REGULAR BAPTISTS IN COLONIAL ANGLICAN VIRGINIA:

CIVIL OBEDIENCE DURING RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

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Regular Baptists in Tidewater Virginia: Religious, Political, and Moral Engagements

Two forces shaped the life of both church and government in the Tidewater region of Virginia: slavery and water. The Tidewater was the earliest settled region in the English colony in 1607.[1] Baptists came into the region temporarily about a century later in 1714.[2] The response of both Anglicans and Regular Baptists to slavery will be explored here, as the Tidewater region had the highest population of enslaved people in Virginia during the eighteenth century.[3] The ministers stood before members of their congregations who were owners, to whom they had to give deference, lest they lose access to minister to their slaves. Their responses to government regulation of church interaction with slaves is an example of how the colonial government regulated religion, whether established or non-conformist.

While slavery was a colony-wide presence, it was particularly prevalent in the Tidewater region. Africans were 66 percent of the population in the Tidewater region by the mid-eighteenth century.[4] The economic interests that required the perpetuation of slavery superseded the moral and ethical concerns of both Anglican and Baptist Christians. By the early eighteenth century, slavery was a way of life. Merton Dillon indicates that there was 'no effective counterforce . . . to prevent white settlers who could afford to do so from taking full advantage of the alluring economic opportunities offered by the exploitation of blacks. . . . By

[1] Wakelyn (ed.), *America's Founding Charters*, p. 27.

[2] F. Anderson, '300 years of Baptists in Virginia', pp. 3710-3720, pp. 3710, 3713.

[3] M. Sobel, *World They Made Together*, p. 3.

[4] Irons, *Proslavery Christianity*, pp. 23-24; Sobel, *World They Made Together*, p. 3.

1710, about one-quarter of the population of Virginia . . . were black slaves'.[5] Van Cleve reports, 'By 1770, slavery was a large-scale (billions of today's dollars in assets) socioeconomic institution that was central to slave state agriculture economies and represented one-third or more of their wealth'.[6] The Crown wanted 'to maximize British investment in colonial slave plantation agriculture [through] the transatlantic slave trade, [to] maintain a reliable supply of relatively inexpensive colonial forced labor while also significantly enhancing British naval power'.[7]

Slavery in Virginia

In August 1619, an English privateer ship, the White Lion, needing to barter for supplies to continue its voyage, traded between twenty and thirty enslaved Africans at Point Comfort in the Tidewater Virginia.[8] From Point Comfort, Virginia, dependence on slave labor for agriculture and home life rapidly became a way of life in Virginia. Sobel indicates that in the 150 years between 1619 and the mid-eighteenth century, whites and blacks living in proximity influenced one another. Sobel observes, 'In Virginia the racial balance was such that most whites were in both intensive and extensive contact with blacks'.[9] Nevertheless, there were clear boundaries slaves could not cross while their masters could with impunity.

Anglicans and Regular Baptists navigated the world between the masters who demanded the physical labor of their bondsmen and their faiths mutual mandate to care for the human souls of those in physical bondage. Anglican ministers walked that boundary line carefully; ministering to black congregants when the slaves' owners allowed it, as will be

[5] M. L. Dillon, *Slavery Attacked: Southern Slaves and Their Allies 1619-1865* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1990), p. 5.

[6] G. W. Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago, 2010), p. 6.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[8] L. Cochran, 'The 1619 Landing – Virginia's First Africans Report & FAQ's', Hampton History Museum, https://hampton.gov/3580/The-1619-Landing-Report-FAQs (Accessed: 20 January 2020).

[9] Sobel, *World They Made Together*, p. 3.

seen below in Rev. Wiley's experience.[10] Dissenting Christians were suspected of crossing the social strata between black and whites. Regular Baptist minute books reflected their efforts to discipline their black members when they were not living with their masters peacefully.[11] The larger Tidewater culture identified preaching black men as a source of neighborhood trouble.[12] Both Anglican ministers and Regular Baptist elders sought to meet the spiritual needs of their enslaved congregants, while not triggering the fears and sensitivities of their white owners, lest contact with their slaves be refused. The intersection of faith and slavery created fissures among church members, in both Anglican and Regular Baptist churches.

Slavery was not just a colonial concern; Anglican prelates in London were concerned about the pastoral care dilemma facing their ministers in Virginia. Speaking of slavery in Virginia, Thomas Hayter, Bishop of Norwich, in 1755 commented, 'The proprietors of slaves in our American settlements, those of them I mean from who the offence cometh, must be presumed to act upon some such reasoning as this—that their slaves are their property by right of purchase and as they were purchased, that their bodies might be employed in the service of their purchasers, they have no concern with their souls, and therefore are not obliged to take any care of them. This is a plea, of which no human court of judicature can take cognizance; but the evangelical laws of kindness, hath, in the clearest and strongest terms decided upon it, that it is an excuse, which will heighten our condemnation'.[13]

Even as Virginia managed to accommodate dissenting Christians, Woody Holton and others point out the colony turned commonwealth refused to take the risk of general

[10] 'Rev. William Willie to Dr. Cartwright of the Bray Society, 30th August 1749', reprinted in D. De Simone, 'The Reverend William Willie', *Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter*, 14 (March 1993), p. 7.

[11] Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Record Book, pp. 5, 7-8, 11-14.

[12] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 13 December 1776, p. 1.

[13] Hayter, *Sermon Preached . . . Friday February 21, 1755*, p. 19.

emancipation.[14] This refusal aligns, according to George Van Cleve, with the 'crown's policy, particularly in the eighteenth century, . . . to maximize British investment in colonial slave plantation agriculture, which most contemporaries believed necessitated protection for the slave trade and for slavery as well'.[15]

As a result of the economic investment in slavery, the Anglican Church early on had its activity among slaves tightly regulated by the government.[16] Anesko comments, 'in the very years that slavery was being codified into law and fixed in the social framework of the colony, the church suffered dramatically from popular indifference'.[17] A rather presumptuous minister, Anthony Gavin, at St. James parish in Goochland, Virginia, wrote directly to the Bishop of London, 'There is one thing that grieves my heart, viz: to see Episcopacy so little regarded in this colony, and the cognizance of spiritual affairs left to the Governor and council by laws of this colony. And next to this, it gives me a great deal of uneasiness to see the greatest part of our Brethren taken up in farming and buying slaves which in my humble opinion is unlawful for any Christian, and in particular for a clergyman'. [18] Gavin himself was not a slave holder. Gunderson observes that when Gavin's parish was divided in 1744, none of the new parishes wanted him; likely because he was 'an opponent of slavery'.[19] This young minister was aggrieved by the seeming impotence of the Virginia Commissary, the formidable but aged James Blair to influence the government. He wistfully urged that a

[14] W. Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999), pp. xx-xxi; E. S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 2003), pp. 299-315; S. Wilentz, *No Property in Man: Slavery and Antislavery at the Nation's Founding* (London, 2018), pp. 46-53; A. Delbanco, *The War before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, 2018), pp. 52-56.

[15] Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders' Union*, p. 20.

[16] Anesko, 'Slavery and the Anglican Church', pp. 247-278.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 250.

[18] Letter of Mr. [Anthony] Gavin to the Bishop of London, St. James Parish, Goochland, August 5, 1738 in Perry (ed.), *American Colonial Church*, vol. 1, pp. 360-361.

[19] Gundersen, *Anglican Ministry*, pp. 93, 132.

Deputy Commissary to be appointed by the Bishop whose 'zeal, courage & resolution & such as could redress some great neglects of duty in our brethren, & bring Episcopacy to be better regarded, for even some of the clergymen born and educated in this colony are guilty in this great point'.[20] The government of the period assumed that both Established Church and dissenting church would accommodate the economic interests of the landed gentry. Slavery was an entrenched social evil in Virginia, and in all the southern colonies. People in the northern colonies also held to deep-seated racism and did not see the manumission of slaves as a goal worthy of hazarding everything.[21]

Tidewater Virginia was, therefore, a slave society, one in which 'slavery is the primary source of income for the elite',[22] and which regulated society to support slavery, shaping all other social structures, including church activity.[23] Anthony Parent summarizes how slavery was encoded into the laws in Virginia. Wealthy planters created law to protect their debt-encumbered investment in slaves. This included laws governing everything from Christianization, to bastardy, to emancipation.[24] The law created a barrier between black and white that evangelical Christianity could have challenged.

Scully argues that the Baptists in Tidewater Virginia contained members with strong anti-slavery sentiment. The Baptists welcomed slaves into their membership, but 'struggled to define the exact status of their black members'.[25] Lindman indicates that 'membership in a biracial church constituted the norm for black Baptists during the eighteenth century', when they joined at all. Many were content with just listening to the sermons; their owners not

[20] Letter of Mr. [Anthony] Gavin to the Bishop of London, St. James Parish, Goochland, August 5, 1738 in Perry (ed.), *American Colonial Church*, vol. 1, p. 361.

[21] Nash, *Race and Revolution*, p. 38.

[22] Parent, *Foul Means*; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, pp. 3-15, 41.

[23] Scully, *Nat Turner's Virginia*, pp. 39-42; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, pp. 347-351.

[24] Parent, *Foul Means*, pp. 105-134, p. 133.

[25] Scully, 'Somewhat liberated', p. 341.

permitting further commitment.[26] The elite were well aware of this definitional struggle, arising from the tension between slaves' legal status as property and their religious status as human beings created in the image of God. Discussion of this tension in front of slaves 'made Baptists and other evangelicals deeply suspect in the eyes of other white Virginians. Evangelicals frequently had to defend themselves from charges of stirring rebelliousness among slaves, especially in the eighteenth century. For suspicious whites, there was plenty of evidence that slaves took the linkage between religious, spiritual, and personal liberty to heart'.[27] Baptism by a Baptist meeting house, like baptism in an Anglican church, was routinely subject to the approval of the slave's master.[28] Slave owners saw slaves as property only and slavery as strictly an economic system; they objected to evangelists' religious zeal interfering with government policies that supported their economic system.[29] The Baptists, whom Goetz asserts accommodated racism within their faith, also provided ample argument for manumission. Scully argues that the association of 'evangelicalism with republicanism that offered white male evangelicals a path to authority . . . also provided the foundation of a small but influential white Baptist anti-slavery movement in the early national period'.[30]

Both pro-slavery and pro-manumission opinions could be found in any one congregation among Tidewater Regular Baptists. Najar describes how the issue of slavery became a point of friction in evangelical churches, including Regular Baptist Churches, in the Upper South. To maintain harmony among themselves, many churches and their related Baptist Associations set slavery in the state column rather than the church column and deemed it not a suitable topic of discussion. Advocacy for manumission was marginalized as

[26] Lindman, *Bodies of Belief*, p. 136.

[27] Scully, 'Somewhat liberated', p. 347; see also idem, *Nat Turner's Virginia*, p. 169.

[28] Lindman, *Bodies of Belief*, p. 137; Mill Swamp Baptist Church Minutes, pp. 8-9.

[29] Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, p. 101-102.

[30] Scully, 'Somewhat liberated', pp. 328-371, p. 347; Scully, *Nat Turner's Virginia*, p. 96; Goetz, *Baptism of Early Virginia*, pp 179-181.

the governing authorities were intractable on the issue. It became hard for anyone, including Regular Baptists, to imagine life in an agricultural setting without slaves.[31] Wolf indicates that 'the antislavery sympathies among the Baptists arose in part from egalitarian strains within their doctrine and from their commitment to righteous living. . . . The Baptists, however, never tried to force members of their church to free their slaves'.[32]

Water Culture

Water controlled the patterns of settlement, as rivers draining into the Chesapeake Bay and Albemarle Sound facilitated travel and commerce. The high ground between the water courses provided fertile soil for crops and settlement.[33] Water was both a source of transportation and a barrier. The Great Dismal Swamp lies now within the corporate limits of the city of Sussex, Virginia, but in the eighteenth century, it was wider and deeper, almost impenetrable. It was a region used by enslaved run-aways and scofflaws to evade authorities. What remains of the swamp land now yields rich archaeological sites where communities of run-away slaves, called maroons, settled and lived their lives sheltered within the swamp.[34] The Great Dismal Swamp in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina, sheltered at least two communities of escaped slaves.[35]

English settlement in the region of Virginia south of the James River followed the rivers and swamps that Virginia shares with North Carolina as these waterways flowed into

[31] Najar, 'Meddling with Emancipation', pp. 157-186.

[32] Wolf, *Race and Liberty*, p. 11.

[33] R. Sawyer, *America's Wetland: An Environmental and Cultural History of Tidewater Virginia and North Carolina* (Charlottesville, VA, 2010), pp. 57-58.

[34] Quakers and Baptists were among the dissenters who settled in this region. See U. P. Joyner, Jr., *They Crossed the Blackwater: The First Settlers of Southampton County*, Virginia, 2d ed. (2003), p. 32; 'Isle of Wight County Records', pp. 211-212.

[35] S. A. Diouf, 'The Great Dismal Swamp', in *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York, 2014), pp. 209-229; D. Sayers, *A Desolate Place for a Defiant People: The Archaeology of Maroons, Indigenous Americans, and Enslaved Laborers in the Great Dismal Swamp* (Gainesville, FL, 2016); McIlvenna, *Very Mutinous People*, p. 125.

the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina rather than into the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia. Virginian William Byrd led a team of surveyors representing both colonies to settle the line between Virginia and North Carolina in 1728.[36] Byrd observed, 'the people on the frontiers entered for land, and took out patents, either from the king [Virginia] or the lords proprietor [North Carolina]. The crown was like to be the loser by this uncertainty, because the terms both of taking up and seating land were easier much in Carolina'.[37] Settlement flowed between the two colonies in this 'no-man's land' region claimed by both colonies until 1728.

The area between the James River and the Virginia/North Carolina boundary is shaped like an obtuse triangle, as the James River flows toward the southern end of the Chesapeake Bay. The counties where Baptists settled include Isle of Wight County, which was named in 1634, being mostly formed from the territory of Warrosquyoake, one of the original colonial shires. Southampton County was carved out of Isle of Wight in 1749, and Sussex County was formed out of Surry County in 1754.[38] Extant records for Isle of Wight County begin in 1746. These records indicated the parishes there could not attract a competent clergyman due to the soil producing a poor grade of tobacco.[39] John Purdie's history of Newport Parish from 1606 to 1826, ends in 1748, well before David Barrow and Mill Swamp Baptist were present in the vicinity in 1774. Purdie's history does, however, provided a glimpse into what was considered important to a long-time church record-

[36] R. L. Heinemann, J. G. Kolp, A. S. Parent, Jr., W. G. Shade, *Old Dominion, New Commonwealth: A History of Virginia 1607-2007* (Charlottesville, VA: UVA Press, 2007), p. 35. Governor Spotswood would later explore the western mountains of Virginia.

[37] W. Byrd, *The Westover Manuscripts: Containing the History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina: A Journey to the Land of Eden, AD 1773 and A Progress to the Mines Written from 1728 to 1736 and Now First Published* (Petersburg, 1841), p. 8, Documenting the American South, https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/byrd/byrd.html (Accessed: 18 August 2018).

[38] Doran, *Atlas*, pp. 6, 22, 24.

[39] 'Isle of Wight County Records', pp. 211-212; Isle of Wight County, Virginia, Order Book, 1746-1752, microfilm, Isle of Wight Reel #119; Isle of Wight County, Virginia, Court Order Book, 1772-1780.

keeper.[40] It reflected the Anglican understanding of parish organization as a geographically located place. Persons who resided within the parish boundaries 'belonged' to that parish, whether their doctrine was Anglican or not. As evidenced by the century that passed between county formations, this region was not prime real estate. It was low land often covered with shallow water, and subject to the vagaries of storm and tides. Though nearby to the major white settlements along the James River, such as Williamsburg, it was isolated enough that religious dissenters could live there relatively undisturbed.

Regular Baptists migrated back into Virginia from North Carolina in the 1770s, settling in counties south of the James River and forming churches that affiliated with the Kehukee (North Carolina) Association. Between 1774 and 1791, nineteen Baptist meeting houses formed in southeast Virginia. There were sufficient number of churches in Virginia to form the Portsmouth Baptist Association in 1791.[41] One leader, John Maglamre, focused on strengthening Baptist laity and preachers as they established meeting houses, while David Barrow embraced more active community involvement, including advocacy for manumission of the slaves in his community. Despite the well-established and historic presence of the Tidewater Established Church parishes, the Regular Baptists who moved into the area from North Carolina thrived. By the mid-to-late eighteenth century, as Jewel Spangler notes, many Anglicans were becoming Baptists in this area because the Anglican Church had become moribund.[42]

Baptists settled in three communities: Raccoon Swamp in Albemarle Parish, Sussex County; Mill Swamp in Newport Parish, Isle of Wight County; and Black Creek, Nottoway

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[40] J. Purdie, 'Historical Sketch of Newport Parish, 1606-1826', in Records of Vestry Meetings of Christ Church Newport Parish 1836-1894, Isle of Wight County Records, Reel 50, Microfilm, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia; Mill Swamp Baptist Church Minutes; *History of Mill Swamp Baptist Church* (2014).

[41] Jones, *Virginia Portsmouth Association*, p. 14.

[42] J. Spangler, 'Becoming Baptists: conversion in colonial and early national Virginia', *The Journal of Southern History*, 67 (May 2001), pp. 243-286, p. 270.

Parish, Southampton County. The meeting notes of all three Regular Baptist meeting houses included both white and enslaved members; names were recorded in the minute books for each congregation.[43]

Early Baptists in Coastal Virginia and North Carolina

The earliest Baptists in Virginia were General Baptists, present in Virginia in 1714. These General Baptists sent a petition to a General Baptist Church in England to send a minister to them. Baptist Elder Robert Norden migrated to Virginia in response to the request, and organized churches in Prince George County and in Isle of Wight County in the early eighteenth century.[44] Richard Knight indicated the Isle of Wight group migrated southward sometime in the 1740s, settling near Kehukee Creek in North Carolina, because 'the place [Isle of Wight] was visited with a wasting, pestilential disease'.[45] While in North Carolina, these Baptists came under the influence of missionary preachers from the Regular Baptist Philadelphia Baptist Association, and formed the Kehukee Baptist Association in 1769. As Burkitt summarized, 'Thus by means of those ministers who visited the churches, several were reformed, and the work of reformation progressed, until the greater part of what few churches were gathered in North Carolina, came into the Regular Baptist order'.[46] As in England, General Baptists embraced a theory of Christ's atonement as a general atonement, offered to everyone. Particular Baptists, in England, of which both Regular and Separate

[43] By 1789 the membership records for Raccoon Swamp includes 139 members: 25 white men, 57 white women, and 57 enslaved men and women (Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Minutes, pp. 19-20). By 1788, Mill Swamp's records include 271 members: 114 white men, 101 white women, and 57 enslaved men and women (Mill Swamp Baptist Church Minutes, pp. 2-6). By 1788, Black Creek Baptist Church membership record includes 135 men, 107 women. (Black Creek Baptist Church, pp. 16, 22-23, 25).

[44] Anderson, '300 years of Baptists in Virginia', pp. 3710-3729. Quakers were also settled in Isle of Wight and Southampton Counties. See Joyner, *They Crossed the Blackwater*, p. 32.

[45] Knight, *General or Six-Principle Baptists*, p. 317. There is much discussion regarding which Baptist church was founded first, the Isle of Wight Church (Mill Swamp 1714), or the congregation in Prince George County (1715). See B. S. White, 'Prologue,' in *Mill Swamp Baptist Church*, pp. 8-10; Anderson, '300 years of Baptists in Virginia', p. 3714.

[46] Burkitt and Read, *Kehukee Baptist Association*, p. 35.

Baptists in America were subsets, interpreted Christ's atonement as particular to those who made a specific decision to believe that Christ's death applied to them. Edwards characterized the difference, 'These styled General Baptists [hold] the doctrine of general redemption, in opposition to those who limit the extent of Christ's death to the elect'.[47]

The Church of England did not have as well-established a presence in the North Carolina colony as in Virginia. North Carolina was among the colonies where the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) sent missionary priests. Freeze indicates that that in 1765, twenty-seven parishes in North Carolina had no minister present in the community.[48] Malone's biographical sketches of the Anglican ministers indicate that they had difficulty gathering people to worship in the parish church, some blaming the difficulty on Baptist activity.[49] John Bennett, however, was an exception to this trend. An Anglican minister supported by the SPG, he was assigned to Northampton County, North Carolina, an area on the North Carolina-Virginia border, just southwest of Southampton County, Virginia. He offered the following observation on the Baptists in his parish,

> Last Saturday, Monday and Wednesday, two, three, and four New Light Baptist teachers attended our service with many of their people: the teachers, I am informed, have since delivered themselves in more respectful terms of the Church of England than they were before accustomed. That Sect has very much increased in the country around us: however, I am in great hopes that frequent weekly lectures will fix the wavering and draw back many of those who have strayed from us.[50]

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[47] Edwards, *Materials*, vol. IV, p. 2; see also M. A. Huggins, *A History of North Carolina Baptists, 1727-1932* (Raleigh, NC, 1967), pp. 24, 32, 39; D. T. Morgan, Jr., 'The Great Awakening in North Carolina, 1740-1775: the Baptist phase', *The North Carolina Historical Review*, 45 (July 1968): pp. 264-283; Clark, *Philadelphia Association*, pp. 76-78. For each group's English origins, see Watts, *Dissenters*, pp. 41-50, 65-66.

[48] G. Freeze, 'Like a house built upon sand: The Anglican Church and Establishment in North Carolina, 1765-1776', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 48 (1979), pp. 405-432, pp. 406, 411.

[49] M. T. Malone, ''Sketches of the Anglican clergy who served in North Carolina during the period 1765-1776, part II', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 39 (1970), pp. 399-439, p. 400.

[50] D. Oliver, *The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in the Province of North Carolina* (Raleigh, NC, 1910), p. 18-20; 'Mr. Barnett letter to the Secretary, S.P.G., Northampton, North Carolina, 15 September 1770', in W. L. Saunders (ed.), *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 8 (Raleigh, NC, 1890), pp. 228-229.

Apparently, the teachers among the Baptists became less critical of Mr. Bennett after listening to him over the course of three days.

North Carolina Governor Tryon described 'Anabaptists' as 'an avowed enemy to the mother church'.[51] During the Regulator War in 1771, his army sent civilian militias fleeing for their lives. Baptist historian Edwards indicates that Tryon described 'the Regulators as a faction of Quakers and Baptists who aimed at overturning the Church of England'.[52] However, Edwards avers, 'among the 4000 Regulators, there were but seven of the denomination of Baptists'[53] and these were threatened with excommunication from their churches for their involvement.[54] Edwards, with an eye on history, was motivated to record this information 'lest the governor's words should in time make the North Carolina regulation another Munster [sic] tragedy'.[55] Edwards is referring to an infamous sixteenth-century Anabaptist takeover of the city of Münster, Germany.[56] The aftermath of the battle of Alamance in 1771 decimated Separate Baptist numbers in North Carolina, driving them into Tennessee and South Carolina.[57]

This incident may have given the Regular Baptists of the Kehukee Association motivation to write to the new governor who succeeded Tryon. In 1772, the Kehukee Association sent a letter to the new North Carolina Governor Josiah Martin, thanking him for 'the protection we enjoy in exercise of our religious and civil liberties, for which it is our duty

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[51] Governor Tryon letter to the Reverend Mr. Daniel Burton, Secretary to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Brunswick, NC, 20 March 1769, in Saunders (ed.), *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 8, pp. 12-16, p. 14; L. H. Hoyle, 'Baptists', in Jonas, Jr. (ed.), *Religious Traditions of North Carolina*, pp. 15-32, p. 18

[52] M. Edwards, 'History of the Baptists of North Carolina', manuscript, pp. 170-171, p. 170, reprinted in Saunders (ed.), *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 8, pp. 654-655.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] H. von Kerssenbrock and C. S. Mackey, *Narrative of the Anabaptist Madness: the Overthrow of Münster, the Famous Metropolis of Westphalia* (Boston, MA, 2007), pp. 1-3.

[57] Hoyle, 'Baptists', in Jonas (ed.), *Religious Traditions of North Carolina*, pp. 15-32, p. 18.

and shall be our constant endeavor to distinguish ourselves as loyal Subjects to our most gracious Sovereign, and useful members of Society.'[58] He acknowledged the gratitude in a return correspondence, 'The tolerating Spirit of the Brittish [sic] Government, and the Security it gives to the civil and religious liberties of the Subjects are blessings of which you seem to entertain a just sense and cannot be too highly valued. Your intended constant endeavor to distinguish yourselves as loyal Subjects to our most gracious Sovereign and useful members of the Community are highly commendable and will be certain crowned with Success as they shall be properly directed'.[59] Regular Baptists, aware of their dissenting status in North Carolina and, especially after the regulator conflict, thought it 'expedient' to demonstrate their gratitude for the peaceful co-existence permitted by the governor.

Regular Baptist Settlement in Tidewater Virginia

Regular Baptists, along with their Anglican neighbors, lived in a vortex of change between 1770 and 1800, and experienced the social impact of it. The Tidewater Virginia Regular Baptists were led by John Meglamre and David Barrow from North Carolina. They had different strategies for relating to their neighbors. John Meglamre, elder at Raccoon Swamp Baptist Church, focused on leading Regular Baptist churches and their associations, seeking to be a peacekeeper and bridge-builder between Regular and Separate Baptists. David Barrow, on the other hand, while leading Mill Swamp Baptist Church and Black Creek Baptist Church, engaged the larger community through his service at the Southampton county court.[60] The churches that these men led attracted a few relatively well-off inhabitants of the parishes where the churches were located. James Bell, a former Burgess turned Separate Baptist preacher in the vicinity of Isle of Wight County, was baptized by John Meglamre.

[58] Minutes of the Kehukey Association, 14 September 1772 in Sprunt, 'Kehukey Association', pp. 19-20, p. 19.

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] Scully, *Nat Turner's Virginia*, pp. 60-64, 70; pp. 102-104.

Elias Herring was a former vestry member who joined the Baptists but missed the society of his Anglican social peers in Southampton.[61] Though not without some tensions, Virginia's experiment with Christian pluralism was in this region a limited, but significant, success, at least in the relationship between Anglicans and Regular Baptists. The two groups were generally at peace with each other. Little records no instances of persecution in Isle of Wight, Sussex, or Southampton Counties. Other Tidewater counties were scenes of persecution; these were reactions generally to Separate Baptist activity.[62]

Regular Baptists in Tidewater Virginia lived within the tension between the authority of the Bible, the social pressure of their church polity, and the authority of the parish and county government. The Regular Baptists were good citizens in every way. They paid their tithe levies for the parish and the county, they joined in their assigned road crews, and when given leadership roles, lived up to the expectations of their neighbors. Where their interests paralleled, they lived amicably with all their neighbors, and they were generally accepted by them. That acceptance, however, brought with it pressure to conform to generally accepted social norms of the Anglican majority. The story laid out in the intersection of Anglican ministers and parishioners with the 'newcomer' Regular Baptists illustrates the point that, while toleration was well-intended, it was of limited utility because it protected the interests of the majority Anglicans who then expected social conformity to social norms they considered not directly related to religious expression.

Slavery was a prime example of an overarching cultural norm that was a point of tension among Baptists, just as it had been an issue among Anglicans. Slavery was an entrenched fact of life in Virginia, especially in the Tidewater, where it was established earliest, though a few Anglicans and Regular Baptists struggled to reconcile their consciences

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[61] *A Pilgrimage of Faith 1773-1973: The History of Sappony Baptist Church, Petersburg Association, Stony Creek, Virginia* (1973), p. 2.

[62] L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, p. 521.

to the practice. Rev. Anthony Gavin in a letter to the Bishop of London called slavery 'unlawful', particularly 'for a clergyman'. [63] The stand of some Baptists regarding manumission of slaves at Black Creek Church, led by the example of Elder David Barrow, caused division among the members. Their much-valued and strove-for internal unity was strained over this issue. As detailed below, the conflict led some members of Black Creek Baptist Church to agree to disagree about slave holding to resolve the matter, and possibly led two members, on opposing sides of the slave issue, to depart from the church, because the church would not fully endorse their respective positions.[64] The American Revolution crystalized in the minds of leaders, influencers, and followers alike that the conscience belonged to the individual and was sacrosanct, except where it was not. Because of a law enacted in 1667 in Virginia colony which decreed that baptism did not affect the legal status of slaves who embraced Christianity,[65] slaveholding became a matter controlled by the state, and no longer an issue for the churches to debate, at least in theory. The state considered the issue settled by a Solomon-like separation of the concern of the church (the soul of the enslaved) from the concern of the slaveholder (the mind, body, and will of their enslaved property). Human beings, however, are not so easily divided. It was the great contradiction that left its mark on all Virginians, establishment and dissenter, free and enslaved.

Anglicans and Regular Baptists in Sussex County, Virginia

New Anglican parishes were formed often before new county lines were established. Newport Parish, in Isle of Wight County, took that name in 1734 when parish dividing lines were adjusted there, Newport being the new upper parish. The lower parish took the name

[63] Letter of Mr. [Anthony] Gavin to the Bishop of London, 5 August 1738 in Perry (ed.), *American Colonial Church*, vol. 1, pp. 360-361; see also Anesko, 'Slavery and the Anglican Church', pp. 254, 278.

[64] Black Creek Baptist Church, pp. 8-10.

[65] Virginia Grand Assemblie, September 1667, 19th Charles II, Act III, 'An Act Declaring that Baptisme of Slaves doth not Exempt Them from Bondage', in Hening, *Statutes*, vol. II, p. 260.

Nottoway Parish. When Southampton was formed out of Isle of Wight in 1749, Nottoway Parish became the Established Church parish in Southampton County.[66] Albemarle Parish, formed in 1738, served Sussex County.[67] The parish leaders in this area were a mixture, some being effective leaders and moral examples, but others being scandalous in their behavior. Albemarle parish rector, William Willie, was granted the honor of serving as Commissary *pro tem* in 1771 in the absence of the bishop's appointed Commissary, James Horrocks. Willie died in 1776 just before the Revolution.[68] He kept excellent, meticulous records of his parish ministry. On the scandalous side of the ledger, Rev. George Pedie was dismissed in 1742 from Nottoway Parish on account of 'being guilty of many immoralities, such as drunkenness, prophane [sic] swearing, and lewd and debauched actions'.[69] Nottoway Parish (Southampton County) and Newport Parish (Isle of Wight County) records did not survive the ravages of time and much of the parish activity discussed here was abstracted from county order books.

Albemarle Parish, Sussex County

Albemarle Parish was created by an Act of the House of Burgesses in 1738; its first Anglican minister, Rev. William Willie, likely began his service in 1739. His tenure in parish extended to his death on April 3, 1776. Nottoway Church seems to have been the preferred meeting place for the vestry, and St. Andrews seems to be the main chapel of ease. Other

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[66] J. Purdie, 'Historical Sketch, Newport Parish'; See also Virginia General Assembly, August 1734, 8th George II, Chap. XX 'An Act for dividing the parish of Henrico; and for uniting and dividing the parishes of Newport, and Warwicksqueak, in the County of Isle of Wight; and for other purposes therein mentioned', in Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 4, pp. 443-446, p. 444; *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia 1742-1747, 1748-1749,* vol. 7 (Richmond, VA, 1909), p. 371, https://archive.org/stream/journalsofhouseo07virg_1#page/n7 (Accessed: 18 August 2018).

[67] L. C. Bell, 'Albemarle Parish', pp. 3-5; reprint, p. 151. See also Virginia General Assembly, November 1753, 27th George II, Chap. XVII, 'An Act for dividing the county of Surry, and adding part of the parish of Albemarle to the parish of Southwark,' in Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 6, pp. 384-385.

[68] Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, vol. II, p. 343.

[69] Hall (ed.), *Executive Journals*, vol. V, pp. 72-73, 81-82, 86.

chapels included St. Mark's and St. Paul's. Willie was a very careful record keeper, signing most of the vestry minutes until December 1775. Nelson indicates that Willie baptized between 1740 and 1775, '4958 persons, 4112 whites and 846 blacks, averaging 138 baptisms annually'.[70] Nelson comments, 'Willie's baptisms were performed week in and week out. . . . Here is impressive evidence of an Anglican parson's overcoming pervasive white fear, negligence, and resistance to extend Christian Baptism to the parish's slaves. Moreover, it is a telling evidence of a growing and vital ministry on the eve of the Revolution'.[71] Dave De Simone, a researcher at Colonial Williamsburg, described Willie as 'respected by his parish', and yet 'frustrated' over his struggle to bring slaves to faith.[72]

One source maintains that Willie 'was one of the largest slaveholders in Sussex', though this is disputed.[73] Either way, he understood the humanity of slaves and wanted to see their souls redeemed. He worked very hard to maintain comity with his white parishioners and still assist slaves who desired baptism to understand the rite's intent. A letter he wrote to Dr. Cartwright of the Bray Society in 1749 describes his struggle.

> When they [slaves] come to me again, after asking questions concerning our former Conversation, and making them say distinctly the Creed and Lord's Prayer (which I take care they get) I desire them to apply to their Masters . . . to be taught the several answers they are to make when baptiz'd; and likewise get some person of authority to present them, . . . At the usual time, after the white children are baptiz'd I call them up. As for the negro Children, them I baptize after the Congregation is dismiss'd (that I may give no offence).[74]

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[70] Nelson, *Blessed Company*, p. 212. Nelson's statistics are drawn from data contained in Richards, *Register of Albemarle Parish*.

[71] Nelson, *Blessed Company*, p. 267.

[72] De Simone, 'William Willie', pp. 6-7.

[73] *Sussex County: A Tale of Three Centuries*, Virginia Writer's Project, Work Project Administration (Waverly, VA, 1942), p. 39, citing Richards, *Albemarle Parish Register*, pp. 96-172. Richards, in the introduction to a published edition of the register disputes the claim that Willie was the largest slave holder in Sussex County. Richards, *Albemarle Parish Register*, p. viii.

[74] 'Rev. William Willie to Dr. Cartwright of the Bray Society, 30th August 1749', reprinted in De Simone, 'William Willie', p. 7.

He observed further on the slaves condition, 'their perpetual bondage I likewise put the best face upon—But you know, Sir, that he who loses his liberty, loses half his virtue'.[75] Willie trod carefully around his parishioners' sense of class distinctions by baptizing slave children after the white families had departed the church service. Yet, he involved the slave holder in the process of readying more mature slaves for baptism. He was aware that slaveholders were resistant to the idea of slaves learning about Christianity; he told Cartwright that he met with 'clamour and opposition' and 'opposition and grumbling'.[76] If the holder was required to participate in the slave's catechism and presentation for baptism, the objection that the minister was somehow colluding with the slave to undermine the authority of the slave holder was addressed. Whether just or not, Willie's strategy allowed him to address the spiritual requests of the enslaved while assuring the slave holders that their authority over those whom they held as property was respected. His was an effort to keep balance between fulfilling the gospel's imperative to baptize and disciple, and the mandates of the civil law to maintain a peaceful slave population.

Willie was also disturbed by the presence of dissenters within his parish. He comments in the same letter to Dr. Cartwright, 'Some time ago, I brought back to the Church two Anabaptists; and last winter I baptiz'd one man and two women, who had been brought up Quakers. I am, Sir, a true and strict son of the Church of England; but I should think myself much happier in convincing an Infidel, or reclaiming one notorious Sinner, than in reconciling to our Church all the Sectaries in the Christian World'.[77] The Baptists in Sussex County did petition the House of Burgesses for toleration to be extended to them. The

[75] 'Rev. William Willie to Dr. Cartwright of the Bray Society, 30th August 1749', reprinted in De Simone, 'William Willie', p. 7.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[77] *Ibid.* The mention of 'bringing back to the church' two Anabaptists here and in Rev. Anthony Gavin's Letter of Bishop of London in 1738 are so far the only circumstantial evidence discovered of Baptists being received into Virginia's Established Church. Mr. [Anthony] Gavin to the Bishop of London, 5 August 1738 in Perry (ed.), *American Colonial Church*, vol. 1, pp. 360-361.

language of the petition highlights the fact that Quakers and Presbyterians were already enjoying the benefits of toleration.[78] Perhaps Willie or a member of the vestry or county court informally told Meglamre to submit the petition. Willie was at that time serving as Commissary *pro temp*, though, according to Brydon, he did not feel very confident in his authority because his position was rather tenuous.[79] He had been given charge over the Virginia parishes as Commissary *pro temp* in 1771 by Commissary James Horrocks while he journeyed to England.[80] Willie's obituary characterized him as 'humane, hospitable, and benevolent . . . . [he gave] unwearied attention to the conscientious discharge of his pastoral office'.[81] He was survived by his wife, who was allowed to live on the glebe until the end of the year when William Andrews, the new incumbent would take up residence.[82]

John Meglamre and the Raccoon Swamp Baptist Meeting House

In 1770, John Meglamre, an active Kehukee Baptist Association pastor, was invited by Baptists living in Sussex County, Virginia, to preach.[83] Born in Maryland in 1730, he was of Scottish Presbyterian heritage and migrated as a young adult to North Carolina. He was baptized at Fishing Creek Baptist Church in 1765. In 1767 Kehukee Church in Halifax, North Carolina called Meglamre to serve as Elder. He was one of the founding pastors whose churches formed the Kehukee Association in 1769.[84]

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[78] J. P. Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia 1770-1772* (Richmond, VA, 1906), pp. 186, 188-189, HathiTrust.

[79] Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, vol. I, p. 363n.

[80] L. C. Bell, 'Albermarle Parish', p. 131, 155, 171; *Sussex County*, p. 39; Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, vol. II, pp. 343-353.

[81] 'Obituary of William Willie', *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 19 April 1776, Accessible Archives.

[82] Davis and Hogwood (eds.), 'Vestry Meeting, 18 July 1776', *Vestry Book of Albemarle Parish*, p. 223.

[83] S. F. F. Pennington, *Hitherto-Henceforth 1772-1997, Antioch Baptist Church, Portsmouth Association, Yale Virginia* (1997), p. 4; V. Cherry (comp.), *A History of the Churches of Sussex County, Virginia* (2011), pp. 17-39, p. 30. The congregation of Raccoon Swamp Baptist Church changed its name to Antioch Baptist Church in 1852.

[84] G. Ryland, 'Address on John Maglamre', in the *Minutes of the Petersburg Baptist Association Virginia Twenty-Sixth Annual Session held with Newville Baptist Church, Sussex County, Virginia, September 14-15, 1932* (Petersburg, VA, 1932), pp. 20-22, p. 138.

He began crossing the Virginia border into Sussex County in 1770 and preached in local homes. In 1772, he moved his family permanently to Sussex County to found and lead the Raccoon Swamp Baptist meeting house, founded June 13, 1772.[85] In February 1772, Baptists in Sussex County petitioned the House of Burgesses. Finding 'themselves restricted in the exercise of their religion, their teachers imprisoned under various pretenses, and the benefits of the Toleration Act denied them, although they are willing to conform to the true spirit of that Act, and are loyal and quiet subjects; and therefore [pray] that they may be treated with the same kind indulgence in religious matters as Quakers, Presbyterians, and other Protestant Dissenters enjoy'.[86] In the *Journal of the House Burgesses,* this petition was grouped with several religious freedom petitions from several counties and deemed by the Committee on Religion as reasonable and the House agreed to them and ordered that a bill be prepared by the Committee on Religion for consideration. No further action was noted.[87] Though there was no court record indicating a proceeding against him, Meglamre may have attracted some undesired attention. Meglamre first appeared in Sussex County records, assigned to a Raccoon Swamp road maintenance crew in June 1772, and was listed as land owner in an October 1771 Albemarle Parish land procession report.[88] Though Meglamre had done some brief itinerant preaching in the area, he eventually settled in the neighborhood at the urging of the Baptists living there. He bought 295 acres for £120 in June 1772, eventually selling the tract in two pieces for £150 within three years. As part of the transaction in October 1772 he specified that one acre was set aside for Raccoon Swamp Baptist Church to build. In November 1775, he sold 195 acres to Zadok Bell, 'being land where [he] now lives'.

[85] Pennington, *Antioch Baptist Church,* p. 4; Burkitt and Read, *Kehukee Baptist Association*, p. 138.

[86] Kennedy (ed.), *House of Burgesses of Virginia 1770-1772*, pp. 186.

[87] *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

[88] Sussex County Order Book, 18 June 1772, p. 137; Davis and Hogwood (eds.), 'October 1771 Processioning Reports', *Vestry Book of Albemarle Parish*, pp. 204, 263.

He operated as a leader of a small dissenting church but participated effectively in the larger life of the community.[89]

Meglamre maintained his North Carolina ties, and so this congregation became a part of the Kehukee Baptist Association at the September 1772 meeting, not long after the church's founding. Meglamre often served as moderator of the Kehukee Association's meetings, and was one of the key leaders to help form, in 1790, the Portsmouth Baptist Association in Virginia.[90] Meglamre was one of the leading preachers in a revival in Sussex County. Garnett Ryland comments, 'Meglamre combined ability as an administrator with power as a preacher. The old church book of Raccoon Swamp . . . shows the wisdom and firmness with which he led the church in the solution of many of its problems of organization, doctrine and discipline'.[91] The Raccoon Swamp Meetinghouse's presence in Sussex County and Albemarle Parish document the peaceful co-existence by Regular Baptists alongside their Anglican neighbors.

Raccoon Swamp Meeting House was organized on June 13, 1772 when John Meglamre and Elders John Rivers and Benjamin Bell led a group of eighty-seven baptized people to covenant together: 'We, the Baptist ministers of the Regular Church in North Carolina, being called by the inhabitants aforesaid: and on examination, found there the number of eighty-seven persons, all of them baptised upon profession of their faith; who we esteem faithful and on their request and free consent, we have constituted them into a Gospel Church'.[92] Just as the Philadelphia Association had examined the churches in North Carolina

[89] W. L. Hopkins (ed.), *Sussex County, Virginia Deed Books A-E, 1754-March 1779* (Richmond, VA, 1990), pp. 146, 149, 175.

[90] 'Kehukey Association Minutes, 14 September 1772', pp. 1-32; Jones, *Virginia Portsmouth Association*, p. 20.

[91] Scully, *Nat Turner's Virginia*, pp. 60-61; Ryland, 'John Maglamre', pp. 20-22; Pennington, *Antioch Baptist Church*, p. 4; 'Kehukey Association Minutes, 6 November 1769', pp. 1-32.

[92] Pennington, *Antioch Baptist Church*, p. 5.

and ‘set them in order’, so these North Carolina Regular Baptists helped this group of Baptists form a meeting house in regular order.

There is no notation in the Sussex County Court Order Book of Meglamre or others registering with the county for a particular location for a dissenting meeting house. Why was this? Sussex County was formed in 1754, less than twenty years before the Regular Baptists organized the Raccoon Swamp meeting house. Unlike in Prince George County in 1714, no one in Sussex County registered their home as a meeting location, yet the Baptist gathering thrived in its early years. By 1777, Raccoon Swamp reported to the Kehukee Association a membership of 209, an increase of 122 persons in five years.[93] It is possible that the positive reception in Williamsburg of the Sussex County petition for religious toleration was sufficient for the Rev. William Willie, by then a venerable Anglican vicar, to not press the sheriff to harass them. The Baptists had petitioned the House of Burgesses for religious toleration in February 1772 and organized themselves into an orderly meeting house in June 1772. Like people who travelled in from the surrounding countryside to the Nottoway Anglican Church and its three chapels of ease, the people who formed the Baptist congregation gathered regularly though coming from disparate parts of Sussex County.[94]

Meglamre settled in the area as a local land owner and known Baptist elder, and moved about freely, between branches of a recognized Baptist meeting house, in a manner similar to the way Anglican vicars moved around their large parishes, preaching regularly at the chapels of ease provided by the local vestry.[95] Unlike a landless itinerant, which Anglicans most complained of among their parishes, Elder Meglamre purchased land and,

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[93] Burkitt and Read, *Kehukee Association*, pp. 49-50.

[94] In the September 1772 minutes of the meeting of the vestry, the levy list included provisions for the clerks and sextons of Nottoway Church, St. Paul’s Church, St. Andrews Church, and St. Marks Church. Davis and Hogwood (eds.), ‘Vestry Meeting, 29 September 1772’, *Vestry Book Albemarle Parish*, p. 208; Pennington, *Antioch Baptist*, p. 7; Burkitt and Read, *Kehukee Association*, pp. 49-50.

[95] Pennington, *Antioch Baptist Church,* p. 23; Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Record Book, 7 November 1772, p. 5.

thereby, had a modest stake in the community life of Sussex County. As a landowner, he was enfranchised to vote in local elections, and sit on juries when the county court was in session, although there is no extant record that he did.

By the mid-eighteenth century, slavery was an entrenched economic system for landowners in the Tidewater region and in all of Virginia. Slave owning was a complicated issue for Anglicans and Baptists alike. Anglicans so feared that baptism would be seen as a route to manumission, that the House of Burgesses passed a provision in the 1705 slave code that explicitly forbade using membership in the Established Church as a basis for petitioning for freedom for enslaved persons.[96] Despite the law, Dillon assesses, slaves 'only reluctantly gave up the notion that baptism made them brothers in Christ with the white population and entitled them to freedom'.[97] Goetz comments that the law did allow the local parish ministers to catechize slaves with their owners' permission, but this was not widely done.[98] In contrast, Baptists were much more willing to share the gospel with enslaved persons. By 1789, fifty-seven of Raccoon Swamp's 142 members were enslaved individuals.[99] Isaacs argues, 'It was a particular mark of the Baptists' radicalism . . . that they included slaves as "brothers" and "sisters" in their close communities. . . . The slaves were members and therefore subject to church discipline', [100] just like white members. This radicalism was a point of sensitivity. In 1776, an editorialist wrote in the *Virginia Gazette,* 'Their religion teaches that the souls of all men are equal in the sight of God; and, for religious purposes, they level so indiscriminately with those they should command, that all subordination must be destroyed by it'.[101]

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[96] Virginia General Assembly, October 1705, 4th Anne, Chap. XLIX, 'An act concerning Servants and Slaves', para. XXXVI, in Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 3, pp. 448-462, p. 460; Parent, *Foul Means*, pp. 113-114.

[97] Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, p. 19.

[98] Goetz, *Baptism of Early Virginia*, pp. 121-123, 166-169.

[99] Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Record Book, 1789 List of Members, pp. 19-20.

[100] Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, pp. 171-172.

[101] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 13 December 1776, p. 1.

A satirist in Hunter's *Virginia Gazette* in 1752 implied that the liberty dissenters called for would lead to social disorder. The satirist, reacting to the migration of dissenting Christians into the west, writes,

> Extensive toleration, which is destin'd to make us wiser than our Mother Country,--which will make England a Land of Slavery in Comparison of Virginia for Liberty. ---Liberty! O charming Liberty! Sing to Triumphe for Liberty. Do not, pray, Gentlemen, put such a disgrace upon the Goddess, as to make her come in at the Back-door . . . No, let the Fore-door be thrown open to welcome her and her attendant Anarchy, and her votaries of all sorts; make the Capes wider if possible, that their entrance may be render'd as august as can be imagined . . . let them revel from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, and that you may be true worshippers of Liberty make your Negroes as free as yourselves. Then shall . . . you out-do Philadelphia for variety of Peculiarities [Europeans migrants of various religious traditions], and grow rich as Pennsylvania herself, without planting that sovereign Weed [tobacco], which has never yet planted in Pennsylvania.[102]

Satire usually has embedded within it truth of which the satirist may or may not be aware. Toleration is satirized as anarchy. The satirist saw the connection between freedom in matters of religion for dissenters and legal freedom for slaves; his *reductio ad absurdum* argument was prescient. A later writer in the *Gazette* worried that 'sectaries' and slaves were dangers to society. He agreed with the satirist but put it more plainly: 'Negroes and Sectaries . . . are each of them, separately, disease enough in any government, but together, would invigorate and complete the malignity of each other'.[103]

The association of slaves with New Light preaching became an identifier for slave holders seeking run-away slaves. Jupiter, alias Gibb, 'has several scars on his back from a severe whipping had at Sussex court-house, having been tried there for stirring up the Negroes in an insurrection, being a great Newlight preacher'.[104] Charles, a run-away from

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[102] Scully, *Nat Turner's Virginia*, p. 20-21; *Virginia Gazette* (Hunter), 20 March 1752, pp. 1-2, https://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?issueIDNo=52.H.13&page=1&res=LO (Accessed: 17 August 2019).

[103] *Virginia Gazette* (Hunter), April 10, 1752, p. 1, https://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?issueIDNo=52.H.18 (Accessed: 17 August 2019).

[104] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 1 October 1767, p. 1, https://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?IssueIDNo=67.PD.44&page=1 (Accessed 29 November 2019).

Charles City, 'reads well, and is a great Preacher, from which I image he will pass for a freeman'.[105] A Chesterfield County mulatto, named Primus, 'has been a preacher ever since he was 16 years of age and has done much mischief in his neighbourhood. I expect he will endeavor to pass for a freeman'.[106] The commentators' concerns in the 1750s were born out in some quarters as enslaved men, who embraced dissenting church doctrine, became a source of concern among slaveholding whites.

The membership records of Raccoon Swamp between 1774 and 1780 include at least fifteen enslaved persons, as evidenced by instances of discipline for various infractions euphemistically described in the minutes as 'disorderly walking'. The discipline meted out to white members was also described as being for 'disorderly walking'. Disorderly walking generally meant behaving in ways that were inconsistent either with Christian or social mores. These mild censures in the church records could apply to white women and men, as well as slaves. For slave members, censure could be for disobedience to their masters. Baptists, like Anglicans, were motivated to maintain discipline within their slave population. On May 5, 1776, 'Wm Barker's Ned [was] censured for disorderly walking'. [107] For women, it might be encouragement to return to her home. In February 1775, the church advised Sister Jude to abide with her husband, according to 1 Corinthians 7:13. For men, drinking to excess was an issue that would bring on censure. On February 5, 1776, 'Charles Judkins [was] censured for drunkenness'. [108] Censure for disorderly walking could be brought if two members were arguing and not resolving the dispute. On August 3, 1778, the record states

[105] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 18 April 1771, p. 3, https://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?IssueIDNo=71.PD.18&page=3 (Accessed: 29 November 2019).

[106] *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 27 February 1772, p. 3, https://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?IssueIDNo=72.R.03&page=3 (Accessed: 29 November 2019).

[107] Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Record Book, February 1775, p. 7.

[108] *Ibid.*

that ‘a committee [was] appointed to settle a matter between J. S. Bell [one of the church elders] and Mary Stokes made a report to the church, settled’.[109]

Censuring also had political overtones. Raccoon Swamp, for example, threatened censure for disorderly walking if a couple were to go to an Anglican minister for a legal marriage. ‘Query: What shall be done with a member that utterly rejects the plan of marriage, adopted by the Baptist association and churches; and to enter into the marriage state, by the authority of a priest, which we have no reason to believe was ever called of God, to ministerial function. Answered by the church, him or they are disorderly and to be dealt with according to Gospel Rule’.[110] Marriage rites were a particular point of friction between the Establishment and dissenters of all sorts, as only Anglican ministers had the legal authority to marry couples until 1784 when the House of Delegates gave non-establishment ministers license to conduct marriage ceremonies.[111] Spangler indicates that this was a major practical step away from toleration and toward genuine religious freedom.[112] In a time of war, Ragosta indicates that dissenters tied their support of the on-going struggle with Britain to the granting of additional liberties for dissenting ministers. For example, Ragosta cites the General Assembly’s reluctant allowance for Virginia’s ‘dissenting ministers to perform marriage ceremonies but limited the number of those who could perform marriage rites and required them, unlike their Anglican counterparts, to obtain a license, generally restricting each dissenting minister to one county’.[113] The Delegates were following their precedent of only

[109] Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Record Book, February 1775, p. 10.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[111] Semple, *Baptists in Virginia* (1810), p. 34; Nelson, *Blessed Company*, p. 222; Hockman, ‘Hellish and Malicious Incendiares’, p. 173.

[112] Spangler, *Virginians Reborn*, p. 211; Virginia General Assembly, October 1780, 5th of Commonwealth, Chap. XVI, ‘An act declaring what shall be a lawful marriage’, para. 1 in Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 10, pp. 361-362.

[113] Ragosta, ‘Fighting for freedom’, p. 249.

permitting one dissenting meeting house per county. Again, toleration was applied to permit but limit dissenter activity, not freely accommodate it.

At the Kehukee Baptist Association meeting in August 1776, 'John Moore Sr. moved for a plan to be fallen upon for Marriage in the regular Baptist society, the association took it into consideration and appointed . . . a committee to draw a plan for the same'.[114] The committee presented a plan on October 20, 1777, calling for the marriage candidates to 'properly [publish their intentions] three several Sundays in publick congregation (or parish) in the County (or parish) where one or both of the parties resides by the Minister (or clerk) of some regular Baptist Church having care of souls'.[115] It appears from this regulation that a couple in a Regular Baptist church needed to obey the civil laws regarding marriage but were not to be married by any but a regular Baptist preacher.[116] Thus in 1778, Raccoon Swamp applied this policy to its membership, creating a potential conflict if a couple simply went to the Anglican parson for marriage rites.

These records document that Baptists had an effective means to hold members accountable for the way they lived without exposing them to public shaming should the records be made public. Censure was sometimes followed by excommunication if the persons subject to censure chose not to repent. Just as the County Court would issue a grand jury notice to appear requiring the presence of a person at the next court to answer a charge, so Raccoon Swamp would censure a member for 'disorderly walking' (living a disorderly life as Paul described in 2 Thessalonians 3:6) and cite them to appear at the next meeting to answer for the issue. They used judicial language in discussing church discipline. Like the court, which would appoint three or more persons to deal with an estate or look into a purchase on

[114] 'Kehukey Baptist Association Minutes, 20 October 1777', pp. 28-29.

[115] *Ibid.*

[116] *Ibid.*

behalf of the county, the church would appoint committees of three or more to look into issues arising between members.[117]

The residents of Sussex County who attended Raccoon Swamp Baptist Church during this period strode the line between peaceful coexistence with their neighbors while pressing for recognized space in the community. Raccoon Swamp's membership had an interesting relationship with Albemarle Anglican parish. The Regular Baptists were well known in the neighborhood and had regular and trusted interaction with the Anglican leadership in Sussex County. The membership was a mix of land-renting and land-owning Sussex County residents. The procession reports in the Albemarle Parish Vestry books identify twenty-four Raccoon Swamp members whose land boundaries were verified via procession reports. Nathaniel Holt, who was appointed the church clerk at Raccoon Swamp in 1773, also served as an official land processioner in 1772, 1775 and 1779. In 1772 and 1775, Holt was partnered with James Bell, another member of Raccoon Swamp Church.[118] Clearly, Regular Baptists where not considered "outsiders" by the Anglican majority but were accepted as valued citizens. The opposite was true as well. In April 1771, Holt was listed in the parish levy for payment for services rendered as clerk for St. Andrews church. Apparently, when he joined Raccoon Swamp, he was known and trusted by many Baptists as he was given responsibility on a committee to raise funds to build the meeting house and to serve as one of the church elders.[119] In May 1778, Holt was appointed to a committee commissioned to approach the vestry about the care of an indigent woman among the Baptist's membership. This was after one year of underwriting her support among members of Raccoon Swamp.

[117] Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Record Book, 2 February 1778, p. 9; 5 February 1779, p. 10.

[118] *Ibid.*, 13 February 1773, p. 5-6; Davis and Hogwood (eds.), *Vestry Book Albemarle Parish*, 29 June 1779, pp. 222, 227.

[119] Davis and Hogwood (eds.), *Vestry Book Albemarle Parish*, 2 April 1771, p. 193; Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Record Book, 13 February 1773, pp. 5-6.

Apparently, the petition of the Baptist committee received a positive reception. Holt was paid £7.10 by the vestry in January of 1782 for keeping her for three years.[120]

Not all was harmonious, however, between the parish and Raccoon Swamp. In the same year as the petition for indigent care for a member, the business session of Raccoon Swamp held in February 1778 warned (as was mentioned just above) that Baptist couples who were married by the local Anglican minister, Rev. William Andrews, who succeeded Rev. Willie upon his death in 1776, would be placed under censure for going to him.[121]

Meglamre's Influence among Baptists and Anglicans

Peacemaking between Regular and Separate Baptists

Long before John Meglamre moved to Virginia, he participated in efforts to seek reconciliation between Regular Baptists and Separate Baptists. The two groups had kept their distance for years because a Regular Baptist elder had declined to assist Isaac Stearns with ordination of additional pastors. The Regular Baptists considered Separate Baptists 'a disorderly set, suffering women to pray in public and permitting every ignorant man to preach that chose; and that they encouraged noise and confusion in their meetings'.[122] As pastor of Kehukee Church in Halifax, North Carolina, in August 1771, Meglamre was among the pastors commissioned by the Kehukee Association to visit the September 1771 meeting of the Virginia General Association of Separate Baptists. The Separate Association in turn sent delegates with a response declining to be in communion for three reasons:

> (1) The Regulars were not being strict enough in receiving experiences, which persons made application to their churches for baptism in order to become church members. (2) They refused communion with Regular Baptists churches because Separate Baptists believed that faith in Christ Jesus was essential to qualify a person for baptism, yet many of the Regular churches had members in them who

[120] Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Record Book, 22 May 1778, p. 9; Davis and Hogwood (eds.), *Vestry Book Albemarle Parish*, 25 January 1782, p. 234.

[121] Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Record Book, 2 February 1778, p. 9; Davis and Hogwood (eds.), *Vestry Book Albemarle Parish*, 18 July 1776, p. 223.

[122] Semple and Beale, *Baptists in Virginia* (1894), p. 16.

> acknowledged they were baptized before they believed. (3) The Separates found fault with the Regulars for their manner of dress, supposing they indulged their members in superfluity of apparel.[123]

Meglamre was among reformers who took these criticisms to heart, particularly point two, and sought an internal reform on the issue of baptism. Several churches, who had joined the Kehukee Association as Regular Baptists, pulled out of the association rather than confront long-term members with the necessity of believer's baptism.[124] Huggins observed that 'the principle emphasis of the Regulars was concerned with doctrine while the emphasis of the Separates was evangelism'.[125] Meglamre and others, who were intentional about making new converts to the Baptist faith, had hoped for communion with the Separates in Virginia. The tension between the two groups reflects what Irons describes as Baptists being 'radically congregational in theory but profoundly connectional in practice'.[126] The one element both Regular and Separate Baptists had in common was their insistence on congregational autonomy, which was unlike the practice of Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Quakers, who have hierarchical forms of church government. This one element, however, made communion difficult when there were serious doctrinal or praxis or cultural (i.e. 'superfluity of dress') differences between the two groups of Baptists.

Meglamre, when he moved to Virginia, took this lesson with him. When Virginia and North Carolina churches decided in 1790 that it was mutually beneficial to the churches to create a new association in Virginia, the association that was formed, Portsmouth Association, contained both Regular and Separate Baptist Churches. Meglamre was elected the first moderator of the association, and his protégé, David Barrow, preached the first associational sermon. The constitution agreed to by the twenty-eight pastors in attendance

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[123] Burkitt and Read, *Kehukee Baptist Association*, p. 42.

[124] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[125] Huggins, *North Carolina Baptists,* p. 75.

[126] Irons, 'Evangelical Geographies', in Tise and Crow (eds.), *New Voyages to Carolina*, p. 148.

protected the sovereignty of each church. Article 3 states, the association 'shall have no power to lord it over God's heritage; nor shall they have any classical power over the churches; nor shall they infringe the internal rights of any church in the union'.[127] What he had not been able to achieve in North Carolina, Meglamre saw achieved in Virginia, however tenuous the connection. Meglamre applied this effort toward unity in his own neighborhood, when a neighboring church, Sappony Baptist, which is listed by Burkitt and Read as a Separate Baptist congregation, chose in 1773 as its second pastor elder James Bell, one of John Meglamre's early Virginia converts.[128]

James Bell, Virginia Cavalier turned Baptist Elder

Among the early converts to the Baptist faith from among the Anglicans in Sussex County was James Bell. His family owned extensive property in the county, and he fulfilled roles expected of wealthy citizens. He was appointed a justice for Sussex County, serving in March 1770. At that court session he was listed as a lieutenant in the county militia. In May 1770, the court ordered him to be responsible for the county census; producing a list of tithables for citizens in Sussex County living south of the Nottoway River.[129] Bell had aspirations; he successfully stood for one of Sussex County's seats in the Virginia House of Burgesses and was seated in May 1770, replacing the deceased John Edmunds.[130] His success as an aspiring squire was not without cost. On March 17, 1770, he hosted a gathering called a 'treat', wherein guests could imbibe freely of alcohol. This conviviality was expected by his

[127] Jones, *Virginia Portsmouth Association*, p. 15, quoting from the 1791 minutes of the Portsmouth Baptist Association meeting.

[128] Burkitt and Read, *Kehukee Association*, p. 50; *Sappony Baptist Church*, p. 2.

[129] J. B. Boddie, *Southside Virginia Families*, vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD, 2003), p. 36; Sussex County Order Book, March 1770, pp. 434-435.

[130] W. G. Stanard and M. N. Stanard, *Colonial Virginia Register* (Baltimore, MD, 1989), p. 177.

fellow freeholders as a sign of respect for the voters.[131] One of his neighbors, John Ray, walked away from the gathering, apparently quite drunk, and drowned in Joseph's Swamp. Rev. William Willie recorded the incident in his parish register with the notation, 'I wish others may take warning from this'.[132] Bell continued in his expected roles. In September 1770, he was present as a justice at the county court and in July 1771 he sat in the House of Burgesses session. In October 1771, he and Nathaniel Holt served together as procession masters. However, his conversion was a turning-point in his public service tenure. Augustine Clairborne, county clerk in 1771, made the note that Bell 'turned Anabaptist and was publickly deposed' from his position both as a Burgess and as a justice for the county.[133] By February 1772 he was replaced in the House of Burgesses by Richard Blunt and by June 13, 1772, the Baptists meeting at Raccoon Swamp had appointed him a deacon.[134] He was soon preaching. Though James Bell suffered temporary opprobrium for joining the 'Anabaptists', a term oft used to associate Baptists with rebels of an earlier century.[135] While the ignorant might be swayed by Baptists, the better sort should not be so easily swayed.[136]

Why was Bell 'publickly deposed' from his Burgess position? Various explanations have been offered. Taylor indicates that Bell's brother Benjamin, who had become a Baptist in North Carolina, shared his conversion experience with James and 'the affectionate concern which was manifested for his welfare affected him deeply'.[137] Williams suggests that John

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[131] C. S. Sydnor, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1973), p. 59.

[132] Richards, *Register Albemarle Parish*, p. 167.

[133] G. M. Williams, *Sussex County, Virginia: A Heritage Recalled by the Land* (Petersburg, VA, [2012]), p. 55. Williams is retired from the office of the Clerk for Sussex County, Virginia. He cites Sussex County Loose Papers #1771-204.

[134] Sussex County Order Book, September 1770, p. 532; Davis and Hogwood (eds.), *Vestry Book Albemarle Parish*, p. 205; Stanard and Stanard, *Colonial Virginia Register*, pp. 179, 182; Raccoon Swamp/Antioch Baptist Church Record Book, p. 2.

[135] Ryland, *Baptists of Virginia*, pp. 3, 32.

[136] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, pp. 6-9.

[137] J. B. Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers* (1859), pp. 172-173.

Ray's death in 1770 possibly caused some soul-searching on Bell's part. He notes that Bell's last appearance as a county magistrate was the same day that Ray's widow applied to be the executrix of his will.[138] Bell was baptised by Meglamre, Taylor says, in 1770.[139]

James Bell was present at the Kehukee Meeting House in North Carolina with Meglamre at the August 1771 meeting of the Kehukee Baptist Association. So it is possible that James Bell, visiting his brother Benjamin Bell in North Carolina, after the July 1771 House of Burgesses session, was introduced to James Meglamre while he was pastor of Kehukee Church, and experienced Baptist polity in an association meeting not long after his conversion. Likely he followed Meglamre back to his home county and was appointed a deacon when Raccoon Swamp meeting house was constituted an independent body of believers. Eventually, Bell was called to serve as an elder for a gathering of Baptists near Stony Creek in Sussex County, where he served till his death in 1778.[140] Apparently, all of this change in Bell's life did not affect his relationship with the Anglican vestry. Both he and Nathaniel Holt, now Baptists, were appointed procession masters for an area including Raccoon Swamp, in December 1775.[141] Thus, it seems Meglamre and the leaders he nurtured lived peaceably among the Anglicans around them.

David Barrow and Regular Baptist Civil Engagement

Another of John Meglamre's young associates in North Carolina was David Barrow. He joined Meglamre in the formation of Raccoon Swamp and was subsequently asked by members of Raccoon Swamp who lived in Isle of Wight County to serve as their preaching elder, forming Mill Swamp Baptist Church in May 1774.[142] In September 1774, David

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[138] Williams, *Sussex County*, pp. 54-55.

[139] J. B. Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers* (1859), p. 173.

[140] J. B. Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers* (1859), p. 173; *Sappony Baptist Church,* p. 2.

[141] Davis and Hogwood (eds.), *Vestry Book Albemarle Parish,* p. 222.

[142] *History of Burleigh/Mill Swamp Baptist Church* (2014), pp. 13-14, 58.

Barrow was also asked to serve as a preaching elder for Baptists living in Southampton County. The two branches off Raccoon Swamp Baptist Church were approximately twenty miles apart from each other. Barrow settled in Southampton County while serving both churches. He led both churches from 1774 to 1798, when he sold his farm and moved to Kentucky.[143] He spent these years farming, preaching, and leading the Kehukee and Petersburg Association meetings. After the Revolution, he also served as a judge in the Southampton County Court. He had been recommended to the Governor to serve in this capacity by the current justices of the Southampton Court; this recommendation was repeated in March 1782, and Barrow was sworn in on May 9 of that same year. He was one of the four justices present in thirty-nine sessions of the court from 11 May 1786 to 10 June 1790. There is no record of his participation as a judge from June 1790 until his departure from Virginia to Kentucky.[144] Ernest Freeberg comments, 'Before he took his leave from Virginia, Barrow told his fellow Baptists that there was only one solution to the problems that were driving him away from his native land, one way to resolve the conflict over slavery, restore spiritual fervor to the Baptist community, and reassert the authority of its leadership. The one solution, he believed, was to trust that God would 'again revive his work in these parts' through 'a glorious revival'.[145]

Barrow had come to Virginia as an eager young man seeking to serve God and his churches. What caused him, more than twenty years later, to move his family westward across the Commonwealth, over the mountains and into the Kentucky wilderness?[146] Speculation is not necessary, because he wrote a 'Circular Letter' to explain this decision.

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[143] *History of Burleigh/Mill Swamp Baptist Church,* p. 19; E. A. Freeberg, III, "Why David Barrow Moved to Kentucky," *The Virginia Baptist Register*, vol. 32 (1993), pp. 1617-1627, p. 1626.

[144] J. B. Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers* (1859), pp. 161-171; Burkitt and Read, *Kehukee Association*, pp. 65-66, 78-79, 90, 106-107, 119; Jones, *Virginia Portsmouth Association*, p. 20; Alley, *Baptists in Virginia*, p. 125; *Southampton Order Book, 1778-1784, 1784-1788*; *1786-1790*.

[145] Freeberg, 'David Barrow', p. 1626.

[146] Huggins, *North Carolina Baptists*, p. 75.

Before examining his reasons, a knowledge of the social and ecclesial circumstances in both Isle of Wight and Southampton Counties will be helpful.[147]

Parish records from the Newport Parish in Isle of Wight are limited, and parish records of Nottoway and St. Luke's in Southampton are not extant, so knowledge of parish activity is only known through the parishes' interactions with the county court as revealed in its order books and through near-contemporary secondary sources such as Bishop Meade.[148] Newport Parish was founded in 1734 when the original parish in the Isle of Wight was divided.[149] Among its ministers was John Camm, who would later become President of the College of William and Mary. Another was John Milnor, rector of Newport Parish from 1760-1766, who resigned in disgrace.[150] Henry John Burges, a native of the North Carolina coast, was appointed to Newport Parish in 1770. In 1778, he moved to Suffolk Parish in Nansemond County.[151] This change of venue corresponds with an infamous event in Suffolk Parish history involving Elder David Barrow.

In 1777, members of Mill Swamp Baptist Church, living in Nansemond County (present day Suffolk, Virginia), requested that a branch of the Mill Swamp Church be established near them, with David Barrow visiting them periodically. This was granted, and in 1778, David Barrow and Caspar Mintz, another Baptist preacher, visited the area. What all the various accounts agree on is that some neighborhood men, around twenty of them, were determined to break up the Baptist meeting. They roughed up Mintz but directed most of their

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[147] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Circular Letter', pp. 440-451.

[148] W. Meade, 'Article XXV, Parishes in Isle of Wight and Southampton', *Old Churches,* vol. II (1861), pp. 299-305.

[149] E. M. Babb, *History of Ivor and its Environs* (1965), p. 12; G. M. Mason, 'The Colonial Churches of Isle of Wight and Southampton Counties, Virginia', *The William and Mary Quarterly,* 23 (January 1943), pp. 41-63, p. 42; 'Isle of Wight County Records', *William and Mary Quarterly*, p. 210.

[150] 'Isle of Wight County Records', *William and Mary Quarterly*, p. 210; 'John Milner', in J. McLachlan, *Princetonians: 1748-1768: A Biographical Dictionary* (Princeton, NJ, 1976), pp. 237-238.

[151] Babb, *Ivor*, p. 28; M. D. Haywood, 'Thomas and Henry John Burges, Church of England Missionaries in the Provinces of Virginia and North Carolina during the Eighteenth Century', (Raleigh, N.C., 1926), pp. 7-8, manuscript, Virginia Museum of History and Culture, Richmond, Virginia.

violence toward David Barrow. Joseph Dunn records, 'They jeered and sung songs and finally captured Barrow and Mintz and carried them to the river and dunked them. Barrow was the chief sufferer, as they thrust his face into the mud of the river'.[152] Taylor recounts, 'They plunged Mr. Barrow twice, pressing him into the mud, and holding him down, nearly succeeded in drowning him. In the midst of their mocking, they asked him if he believed'.[153] According to a letter about the incident transcribed by Little, Barrow replied, 'I believe you mean to drown me'.[154] This practice was common in Great Britain, where Catholics often suffered near drownings at the hands of Protestants worried about them being enemies of the state.[155] It could be that Barrow's assailants thought him an enemy of the local parish or county government. Dunn describes the Baptist versions as hagiography, making a martyrdom story out of an isolated incident. He suggests that 'the affair was evidently the outcome of the reckless mood of a crowd of young rowdies, who resented the preacher's criticism of them. Only the fevered imagination of a pious chronicler could make it appear as part of a systematic persecution by the established church'.[156] Dunn, however, may not have taken into consideration the history between Barrow and Burgess.

Baptist Elder David Barrow and Anglican minister, Rev. Henry John Burgess, were contemporaneously ministering in Isle of Wight County prior to this incident. Mill Swamp was a most unusual church. Their membership was growing and came to include community leaders and enslaved persons, indicating that the Regular Baptists were accepted by their neighbors, and inclusive in scope. Mill Swamp's reports to the Kehukee Association during this period indicate growth from a membership of 83 persons at its founding in 1774 to 187

[152] J. B. Dunn, *The History of Nansemond County Virginia* (1907), pp. 45-46, HathiTrust.org.

[153] J. B. Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers* (1859), p. 163-164.

[154] L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, p. 463.

[155] Colley, *Britons*, p. 22.

[156] Dunn, *Nansemond County*, p. 46.

reported in August 1773.[157] It appears that one of the county judges and a member of the vestry, John Lawrence, joined the Baptists in July of 1774. In addition, Mill Swamp had among its members fifty-four enslaved persons.[158] Spangler notes that by the time Burgess left Isle of Wight County, 'the Baptists had a firm toehold in the county and could not be stopped from expanding their ministry'.[159] This was, however, more a result of weak Anglican leadership in the area that did not closely monitor dissenting groups in their neighborhood.[160] When Burgess moved over to Suffolk parish in Nansemond County in 1778, it is possible that his prior knowledge of Barrow's activity concerned him. Barrow had been put on notice, according to Taylor, 'that they might expect rough treatment'.[161] Burgess had just arrived in Suffolk Parish after their pulpit had been vacant since 1775. The tory parson, John Agnew, had been expelled from the parish. Dunn suggests that the two Baptists 'stirred up some ill-feelings'.[162] So while the hagiography may be critiqued, the young rowdies may have wanted to impress the new rector regarding their zeal for the Church. The rowdies did focus in on a major point of friction between the Establishment and Baptist dissenters—believer's baptism. Barrow's near drowning was an isolated incident because no records indicate either he or John Meglamre or other Regular Baptist pastors in the region suffered any injury outside this incident.

In general, the Anglican Establishment was much more positive in their relationships with Baptists. Baptist integration into the social structures into Southampton County is evidenced in their meeting books and other county records. Black Creek enforced civil

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[157] Mill Swamp Church Minutes, p. 1; 'Kehukey Association Minutes, August 1773', p. 22.

[158] Burkitt and Read, *Kehukee Baptist Association*, p. 49-50; Isle of Wight Order Book, 1772-1780, pp. 3, 25, 89; Mill Swamp Church Minutes, 2 July 1774, p. 1.

[159] Spangler, *Virginians Reborn*, p. 101.

[160] *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

[161] Dunn, *Nansemond County*, p. 45.

[162] Gundersen, *Anglican Ministry*, p. 236; Dunn, *Nansemond County*, p. 45.

obedience. Member Peter Butler was disciplined in February 1778 for 'rejecting civil authority'; but May Butler was excommunicated by the church, its most severe sanction.[163] In February 1792, Henry Jones and James Johnson were brought before the church for discipline due to 'beating a free negro contrary to law'.[164] Jones 'acknowledged his fault [and] the church continued to forbear with him';[165] whereas James Johnson expressed no remorse. The following June, the church chose to declare Johnson 'out of their membership' due to his attitude.[166] Henry Jones acknowledged the legal and moral law he had violated; whereas Johnson did not consider the issue of beating a free black person a serious offense. The churches' disposition of the case reflected the men's disparate responses to the discipline. Elias Herring, a county judge for Southampton and a member of the Nottoway Parish vestry since 1772, is recorded as a member of Black Creek Baptist Church in January 1776, and selected to serve as church clerk.[167] Spangler notes that Herring was likely the 'richest and most powerful man in Southampton County'.[168] Herring may have been introduced to the Baptists through a series of land transactions. Giles Joyner and his wife deeded over land to a committee representing a 'society of the people called Baptists'[169] on May 11, 1775, which Herring endorsed as a presiding judge. Later in December 1775, Herring and his wife, Keziah, sold land of John Council, a member of Black Creek Baptist Church.[170]

Sometime in either 1775 or 1776, the Herrings joined Black Creek Baptist Church. While this affiliation probably affected his status as a member of the vestry, it had no effect

[163] Black Creek Baptist Church, p. 2.

[164] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[165] *Ibid.*

[166] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[167] Southampton Order Book, 1772-1777, pp. 99-100; Black Creek Baptist Church, p. 1.

[168] Spangler, *Virginians Reborn*, p. 126.

[169] Southampton Order Book, 1772-1777, p. 409.

[170] *Ibid.*

on his service as a county justice. He continued service as a county justice until May 1789.[171] He may have experienced some difficulty pulling away from his Anglican connections. He was excommunicated from Black Creek Baptist Church in August 1788 because he was 'neglecting the public worship of God and making choice of ungodly company . . . [and] for drinking to excess and swearing and joining in a club with the ungodly'.[172]

In August 1781, in Southampton County, both Barrow and Meglamre were granted licenses by the county to conduct marriages, ten months after the law was changed in Williamsburg.[173] Spangler's major step meant that Regular Baptists and other dissenters gained their first equal privilege with the Anglicans; treating dissenting preachers as legitimate ministers. The law acknowledged that perhaps religious pluralism could be accommodated safely by society.

By November 1781, Barrow was recommended to the Governor to serve as a justice of the peace on the Southampton County Court. The last notice of his service as justice was in June 1790.[174] Barrow and Meglamre illustrate differing approaches to relating to the larger societal structures. Meglamre, outside of an assignment to a road crew, never participated in county leadership. His focus was on guiding younger Baptist leaders and their churches.[175] Barrow, on the other hand, while serving as elder at Mill Swamp and Black Creek, also found time, after the Revolution, to lead Baptist work and serve as a county justice. Meglamre lived until December 1799, dying in Sussex County, where he had planted his life serving Raccoon

[171] Southampton Order Book, 1786-1790, p. 149.

[172] Black Creek Baptist Church, p. 11.

[173] Virginia General Assembly, October 1780, 5th of Commonwealth, Chap. XVI, 'An act declaring what shall be a lawful marriage', para. 1 in Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 10, pp. 361-362; Southampton Order Book, 1778-1784, August 1781, p. 154.

[174] Southampton Order Book, 1778-1784, p. 164.

[175] Ryland, 'John Meglamre', p. 22.

Swamp Baptist Church.[176] Barrow, a generation younger, moved his family to Kentucky in 1798, despite his apparent successful integration into Southampton County's community.

Barrow's Advocacy for Emancipation of Slaves

In the 1780's Barrow began a journey from a small freeholder in Southampton County with a few slaves to an ardent advocate for abolition. On 18 November 1783 and 11 March 1784, David Barrow filed documents of manumission for his slaves.[177] By this time, he was serving as a judge in the county, including over criminal cases.[178] His decision to manumit his slaves did not impact his status in the community. He served as judge regularly until June 1790.[179]

The continued importation and management of slaves in the late eighteenth century was considered problematic by Virginia's colonial government. Though they received no response, the House of Burgesses sent a petition of George III asking that he allow colonial governors the authority to stop importation of slaves. The petition argued that the slave trade, while it was making some British subjects rich, was inhumane and endangered the existence of the colonies. The petition deemed slave importing 'a pernicious business' which the colonial governors needed to regulate.[180] The petition perhaps got no response because the Board of Trade wanted to protect the slave trade.[181] Southampton Court judges, in January 1778, five years later, were concerned about the number of owners seeking to manumit slaves. They instructed Southampton's two parish vestries to 'make inquiry concerning the

[176] J. B. Taylor, *Baptist Ministers* (1859), p. 64.

[177] Southampton Order Book, 1778-1784, 11 March 1784, p. 383; C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 441.

[178] Southampton Order Book, 1778-1784, p. 191.

[179] Southampton Order Book, 1786-1790, p. 254.

[180] Virginia House of Burgesses, Petition to George III, 12 April 1773 on the importation of slaves, Colonial Petitions Collection, Library of Congress (Accessed: 15 September 2018).

[181] Van Cleve, *Slaveholders' Union*, p. 20.

premises and deal with such slaves as the law directs'.[182] Najar points out that Baptists sought to govern both the public and private lives of their members and the issue of how their members related to slaves was part of this oversight.[183] Bro. Tines and his wife were reported for 'using barbarity toward their slaves'.[184] They were ordered to appear at the next business meeting of the church. This language was similar to language that the court used upon receiving charges from a Grand Jury.

Post-revolution, slavery was easier to protect as the revolutionaries became the governing leaders of a new nation. In debates, slave states had virtual veto power over legislation dealing with slaves in the new Continental Congress. They were 'far larger stakeholders in a much smaller country'.[185] Slavery created significant tension among the members of Black Creek, as born out in the minutes of Black Creek Baptist Church business meetings. The presence of the largest landholder, Elias Herring, who was heavily invested in the slave economy, may have contributed to the tension. Slavery was debated by the Black Creek Baptist congregation. In February 1786, the congregation recorded an official query that required discussion and an answer. 'Is it a [righteous] thing for a Christian to hold or cause any of the human race to be held in slavery'?[186] Consideration of the query was postponed to the next conference. In November 1786, the question was discussed, and a terse answer recorded: 'unrighteous'.[187] The congregation continued to wrestle with the implications of this moral statement. The question came in May of 1787, could freeholders

[182] Southampton Order Book, 1778-1784, p. 2.

[183] Najar, 'Meddling with Emancipation', pp. 158-159.

[184] Black Creek Baptist Church, p. 8. There is no indication in the meeting minutes that the Tines appeared to answer for the incident in question.

[185] Van Cleve, *Slaveholders Union,* p. 42; Wolf, *Race and Liberty*, pp. 40-41.

[186] Black Creek Baptist Church, p. 5-6.

[187] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

rent slaves from slave holders or was this equally condemned? The discussion was postponed in May and June. In July the question was withdrawn with no resolution.[188]

The debate may have caused ill feelings among the members. Elias Herring, who had been clerk of the church, stopped attending and may have moved back toward his Anglican circle of friends. The August 1788 minutes indicated that Herring was excommunicated due to his 'neglecting the public worship of God and making choice of ungodly company . . . [and] for drinking to excess and swearing and joining in a club with the ungodly'.[189] The tensions continued at Black Creek, with members who advocated for abolition even refusing to take communion with members who held slaves. Sarah Barrow, elder David Barrow's wife, and a few other members in June 1791, on the question of holding or hiring slaves, 'caused a debate which took up the greater part of the day'.[190] The church agreed to 'bear with them until a further hearing'.[191] Brother Noel Vick, who objected to taking communion with slave holders, was told in February of 1794 that he 'should content himself as much as possible under the care and in fellowship with the church'.[192] While struggling with this issue, the congregation at Black Creek was making an effort to maintain the unity that the confession they signed in 1786 committed them. The 1743 Philadelphia Confession, which was likely the confession they signed in 1786, states, 'All saints that are united in Jesus Christ, their head, by his Spirit, and . . . being united in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, in an orderly way, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward

[188] Black Creek Baptist Church, pp. 8-10.

[189] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[190] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[191] *Ibid.*

[192] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

man'.[193] Their mutual accountability to one another, along with the economic and cultural pressures on them as citizens of the newly formed Commonwealth of Virginia, created the tension within the group that some, like Elijah Herring and Bro. Vick, could not sustain. Bro. Herring left the church and the church disowned him; not so much because of the source of the tension, but because of the route he chose to alleviate the tension between his accountability to the Baptist church as a member and leader and his integration as a leader in the community. Bro. Vick chose initially to stay faithful to the congregation and advocate for change, but he too eventually parted ways with the congregation. In 1802, the church 'declared him out of fellowship' due to 'his long absence from attending our appointed meetings'.[194] Both left the church over the question of slave holding. Scully argues that for Barrow and other advocates manumission 'presented the opportunity for white Baptists voluntarily to free themselves from the sin of slavery and take a leadership role in the ending of slavery in the new nation. . . . Manumission was a concrete and public point at which these men's belief in the association of Christianity, republicanism, and freedom was realized'.[195] Barrow crossed that line in 1784. Many Baptists did not want to follow Barrow's example.

Semple criticized Barrow's abolitionism as rendering him less effective and divisive; that is, his position 'was . . . productive of more evil than good. While it embarrassed his affairs at home by lessening his recourses for the maintenance of a large family, it rendered him suspicious among his acquaintances, and probably in both ways limited his

[193] *A Confession of faith, put forth by the elders and brethren of many congregations of Christians (baptized upon profession of their faith) in London and the country. Adopted by the Baptist Association met at Philadelphia, Sept. 25. 1742: To which are added, two articles viz. of imposition of hands, and singing of psalms in publick worship. Also a short treatise of church discipline* (Philadelphia, 1743), pp. 98-99, America's Historical Imprints.

[194] Black Creek Baptist Church, p. 36.

[195] Scully, *Nat Turner's Virginia*, p. 117.

usefulness'.[196] Anglican ministers faced the same tension. They dared not seek to catechize enslaved persons in their parish without the express consent of the slave holder.[197]

Barrow and his wife certainly saw the contradiction between the freedom enjoyed by the free residents of the new nation and the bondage in which their black brethren were held. Barrow not only led by example in 1784 by manumitting his own slaves, but he was entrusted by his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Gilliam, with the freeing of her own slaves. In her will, she instructed Barrow to see to it that Jeremiah, age 19, was bound out to a blacksmith and then set free once his apprenticeship was concluded. Jeremiah's wife, Polly, age 18, was also to be freed once his apprenticeship was completed. Gilliam wanted to make sure that Jeremiah, as a freedman, would have a trade to support his family.[198]

In the 1790s, Barrow took his advocacy for manumission outside the church walls.[199] He was appointed to a committee charged to consider the 'equity of hereditary slavery' at the annual meeting of the Baptist General Committee (a group uniting Regular and Separate Baptists in 1788). The committee could not agree among themselves on a statement. The committee turned to John Leland to craft a statement that they sent around to their sister associations, but it received little support.[200] In 1796, Barrow was the moderator for the Portsmouth Association, which adopted the following resolution: 'Covetousness leads Christians, with the people of the country in general, to hold and retain in abject slavery a set of our poor fellow creatures, contrary to the laws of God and nature'.[201] Indeed, as the Burgesses' petition noted in 1773, some of the King's subjects enjoyed 'emoluments' from

[196] Semple and Beale, *Baptists in Virginia* (1894), p. 466.

[197] Anesko, 'Slavery and the Anglican Church', pp. 254, 278.

[198] Southampton Order Book, 1778-1784, p. 383; Hopkins, *Sussex County, Virginia Will Books A-F*, p. 139.

[199] Alley, *Baptists in Virginia*, pp. 125-127.

[200] Ryland, *Baptists of Virginia*, pp. 150-151.

[201] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

slavery.[202] Barrow challenged Baptists to consider whether they were as covetous as the wealthy people around them, exploiting the energies of fellow human beings for profit.

The North Carolina Kehukee Association Baptist leaders who moved into the region south of the James River were in some ways returning to their roots. The area was not prime tobacco land and yet small farmers, and large land holders were able to develop a modicum of wealth in the area. While Albemarle Parish in Sussex County, under the long-lived leadership of William Willie, enjoyed stability during his tenure, the Anglican parishes in Isle of Wight and Southampton were less privileged, with ministers coming and going. The Baptists, along with the Quakers and Presbyterians in this area, were generally undisturbed by the Established Church. After the Revolution, David Barrow was fully integrated into the leadership of the county. Elias Herring joined him regularly presiding at county court sessions. However, as the conflict over slavery indicates, some Baptists knew they needed to challenge the economic exploitation of human slaves. Their Anglican leaders, seeking to curtail the importation of slaves, called it 'a trade of great inhumanity'.[203] As Barrow charged, covetousness and conforming to the expectations of others served to short-circuit efforts, even at the local level, to challenge the social system sustained by slavery.

Barrow determined in 1797 that his family needed a change of venue and some new opportunities. Like so many Revolutionary war veterans in Virginia, he saw land in Kentucky as the place for this to happen. However, he did not want to create a mistaken impression or leave room for rumors about his departure, so he published a *Circular Letter*, meant for distribution in the churches where he preached or led. Circular letters were often sent by Associations to their constituent churches or other affiliated Baptist Associations following a

[202] Burgesses, Petition to George III, 12 April 1773.

[203] *Ibid.*

meeting to report the minutes and results of any decisions taken. Barrow borrowed this device for his departing message.

So, why did he leave Virginia where he was well established in his community and esteemed among Baptists? He wrote the letter, 'for the satisfaction of such enquirers (whom he cannot visit personally) . . . withal, to stop the mouths of some few enemies that I may have in this country, who in my absence may take the liberty to let out some ungenerous sayings, concerning the motives of my moving'.[204] He does admit that it was at least partially an economic decision.

> I find by long experience and constant efforts, that I cannot comfortably support my family, educate my children, and attend so much to public calls, as I have done, with my means, in this poor country, without falling into the line of speculation, or that of holding slaves, or sticking closely and personally to my farm. . . . The business of speculation, I think incompatible with the work of the ministry . . . And that of holding, tyrannizing over, and driving slaves, I view as contrary to the laws of God and nature. And if I must turn into the business of agriculture . . . common sense dictates that it would be most advisable in a country, where the God of Nature has been the most liberal with his bounties, in respect to soil, etc.[205]

In June 1796, Southampton experienced 'amazing floods of rain' which threatened the crops on everyone's farm.[206] Black Creek Baptist Church called for a day of fasting and humiliation before almighty God on June 29 to request relief from the 'devastation'.[207] Additionally selling his farm in Southampton enabled him to pay off debt, and enabled him to raise his family and educate his children. He was also no longer able to responsibly offer the hospitality expected of a county leader without feeling the economic pinch it caused.[208]

Toward the end of his letter, Barrow made an appeal to owners of slaves.

> I wish that all masters, or owners of slaves, may consider how inconsistently they act, with a Republican Government, and whether in this particular, they are doing, as they would others should do them!—I wish, most sincerely wish! That the poor, oppressed,

[204] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 444.

[205] *Ibid.*, p. 445.

[206] Black Creek Baptist Church, p. 27.

[207] *Ibid.*

[208] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 445.

> naked, hunger bitten [ ] may have patience, and fortitude to bear up under an [ ] arts honestly to do and perform their duty, (or rather wh[at i]s exacted of them) to the oppressors, and constantly pray, and look forward by faith, to that desirable time, when they will be delivered from the iron talons of their task-masters, and joyfully put off the galling yoke of slavery—And by the way I wish, that all those who are so happy as to have been liberated, may behave themselves industriously, honestly and honorably to the cause of Liberty.[209]

Knowing that some would take exception to the description of the 'iron talons' of slavery, he offers a footnote:

> In all probability some readers may be rather offended at some remarks and expressions in this letter, concerning slavery: especially those who are inclined to be merciful, and somewhat tender to their slaves; but such ought to consider, that however gentle they may be towards them, the nature of their situation is such, that they are daily liable to fall into worse hands; for who can tell what sort of feelings his heirs and successors will possess? So that if we view the subject with all the horrors attending it, it is impossible for language to dress it in colours too dark.[210]

Emancipation of slaves, for Barrow, was a goal worthy of hazarding everything because he saw their humanity and he would continue in Kentucky to push for change.[211]

In the larger social context, Nash contends, the 1770s and 1780s was a prime time for making changes. If the country's founders had made a united effort to abolish slavery, the three deep southern states' intransigence could have been overcome by the risks inherent in their isolation.[212] The Virginia House of Delegates in 1782 reinstated private manumission, which made Barrow's manumission of his slaves a legal possibility.[213]

Conclusion

Regular Baptists and Anglicans in the Tidewater region felt pressure to conform to a civil environment that embraced slavery as an economic and social institution within

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[209] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 451.

[210] *Ibid.*

[211] Barrow, *Hereditary Slavery Examined*.

[212] Nash, *Race and Revolution*, pp. 11-18.

[213] Virginia General Assembly, May 1782, 6th of Commonwealth, Chap. XXI, 'An act to authorize the manumission of slaves' in Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 11, p. 39-40.

Virginia. Rev. Willie tried to put a 'best face upon' the slaves' unjust condition. He was aware of the challenge that the enslaved condition put a human being, 'that he who loses his liberty, loses half his virtue'.[214] Barrow echoed Willie's assessment of the unjust condition, 'What justice or mercy there can be in taking an unoffending people forcibly from their native country and that at a great distance, under the pretense of refining and Christianizing them, and then reducing them and their posterity to abject hereditary slavery'?[215]

While toleration created the potential for peace between white neighbors in the Tidewater, it also created a condition that allowed the government to determine the terms upon which Established and dissenting churches related to one another and how both related to Virginia's colonial and early republican government. Neither group could effectively challenge the presence of slavery in the colony. As the Anglican ministers learned during the Parson's cause, a minister was in no position to defend his own rights without consequence, much less the human rights of enslaved persons within their parish. Regular Baptists' embrace of slaves as members of their churches created tension both within the church and about the church. By 1790, Virginia was home of 293,000 slaves, 42 percent of the total number of slaves in the United States.[216] Virginia Anglican parishioners and Regular Baptist church members were slaveholders and economically dependent upon the system. Very few were willing to emancipate those they forced to work their fields and undertake countless other household tasks. Both groups, under the religious toleration regulations, lived under the umbrella of a colonial government run by and for the landed gentry who did not want their economic and social commitment to slavery challenged.[217]

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[214] Willie to Cartwright, 30th August 1749, in De Simone, 'William Willie', p. 7.

[215] Barrow, *Hereditary Slavery Examined*, p. 38.

[216] L. K. Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York, 2009), p. 29.

[217] E. S. Morgan, *American Slavery*, pp. 316-336.

The presence of both an Established Church and dissenting churches, including Regular Baptists, in late colonial and early Republic Virginia required both crown officials and the independent government to create situationally informed solutions that impacted religion's role in Virginia and that maintained the government's managerial authority over religious expression. When that authority became untenable in the late eighteenth century, government officials worked to create conditions that allowed the state's leadership to influence the conditions under which religious leaders could be active in the public sphere, including but not limited to the issue of slavery.

Regular Baptists in the Tidewater Region settled in Virginia late in the colonial period. Anglicans had by then been managing dissenters in their midst for at least thirty years. Both religious bodies were uncomfortable under the toleration regulations for different reasons. For Anglicans, dissenting Christians were both a pastoral and a theological concern. For Regular Baptists, colonial policies, that protected the established status of the Anglican Church, were a nuisance to their privilege to worship God in their own fashion. Both groups were forced to look to the government for redress of their mutual grievances. A pamphlet exchange between Rev. James Maury, rector of Albemarle Parish, and Rev. David Thomas, elder at Broad Run Baptist Church, amply illustrates the nature of Anglican grievances, and Baptist rejoinders to those complaints.

Chapter Six

The Pamphlet Exchange between Anglican Reverend James Maury and Regular Baptist Elder David Thomas

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Virginia was surrounded by colonies with much weaker Anglican establishments, because the first charters had initially offered religious toleration to dissenting immigrants. Virginia used its influence as the oldest and most prosperous colony on the Chesapeake Bay[1] to push Maryland to create an official Anglican establishment in 1692, and encouraged the Carolinas to strengthen their establishment in 1702.[2] The Russos remind readers that 'Virginia was founded explicitly as a Protestant colony to counter Catholic Spain's ambition to dominate North America's southern coast, and from its beginnings the government maintained an established, state-sponsored, and Protestant church'.[3] Though well established around the Chesapeake Bay, the Anglican church's weakness in the other colonies created an environment where non-conformists flourished as long as they did not challenge the government-mandated perquisites of the Anglican church. Virginia's Anglican establishment was not immune to the challenges posed by the new arrivals from the colonies where religious pluralism was more common, particularly Pennsylvania, where Regular Baptists were sufficiently numerous to found a Baptist Association to promote evangelism and church growth.

The question posed by the presence of Baptists in Virginia, for the Anglican mind, was whether they were a legitimate expression of Protestant Christianity in doctrine and

[1] Russo and Russo, *Planting an Empire*, Kindle loc. 171.

[2] Krugler, *English and Catholic*, pp. 163-165, p. 244; Wilson, *Ashley Cooper*, p. 79; Underwood and Burke, *Religious Freedom in South Carolina*, p. 14.

[3] Russo and Russo, *Planting an Empire*, Kindle loc. 204.

practice. Following on, the question becomes should the colonial government interpret the Act of Toleration loosely in relation to these newcomers, as was the case in New York or the Jerseys?[4] Or should colonial leadership strictly abide by the letter of the Act of Toleration and thus seek to manage non-conformist Christian meetings with the same level of oversight provided to the Established Church?

Pamphlet Publishing on Religion in Virginia

In mid-eighteenth-century colonial Virginia, one of the hot topics of the day was the presence of Christians dissenting against the Established Anglican Church. Publishing pamphlets to debate current events was the eighteenth century's extended blog posts. They were multi-page, densely packed essays, making their argument point by point, in order to sway public opinion on the topic. Homer Calkin asserts that 'the pamphlet was considered of prime importance in forming and shaping the minds of the people'.[5] Such pamphlets were widely read in that era and may have contributed to the acceptance of religious freedom in the minds of educated colonists. The fact that they were written at all indicates that there was still much misinformation and misunderstanding on both sides, which needed to be addressed.

Opinion pieces were frequent in the various editions of the *Virginia Gazette*; both decrying the presence of dissenters and advocating for their peaceful presence in the colony.[6] In 1768, Rev. James Waddell, a Presbyterian minister, answered the Lunenburg parish minister Isaac William Giberne, who had made 'hard speeches'[7] that Waddell determined to

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[4] Jacobsen, *Unprov'd Experiment*, 181-182; Cobb, *Rise of Religious Liberty*, p. 346.

[5] H. L. Calkin, 'Pamphlets and public opinion during the American Revolution', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 64 (January 1940), pp. 22-42, p. 41.

[6] J. Waddell, 'To the Rev. W. G., Rector of Lunenburg parish, in Richmond', *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 21 July 1768, research.history.org (Accessed: 18 January 2020); 'An Address to the Anabaptists imprisoned in Caroline County, August 8, 1771', *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 20 February 1772, Accessible Archives (Accessed: 18 January 2020); 'The Sentiments of the several companies of militia and freeholders of Augusta, in Virginia, communicated by the deputies from the said companies and freeholders to their representatives in the General Assembly of the Commonwealth', *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 18 October 1776. See also Ragosta, *Religious Freedom*, p. 40-73.

[7] Waddell, 'To the Rev. W. G.', *Virginia* Gazette (Rind), 21 July 1768; Gundersen, *Anglican Ministry*, p. 254.

answer. Waddell had apparently the audacity to preach in the pulpit of one of Lunenburg parish's chapels of ease at the invitation of those gathered. The author of the address to Anabaptists in Caroline County declaims, 'And what is the good you pretend to give us in exchange for all this mischief? Why, you and your followers, Pharisee-like, appear unto men to pray and be more righteous than your neighbors; but, in reality, have only exchanged order, pure, and rational worship, for noise and confusion'.[8] He further warns, 'The General Court have exercised their power; and while none but qualified teachers assume that office, and they meet only at licensed houses, you will meet with protection, and not interruption, from magistry here; but as often as you break those limits, and every one undertakes to preach everywhere, you may expect to be proceeded against as the Law directs, and can derive no advantage from the Act of Toleration'.[9] The author lays out the Anglican position on the Act of Toleration; dissenters must stay within the limits prescribed or else face justice. Maury's pamphlet was published as the tension between Establishment and Dissenter was being argued via such pieces published in the *Gazette*.

Anglican Reverend James Maury

Toward the end of his life, Virginia Anglican minister James Maury looked with apprehension about his Fredericksville parish as the number of dissenting congregations sprung up in surrounding parishes. Annoyed in 1755 that two Presbyterian ministers preached to a group of men in a tavern in his parish as they readied to join the Virginia militia during the French and Indian War, Maury wrote, 'If to effectuate their intentions, however pious, the laws of the community must be violated and if the violation of such laws be an evil; they have, if not intentionally, yet eventually acted upon the unsound principle, which St. Paul

[8] 'An Address to the Anabaptists imprisoned in Caroline County', *The Virginia Gazette*, 20 February 1772.
[9] *Ibid.*

disclaims with so much abhorrence, doing evil that good may come'.[10] Maury ends the letter with 'Do me the justice, Sir, to believe, that a pure zeal for the established church, a sincere desire to guard the part of it which is intrusted [sic] to my care from errors in doctrine as well as practice, and a compassionate concern for many honest but ignorant people who by being unhappily seduced from the church to the coventicle have been involved in inexplicable difficulties, have been my only motives in troubling you with this complaint'.[11] Maury's view would no doubt be that dissenters needed close supervision so as to prevent social instability.

While Maury complained, Baptists who were active in nearby Louisa or Albemarle counties were not troubled by him.[12] He was alarmed enough by the activity of Baptists around him to address a pamphlet to straying members of the Established Church. It was his parting pastoral gift to defend a church he loved.[13]

James Maury published *To Christians of Every Denomination among Us, Especially Those of the Established Church, an Address: Enforcing an Inquiry into the Grounds of the Pretensions of the Preachers, Called Anabaptists* . . . , hoping to stanch the flow of Anglicans out of the Established Church.[14] Maury was an Irish-born Huguenot who was brought to Virginia as an infant, and educated at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg. He spent some time as an usher at William and Mary and taught school before receiving orders

[10] Rev. James Maury letter, 6 October 1755, in 'Letters of Patrick Henry, Sr., Samuel Davies, James Maury, Edwin Conway, and George Trask', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1 (October 1921), pp. 261-281, pp. 277-279. Maury refers here to St. Paul's letter to the Romans 3:8.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 278-279.

[12] L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, pp. 522-523. The minutes of the first Separate Baptist Association meeting in 1771 notes a church in Louisa, founded in 1770 with a membership of 100; this meeting occurred two years after Maury's death. Semple and Beale, *Baptists in Virginia* (1894), pp. 70, 215-217.

[13] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*; S. L. Patterson, 'Biographical Sketches of Anglican Clergymen Trained at the College of William and Mary, 1729-1776: A Study of James Blair's Plan and Its Results' (MA Thesis, The College of William and Mary, 1973), pp. 32-39, p. 39.

[14] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*.

and taking his first ministry position in 1742 at St. John's Parish (King William County). He transferred to Fredericksville Parish in Louisa County in 1751.[15]

James Maury was an activist in his parish work. He complained of dissenting ministers in an October 6, 1755 letter to Commissary Thomas Dawson, saying that itinerants were causing much confusion among 'well-meaning but deluded people', and that 'many other unhappy effects have usually attended the ministry of itinerants and enthusiasts in this colony, wherever they have either boldly intruded or been legally licensed'.[16] He became a bit defensive in his argument saying,

> I trust, I am far from the inhuman and uncharitable spirit of persecution. No man, either professes or thinks himself a warmer advocate for liberty of conscience, that natural right of mankind. But [he turns] when men, under pretence [sic] of asserting and exercising this right, sow the seeds of discord and confusion when they so industriously propagate heterodox opinions in a manner inconsistent with and repugnant to the formal sanctions of government and law: none, surely, not their most zealous adherents, nor even themselves, can justly complain, should they be laid under just and equitable restraints.[17]

Maury was among the ministers who had resisted implementation of the Virginia General Assembly's 'two-penny act' which would have taken Virginia ministers' salaries off of unstable tobacco standard and guaranteed that their 16,500 pounds of tobacco would earn 2 pennies per pound, regardless of the market.[18] The ministers argued with their parish vestries to maintain the status quo of their lawfully prescribed salary of 16,000 pounds of tobacco per annum and sent emissaries to London to advocate for the law's nullification. The Bishop of London saw the Act as an instrument for the colonial leaders 'to lessen the

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[15] Gundersen, *Anglican Ministry*, pp. 23, 469.

[16] James Maury, Rector, Fredericksville Parish, Letter to Thomas Dawson, Commissary of Virginia, Williamsburg, 6 October 1755, in *Dawson Family Papers*, microfilm, image 173.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Gundersen, *Anglican Ministry*, p. 189, pp. 204-210; see also 'Letters of James Maury', in A. Maury, ed., *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family Translated and Compiled from the Original Autobiography of the Rev. James (Jacques) Fontaine* (New York, 1853), pp. 378-447.

influence of the Crown and the maintenance of the clergy'.[19] When the law was disallowed by the Board of Trade as a result of lobbying efforts by the clergy, Maury proceeded to sue for payment of his full salary. The vestry lost the case; but in an odd alliance between the vestry and dissenting church men on the jury, Rev. Maury was awarded a symbolic award, rather than the full back pay he sought. The Hanover County jury, made up of a 'vulgar herd', mocked his request for damages; awarding him 'one penny' rather than the £250 he sought.[20] This personal setback for Maury had colony-wide reverberations. Shrady Hill and Rhys Isaac both indicate that the Anglican leadership feared the verdict would further encourage other vestries to withhold the salary of their clergy. Indeed, clergy salaries did become harder to collect.[21] Though honored 'as a learned man or reverenced as a good man' and an 'able, faithful, and exemplary pastor', Maury is mostly remembered as Thomas Jefferson's tutor and either the villain or the victim in the aftermath of the Parson's Cause.[22]

Maury may have had personal as well as pastoral concerns in mind when he produced his tract against Baptists. His personal grievances surely stemmed from his ill treatment before the Hanover County jury. Dissenters had wrought injustice upon him by depriving him of his due back salary. Green, his publisher, highlights his pastoral concerns when she introduces the tract with the statement, 'Mr. Maury having, for some time before his death, been totally incapacitated, by a tedious and very painful illness, from performing the duties of his extensive parish (in which, whilst he was able, no man was every more punctual) heard,

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[19] T. Terrick, Bishop of London, letter to the Board of Trade, 14 June 1759, in *Fulham Papers*, vol. 13, images 251-252.

[20] James Maury, Letter to James Camm, 12 December 1768, in Maury, *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family*, pp. 418-424. Interestingly, Maury's narrative indicates that gentlemen whom the sheriff approached to serve on the jury that court day recused themselves with various excuses. The sheriff therefore pulled the jury from more common men, including four whom Maury identified as 'New Lights'.

[21] A. S. Hill, 'The Parson's Cause', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 46 (March 1977), pp. 5-35, pp. 29-30; Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, pp. 144-146.

[22] 'Obituary of James Maury, Rector of Fredericksville', *The Virginia Gazette,* 24 August 1769, Accessible Archives.

with much grief, of the mischiefs everywhere occasioned by a strange motley tribe of sectaries, calling themselves Baptists. It was with the hope of restraining this spirit of delusion that the following papers were drawn up'.[23] Gundersen asserts that the 'tract was, in all, a strong statement of the belief that only an ordained ministry deserved a hearing'.[24] At forty-six folio pages in length, and with awareness that his death was near, this tract was his last effort to offer rational advice to his parish on dealing with the Baptists around them.

Many of the points he makes there are drawn from the experience of himself and area ministers who encountered the aggressive style and civil disobedience of the Separate Baptists. As a result, David Thomas, in his reply had to distance himself and Regular Baptists overall from the practices of Separate Baptist elders. As Kidd and Hankins observe,

> From the radical fringe of the [great] awakening's evangelicals, however, a new Baptist faction emerged. Like many radical evangelicals, these Separate Baptists experienced harsh persecution at the hands of the colonial governments. But the Baptists surging out of the Great Awakening would not back down. They took aim at America's established churches and eventually captured the hearts of millions of Americans.[25]

Much of consternation that Maury expresses in his pamphlet is due to the energetic efforts and the civil resistance of Separate Baptist preachers. Regular Baptist Elder Thomas would answer most of Maury's objections, but would not defend the noisy gatherings, 'given to boisterous preaching, singing "man-made" hymns and a call for conversion that could unleash powerful emotions'[26] that characterized Separate Baptist meetings.

Maury began this specific dispute when he arranged for the posthumous publication of his pamphlet, *To Christians of Every Denomination among Us, Especially Those of the*

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[23] 'Advertisement to the Reader', in Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 2.

[24] Gundersen, *Anglican Ministry,* pp. 190.

[25] Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, pp. 19-20.

[26] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 63; B. J. Leonard, 'Baptist Revivals and the Turn toward Baptist Evangelism: 1755/1770', in M. E. Williams, Sr. and W. B. Shurden (eds.), *Turning Points in Baptist History: A Festscrift in Honor of Harry Leon McBeth* (Macon, GA, 2008), pp. 91-101, p. 94.

Established Church, an Address: Enforcing an Inquiry into the Grounds of the Pretensions of the Preachers, Called Anabaptists . . . . Published in 1771, it had a three-fold aim: (1) to challenge Baptist claims of orthodoxy; (2) to forestall wavering Anglicans from leaving the Established Church; and (3) to encourage Anglicans who had joined Baptist meeting houses to reflect on whether that was the best decision.[27]

Maury's Charge against Baptist Claims to Orthodoxy

Maury first wanted to establish that Christian faith is wholly rational: 'its moral precepts, and the motives enforcing them, are in the highest degree rationale'; a concept in line with the enlightenment-based curriculum at the College of William and Mary where he received his education.[28] This was the higher ground; to be contrasted with the emotionalism of Baptist worship. He conceded the place of Scripture as an authority in church life: 'Thenceforward our reason obligeth us to regard [the Scriptures] as a perfect rule of faith and manners, and the unerring standard of all religious truth', and subsequent generations of believers after the first generation 'were directed to examine by that whatever should be advanced in doctrine or morals by subsequent teachers, . . . and, according to its agreement with or deviation from that, to admit it as orthodox, or reject it as erroneous'.[29] Further, Scripture is intended to test the character of any teacher who claims to have been sent by God. 'This last there have been pretenders to in every age and nation', Maury posited, and 'to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit is evidently a point of the last importance'. [30] He

[27] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, cover page.

[28] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 1; James Blair, Commissary of Virginia, commended Maury to the Bishop of London in February 1741. James Maury 'has been educated at our college and gave a very bright example of diligence in his studies and of good behavior as to morals. He has made good proficiency in the study of Latin and Greek authors and has read some systems of philosophy and divinity'. 'Journals of the Meetings of the President and Masters of William and Mary College [continued] II', *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Papers*, 1 (1892), pp. 214-220, p. 220, books.google.com.

[29] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*', p. 4.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

argued that Baptists are not exemplars of orthodoxy based on biblical standards. He cited Gamaliel's admonition in the Book of Acts as a caution in this instance, lest one should 'mistake a counterfeit for a true commission from Heaven'.[31] Thus, Maury, following the example of early Christians, will present evidence on whether Baptists were counterfeit or genuine proclaimers of orthodox Christianity.

His first objection to Baptist teaching was their exclusivist position on salvation, summarizing, 'that all, who are not regenerate and converted, *in their sense of the terms* [his emphasis], are certainly in a state of damnation;' that the members of no communion but their own were thus regenerate and converted'.[32] He added to this objection that Baptists believe that Anglican clergy were equally 'in the same deplorable condition' and that there was no solution apart from separating from a hopelessly corrupt church and begging leave to join the Baptists.[33] Further, Baptist ministers touted themselves to 'their credulous followers' as infallible teachers of God's word, whose words and deeds were directly 'inspired by the Holy Ghost'.[34] His objection here was not so much the exclusivity of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, but the implication that Anglicans were not taught such in their churches and thus needed to join the Baptists to get the real message. He argued that Baptist preachers were claiming direct inspiration from God, outside the boundaries of holy writ.[35]

In Maury's mind, Baptist preachers clearly were not qualified, being unauthorized and unworthy spokesmen of the gospel. Maury asserted that even if a preacher produced recognized credentials, the right to preach was governed by the laws of the land, for no one, 'worthy to be called a Christian, will presume to act in opposition to [toleration] laws, ...

[31] Acts of the Apostles 5:34-39; Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 6.

[32] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 7.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Ibid.*

For to such laws the gospel requires a punctual obedience'.[36] Some dissenters in Virginia (notably Separate Baptists) were breaking the law by not registering their meeting places and traveling from place to place to preach, thus disobeying the gospel. Someone without clear credentials was either 'a poor deluded enthusiast' who must be helped gently to recover 'from his phrensy and delirium,' or someone who was deliberately deceptive, and 'the justest object of abhorrence and detestation'.[37] Maury characterizes these preachers as filled with

> spiritual pride and religious rancor, and holy rage, which so strongly characterize the precise and conceited fanatic, the rigid and censorious bigot, the fiery and persecuting zealot: characters, that have never failed to produce the most horrid and tragical effects, when unchecked by the wholsome [sic] restraints of government and law, and properly armed with authority and power.[38]

This may well describe an encounter that one of his colleagues, Rev. William Meldrum,[39] experienced with Separate Baptist Elder James Ireland. Rev. Meldrum, attending a Separate Baptist meeting in Culpeper County, disputed with the preacher, John Picket, following the sermon. Little records that 'Picket answered him with a great deal of candour',[40] but was slow in his responses to the accusations of the Anglican parson. Picket's fellow Separate Baptist preacher, Elder James Ireland, intervened and engaged Rev. Meldrum. Ireland 'gently laid hold of a chair and placed [himself] upon it close by him, determined to argue the point with him from end to end. The fight was on and the argument continued for some time, without any appreciable results for either end'.[41] Little observes, 'This action on the part of Mr. Ireland in locking horns with Parson Meldrum was all the more courageous when we remember that the Parson of that day was held in very high esteem

[36] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 26.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[39] Gundersen, *Anglican Ministry*, p. 270.

[40] L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, p. 154.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

and that resistance to him was the same as resisting an officer of the law'.[42] Surely, from the Anglican minister's point of view, Ireland's behavior, though standing up for his colleague, was the height of 'spiritual pride and religious rancor'.[43]

Maury's objection reflected a pastoral mindset keen to protect the position of the Established Church in Virginia as well as the souls in his parish who were attracted to this 'new thing' that had come into the region and settled there legally. The Established Church in Virginia had, until the mid-eighteenth century, little to no serious competition in the religious marketplace. They had relied on law and social convention to maintain their hegemony, but as Spangler notes, it was 'a religious monopoly neither invincible nor evenly developed across the colony'. [44] By the time Maury wrote his pamphlet, dissenting churches were very much present in Virginia, and Regular and Separate Baptists were making their presence felt.

The Baptists, without buildings until a landowner sold or gifted them acreage to build meetinghouses, preached wherever people would gather. The Separate Baptists, notably, crossed parish lines without seeking permission to do so. Separate Baptist Elder Samuel Harriss travelled to preach throughout the colony. In Culpeper County, a judge released him when he indicated that he lived 'two hundred miles from thence, and that it was not likely he should disturb them again in the course of the year'.[45] From Culpeper, Harriss travelled to Fauquier County, preaching at Carter's Run Separate Baptist Church, then travelled over the Blue Ridge to preach. Coming back through Culpeper County, he stopped at a meeting and was moved to preach, despite the pledge he made to the judge. Little, citing historian David Benedict, indicates Harriss stated, 'I partly promised the devil, a few days past, at the courthouse, that I would not preach in this county again for the term of a year; but the devil is

[42] L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, p. 155.

[43] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 10.

[44] Spangler, *Virginians Reborn*, pp. 11, 18.

[45] L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, p. 48.

a perfidious wretch, and covenants with him are not to be kept, and therefore I will preach'.[46] According to Benedict, the Culpeper County court did not seek to make him accountable for breach of pledge.[47] Even so, his statement was indicative of the kind of inflammatory rhetoric that surely seemed irresponsible to Maury. If the Separates had been the only Baptists in the colony, Maury's criticism would have carried more weight. As will be seen below, David Thomas was more measured and irenic, typical of Regular Baptists, and was thus the ideal spokesman. One can only wonder at the reaction had Harriss responded to Maury instead.

Baptists preached to people using strong exhortations, seeking to elicit a response from them, rather than merely informing the mind. Preaching was the primary and only means of religious instruction among Baptists in this period. The space created by the Act of Toleration was sufficient to enable Regular Baptists and other dissenters to press for additional space in society to exercise their faith. The fact that this style of worship attracted the lower classes, servants, and slaves disturbed the Anglican system, where these type folk were welcome in church, but toward the back or in the balcony so they could listen and learn while their social betters sat in more commodious pews and closer to the pulpit.[48]

Anglican discipleship was more structured, relying on the cycle of lessons and prayers prescribed by the Book of Common Prayer to train up parish residents in their faith.[49] While the Established Church had made adjustments to accommodate wilderness living by tolerating home-based worship, and provided chapels of ease, the use of the Book of Common Prayer provided the householder and the parish-paid readers at a chapel of ease the

[46] D. Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, and in Other Parts of the World,* vol. II (Boston, 1813), p. 336; L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, p. 48.

[47] Benedict, *Baptist Denomination in America*, vol. II (1813), p. 336.

[48] Gewehr, *Great Awakening*, pp. 106-137, p. 116; Nelson, *Blessed Company*, p. 188; D. Upton *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New Haven, CT, 1997), p. 180.

[49] Spangler, *Virginians Reborn*, pp. 34-36.

means to lead worshippers through the church year, whether a minister was present or not.[50] At a meeting of the clergy in 1754, many Anglican ministers, seeking to respond to the challenge of dissenters in their midst, sought permission to try extemporaneous praying and preaching, which Baptists used to good effect. Commissary Thomas Dawson squelched the idea; Anglican ministers were 'not at liberty to use or to refuse what prayers we please . . . but must be governed by the rubricks of our liturgy'.[51] Thus, the Anglican minister could not adjust their spoken prayers meet to local conditions.

Maury's Appeal to Straying Anglicans

Maury began this section addressing Anglicans with his concern about the seeming irrational behavior of his parishioners in listening to these Baptist teachers. He reminded his readers that God 'is pleased to deal with us as rationals'.[52] He admonished,

> Can any conduct be more unreasonable that dealing with ourselves as if we deserved degradation from the superior rank assigned us in the scale of being, to that of creatures' void of understanding? Yet certainly, such is the conduct of those who neglect their rational powers as far as they can and ought to be exerted; especially where their everlasting interests are so closely connected with a just and vigorous exertion of them.[53]

He seemed a bit put off by his parishioners who did not seem to be exercising their rational judgement on matters of religion. Here he asserted, 'Reason and revelation are alike the gifts of God'.[54] This statement reflected the influence of Archbishop John Tillotson on college-trained Virginia Anglican ministers. Archbishop Tillotson's sermons circulated widely in the colonies; his reputation was reflected in the naming of a parish after him in 1757.[55] Bob

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[50] Nelson, *Blessed Company*, p. 58.

[51] Dawson, 'Address to the Clergy Assembled', *Fulham Papers,* vol. 13, images 137-139; *Dawson Family Papers*, image 296.

[52] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 8.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[55] Chap. XVIII, An Act for dividing the Parish of Saint Anne, in the County of Albemarle, April 1757, 39th George II, in Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 7, p. 141.

Tennant indicates 'Reasonable persuasiveness [was] indeed the core of Tillotson's strategy' in developing sermons and catechisms.[56] Nelson argued eighteenth-century Virginia homilies, following Tillotson's pattern, expressed 'a religion that sought to replace spiritual experience, mystery, and miracle with decent and responsible individual behavior'.[57]

Maury next proposed a test to determine whether an outsider's teaching is valid: 'Whenever any innovator shall assume the venerable character of a teacher of religion, seriously and impartially to enquire—whence he received his authority to teach it, what is his practice and conduct as a teacher, and what are his doctrines'.[58] Ever the teacher, Maury then purposed to demonstrate to the reader how to determine an innovator's teaching authority, as a pattern for them to make inquiries regarding innovators in their neighborhood.[59] He reasoned here from apostolic succession. In Maury's mind, perhaps thinking of Elder Harriss and others like him, Baptist preachers clearly were not qualified, being unauthorized and unworthy spokesmen of the gospel.[60]

Maury began his examination of authority with scripture. He cited various Bible figures, pointing out that God did send messengers and gave them the responsibility to communicate a message. He summarized, 'I cannot recollect a single instance of any person in the whole history of the New Testament, who, with approbation, took upon him to preach the gospel, until appointed and authorized to do so, either by Christ or the Holy Ghost, or else by the apostles, bishops, and governors of the church'.[61] Further, he stated, 'whenever then any person shall claim a right to preach the gospel, we lay it down as a rule, that we are not

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[56] B. Tennant, 'John Tillotson and the voice of Anglicanism', in K. Duncan (ed.), *Religion in the Age of Reason: A Transatlantic Study of the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York, 2009), pp. 97-120, p. 105.

[57] Nelson, *Blessed Company*, pp. 204-207.

[58] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 16.

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23.

[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

only permitted, but in duty bound, to try the strength of his claim by this principle; and on whatever he pretends it to be founded, are to inquire, 'by what authority doest thou 'these things, and who gave thee this authority'?[62]

Maury may have had Elder Harriss or other Separate Baptists in mind with this statement. Maury's opinion in an earlier letter to Commissary Dawson was less charitable, 'If to effectuate their intentions, however pious, the laws of the community must be violated and if the violation of such laws be an evil; they have, if not intentionally, yet eventually acted upon the unsound principle, which St. Paul disclaims with so much abhorrence, doing evil that good may come'.[63]

Maury then turned to those parishioners who have not strayed from their parish church. His purpose is to fix their commitment to England's church. He pointed out their relationship to the king is to be subject to his laws, and thus his church. He begged them that they should only depart from the church, 'that conscientious scruples be honestly and sincerely the motive, the only motive. For separation is usually unwarrantable on any other principle'. [64] He warned them of the dangers of nonconformity; it was schismatic and spiritually dangerous.

The final group addressed are Anglicans who have already 'separated from the established church'.[65] Maury encouraged them to examine his argument. He hoped 'to find your ears still open to the voice of good sense, of duty, of reason, and I will add, of scripture too. If they be, you will, you must engage in the inquiries to which you have been urged'.[66]

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[62] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, pp. 24-25.

[63] Maury, Letter to the Bishop of London, *William and Mary Quarterly*, p. 278. The editor of the letters in the William and Mary Quarterly identifies this letter as addressed to the Bishop of London. It is not so addressed in Dawson's papers. It is possible that Maury addressed the same letter to both officials or that Dawson was sent a copy of the letter.

[64] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, pp. 32-33.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[66] *Ibid.*

He warned them that their 'very fondness for your new teachers, and, in vulgar phrase, for your new religion, calls upon you to act this reasonable part'.[67] Pastorally, he wanted to see them return to the parish church, and he hoped his arguments were sufficient to guide them back. He challenged them, 'if these, after a trial, be found solid and just; your separation, which till then must be considered as the result of giddiness, humour, or caprice, will thenceforward be deservedly considered as a result of deliberation, principle and judgement'.[68] He concluded and personalized his argument; asking the God of heaven to give them wisdom, so that the churches can once again be in harmony for the good of the country.

Regular Baptist Elder David Thomas' Rejoinder

Regular Baptist Elder David Thomas had to respond to Maury's publication with a pamphlet of his own.[69] David Thomas' influence was felt beyond Broad Run Baptist Church and the other meeting houses nurtured by him. Those new Baptists whom he trained to be church elders served in churches as near as in the neighboring parish in Fauquier County to as far south as the North Carolina line in Pittsylvania County. Their increase, along with the more aggressive Separate Baptist gains, no doubt alarmed many Anglican ministers.

Maury was a controversial but respected minister in Virginia. As his pamphlet began to circulate, no doubt it came to the attention of David Thomas. Being well-known by the establishment as a leading Baptist elder in Virginia, it was incumbent that he respond.[70] The son of Welsh Baptists, born in 1732 in Pennsylvania, Thomas' parents sent him to Isaac Eaton's academy at Hopewell, New Jersey. He began preaching in Baptist churches in

[67] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, pp. 36-37.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[69] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*.

[70] Taylor recorded that Thomas received his education at Hopewell School in New Jersey under Isaac Eaton. Further, he was awarded an honorary Master in the Arts in 1769 from Rhode Island College for his literary attainments. J. B. Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers* (1859), p. 43; Guild, *James Manning*, p. 89. Semple attested that 'Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry held him in high esteem'. Semple and Beale, *Baptists in Virginia* (1894), p. 21n.

Pennsylvania. Rhode Island College awarded him an honorary MA for his literary attainments in 1769. S. H. Ford summarized his impact in Virginia, 'With a classical education, which few of his contemporaries possessed, his heart was filled with the love of God and sympathy for his fellow men. God led him to speak on, and much people believed through him'.[71] While engaging in ministry in Virginia, Thomas maintained regular contact with his contemporaries in Pennsylvania. He preached the funeral sermon of Philadelphia Baptist Association elder Benjamin Griffiths of Montgomery Church in 1768.[72]

His response to Maury, *The Virginian Baptist*, was published in Baltimore in 1774. Though he does not address him directly in this sixty-page essay, responses to Maury's three diagnostic questions can be found in its pages. His essay consisted of three sections: (1) an explanation of doctrine to establish Baptist orthodoxy; (2) answers to widely-held objections to Baptists; and (3) responses to prejudicial attitudes toward Baptists. The exchange went no further than these two publications, but these two essays illustrate the attitudes engendered on both sides by legal toleration.[73]

Terry Christian, in a recent analysis of Thomas' defense, concludes that the *Virginian Baptist* was a 'skillfully drafted' refutation of the notion that Baptists were dangerous enthusiasts bent on destroying the true church in Virginia, and offers analysis of the pamphlet's relationship to the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith, but does not mention the Maury pamphlet.[74] Thomas' defense of Baptists in Virginia, however, was not written in a vacuum and was clearly specifically responding to Maury's pamphlet. Though he did not

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[71] S. H. Ford, 'David Thomas—The Old Blind Preacher', *The Christian Repository*, Louisville, KY, March 1857, pp. 162-170, p. 163, University of Wisconsin Archives, books.google.com.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 168; W. B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Baptist Pulpit; or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished Clergymen of the Baptist Denomination in the United States from the Early Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-Five with an Historic Introduction*, vol. 6 (New York, 1860), p. 38n, books.google.com.

[73] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist.*

[74] T. Christian, 'An Analysis of David Thomas's *The Virginian Baptist*' (MA Thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), p. 149.

follow the order of the thirty-nine articles point by point, Thomas used language to describe Baptist doctrine that closely aligned with the Anglican statement of faith. He thereby hoped to convince the reader that Baptist doctrine, while it differed on details with Anglican faith, was orthodox.

Thomas began the *Virginian Baptist* with a purpose statement in the preface. He intended to answer the critics that abounded in Virginia and to demonstrate that Baptists were propagating an orthodox faith. Maury asserted frequently in his tract that Baptists were new or novel preachers, and therefore to be held up to suspicion.[75] Thomas' defense began with 'If people will but read this account of our principles and practice, and impartially examine both by the word of God, I believe they must be convinced that it is no new notion of our own invention we are propagating, but the pure gospel of Jesus Christ'.[76] Like Maury, Thomas appealed to the reader's reasoning. Just as Maury did not attack a particular instance of Baptist work in his parish, Thomas did not directly attack any specific Anglican minister.

Thomas' introduction appealed to the reader's sense of fairness and equity. He offered regret that controversy had surrounded the work of Baptists in Virginia; his initial defense was that Anglicans started it. As with earlier controversies, he stated, 'while people in general are contending in behalf of the external form of godliness, the power of it commonly falls under a lamentable decay; insomuch, that charity in many places [which Maury claims is his motivation] has been changed into cruelty, and bigotry and party-rage have succeeded in the place of an honest zeal for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls'.[77] Thomas would have sympathetic hearers on this point. As Isaac indicates, anticlericalism was a long held attitude in Virginia.[78] Thomas presented himself as being equally zealous for the well-being

[75] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, pp. 15, 36, 37, 39.

[76] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. i.

[77] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination,* pp. 28, 37; Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. i.

[78] Isaac, 'Religion and Authority', pp. 3-36, p. 6.

of souls. Maury wanted an answer on the gospel preached by Baptists; Thomas was happy to provide it.

Baptist Religious Principles

Thomas began his answer with an explanation of Baptist religious principles. Following closely the order of the Philadelphia Baptist Association's 1743 Confession of Faith, Thomas' first section outlined Baptist Principles.[79] Just as Maury was quick to cite Scripture as authority for his concerns about Baptists, so Thomas began with an affirmation of Scriptural authority. Thomas stated that Baptists 'embrace these sacred writings, as our only certain and infallible rule of faith, and obedience'.[80]

Some of the language used by Thomas to describe Baptist doctrine was similar to the language found in the thirty-nine articles of faith published by the Church of England. Both Baptists and Anglicans upheld a Trinitarian view of God. Article 1 of the Church of England's Thirty-nine Articles stated there is 'One living and true God, everlasting, without Body, Parts, or Passions'.[81] Thomas' section on the 'Religious Principles of Baptists' included his Article. II, 'That [God] is an infinite and eternal Spirit; without body or parts or passions'.[82] Article II of the Church of England's *Thirty-Nine Articles* highlighted the nature of God the Son, 'So the two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided'.[83] Thomas' 'Religious Principles' stated in Article VII that Christ 'who though composed (if I may use the expression) of two distinct natures, conjoined (*sine confusion, aut mutatione)* without

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[79] Christian, 'Analysis *Virginian Baptist'*, pp. 152-154.

[80] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 8.

[81] Archdeacon Welchman, *The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, Illustrated with Notes, and Confirmed by Texts of the Holy Scriptures and Testimonies of the Primitive Fathers together with References to the Passages in Several Authors, which more largely explain the Doctrine contained in the said Articles,* 6th ed. (London, 1774), p. 1, Eighteenth Century Online.

[82] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, 8.

[83] Welchman, *Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 6.

confusion, or mutation in him, was and still is but one person'.[84] While Thomas' language was plainer on this point, both Anglicans and Baptists affirmed the one person and the two natures of Christ. Thus, Thomas made the point that Baptists were orthodox Trinitarian Christians, just like Anglicans.

For both Baptists and Anglicans, the two primary ordinances observed by the church were Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Church of England Article XXV stated that these are 'effectual signs of grace and God's good will toward us. There are two sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.' [85] Thomas commented in 'Religious Principles' Article XIII, 'that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only ordinances that deserve the name of sacraments, which our blessed Saviour has appointed for his people to observe'.[86] On baptism, the statements diverged; the Church of England, Article XXVII stated, 'The baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained in the church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ'.[87] Thomas asserted in 'Religious Principles' Article XIII that 'these ordinances are to be administered to none but professing believers'.[88] This divergence has been a distinction marking Baptists even before immersion became the widest-practiced form of baptism administered by Baptists.[89] Believer's baptism, as opposed to infant baptism, has been a point of friction between Baptists and other Protestants since Baptists began defending believer's baptism in England.[90] Smith observes that baptism was a 'deeply significant . . . part of the popular

[84] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 11.

[85] Welchman, *Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 59.

[86] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 18-19.

[87] Welchman, *Thirty-nine Articles*, pp. 63-64, p. 64.

[88] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist,* pp. 18-19, p. 18.

[89] A. N. Chute, N. Finn, and M. A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville, 2015), pp. 22-23.

[90] See for example, H. Danvers, *A treatise of baptism wherein that of believers and that of infants is examined by the Scriptures, with the history of both out of antiquity: making it appear that infants baptism was not practised for near 300 years after Christ &c.: with a reply to Mr. Wills in defence of the said treatise and a second reply*

appeal of Baptist Christianity . . . as compared to the staid formalism and sobriety of the Anglican church service'.[91]

Another interesting divergence, which concerned Maury, were the qualifications for ministering to a congregation. The Church of England's Article XXIII stated simply,

> It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of publick preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have publick authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's Vineyard.[92]

In Virginia, the colony's top governing official (usually the Lieutenant Governor) fulfilled this role.[93] Maury was especially insistent on this issue. Perhaps, as Frank Lambert speculates, the Anglican clergy were jealous for their century-old monopoly on church life in Virginia. Evangelist George Whitefield made it possible to hear from a religious authority outside of a church building. The dissenting preachers who followed him succeeded in drawing crowds.[94] Maury's objection was framed by the Established Church's junior partnership with the colonial government. The partnership was presumed to be what was best for an orderly society. Any challenge to this partnership was deemed a threat to civic order.

Thomas' response on the issue of who chooses the preacher was quite explicit in Principles Article XI. The churches' 'officers whether Ministers, Elders or Deacons are not to be imposed upon her by any authority besides, but are to be chosen by the unanimous suffrage of her own members, by the common sense or universal vote of the whole

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to Mr. Baxter in defence of the same: as also a rejoynder to Mr. Wills his Vindiciae, with an answer to his appeal (London, 1675), Early English Books Online.

[91] J. H. Smith, *Great Awakening in British America*, p. 276.

[92] Welchman, *Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 55.

[93] At times an appointment was challenged by the local parish vestry; such as when Lt. Gov. Spotswood chaffed at St. Anne's vestry refusing to admit to incumbency one of his designees (Letter to the Board of Trade, 14 August 1718, in Brock (comp.), *Official Letters of Spotswood*, vol. II, pp. 286-298, p. 292). The vestry's actions here parallels closely the Baptist concept of local church autonomy, which even in Baptist life during this period was not fully developed. The Philadelphia Baptist Association would, at times, admonish a local congregation for improper doctrine or practice. Clark, *Philadelphia Association*, p. 68-70.

[94] F. Lambert, *Founding Fathers*, pp. 137-138.

assembly'.[95] Just as human conscience should not be subject to governing authorities, so gatherings of like-minded persons should be free to hear whom they chose without government endorsement or censure, so long as civil law was obeyed, and as long as it there was no direct conflict with God's law. These divergent ecclesiologies were the fundamental issue that drove much of the friction between the Anglicans and Baptists.

Baptist Church Praxis

The second part of Thomas' defense responded to Maury's charge that Baptist assemblies were not set up as scriptural churches. Maury questioned the legitimacy of their more informal ecclesial structure. Citing both the original language of the New Testament and the definition for church expressed in the Book of Common Prayer (Article 19), Thomas began his response at a point of agreement, that the church is not a building but a gathering of the faithful. He argued one gathering point was impossible because of the geographic dispersion of the faithful. God has permitted, therefore, 'many distinct societies, each of which is called a particular church'.[96] Thomas seemed to be setting up an equivalency between the Established Church and dissenting churches, while simultaneously emphasizing the 'particular' status. Baptist ecclesiology was founded on the direct relationship between a local church and Jesus Christ. Each church was self-governing under the Lord Jesus Christ and accountable to no earthly ecclesiastical hierarchy.[97]

So, how were Baptists, as a 'distinct society', a church? Thomas' section on this question opened with a description of who may be a church member. In Maury's Anglican world, membership was equivalent to presence in a geographic location. Infants, by law, had

[95] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 17.

[96] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[97] For an overview of Baptist ecclesiology, see Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, especially Chapter 6 'Baptist Church Polity', pp. 135-158.

to be baptized.[98] For Thomas, physical location had little to do with church membership. Thomas argued that a church consists of (1) a minimum number, of at least three (citing Tertullian), who (2) have made a profession of faith, and (3) have been baptized in the pattern set forth in Scripture.[99] Elaborating on point two, Thomas highlighted the Baptist stance against including infants among the faithful and criticized the lax moral behavior of 'scabby sheep' who should be excluded from church fellowship.[100] Thomas cited evidence of a problem by mentioning 'drunkards, or lyers, or adulterers or gamesters'.[101] Anglican Virginians did not have a pattern of dismissing members. They relied on county courts to apply penalties against swearing or public drunkenness, and adultery.[102] This contrast reflected the Anglican public role to uphold morality; the churchwarden was expected to report moral scofflaws to the county court for a penalty. Baptists, as 'independent of other societies', shouldered the burden of moral discipline among their membership.[103] On point three, Thomas noted a common standard between Anglicans and Baptists, baptism 'must be administered by none but an approved minister'. [104] From there, his point diverged, insisting that water baptism by immersion in the name of the Trinity, was the only form of baptism allowed by God.[105]

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[98] Virginia Grand Assembly, James Citty, 4 September 1632, Act XIII, in Hening, *Statutes*, vol. 1, p. 183, 'And all preaching, administringe of the communion, baptizing of children and marriages, shall be done in the church except in cases of necessitie'.

[99] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 25. Thomas cites in Tertullian (*De Exhortatione Castitatis*, chap. 7), the same passage that seventeenth-century English prelate Peter King cites in defining the church. P. King, *Constitution, Discipline, Unity and Worship of the Primitive Church that Flourished within the First Three Hundred Years after Christ.* In Two Parts . . . (London, 1691; reprint, 1843), p. 5, books.google.com.

[100] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 25.

[101] *Ibid.*

[102] *Ibid.*

[103] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[104] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[105] *Ibid.*

On setting up a church, Anglicans in Virginia had long practiced building a chapel of ease for residents of far-flung sections of a parish, a chapel which might later become a parish church, when enough residents were in the area and could support a minister. Baptists, Thomas indicated, were bit more careful about the process. The process followed closely the pattern that the Philadelphia Baptist Association set up for establishing new works. If a few Baptists were in an area, they wrote the Association to request a minister to come help them. If these consisted of new converts, Thomas explains, there is not likely a minister in the area. The minister sent by the Philadelphia Baptist Association would ask these about their faith, and if found sufficiently grounded in the faith, would declare them a properly constituted church. Many of the early Regular Baptist Minute Books included the Philadelphia Confession of Faith with the signatures of the first members affixed underneath, thus recording the event.[106] As Weaver notes, the Philadelphia Baptist Association took pains to avoid the appearance of setting up a hierarchy parallel to the Established Church. These new churches were welcome but not required to join the Philadelphia Baptist Association to receive support and guidance from more experienced Baptist elders.[107] The closest parallels to this arrangement in Anglican life were churches petitioning the Virginia General Assembly to discipline rogue vestries by dissolving them and ordering a new vestry election. In 1754, the ministers, called together by the Thomas Dawson, formed a mutual aid society to support the widows and orphans of deceased clergy.[108]

Churches needed ministers to function well. Thomas addressed the calling and function of clergy among Baptists in the next few sections of Part II. He started with a notice

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[106] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist,* pp. 26-27; Clark, *Philadelphia Association*, pp. 79-81; see, for example, the Minute Books of Brock's Gap/Smith and Linville Creek Baptist Church (Augusta/Rockingham County); Mill Creek Baptist Church (Frederick/Berkley County); Broad Run Baptist Church (Fauquier County); Chappawamsick Baptist Church (Stafford County); Thumb Run Baptist Church (Stafford County).

[107] D. Weaver, *In Search of the New Testament Church: The Baptist Story* (Macon, GA, 2008), p. 54.

[108] Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church*, vol. II, p. 184.

in Chap. III that Baptists 'never ordained any in private, all our neighbors are allowed to see our order in this particular'.[109] Baptist ordinations were done carefully and orderly. Regular Baptist elders had to be convinced that a candidate understood the Christian scriptures thoroughly and could teach it well to others. Though it was not as arduous logistically as the Anglican's process, Thomas wanted to assure readers that due diligence was done.[110] The Philadelphia Baptist Association, on the ordination certificate that they issued to Thomas, noted that he was ordained only after 'due examination, whereby he appeared to have a competent share of learning and other prerequisites to the sacred office . . . , [he was] admitted to holy orders, according to known and approved rites of the Baptist church'.[111] Thomas followed this pattern, training men for holy orders whom the churches he planted chose as their leaders.

Thomas also dealt in this pamphlet with the salaries of Baptist elders. In this period, Baptist elders received no regular compensation for their oversight of a congregation. Thomas, however, advocated for it. He balanced this with the admonition that the elder should be satisfied with whatever a congregation can provide. He critiqued ministers who refused to preach if not paid their annual salary up front or who moved about from place to place seeking better support. A quick examination of the parish assignments of Anglican ministers between 1750 and 1775 in Gunderson's appendix notes very few such moves between parishes. This may have been more of an issue before Commissary James Blair's reforms in the early eighteenth century.[112] Thomas may be reacting also to an accusation leveled by Richard Bland at Virginia Anglican clerics during the heat of the Two-Penny

[109] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 28.

[110] *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

[111] Gillette (ed.), *Philadelphia Baptist Association* (2007), p. 86.

[112] Gundersen, *Anglican Ministry*, pp. 233-288; E. Bond and J. Gundersen (eds.), 'Episcopal Church in Virginia', pp. 163-344, pp. 174-175; pp. 183-184.

controversy. Bland accused the clergy who challenged the Two-Penny Act of hurting the church and their own reputations 'to gain a small pecuniary advantage'.[113] Indeed, Maury believed Patrick Henry's calumnies against him were also drawn from Bland's pamphlet.[114]

Thomas next addressed the issue of church governance. Most Anglican Church members did not concern themselves with the governance of the parish; they had elected a vestry to manage the parish. Their only concern was to pay their share of the parish levy and to work occasionally on road crews. Baptists, however, were intimately involved in the 'family business' as Thomas terms it.[115] These weekday meetings, Thomas assured his readers, never dealt with government affairs. There were no intrigues against the government. He declared Baptists 'profess a loyal subjection to his majesty; and are well satisfied with him as our earthly sovereign. King George the third of Great Britain, we heartily acknowledge as our rightful king; and do on all occasions, agree to pay him all due homage and allegiance'.[116] The *Virginian Baptist* was published one hundred fourteen years after the fall of the Puritan Commonwealth in England. English Baptists had helped the Puritans topple Charles I and took up arms to defend the new Republic. Thus, they carried from that alliance a perception of disloyalty, whether the eighteenth-century Baptists deserved it or not.[117] Maury, in his pamphlet, does not directly address this, but he does accuse Baptists of breaking the civil law.[118] Thomas took great pains to assure his readers that Virginian Baptists did not carry the stain of rebellion against lawful authorities, despite the impression created by the civil disobedience of Separate Baptists.

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[113] Bland, *Letter to the Clergy of Virginia*, p. 19.

[114] Gundersen, *Anglican Ministry*, pp. 233-288; Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, 30-31; James Maury letter to John Camm, 12 December 1763, in Maury, *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family*, pp. 421-422.

[115] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 32.

[116] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 33.

[117] Watts, *Dissenters*, pp. 213-215.

[118] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 20.

Ironically, soon after the publication of this pamphlet, Baptists and other dissenters, hoping to be relieved of the onerous burden of religious toleration, would follow Virginia's Anglican gentry into a war for independence. As William Fristoe admitted, 'Baptists took an active part with their fellow citizens in opposing British usurpation'.[119] In 1786, the Baptist General Association sent a memorial to the Virginia General Assembly, remonstrating against an effort by clergy of the now Protestant Episcopal Church to secure their ownership of the pre-revolution churches and glebes that had been built with tax-payer funds. The memorial stated, 'for this free government we advanced our property and exposed our lives on the field of battle with our fellow citizens; being often stimulated with the harmonious proclamation of equal liberty of conscience and equal claim of property'.[120]

Thomas' next section dealt with Baptist worship practice and their response to harassment. He described a very orderly form of worship that occurred with or without a minister present, beginning at noon on Sunday and lasting until dark. Sometimes, as Little has recorded, Baptist worship services were interrupted by area residents who came to make light of the events.[121] Separate Baptist minister Samuel Harriss was accosted by 'Capt. Ball and his gang' while preaching in Culpeper County, Virginia.[122] Baptists, Thomas noted, had learned to endure these interruptions without challenging them, for challenges often 'operate[d] like oil cast into a fire'.[123] Little commented, 'Baptist people never knew when they assembled for worship, whether they would be permitted to proceed with it in a peaceable and orderly manner, or have it rudely and barbarously broken up. Nevertheless, Baptist worship services were open to 'all sober persons'; Thomas deemed it 'ungenerous to

[119] Fristoe, *Ketocton Baptist Association*, p. 155.

[120] Ryland, *Baptists of Virginia*, pp.127-130, p. 128

[121] L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, pp. 32-52.

[122] *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48; Ryland, *Baptists of Virginia*, pp. 57-59.

[123] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 35.

exclude any . . . from so hopeful a means of salvation'.[124] Thomas kept the door open; no one, not even the most intemperate mocker, was excluded from observing a Baptist worship service.

Responses to Objections about Baptists

Part three of Thomas' response answered widely held objections about Baptists. He opened by affirming the truthfulness of the foregoing section and then pressed into one of the main issues. Can Baptists be trusted? This is the underlying issue on the second objection that Baptists are 'schismaticks, hereticks, and apostates!'[125] Maury was repeating what many of his peers considered an accurate evaluation. Anglican Rev. William Meldrum attended a Baptist meeting in Culpeper County, where he listened attentively to Separate Baptist Elder John Picket. He 'called [Picket] a schismatic, a broacher of false doctrines, and that he held up damnable errors that day'.[126]

Thomas offered a rejoinder; many families who migrated here were Baptists by conviction, so they have never been a part of the Established Church, and, as 'free-born Britons', why should they be expected to change their convictions when they moved to a new area.[127] This was a very Lockean response; as Ian Harris notes, 'Locke postulated a natural liberty to worship according to one's own judgement about which manner of worship to adopt'.[128] Locke's toleration helped Baptists and other dissenters make a case for religious toleration in Virginia. Yeates draws a direct comparison between Roger Williams, an early North American Baptist, on religious liberty and John Locke on toleration. He explains that

[124] L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, p. 63; Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 36.

[125] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 39.

[126] L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, p. 155.

[127] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 39.

[128] I. Harris, 'John Locke and Natural Law', in J. Parkin and T. Stanton (eds.), *Natural Law and Toleration in the Early Enlightenment*, Proceedings of the British Academy, vol. 186 (Oxford, 2013), pp. 60-105, p. 70.

Williams argues against the concept of a national church.[129] Yeates further states that Locke argued against state sanctions on non-conformists based on natural rights.[130] Bejan posits with Yeates that Williams, though a contemporary of Locke, is often overshadowed in the discussion of foundational thought undergirding religious liberty.[131] Thomas, in light of Williams and Locke, argued it was no disloyalty to the state to not participate in the life of the Established Church.

What about Anglicans who joined Baptist churches? Maury warned them of the danger of associating with non-conformists and invited them to return to their mother church. Thomas argued those Anglicans who have joined did so of their own volition. Surely, one would not call such honest folk schismatic or heretics.[132] Najar points out that the transition from an Anglican parish church to a Baptist meeting house was facilitated somewhat by geography, especially in the less settled areas of pre-Revolution Virginia.[133] Anglican parishes depended on sufficient population to support the facilities and staff (minister, sexton, churchwarden), along with the safety net functions. If the vestry did not provide a chapel of ease for a cluster of people living more than a morning's carriage ride distant from the parish church, then that non-conformist chapel looked convenient, especially as they likely knew the Baptists as good neighbors.

Thomas then offered an olive branch. He acknowledged 'that the Church of England is a Christian church', and the Book of Common Prayer's 'main articles . . . are very sound and good'.[134] The problems emerged in the praxis of certain details: set prayers, ecclesiastical

[129] Yeates, 'Tolerating on faith', p. 51.

[130] *Ibid.*, p. 208. Yeates' thesis is that religious toleration undergirds political toleration.

[131] Bejan, *Mere Civility*, pp. 145.

[132] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 43-44; Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, 40-41.

[133] M. Najar, 'Sectarians and Strategies of Dissent in Colonial Virginia', in P. Rasor and R. E. Bond (eds.), *From Jamestown to Jefferson: The Evolution of Religious Freedom in Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA, 2011), pp. 108-137, pp. 112-113.

[134] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 41.

government, baptism by the pouring of water, and use of the sign of the cross. The root of the differences between Baptists and Anglicans was essentially ecclesiology and its praxis in church life. Both found fault with the other; Baptists objected to set rituals and prescribed prayers; Anglicans objected to unauthorized preaching in unlicensed churches.

Maury could not conceive why an Anglican family would want to depart the church. As the Established Church in a community, it was the anchor of that community's common life. How can a common life exist with multiple churches in the area? Taylor Stoermer explains that 'the Church of England was deeply embedded in the English constitution, and therefore, in English history that moved forward from the sixteenth century'.[135] The Anglican Church that was transplanted from England to the colonies saw itself as a comprehensive church for everyone in the colony. Toleration, mandated by the 1689 Act, and applied in Virginia in 1699, was a profound challenge to the Church's understanding of its role. The Established Church served as the local and colony government's agency charged with multiple tasks: maintaining property boundaries and county roads, providing for a social safety net, disciplining wayward members of the community, caring for common social needs such as marriages and burials, in addition to providing moral and spiritual guidance to the community. It was difficult to imagine having organizations outside the Established Church performing these functions.

Thomas did not directly address this issue. He assured those 'who attend our meetings, that we preach agreeable both to scripture and reason, that subjects should bow to government; wives submit to their husbands; children obey their parents, and servants and slaves be in subjection to their masters, as far as their commands do consist with the word of God, in all things'.[136] Baptists were not trying to disrupt community life, though he admitted

[135] T. Stoermer, '"An entire affection and attachment to our excellent constitution": the Anglican political culture of British Virginia', *Anglican and Episcopal History,* 82 (September 2013), pp. 253-288, p. 263.

[136] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 58.

that disruptions to family and community life happened occasionally as the gospel message received a hearing.

The next objection Thomas addressed was closely related to Anglican identity. The Church, as a function of the state, generously allowed for toleration. Why must Baptist preachers declaim against her? Why must Baptists preach adult conversion to their neighbors? Thomas responded by addressing an organic understanding of church membership, as understood in the Anglican Church. Children, born to Anglican parents and properly catechized by the parish minister, would hear the gospel and become Christians at the appropriate time. Indeed, there were none but Christians in the geographic area of the parish. Thomas disagreed; membership in Christ's church was not organic, but was a result of hearing and responding to the gospel message. Again, bringing Williams and Locke into the response, Thomas indicated that it would be the height of selfishness and a lack of charity to not give individuals an opportunity to escape God's judgment through the mercies of Christ. The opportunity to hear and respond was, Thomas insisted, something to which every person has a natural right.[137]

A serious challenge to Anglican culture was Baptist refusal to baptize infants. In the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, the priest administering baptism to the infant said, 'sanctify this water to the mystical washing away of sin: and grant that this child now to be baptized therein, may receive the fullness of thy grace, and ever remain in the number of thy faithful and elect children, through Jesus Christ our Lord'.[138] A Cambridge divine argued in 1719 that withholding baptism was a 'dangerous error'.[139] Thomas summarized the Anglican argument,

[137] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 58.

[138] *The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies According to the Use of The Church of England: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David Pointed as They Are to be Sung or Said in Churches, Order of Morning Prayer, A Prayer for the Clergy and People* (Cambridge, 1762), p. 263, books.google.com.

[139] P. Booth, *Friendly Advice to the Anabaptists, . . . or, a Reply to Mr. Eben. Hall's Antidote* (Cambridge, 1719), p. 28, Eighteenth Century Online.

'One would think you would have compassion on little infants, who never did, or even thought any evil. But instead of that, you doom them to hell without mercy also'.[140] Thomas responded to this charge pastorally. He agreed that the concept of infant eternal perdition was shocking; especially in light of high infant mortality, 'by common computation the third part of mankind at least, do generally die in that feeble state'.[141] He averred, however, that no 'Virginian Baptist' held to this doctrine. He suggested,

> since God has been pleased graciously to provide a Redeemer for lost sinners of mankind, why may we not humbly hope, that in mercy saves the greater part, if not all who die in infancy? For my mind of it, I can discern nothing either in Scripture or reason to the contrary. But I pretend not to be positive in this case. Secret things belong to God alone.[142]

That being said, Thomas maintained believer's baptism because infant baptism 'is a meer [sic] tradition of men, and never yet received the sanction of God's approbation'.[143] Baptism of confessed believers only has been a hallmark of Baptists since their origins in early seventeenth century England.[144]

Thomas next dealt with some long-held expressions of prejudice against Baptists. Christian surmises that Thomas' publication of this piece was timely, considering the turmoil that was stirring before the Revolution.[145] Thomas started with Maury's first objection, that Baptists were a novelty and Maury warned his readers to think 'before you believe any novel teacher of religion whatever, particularly one, who pretends to be sent by God'.[146] Thomas then reminded objectors that Anglicanism was once a novelty; indeed, 'the Papists sued to reproach her at her rise, as an upstart sect. Yea, condemned her to death, for withdrawing

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[140] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 46.

[141] *Ibid.*

[142] *Ibid.*

[143] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[144] Weaver, *New Testament Church*, p. 9.

[145] Christian, 'Analysis *Virginian Baptist*', p. 43.

[146] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 10.

from the Church of Rome'.[147] Revival in religion, he said, inevitably looks like something new and different from what was beforehand normal.[148] As Mulder points out, 'supporters of the awakenings . . . disliked the coldness they perceived in the state-run churches. In response, participants from various churches had joined in quests for an active . . . Christianity they hoped would overcome lifelessness . . .'.[149]

Perhaps the objection that Maury focused most upon was the Baptist claim of immediate inspiration for preaching. Maury sarcastically asked,

> They are sent from heaven, then? Yes, favoured with immediate revelations from thence! With divine illuminations! With prophetick visions! With a familiar intercourse with the father of Spirits and of lights! Great indeed is their happiness, as well as yours, if it be so!—but, if not, nothing can equal their frenzy or their presumption, unless it be your weakness. Hath your understanding been convinced, that this extravagant claim of theirs is well founded?[150]

Maury continued, demanding evidence or proof of the miraculous, such as the miraculous instances from the Gospels and Book of Acts.[151] His sarcasm reflected his disdain toward dissenters who were not quietly tending their own congregants but spreading their message and drawing converts.

Thomas' reply also reflected an enlightenment outlook on the question at hand. He denied that Baptists 'pretend to immediate inspiration', equal to that of the Apostle.[152] He pointed out as a counter argument that 'the established church . . . in her public prayers, intreats the Lord, "to send down upon her bishops and curates, and all congregations committed to their charge, the healthful spirit of his grace". And concludes her devotions

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[147] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist,* p. 53.

[148] *Ibid.*

[149] Mulder, *Controversial Spirit*, p. 5.

[150] Maury, *To Christians of Every Denomination*, p. 42.

[151] Maury cites instances of blind persons receiving sight (Luke 7:22), mute people speaking (Mark 7:37), maimed walking (Matt 15:31), diseases cured (Luke 9:1), and dead raised to life (Luke 7:12-15). These were rhetorical challenges, assuming a negative answer.

[152] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 56.

with the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all evermore, amen'.[153] Thomas quoted directly from the Order for Morning Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer. He argued that Baptists were simply asking for God the Holy Spirit's grace upon their preaching. This practice was neither 'enthusiastic nor divisive, unless the life and power of godliness is so'.[154] He asserted that this is a point of agreement rather than a point of contention with the established church.

As Thomas concluded his section on objections, he dealt with the charge of Baptists disturbing the peace with their meetings and that they did not deserve toleration because of their general hypocrisy. Regarding disturbing the peace, Thomas did not try to defend the noisemakers. He pointed to the ministry of George Whitefield and the Presbyterians as the root source of much of the commotion, and the First Great Awakening's influence upon certain Baptists. He stated, 'Those who think it is of God, are the fittest to defend it. They are of age, ask them, they shall speak for themselves. I confess I can find no account of it in the word of God'.[155] He refused to defend the emotional excesses of the Separate Baptists, stating that emotional outbursts were not part of his experience while preaching.[156] As to the charge that Baptists did not deserve toleration because they are hypocrites, Thomas argued that every society has a few bad people. Baptists, however, did seek to discipline those among their communion who become 'profligate or profane'.[157] Indeed, a hallmark of Baptist church Minute Books were the instances where a member was admonished or excommunicated over misbehavior. He accused the objectors of 'eagle-eyed malice, [seeing]

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[153] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 56, quoting from the Order for Morning Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer.

[154] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 56.

[155] Thomas is alluding to an incident in the Gospel of John where Pharisees question the experience of a blind person whose sight Jesus restored. The blind person's parents, wanting to avoid trouble, responded to the Pharisees, 'he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself' (John 9:21, 23).

[156] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 63.

[157] *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

faults where there is none . . . calling virtue vice and vice virtue'.[158] He challenged the reader to remember that 'the brightest badge of honor [is] to be reproached for the name of Christ' and that Jesus Christ was the final judge of all Christians, established and dissenter alike.[159]

Christian and Weaver agree that Thomas' *The Virginian Baptist* helped refute some of the widely-held charges against Baptists. Christian concludes, 'Thomas skillfully drafted *The Virginian Baptist.* His writing demonstrated that Baptists were not a heretical sect'.[160] Thomas used scripture in *The Virginian Baptist* in two ways; first, to defend Baptist doctrine and second, to highlight common ground with Anglicans. Citing 1 John 4:7-14, Thomas declared Baptists to be Trinitarians, as were Anglicans. Comparing the first article of the Thirty-nine Articles with Thomas' explanation of Baptist Doctrine, the language reflected the similarity in doctrine.

Table 6.1: Thomas and the Thirty-Nine Articles

Thirty Nine Articles of Religion[161]	Thomas' Religious Principles of the Baptist Church[162]
Article 1: Of faith in the Holy Trinity There is but one living and true God, everlasting without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost	Article II Of the Divine Being We believe, that there is but one, the only living and true God, the creator and preserver, and upholder of all things. That he is an infinite and eternal Spirit; (John iv, 24) without body or parts passions [sic]; and possesses of all possible excellencies; almighty, most wise, just, holy and good. And therefore, the alone worthy object of all religious worship and reverence and adoration of angels and men. Article III Of the Holy Trinity

[158] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 64.

[159] *Ibid.*

[160] Christian, 'Analysis *Virginian Baptist*', p. 149.

[161] Anglican Communion, 'Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion', http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/109014/Thirty-Nine-Articles-of-Religion.pdf (Accessed: 16 November 2017). The language here is identical to the 1762 Articles of Religion.

[162] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 4.

	We believe that in this incomprehensible being which we call God, there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. All partaking of the same mysterious essence: and of consequence, perfectly equal in glory. (1 John v, 7)

Thomas showed ample familiarity with the Book of Common Prayer and capably defended Baptist doctrine and practice as orthodox. In his section on the definition of the church, Thomas quoted from Article 19, 'Hence we are told in the Prayer-Book, that 'the Church of Christ is an assembly of faithful men'.[163] When defending Baptist pastors' desire for divine inspiration in their preaching, he compared this to phrasing in the Anglican order for Morning Prayer for the clergy and people.[164]

Weaver reflects that *The Virginian Baptist*, as a summary of Baptist beliefs and a response to the charges against them, was a capstone of the public witness of Regular Baptists, who demonstrated they could be trusted by being 'law abiding citizens of the colony'.[165] He noted that at the time of publication, 'Thomas was content with English rule, noting that Baptists were loyal' to the king of England as part of their obedience to the King of kings.[166] Perhaps it was Thomas' use of language familiar to Anglicans, drawn from the Thirty-Nine Articles, that helped Baptists seem less 'odd' to their Anglican neighbors. It was an effective strategy, because it reinforced Thomas' main point: that Baptists were people whose basic doctrines were familiar, and whose presence was not a threat, but a positive asset in the community. Maury's warning and Thomas' response were published in the early 1770s, before the Revolution, and reflected the struggles each side had with toleration as it was expressed in the law and applied locally. Anglicans saw the toleration regulations as

[163] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 23.

[164] *Ibid.*, p. 56; *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 54.

[165] Weaver, 'David Thomas', p. 12.

[166] *Ibid.*

good for the established church and therefore good for society. Regular Baptists obeyed the regulations but saw them as unnecessary limitations upon their God-ordained church expansion activity. Thomas' rejoinder to Maury's pamphlet demonstrated that Regular Baptists were well within the Protestant Christian fold theologically and their praxis was no danger to the good order of colonial society.

Conclusion

James Maury's difficulty with Baptists was the aggressive preaching of their itinerant preachers and lay Anglicans absenting themselves from the Established Church to worship. Maury cast doubts in the minds of Anglican readers on whether Baptists were as trustworthy as they appeared to be. However, as Spangler points out, Regular Baptists did not challenge the social hierarchy directly. In fact, they were eager to reinforce social norms, such as imposing penalties for sexual sin or drunkenness or simply quarrelsomeness.[167] Finke and Stark observe, 'The decline of the old mainline denominations was caused by their inability to cope with the consequences of religious freedom and the rise of a free market religious economy'.[168] Kidd and Hankins assert that 'some Regular Baptists embraced the revivals of the Great Awakening, but the respectable Baptists who did not do so found themselves swamped by the rising evangelical tide'[169] that was Separate Baptist work in Virginia. The Anglican Church in Virginia had enjoyed a protected monopoly for over a century. An unintended consequence of Gooch's decision to open Virginia up to dissenter migrants was the creation of a religious marketplace; limited at first, but irrepressible. Regular Baptists lived within the limitations and did not challenge the status quo, meeting peacefully and teaching willing converts.

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[167] Spangler, *Virginians Reborn*, p. 132.

[168] Finke and Stark, *Churching of America*, p. 55.

[169] Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, p. 38.

The tide of Separate Baptist evangelical activity in Virginia affected both Anglicans and Regular Baptists. Anglicans sought to tightly manage the activity, with mixed results. Regular Baptists adapted by seeking to create order in the wake of Separate Baptist activity, but this was not well received by the Separates. In 1765, David Thomas was invited to a church in Orange County that was newly constituted by Separate Baptist Samuel Harriss to 'teach them the ways of God more perfectly; he came, but in his preaching expressed some disapprobation of such weak and illiterate persons. This was like throwing cold water upon their flaming zeal; they took umbrage, and resolved to send once more for Mr. Harriss'.[170]

Anglican Reverend James Maury and Regular Baptist Elder David Thomas ministered within an environment in which the government of the colony had oversight of their activity. Virginia's leadership attempted to tightly-control both Anglican and Non-Conformist churches. A locally elected vestry supervised Maury, and the parish clerk and warden, and determined the budget for parish outlays for church expenses and charity case care. Parishioners had no recourse to replace the life-appointment of a vestry member except to petition the House of Burgesses to dissolve the vestry and elect a new vestry. Regular Baptists, as was the case with other dissenters, had to wend their way through a maze of regulations designed to limit the expansion of non-Anglican religious bodies. They also experienced the transition from religious toleration to religious freedom as the Commonwealth of Virginia emerged from the colony after the Revolution.

[170] Benedict, *Baptist Denomination in America* (1850), p. 648.

Chapter Seven

The Impact of Religious Toleration on the Colonies and Colonial Virginia's Anglicans and Regular Baptists

An editorialist in the *Virginia Gazette* in December 1776, defending toleration regulations, commented, 'The sectaries are mistaken . . . when they suppose they are taxed for the support of a foreign church; they only contribute to the support of government, for no government can be well regulated which turns every religious order, uncontrolled, loose on society'.[1] Since 1740, the various sectaries who migrated into Virginia put this idea to the test. Indeed, the trickle of dissenting migrants that Lt. Governor Gooch allowed into the west became a steady stream of new migrants into Great Britain's oldest North American colony. Would loosening the controls of government over religion cause the downfall of the colony?

The experience of Anglican and Regular Baptist dissenters in negotiating the legal landscape between toleration and religious freedom in Virginia reveals the ways they influenced one another while also influencing the law. The Virginia House of Burgesses reluctantly enacted toleration in 1699 only after Presbyterian Francis Makemie sued for official recognition of the Presbyterian Church based on the 1689 Act of Toleration in England. The 1699 Act was a legal acknowledging that the Established Church and local county governments were required to tolerate the presence of dissenting churches so long as those dissenting churches conformed to certain rules and restrictions on their activities, as determined by the government. Virginia tried to accommodate religious dissent while maintaining the government's traditional role of managing religious activity. Johnson and Koyama point out 'Religious freedom did not exist in the premodern world. Because of the

[1] 'To the publick', *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 13 December 1776, p. 1.

role religion played in upholding political order by offering legitimacy to rulers, political elites sought control over religious practice. In the absence of genuine religious freedom, there was at best what we call conditional toleration'.[2] Religious toleration did not work well in colonial Virginia because competing interests related to migration, defense, and commerce mitigated against a 'purely Anglican' Virginia, and was thus fraught with tension between what Anglicans expected and what religious dissenters wanted. Toleration, as Edgar notes, was as easily granted as withdrawn by a sovereign, [3] though the experience of Huguenot refugees, whom England patriated to the colonies as a result of France's revocation of the Edict of Nantes, may have given pause of the idea of withdrawing religious toleration from English subjects.

Toleration did, however, create space where Establishment and Dissenting church leaders and members could see the benefits and drawbacks of the policy. The benefit of the toleration regime was peaceful co-existence among neighbors with different religious commitments. It gave both Anglicans and Regular Baptists permission to strengthen weaker churches within their sphere of influence. The Anglicans organized a society to fund raise and endorse missionaries where Great Britain had colonial assets, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG). Baptists in and around Pennsylvania, organized the Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA) for mutual support and to send messenger-evangelists to support Baptists living in isolation to help them organize churches or strengthen weak churches who need clarification on doctrine or practice.

[2] Johnson and Koyama, *Persecution & Toleration*, pp. xi-xii.

[3] W. Edgar, 'Introduction', *Religious Freedom in South Carolina*, p. ix-x.

The Founding of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG)

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, founded by Thomas Bray, was granted its charter on June 16, 1701 by King William III 'to promote the Glory of God, by the Instruction of Our People in the Christian Religion' in the 'Plantacons, Colonies, and Factories beyond the Seas, belonging to Our Kingdome of England'.[4] Bray's time in Maryland set in his mind 'the struggle of the Church of England there to legally establish itself against the opposition of Quakers and Roman Catholics' and this problem was the catalyst for forming this missionary society.[5]

One of the traditions established early on by the SPG was the offering of an annual sermon. These sermons, according to Strong, 'gave rise to an Anglican vision of imperialism that was genuinely concerned with evangelism and the conversion of both indigenous peoples and white colonists from the very first decade of the Society's existence'.[6] They reflected on the opportunity provided for missionary expansion of the Church through the ever-expanding trade relationships with the colonies. 'In 1704 John Hough insisted that the Society's mission was a matter of obedience to the gospel'. Commenting on Matthew 28:18-20, 'Hough urged that the gospel as the means of salvation should be proclaimed 'to every Body without Distinction or Exception'.[7] William Beveridge, in his annual sermon, saw the hand of God in guiding the expansion of the British empire, 'Now, that we have so many . . . colonies in America, all among the Infidels and Heathens, whereby we may have the fairest Opportunity that ever can be offered, to open their Eyes, and turn them from Darkness to Light, from the

[4] Thompson, *Into All Lands*, p. 17.

[5] R. Strong, 'Anglican Imperialism', p. 175.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 176. Strong points out that the SPG was founded almost a century before British Baptist William Carey published in 1792 his *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* (p. 176).

[7] Strong 'Anglican Imperialism', p. 183.

power of Satan to God'.[8] Indeed, 'Kennett envisaged this divine directing of the English as a feudal transaction by which God granted the English land in return for religious service which, if no carried out in the spread of the gospel in the empire, God could, and world, revoke'.[9] In sum, God provided the territory; the English provided the preachers; the residents provided the hearers. Indeed, 'the zeal for the expansion of the national church was reawakened'.[10] Travis Glasson summarizes the motivations of the early supporters. They 'envisioned the Church of England as a global institution, a supranational church with a reach commensurate with England's expanding power. From the start, the Society's supporters regarded the Roman Catholic Church and other Protestants as their rivals. . . . the Society's backers saw the Atlantic world as a field of intense religious competition'.[11]

The Society set about a subscription drive to fund the provision of missionaries to the colonies. 'Printed copies of the Charter and letters of deputation had been issued throughout the [English] dioceses, soliciting contributions for the Society's work overseas'. The drive began in October 1701, and its first year collected £1537. Groups of clergy and laity sent official contributions from the dioceses. It was a national church-wide effort endorsed by all the leadership from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the local Bishops.[12] The Society method for supporting missions was created by Dr. Thomas Bray and his lay and clerical associates.

Candidates for SPG support had to be either recommended by their Diocesan leadership or three other reputable members of the Church of England, well-known by members of the Society. They also had to be literate and able to read and pronounce English

[8] Strong, 'Anglican Imperialism', p. 184, quoting Willliam Beveridge, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London, 1707), pp. 14-15.

[9] *Ibid.*, 185.

[10] Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism*, p. 85.

[11] T. Glasson, *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (New York, 2011), p. 4.

[12] Thompson, *Into All Lands*, p. 20.

to be understood when reading from the book of Common Prayer or Preaching.[13] Appointed missionaries were provided two key resources to aid their navigation of their new ministry field. George Keith, a former Quaker turned Anglican, was tasked by the SPG to provide a report on conditions in the colonies.[14] Keith and his travelling companion, John Talbot, 'covered all the colonies from Maine down to North Carolina—800 miles—visiting some of them twice, and preaching everywhere'.[15] His report was provided to missionaries. Bray also wanted to make sure his appointees understood the laws under which they would operate, given the varying religious regulations in each colony. Therefore, a copy of Nicholas Trott's *The Laws of the British Plantations in America, related to the church and the clergy, religion and learning* was provided to each missionary.[16]

The missionaries that the Society sent to the British North American colonies were not always suited to the task. Glasson indicates that 'Cumulatively, between 1701 and 1785, the SPG financially supported 309 clergymen, schoolmasters, and catechists to the colonies that became the United States'.[17] He also observes that 'The dangers, difficulties, and low pay of overseas work meant that the Society could rarely find enough university-educated English ministers to meet the needs of the colonial church. Ireland, Scotland, and Wales were important sources of manpower'.[18] In the Carolinas, the Commissary Alexander Garden, had particular concern about an SPG-supported missionary in his colony, a Rev. Boyd. In 1737, Boyd apparently expected unconditional obedience of his parishioners and they expected him

[13] United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, *Standing Orders of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (1706), Section VII 'Orders Relating to the Missionaries', pp. 11-15, Eighteenth Century Collections Online (Accessed 23 November 2020).

[14] Thompson, *Into All Lands*, p. 25.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[16] Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, p. 26, n. 42.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

to acclimate to their way of life.[19] A misunderstanding arose between the SPG that funded Rev. John Blair's passage to North Carolina. The local Anglicans presumed that he 'was obliged to serve them throughout the colony, whereas the minister himself hoped to settle in Chowan and attend only to St. Paul's Parish'. Blair gamely attempted to meet their expectations.[20] Pennsylvanians, while Penn was required by charter to permit the building of Anglican churches in the colony, did not trust the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel because the organization 'did not recognize the Congregational, Lutheran, Reformed, Quaker and Baptist churches as true churches. Therefore, it was bound to persecute'.[21]

Philadelphia Baptist Association Mission Endeavors

Baptists who settled in Pennsylvania, the Jerseys, and Delaware had the space to organize for mutual support and edification, and established a pattern of sending member Baptist Elders to preach to isolated Baptists without an elder in the area and to help establish and strengthen churches, particularly in Virginia and the Carolinas. Among the elders that were regularly sent out by the Association was John Gano. In 1754, John Gano was invited by Charleston Baptist Association leader Oliver Hart to preach in the backcountry. The tour was a resounding success both in terms of gaining converts and, for Hart, a fund-raising endeavor to 'training young converts for the ministry'.[22] He replaced Morgan Edwards as a traveling minister in 1773. The Association saw the usefulness of the role continuing, and appointed John Gano for a year, and instructed the treasurer to 'pay him the interest of the Association fund, to help defraying his expenses'.[23] Without these travelling ministers,

[19] O. V. Burton and D. Herr, 'Religious Toleration and the Growth of the Evangelical Ethos', in Underwood and Burke, *Dawn of Religious Freedom*, pp. 146-183, p. 148.

[20] McIlvenna, *Very Mutinous People*, pp. 105-106.

[21] Frost, *Perfect Freedom*, p. 57.

[22] T. L. Little, *Origins of Southern Evangelicalism*, p. 176.

[23] Gillette (ed.), *Philadelphia Baptist Association* (2007), p. 130.

supported by the contributions of churches to the Association, the Baptists who settled into Virginia and the Carolinas would have had a much more difficult time establishing their work. As Griffith summarizes, 'The pastors were requested, and the churches urged to be liberal in aiding them to visit destitute churches and settlement'.[24] Without the religious tolerant conditions in the Middle Atlantic colonies, these early Baptist churches would not have had the strength or means to be a concern to the SPG.[25]

The Dissenters' Challenge in Virginia

For dissenters in Virginia, toleration had a drawback. Virginia Anglicans, as the Establishment, drew up the toleration regulations without negotiating conditions with dissenting Virginians. At the time, the House of Burgesses was under a royal governor, and Virginia's Act of Toleration was created to conform to William III's Act in England. The closest representation the average land-owning dissenter had was his vote for the local Anglican Parish vestry and county Burgess, usually a wealthy white adherent of the Established Church. The dissenters were granted the privilege of opening meeting houses, but had to abide by the regulations Anglicans set. This was not a compact made between peers.

Religious freedom, in contrast to toleration, is a condition in which the government privileges no one church or denomination over others. This became the rallying cry of dissenters in Virginia, and of many Anglicans in Virginia, during and after the Revolution, as they made a connection between political freedom and religious freedom. This was most notably expressed in the 'Ten-Thousand Name Petition' presented to the newly-formed Convention of Virginia in October 1776.[26] Signed by persons of many Christian denominations, including Anglicans, the petitioners requested that all denominations would

[24] Gillette (ed.), *Philadelphia Baptist Association* (2007), p. 6.

[25] Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, p. 18.

[26] J. P. Hall (trans.), 'Legislative petitions: ten-thousand name petition', *Virginia Genealogical Society Quarterly*, vol. 35 (Spring 1997), pp. 101-114.

have an equal relationship with the government, and expressed hope that the new condition would create peace and reduce friction between neighbors. [27] Regular Baptists were among signatories to this petition: William Garrard and Thomas Hart of Frederick County, and John Alderson, Jr. and Thomas Alderson of Rockingham County.[28]

Regular Baptists, as dissenters, sought equal standing for their churches and associations within Virginia's social framework. Members of the Established Church had worshipped regularly with their local leadership, if they attended the main parish church; dissenters rarely had the same sort of social access. Occasionally Regular Baptists had members who were influential in the community, but this was more the exception rather than the rule. Problems arose, according to Steven Waldman, when the Anglican majority 'expected their faith to dominate, usually at the expense of religious minorities'.[29] Ralph Pyle and James Davidson indicate that by the time of the Revolution, 'religious adherence had become so embedded in the laws and customs of the colonies that there was a clear ranking of religious groups according to their possession of social, economic, and political resources'.[30] Virginian Anglicans had the early advantage and subsequently a monopoly in all three categories. However, legal changes that began in England and internal pressure in the colony itself required Virginia's Established Church to adapt to the presence of dissenting Christians, who reluctantly paid taxes that supported the parish's worship and benevolence. Martha Nussbaum comments, 'dissenters simply did not accept the suggestion that an established church, financed by taxpayer money, could treat citizens equally'.[31] The Regular Baptists' contribution to the replacement of toleration with religious freedom is examined

[27] J. P. Hall (trans.), 'Ten-thousand name petition', p. 108.

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 112.

[29] Waldman, *Sacred Liberty*, p. 4.

[30] Pyle and Davidson, 'Origins of religious stratification', p. 58.

[31] Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience*, p. 85.

here, using the extant writings produced by Regular Baptist elders David Barrow, David Thomas, and William Fristoe. Regular Baptists, in their practice and in their writings, documented their efforts both to live within the strictures of religious toleration while pressing for more liberty for themselves and their fellow dissenters. Their story offers a fuller picture of how Regular Baptists influenced the movement of Baptists in Virginia from a marginalized minority to a respected and influential religious body. It also highlights their contribution to the eventual legal disestablishment of the Anglican Church and the adoption of religious freedom under Virginia's new republican government.

Dissenting congregations flourished in the eighteenth century, despite judicial and extra-judicial efforts to repress them. Such efforts included mob violence, jail confinement, civil penalties for unauthorized meetings, and bureaucratic obstacles in the licensure process. Gill observes, Virginia was 'an environment wherein religious minorities are gaining significant ground [and] will . . . be amendable to the growth of religious freedom but not without conflict or attempts to restrict that freedom by leaders of the dominant religion'.[32] The Anglican leadership in Virginia tried to use the county and later the general court of Virginia colony to limit the growth of dissenting congregations. Regular Baptists consistently conformed to the licensure process, but nevertheless found themselves dealing with civil penalties, mob violence, and the inconvenience of the licensure process.[33] The toleration regulations forced dissenting ministers and their congregations to seek licensure through the General Court in Williamsburg. This process created obstacles for Baptists that even New Light Presbyterians did not face.[34] It could be that Separate Baptists' provocative civil disobedience created resistance to offering any Baptist an easy path to licensure. The

[32] Gill, *Political Origins*, p. 8.

[33] Sparacio and Sparacio, *Fauquier County*, 27 March 1762, vol. II, p. 244; L. P. Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, pp. 516-519.

[34] Fristoe, *Ketocton Baptist Association*, pp. 72-74; Hutson, *Church and State in America*, pp. 88-91.

anonymous author of 'An Address to the Anabaptists Imprisoned in Caroline County', in 1771, commented,

> You have, I hear, desired to see the Law by which you are condemned. This is what you have a Right to, and in which I propose to give you Satisfaction; though the Conduct of one of your Champions, in daring, by letter to the Gentleman who has been discharging the Duty of an active upright Magistrate, in most of your Commitments, to consign him to Perdition, as your persecutor for that Conduct, might provoke another Kind of Treatment.[35]

His argument reflected the opinion of the Anglican leadership class in Virginia. The Act of Toleration was the law and if dissenters did not like the law, they should apply for redress to the legislature in Williamsburg, rather than committing civil disobedience.[36]

The regulations to enforce Anglican dominance were inconsistently applied, and Regular Baptists and other dissenters were able to mobilize against the establishment.[37] An anonymous scold addressed Baptists in the *Virginia Gazette* writing, 'I do not mean to exclude toleration to scrupulous consciences: I am for that up the broadest Bottom a due regard for the publick peace will admit of; but of that the Legislature are to judge, and to fix its Limits, to which Dissenters must conform'.[38] Dissenters organized to push for a kind of equality. This most notable push included the Ten-Thousand Name petition of 1776 stated, 'Your petitioners therefore having long groaned under the burden of an ecclesiastical establishment beg leave to move your honorable house that this as well as every other yoke may be broken and that the oppressed may go free so every religious denomination being on a level animosities may cease'.[39] Jon Butler indicates that 'Baptists argued that government ought to nourish religions—that is, Christianity—so the new United States might become a

[35] 'An Address to the Anabaptists', *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 20 February 1772.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] Pyle and Davidson, 'Origins of Religious stratification', pp. 57-76.

[38] 'An Address to the Anabaptists', *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 20 February 1772.

[39] 'Ten-Thousand Name Petition', 16 October 1776, Legislative Petitions of the General Assembly, 1776-1865, Accession Number 36121, Box 366, Folder 13, Library of Virginia, Virginia Memory Project.

Christian society because they knew it wasn't'.[40] Baptists certainly wanted the state to allow religious freedom, but Butler misreads the motivation. More accurately, Brackney posits that 'Baptists [expected] government to refrain from interference with matters of the spiritual realm'.[41] David Barrow asserted in point 14 of his 'Political Creed': 'That civil rulers have nothing more to do with religion, in their public capacities, than private men; save only, that they should protect its professors in the uninterrupted enjoyment of it, with life, property, and character, in common with other good citizens'. [42] Baptists did not want an establishment; rather, they wanted a friendly neutrality. The question was whether such friendly neutrality was even possible, or if it would threaten the good order of society. No one really knew, early in the eighteenth century, whether or not a society with free churches would remain orderly.

Anglican Response to the Growing Dissenter Presence in Virginia

Anglican ministers, seeking to preserve their place overseeing the spiritual and social welfare of all the inhabitants of their parishes, pressed too hard by persisting in their appeal to the Board of Trade and to the Bishop of London to recommend against the Crown's approval of the 'Two-Penny Act' in the 1750s. The Parson's Cause created a breach in the relationship between the parsons and their gentry parishioners. Isaac points to the Parsons' Cause as a contributor to the 'general crisis of authority within Colonial society'.[43] The controversy created a precedent that gave the Revolutionary-period House of Delegates political space to suspend the salaries of the Establishment clergy altogether. The breach widened the gap between the Established Church and the government leadership.[44]

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[40] Butler, 'Coercion, miracle, and reason', in Hoffman and Albert (eds.), *Religion in a Revolutionary Age*, p. 26.

[41] W. H. Brackney, *Baptists in North America: An Historical Perspective*, Religious Life in America (Malden, MA, 2006), pp. 41-42.

[42] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter,' p. 448.

[43] Isaac, 'Religion and Authority', p. 5.

[44] J. Kukla (ed.), 'New light on the parsons' cause in colonial Virginia', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 86 (December 2017), pp. 367-394, p. 384.

The challenge for eighteenth-century Anglicans was how to accommodate dissenters even as they presumed their own influence and power to define church and social life in Virginia. In February 1772, the House of Burgesses tasked their Committee on Religion to craft an updated version of the Act of Toleration to respond to the conditions created by the migration of dissenters into the colony and responding to the strife that had thus ensued.[45]

On the eve of the Committee for Religion's consideration of another Act of Toleration in March 1772, which was never voted on by the House of Burgesses, Anglican Reverend and William and Mary Professor Samuel Henley, preached a sermon before the members of the House of Burgesses that suggested that there should be space between religion and the state.[46] Drawing from Jesus' admonition in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 12, to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, Henley wondered whether 'government and religion are distinct from each other'.[47] He argued that the two spheres have distinct jurisdictions but the intersection in each human being requires some navigation. The government should not penalize thoughts internal to the person not acted upon. Religion should not seek to penalize the law-breaker. Henley argued, 'Obedience to human and divine laws arises from distinct motives. A man may be a worthy member of society, observant of all its prohibitions, obedient to all its injunctions, and yet, in his religious capacity, guilty of many transgressions'.[48] This distinction may have occurred to him in part due to several decades of experience with dissenters in the colony who lived in the community, served in local political offices, and maintained positive relations with their Established Church neighbors.

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[45] Kennedy (ed.), *House of Burgesses* (1906), pp. 182-183; R. Isaac, 'The rage of malice of the old serpent Devil', in Peterson and Vaughan (eds.), *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom*, pp. 139-169, p. 142.

[46] Isaac, 'Rage of malice of the old serpent Devil', pp. 142-143; S. Henley, *The Distinct Claims of Government and Religion, Considered in a Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Burgesses, at Williamsburg, in Virginia, March 1, 1772* (Cambridge, 1772), front cover, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

[47] Henley, *Distinct Claims*, p. 9.

[48] *Ibid.*

The hazard for dissenters, however, in navigating between the 'two spheres' was the expectation that everyone should use the majority's navigation route. The majority did not necessarily lay out clear directions on how dissenters may express their faith. Thomas Jefferson, who worshipped as an Anglican but was definitely more of a free thinker, would have agreed with Henley's assessment that the two spheres have separate but intersecting interests. Jefferson had a high regard for religion but argued that it should not be politicized. He considered faith a personal matter that should not be encroached upon by the government. The spheres intersected, for Jefferson, at the point of morality.[49] It is at this intersection, however, that religion was refused right of way by the economic interest invested in slavery.

This attempt to accommodate the dissenters in 1772 was complicated by the presence of slavery. Isaac comments, 'the issues of religious freedom, like that of other freedoms in Virginia, could not be separated in theory or practice from the fact of slavery. One of the reasons why Baptists . . . met with such hostility and repression was their insistence on carrying the gospel'[50] to everyone, white and black. Further, the Burgesses felt terrific pressure to put a 'stop to mass gatherings for preaching and to enclose the sectaries within the safe bounds of licensed meetinghouses that could be put off-limits to slaves, unless they had their masters' permission'.[51] The 1772 effort to expand religious toleration came to naught because dissenters strongly resisted the limitations the Burgesses would put on dissenting meetings.[52] Just as plantation owners had resisted the catechizing of slaves by their parish rectors, so they resisted efforts by dissenting preachers to get within earshot of slaves so they could hear their preaching. The slaveholding interest wanted a legal barrier between

[49] Holowchak, 'Duty to God and duty of man', pp. 239-241; see also Sanford, 'The religious beliefs of Thomas Jefferson', in Sheldon and Driesbach (eds.), *Religion and Political Culture in Jefferson's Virginia*, pp. 61-92.

[50] Isaac, 'Rage of Malice of the old serpent Devil', pp. 139-169, p. 143.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 162.

[52] *Ibid.*

dissenting preachers and slaves, like the barrier they secured between their slaves and Anglican ministers. The slaveholders considered unmonitored exposure to Christianity from Anglicans or dissenters to be a threat to their control over their human property.

Regular Baptists welcomed slaves as members. This created an interesting dynamic among the white and black members. Scully comments, 'The black men and women who joined the Baptist churches of southeastern Virginia in increasing numbers in the second half of the 1780s brought with them their own sense of the meaning and implications of both Christianity and the Revolution, which differed in important ways from those of their white brethren'.[53] The language of freedom that the white members used emphasized the connection between civil and religious liberty; this same language had connotations for black members that 'had very concrete results—freedom—which they continued to embody in the churches even as white members retreated from such implications'.[54] Few Baptist leaders embraced the connection made by their black members. The few white Regular Baptists who saw slavery as a grievous problem, chose to go along with the majority of their white peers' desire to relegate the issue of slavery to the government for resolution. This choice, for the sake of church unity, allowed their slave-holding members to protect their interest. Thus, Regular Baptists on both sides of the question concluded the issue was something churches should neither continue to discuss nor seek to resolve.[55] Challenging economic interests and the supporting structures for a society built upon slave exploitation seemed too upsetting at the time. Regular Baptists made an effort to live peacefully among their Anglican neighbors; they did not want to create more friction either internally in their churches or externally in

[53] Scully, *Nat Turner's Virginia*, p. 96.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[55] Najar, 'Meddling with Emancipation', pp. 157-186.

their communities. They wanted a hearing in the community for their arguments against religious toleration; drawing slavery into the conversation was deemed counter-productive.

Regular Baptists and Arguments against Religious Toleration

Martin Fitzpatrick, in his essay on the background of toleration, indicates that early English efforts toward toleration were concerned with 'the extent to which conceding the right of liberty of conscience was compatible with the security of the state and social stability'.[56] Apologists defending dissenting congregations appeared on both sides of the Atlantic. Fitzpatrick cites Micaiah Towgood's pamphlet, originally published in 1753, defending dissent in England. Dissenters had no desire to destroy the church, Towgood asserts, 'We bear it no enmity, God is our witness. We wish it, from our souls, glory, prosperity, purity, peace . . . We wish to see it established upon . . . which alone it can stand firm, even the scriptural foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being its only lawgiver and king'.[57] Similarly, David Thomas writes, 'We are far from exulting in [the established church's] decaying state, but do lament and bewail it, and would gladly contribute all our power to affect [the established church's] restoration and recovery'.[58] Dissenters, at root, wanted to expand the space legal toleration gave them; but they were not, at least at the beginning, making an attempt to destroy the church supported by government underwriting. English petitions for religious toleration, Fitzpatrick indicates, arose from 'their sense of worth as citizens'.[59] Likewise, Virginia Baptists valued their role as citizens. The pattern of petitioning for redress of grievances created a pattern later dissenting groups would use to

[56] Fitzpatrick, 'From natural law to natural rights?', p.196.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 200; M. Towgood, *A dissent from the Church of England, fully justified ... Being the dissenting gentleman's three letters in answer to the Letters of Mr. John White on that subject* , 4th ed. (Boston, 1768), p. 71, America's Historical Imprints.

[58] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 44.

[59] Fitzpatrick, 'From natural law to natural rights?', p. 220.

challenge the majority culture and see positive change. So valued was petitioning that it was enshrined in Article 1 of the Bill of Rights, 'Congress shall make no law . . . abridging . . . the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances', following the clauses on religion, speech, and the press.[60]

Fristoe highlighted Baptists' republican credentials: 'Baptists took an active part with their fellow citizens in opposing British usurpation and aiming to secure our just rights which we deemed right then, and we have never retracted since'.[61] David Barrow's *Circular Letter* also reflected this republican pattern. Point 5 in his 'Political Creed' stated, 'That no man can be bound in person, or property, but by laws of his own making, or that of his representatives, fairly chosen'.[62] Among colonial Virginia's Regular Baptists, there was a seemingly compatible amalgam between biblical fidelity and republican idealism.

The language of religious liberty argues that the conscience is sacrosanct. Pressure should not be applied to the body to force conformity on the conscience. Regular Baptist documents demonstrated familiarity with how religious language was used by colonial leadership, and used the language themselves to communicate their desire for more toleration, indeed religious liberty. Thomas, in *The Virginian Baptist* (1774), commented on the limitations of earthly power over the church. Christians 'should obey earthly kings, and all in lawful authority, as far as they rule in righteousness'.[63] Further, regarding church power, Thomas claimed the church 'has not power to force any into . . . communion'; further, 'the Almighty alone has reserved the government of conscience to himself; nor is it subject to any inferior jurisdiction. It ought not to be, nay it cannot be swayed by human authority. For it is

[60] 'The Bill of Rights (Amendments 1-10)', National Center for Constitutional Studies, https://nccs.net/blogs/americas-founding-documents/bill-of-rights-amendments-1-10 (Accessed: 22 June 2019).

[61] Fristoe, *Ketocton Baptist Association*, pp. 154-155.

[62] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 447.

[63] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 16.

absolutely impossible to force conviction on the mind . . .'.[64] Trying to enforce conformity through legal redress, Thomas concluded, was an indication of 'persons striving for civil power and worldly empire and dominion' rather than to be a servant of the church of Christ.[65] Thomas' colonial readers were well acquainted with the Parsons' Cause, evidence which supported his point.

Only a few decades into the following century, it was evident that religious freedom had impacted deeply the early republic. Alexis Tocqueville observed, 'In the United States, even the religion of most of the citizens is republican, since it submits the truths of the other world to private judgment: as in politics, the care of their temporal interests is abandoned to the good sense of the people. Thus, every man is allowed freely to take that road which he thinks will lead him to heaven . . . .' [66] The transition from religious toleration to religious freedom was similar in pattern to the transition from dependent colony to free-standing state.

Conscientious consent was key to both the choice to embrace a religion (or not) or to choose who would represent the country in making law. This perhaps contributes to the ease with which leaders in public life of the late colonial and early republic period in Virginia used religious language to express public law. As Fitzpatrick says of English dissenters, 'The civic-mindedness of Dissenters . . . testifies to their belief in the close relationship between dissenting ideals and good citizenship'.[67] Regular Baptists saw no conflict between their republican ideals and their Christian faith; their republican ideals were the point of commonality between them and the Anglican leaders of Virginia.

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[64] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 17.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[66] A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, vol. 1 (New York, 1898), p. 539.

[67] Fitzpatrick, 'From natural law to natural rights?', p. 221. See also, Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, p. 48.

Regular Baptist Advocacy for Religious Freedom

Daniel Dreisbach asserts that Jefferson's Statute of Religious Freedom 'did not advocate, in the modern sense at least, a strict separation between religion and civil government, nor was it a blueprint for a wholly secular state. It was a bold and eloquent affirmation of the individual's right to worship god, or not, according to the dictates of conscience, free from governmental interference or discrimination'.[68] Jefferson 'defined religious liberty in aggressive terms', Christopher Grenda comments, arguing that a human judge has no business adjudicating opinion just because it runs counter to general sentiment; i.e., in modern parlance, not 'politically correct'.[69] Here Jefferson found a willing ally among evangelicals as they sought unfettered space to share their religious opinions freely. They resisted efforts to restrict their views to a private sphere 'because their principles were considered too contentious for political society'.[70] Dreisbach observes,

> Separation of church and state was not an end in itself, rather it was a means toward achieving religious freedom. If free and uninhibited religious exercise was fostered through a limited interaction between church and state, then Jefferson endorsed such a cooperative arrangement. Jefferson used religious language in his Statute for Religious Freedom, calling the 'object of his bill' a 'manifestation of God's supreme will'. The 'wall' Jefferson constructed was not between religion and civil government generally, but between religious freedom and the powers of the state.[71]

Dreisbach's observation can be tested by examining how hard Jefferson's wall was from the perspective of a dissenter, David Barrow, a Regular Baptist who expressed republican ideals in his *Circular Letter*.[72] Elder Barrow divided his letter to his fellow Baptists into two sections. He indicated that his letter, combining his religious and political

[68] D. L. Dreisbach, 'New perspective on Jefferson's views on church-state, p. 187.

[69] Grenda, 'Revealing liberalism in early America', p. 156.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

[71] Dreisbach, 'New Perspective on Jefferson's Views', p. 201; Grenda, 'Revealing liberalism in early America', p. 155.

[72] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', pp. 440-451.

points of view, was a description of his 'creed'.[73] On the religious side, Barrow's summary aligns with the Philadelphia Confession of Faith of 1742, which was the standard confession signed by those who gathered to constitute a Regular Baptist Church.[74] On the political side, Allen indicates that Barrow drew from several founding documents, especially George Mason's Virginia Bill of Rights.[75]

Regarding religion's relationship to the state, Barrow's point number thirteen affirmed 'that all religious tests, and ecclesiastical establishments, are oppressive, and infringing the rights of conscience'.[76] The influence of George Mason's Virginia Declaration of Rights is evident. Section 16 of Mason's Declaration stated, 'That religion, or the duty which we own to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity toward others'.[77] This declaration was 'adopted by the Virginia Constitutional Convention on June 12, 1776'.[78] Even as it declared that persons are free to express their religion as they wish, this section expressed belief in a Creator and called Virginians to practice their faith with 'forbearance, love, and charity towards each other'.[79] While the government was not to interfere with how people individually expressed their religion, it was clear that the delegates to the convention were

[73] Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 446.

[74] *Confession of Faith Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of Many Congregations of Christians (Baptized Upon Profession of Their Faith,) in London and the Country, Adopted by the Philadelphia [Baptist] Association, Met at Philadelphia, September 25, 1742 . . .* (Philadelphia, 1829). See Broad Run Baptist Church (Fauquier County, Virginia), Minute Book 1762-1872; Ketoctin Baptist Church (Loudoun County, Virginia), Minute Book 1776-1890.

[75] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 442; 'The Virginia Declaration of Rights', *America's Founding Documents*, https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/virginia-declaration-of-rights (Accessed: 17 June 2019).

[76] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 448.

[77] 'Virginia Declaration of Rights', section 16.

[78] *Ibid.*, introduction.

[79] *Ibid.*, section 16.

comfortable invoking religion in support of the aspirations in the Declaration of Rights. As Robert Bellah observes, 'Americans were a religious people and their public life ever gave expression to that fact, but they avoided any hint of establishment by opting for more neutral religious language that could give offense to none'.[80] The delegates invoked God's role, Creator, instead of God's name, though they expressly charged Virginians to adopt the Christian virtues of patience, love, and generosity toward one another, which would no doubt be beneficial to the orderly conduct of governance.

Barrow echoed James Mason's sentiment in the *Declaration of Rights*, section 16, in point 14 of his *Circular Letter*, 'That civil rulers have nothing more to do with religion, in their public capacities, than private men; save only, that they should protect its professors in the uninterrupted enjoyment of it, with life, property, and character, in common with other good citizens'.[81] Barrow wanted religion free from government interference; however, he expected government structures to protect individual religious expression in a manner similar to how life and property and a person's reputation were protected by law. Just as a person could expect their life and property to be unmolested provided that such was being used lawfully, so each individual should expect their right to free expression of their faith to be protected. Barrow was reflecting the religion clause in Amendment One of the United States Constitution's Bill of Rights. Americans did not want the government to mandate an established expression of Christianity, nor did they want government to limit a person's public exercise of their preferred expression of religion.[82]

Contemporary commentators expressed both hope and anxiety about the ramifications of religious freedom for the new American Republic. David Ramsay, in his 1789 history of

[80] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, p. 45.

[81] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 448.

[82] Ragosta, *Religious Freedom*, pp. 60-61.

the American Revolution, observed, 'The world will soon know the result of an experiment in politics, and be able to determine whether the happiness of society is increased by religious establishments, or diminished by want of them'.[83] The editorialist in the *Virginia Gazette* in 1776 could not imagine an orderly society where religion was not regulated by the government.[84] How would this 'free market' of religion that Barrow and the Virginia Delegates envisioned operate? Finke argues that it has had a profound effect both on the churches and the people. Though many churchmen were concerned that church attendance and support would drop precipitously if the state did not support the church with regulation and financial help, this did not turn out to be the case. Individuals were free to choose their own way to express faith. Religious organizations had a level playing field as far as their relationship with the state. The deregulation of the religion, Finke notes, allowed religious pluralism to flourish.[85] Philip Gorski concurs, calling the religion clause of the First Amendment a balancing act that strengthens religious pluralism by thwarting majority efforts to predominate over the culture to the exclusion of others.[86]

Effects of the Transition to Religious Freedom

For both Anglicans and dissenters, the results of religious toleration were mixed. Anglican vestries depended on the tax support from the parish residents and resisted change. Yet they were obliged to acknowledge that dissenters had joined them in supporting the Revolution. As Jürgen Habermas observes, the weakness in toleration is that 'each act of toleration must circumscribe the range of behavior everybody must accept, thereby drawing a line for what cannot be tolerated. . . . As long as this line is drawn in an authoritarian manner,

[83] D. Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, vol. 2 (Trenton, NJ, 1811), p. 403.

[84] 'To the publick', *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 13 December 1776, p. 1.

[85] Finke, 'Religious deregulation', pp. 610, 624-625.

[86] P. Gorski, 'Religious pluralism and democratic inclusion', pp. 623-635.

i.e., unilaterally, the stigma of arbitrary exclusion remains inscribed in toleration'.[87] Pauline Kaurin echoes Habermas' concern; arguing that 'the classical definition of toleration as religious neutrality' is not realized 'in the real world'.[88] Religious toleration in Virginia attempted to draw a line of privilege between the Established Church and dissenting ministers and meetinghouses. Privileges included receiving all residents' church levies, marriage bond payments, and the purchase of a farm by the vestry for the use of the Anglican parish minister and his family, in addition to his salary. Anglicans used their privileged access to the governing authorities to try to limit the growth of dissenting congregations. This was done, however, in Habermas' term, 'unilaterally', without the consent of propertied dissenters who could vote for members of a new or reset Anglican vestry and for their representative sent to Williamsburg to participate in making law. Because it was not a reciprocal arrangement, the Anglican toleration regulations created the intolerance expressed by officials and citizens alike toward dissenters, including Regular Baptists who tried to work within the system.[89]

Dissenters in the mid- to late-eighteenth century achieved religious liberty in part because the leaders of the effort stayed focused on securing religious freedom since religious toleration did not benefit them or the state. At root, as Isaac notes, 'religious freedom is . . . an issue of social relationships. Repressive controls on [dissenters] had been a defense of certain kinds of traditional community against the claims of a religion of personal conversion'. [90] Scott Rohrer notes that 'the presence of outside preachers in a parish threatened to undermine the church's power and to weaken the carefully constructed alliance of church and state. Baptists . . . believed that the new birth rather than the state-established

[87] Habermas, 'Religious tolerance', pp. 6-7.

[88] Kaurin, 'On the virtue of charity', p. 177.

[89] Habermas, 'Religious tolerance', p. 7.

[90] Isaac, 'Rage of malice of the old serpent Devil', p. 162; Habermas, 'Religious tolerance', p. 11.

territorial church should stand at the center of a voluntary religious fellowship'.[91] The new migrants and the established majority needed to navigate new schemes for accommodating one another peacefully. Religion, however, has had a specific burden to prove that the ethics derived from it accommodated the ethical norms of society at large.[92]

One result of the development of religious liberty was that religion, under the influence of enlightenment thought, became a matter of private choice. Jan Lewis explains, 'One might select a church or a creed much as he chose a political candidate, a new costume, or a line of work. Religion was made subordinate to democratic principles, in the widest sense, and in fact democratic principles infused religion, as faith became a matter of personal choice and individual feeling'.[93] This arrangement meant that, as Anthony Waterman explains, 'liberty' took precedence over 'obedience' for dissenting Christians.[94]

Baptists and their enlightenment allies (Jefferson, Mason, and others) had divergent reasons for pushing the Virginia House of Burgesses to enact religious freedom. At its most helpful, religious freedom allowed for peaceful co-existence. The government was no longer managing the religious life of citizens. There were social costs, however, for Anglican gentry and for dissenters in the lower class. Anglicans lost some of their influence in the community, and dissenters, while free to pursue their faith as they saw fit, also felt the pressure to conform to other social norms, chiefly the acceptance of slavery as an economic reality to meet the demands of an agriculture-based society.[95] Barrow in citing reasons he was leaving Virginia for Kentucky indicated,

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[91] Rohrer, *Wandering Souls*, p. 74. See Gospel of John 3:3-8.

[92] Isaac, 'Rage of malice of the old serpent Devil', p. 162; Habermas, 'Religious Tolerance', p. 11.

[93] J. Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, p. 51.

[94] A. M. C. Waterman, 'Theology and political doctrine in church and dissent', in Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion*, p. 214.

[95] Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, p. 57; see also T. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York, 2010), p. 169; Najar, 'Meddling with Emancipation', pp. 162-163.

> I cannot comfortably support my family, educate my children, and attend so much to public calls, as I have done, with my means, in this poor country, without falling into the line of speculation, or that of holding slaves, or sticking closely and personally to my farm. . . . The business of speculation, I think incompatible with the work of the ministry; or at any rate, it is very difficult duly to attend to both. And that of holding, tyrannizing over, and driving slaves, I view as contrary to the law of God and nature.[96]

Most Regular Baptists conformed to slaveholding. Regular Baptist Elder Nathaniel Saunders, jailed in Orange County in 1773 for preaching, was lauded as a 'worthy and respectable member' of society when he died in 1808. His kindness toward his slaves was cited as an example.[97] Some, however, resisted the social and economic allure of slave-holding. Regular Baptist Elder David Barrow emancipated his slaves in 1784, championed emancipation among his fellow Baptists in 1796, and finally moved to Kentucky in 1799, where slavery was not as entrenched.[98] Other members of Black Creek Baptist Church also resisted.

In Virginia, slavery was a social system that sustained a multi-million dollar agricultural enterprise and was an entrenched fact of life for slaveholders, whether Anglican or Regular Baptist. Barrow discovered how difficult it was to support his family and maintain his social obligations as a county judge once he had to choose between depending on paid labor or neglecting his church and county obligations for his farm to profit. The economic and social pressure on his Regular Baptist congregation caused a heated stalemate on the discussion of the morality of slavery. Religion, at Jefferson's intersection with public policy, was not yielded the right of way. The government's wall between slaveholding law and the morality of slavery held firm, never effectively challenged by either Established or dissenting churches, for the sake of the prosperity of the white population of Virginia.

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[96] C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 445.

[97] Boyer, *Saunders Family*, p. 18.

[98] Alley, *Baptists in Virginia*, pp. 125-127; C. R. Allen, 'David Barrow's Letter', p. 451.

Religion and the Early Public Square

Regular Baptists had no hesitation about engaging with the government of the new Commonwealth of Virginia. They and their fellow citizens, Anglican and dissenter alike, had won a hard-fought struggle for civil freedom, and they were jealous of their liberties as a result. The new nation of states, tied together by an alliance of necessity, needed to create a system to lead the nascent republic. Bellah assesses that they borrowed heavily from Christianity. The 'American civil religion . . . borrowed selectively from the religious tradition in such a way that the average American saw no conflict between the two'.[99] The people who settled in the new world related to their environment through the lens of the Bible, seeing the new world as a new Eden and their idealized selves as new creations.[100]

Because the Christian religion had a variety of expressions in Virginia by the late eighteenth century, it was clearly evident that no one denomination could unify the people of Virginia. The Enlightenment-informed leaders gave dissenting Christians in Virginia what they wanted in 1786: freedom from state management with the passage of the Statute of Religious Freedom. The governing elite received a gift in return. They now had the room to create a public square that accommodated religion while transcending the particularities of the various religious denominations present at the time. Though free from state oversight, Christians willingly subordinated themselves to the 'will of the people'.[101] By creating a space that transcended particular beliefs, Virginia transformed the state's relationship with religion from managing a government department to being an impartial facilitator of all lawful social/cultural arrangements. As Samuel Lowe suggests, 'ruling regimes need religion to be compliant, to absolve itself from decision-making processes or policy-setting agendas,

[99] R. Bellah, 'Civil religion in America', *Daedalus*, 96 (Winter, 1967), pp. 1-21, p. 13.

[100] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 2-10.

[101] Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 20.

and then never question or challenge decisions made or policies implemented by governments'.[102] In Virginia, that compliance was worked out as Anglican parish vestry members went to Williamsburg to sit in the legislature; but their ministers were forbidden by law to be seated there. To maintain unity, a strong Baptist value, Regular Baptists decided at the local church and association level, to agree to disagree on slavery and emancipation by yielding debate on the issue to the state. The other states in the new nation soon followed Virginia's lead in granting religious freedom. Johnson and Koyama comment that 'fear of state intervention in religious affairs made religious freedom attractive in late eighteenth-century America'.[103] The trade-off of sharing space with other competing social and cultural arrangements, while everyone respected the public space of the nation, seemed a good idea at the time.

Ultimately, Perez Zagorin points out, 'Whenever tolerance has been recognized as more than a temporary expedient, wherever it has been advocated for religious, moral, and humanitarian reasons, it has also a relation to and tended to develop in the direction of religious freedom'.[104] Toleration created a lawful space for religious dissenters to press for unfettered permission to express their faith. This led to conflict with the majority culture. In Virginia, Regular Baptists kept up the pressure while obeying the toleration regulations by working with ecclesiastical and enlightenment allies to secure a more level social standing, not under, but alongside the Anglican majority. The Revolutionary War created the space that dissenters had wanted all along. Pestanta suggests 'that Baptists in Virginia supported the Revolution on the grounds that its success would improve the position of their churches offered further proof that their stance was the result more of practical than of principled

[102] S. C-Y. Lowe, 'The challenge of freedom: Baptists, slavery, and Virginia, 1760-1810' (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2003), p. 500.

[103] Johnson and Koyama, *Persecution and Toleration*, p. 277.

[104] Zagorin, *Religious Toleration*, p. 311.

considerations'.[105] The challenge that was created for dissenters who now had access to long-standing traditional power centers, was the pressure to conform to other social expectations. The social pressure was keen to maintain and support the slavery system.[106] The pressure was real and effective because even though some sympathy for abolishing slavery was present among Baptists, a 1785 resolution for emancipation circulated among the churches was generally ignored by them. W. Harrison Daniel suggests, 'perhaps [because] the substance of the statement encroached upon the prerogative of the state'.[107]

Just as the seventeenth century Anglican Burgesses wanted to put law between the body and soul of a slave, so also many eighteenth century Baptists assumed that the church could not interfere with the lawful, albeit 'unrighteous' practice of slave holding.[108] After achieving religious equality, Regular Baptists generally adopted the social mores of the majority around them, even as they recognized the harm done by slavery. They won their liberty to worship God within their own context, but in doing so, adapted their faith to their social environment rather than impacting that environment with their faith. As dissenting white Virginians enjoyed their religious liberty, they left behind members of their own churches whose freedom was not yet included. The state maintained, and the church in Virginia agreed to respect, the legal wall between slaves and their freedom.

While the state no longer closely regulated religious activity, it was still the frame in which faith was expressed, whether by Anglicans or Regular Baptists, and that box inevitably impacted religious expression. The founders had agreed to 'leave religious choice a local and individual decision'[109] for several reasons. First, the diversity of expressions of Christianity

[105] Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, pp. 206-208.

[106] Goetz, *Baptism of Early Virginia*, pp.182-187.

[107] W. H. Daniel, 'Virginia Baptists and the Negro in the early Republic', *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 80 (January 1972), pp. 60-69, p. 65.

[108] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

[109] Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, p. 213.

made choosing a national church an impossible choice. Second, endorsing locally popular churches would have alarmed adherents of minority denominations. Third, most 'citizens opposed the idea of the state meddling in religion on principle'.[110] The transition from religious toleration to religious freedom, while a success, did not create an environment where church and state did not impact one another. A key example of this impact is the first contested election in the early republic for the role of President of the United States.

Baptists First Foray into National Politics

Thomas Jefferson's candidacy for the office of president in 1800 was divisive partly because his candidacy became a test on how religion and the public square should relate. Amanda Porterfield argues that 'the presidential election of 1800 was the first time that voters made the choice between two different philosophies of government [federalism vs. republicanism] and two different approaches to religion's role with respect to government authority'.[111] For some clergy, Jefferson's 'open profession of Deism' was a stumbling block, along with his open support for the French Revolution, with its anti-religion excesses, made him unsuitable to serve as president.[112] Other clergy, particularly Baptists, who enjoyed seeing religious freedom become the law of the land, whole-heartedly supported Jefferson. Porterfield indicates that 'Baptists played a crucial role in galvanizing popular hostility to Federalism'.[113] Federalists, John Ferling observes, 'turned upside down Jefferson's commitment to religious liberty, asserting that he was irreligious and hoped for the liberty not

[110] Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, p. 213.

[111] A. Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation*, American Beginnings, 1500-1900, edited by E. G. Gray, S. Mihn, and M. A. Peterson (Chicago, 2012), p. 147.

[112] F. Lambert, "'God—and a religious president—(or) Jefferson and not God': Campaigning for a voter-imposed religious test in 1800', *Journal of Church and State*, 39 (1997): pp. 769-789, p. 769; Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, p. 4; J. Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800* (New York, 2004), p. 60.

[113] Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt,* p. 149.

to worship'.[114] Porterfield indicates that one of the 'pillars' of Jefferson's success in winning the election was his support among Baptists who were 'opposed to state interference in religion . . . , and their arguments for religious liberty brought them into the political mainstream where the religious separatism supported Jefferson's laissez-faire policies of western expansion'.[115]

The 1800 federal election was the first contested election and created the two-party system,[116] and part of the division related to how religion and government would relate to one another in this new republic. Porterfield observes, 'Dissension over the nature of religion and its proper place in the American republic played an important role in [the] politicization of American life'.[117] Jeffersonians charged federalist-supporting clergy as power-seeking and Federalists defended their clerical support as good for society.[118] Ironically, the evangelicals [particularly Baptists] 'most bent on separating religion from politics contributed most significantly to partisan Republican growth and to the stridency of moral debate within politics. As Elizabeth Myers assesses, 'The importance of changing political and religious norms as the election of 1800 approached cannot be overemphasized. . . . Religious leaders were exercising more independent power over politics'.[119] While the new Constitution did not establish a religious test for public office, Lambert observes that a religious test emerged through a 'voter-imposed religious test to be won in the arena of public opinion'. [120]

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[114] Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, p. 90.

[115] Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, p. 148.

[116] E. Myers, 'Timing is everything: The social context behind the emergence of separation ideology during the presidential campaign of 1800', *Texas Law Review*, 83 (2005), pp. 933-959, p. 939.

[117] Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, p. 148.

[118] *Ibid.*

[119] Myers, 'Timing is everything', p. 957.

[120] F. Lambert, ' God—and a Religious President', p. 770.

The Federalists, led by Massachusetts lawyer and American founder John Adams, followed a more traditional understanding of that relationship of the church and state. Responding to an address by the Maryland General Assembly, he comments on religion,

> What shall I say to you, gentlemen, on the subject of destruction of religion and encouragement of loose principles? I am not fond of introducing this sacred topic into political disquisitions. But religion is the basis of moral obligation—of the essence of all government; the only ground of confidence between man and man, and the foundation of all society. Without it the world would be a universal and perpetual war of artifice, intrigue, fraud, stratagem, and violence, of all men against all men. This at least is my opinion, tho' I shall not persecute those who differ from me.
>
> When religious liberty has been asserted by invincible arguments of the soundest divines as well as the philosophers of this century and the last; when every engine of wit, satire, humor, and ridicule, have been employed to discountenance intolerance, is the whole to terminate in a cruel and sanguinary persecution of all religion? In the annihilation of all the sacred foundations of morality, government, and society? America will not, I trust, be willing to be converted into a perfect bedlam, whatever other parts of the world may with it.[121]

The Federalist position seemed to inherit the beliefs of the colonial era that religion's role in public life is to civilize people. As Lambert observes, the French Revolution 'was to them a case study of what happens when infidels gain control'.[122]

A difference can be observed in the behaviour of government toward the church. In the 1750s, in the build up toward the French and Indian War, the governor of Virginia asked Commissary Dawson to call all Virginia clergy to Williamsburg and to urge them (command them) to return to their parishes and support the righteous cause against the French and their Indian allies.[123] The governor could count on Dawson doing his bidding. After the Revolution and when religious freedom was the law the land, Christian clergy could support (or not support) whatever policies or whatever persons they chose. Both Federalists and Democrat Republicans had their clerical supporters. Clergy often supported the side that

[121] J. Adams, 'The President's answer to the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, Philadelphia, December 23, 1798' in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 January 1799, p. 3, newspapers.com (accessed: 7 November 2020).

[122] Lambert, 'God—and a Religious President', pp. 771, 778.

[123] Dawson, 'Address to the Clergy Assembled 1754', images 138-139; 147, microfilm.

seemed most amenable to their goals. As Lambert observes, in that free arena, 'Federalist clergy launched a vigorous and extensive effort to secure a voter-imposed religious test against Jefferson'.[124] In the 1800s the clergy who aligned with Federalists were a threat to the Democrat Republicans.[125] A Republican, in the 18 April 1799 issue of their newspaper, *The Aurora*, declaimed Federalists as would-be papists, whose clergy supported a new establishment. He outlines as the 'creed' of the Federalist, in first person, 'I believe that the protestant churches have ever been in error with respect to their constructions of the Revelation of St. John—as it is now clear that the Pope is neither anti-christ nor the beasts but that both these characters apply to the French and to them only. It follows, therefore, that Pius the 6th ought to be re-established, in both his spiritual and temporal kingdom'.[126] This sort of misleading, misinformation in print was part of what motivated the ill-advised federal Alien and Sedition Act of 1798.[127]

One of Jefferson's key Baptist allies during the election of 1800 was John Leland. Porterfield indicates that Leland and his fellow Baptists' loyalty to Jefferson lay in his authorship of Virginia's Statute of Religious Freedom. Their 'demands for the right to worship without impediment enabled the success of Jeffersonian politics'.[128] Building on Roger Williams' arguments for religious liberty, Backus was convinced that 'religious liberty cleared the way for people to turn toward God' without a state-endorsed expression of faith being an impediment.[129] When Jefferson was elected, Backus hoped, Williams' concept of religious freedom would be 'vindicated and that state control of religion would never

[124] Lambert, 'God—and a Religious President', p. 778.

[125] Myers, 'Timing is everything', p. 958.

[126] A Republican, 'The Creed of a Federalist, with authorities', *Aurora*, 18 April 1799, pp. 2-3, p. 2, newspapers.com (Accessed: 4 November 2020).

[127] Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, pp. 53-55.

[128] *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153.

[129] *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 149.

recover'.[130] Leland, in an address given 'at the request of the Republican Committee . . . at Pittsfield . . . July 4, 1824', that partially reflected on the advocacy for religious liberty, commented, 'Almost two centuries past, Roger Williams was ejected from Salam . . . for contending for the same doctrine—that rules, in their official capacity, had nothing to do with religion. This claim occasioned the Baptists to be whipped, the Quakers to be hanged and the witches to be gibbeted'.[131]

David Barrow's political creed, expressed in his circular letter, gives further evidence of Baptist alignment with Jefferson's Democrat-Republicans. His fifth point, 'That no man can be bound in person, or property, but by laws of his own making, or that of his representatives, fairly chosen',[132] has a parallel in A Republican's 'Creed' published in the *Aurora* in 1799. Point 17 stated, 'A Republican believes that no man's life, liberty, or property ought to depend on the mere will and pleasure of any other man'.[133] Barrow calls government 'a civil compact' . . . 'subject to the control, and liable to alteration, when thought proper by the majority' (point 4); the Republican author of the 'creed' in the *Aurora*, calls government 'a solemn pact between the governors and the governed' (point 28).[134] On militia, Barrow deems that 'a well regulated militia is the best natural defence [sic] of a free government' (point 17). This aligns with Republicans point that 'the militia . . . must be considered as the palladium of our security and the first effectual resort in case of hostility' (point 9).[135] While religious liberty was among Barrow's points (points 13 and 14), he had also adopted as his own points similar to the Republican 'creed'.

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[130] Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, p. 149.

[131] Leland, *Writings of Elder John Leland*, pp. 501-507, pp. 506-507.

[132] C. R. Allen, 'Barrow's Circular Letter', p. 447.

[133] Republican, 'Creed', *Aurora*, p. 2.

[134] C. R. Allen, 'Barrow's Circular Letter', p. 447; Republican, 'Creed', *Aurora*, p. 2.

[135] C. R. Allen, 'Barrow's Circular Letter', p. 448; Republican, 'Creed', *Aurora*, p. 2.

The alliances with Congregationalist clergy that Adams built and with Baptist clergy that Jefferson cultivated demonstrates the influence that the pulpit had in shaping public opinion. Whereas Anglican ministers (mostly) did their governors' bidding, they and their dissenting colleagues took advantage of the freer public square to seek to influence political discourse in the nation, something which the nascent political parties took full advantage. The citizens of Philadelphia were offered a choice in 1800. In the *Aurora General Advertiser*, Federalists were caricatured as wanting 'an established church, a religious test, and an order of priesthood'; the Republicans meanwhile offered 'religious liberty, the rights of conscience, truth and Jefferson'.[136] Jeffersonians (Democrat Republicans) felt pressure from the Federalists to 'proclaim respect for religion and counter their reputation for religious skepticism'.[137] Federalists, with Adams at their helm, took advantage of Jefferson's perceived weakness on religion, while guarding against any idea that they wanted to establish a religion for the new country. Adams pointedly declared, in his response to Maryland, that 'I shall not persecute those who differ from me'.[138] McBride accesses that clergy backing the Federalist party did so out of an effort to maintain the status quo, particularly in New England; whereas clergy that supported Jefferson's Republicans did so to promote 'social equality through religious liberty'.[139] Baptists, by advocating either through petitioning or suffering unjust imprisonment, were 'old hands'[140]--early participants in early America's national dialogue on not just religious matters, but other matters of common concern.

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[136] 'Attention! Citizens of Philadelphia', *Aurora General Advertiser*, Philadelphia, PA, edited by W. Duane, 14 October 1800, p. 2, newspapers.com (Accessed: 4 November 2020).

[137] Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, p. 157.

[138] *Ibid.*, p. 157; Adams, 'President's Address, December 23, 1798'.

[139] McBride, *Pulpit and Nation*, p. 143.

[140] Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, p. 150.

Conclusion

Regular Baptists and Anglicans lived in the new republic and worshipped God as their conscience dictated in the same legal environment. Because there was no separation between their souls and their bodies, as free men, they had the freedom granted in the new Constitution to speak into the public square as Christians. The only caveat, as McBride notes, is that the public square sometimes pushed back, by either endorsing Christians who had the right opinions or excoriating the participation of believers with wrong opinions for trying to create an improper 'alliance between church and state'.[141]

Even though they were a tiny portion of a minority in Virginia, Regular Baptist efforts to live peaceably among the Anglican majority in Virginia had outsized influence, certainly due to the leadership of ministers such as John Marks, David Thomas, David Barrow, and John Meglamre, and others. By living quietly, serving their communities well, and not striking back when they were mistreated, Regular Baptists helped Virginia's leaders move from a position of active distrust and resistance to the presence of dissenters to a place where religious pluralism was no longer seen as a threat to the well-being of the community. Indeed, the editorialist in 1776 was answered; society reorganizes but does not fall apart when religion is not regulated.

[141] McBride, *Pulpit and Nation*, p. 107.

Conclusion

Religious toleration was a failed experiment in the British North American colonies, but the lesson learned by the colonial governments was that religion need not be a source of friction, provided there were a few points of agreement. Virginia's experience attempting to manage dissenter activity to limit its expansion did not work as anticipated. Dissenters' ability to successfully navigate or challenge limitations set on them by governments attested to the Enlightenment idea that the human conscience could not be managed by the state. Regular Baptists became part of the answer to the question of whether religious toleration was a functional government policy that accommodated the need for an established church while offering space to non-conformists.

The British North American colonies, while making many English merchants and colonists quite wealthy, also provided a way to relieve social pressures in England, whether it was conflict related to questions of religion or a means to keep debtor prisons less over-crowded. Regular Baptists came to the British North American colonies partly as refugees from the political and social difficulties that came upon them after the restoration of the Stuart kings because some Baptists in England had supported Cromwell during the English Civil War and participated in the Parliament of the Commonwealth.[1] While a few migrated to the new world earlier, the mass of Baptists from England and the British Isles, who could either afford the trip or were willing to indenture themselves upon arrival, came at William Penn's invitation and settled in Penn's colonies beginning in the 1730s.[2] Like the Quakers, they were a peculiar people with their own forms of worship; unlike the Quakers, they were

[1] Watts, *Dissenters*, pp. 135-136, 144-145, 215-216, 223-224, 237.

[2] Schwartz, *Mixed Multitude*, pp. 2, 5; Cook, *Delaware Baptists*, p. 15.

not pacifists so their presence in a colony, while a social irritant, was not considered a security threat. The only colonies where Baptists were not welcome were Massachusetts and Virginia. The other colonies had embedded in their charters religious toleration and practiced limited religious freedom (Rhode Island excepted). Where Baptists could settle, they thrived. By the mid-1740s, because of migration patterns set up by land speculation and security concerns, they were present in every North American British colony.

Whether pragmatism or philosophy informed the decisions of the risk-taking English nobles who funded the colonial ventures, most of them opted to provide for religious toleration, if not freedom, in their chartered territories. The exceptions were Massachusetts and Virginia, whose founders had their own reasons. Massachusetts, founded by Puritans, wanted to get church life right in New England and show old England how a pure church could operate. Virginia, in contrast, sought to adapt English law and customs to their conditions in Virginia, including an early establishment of the Anglican church. Both colonies considered Protestant pluralism a threat.

The migration encouraged by colonial land speculators inevitably thwarted their efforts to maintain only Congregational or Anglican churches in their territories. The Mid-Atlantic colonies served as a starting place for many dissenting Protestants immigrants. The Crown played the toleration card to require Massachusetts to allow Anglican churches, supported by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, to be present in the colony. Presbyterians pried open official non-conformist settlement in Virginia in the late seventeenth century, and other dissenters followed in the mid-eighteenth century. Virginia's government presumed that, just as they had managed the affairs of the Anglican parishes in the colony, so they would manage dissenting church expansion to limit it.

The North American British colonies were wedged between Catholic interests north of them in French Canada and south of them in Spanish Florida and South America, and the

governors of each British colony were required to keep a wary eye on possible threats to their territory. Part of Gooch's preparations in Virginia to defend the western frontier invited dissenters to settle in Virginia. Regular Baptists were part of that early settlement, joining Presbyterians, the group Gooch mainly targeted. The Regular Baptists in the western wilderness cooperated with their neighbors to protect their homesteads and, though not parish funded, participated in the safety net that churches were expected to provide. This settlement had the unintended consequence of creating opportunities to expand into Virginia. Regular Baptists were among the refugees fleeing eastward into northern Virginia to escape Shawnee nation aggression west of the mountains. Many stayed in northern Virginia.

Once over the mountains, in a more densely settled region, Regular Baptists continued their practice of preaching to their neighbors, while also conforming to the toleration regulations as best they could. This region was somewhat distant from Williamsburg and the toleration regulations were not uniformly enforced across all counties and parishes. In Loudoun County, there is no record that Regular Baptists had trouble with any of their neighbors. However, in Fauquier county, Baptist Elder David Thomas' flock found themselves before the county justices several times before he could secure sufficient documentation from the Philadelphia Baptist Association to prove he was a licensed Baptist minister. In this region, Thomas became first among equals as he convinced literate men of Baptist principles and trained them to lead congregations. Regular Baptists expanded their church network even as they obeyed toleration regulations, though they did not experience the explosive growth enjoyed by Separate Baptists, because the toleration regulations had their intended effect—limiting Regular Baptist expansion.

Northern Virginia was the first region in Virginia where Regular Baptists thrived, even as their Separate Baptist cousins created confusion for the authorities by deliberately not conforming to the toleration regulations. Virginia's government had not anticipated that any

non-conformists would defy their regulations. Virginia jailed law-breaking, peace-disturbing Separate Baptists, unintentionally creating martyrs and eliciting sympathy for them. In rare instances, Regular Baptists also experienced legal as well as social trouble due to their sharing a denominational name with the Separate Baptists.

While David Thomas was expanding his church network in northern Virginia, Regular Baptists from North Carolina migrated into the Tidewater region of southeast Virginia. Their leadership, John Maglamre and David Barrow, did not experience much friction with the deeply settled and entrenched Anglican establishment there. Barrow's near drowning was more a result of a local Anglican vicar's irritation that he was preaching in his new parish than a deep animus against him locally. Both men were well respected by their Anglican neighbors.

Virginia's Tidewater was the home to most of the enslaved population in Virginia, though slaves were present in every corner of Virginia by the time Regular Baptists were settling in the colony. Both Anglicans and Regular Baptists struggled with the ethical calumny that was slavery. The government had placed the masters of their bondsmen completely in control of their movements and how they were exposed to Christianity. Anglican ministers had to gain permission from the owner to catechize them. Dissenters were looked upon suspiciously as they transgressed the line between slaves and their masters.

The social pressure to accept slavery was tremendous. Anglican ministers who objected to slavery found themselves assigned to less affluent parishes. Baptist churches were threatened with division, and because unity was a major value among Baptists, they pushed the issue out of their circle of concern other than to exhort Baptists who owned slaves to be kind to them. Many Virginians who owned slaves did not see the usefulness of exposing them to biblical teaching; they thought it dangerous to their agricultural enterprise, if not their

lives, for slaves to be given an understanding of Christian liberty. The irony of Virginia and Carolina slave holders decrying their bondage by taxation under George III is rich.

Much of the friction between Anglicans and Regular Baptists was ecclesiastical. Effective Anglican parish vestries took their roles as creator of local social order and the social safety net seriously. Service on a vestry was often the first step toward more political influence. Everyone living within the boundaries of a parish was their responsibility, whether parishioner or dissenter. Anglican pastor James Maury may have rued the day that Baptists ever crossed his path, but his concern for their deleterious impact on his parish and in Virginia overall motivated him to leave a parting gift for distribution. The post-humous publication of his pamphlet urged loyalty to the parish church, warning Anglicans of the danger of listening to Baptists, and urging those who strayed to come back home for their benefit and the good of the community. Baptist elder David Thomas answered the document with an extensive pamphlet of his own that has become, along with Morgan Edwards' *Materials*, researchers' main windows into ecclesiology doctrine and practice of colonial Baptists. Thomas' pamphlet had an audience because Thomas' life, and the lives of his congregants, demonstrated that their doctrine and praxis were not a threat to good social order in Virginia, despite the prejudicial concerns of the Anglican majority.

After the revolution, the Commonwealth of Virginia, had to work out what laws from the colonial period would transfer into the Commonwealth and what laws would be modified or cancelled. The question of religion took ten years to decide with the passage of the Statute of Religious Freedom in 1789. In those years and afterward, both Anglican and Regular Baptists had to navigate their new relationship with the government. Both were freed from Virginia's micro-management.

Many feared that religious freedom in America would lead to chaos; the kind of chaos that did erupt in France. Such chaos was averted in America partly because churches in

America had bought into the American experiment with self-government. Up until Parliament decided to tax American products in the 1760s, the colonists were nearly self-governing, with crown officials rarely upending locally passed law. The civil liberty that the colonials fought for contained within it the presumption that religious liberty would logically follow.

For the Anglicans that meant an uncertain future where their traditional sources of income were stripped away.[3] They had to adopt that name Protestant Episcopal Church to remove the association with Great Britain. They gained their first bishops, which had been denied them prior to the revolution.[4]

For Regular Baptists, it meant that they no longer had to process applications to create new churches, a good thing, but they also had to figure out how to relate to the government now that they were no longer under its regulatory thumb. Though free from government oversight, they continued to live within the law in Virginia. Like their Anglican neighbors, Baptists accepted the status quo on slavery, even embracing it. When objections were raised, they cast slavery as a civil, not a religious, matter that the church should not debate, for the sake of the higher value of unity.

With an open public square, Baptists and Anglicans could both speak into the life of the Virginia Commonwealth, even though they had to navigate the tensions arising from social expectations. How they navigated those tensions became a blueprint for churches in early America. Regular Baptists involved themselves in their communities, and generally obeyed the toleration regulations, while setting high standards for their congregants' behavior. Their civil obedience during the late colonial period was a significant part of the underlying circumstances in Virginia that created space for religious freedom. Even as the terms of civil engagement were reset, Baptists continued their involvement in community

[3] Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church,* vol. II, pp. 438-449.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 461-469.

life, even as they called their fellow citizens to believe the gospel. As Regular Baptist Elder David Thomas explained in the *Virginian Baptist*,

> We also esteem ourselves duty bound to give all deference to the legislature of this colony; and to respect, regard and obey all in lawful authority. And as standing evidence hereof, we freely pay all taxes, levies, etc. We muster, clear roads, etc. as well as others. And in one word, we comply with all the laws of our country without exception. No do we desire any further liberty, than peaceably to enjoy the fruit of our own industry; and to worship God in that manner which we verily believe is most acceptable in his sight, without molestation.[5]

Regular Baptists' active involvement in their communities, their civil obedience 'without exception' helped demonstrate to Virginia's leaders that religious pluralism was no threat to good social order and that regulating church life was not necessary to support the peace and welfare of their communities.

[5] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, p. 33.

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