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WILLIAM T. BRANTLY (1787-1845):  
A SOUTHERN UNIONIST AND THE BREAKUP  
OF THE TRIENNIAL CONVENTION

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Robert Arthur Snyder

May 2005

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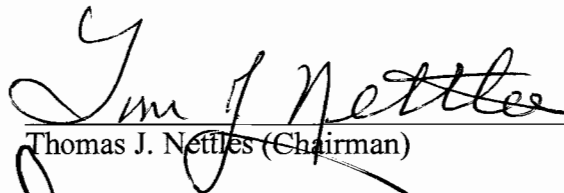
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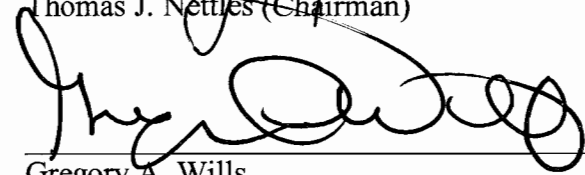
**APPROVAL SHEET**

WILLIAM T. BRANTLY (1787-1845):  
A SOUTHERN UNIONIST AND THE BREAKUP  
OF THE TRIENNIAL CONVENTION

Robert Arthur Snyder

Read and Approved by:

  
Thomas J. Nettles (Chairman)

  
Gregory A. Wills

  
Shawn D. Wright

Date June 28, 2005

To Jesus Christ,  
my Lord and Savior,  
and to His servants,  
my Dad and Mom,  
who encouraged me  
to pursue this project  
to God's glory.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABM</i>	<i>The American Baptist Magazine</i>
<i>ABQ</i>	<i>American Baptist Quarterly</i>
AFBCP	The Archives of the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, American Baptist Historical Society, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania
<i>BHH</i>	<i>Baptist History and Heritage</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>The Biblical Recorder</i>
<i>CI</i>	<i>The Christian Index</i>
<i>CIBM</i>	<i>The Christian Index, and Baptist Miscellany</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Christian Review</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>The Columbian Star</i>
<i>CSCI</i>	<i>The Columbian Star, and Christian Index</i>
<i>JSCBHS</i>	<i>Journal of the South Carolina Baptist Historical Society</i>
MFP	Manly Family Papers, William Stanley Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama
<i>SWGI</i>	<i>The Southern Watchman, and General Intelligencer</i>

## PREFACE

The Scriptures reveal that *grace* extends beyond salvation into vocation, for every saint is “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand” (Eph 2:10). To grace, I am completely indebted for this project on William T. Brantly.

First, God chose this project for me. My first contact with Brantly came through a seminar on Baptist identity that I initially wanted to avoid. The seminar’s professor, Dr. Thomas J. Nettles, introduced us to several old Baptist newspapers. Providentially, the first article I read was Brantly’s essay, “Objects of Attention,” which described his goals as an editor and his vision for church reformation. Both his epistemology and his plea for evangelical unity impressed me, for they resembled neither fundamentalism nor ecumenism. Other articles impressed me with Brantly’s terse style, mature thought, and breadth of knowledge. Even deeper, Brantly’s preaching and piety have often challenged my own faith and holiness. God certainly gave him much grace to wear many hats well. Even though I do not agree with all that Brantly did or said, the man has by and large fulfilled my desire for a mentor in the dual callings of preaching and teaching. In granting this longterm desire, God be praised!

Second, God enabled me to complete this project. Not only did God freely grant both the natural and spiritual abilities to write on a former Christian—even pulling me out of a spell of doubt during my initial years in Louisville—He also lavished His grace upon my family through many generous individuals and churches, thereby reproving me of sinful independence and teaching me the truth of Paul’s remark that no member of Christ’s body can say to another, “I have no need of you” (1 Cor 12:21). In particular, I thank God for the kindness of members at DeHaven Memorial Baptist Church (LaGrange, Kentucky) and at Spring Branch Baptist Church (Vevay, Indiana)—

especially Benny and Jean Garland, whose house we rent so affordably. I also thank God for generous scholarships (especially a timely one from the Ransdells), as well as gifts from window washing customers (the Meades, Bowmans, and Hanlons) and friends (the Listers, Moerschels, and Grows). Encouragement has come from Jarrett Burch, my friend and fellow historian of antebellum Baptists, and from my advisor, Dr. Nettles, a true soldier for the truth and advocate of primary sources in research. For skills in research methodology, I gratefully acknowledge my debt to Dr. Craig A. Blaising, whose full-year course on patristics walked me through the process. Finally, I have been greatly blessed through my extended family (Mark and Connie Allen, Lee and Sue Granlund, Reuben Tieszen), my grandparents (Maurice and Evelyn Bomstad, and Art and Betty Snyder), and my parents, Ron and Nancy Snyder, who initially encouraged me to pursue a doctorate at Southern Seminary. To them, under Christ, I dedicate this work, thanking both them and God for the means to discharge my stewardship. May the Lord Jesus reckon the fruits of this project to each and every believing contributor! For as He said, with my paraphrasing slightly, “He who receives a preacher in his status as a preacher will receive a preacher’s reward” (see Matt 10:41).

Lastly, my wife, Jinna, has been so close to me throughout this project that even now I have caught myself writing this preface in the first person *plural*. Truly we are more than partners. We are one in both flesh and spirit. Dear sister, I hope your mansion is next to mine in Glory. Thank you so much for your *love*—“strong as death,” unquenchable and priceless (Song of Sol 8:6-7).

Robert Arthur Snyder

Switzerland County, Indiana

May 2005

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The ministry of William T. Brantly (1787-1845) points out several causes behind the breakup of the Triennial Convention. The most commonly identified causes are differences in organizational structure and the controversy over slavery, with Southern historians emphasizing the former and Northern historians emphasizing the latter. Though both of these causes were present, Brantly's ministry points out another. As the Triennial Convention progressed, the basis of union shifted from union around general benevolent efforts to union around more specific sectarian and sectional endeavors. In other words, the breakup concerned not only how Baptists were united or how much they were united, but also for what reason they were united.

#### **Thesis**

This dissertation seeks to answer the question, what light does the ministry of William T. Brantly shed for understanding the breakup of the Triennial Convention? Several considerations support the relevance of Brantly's ministry for understanding the breakup of the Triennial Convention. First, Brantly's ministry (1809-1844) was nearly coterminous with the Triennial Convention (1814-1845). Second, Brantly's national leadership spanned the years of growing disunion, from the initial sectionalism of 1826 to the Bible convention of 1837, when South Carolina boycotted the meeting. Third, Brantly personally faced the sectional differences, for he was a Southerner who spent eleven years of his mature ministry in the North (at Philadelphia) before returning to the South as pastor of historic First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina. Finally,

Brantly influenced several key Southern leaders, some of whom precipitated the 1845 split in the Triennial Convention and established the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>1</sup>

The dissertation argues that Brantly's longtime mission of uniting Christians in useful effort for a moral revolution exemplified the early vision of the Triennial Convention, and that his inability as a Southerner to maintain this mission nationally among Baptists indicated grave disunity within the Convention as early as 1837.

Union in effort expresses both the early vision of the Triennial Convention and the focus of Brantly's ministry. At the Convention's first meeting, the president, Richard Furman, asserted the reasonableness of a "union in one common effort" and expressed hopes that effort in home missions and ministerial education would soon be added to foreign missions. According to Furman, such effort would eventually lead to the coming of the Kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup> Brantly shared this vision. His watchword was "effort"—specifically, useful effort. Like William Carey, Brantly abhorred the contradiction of warm petitions and cold exertions. And he lived as he spoke. In the words of one eulogy, Brantly's own life was "one uninterrupted scene of arduous labor."<sup>3</sup>

Brantly was not content to work alone. He labored in and for societies, both denominational and interdenominational. He identified himself as one of the "Unionists," confessing that he felt "too weak and dependent to attempt to work alone."<sup>4</sup> The work of the unionist involved making peace between old antagonists as well as forming new organizations. This work also involved finding and mentoring potential ministers, which Brantly often did. The goal of this united effort was not simply revival, but ultimately the

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., W. T. Brantly, Jr., J. P. Boyce, Richard Fuller, and especially Basil Manly, Sr.

<sup>2</sup>William H. Brackney, "Triumph of the National Spirit: The Baptist Triennial Convention, 1814-1844," *ABQ* 4 (June 1985): 169. The Convention's constitution also mentioned union for effort, setting forth "a plan for eliciting, combining, and directing the Energies of the whole Denomination in one sacred effort" (*Proceedings of the Baptist Convention for Missionary Purposes; Held in Philadelphia, in May, 1814* [Philadelphia: Ann Coles, 1814], 3; cf. "Constitution of the Triennial Convention, May, 1814," *ABQ* 8 [September 1989]: 220).

<sup>3</sup>M., "Dr. Brantly," *CI*, 9 May 1845, n.p. Manly added, "He *loved to work*" (ibid.).

<sup>4</sup>William T. Brantly, "Objects of Attention," *CI*, 1 January 1831, p. 2.

unending Revival, the millennial Kingdom of God. To Brantly and his contemporaries, the onset of the Kingdom meant nothing less than a moral revolution.<sup>5</sup> All these objectives stand together in the following remarkable paragraph, reprinted by Brantly in the prime of his ministry:

Yes, and this is not all, *Missionaries* will be sent; *Bibles* will be published; *Sunday schools* will be multiplied; *temperance* will be promoted; and the cause of God, with which all these subjects are most intimately connected, will be carried onward; *Revivals* will be multiplied, and extend and spread, until every dark corner of the earth shall be illuminated with radiant glory from on high. Who that loves Christ or his kingdom, does not long to labor and see, as well as agonize and pray, ‘*Thy kingdom come?*’<sup>6</sup>

Thus in Brantly’s mind, the activities of what historians have dubbed the “Benevolent Empire” were truly adumbrations of God’s Empire.

Brantly was able to maintain his mission of union in effort through 1836, when both sectional and sectarian concerns began to rival foreign missions as the preoccupation of missionary Baptists. The sectional interest is well known. To many Northerners, slavery became the defining criterion of unity rather than missionary effort. The sectarian interest concerned how to translate the Greek word *baptizo* in English versions of the Bible. Brantly perceived in this Bible controversy the danger of Baptist bigotry. Brantly was heavily involved in this controversy—serving on committees, writing pamphlets, and even hosting the great Bible Convention of 1837. Emerging from this controversy, Brantly regarded the Triennial Convention as “no longer existing but in name.”<sup>7</sup> In Brantly’s opinion, 1837 marked the end of the Triennial Convention. Brantly returned to the South and never again actively participated in national leadership after 1838.

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<sup>5</sup>The idea of a “moral revolution” perhaps came from Francis Wayland’s stress on “the importance of moral effort at the crisis of a social revolution” to give “physical and intellectual changes . . . a corresponding moral impression” (*Encouragements to Religious Effort: A Sermon Delivered at the Request of the American Sunday School Union, May 25, 1830* [Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1830], 7).

<sup>6</sup>This quote from a correspondent is found in W. T. Brantly, “Baptist General Tract Society,” *CSCI*, 2 October 1830, p. 221.

<sup>7</sup>Brantly’s editorial in the *Southern Watchman, and General Intelligencer* is quoted by Thomas Meredith in “A. and F. Bible Society,” *BR*, 27 January 1838, n.p.

## Historiography

No biographical history has yet been written on Brantly except a few memoirs appearing shortly after his death and some short pieces for encyclopedias. Therefore, scholarship sheds light on Brantly indirectly, as a participant within larger religious phenomena—evangelicalism, Southern religion, and the Triennial Convention.

### Evangelicalism

The historiography on evangelicalism pertains to Brantly in two aspects. First, the central topic of this dissertation—unity—cannot be adequately discussed without considering interdenominational, or *evangelical*, unity. Second, Brantly himself was an evangelical; therefore, Brantly’s ministry must be understood in light of evangelicalism. Conversely, this dissertation contributes to the historiography of that movement.<sup>8</sup> Since its inception in the late 1970s, historiography on evangelicalism has mushroomed.<sup>9</sup> Out of this scholarship, a general consensus has emerged on two points.

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<sup>8</sup>According to D. G. Hart, evangelicalism can be defined either socially around the revival and anti-formalism or theologically around anti-traditionalism and the experience of the new birth (see D. G. Hart, ed., *Reckoning with the Past: Historical Essays on American Evangelicalism from the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 18-19). Brantly’s status as an evangelical holds for both categories. Socially, having been converted at an 1802 camp meeting, Brantly actively promoted protracted meetings and the interdenominational benevolent societies of the evangelical network. Theologically, Brantly modified the doctrine of the atonement, and slighted metaphysics in favor of experimental religion and biblical terminology. Therefore, Brantly is an evangelical as well as a Baptist.

<sup>9</sup>The rise of evangelicalism as a valid field of historiography occurred in three stages. First, American religious history gained respectability as intellectual history in the postwar academy of the 1950s. Second, the pluralistic social studies of the late 1960s and early 1970s challenged the dominance of “church” history and introduced the validity of studying cultural movements. Third, with the reappearance of evangelicals in politics and the presence of university-trained evangelical historians, evangelicalism took advantage of religious pluralism to present itself as an important social movement in American culture.

This chronological sketch of evangelical historiography is based on Henry May, “The Recovery of American Religious History,” in *Ideas, Faith, and Feelings: Essays on American Intellectual and Religious History 1952-1982*, 65-86 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Anne C. Loveland, “Later Stages of the Recovery of American Religious History,” in *New Directions in American History*, ed. Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 487-502; and Hart, *Reckoning with the Past*, 15-17. Organized evangelical historiography began with the 1979 conference on the Bible and American culture and culminated in the formation of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals. The conference papers were published in Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, eds., *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).



First, the Second Great Awakening is the most critical period for the formation of American evangelicalism.<sup>10</sup> Socially, revivals and benevolent activity became institutionalized through “new measures,” which Brantly justified and promoted. The resulting revivalism and benevolent societies together turned the Awakening into “a comprehensive program designed to Christianize every aspect of American life.”<sup>11</sup> Theologically, creedalism succumbed to an overemphasis on new birth and to an exaggerated view of *sola scriptura* that ignored ecclesiastical tradition.<sup>12</sup> As an apparent example of this mindset, Brantly’s rejection of theological systems and his formation of a Baptist association without a confession of faith will receive scrutiny in later chapters.

Recently, D. G. Hart, a former aspirant to evangelical historiography, has argued that evangelicalism did not exist in nineteenth-century America, but is rather an abstract construction generated in 1940s fundamentalism and applied to earlier generations by scholars of the late 1900s. In contrast to the traditionless “new evangelicalism” of the twentieth century, Hart notes, “Protestant diversity was arguably strongest during the six decades before the Civil War than during any other period of

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<sup>10</sup>For a survey of nineteenth-century evangelicalism, see William G. McLoughlin, “Introduction,” in *American Evangelicals: An Anthology* (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 1-27. On the significance of evangelicalism to American history, McLoughlin claimed, “The story of American Evangelicalism is the story of America itself in the years 1800 to 1900, for it was Evangelical religion which made Americans the most religious people in the world, molded them into a unified, pietistic-perfectionist nation, and spurred them on to those heights of social reform, missionary endeavor, and imperialistic expansion which constitute the moving forces of our history in that century” (ibid., 1).

<sup>11</sup>This description comes from George M. Marsden, who may not have referred to both causes cited above (*The Evangelical Mind and the New School Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970], 3). Fred J. Hood argues that revivalism beat out benevolent societies as the method of choice among evangelicals (*Reformed America: The Middle and Southern States, 1783-1837* [University: The University of Alabama Press, 1980], 169, 201-02). Other scholars point out the continued existence of the societies (e.g., John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South*, Contributions to the Study of Religion, no. 7 [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982], 98, 116 n.2, where he cites Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers’ Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States 1800-1865* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960], 89-95). Arguably, the “benevolent societies” of today are called “parachurch organizations.”

<sup>12</sup>For an extensive examination of the decline of creedalism and of other traditional authorities in the Second Great Awakening, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). Regarding objective doctrines, Brantly rarely mentions justification by faith alone.

United States history.”<sup>13</sup> In response, it seems that Hart’s thesis fails to account both for pre-Victorian British evangelicals and for their benevolent societies, which were later imitated in America, where they exerted significant cultural influence from about 1826 to 1837.<sup>14</sup> These societies incarnate what Hart categorizes as “the abstraction *evangelicalism*,” which “promised unity and more—unity *for action*.” Brantly is certainly a case in point. The true value of Hart’s critique concerns the way historians have suppressed denominational subtleties under the generic rubric “evangelical.”<sup>15</sup> The present study hopes to fuse Brantly’s denominational peculiarities with his evangelical activity into an intensely theological portrait of a *Southern unionist*.

Second, scholars agree that culture and religion interacted very closely in the Second Great Awakening—perhaps more so than at any other time in American history, except the days of Puritan New England. Scholars disagree over the nature of the interaction. For example, Nathan Hatch emphasizes culture’s influence on religion, while Jon Butler emphasize religion’s influence on culture.<sup>16</sup>

In light of this religion-culture dialectic, Daniel Walker Howe characterizes most antebellum Protestants as being quite similar in religion, but quite different in culture. He classifies Protestants as being either cultural insiders or outsiders. He grounds his bifurcation upon analyses of political historians such as Lee Benson, who classified both the American political parties (the Democrats and the Whigs) as liberal,

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<sup>13</sup>D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 28-29, 178-87, 53.

<sup>14</sup>Although Hart does mention the formation of the American Bible Society (1816), this reference comes from another source (*ibid.*, 126). For pre-Victorian British evangelicalism, see Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000). For the influence of the British movement on America along with the American movement’s subsequent rise and fall, see Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

<sup>15</sup>Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, 177-78.

<sup>16</sup>Contrast Hatch’s title, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, to the subtitle of Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

but in different ways. The Whigs advocated a “positive liberal state,” which facilitated the individual’s pursuit of self-improvement; the Democrats advocated a “negative liberal state,” which left individuals alone to improve or not. Both groups sought to enhance the freedom of the individual. Both groups were sons of the Revolution. Similarly, most antebellum Protestants abandoned clerical and confessional hierarchy in favor of some form of evangelicalism. The insiders resembled the Whigs in that they “were seeking to create the functional equivalent of an established church, within which evangelicals would take the lead in reforming society as a whole along their own moral lines.”<sup>17</sup> The insider’s favorite tool was the benevolent society of moral reform. The outsiders kept reasserting their individual autonomy by appealing straight to the “people” in starting a new group. The outsider’s favorite tools were forms of mass media, like the camp meeting and the religious press. Both insiders and outsiders made appeals to individual choice and sought for an improved version of Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

The differences between insiders and outsiders were not primarily theological or ecclesiastical, since most denominations split along these lines.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, over time an outsider denomination could acquire insider status, as the Methodists did. Howe claims the difference between insider and outsider is primarily cultural: “In the last analysis, what set the outsiders apart from the mainstream Whig evangelicals was their

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<sup>17</sup>Daniel Walker Howe, “Protestantism, Volunteerism, and Personal Identity in Antebellum America,” in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 219.

<sup>18</sup>The insider-outsider correlation between antebellum politics and religion finds verification in Hatch’s research. Hatch shows how Jeffersonian rhetoric created anticlericalism and populism, i.e., a correlation between the political Democrats and the religious outsiders. At times, Hatch’s outlook resembles older scholarship in claiming that the insiders were reactionaries who created “benevolent societies” for the *malevolent* goal of exerting social control in order to maintain power. Contrary to this judgment, insiders were much more in power and much less in need of social control than scholars often imagine. In truth, Hatch’s thesis of *democratization* (not of church organization per se, but in mindset) should be expanded beyond the outsiders, for insiders incorporated the techniques of the outsiders.

For the initial turn in scholarship away from the social control theory, see the articles by Lois Banner, especially “Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation,” *Journal of American History* 60 (1973): 23-41.

<sup>19</sup>See E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture 1795-1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978), 46-47.

attitude toward American society.” The hallmark of the insider evangelicals was their peace with eighteenth-century polite culture, due partly to their heavy use of print (versus oral) culture and partly to their rise in social standing within a free society. Therefore, Howe concludes, “In the antebellum era, what defined the outgroups in American society was often their refusal to conform to middle-class standards of character as these were defined by moral philosophy and polite culture.”<sup>20</sup>

Howe’s categorization works well with Brantly, who was definitely an insider Baptist. Much of Brantly’s ministry concerned a plethora of benevolent societies, such as Bible societies, tract societies, temperance societies, peace societies, various education societies, and, of course, mission societies. To Brantly, being “useful” often meant putting “effort” into some benevolent society. In addition to the benevolent societies, Brantly’s status as an insider is also confirmed by his adherence to polite culture. Brantly held city pulpits, oversaw academies, edited hymnals and magazines, advocated manners for the ministry, and ended his career as the president of the College of Charleston and the Horry Professor of Moral, Intellectual, and Political Philosophy.

Being both a Baptist and an insider put some strain on Brantly’s life, for in general, Hatch is right in classifying Baptists as outsiders.<sup>21</sup> This tension appeared in Brantly’s effort at establishing a state convention in Georgia and continued into his work as an editor. For example, when a farmer once wrote in favor of the insiders’ ways (after having changed his view and in light of many acquaintances still holding the other opinion), Brantly printed the letter, but also apologized for its lack of cultural polish.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Howe, “Antebellum America,” 219, 222.

<sup>21</sup>Brantly himself recognized his denomination’s status as outsiders in former days. For example, in describing the history of early American Baptist preachers such as Edmund Botsford and Samuel Harris, Brantly thought it necessary to apologize to his readers for their rough ways (“Character of the Early American Baptist Preachers,” *CSCI*, 4 July 1829, pp. 1-2).

<sup>22</sup>He prefaced the letter, saying, “The style and manner of the subjoined composition are not exactly to our mind; but as we would not be too fastidious in judging the merits of the productions of our correspondents, we allow room to this, in the hope that it may benefit some who would not be affected by a more polished discourse” (W. T. Brantly, “A Plain Exhortation by a Plain Man,” *CSCI*, 24 April 1830, p. 261).

Studying an insider within a largely outsider denomination contributes to our knowledge of the antebellum era. First, the rhetoric of the Revolution went far beyond the individualism of the outsiders. For Brantly, patriotism included temperance societies fighting for the liberation of Americans from the tyranny of alcohol. Second, the vision of the Millennium moved antebellum insiders. Brantly classified Jonathan Edwards as required reading and reprinted Edwards's *History of Redemption* in the *Christian Index*.<sup>23</sup>

### **Southern Religion**

Great as the insider-outsider division was, the Northern-Southern division proved to be greater. Brantly eventually identified himself more as a Southerner than as an American. When Brantly went north and ministered in Philadelphia, he classified himself among the "Unionists," echoing perhaps the language of Daniel Webster, quoted a year earlier in Brantly's own magazine.<sup>24</sup> But by the end of 1837, when Brantly announced his reasons for assuming the editorship of a Charleston newspaper significantly titled, *The Southern Watchman*, Brantly had already reconciled himself to national disunion:

The Baptists of the South, though agreeing in fundamental principles with those of the North, are now in many important respects a distinct and separate people. On some very exciting questions they are becoming every year more and more distant from each other. And while I heartily deprecate all uncharitableness, or even rivalry among brethren, I cannot fail to perceive that independent action on the part of those who have their domestic institutions to protect and vindicate in conformity with the word of God, is the course of sound wisdom.<sup>25</sup>

This quote presents a great incentive for studying Brantly's life and ministry. Brantly was a Southerner possessing national denominational leadership during the critical

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<sup>23</sup>Strangely, Howe downplays the influence of postmillennial vision in favor of self-improvement. Here Howe's thesis seems skewed by his preference for the Unitarians and for their significance on American culture. This influence seems overstated—especially for understanding ministers from the South, where Unitarianism never fared well.

<sup>24</sup>Compare Brantly, "Objects of Attention," 2 to "Review of Congressional Proceedings," *CSCI*, 13 February 1830, p. 112. Brantly's quotation marks around "Unionists" indicate a borrowed term.

<sup>25</sup> William T. Brantly, "To the Patrons of the Southern Watchman," *SWG*, 24 November 1837, n.p.

decade of the 1830s, when national unity began to disintegrate. Brantly faced the slavery question face-to-face. For example, he led devotions with an English “missionary” for abolition, James Hoby, during the 1835 Triennial Convention—the last Triennial Convention that J. B. Jeter described as harmonious. He then suspected abolitionist sentiments within the new American and Foreign Bible Society, formed in 1836. Thus around eight years before the formal separation of the Baptists, Brantly was an eyewitness to their growing distance and to the emergence of “a distinct and separate people”—the Southern Baptists.

In light of Brantly’s self-identification as a Southerner, Southern culture forms another backdrop for understanding his ministry. Recent scholarship on Southern culture has often focused on problems posed by the Marxist historiography of Eugene Genovese.<sup>26</sup> His work sparked a debate between Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s hypothesis of a pre-modern state of neo-chivalric honor and Michael O’Brien’s understanding of a modern Southern romanticism.<sup>27</sup> These discussions of “Christian gentility” overlap studies specifically on Southern religion. For example, in *Religion in the Old South*, Donald Mathews explored the mutual influence of evangelicalism and slaveholding culture on each other.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, E. Brooks Holifield explored the pressures of urbanity

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<sup>26</sup>For an overview of the history of Southern religious historiography, see John B. Boles, “The Discovery of Southern Religious History,” in *Interpreting Southern History*, ed. John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 510-48.

<sup>27</sup>For a short description of the debate set in motion by Eugene Genovese, see A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South*, Southern Biography Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 5-6.

<sup>28</sup>See Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). In a more recent article, Mathews argued, “Two of the most distinctive influences on Protestantism in the South were the evangelical movement and the presence of African slaves. These, together with a dialectic between the South as a place and as an idea, made religion in the region unique” (idem, “‘Christianizing the South’—Sketching a Synthesis,” in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], 85). On the same theme, see Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), and more recently Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1997).

behind the rational theology of “gentlemen theologians.”<sup>29</sup> Combining the findings of southern religious historiography with those of evangelical historiography can create some interesting questions. For example, in light of Brantly’s sermon, “Trinitarians Rational,” and his later claim not to dabble much in metaphysics, should the first be seen as a Southern trait and the latter as an evangelical trait? The dissertation explores such questions as they pertain to the thesis.

The dissertation’s contribution to Southern religious historiography is twofold. First, as a Baptist evangelical, Brantly’s ministry displays some of the influence of organized religion on culture, such as supporting temperance movements in the South. Second, as a returning Southerner in late 1837, Brantly’s apparent inconsistency in not following teetotalism’s logic into abolitionism suggests the power of the slavery system over the Southern evangelical mind.

### **The Triennial Convention**

The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions began in May 1814 as a result of the conversion of two of America’s first foreign missionaries, Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice, to Baptist views. This convention—the so-called “Triennial Convention,” for it met every three years—was the first national organization of Baptists in the United States. The Triennial Convention’s range of activities grew until 1826, the year of the “Great Reversal,” when projects extraneous to foreign missions were excised. For a while, a policy of silence kept sectional differences calm, until sectarianism flared them up. From the late 1830s onward, sectional strife slowly grew, until finally the Convention broke apart in 1845 over slavery, resulting in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention and the reorganization of the remaining group into the American Baptist Missionary Union. A

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<sup>29</sup>Holifield, *Gentlemen Theologians*, ix.

clear-cut field for Baptist studies presents itself—the thirty-year life span of the Triennial Convention along with its two generations of Baptist leaders, such as Brantly.

The Triennial Convention itself has attracted little scholarly attention. There is no standard history of the Triennial Convention. Instead, the Convention is usually discussed in light of the subsequent division into Northern (or “American”) Baptists and Southern Baptists. The division has also affected the historians themselves, for they often have come from one of the two denominations and reflected some level of partisanship. Perhaps the interest in the division has persisted because, unlike other denominations, this sectional division never healed.

The historiography of the Triennial Convention began among church historians in the ecumenical atmosphere of the late 1940s to early 1960s. Before this era, there were isolated studies, some of which remain valuable, but they led to no extended discussion.<sup>30</sup> A scholarly discussion began with Robert A. Baker’s dissertation at Yale, later republished as *Relations between Northern and Southern Baptists* (1948). According to Baker, the two forms of Baptist “connectionalism”—the association of churches and the society of individuals—were combined to form the Triennial Convention. This combination eventually fell apart with Baptists in the North reverting to a strict society plan and Baptists in the South reasserting an associative convention.<sup>31</sup> Subsequent Southern Baptist histories have stressed these same organizational differences behind the origins of the 1845 split. In the first published history of the Southern Baptist Convention, W. W. Barnes noted the Southerners’ reliance on associations and argued

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<sup>30</sup>Earlier studies of value include W. H. Eaton, *Historical Sketch of the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society and Convention* (Boston: Massachusetts Baptist Convention, 1903); Albert L. Vail, *The Morning Hour of American Baptist Missions* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907); Mary Burnham Putnam, *The Baptists and Slavery, 1840-1845* (Ann Arbor: George Wahr, 1913); and William W. Sweet, ed., *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists 1783-1830, A Collection of Source Material* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1931; reprint, New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964).

<sup>31</sup>Robert A. Baker, *Relations between Northern and Southern Baptists* ([Fort Worth: Evans Press], 1948). That Baker’s work was a seminal study is indicated by his need to coin several of his terms, including “connectionalism” and “denominational consciousness” (*ibid.*, 3).



that the three influences of the Philadelphia Confession, the General Baptist heritage of the South, and the Separate Baptists' strong church discipline all contributed to the new convention's mentality.<sup>32</sup> In 1974, Baker trumped Barnes with a new history of the Convention, reasserting his old arguments and adding that the Triennial era was the era for state conventions.<sup>33</sup> Baker's protégé, H. Leon McBeth, has also stressed these elements in his general history of the Baptists.<sup>34</sup>

Baptist historians in the North did not fully agree with Baker's theses. American Baptist Winthrop S. Hudson questioned two of Baker's assumptions, namely, that connectional life developed slowly among Baptists and that this delay was to be expected, since Baptists emphasize independence. By close consideration of the discipline and activities of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Hudson claimed that colonial Baptists stressed both independence and connectionalism through the association's delicate use of non-coercive withdrawal. In contrast, associations of the early republic lost their sensitivity to church representation and also began to legislate as if they had church-power.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Robert Torbet, another leading Baptist historian in the North for this era, downplayed the organizational differences in favor of specific issues. According to Torbet, "The chief sources of [Triennial] controversy were theology

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<sup>32</sup>William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention: 1845-1953* (Nashville: Broadman, 1954), 6-8, cited in H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 349.

<sup>33</sup>Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1607-1972* (Nashville: Broadman, 1974), 180, cited in Walter Jarrett Burch, "A Historical and Theological Inquiry into the Impact of Adiel Sherwood in the Establishment of Georgia Baptist Institutions" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 5. Baker also reiterated his dialectical views in 1964, when he also argued that the two weightiest factors for the form of the new Southern Baptist Convention were: (1) the spirit of the original Triennial Convention constitution, and (2) the personal views of South Carolinian William B. Johnson (idem, "Reflections on the Southern Baptist Convention," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 6 [April 1964]: 15-20).

<sup>34</sup>McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 347-50.

<sup>35</sup>Winthrop S. Hudson, "The Associational Principle among Baptists," *Foundations* 1 (January 1958): 10-23. Hudson also edited a fine survey of historical views of Baptist ecclesiology: *Baptist Concepts of the Church: A Survey of the Historical and Theological Issues which have Produced Changes in Church Order* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959).

and missionary interest.” His general history favors the North just as McBeth’s favors the South.<sup>36</sup>

In the wake of these Northern-Southern discussions, a few studies appeared on the Triennial Convention. Several scholars explored the pivotal events surrounding 1826.<sup>37</sup> A few wrote biographies of key Triennial leaders.<sup>38</sup> The ecumenical years also provided the few full studies done on the Triennial Convention, which remain as unpublished graduate work.<sup>39</sup> When it is realized that this dearth of scholarship marks the highpoint of studies on the Triennial Convention, it is not unreasonable to think of Triennial leaders as forgotten. This is especially true of Southern leaders like Brantly, who died before the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention and so did not make the list of “founders” of the Convention.

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<sup>36</sup>Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1963), 283. Torbet’s earlier works include his published dissertation, *A Social History of the Philadelphia Baptist Association: 1707-1940* (Philadelphia: Westbrook Publishing, 1945), and a history of foreign missions, *Ventures of Faith: the Story of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, 1814-1954* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1955).

It should be clarified, here, that the differences are largely in emphasis—the North stressing the issue, the South stressing the organization—with neither side discounting other factors. In some regards, this debate resembles the political debates around the Civil War, with the North stressing slavery (an issue) and the South stressing states’ rights (organization).

<sup>37</sup>For example, see Winthrop S. Hudson, “Stumbling into Disorder,” *Foundations* 1 (April 1958): 45-71; and John C. Hillhouse, Jr., “Caucus Politics: Obadiah Brown’s ‘Hearth Group’ at the Baptist Triennial Convention of 1826,” *Foundations* 16 (January-March 1973): 15-20.

<sup>38</sup>Biographical studies include Hortense Woodson, *Giant in the Land* (Nashville: Broadman, 1950), which is a biography of William B. Johnson; Robert G. Gardner, “John Leadley Dagg: Pioneer Baptist Theologian” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1957); Roger Hayden, *William Staughton: Baptist Educator, Missionary Advocate and Pastor* (London: Baptist Union Library, 1965); and John C. Hillhouse, Jr., “Obadiah B. Brown: Pioneer Baptist Denominational Editor and U. S. Post Office Official” (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1970). Articles include Harold Wilson, “Basil Manly, Apologist for Slavocracy,” *Alabama Review* 15 (1962): 38-53; John B. Boles, “Henry Holcombe, A Southern Baptist Reformer in the Age of Jefferson,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54 (Fall 1970): 381-407; and Jonathan A. Lindsey, “Basil Manly: Nineteenth Century Protean Man,” *BHH* 8 (1973): 130-43.

<sup>39</sup>The two graduate studies are Earl Eugene Eminhizer, “The Rise and Fall of the Triennial Convention” (Th.M. thesis, Crozer Theological Seminary, 1956); and Raymond Hargus Taylor, “The Triennial Convention, 1814-1845: A Study in Baptist Cooperation and Conflict” (Th.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960). After these studies, at least two articles have appeared on the Triennial Convention: Claude L. Howe, “The Significance of the Formation of the Triennial Convention,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 6 (April 1964): 5-14; and William H. Brackney, “Triumph of the National Spirit: The Baptist Triennial Convention, 1814-1844,” *ABQ* 4 (June 1985): 165-83.

In the late 1970s, a new era in Baptist historiography began. The conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention led Southern Baptist historians away from outside comparisons to the introspective question of identity: Who are Southern Baptists? More specifically, as one title aptly put it, *Are Southern Baptists "Evangelicals"?*<sup>40</sup> In answering this question, presentations often use the past to justify or condemn current measures of reform. Interestingly, the question has often revolved around not just the kind of theology, but also the importance of theology itself to Baptists in the past.<sup>41</sup> According to one survey, many historians have suspected that scholarship will actually be hurt by the current controversy.<sup>42</sup>

Regarding the possible influence of the present controversy on the study of William T. Brantly, the aim will be to present the man in his context and to elucidate the true themes of his life. Such aims will actually secure the relevance of this study to the current questions, for though this dissertation examines only one antebellum Baptist of the South, the larger picture of antebellum Southern Baptists will only be accurately seen by adding one pixel at a time. Though not officially one of the Southern Baptist "founders," Brantly mentored some of those founders and stands as both a witness and a contributor to the fragmentation of the Triennial Convention. Brantly ultimately

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<sup>40</sup>James Leo Garrett, E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull, *Are Southern Baptists "Evangelicals"?* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983). The same theme is reexamined in David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993).

<sup>41</sup>Evidence of those advocating the importance of theology may be seen in the recent spurt of publications on historic Baptist theologians and theology by Broadman-Holman Press. Consider also the following collections: Paul S. Basden, ed., *Has Our Theology Changed? Southern Baptist Thought Since 1845* (Nashville: Broadman, 1994); and Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), which complements the earlier compilation by James E. Tull, *Shapers of Baptist Thought* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1972). The October 1996 issue of *Baptist History and Heritage* examined the theological legacy of Calvinism among Baptists.

In contrast, as Burch points out, the elaborate synthesis posited by Walter B. Shurden for the Southern Baptist Convention—Charleston regular order, Sandy Creek evangelism, Georgia leadership, and Landmarkism—virtually ignores the theology of each tradition (Burch, "Adiel Sherwood," 8). For Shurden's influential synthesis, see Walter B. Shurden, *Not a Silent People*, rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1995); idem, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?" *BHH* 16 (April 1981): 3-8.

<sup>42</sup>Robert E. Johnson, "The Status of Baptist History: Research, Writing, and Publishing," *BHH* 30 (October 1995): 31.

identified himself as a Southern Baptist. Thus Brantly's identity is inextricable woven into the Southern Baptist Convention's historical identity.

Since the mid-1970s, Baptists of the Triennial Convention have attracted a few historians. Studies on R. B. C. Howell, Luther Rice, and Richard Furman soon appeared, while studies on Basil Manly, Sr., Spencer H. Cone, Adiel Sherwood, and Jesse Mercer have just appeared.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps Baptists of the Triennial Convention are now starting to receive attention in their own right—an encouraging sign indeed, for these Baptists have been described too often in terms dictated by the history of the Presbyterian denomination.<sup>44</sup> One hopes that the current interest will finally result in the writing of a comprehensive, detailed history of the Triennial Convention.

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<sup>43</sup>Joe W. Burton, *Road to Augusta: R. B. C. Howell and the Formation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman, 1976); Evelyn W. Thompson, *Luther Rice: Believer in Tomorrow* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983); William H. Brackney, ed., *Dispensations of Providence: The Journal and Selected Letters of Luther Rice, 1803-1830* (Rochester: American Baptist Historical Society; Washington, DC: George Washington University; Nashville: Historical Commission, SBC, 1984); James A. Rogers, *Richard Furman: Life and Legacy*, Baptists: History, Literature, Theology, Hymns (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985; reprint, with new forewords, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001); Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy*; John Thornbury, *A Pastor in New York: The Life and Times of Spencer Houghton Cone* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2004); Jarrett Burch, *Adiel Sherwood: Baptist Antebellum Pioneer in Georgia*, Baptists: History, Literature, Theology, Hymns (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003); and Anthony L. Chute, *A Piety above the Common Standard: Jesse Mercer and the Defense of Evangelistic Calvinism*, Baptists: History, Literature, Theology, Hymns (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004). Of these works, Fuller's biography is the most helpful for this dissertation because of the close relationship between Brantly and Manly.

<sup>44</sup>An instance of this methodological fallacy may be found in Jain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994). The sole chapter on the Baptists implies that their struggles over Calvinism resulted in two "schools" in much the same way as the Presbyterians split into Old School and New School factions (*ibid.*, 301-28). In reality, the "Old School Baptists" (better known as "Primitive Baptists") were opposed to organized missionary efforts (unlike Old School Presbyterians) and were by-and-large cultural outsiders (definitely unlike Old School Presbyterians). Baptists split mainly along cultural lines, while Presbyterians split along theological lines. To be fair to Murray, his book is highly edifying and works well enough when restricted to Presbyterians. As more work is done on the Triennial Convention, it will be easier for historians to avoid erroneous simplifications about the Baptists.

Scholarship on the Primitive Baptists has been scrutinized well by Jarrett Burch ("Adiel Sherwood," 33-39). Two of the most recent titles on this movement are James Rhett Matthias, "'Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed?': The Origins of the Primitive Baptists, 1800-1840" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1997); and John G. Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998). The cultural character of the Primitive Baptists has been astutely observed in Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture," *The Journal of Southern History* 36 (November 1970): 501-29.

## Methodology

Because little scholarship now exists on Brantly, this dissertation must rely almost solely upon primary sources—especially Brantly’s published materials. For six years, Brantly edited the *Columbian Star*, a religious weekly, which he later renamed and sold to Jesse Mercer as the *Christian Index*. Regrettably, only a few numbers remain extant from the first two years, when the paper was published in folio form. A wealth of editorial comment is found in the four subsequent years in octavo form (mid-1829 to mid-1833).<sup>45</sup> Brantly himself recognized that the “Octavo form” would preserve items better than the sheet.<sup>46</sup> These four years of editorial work form the core of primary source material for three reasons. First, much of the biographical information on Brantly’s life comes from his reflections found here. Second, religious newspapers functioned as the national news medium of Brantly’s day. Outside of conventions, Baptists conducted national conversations via this medium, and often tallied the state papers on an issue in a similar way that polls are taken today.<sup>47</sup> Third, the great variety of Brantly’s topics makes it the greatest aid to knowing his mind. Truly, the present study owes a large debt to Brantly himself for his judicious selection of material from four key years of American church history.

Using the *Christian Index* as the star witness does pose some danger. Heavy use tempts one to misjudge the preacher, as if Brantly were preoccupied with cultural

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<sup>45</sup>Some articles from the folio years have been found reprinted in *The American Baptist Magazine*. Presumably more may be reprinted in other periodicals.

The *Star and Index* may not fully reflect Brantly’s opinions or (at least) his expertise. For a couple years, Brantly received substantial help in editing the weekly from poet Willis Gaylord Clark. This fact should be kept in mind when using this source.

<sup>46</sup>Brantly reprinted more than one article, explaining, “It is placed in the present form for the sake of being preserved” (W. T. Brantly, “Benefits of Affliction,” *CSCI*, 29 August 1829, p. 135). In July 1829, the *Index* changed “from the sheet to the pamphlet form,” which he also called the “Octavo form” (idem, “The End of the First Vol. of the Star and Index for 1830,” *CSCI*, 26 June 1830, p. 407; idem, “Are You Tired of Reading?” *CI*, 25 June 1831, p. 401).

<sup>47</sup>Timothy L. Smith was one of the first scholars to demonstrate the great potential of using religious periodicals as the foundation for research into antebellum American Christianity (see *Revivalism & Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* [New York: Abingdon Press, 1957; reprint, with new afterword, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980]).

concerns. The week-to-week pulpit ministry would show otherwise.<sup>48</sup> In addition, Brantly himself warned of wrong inferences:

To say that all I have published has met my own approbation, or that every thing laid before my readers, was intended to invite their sanction, would be saying what is not so. Sometimes both sides of a contested doctrine have been sparingly admitted,—and many *facts* have been allowed a place, merely as forming a part of the history of the church, or of the world, without any pledge of support, or disapproval, on my part—I have merely wished to point them out and leave my readers to decide upon their merits and bearings.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, the present study will add little beyond synthesis, in hopes of letting Brantly speak by-and-large for himself.

Other published materials include printed sermons and addresses, tracts, circular letters, and contributions to other religious weeklies. Regarding Brantly's printed sermons, Benjamin Gildersleeve, a Southern Presbyterian, once lamented with marvel that so few sermons from so qualified a preacher ever appeared in print.<sup>50</sup> Besides a few scattered publications, the majority of Brantly's published sermons appear in his self-edited collection, entitled *Themes for Meditation, Enlarged in Several Sermons, Doctrinal and Practical*. This book does not represent Brantly well, for though it is quite eloquent and powerful, it was prepared in haste and made copious use of earlier publications. Brantly's powerful mind best appears in his essays and occasional pieces (besides the editorial work of the *Star and Index*). Brantly's earliest essays consist of

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<sup>48</sup>American Puritan scholar Harry S. Stout has exposed the danger of skewing an overall portrayal of preachers by considering just their published work. See his revisionist history, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). The greatest possibility of knowing Brantly's regular preaching may come from manuscripts of Basil Manly, Sr., who took down over two hundred sermon outlines as he listened to his mentor preach (Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy*, 22).

<sup>49</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Circular Address to the Friends and Readers of the Christian Index," *CI*, 19 November 1831, p. 336; see also Brantly, "To Those Readers Who Continue with Us," *CI*, 29 December 1832, p. 402. Brantly himself purposed, "We design that the Index shall supply materials to the future historian, and are therefore solicitous to give it, as far as practicable, the character of a Register of important events" (W. T. Brantly, "Minutes of Associations for 1831," *CI*, 17 March 1832, p. 160).

<sup>50</sup>[Benjamin Gildersleeve], Review of "Trinitarians Rational.—A Sermon delivered in the Baptist Church, Augusta, Georgia, on the 8th February, 1824, by William T. Brantly, A. M. Pastor of said Church, from 1 Tim. iii. 16.—'Great is the mystery of Godliness—God manifest in the flesh,'" *The Missionary*, 15 March 1824, pp.154-55.

nine contributions to the *American Baptist Magazine* (1817-22). Thereafter, his ideas appear in the *Columbian Star* (then published in Washington, D. C. and edited by James D. Knowles and Baron Stow). Several circulars also come from his early ministry. In Philadelphia, for six months in 1830, Brantly also edited the *Baptist Tract Magazine*, but it does not contain personal data. In the mid-1830s, Brantly published two tracts and two position papers—one advocating an extreme temperance position and the other arguing against a Baptist version of the Bible. The version controversy also led Brantly to write letters and articles in 1836-1837 to the *Christian Review*, the *Gospel Witness*, the *Biblical Recorder*, and the *Southern Watchman, and General Intelligencer*. This marks the crest of Brantly's public ministry. Other than a few editorials early in 1838, no published material has yet been found for Brantly's Charleston ministry.

Although published materials are not copious, they far exceed the dearth of private documents. The search for Brantly's papers has largely failed. The College of Charleston, where he was president at the time of his debilitating stroke, has no records before 1861 other than faculty and trustee minutes. Presumably, W. T. Brantly, Jr. had his father's most personal papers. Evidence for this supposition is found in the son's memoir of his father, which includes a very personal lament that Brantly, Sr. intended to keep private. This is the only evidence found so far of any kind of journal. The present-day Brantley Association (which covers both Brantlys and Brantleys) has also failed to find Brantly's papers, even though the director said that he has been interested in Brantly for fifteen years and would give his "right arm for the family papers of the Doctor."<sup>51</sup> In addition to these avenues, several archives have been contacted with little success. The largest discovery so far is a small collection from the American Baptist Historical Society (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania). This collection consists of Brantly's letters to First Baptist Church of Philadelphia. Beyond that, some private letters were published in various periodicals. Overall, the amount of private material remains small.

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<sup>51</sup>Ken Brantley to Robert Snyder, 27 January 2002.

The dearth of private documents has been partially overcome in three ways. First, much help has come from biographies of Brantly's contemporaries—especially of Richard Furman and Basil Manly, Sr., who ministered in Charleston's First Baptist Church before Brantly.<sup>52</sup> Second, Brantly's home life has been illuminated by the letters of his close friend, Basil Manly, Sr. These letters especially shed some light on Brantly's Beaufort days (when his first wife died) and on his later Charleston ministry, which lies outside the scope of this dissertation. Third, Brantly's early ministry in the South and even some of his Philadelphia ministry can be partially reconstructed through his reflections in the *Star and Index*. As much as possible, then, this dissertation describes Brantly's pre-1833 ministry in his own words, using his own reflections. This procedure provides a double benefit by shedding light on both Brantly's circumstances as well as on his own reactions to these circumstances. But even with these compensations, the lack of private documents has determined the shape of the dissertation. Even though it is possible to construct a full biography without the man's papers, this dissertation focuses on Brantly's ministry and thus falls short of being a full biography of the man.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, as chapter 2 shall demonstrate, Brantly justified much of his activity and criticized others with an idea of "usefulness" derived not from the philosophers, but from the Bible. This book—the Holy Book—receives particular attention throughout the dissertation. Since Brantly was a Christian and a preacher, the Bible provided much of the intellectual and moral context for Brantly's life and thought. Consequently, the

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<sup>52</sup>Rogers, *Furman and Fuller, Chaplain to the Confederacy*. Regarding the urban background, Philadelphia has not attracted as much recent research as has Charleston. The latter has received concentrated attention in Michael O'Brien and David Moltke-Hansen, eds., *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1986); Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *The Web of Progress: Private Values and Public Styles in Boston and Charleston, 1828-1843* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>53</sup>Two examples of successful biographies written on men who largely kept their personal lives private are Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), and John R. Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator: Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). For a helpful introduction to the history and types of biography, see Catherine N. Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).



dissertation cites texts that spoke significantly to Brantly. No study on William T. Brantly would stand complete if the backbone of Scripture were omitted from its frame.

### **Overview**

The following study consists of three parts—early history, theology, and later history. In the first part, encompassing chapters 2 through 4, Brantly’s personal mission is defined in the early South, illustrated in his first two Southern ministries, and climaxed in his efforts in Philadelphia. Two mentors—a revival preacher and a spiritual scholar—shape his mission, but the death of his first wife put fire into the form. Two pastorates illustrate his twofold goal of organizing Baptists for missions and ministerial education. In these endeavors, Richard Furman is the mastermind and model, and a state convention is the result. Finally, in Philadelphia, Brantly attains peace at First Baptist Church and then embodies his ideals in the formation of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches. Almost by itself, this association proves that Brantly sought to unite Christians into useful effort for the Kingdom of God.

The formation of the new association in contradistinction to the venerable Philadelphia Association raises the question of heresy in doctrine and innovation in practice. These twin concerns launch part two, a theological examination of Brantly’s thought during the early heyday of his Philadelphia ministry. Chapter 5 examines his Calvinistic doctrines of total depravity and limited atonement, while chapter 6 examines his firm belief in the final and sufficient authority of Scripture, especially in contrast to metaphysics and philology. In his doctrines of salvation and Scripture, Brantly falls within Baptist orthodoxy. His theology often emphasizes the congruity of divine sovereignty with human effort, based on the Edwardsean distinction between natural and moral ability. This emphasis, along with his rejection of metaphysical systems, inclined Brantly to remain open to new measures, which he often embraced. Chapter 7 describes his adherence to two revivalistic new measures—protracted meetings and the anxious

seat—along with his cautious reception of “hasty admissions” to church membership. The doctrine of immediate repentance and the utility of exciting emotions girded his revivalism. Chapter 8 considers his involvement in benevolent societies, both in the denomination and without, especially in the temperance movement. By considering the theology behind the practice, Brantly is shown to be neither a doctrineless ecumenist nor a pragmatic activist, but a thoughtful Christian reformer.

The next two chapters are crucial for understanding Brantly. The chapters face the objection: If Brantly is a unionist, why did he promote his denomination? Implicit to this objection is the common assumption that denominations create barriers to true unity. Chapter 9 examines Brantly’s own justification for his involvement in Baptist publishing, as well as his apology for close communion on the basis of antipaedobaptism. In each endeavor, Brantly saw denominationalism as a necessary expedient along the greater path of reformation. While Baptists may lead for a time, it is not to create a faction, but eventually to unite all Christians in greater truth and righteousness. Chapter 10 shows the subordination of denominationalism to evangelicalism. On the one hand, Alexander Campbell demonstrates that Baptists can have heretics in their ranks; on the other hand, Kingdom activists in other denominations show that unity around a revival spirit and active benevolence exceeds unity around either doctrine or denomination. Strange as it may sound, Brantly’s idea of evangelical unity possessed a denominational identity, a doctrinal boundary, and an even greater emphasis on active benevolence.

With a definition and description of Brantly’s personal mission firmly in place, the final three chapters return to history, placing the man squarely within the Triennial Convention. Chapter 11 discusses the Convention’s transitional period (1826-1835), when sectionalism created the risk of disunity, but “a spirit of compromise” and a prudent policy of silence seemed to succeed in maintaining harmony despite southern political strife and British interference over slavery. With a closing consideration of Brantly’s views on slavery and abolitionism, despite his temperance crusade, the stage is set for

Brantly's role within the breakup of the Triennial Convention. Chapter 12 examines at length the events leading up to the great Bible Convention of 1837, which then forms the core of chapter 13. The American Bible Society forced Baptists to make a decision about active evangelical unity. In choosing to go it alone, some Baptists—especially in New York—acted in haste, thereby alienating some key Southerners. Through both sectarian and sectional assertiveness, the Bible Convention visibly manifested disunity among missionary Baptists for the first time. Whole states were absent. Brantly's own alienation as an advocate of evangelical unity visibly demonstrates the end of unity and the beginning of strife within the Triennial Convention. His subsequent editorials in the South reveal his identity, and show that Brantly was all along a *Southern* unionist.

### A Memorial

In sizing the stature of an individual, Brantly emphasized the enduring character of a man's deeds. For example, in eulogizing Richard Furman, Brantly claimed that the principles, examples, and integrity of a holy man's entire life "will abide like seeds incapable of corruption," in that "remote ages shall feel the blessed effects of a life dedicated to God." While Brantly himself asserted that "full sum of practical good" cannot be exhibited on earth, some of the "seeds" he himself laid by God's grace deserve consideration and preservation.<sup>54</sup> Certainly some of his contemporaries thought so:

For forty years he was known as one of the most laborious, gifted, and successful ministers of the gospel connected with the Baptist denomination. Monuments of his usefulness, incalculably more durable than brass, are found in various parts of our Union. The hundreds who have been converted to God through his instrumentality, the numerous saints who have grown in grace under his ministry, the large numbers who have been trained by his instructions for the important stations which they are now filling in life, call upon us to preserve from oblivion the memory of one who was so dear to them and such a blessing to the world.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>William T. Brantly, *The Saint's Repose in Death. A Sermon, Delivered on the Death of the Rev. Richard Furman, D. D. Late Pastor of the Baptist Church, Charleston, S. C.* (Charleston: W. Riley, 1825), 14. As proof, Brantly quoted the Scriptures, "The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance, and . . . their memorial is blessed" (ibid., 14-15, quoting Ps 112:6 and Prov 10:7).

<sup>55</sup>"Intrepid Faith," *CR* 10 (December 1845): 594.

But while the “monuments” endured, the “memory” did not.

It is sincerely hoped and offered in prayer that the following memorial will benefit both Baptists and individual Christians. Baptists face many difficulties today. Neither the doctrine nor the discipline of the typical Baptist church today comes close to the rigor of Brantly’s day. Lest anyone think that this is no loss, based upon the assumption that one has to choose between doctrine and discipline on the one hand, and evangelism, missions, and revival on the other hand, Brantly embraced both hands. Remarkably, he was both a deep thinker and an active itinerant, both an ardent evangelical and an advocate of close communion. The larger questions really concern not his integrity, but his legacy. Baptists today live with new measures and benevolent societies. Today, they go under the names of “church growth” and “parachurch organizations.” To assess these better, a look to the headwaters is in order. Furthermore, Southern Baptists live with the Furman model of hierarchical conventions, which Brantly actively embraced. Georgia Baptists in particular live with two of Brantly’s productions—the state convention and the *Christian Index*, now reported to be “the oldest continuing weekly religious periodical in the nation.”<sup>56</sup> While not a father of the Southern Baptist Convention, for he died six weeks too soon, Brantly should nonetheless be classified as a grandfather of the Southern Baptist Convention, whose ideal of united effort still shines today through the Cooperative Program.<sup>57</sup>

If the reader is not a Southern Baptist or even a Baptist, the present study should still stimulate greater faith and obedience—as long as the text does not cloud the picture too much. Reading Brantly himself is strongly convicting, for by almost universal acknowledgment, he was blessed of God as a preacher. Reading about Brantly is almost as challenging, for he labored much in the Kingdom without losing his love for

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<sup>56</sup>Chute, *Piety above the Common Standard*, vii.

<sup>57</sup>See also Article XIV, “Cooperation,” in *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1998), pp. 18-19.

Scripture or his devotion to God. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of his career was his interdependence. So often Christian biographies focus on the maverick, such as the pioneer of a new mission or the inaugurator of a new movement. Obviously books of that sort have their place, just as Scripture focuses at times on Abraham, David, or one of the prophets. In Brantly, however, the focus rests on Christian unity more than individual achievement. The team, rather than the star performer, takes precedence. For those of us with a bent to independence, Brantly presents an enlightening alternative.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SHAPERS OF A PERSONAL MISSION

Jesus once said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).<sup>1</sup> Examining a man’s teachers, therefore, often sheds light on the man himself. William T. Brantly had two primary teachers in the faith—George Pope, the frontier Separate Baptist pastor, and Jonathan Maxcy, the New England scholar with a Regular Baptist background. This mixture of revival preaching and spiritual scholarship remained with Brantly his entire life. Beyond these men, Brantly ascribed the greatest earthly influence on his life to a woman—his first wife, Anna. Together, these three—Pope, Maxcy, and Anna—helped to shape and to define Brantly’s personal mission of uniting Christians in useful effort.<sup>2</sup>

#### **George Pope and the Great Revival**

George Pope (d. 1815) was a leading Baptist preacher in the Sandy Creek Association during the so-called Great Revival (c. 1787-1805). Historian John B. Boles has described this Revival as “the South’s ‘Great Awakening,’” whose transregional and interdenominational character indicates a near instantaneous cultural shift. The Revival had two centers: first, the Cumberland region of Kentucky and Tennessee, which in 1801 ignited the second—the Piedmont region of the Carolinas, where Pope ministered.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

<sup>2</sup>The idea of “influence” in this paragraph does not deny the grace of God through the risen Lord Jesus Christ, but refers to secondary causes, which are well within the purview of the historian.

<sup>3</sup>John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 70, 73. While Boles covers only the Kehuckee Association for North Carolina Baptists, Brantly’s recollections add information about the Sandy Creek Association. For the general background of the Sandy Creek Association, see Robert B. Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia*, ed. G. W. Beale, rev. and enl. ed. (Richmond: Pitt and

The Great Revival had several novelties, which made it distinct from earlier revivals. The greatest novelty was the camp meeting. The first camp meeting of North Carolina lasted five days at Hawfields in October, 1801.<sup>4</sup> Others followed. According to Brantly, “Those meetings became *camp-meetings*, almost from necessity, since it was next to impossible to persuade the people to leave the ground.”<sup>5</sup> Other novelties included extraordinary bodily motions, such as the “fantastick exercise of jerking, dancing, &c. in a religious way,” and falling prostrate as if “struck by lightning.”<sup>6</sup> These extremes generated initial skepticism not only in coastal Baptists such as Richard Furman and Edmund Botsford, but also in frontiersman George Pope, who remained aloof, until he ascertained from the fruit of the Great Revival a true work of grace.<sup>7</sup> Even so, Pope apparently retained his dislike of uncontrolled excess. In contrast to the commotion of the Methodist camp meetings, Brantly reported that at Pope’s meetings, crowds listened in “silent admiration” to the “rich and mellow tones of that voice,” even “whilst the rain was poured down in torrents upon them.”<sup>8</sup>

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Dickerson, 1894); William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South: Tracing through the Separates the Influence of the Great Awakening, 1754-1787* (Nashville: Broadman, 1961); and Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

The Kentucky origin of the Great Revival receives confirmation from Basil Manly, Sr. (M., “Dr. Brantly,” *CI*, 9 May 1845, n.p.), who also testified of Pope’s leadership, and from Richard Furman, who described the meetings of the North Carolina revival as “Kentucky stile” (quoted in James A. Rogers, *Richard Furman: Life and Legacy*, Baptists: History, Literature, Theology, Hymns [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985; reprint, with new forewords, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001], 106).

<sup>4</sup>Boles, *Great Revival*, 75.

<sup>5</sup>W. T. Brantly, “On the Character of the Early Baptist Preachers: George Pope, of N. C.,” *CSCI*, 29 August 1829, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup>David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, and Other Parts of the World* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1813; reprint, Gallatin, TN: Church History Research & Archives, 1985), 2:110; Letter from Richard Furman to John Rippon, 11 August 1802, as quoted in Rogers, *Furman*, 108.

<sup>7</sup>As an example of coastal skepticism, the 1803 circular of the Charleston Association, written by Joseph B. Cook, posed the question, “How may enthusiasm be distinguished from the influence of the spirit and Grace of God on the Heart?” For a summary of his answer as well as Furman and Botsford’s thoughts and observations on the revival, see Rogers, *Furman*, 106-13. For Pope’s initial aloofness and a summary of the revival based in part on Pope’s observations, see Benedict, *General History*, 2:108-11.

<sup>8</sup>Brantly, “George Pope,” 130. As a teen, Brantly would often go to some “well shaded corner of the great solitary forest” to hear Pope preach (*ibid.*). Brantly’s experiences lends some credence to

Brantly's testimony to Pope's ministry provides vital information on an otherwise obscure ministry, and simultaneously provides insight into what Brantly himself valued from his early spiritual teacher, whom Brantly dubbed "the holy man."<sup>9</sup> Two aspects in particular impressed Brantly.

First, George Pope was "the instrument which a merciful Saviour employed first to rouse him from the guilty torpor of sin, and to direct him to the blood of the New Covenant for pardon and reconciliation."<sup>10</sup> A later memoir describes how awakening and faith did not occur simultaneously. For a time, Brantly experienced "mental agony" under spiritual conviction, which "prepared him to appreciate the distress of souls burdened with sin" and to counsel "with many tears of sympathy." Brantly's own doubts and fears left him at his baptism, when "he was favored with a most luminous manifestation of the divine presence."<sup>11</sup> More external details come from another memoir:

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Boles's claim that the revivals were theological in nature and not "hysterical 'holy fairs' associated with . . . simple frontiersman who wanted their whiskey straight and their religion red-hot" (*Great Revival*, 70).

Regarding camp meetings, David Benedict observed two differences between the Baptists and the Presbyterian-Methodist coalition: (1) Baptists ceased holding camp meetings after the zeal for them abated; and (2) Baptists witnessed frequent cases of "falling down under religious impressions," but no incidents of "the fantastick exercise of jerking, dancing, &c., in a religious way [that] prevailed much with the united body of Methodists and Presbyterians, towards the close of the revival" (Benedict, *General History*, 2:109-10).

<sup>9</sup>Brantly, "George Pope," 130. George Whitefield Pope was born in England to a relative of the famous poet, Alexander Pope. George Pope was pastor at Abbott's Creek Baptist Church for nearly thirty-one years (1783-1813) before moving toward South Carolina, where he died in 1815. The church was in Rowan (now Davidson) County, North Carolina. Brantly last had contact with Pope in 1806.

For Brantly's recollections, see Brantly, "George Pope," pp. 129-30, and his footnote to W. D., "Intelligence from the Western Part of N. C.," *CI*, 7 July 1832, p. 12. For a more general biographical sketch, see Henry Sheets, *A History of the Liberty Baptist Association from Its Organization in 1832 to 1906 Containing Much History Incidentally Connected with This Body . . .* (Raleigh: Liberty Association, 1907), 40-44. For the background of Abbott's Creek Baptist Church and its pastor, George Pope, see George W. Purefoy, *A History of the Sandy Creek Baptist Association, from Its Organization in A. D. 1758, to A. D. 1858* (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1859), 68-69, 297.

<sup>10</sup>Brantly here speaks in the third person about himself. See the footnote to W. D., "Intelligence from the Western Part of N. C.," 12.

<sup>11</sup>"Intrepid Faith," *CR* 10 (December 1845): 594-95. Brantly apparently believed that the Holy Spirit gave a sort of "illumination" with baptism, for he once said approvingly of the early church, that baptism "was at first *properly enough* associated with the idea of illumination" ("Baptist Version of the New Testament," *The Christian Review* 2 [March 1837]: 40, italics added).



He was baptized in Deep River. . . . At that time, the ceremony of “washing the saints’ feet,” and also that of “laying on of hands,” was practised in that Church, and among the Baptist Churches generally. Accordingly, after baptism, the young Brantly, with a very large number of newly baptized persons, were arranged, kneeling, on the river bank; and the elders present, led by the venerable *Bishop Pope*, passed along the entire range, laying their hands on their heads, uttering prayers and blessings on them severally, “*confirming* the souls of the disciples.”<sup>12</sup>

Brantly subsequently joined the congregation of George’s Creek Baptist Church, whose pastor was Pope’s associate and Brantly’s cousin, the Elder William Brantly.<sup>13</sup> Brantly was fifteen at the time of his conversion.

Second, Brantly was greatly impressed by Pope’s “great usefulness,” despite his lack of “great talents.” According to Brantly, Pope enjoyed few of those “literary advantages,” which were thought so necessary in Brantly’s day; but Pope did know “ONE BOOK,” and he did possess sufficient vocabulary to communicate his thoughts. These small advantages proved sufficient. Once, when an aged infidel came with sophisticated addresses and started to draw a crowd, Pope simply ignored him, preached the “logic of the Cross,” and thus drew the infidel’s crowd away. The numerical success was amazing. While David Benedict attributed only 500 baptisms to Pope’s ministry, Brantly estimated that about 5000 occurred between 1801 and 1806, with “fifties and hundreds” baptized on single occasions.<sup>14</sup> Success extended beyond individual converts to general reformation. Pope was regularly called in to visit counties plagued by

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<sup>12</sup>M., “Dr. Brantly,” n.p.

<sup>13</sup>The coincidence of the name “William Brantly” can be confusing. In David Benedict’s association roster, the clerk for the Sandy Creek Baptist Association is listed simply as “William Brantly” (see Benedict, *General History*, 2:527). In contrast, the Association minutes list this older Brantly as “Elder William Brantly,” while calling the younger one “William T. Brantly” (see, e.g., Purefoy, *History*, 95-96, where both men are mentioned in the same context). The family connection between the two men is uncertain, though Manly calls the elder “cousin” (M., “Dr. Brantly,” n.p.). Elder Brantly died before the October 1812 Association meeting, whose minutes lament his death (Purefoy, *History*, 96).

As for the background of George’s Creek Baptist Church, Purefoy wrote: “This church is located in Chatham county, eight miles southeast from Pittsborough. It has a large and commodious house of worship. It was constituted in A.D. 1802, by Elders George Pope, William Brantly (of Deep River), and William Angel” (*History*, 271). In 1809, the church reported 150 communicants (Benedict, *General History*, 2:527).

<sup>14</sup>Brantly, “George Pope,” 130; Benedict, *General History*, 2:110.

immorality and vice. Brantly reported that in one county “the most hideous forms of vice were exchanged for the benign and salutary virtues of the christian character.”<sup>15</sup>

The paradoxical success of a man without great talents illustrates two aspects of Brantly’s idea of ministerial “usefulness.” First, Brantly assessed a minister’s true usefulness by converts and general reformation, rather than by learning and reputation. While Earth had largely forgotten Pope even in Brantly’s day, Brantly argued that Heaven had not, for (quoting the prophet Daniel) “if they that *turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever*, [Pope’s] resplendence in the firmament of ultimate glory, will be surpassed by few.” While the world may pass by these credentials unnoticed, they nonetheless “may be seen and read in those *Living Epistles* which the Spirit has written under his instrumentality”—in such “living epistles” as Brantly himself.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, Brantly assessed the fifty-year ministry of Samuel Jones, D.D., a “man of intelligence and respectability” in the Philadelphia Association, by the “few accessions” to his congregation at Lower Dublin, Pennsylvania. Brantly asked, “Did the church and its venerable pastor, during that long interval, think that the Lord might be left to do his work, or were they actively engaged *in spending, and in being spent* for his declarative glory?”<sup>17</sup>

Second, a minister’s usefulness may vary with historical context. Though “the fancy of modish times” regarded Pope and other early American Baptist preachers as relics from a “rude and uncultivated age,” Brantly claimed that they fit their times better than men of literary refinement or monetary remuneration did. To him, those preachers “resembled officers educated upon the field of action.” They possessed strong natural abilities—practical wit and boldness—as well as a “love of liberty, both civil and

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<sup>15</sup>Brantly, “George Pope,” 130.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 129. The biblical references are Dan 12:3 and 2 Cor 3:1-3.

<sup>17</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Oldest Baptist Church in Pennsylvania,” *CSCI*, 18 July 1829, p. 34. The biblical reference is 2 Cor 12:15.

religious.”<sup>18</sup> Like the Methodists, their “rapid extension” depended “in a great degree upon the constitution of the ministry.” Specifically, by denying the necessity of literary training, both denominations were able to recruit men into “immediate service.” Unlike the Methodists, who carried “a stiff, lofty carriage,” even in dress, early Baptists broke down the wall between clergy and laity. Moreover, by denying the necessity of financial support, early Baptists did not wait for a call before taming the wilderness. “Had they waited for such CALLS,” Brantly asserted, “they would have accomplished nothing.”<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, usefulness adapted to the times and proved itself in results. Since the times had changed, Brantly advocated ministerial education and financial support. While self-denying efforts may have fit frontier days, permanent prosperity demanded pay for the minister. As proof, Brantly pointed to the wilted vineyard that Pope had planted.<sup>20</sup>

### **Jonathan Maxcy and Formal Education**

An interesting turn of events led William T. Brantly from rural North Carolina to senior recitations under New Englander Jonathan Maxcy. Had Brantly remained in North Carolina, he perhaps would have filled the shoes of his cousin William, ministering among the Sandy Creek brethren. The young man’s zeal for preaching had become well-

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<sup>18</sup>William T. Brantly, “Character of the Early American Baptist Preachers,” *CSCI*, 4 July 1829, pp. 1-2.

<sup>19</sup>William T. Brantly, “Character of the Early American Baptist Preachers,” *CSCI*, 11 July 1829, pp. 17-18. On the similarities between Baptists and Methodists in their “rapid organization of small societies,” which “soon became the chief characteristic of the Second Great Awakening,” see Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Principle,” *American Quarterly* 21 (1969): 38. Caution should be exercised towards Mathews’s sociological explanation of the Second Great Awakening, for it neglects the supernatural element, cannot account for the similar surge of societies in England (since the people there were not dislocating into frontiers), and ignores the earlier work of the Separate Baptists, who could not have mimicked the Methodists they preceded by over two decades.

<sup>20</sup>Brantly boldly asserted, “Religion never will be permanently prosperous in any community, until this doctrine [of a minister’s right to remuneration] is *believed* and *practiced*” (Brantly, “George Pope,” 129-30). In reviewing the Sandy Creek Association almost thirty years later, Brantly mourned that it was “sinking into decay” and counseled them as an “old friend” to “consider [your ministers] as your servants if you please; but treat them at least as well as your slaves. Give them food and clothes for themselves and their families” (W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 16 January 1830, p. 35; cf. W. D., “Intelligence from the Western Part of N. C.,” 12).

known immediately. At the close of a service, he would at times beg for the opportunity to address the congregation, who in order to distinguish him from his cousin, used to address him as “Green-horn Billie.” At that time, Brantly had no formal education. Born on 23 January 1787 as the eldest son of William and Mary Ann, young William had spent his days in farm work. The only tutelage he had received was from his pious mother, who had taught him to read, and from occasional books, which he would read voraciously at the end of the day.<sup>21</sup>

Skill does not usually remain obscure (Prov 22:29). A local Scotsman from Pittsborough, named William Warden, who did not attend Brantly’s church (or perhaps any at all), spotted the young man’s potential and offered him money for education.<sup>22</sup> Soon Brantly attracted the attention of some of the ministers of the Charleston Baptist Association, who resided along the Peedee River. According to the history of the association:

In 1805, Mr. William T. Brantley [*sic*], who had been studying at Mr. Park’s Academy, at Jeffer’s Creek, was recommended by Mr. Woods and Gen. Thomas; on which it was agreed, that the expenses of his education and board for the current year should be paid. Mr. Brantley was soon after examined in Charleston, by the Special Committee; approved and placed under the care of Mr. [John M.] Roberts.

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<sup>21</sup>Genealogical data has been bountifully provided by the Brantley Association under the leadership of Ken Brantley. This Association has compiled the history of the over one million Brantley and Brantley descendants of Edward Brantley (c. 1615-1688) of Isle of Wight County, Virginia. Brantly received his father’s first name as well as his mother’s maiden name for his middle name—Tomlinson. As an adult, Brantly substituted his pen name “Theophilus” for his given middle name. In spite of this, Richard Fuller’s funeral address reverted to “Tomlinson” (*Intrepid Faith. A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. William Tomlinson Brantly, D. D.; with A Sketch of His Life and Character; Delivered at the Request of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, S. C.* [Charleston: First Baptist Church, 1845]). Brantly’s son, William Theophilus Brantly, Jr. (b. 1816), did receive the pen name at birth.

According to Basil Manly, who originated from the same county as Brantly, “William Tomlinson Brantly was one of a numerous family of children, from pious and respectable parents, born near Rocky River, in Chatham county, N. C., a few miles S. W. from Pittsborough. His mother possessed an unusually strong and discriminating mind, and was of masculine frame and energy: his father had a very pious turn of mind, a remarkably placid temper, and was peculiarly gentle and harmless” (M., “Dr. Brantly,” n.p.). No word has yet been found regarding any parental influence on Brantly, other than learning to read under his mother.

<sup>22</sup>Purefoy, *History*, 306 note. One memoir claims that the benefactor was “not a professor of religion” (A Southern Contributor, “Biographical Sketch of the Late Rev. William T. Brantly, D. D.,” *Baptist Memorial* 9 [1850]: 310).

In the course of the year following he was admitted into the South Carolina College, where he graduated in 1808.<sup>23</sup>

The Charleston Association had established the General Committee (here called the “Special Committee”) as a scholarship board, funding the education of potential Baptist ministers. Richard Furman, the famous pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, presided over this committee from its founding on 7 November 1792 to his death in 1825. Another famous minister, Henry Holcombe, served as secretary in the early years. The committee examined Brantly for true piety, evangelical principles, natural ability, and a desire for ministry.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, in 1805 Brantly crossed the bridge that Furman had helped to build twenty years earlier between the low country Regular Baptists and the upcountry Separates.<sup>25</sup>

Brantly made excellent speed in his education. He spent less than two years in the academy of John M. Roberts, pastor of High Hills Baptist Church of Santee, South Carolina, before joining the junior class at South Carolina College in Columbia, where Jonathan Maxcy presided. Both institutions ranked among the best in the state at the time. Roberts’ Academy was the earliest educational institution of South Carolina Baptists, boasting a 1796 graduate of Rhode Island College as rector as well as an excellent library, which later formed the nucleus of the library at Furman Institution after

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<sup>23</sup>This quote out of Wood Furman’s *History of the Charleston Association* comes from Benedict, *General History*, 2:452-53. According to one contemporary, “Rev. William Theophilus Brantly D. D. of North Carolina was received as a beneficiary of the Education Fund in 1805 & graduated in the South Carolina College in 1808” (William Bullein Johnson, “The Reminiscences of William Bullein Johnson,” ed. J. Glenwood Clayton, *JSCBHS* 4 [November 1978]: 42).

<sup>24</sup>Though manned by the same individuals, the Charleston Association and the General Committee were legally separate institutions. For more information, see Joe M. King, *A History of South Carolina Baptists* (Columbia: The General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964), 160-62; and Appendix C, “Rules of the General Committee,” in Rogers, *Furman*, 287-92. For Brantly’s own high esteem of the General Committee, see Brantly, “Education,” *CSCI*, 21 November 1829, p. 322.

<sup>25</sup>On the union of Regular and Separate Baptists, see Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 138-46. For Furman’s role in establishing rapport between Regular and Separate Baptists, see Rogers, *Furman*, 16, 21-22. For other studies on Furman, see Harvey Toliver Cook, *A Biography of Richard Furman* (Greenville: SC: Baptist Courier Job Rooms, 1913); Zaqueu Moreira de Oliveira, “Richard Furman, Father of the Southern Baptist Convention,” in *The Lord’s Free People in a Free Land: Essays in Baptist History in Honor of Robert A. Baker*, ed. William R. Estep (Fort Worth: Evans Press, 1976), 87-98; Thomas J. Nettles, “Richard Furman,” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 140-64.

the academy's demise sometime before 1810. Though Roberts reportedly did not hold students to high expectations, perhaps Brantly's voracious appetite made up for the deficiency and contributed to the institution's "great reputation."<sup>26</sup>

At South Carolina College, Brantly met its renowned president, Jonathan Maxcy (1768-1820). Maxcy was relatively new to the college and to the South, having completed only his second year of sixteen as president. Before that time, he had first been president of Rhode Island College (later renamed Brown University) from 1792 to 1802. There he had stunned many by replacing the venerable James Manning at the green age of twenty-four. From 1802 to 1804, Maxcy briefly served as the president of Union College in Schenectady, New York. According to Brantly's recollection, grave opposition there had arisen from some on the college's board to Maxcy's standing as a Baptist, which "nothing but the superior claims of genuine merit could have conquered."<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in South Carolina, most had expected a Presbyterian to head the new college.

Jonathan Maxcy exerted a significant influence over William T. Brantly. The two men were exceptionally close, sharing "an intimacy far stronger than is ordinarily found between those sustaining such a relationship."<sup>28</sup> Brantly himself recognized his special status, for while other students were treated with "distant respect" and found their president "accessible without familiarity," to Brantly, Maxcy was "peculiarly kind and accessible." Brantly also found Maxcy "a most engaging and amiable man in the

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<sup>26</sup>King, *History*, 163-65. Regarding Brantly's college matriculation, see the faculty minutes of South Carolina College for 1 December 1806, as quoted in *A Documentary History of Education in the South before 1860*, ed. Edgar Knight (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 3:85. Brantly entered the College just in time to study moral philosophy and logic (which probably included belles-lettres) in his junior year, and metaphysics in his senior year. Maxcy may have taught all of these. For a synopsis of the curriculum, see Knight, *Documentary History*, 3:100-02.

<sup>27</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Solitary Hours: Jonathan Maxcey [*sic*], D. D.," *CI*, 12 February 1831, 98. W. B. Johnson also testified that "objections to [Maxcy's] election were made on the sole ground of his being a Baptist" (William Bullein Johnson, "The Reminiscences of William Bullein Johnson," ed. J. Glenwood Clayton, *JSCBHS* 5 [November 1979]: 7).

<sup>28</sup>"Intrepid Faith," 595.

companionship of private life.” Comparing their careers, the two men held a lot in common: a nonsectarian spirit, a love for both pulpit and lectern, as well as skill in oratory and metaphysics. Years later, when Brantly embarked on some “*memorial excursions*” in recollecting the memories of deceased friends, three “cherished impressions” appeared about Jonathan Maxcy: his piety, his oratory, and his mental strength. These impressions reveal Maxcy’s lasting influence on Brantly’s personal mission.<sup>29</sup>

First, the *piety* of Jonathan Maxcy impressed Brantly, who claimed, “It is probable that no one living heard so much from his lips on the all important subject of experimental Religion.” The quotations provided by Brantly are long, pertaining to true religion in the heart, the design of religion, and the absurdity of impenitent men enjoying heaven. In each, the Edwardsean strains of Maxcy’s New England background can be heard. Brantly continued his mentor’s emphasis on experimental religion as well as his mentor’s themes. For example, Maxcy once told Brantly, “Heaven appears to be the continuance and perfection of that happiness which is begun in the social state of the church on earth.”<sup>30</sup> Years later, Brantly wrote a sermon entitled, “Heaven Begun on Earth,” which argues for its theme, “The religion of the heart, as produced and nurtured by the good Spirit of God in all the power of experimental sensation, is the pledge and the substance of all that we can expect in the heavenly beatitude.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>W. T. Brantly’s personal recollections are found in two essays: “Solitary Hours: Jonathan Maxcy [*sic*], D. D.,” *CI*, 12 February 1831, pp. 97-99; and “Solitary Hours: Jonathan Maxcy, D. D.,” *CI*, 19 February 1831, pp. 113-14. Maxcy’s life and general traits are further delineated in Johnson, “Reminiscences,” [1979]: 3-7; Romeo Elton, *The Literary Remains of the Rev. Jonathan Maxcy, D. D., with a Memoir of His Life* (New York: A. V. Blake, 1844), 5-6, 9-28; and J. C. Hungerpiller, “A Sketch of the Life and Character of Jonathan Maxcy, D. D.,” *Bulletin of the University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina* 58 (July 1917): *passim*.

<sup>30</sup>Brantly, “Jonathan Maxcy,” 97-98. The long quotations may have come from Brantly’s own commonplace book (cf. “Memorable Thoughts, from a Pastor’s Common place Book,” *CS*, 9 June 1827, p. 85, which resemble Maxcy’s thoughts).

<sup>31</sup>William T. Brantly, “Heaven Begun on Earth,” *The Baptist Preacher* 1 (December 1827): 39. For more information on Maxcy and Edwardseanism, see chap. 5.

Second, Brantly remembered how Maxcy excelled in *oratory*. According to Brantly, Maxcy's "preaching possessed a power and a charm which we have never witnessed, to the same extent, in any other man." Others concurred. Once, while on board a steamboat, a former Speaker of the House told Brantly personally that in both the church and politics, he "had never felt the power of any eloquence like that of Dr. Maxcey [*sic*]," his former teacher at Union College.<sup>32</sup> Brantly's reputation for "overwhelming" oratory must in part stem from Maxcy's influence.<sup>33</sup> Proof for this is given by Basil Manly, Sr., who heard Brantly preach in North Carolina shortly after graduating from college. Manly recalled that the "directness, energy, piety and pathos of his thoughts and delivery, were such as to rouse and excite his audience to no ordinary degree," for the old people now came out of the church, "*some smiling and some wiping their eyes*, and saying '*He's no green-horn now.*'"<sup>34</sup> Even Brantly's later reputation for extemporaneous preaching—how he could powerfully preach a sermon that just before the service resembled to him "a half formed insect on the banks of the Nile"—may also owe something to Maxcy, whose "talent in *extempore* speaking was transcendent."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Brantly, "Jonathan Maxcey," 98.

<sup>33</sup>William Cathcart, ed., *The Baptist Encyclopedia: A Dictionary of Doctrines, Ordinances, Usages, Confessions of Faith, Sufferings, Labors, and successes, and of the General History of the Baptist Denomination in All Lands with Numerous Biographical Sketches of Distinguished American and Foreign Baptists, and a Supplement*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883), 129.

<sup>34</sup>M., "Dr. Brantly," n.p. Though Brantly had improved much during college, Manly recalled that upon graduation Brantly "had not then laid aside the starchness of the College, nor acquired that ease, pungency, and force, which afterward distinguished him." But when Manly heard Brantly a few years later, when the preacher was visiting with "Mrs. Brantly and his elder children," then Brantly "shone conspicuously; and made an impression on multitudes of those who had known him from his childhood" (William 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 Historical Introduction*, vol. 6 of *Annals of the American Pulpit* [New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865], 500).

Brantly had also preached on at least one other prior trip home, for the minutes of the Sandy Creek Association for 1812 record that "William T. Brantly from South Carolina, preached on the Sabbath" (Purefoy, *History*, 95). At that time he had only one child.

<sup>35</sup>Sprague, *Annals*, 6:501-02; Brantly, "Jonathan Maxcy," 114. W. B. Johnson thought less of Maxcy's oratory than Brantly did. According to Johnson, Maxcy excelled in arrangement, terms, and imagination, but he lacked the strength and voice to be ranked among first-class orators ("Reminiscences" [1979], 3, 5). Johnson actually regarded Jesse Mercer as the most interesting man he had ever heard ("Reminiscences" [1978], 44).



Third, Brantly was impressed by Maxcy's *mental strength*. Others have also noted Maxcy's outstanding "power of mental abstraction." According to one memoir, Maxcy "appears to have early imbibed a predilection for the abstruse inquiries of metaphysical studies, and to have thoroughly understood the principles of the various systems of philosophy."<sup>36</sup> To illustrate how Maxcy's powerful mind reacted with the "humbling truths of the Christian Revelation," Brantly offered an extensive excerpt from Maxcy's two-part discourse on the atonement, delivered in 1796. Significantly, Brantly prefaced the quote by saying, "Neither our readers, nor ourselves should fully adopt all the views which he entertained on this subject"<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, Brantly thought that the discourse deserved as an excellent example of thought.

Both in spirituality and in rigorous thought and speech, Maxcy served as a model to Brantly of spiritual scholarship. While not imbibing all his mentor's New England ideas, Brantly seems nonetheless to have imitated Maxcy's ideals. Manly testified of Brantly, "Almost always he had a large school through the week, which he taught personally in the most thorough and laborious manner; and yet he kept up his literary, theological and miscellaneous reading, equal to the advancement of the scholars and divines of his time."<sup>38</sup>

### **Anna Brantly and the Definition of Usefulness**

Though it is often said that behind every great man stands a woman, it is not as often said by the man himself. Brantly thought this way and spoke this way of his first wife, Anna McDonald Martin, a widow, who was also the sister of Charles J. McDonald, one-time governor of Georgia. Although she was older than Brantly and not necessarily a

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<sup>36</sup>Elton, *Literary Remains*, 21. Like an eagle on the air, "the natural element of his mind was greatness, and on subjects of this nature, his powers were displayed to uncommon advantage" (ibid., 16).

<sup>37</sup>Brantly, "Jonathan Maxcy," 113. For the full text, see Jonathan Maxcy, *A Discourse Designed to Explain the Atonement: In Two Parts; Delivered in the Chapel of Rhode Island College, on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 1796* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1806); or Elton, *Literary Remains*, 53-81.

<sup>38</sup>M., "Dr. Brantly," n.p.

“charmer,” the husband “was often heard to remark afterward that she so powerfully allured him by the charms of her intellect that she was quite irresistible.”<sup>39</sup> They were married in Augusta, Georgia, in 1809. The phenomenal stature of Brantly’s two male mentors makes Brantly’s admiration for his first wife appreciable, for Brantly often used to “acknowledge his indebtedness to her for the formation of his intellectual habits, in the most valuable particulars, *more than to all other persons put together.*”<sup>40</sup> He attributed to her much of his later success as a preacher.

At the time of their marriage, Brantly had just agreed to become rector of Richmond Academy, in Augusta, Georgia. Teaching was not his first choice. Preaching took priority. During college, he had let his studies suffer because he kept preaching to destitute churches in Columbia and the surrounding area. Indeed, First Baptist Church of Columbia, South Carolina, has reckoned Brantly among its founders.<sup>41</sup> After graduating with distinction in 1808, Brantly served for one year as principal of the Orphan’s School in Camden, South Carolina, where he again “preached to the destitute in the Baptist

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<sup>39</sup>B. D. Ragsdale, *A Glance Backward: The Brantlys in the Life of Georgia Baptists* (Macon, GA: n. p., 1933), 3. According to one judge who knew her well, she was a lady of such “talents, piety and accomplishments, as are rarely combined in one person” (“Intrepid Faith,” 597).

<sup>40</sup>M., “Dr. Brantly,” n.p., italics original. When assessing the weight of these assertions, one must remember the hidden comparison perhaps being made against Brantly’s second wife, Margaret. When Brantly praised his first wife, did he long for the good old days? Likewise, when Manly praised Anna, did he speak from prejudice against Margaret? Margaret was not well respected by Manly, and the feeling was mutual. In 1844, when Brantly lay helpless from a stroke, Manly confided in his son, “Mrs. Brantly always disliked me from the hour of her marriage. I suppose she heard that I considered Dr. B. to have descended very low to take her up. As far as she dare, she always treated me with scorn—a poor, weak, proud, silly, worthless creature! . . . I’d do any thing for Dr. Brantly, however—and this has always made me treat his wife with external decency. But she scorns and despises us all” (Basil Manly, Sr., University of Alabama [Tuscaloosa], to Basil Manly, Jr., Pittsborough, North Carolina, ALS, August 26, 1844, MFP).

<sup>41</sup>For Brantly’s role in the history of First Baptist of Columbia, see Benedict, *General History*, 2:153-54. For more on the church, see William Cox Allen, *A History of the First Baptist Church, Columbia, South Carolina, in Commemoration of a Record of One Hundred and Fifty Years, 1859-1959* (Columbia: First Baptist Church, Columbia, South Carolina, 1959); Gregory A. Wills, *The First Baptist Church of Columbia, South Carolina: 1809 to 2002* (Brentwood, TN: Baptist History and Heritage Society; Nashville: Fields Publishing, 2003).

The opening to preach in Columbia came partly from Maxcy’s weak constitution. When W. B. Johnson settled in Columbia in 1809, he found Maxcy “too feeble in health, to perform the duties of both offices,” i.e., of pastor and of President of South Carolina College (“Reminiscences” [1978], 39).

Churches in the county, not far distant, of which there were two or three.”<sup>42</sup> In 1810, the trustees of Richmond Academy in Augusta, Georgia, called Brantly as rector. There being no Baptist church at that time in Augusta, Brantly sought for and obtained permission to use the auditorium one or two Sundays a month for preaching. Finally in 1811, after five years of itinerant preaching, Brantly received and answered a call for a salaried position as pastor of First Baptist Church in Beaufort, South Carolina. There he lived with his wife, who bore him four children before she died on 15 October 1818.<sup>43</sup>

While little can be gathered about the particular influence of the life of Mrs. Brantly upon her husband through her life, much more can be learned about the influence of her death. Indeed, despite all that Brantly himself said of her personal influence, her death may have had a more profound impact than her life. Writing to an editor of the *American Baptist Magazine* in Boston, Brantly recorded what had happened and testified of his wife’s influence on him:

She had gladdened nine years of my pilgrimage, and had been the tender counsellor and sweet ornament of my early days. Her sudden removal from me in a few days after the birth of her fourth child, has left me to bleed in the pain of protracted sorrow. . . . When I saw death seizing my fairest earthly hope, and depriving me of one by whose aid my ministry had been formed and directed, and whose deep experimental knowledge in the things of God afforded me extensive helps in my public efforts, it was like a sword piercing through my soul. But she was ripe for bliss.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>W. B. Johnson, “Reminiscences” [1978], 42. Brantly graduated from South Carolina College in their third graduating class (one graduated in 1806, four in 1807, and thirty-one in 1808). He was neither salutatorian nor valedictorian of his class. In 1814, the college awarded him the Master of Arts degree. See Knight, *Documentary History*, 3:80, 96, 124; cf. Maximilian LaBorde, *History of South Carolina College* (Charleston: Walker, 1874), 528.

<sup>43</sup>Richmond Academy still exists today. In fact, the very building in which Brantly taught still stands. For the “Rules and Regulations of Richmond Academy, Georgia, 1819,” which were recorded in the Minutes of the Trustees on 24 December 1819 and so may have been drafted by Brantly himself, see Knight, *Documentary History*, 4:26-31. For more information on the Academy, see Charles G. Cordle, “An Ante-Bellum Academy: The Academy of Richmond County, 1783-1863” (M.A. thesis, University of Georgia, 1935).

Anna’s children were Mary Ann (b. 1810), Eliza Carter (b. 1813), William Theophilus, Jr. (b. 8 May 1816), and Furman (b. 8 October 1818).

<sup>44</sup>“Mourning with Resignation,” *ABM* 3 (March 1819): 49, 50. The letter is anonymous, but its timing, its proximity to an essay by Brantly, and the events described point to Brantly’s authorship.

A private entry, perhaps in a journal, goes much farther than the letter in revealing the extent of the grief that the thirty-one-year-old Brantly experienced:

At length the volume of grief is unrolled in my own house. I am called to read and moisten every page with my tears. 'I was at ease, and God hath broken me asunder.' On my eyelids he has caused to rest the shadow of death. He has applied the hand of death to the loveliest object that ever attracted my eyes, or warmed my heart. In a moment he has taken from me the charms of intellect and the counsels of prudence. He has stopped, by the coldness of a mortal chill, the sweet current of maternal affection, and O, my God has taken from me my immortal Anna. The tenderest earthly name I ever read is blotted with the blackness of dissolution, and my bleeding bosom is torn from lover and friend.<sup>45</sup>

Thus afflicted, Brantly asked his brother in Boston for prayer, wanting "the genuine fruits of sanctified correction," but fearing that he had not yet "had true repentance for my sin and vile ingratitude." In all, Brantly could see that his "languid heart is excited to do more for God than I have done, to live more for heaven and less for earth."<sup>46</sup>

These two elements—chastening providence and heavenly orientation—figure prominently in a sermon Brantly preached ten days after his wife's departure. The proximity of her death gives the sermon a depth of personal integrity that even compels today's reader "to behold a bush that burns, and is not consumed because God is there." Having taken as his text Job 2:10, where the patriarch reproves his wife for accepting from God only good and not adversity, Brantly argued that God is just in all circumstances, and hence that He is entitled to a Christian's gratitude for all good and to his "submissive reverence" under all evil. Indeed, the main point of the sermon states: "The good which we accept at the hand of the Lord, should reconcile us to the evil which he may send upon us; and our cheerful acceptance of what we deem good, should lay us under an obligation to accept what we esteem evil."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>"Intrepid Faith," 599.

<sup>46</sup>"Mourning with Resignation," 50.

<sup>47</sup>William T. Brantly, *The Lenitive of Sorrow. A Sermon, Delivered in the First Baptist Church. Beaufort, (S. C.) 25th Oct. 1818, on the Death of Mrs. Ann Brantly, Who Departed This Life the 15th of the Same Month* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1819), 4-6.

Brantly offered his congregation two strong arguments why Christians should accept from the Lord both good and adversity. First, affliction is *necessary* for those who reside under God's mercy. Without affliction, how would Christians appreciate Heaven, feel the consequences of sin (and thus know it to be evil), or even know the latent sediments at the bottom of their own hearts, which often lie undetected until stirred up? God often uses pain to sanctify His people and to endow them with true sympathy. They have always been known as the "broken hearted" and the "poor in spirit." Therefore, it should surprise no Christian that he must "inherit a large amount of pain," not only in the unique afflictions of a Christian, but also in the sufferings common to all men.<sup>48</sup>

Second, remembering God's goodness "will reconcile [Christians] to all that is *apparently* evil." Brantly warned his audience not to assess events in isolation, for "the acts of divine providence constitute one grand system." A Christian should look to the future and mark the end of Job's life. Then he should look also to the past and recall that bereavement is possible only because God first gratuitously gave. Even more, a Christian must look to Heaven, "a better country" (Heb 11:16). Therefore, Brantly exhorted, "We must learn to appreciate things, not according to the imposing promise which they give of present delight; . . . but rather according to their influence upon our everlasting interest, as they stand connected with the world to come." If his audience would believe this and so accept with resignation all that God gives, Brantly confessed that it would be regarded by the preacher "among the chief lenitives of existing pain."<sup>49</sup>

This remarkable sermon not only demonstrates how pervasively the idea of divine providence governed Brantly's worldview, but also how *personal* it was to him. Far from being a mere speculation, divine providence consoled him in his grief. He knew that no event happened by chance, but came from the hand of a good and just God; therefore, any affliction upon a child of God is never for ultimate evil and so must be

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 7-14.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 14-17, 19, 4. Hence the name of the sermon.

reckoned as *chastening*. A very personal God was chastening him, as he concluded, “The time had arrived when it was necessary that my divided heart should be formed to greater singleness for God, and the dross of my affections purged from a worldly mixture which had grown alarming.”<sup>50</sup> Far from despising the chastening of the Lord, Brantly worshipped Him who “scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb 12:5-6).

This sermon also demonstrates the importance of a heavenly orientation for Brantly’s definition of what is *useful*. Just as providential chastening removes the dross and orients God’s child toward Heaven, what is *useful* must be whatever orients oneself and others toward Heaven. In other words, Brantly defined usefulness more in eternal and heavenly terms than in the earthly terms of Benjamin Franklin’s pragmatism or Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism.<sup>51</sup> While “useful” may have been a general virtue of Brantly’s age, it was Christ that oriented this virtue to Heaven. Moreover, while it is true that all genuine Christians see usefulness in heavenly terms, for they all seek a better country (Heb 11:16), it is not true to the same degree. Brantly told his congregation, “We know little of affliction whilst it stands in the distance of speculation. All that we may have believed as to the effects of transgression in the afflictions of others, is cold theory in comparison of what we must feel, when we [are afflicted].”<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, the difference between Brantly’s conversion under Pope and his grief for Anna consisted neither in a change of orientation nor even in a change of doctrine, as a quick comparison between Anna’s funeral sermon and an earlier funeral sermon would show, but in degree.<sup>53</sup> Affliction led Brantly to *feel* his heavenly

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<sup>50</sup>“Intrepid Faith,” 599.

<sup>51</sup>For a summary of Benjamin Franklin’s practical view of learning, see Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education*, vol. 1, *The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 371-77. For a comparison of evangelicalism and the views of utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham, see Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 186-203.

<sup>52</sup>Brantly, *Lenitive*, 8.

<sup>53</sup>For evidence that Brantly’s doctrine of death and suffering had not changed, compare *Lenitive* to a funeral sermon that Brantly had delivered a year earlier. Many of the ideas are similar. For

orientation. As a corollary, Brantly's interest in Maxcy's speculative theology (what he termed "metaphysics") waned, though he still cherished Maxcy's insight into the feelings of experimental religion in the heart.<sup>54</sup>

Brantly's loss of Anna had a lasting influence on his ministry. For example, Brantly became an excellent deathbed advisor and grief counselor. Just as Brantly's pre-conversion convictions enabled him to call the sinner back to Christ, so also his post-conversion affliction enabled him to call the saint home to Christ. The two experiences worked in tandem, for both the assurance given at his baptism and the comfort given in his affliction offered him the hope, that "others may be comforted 'with the same comfort wherewith God has comforted' me in my affliction."<sup>55</sup>

In addition to grief counseling, Anna's death also made Brantly a better preacher by God's grace.<sup>56</sup> His preaching switched from "the philosophy of Christianity"

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example, in the earlier sermon, "the senses" stand over against "communion with God." In lamenting indwelling sin in believers, the confession is made, "So strong is our affinity to earth, that some sensual alloy is ready to mingle its debasing qualities with all the endeavours of our hands, and all the emotions of our hearts" (William T. Brantly, *A Sermon, Delivered in the Baptist Church, St. Helena, S. C. on the Death of Mr. William Norton, Who Departed This Life March 7th, 1817, in the 71st Year of His Age* [Charleston: John Hoff, 1817], 4).

William Norton had been a founding member and senior deacon of the Baptist church in Beaufort, having previously been a distinguished Episcopalian before he changed his views (Brantly, *William Norton*, 11; *The Baptist Church in Beaufort, Christian Fellowship: or the Solemn Covenant of the Baptist Church of Christ in Beaufort, S. C.*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. [Charleston: W. Riley, 1834], 5, 9).

<sup>54</sup>Evidence comes from a shift in Brantly's preaching (see "Intrepid Faith," 598).

<sup>55</sup>Brantly, *Lenitive*, 3. Brantly quoted 2 Cor 1:4. Upon hearing of Brantly's death, one Northern editor testified, "No one was better able to soothe, as far as gentleness of manner and kindness of heart could do it, the pangs of the frame racked by disease, and to smooth its passage to the tomb. He had unshaken confidence in the exceeding great and precious promises of God, and was eminently successful in illustrating their efficacy to sustain the heart in the terrors of death" (quoted in Fuller, *Intrepid Faith*, 29). For an example of Brantly's grief counseling, see Brantly, "Obituary: Rev. Benjamin Fiveash" *The Missionary*, 18 May 1821, p. 201, which is a letter to the mother of the deceased. For other examples of Brantly's reaction to death or calamity, see Brantly, "Death of the Rev. Robert B. Semple of Va.," *CI*, 7 January 1832, p. 14; idem, "Rev. David Jones," *CI*, 20 April 1833, p. 242; idem, "Remarks" on an "Awful Catastrophe," *CI*, 3 November 1832, p. 288.

For the theology behind Brantly's assessment of the eternal destination of the deceased, see his own explanation in William T. Brantly, *The Saint's Repose in Death. A Sermon Delivered on the Death of the Rev. Richard Furman, D. D. Late Pastor of the Baptist Church, Charleston, S. C.* (Charleston: W. Riley, 1825), 7-12.

<sup>56</sup>This is not to say that before Anna's death, Brantly had been a failure as a preacher. Manly himself had said that Brantly's preaching already "shone conspicuous." Under Brantly's leadership, the Beaufort church had grown from 492 in 1811 to 550 in 1817 (*Minutes of the Savannah River Baptist Association, Convened at Pipe Creek Church, 23d. Nov. 1811* [n.p., n.d.], 4; *Minutes of the Savannah River*

to “that unction and tenderness for which it was afterwards so remarkable.”<sup>57</sup> According to one eyewitness, aged members of the congregation testified “with great emotion of the sanctified effect of this affliction, of the richness and savour which it had imparted to the ministry of their pastor.”<sup>58</sup> From then on, the unction never left him, except for short seasons, from which “he would quickly *wake up*, . . . and then what execution followed! how [*sic*] his people were surprised, convinced, comforted and edified!”<sup>59</sup>

### Conclusion

George Pope, Jonathan Maxcy, and Anna Brantly each had a hand in shaping Brantly’s personal mission. From Pope, Brantly learned by firsthand experience that conversions alone prove a minister’s usefulness. Moreover, Brantly also discerned that a minister should fit his times; therefore, in contrast to preachers of frontier days, Brantly pursued lifelong education. From Maxcy, Brantly drew inspiration for spiritual scholarship and power in extemporary preaching. From Anna, Brantly learned the value of chastening providence, causing him to feel his heavenly orientation, and to pursue the power of the Gospel over the explanation of the Gospel. By God’s grace, this combination of revival, scholarship, and Heaven provided the lasting criteria of what Brantly considered *useful*, as he himself preached, wrote, and actively prepared for death.

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*Baptist Association. Held at Newington Church, Scriven County, Geo. Commencing, 25th October, 1817* [Savannah, GA: Michael J. Kappel & Co., 1817], 5).

<sup>57</sup>“Intrepid Faith,” 598.

<sup>58</sup>Sprague, *Annals*, 6:502.

<sup>59</sup>M., “Dr. Brantly,” n.p.



## CHAPTER 3

### FIRSTFRUITS NEAR THE SAVANNAH RIVER

The ministry of William T. Brantly first bore fruit in the South, near the Savannah River. In 1809, Brantly received ordination in Augusta, Georgia at the hands of Abraham Marshall and Henry Holcombe. By the latter's recommendation, Brantly received a call from the Beaufort Baptist Church, which he then served from 1811 to 1819. In 1819, Brantly remarried and returned to Augusta as rector of Richmond Academy. Here, he constituted a small Baptist church, dedicated a large meeting-house, and enjoyed the favor of the town's elite. In Augusta, Brantly achieved prominence as a Baptist preacher and as a Southern "gentleman theologian."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For information on Brantly's ordination, see Henry Holcombe, *The First Fruits, in a Series of Letters* (Philadelphia: Ann Cochran, 1812), 154; and Anna Olive Jones, *History of the First Baptist Church, Augusta, Georgia, 1817-1967* (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan, 1967), 9. For information on Abraham Marshall, see William 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 Historical Introduction*, vol. 6 of *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865), 168-71; and David Benedict, *Fifty Years among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1860), 52-54. For information on Henry Holcombe, see Sprague, *Annals*, 6:21-220; Holcombe, *First Fruits*; John B. Boles, "Henry Holcombe, A Southern Baptist Reformer in the Age of Jefferson," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54 (Fall 1970): 389; and George H. Shriver, *Pilgrims through the Years: A Bicentennial History of First Baptist Church, Savannah, Georgia* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1999), 22. Brantly admired Holcombe's "talents and services," and spoke well of Holcombe's "ardent and gifted spirit" as one of the "great and good men" (William T. Brantly, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to John Davis, Chairman of the Committee of Supplies, First Baptist Church, Second Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ALS, 4 June 182[6], AFBCP; Brantly, "Education," *CSCI*, 21 November 1829, p. 322).

For information on the Beaufort church, see The Baptist Church in Beaufort, *Christian Fellowship: or the Solemn Covenant of the Baptist Church of Christ in Beaufort, S. C.*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Charleston: W. Riley, 1834)], 5-7; David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, and Other Parts of the World* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1813; reprint, Gallatin, TN: Church History Research & Archives, 1985), 2:152-53; Holcombe, *First Fruits*, 54-55, 76; J. H. Cuthbert, *Life of Richard Fuller, D. D.* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1879), 12-13, 33-34; William Bullein Johnson, "The Reminiscences of William Bullein Johnson," ed. J. Glenwood Clayton, *JSCBHS* 4 [November 1978]: 21-29; and Joe M. King, *A History of South Carolina Baptists* (Columbia: The General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964), 32-33.

For information on Augusta, see Jones, *History*, 7-19; and Marion S. Symms, *A Brief History of The First Baptist Church* (Augusta: Centennial Committee of the First Baptist Church, Augusta, Georgia, [1945]), which contains some valuable photographs. At the dedication of the Augusta building,

Apart from a few national publications, the ministries at Beaufort and Augusta were mainly confined to the South. Accordingly, these ministries demonstrate what Brantly's personal mission looked like in a regional context. Specifically, Brantly helped organize denominational agencies for foreign missions and ministerial improvement. Because these agencies echo the agenda of Richard Furman, president of the Triennial Convention, the ministries at Beaufort and Augusta also demonstrate the harmony between Brantly's personal mission and Furman's ideal of a national Baptist convention. To prove this harmony, this chapter will first give the background of Furman and the Triennial Convention before exploring Brantly's own contribution and justification in uniting Baptists for useful effort.

### **Richard Furman and the Triennial Convention**

On 18 May 1814, thirty-three American Baptists convened at Philadelphia's First Baptist Church for an epochal event—the formation of the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions. On the one hand, this convention—the so-called “Triennial Convention,” for it met every three years—signaled a new trend in American Christianity, for it ranks as the nation's first denominational agency for foreign missions.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the Triennial

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Brantly preached the sermon “The Beauty and Stability of Gospel Institutions,” which he then published (see the reprint in *The Georgia Pulpit: or Minister's Yearly Offering*, ed. Robert Fleming [Richmond: H. K. Ellyson, 1847], 214-24). This sermon received a favorable national review, which called it “the production of a man of learning and genius,” for Brantly dealt with a trite subject with “vigour and originality of mind” (“Reviews,” *ABM* 2 [March 1822]: 301-03. The review quotes passages about the process of regeneration, the progress of Christianity, and revivals of religion.

The phrase “gentleman theologian” comes from church historian, E. Brooks Holifield, who has argued that in the South, the “clerical gentlemen were willing to abandon some of the revered patterns of rural piety” for new ideals of rationality and gentility, in order to reach “the professional and educated classes” (*The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture 1795-1860* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978], 6-7, 36, 49). Holifield lists Brantly among the “gentlemen theologians” (*ibid.*, 218).

<sup>2</sup>In contrast to the Congregationalists' American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (est. 1810), which in 1812 elected Presbyterians to its board, the Triennial Convention “set the pattern for the strictly denominational missionary organizations that were to be constituted in the years that followed” (Charles Chaney, “An Evaluation of the Contribution of Baptists to American Culture in the National Period,” *BHH* 1 [October 1966]: 58).

Convention also signaled a new era in American Baptist history. Before 1813, American Baptists had conducted home missions to Indians through established associations or new local societies, but no one had proposed an agency for foreign missions.<sup>3</sup> They lacked vision, ownership, and “a united effort to raise funds.”<sup>4</sup> With the Triennial Convention, their first national organization, American Baptists gained increased organization, a “domestic missionary spirit,” means for education, and a sense of destiny—a “consciousness of divine leadership” that led individuals to be “stewardship conscious.”<sup>5</sup>

The catalyst for the Triennial Convention came unexpectedly through the providential “gift” of two Congregationalist missionaries, who became Baptists after leaving the United States.<sup>6</sup> The first, Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), along with his wife Ann, inspired the organizing effort through their sacrificial service in Burma. The second, Luther Rice (1783-1836), actually did the organizing effort. After returning to the United States on 7 September 1813, Rice quickly visited almost all the associations and birthed twenty new local missionary societies in only eight months.<sup>7</sup> While riding south on a stagecoach from Richmond, Virginia, Rice conceived the plan of forming one national society for foreign missions, presiding over both state and local auxiliary

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<sup>3</sup>Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 112. On the multiplication of mission societies after 1800, see Earl Eugene Eminhizer, “The Rise and Fall of the Triennial Convention” (Th.M. thesis, Crozer Theological Seminary, 1956), 9-17.

<sup>4</sup>Eminhizer, “Rise and Fall,” 17. At least two prior plans for large-scale union had failed to garner support: Morgan Edwards’s plan in 1770, and the later invitation of the Philadelphia Association for a national “general conference” (J. H. Campbell, *Georgia Baptists: Historical and Biographical* [Macon, GA: J. W. Burke, 1874], 63). William H. Brackney has argued that Edwards’s plan of union for missions and fellowship failed because of Baptist cleavage in the South, New England autonomy, and a general dislike of Philadelphia dominance (“Triumph of the National Spirit,” *ABQ* 4 [June 1985]: 165).

<sup>5</sup>Claude L. Howe, “The Significance of the Formation of the Triennial Convention,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 6 (April 1964): 5-14.

<sup>6</sup>For the term “gift,” see the letter from Joshua Marshman, an English Baptist coworker of William Carey in India, to Thomas Baldwin, a Baptist leader in Boston (as quoted in *A Baptist Source Book: With Particular Reference to Southern Baptists*, ed. Robert A. Baker [Nashville: Broadman, 1966], 58). For other documents leading up to the formation of the Triennial Convention, see Baker, *Baptist Source Book*, 53-61.

<sup>7</sup>Eminhizer, “Rise and Fall,” 21-32.

societies.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to later state conventions, Rice's initial proposal bypassed the existing associations for a new network of societies. The resulting organization proved to be somewhat of a compromise between a society and an association, resembling the former in basing membership on dues and in focusing on one object, but resembling the latter in claiming some power of representation, just as the name "convention" implied.<sup>9</sup> In his early efforts, Rice succeeded greatly. One Baptist recollected, "Probably never was an important undertaking set in motion among our people with so much unanimity."<sup>10</sup>

Although initially Rice was "almost the backbone of the whole organizational effort," he soon received help from Richard Furman (1755-1825), the leading minister among Baptists in the South—a man who possessed an unparalleled reputation for wisdom and skill in managing affairs.<sup>11</sup> Together, they made a close team. According to historian William H. Brackney, Furman was a "thorough-going nationalist" who became "the fount from which ideals and major principles emanated," while Rice was the "sole agent of the Convention" who served as "a continual staff resource and political organizer."<sup>12</sup> Furman served two terms as the Convention's inaugural president before voluntarily stepping down. In explaining the Convention to American Baptists, Furman wrote that it sought "to devise a plan, and enter into measures, for combining the efforts

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<sup>8</sup>For Rice's own description of this epiphany, see Evelyn W. Thompson, *Luther Rice: Believer in Tomorrow* (Nashville: Broadman, 1967), 97.

<sup>9</sup>For the constitution of the Triennial Convention, see *Proceedings of the Baptist Convention for Missionary Purposes; Held in Philadelphia, in May, 1814* (Philadelphia: Ann Coles, 1814), 3-5; cf. "Constitution of the Triennial Convention, May, 1814," *ABQ* 8 (September 1989): 220-22. For the term "compromise," see G. Thomas Halbrooks, "Francis Wayland and 'The Great Reversal,'" *Foundations* 20 (July-September 1977): 201. For a comparison of the two models, see H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 347-50.

<sup>10</sup>Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 126.

<sup>11</sup>Eminhizer, "Rise and Fall," 31; Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 48-49.

<sup>12</sup>Brackney, "Triumph," 168-69. Based on correspondence between Rice and Furman, Brackney concludes, "It is obvious that Rice enjoyed a close working relationship with Furman, whom he respected as the guiding light of the Convention and with whose ideals Rice fully agreed" (*ibid.*, 169). In one letter, Rice himself acknowledges Furman's crucial role by stating that Furman must attend the Philadelphia meeting (see Eminhizer, "Rise and Fall," 37, citing a letter in Harvey Toliver Cook, *A Biography of Richard Furman* [Greenville, SC: Baptist Courier Job Rooms, 1913], 92).

of our whole denomination, in behalf of the millions” without light. Speaking rhetorically, Furman asked the independent-minded Baptists, “We have ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism,’ why should our ignorance of each other continue? why [*sic*] prevent us from uniting in one common effort for the glory of the Son of God?” As motives for united effort, Furman cited millennial prophecies, the Gospel’s “pulsive spirit” to ameliorate “all needs in all places,” divine providence in perhaps designing the conversion of Rice and Judson as “a means of exciting the attention of our churches to foreign missions,” and personal satisfaction from a “delightful union.”<sup>13</sup> In writing these things, Furman echoed the constitution, which described the task of the Convention as “organizing a plan for eliciting, combining, and directing the Energies of the whole Denomination in one sacred effort” for foreign missions.<sup>14</sup>

In closing the 1814 address, Furman expressed hope that both home missions and especially ministerial education would soon be added. These hopes were reiterated in his 1817 address, which cited potential missions around New Orleans and St. Louis.<sup>15</sup> The proposal for ministerial education eventually put some tension between Rice and Furman. Furman desired “a Central Theological Seminary,” but Rice envisioned “a national Institution.”<sup>16</sup> Rice also rashly went ahead with plans for Columbian College against Charleston’s plea for caution until a network for funding materialized.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>For Richard Furman’s “Address,” see *Proceedings, The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions, 1814*, 38-42.

<sup>14</sup>*Proceedings, The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions, 1814*, 38-42.

<sup>15</sup>*Proceedings of the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States, at Their First Triennial Meeting, Held in Philadelphia, from the 7th to the 14th of May, 1817: Together with the Third Annual Report of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions for the United States* (Philadelphia: Anderson & Meehan, 1817), 126.

<sup>16</sup>William Bullein Johnson, “The Reminiscences of William Bullein Johnson,” ed. J. Glenwood Clayton, *JSCBHS* 5 (November 1979): 19.

<sup>17</sup>For the Charleston Association’s disapproval of Rice’s rash behavior, see Appendix E, “Circular Letter Pertaining to Columbian College,” in James A. Rogers, *Richard Furman: Life and Legacy, Baptists: History, Literature, Theology, Hymns* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985; reprint, with new forewords, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001], 296-301). The association advised Rice to suspend operations until a plan for “uniting the churches in Education Societies” be published (*ibid.*, 300).

Around 1820, Furman began advocating that the Triennial Convention become an association of associations, thereby uniting *churches*—not voluntary individuals—within one organization that would house missions, education, and other denominational endeavors. According to his biographer, “This convention plan reflected a special Furman genius,” for no Baptist before him had ever conceived such a grand and unified scheme.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, Furman led the formation of the first Baptist state convention in America, the South Carolina Baptist State Convention (1821). The significance of this movement far exceeded the Triennial Convention, which in 1826 became a one-task society. In 1845, the Furman ideal returned in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, which owes its shape to both the original constitution of the Triennial Convention and to the personal views of William B. Johnson, one of Furman’s protégés in South Carolina, who urged “judicious concentration” as “a means of magnifying denominational unity and effectiveness of work.”<sup>19</sup>

Like Johnson, Brantly inherited much of his own ideal of united effort from Richard Furman. Even though Brantly had neither joined Furman’s congregation nor ministered within the same association, the two men had several ties. For example, Brantly received his education through aid from the Charleston Association—under the same program that Furman now proposed for the Triennial Convention.<sup>20</sup> As a student, Brantly attended school under Furman’s “educational protégé” at the High Hills of the Santee, where Furman had originally ministered and helped to unite the up-country

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 261.

<sup>19</sup>Robert A. Baker, “Reflections on the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 6 (April 1964): 20.

<sup>20</sup>Rogers, *Furman*, 297-98. Before Rice ever appeared, Charlestonian Baptists seem to have already adopted union for effort as their association’s identity. The first line of Wood Furman’s *History of the Charleston Association of Baptist Churches in the State of South Carolina* asserts: “Important purposes are seldom accomplished by solitary efforts. United exertions are necessary” (quoted in Loulie Latimer Owens, “Two Hundred and Twenty-five Years of the Charleston Baptist Association,” *JSCBHS* 3 [November 1977]: 2). Thus when Rice appeared before the Charleston Association at Welsh Neck Church in 1813, the minutes record that his plan met the approval of the Association, who agreed that “a common effort among the baptist churches . . . is both laudable and expedient” (quoted in King, *History*, 167).

Separates and the low-country Regulars.<sup>21</sup> As a young minister, Brantly “frequently passed” the road between Beaufort and Charleston.<sup>22</sup> Later, from Georgia, Brantly and Mercer conferred with South Carolina about cooperation in theological education.<sup>23</sup>

Beyond circumstantial ties, three tributes in particular demonstrate Furman’s influence on Brantly. First, in 1819, Brantly named his second son Furman Brantly. Second, Brantly freely complied with Furman’s scheme for the Triennial Convention, helping to organize a state convention for Georgia Baptists in 1822. Third, Brantly highly praised Furman at the elder’s funeral in 1825. In the honorary address, Brantly expressed apprehension about giving a eulogy. Because Furman “filled so large a scope” and possessed “so much duty and usefulness” along with all the proportionate graces of a minister, Brantly feared that any true representation of his character would “appear over-charged.” What struck Brantly most was Furman’s consistency. Furman’s “unceasing and successful exertions” and “comprehensive goodness” reminded Brantly of the ubiquitous dew and of the faithful sun, which loses none of its glory by its regularity. Given these tributes, it is little wonder that many of the same features Brantly lauded in Furman—gravity, industry, and liberty from theological systems—reappeared twenty years later in Richard Fuller’s eulogy of Brantly himself.<sup>24</sup>

### **Regional Contribution to United Effort**

Brantly’s involvement in the Triennial Convention remained largely regional during his first Southern ministry. Although elected to the Board of Managers for

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<sup>21</sup>Regarding the “educational protégé,” John M. Roberts, Rogers writes, “More than any other man of his time, Roberts had imbibed the spirit of Richard Furman in his concern for education generally, and ministerial education in particular” (*Furman*, 127).

<sup>22</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Rustic Frenchman and His Wife,” *CI*, 23 April 1831, p. 268. For two of Brantly’s reminiscences of Furman, though both in a group setting, see Brantly, “The Late Rev. Dr. Furman,” *SWG*, 1 February 1838, n.p.

<sup>23</sup>King, *History*, 123.

<sup>24</sup>William T. Brantly, *The Saint’s Repose in Death. A Sermon Delivered on the Death of the Rev. Richard Furman, D. D. Late Pastor of the Baptist Church, Charleston, S. C.* (Charleston: W. Riley, 1825), 23, 28.

Foreign Missions in 1820, he was absent from the annual meetings throughout his three-year term.<sup>25</sup> In 1823, Brantly was chosen to serve on the Board's regional standing committee in the South.<sup>26</sup> He did not attend a national meeting until 1826, the year he relocated to Philadelphia. Even so, Brantly's Southern contribution to the Triennial Convention's call for united effort involved his support of foreign missions, his support of ministerial improvement, and his hand in forming the Georgia state convention.

### **Initial Contributions in Beaufort**

**Support of foreign missions.** Brantly's early support of the Baptist foreign mission movement finds clear evidence in his response to Luther Rice's visits in 1813 and 1816. During these years, Brantly and the Baptist pastor at Savannah, William B. Johnson, formed a team, assuming much of the leadership left in the wake of Henry Holcombe's departure for Philadelphia in late 1811. When Brantly and Johnson first met Rice at the November 1813 meeting of the Savannah River Association, the timing was advantageous for both parties. For Rice, conversation with Johnson convinced him to form not just a board, but a convention, which would soon meet in Philadelphia.<sup>27</sup> For the Association, their thoughts were already upon missions. Plans had been laid the previous year to form a "General Committee" for itinerant and missionary efforts, with some of the churches having already given funds.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Savannah had reportedly

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<sup>25</sup>For his election in 1820, see "The Proceedings of the General Convention, at Their Second Triennial Meeting, and the Sixth Annual Report of the Board," *The Latter Day Luminary* 2 (May 1820): 129. For subsequent annual meetings, consult with the Leo T. Crismon, "Proceedings of Triennial Convention 1814-1846 and Annual Reports of the Board of Managers 1814-1846," TMs (text-fiche), James P. Boyce Centennial Library, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>26</sup>Frank K. Means, "History of the Triennial Baptist Convention," TMs (photocopy), p. 18, Special Collections, Jenkins Research Library, International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Richmond, Virginia, 1946.

<sup>27</sup>On Johnson's influence on Rice and the formation of the Triennial Convention, see Thompson, *Rice*, 90, and King, *History*, 215, which cites Rice's own testimony in a letter that appeared on 27 January 1835 in the *Christian Index*. Rice had already formed his plan for a hierarchical society method on his way south to Charleston before coming to the Savannah area.

<sup>28</sup>Brantly and Johnson served on the 1812 committee to form the plan, along with Thomas Polhill of Newington. Brantly also served on the subsequent General Committee as an assistant, under



started an interdenominational missionary society in 1806, though it may have ceased by 1813. During the Association, Rice joined Brantly and Johnson in reading and approving without alteration Johnson's circular on "The importance and advantages of itinerant and missionary efforts."<sup>29</sup> Rice also heard Brantly preach twice, both times on texts relating to obedience as a condition for acceptance with God.<sup>30</sup> By the end of the meeting, the Association had approved Rice's "great design" and "measures," counseling the churches to "use their best endeavors towards the support of foreign missions."<sup>31</sup>

As a result of meeting Rice, Brantly and Johnson (perhaps entirely on their own) formed the Savannah Baptist Society for Foreign Missions.<sup>32</sup> This ancillary society to the forthcoming national convention had two defining characteristics—it was Baptist and it was for foreign missions. Brantly and Johnson patterned their society after one formed earlier in Boston, adopting the same constitution. Echoes of this constitution's preface reached the ears of Georgians and neighboring brethren in South Carolina through a circular letter, drafted by Brantly and Johnson. In their circular, the two men reasoned that the duty to support foreign missions is based on the duty to seek our neighbor's benefit and on the fact that the Gospel bestows the greatest benefit. After mentioning the proposed convention for "organizing an efficient and practical plan, on which the energies of the whole Baptist denomination throughout America, may be elicited, combined and directed, in one sacred effort" to obey the "great command" of

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Johnson's presidency. The Committee sent out two itinerants that same year. Oddly, the Beaufort church is not listed among contributors. See *Minutes of the Savannah River Association, Convened at Sunbury, Georgia, 21<sup>st</sup> Nov. 1812* (n.p., n.d.), 4; *Minutes of the Savannah River Association, Convened at the Union Church, Barnwell District, South-Carolina, 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1813* (n.p., n.d.), 8.

<sup>29</sup>"Circular Letter," *Minutes*, Savannah River Baptist Association, 1813, 10-19.

<sup>30</sup>The texts were Jude 21 and John 15:14.

<sup>31</sup>*Minutes*, Savannah River Baptist Association, 1813, 6. For Johnson's personal recollections of this meeting and of Rice, see William Bullein Johnson, "The Reminiscences of William Bullein Johnson," ed. J. Glenwood Clayton, *JSCBHS* 5 (November 1979): 9-11.

<sup>32</sup>The name "society" implies that the new group did not function under the association, which typically identified their subgroups as a "committee."

Mark 16:15, the two men then invited their “Friends and Brethren . . . to embrace the privilege of uniting in so glorious a cause, so divine a work.” Both this circular address and Johnson’s earlier circular appeared in the *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*, thereby making both Brantly and Johnson national contributors to the epochal 1814 meeting of the first Triennial Convention.<sup>33</sup> The example set in Savannah also had a local effect, prompting Jesse Mercer and the Georgia Association in October 1814 to seek out a plan. The following May, the association “resolved itself into a body for missionary purposes,” reconstituting itself the following year with a board of trustees to act in concert with the board of the Triennial Convention. Two more associations in Georgia (Sarepta and Ocmulgee) formed missionary societies a year or two later.<sup>34</sup>

When Rice met with ministers in Beaufort District in early December 1816, he was “happy to discover a prospect the Mission Society in this quarter may be revived again.” On 3 December 1816, Brantly promised \$100 for the Secretary’s Fund and then handed Rice the subscription list on the following day.<sup>35</sup> This sum was the minimum yearly donation for membership within the Triennial Convention.<sup>36</sup> In the following year, the Savannah River Association urged their churches “to aid the missionary cause by

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<sup>33</sup>See The Savannah Baptist Society for Foreign Missions, “Circular Address,” *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 4 (March 1814): 6-8, which is dated “Savannah, 17<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1813;” and Savannah River Baptist Association, “The Importance and Advantages of Itinerant and Missionary Efforts,” *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 4 (June 1814): 35-42. For the constitution of the Boston group, see The Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel in India and Other Foreign Parts, “Foreign Missionary Society,” *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 3 (March 1813): 284-86.

<sup>34</sup>Jesse Mercer, *History of the Georgia Baptist Association* (Washington, GA: n.p., 1838; reprint, Washington, GA: Georgia Baptist Association, 1980), 54-59; Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 17, 67-68.

<sup>35</sup>William H. Brackney, ed., *Dispensations of Providence: The Journal and Selected Letters of Luther Rice* (Rochester, NY: The American Baptist Historical Society, et al., 1984), 119-20. Rice also met with Benjamin S. Scriven, Thomas Fuller, and [Benjamin] Sweet. At the time, Rice’s itinerancy was solely for foreign missions. Home missions began in 1817 and theological education in 1818 (*ibid.*, 78-79).

The “revived” society probably refers to The Beaufort District Baptist Society for Foreign Missions, which had contributed \$21.37½ to Rice on 4 January 1814. On 11 January 1814, Rice collected \$71.73 from the Beaufort church specifically. See *Proceedings, The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions, 1814*, 28.

<sup>36</sup>See Article II, “Constitution,” *Proceedings, The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions, 1814*, 3.

every means in their power, and especially, by forming missionary societies within their respective limits.”<sup>37</sup> Thus missionary efforts were progressing well in the low-country.

**Support of ministerial improvement.** When the Beaufort church called Brantly, they promised, “If you will come and minister to us in spirituals, we will minister to you temporals.”<sup>38</sup> This promise was not normal at the time. According to Furman, the typical Southern attitude was: “The Lord keep thee humble, and we’ll keep thee poor.”<sup>39</sup> In general, Brantly faced what Baptist historian Robert Torbet has called “a deep-seated prejudice against an educated and salaried ministry.” Frontier churches, especially those with Separate Baptist roots, suspected preparation of quenching the Spirit and admired pastors who farmed all week because this excluded a priesthood class.<sup>40</sup> The result was general ignorance and, at times, even heresy.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to prevailing opinion, Brantly considered “slender and incompetent support” a huge obstacle to religion’s progress. Indeed, no “more ready way to stifle the spirit of godliness”

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<sup>37</sup>*Minutes of the Savannah River Association. Held at Newington Church, Scriven County, Geo. Commencing, 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1817* (Savannah: Michael J. Kappel, 1817), 4.

<sup>38</sup>Sprague, *Annals*, 6:213. The call echoes the language of Paul (see Rom 15:27; 1 Cor 9:11). The congregation at Beaufort seems to have been unusually rich. In 1811, the town was “inhabited chiefly by people of wealth, whose landed estates were at different distances from their homes” (Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 50). Also unusual, Baptists there had a “good, commodious building” (ibid., 73).

Shriver records that Savannah also offered Brantly a position: “On February 17, 1811, the church unanimously agreed to call the Reverend Brantley [*sic*] of Augusta as pastor. Humbly, the church wrote among other things the following: ‘We have but little pecuniary advantage to induce your residence among us: Our Preacher has hitherto been supported from the sale of the pews and occasional voluntary contribution.’ Brantley was offered the flexible amount of somewhere between \$1,000 and \$2,000. By March 15 the church was told that Brantley had accepted a call to the Beaufort church” (*Pilgrims*, 24). The call from Savannah probably came after the call from Beaufort.

<sup>39</sup>Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 61. According to Benedict, Baptists below the Mason-Dixon line were very hospitable with their homes, but “parsimonious” with their pocketbooks (ibid.).

<sup>40</sup>Robert G. Torbet, *The Baptist Ministry: Then and Now* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1953), 26-27, 39; cf. William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South: Tracing through the Separates the Influence of the Great Awakening, 1754-1787* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961), 137. Even if churches did pay the minister, they usually kept him on a year-to-year agreement (Shriver, *Pilgrims*, 29). To balance the record, J. H. Campbell noted that in the very beginning, the infant churches were often “unable to do anything towards the support of the ministry” (*Georgia Baptists*, 14).

<sup>41</sup>For an example of “Arian Baptists,” see Athanasius, Letter to the Editors, *The Missionary*, 7 October 1822, p. 66.

existed than “holding needful support from those who minister in holy things.”<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, like Furman and Rice, Brantly held to “the concept of the ministry as a calling reinforced by adequate training for effective service.”<sup>43</sup> Hence, he contributed to the renaissance of Baptist education in America through both teaching and fundraising.

Later, in Augusta, he even jeopardized his influence by speaking out for Baptist salaries.

Initially, Brantly failed to raise much support for educating ministers. One of his first efforts involved the Savannah River Association, among the generous benefactors to missions. In late 1811, right after he entered the ministry in Beaufort, Brantly brought a gift of \$27.12½ to the Charleston Association as a contribution to the General Committee’s fund. Perhaps gratitude urged him to give back to the fund that had helped him to college.<sup>44</sup> At any rate, he announced his intent to raise a similar interest among the Savannah River Baptists. This he did at the 1811 Association meeting, only to be turned down the following year. This reaction seems to have reflected a larger trend, for as one historian notes, the Charleston Association had for several years seen a decline in giving and so reminded “the churches that they were neglecting the fundamental educational work in the interest of the more spectacular work in missions.”<sup>45</sup> This also shows the exceptional nature of Brantly’s commitment to education.

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<sup>42</sup>“Circular Letter,” Georgia Baptist Association, 1822, in Mercer, *History*, 266.

<sup>43</sup>Torbet, *Baptist Ministry*, 29-30. Torbet entitled his chapter spanning the Triennial Convention, “The Vision of a Trained Ministry.” This Baptist turn toward education was part of a larger trend. As editor of a Georgia weekly in 1821, Nathan S. S. Beman wrote, “Within the course of a few years, a material change has taken place in the publick opinion upon the importance and necessity of an education for a Minister of the Gospel. It is now almost universally conceded that no one ought to sustain so important an office without previous preparation. . . . In no nation, and in no period of our own history, have the concerns of education commanded so much attention as they do in this country at the present time” (*The Missionary*, 2 February 1821, p. 146). Even Abraham Marshall, the son of Separate Baptists, had supported education, serving on Mount Enon’s general committee (Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 16).

<sup>44</sup>Evidence for this motivation may come from Basil Manly. After Brantly had interviewed Manly as a prospective candidate for the Charleston General Committee’s fund, Manly reported to a friend, “They make the offer with great politeness and say they will not consider it as bounty to us but as a debt which they owe and which peremptory demands payment” (Basil Manly, Sr., Chatham, North Carolina, to Iveson L. Brookes, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, ALS, 26 April 1818, MFP). How the debt was incurred—whether from past aid or from the command of Christ alone—remains unclear.

<sup>45</sup>King, *History*, 165.

Having been turned down on a larger platform, Brantly nonetheless encouraged education in his own community, and even in his own home. Upon his arrival in Beaufort (or shortly thereafter), Brantly assumed the presidency of Beaufort College.<sup>46</sup> As president, he initiated a lifelong habit of finding young men to cultivate for the ministry.<sup>47</sup> To aid these men, Brantly established the Southern Education Society. It was not uncommon for a young man to study under Brantly as a resident in his home. Indeed, the homes of many Baptist ministers then were “schools of the prophets.”<sup>48</sup> One highly significant example is Basil Manly, Sr., who was also a native of Chatham County in North Carolina, where he had heard Brantly preach on at least two occasions. Whether it was from common heritage or perhaps from some larger divine plan to give Manly a “spiritual father” in light of his earthly father’s rejection or for some other reason, Brantly treated Manly very well and the two become fast friends for life. Manly not only received \$100 from the Society on 17 May 1818, he was also given Brantly’s pulpit the next night along with an invitation to reside with the Brantlys during his course of study. For the next year, Manly carefully studied his mentor’s oratory, taking notes on two

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<sup>46</sup>William Bullein Johnson mentions that Brantly received an invitation from the college at “about the same time” as the call from the church. He also reported that the college was largely the fruit of Henry Holcombe’s Beaufort District Society (Johnson, “The Reminiscences of William Bullein Johnson,” ed. J. Glenwood Clayton, *JSCBHS* 4 [November 1978]: 42, 35). At the time, the “College” was little more than an academy, a feeder-school to true colleges. Manly told one of his friends, “This Institution though it has the name of a College is little more than a common school” (Basil Manly, Sr., Beaufort, South Carolina, to Iveson L. Brookes, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, ALS, 19 April 1819, MFP). For a brief history and description of Beaufort College, see Cuthbert, *Life*, 12, 33-34.

<sup>47</sup>On Brantly’s habit of gratuitously helping young men receive an education, see J. L. Dagg, “William T. Brantly, D. D.,” *CI*, 11 April 1845, n.p.; “Death of the Rev. Dr. Brantly,” *CI*, 18 April 1845, n.p., which is an obituary taken from the *Charleston Courier*. Examples of men Brantly taught or trained who later became ministers include Basil Manly, Sr. and Richard Fuller in Beaufort, J. Toole in Augusta, Morgan J. Rhees in Philadelphia, and James P. Boyce in Charleston. See Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 21; Sprague, *Annals*, 6:781; W. T. Brantly, “Ordination,” *CSCI*, 12 September 1829, p. 173; and John Broadus, *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce, D. D., LL. D., Late President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1893), 21, 28. Toole received funding from the Georgia General Association, which in 1826 also received a statement from Brantly regarding “the beneficiaries under his charge” (*Minutes of the General Association of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, Held at Augusta, Richmond County, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1826, and Continued to the Thirteenth Instant* [Augusta: William J. Bunce, 1826], 15, 13).

<sup>48</sup>Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 46. In general, the ministers’ houses were veritable “Baptist taverns,” where Baptist people often flocked to stay with “bag and baggage too” (*ibid.*, 85-86).

hundred of Brantly's sermons.<sup>49</sup> In like return, Brantly divulged much of his opinions to the younger man. Even when Brantly moved to Augusta, he urged Manly to accept as "his duty" a tutorship at Richmond Academy and to share the pastorate with him for one-third of his salary.<sup>50</sup> Though Manly declined and attended South Carolina College instead, the lifelong impact was great. In 1844, Manly confessed to his mentor, who lay helpless from a stroke:

I would not have you leave the world . . . without the grateful testimony of your pupil to the value of your instructions, and to the kindness and fidelity which have characterized all your intercourse with me. To you, under God, more than to any other person, I owe whatever I am, or have done in this world; and I shall carry such thoughts and feelings with me into the world of spirits, hoping to renew a hallowed and uninterrupted friendship there.<sup>51</sup>

Just as Maxcy had befriended Brantly ten years earlier, so now Brantly befriended Manly.

### **The Georgia State Convention**

When Brantly moved to Georgia, his influence for missions and education enlarged. Here, for the first time, Brantly assumed statewide leadership.<sup>52</sup> On a state

<sup>49</sup>A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South*, Southern Biography Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 22-23. Verification of the Southern Education Society has been slim. At first, Manly claims to have been a possible candidate of "the committee of the Charlestown [*sic*] Education Society" (Basil Manly to Iveson L. Brookes, Chatham, North Carolina, 26 April 1818). After residing in Beaufort one year, Manly then tells of the founding of an "Ed. Society" that was not realizing expectations in Beaufort, due to the poor state of religion and two years of crop failure. Manly also testifies that the society would move with Brantly to Augusta. Besides Manly, the Society supported Benjamin Fiveash and a certain "Br. House, son of a Baptist Minister in Georgia" (Basil Manly, Sr., Beaufort, South Carolina, to Iveson L. Brookes, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, ALS, 19 April 1819, MFP). Perhaps Brantly's Society existed as an auxiliary of the Charleston General Committee, which is the only southern agency that Manly mentions in a later letter (Basil Manly, Sr., Oak Mount, Chatham County, North Carolina, to Iveson L. Brookes, Greensborough, Guilford County, North Carolina, ALS, 4 October 1819, MFP).

<sup>50</sup>Basil Manly, Sr., Columbia, South Carolina, to Captain Basil Manly, Pittsborough, North Carolina, ALS, 9 July 1821, MFP.

<sup>51</sup>Quoted in Richard Fuller, *Intrepid Faith. A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. William Tomlinson Brantly, D. D.; with A Sketch of His Life and Character; Delivered at the Request of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, S. C.* (Charleston: Published by the Church, 1845), 30. For more on Manly's decision to go to Brantly's alma mater, see Fuller, *Chaplain*, 23-25.

<sup>52</sup>One memoir noted, "His influence, during this period of his residence in Georgia, was extensively felt through various channels, and especially in organizing the Baptist Convention of the State, and in promoting the cause of Missions and of Ministerial Education" (Sprague, *Annals*, 6:498).

level, Brantly supported missions and education in different ways. Regarding general education, Brantly joined with Presbyterians in serving as a vice-president of the Georgia Education Society, started by Hopewell Presbytery.<sup>53</sup> But regarding ministerial training, Brantly confined his work to Baptists. Similarly in missions, Brantly did not join the Georgia Foreign and Domestic Missionary Society, but chose instead to join with his Baptist brethren in forming a state convention for Georgia. Along with other Baptists, he ignored Presbyterian John S. Wilson's appeal for "*an union of effort*" in promoting the Redeemer's kingdom in Georgia.<sup>54</sup> In forming their own convention, Georgia Baptists were following the example of the Triennial Convention, which was the first strictly denominational missionary organization on a national level. Georgia Baptists were also following the example of South Carolina, in organizing not simply a society, but a *convention*, which the Georgians judiciously called a "general association," perhaps thereby avoiding the stigma of the term "convention."<sup>55</sup>

At Powelton on 27 June 1822, the "General Baptist Association for the State of Georgia" was formed under the leadership of Georgia native Jesse Mercer, New England emigrant Adiel Sherwood, and William T. Brantly. As tradition has it, Mercer prayed,

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<sup>53</sup>"Georgia Education Society," *The Missionary*, 25 August 1823, pp. 38-39. The Georgia Association had been in general association with Hopewell Presbytery (Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 68).

<sup>54</sup>In late 1823, Wilson called for the three largest denominations in Georgia—the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians—to meet for deliberations about the "best means for promoting the growth of grace in ourselves, and for spreading its influence in our respective neighborhoods" (John S. Wilson, "A Letter Addressed to the Ministers of the Gospel of Every Denomination in the Upper Parts of Georgia," *The Missionary*, 8 December 1823, p. 97). No Baptist responded in print until Elisha Battle did in June 1824, declaring that Baptists thought "it best and most likely to promote peace and friendship, to be separate." He testified, "In our efforts to Christianize the Indians we all aim at the same thing, but we think it best to have our funds separate, though occasionally we contribute to yours, and you to ours, and we have our separate schools. This we think is best. As to our close communion, I know it is not for want of brotherly affection that we separate" (E. Battle, "To the Rev. John S. Wilson," *The Missionary*, 5 July 1824, p. 10). Battle mentioned close communion because he felt Wilson's meeting would "have a tendency to make the conduct of the Baptists look unfriendly" (Battle, "To Wilson," 10). Indeed, Wilson had appointed a meeting on 6 May 1824, which included the Lord's Supper, but he did not expect many non-Presbyterians to attend (*The Missionary*, 19 April 1824, p. 174).

<sup>55</sup>Missionary Baptists in Pennsylvania later reported objections to the name "convention" due either to the name itself or to their inability to form a true convention. As a result, they called their group "an Association for Missionary Purposes" after the example of Virginia (*Minutes of the Second Annual Meeting of the Baptist General Association of Pennsylvania, for Missionary Purposes; Held at the Meeting House of Fifth Baptist Church, Phil'a., June 4, 1829 . . .* [Philadelphia: John Young, 1829], 15).

Sherwood preached, and Brantly wrote the convention's constitution.<sup>56</sup> In this constitution, Brantly listed "union and co-operation," revival plans, an education fund, and general correspondence among the "specific objects" of the new body.<sup>57</sup>

These objects received elaboration in the General Association's inaugural address to the associations, in which Brantly cited at least four reasons for a statewide organization. First, correspondence alone had failed to give Georgia Baptists "that fulness and affection of harmony which beautifies the heirs of salvation." Second, the need for "revival of religion" demanded "solemn, prayerful deliberation, upon the best methods for producing a change in this dismal history of events." As proof of the need, Brantly cited the woeful habit of most churches hearing the Gospel just once a month. Third, unnecessary contentions and dens of leniency demanded a "uniformity in discipline." Fourth, God's work demanded more men and better pay. In Brantly's opinion, "It is most evident that our Churches have only themselves to blame for the fewness of their ministers." To correct this, Brantly urged education for future ministers and salary for current ministers.<sup>58</sup>

The General Association met with suspicion from many within the other associations. According to one advocate, many suspected "a conspiracy against the

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<sup>56</sup>Ragsdale, *A Glance Backward*, 5. For more information on the early years of the General Association, see Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 18-55. The more on the role of Adiel Sherwood, who first proposed the idea of a state convention within the 1820 meeting of the Sarepta Association, see Jarrett

Burch, *Adiel Sherwood: Baptist Antebellum Pioneer in Georgia*, Baptists: History, Literature, Theology, Hymns (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 85-116. For more on Jesse Mercer and the Georgia state convention, see Anthony L. Chute, *A Piety above the Common Standard: Jesse Mercer and the Defense of Evangelistic Calvinism*, Baptists: History, Literature, Theology, Hymns (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 46-47.

<sup>57</sup>See the tenth article of the General Association's constitution (*Minutes of the General Baptist Association for the State of Georgia [1822]* [n.p., n.d.], 4).

<sup>58</sup>"Address," in *Minutes*, General Baptist Association for the State of Georgia, 1822, 5-8; cf. the preface to the constitution (*ibid.*, 3). For further elaboration on some of these reasons, see later addresses (e.g., on uniformity in discipline, see *Minutes of the General Association of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia; Which Held its 3d Annual Meeting in Eatonton, Putnam County, on the 22d, 23d, 24th April, 1824* [n.p., n.d.], 6-7).



liberties of their fellow-christians.”<sup>59</sup> In 1822, Brantly met this suspicion personally. The General Association sent Brantly and other messengers to the Hephzibah Association, in order to explain the new organization and to solicit the plan’s acceptance. Though the association had been in favor of missions in 1818, the hostile party had ruled since 1819.<sup>60</sup> After introducing himself, Brantly was rudely refused a seat, but he kept silent. Moreover, his letter of correspondence was put to the vote, not to be tabled, but to be thrown *under* the table! Those opposed to the letter had to stand. One heavy man voted so hard that (according to one witness) he “not only rose to his feet, but, wonderful to tell, leaped from the floor, coming down flat-footed, with all his weight, making a tremendous noise, and jarring every plank and beam of the frail tenement where they were sitting.” And as if that was not enough, another man (or perhaps the same one), stood to lecture Brantly, waving a hickory wand toward his head and yelling that Brantly was

engaged in a low, mean, sneaking business; that this missionary abomination was like a cat with nine lives—they thought they had killed it! And killed it! And, lo! Here it had coming poking up again! But now they had made sure work of it, and that if he knew what was for his good, he would leave, and never show himself in that body again.<sup>61</sup>

Rather than leave, Brantly honored the request made by the host congregation at Rocky Creek to preach on the following day, which was Sunday. In “meek dignity,” Brantly reportedly “rose above himself” and preached the Gospel:

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<sup>59</sup>As a solution, the advocate called for union in effort—to silence by good fruit the deluded, who were expecting “results without labour, the end without the means” (A Baptist, “The General Baptist Association of the State of Georgia,” *The Missionary*, 29 July 1822, p. 25).

<sup>60</sup>Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 74. One member of the association, Jordan Smith, became a leading antimission proponent. After serving as moderator in 1823, Smith later separated from the Hephzibah Association to form a new association and fomented trouble by republishing Joshua Lawrence’s circular from the antimissionary Kehuckee Association of North Carolina (see Burch, *Sherwood*, 69).

<sup>61</sup>Campbell, *Georgia Baptists*, 389, per eyewitness testimony of J. H. T. Kilpatrick. According to the minutes, on the last day of the annual meeting, the association did take up and read “the letter and minutes from the General Association.” The minutes also record that Brantly was allowed to “take up the [General Association’s] constitution, article by article, and explain the views and intentions of the above named General Association,” before the “plan was rejected” (*Minutes of the Hephzibah Baptist Association, Convened at Rocky Creek Meeting-House, Burke County, Georgia, Commencing on Thursday, the Nineteenth of September, 1822, and Continued till Saturday, the Twenty-first [n.p., n.d.], 3*).

He rose and announced his text,—Job xxxvi. 2. “Suffer me a little, and I will show that I have yet to speak on God’s behalf.” From this starting point, he poured forth the Divine message of grace to guilty men, in a strain so grand, subduing and attractive, that, though no visible manifestation of Deity was given, and the Almighty answered not out of the whirlwind, the stricken multitude could scarcely have been more affected and overwhelmed, had such really been the case. By an action not uncommon among the Southern Churches, while he was yet speaking, he came down from the platform, and nearly the whole assembly rushed involuntarily to meet him. Down they fell upon their knees, many at once asking him to pray for them, while the big tears in profusion coursed down his manly face.<sup>62</sup>

This incident illustrates so well why the General Association later commended Brantly for “his Christian deportment and faithful discharge of ministerial duties.”<sup>63</sup> As he himself testified, because Baptist unions are “formed upon the principles of popular delegation,” they require “much care and kind feeling to maintain [their] integrity.”<sup>64</sup>

In general, Brantly could not understand how associated Baptists could object to a *general* association, for a state association was nothing more than an association of associations.<sup>65</sup> As assistant clerk, Brantly wrote the General Association’s first four annual addresses (1822-25), making several appeals for the consistency of the new body with New Testament principles.<sup>66</sup> After one year of campaigning, Brantly began openly

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<sup>62</sup>M., “Dr. Brantly,” *CI*, 9 May 1845, n.p. Basil Manly, Sr. later claimed that Brantly had represented the “Georgia Association,” but this reference seems to be either a slip of memory or a mistaken reference to the General Association using the state’s name (see his letter in Sprague, *Annals*, 6:502).

<sup>63</sup>*Minutes*, General Association of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, 1826, 7; Ragsdale, *A Glance Backward*, 2.

<sup>64</sup>Brantly, *Saints Repose in Death*, 29.

<sup>65</sup>“Address,” *Minutes*, General Baptist Association for the State of Georgia, 1822, 6. The logic of an association of associations found expression within the constitution of Georgia’s General Association: e.g., Article 9 expounds, “No decision shall be further binding upon any Association, than the decisions of Associations are upon the Churches which compose them” (*ibid.*, 3). Even queries could be put from the associations, just as churches queried the associations, according to Article 8 (*ibid.*, 4).

The simple argument of this logic hides one important difference. An association of *associations* removes direct representation from the churches. Though a church’s delegates would always have a place in the association, none of them may be chosen to appear at the state level. From this perspective, it becomes easier to sympathize with those Baptists who remained suspicious of a state “aristocracy.” As one of the elite pastors, Brantly appears to have been oblivious to these objections.

<sup>66</sup>For example, Brantly reasoned: Did some object to missionary exertions? If so, let them criticize the apostles and the Author of the Great Commission. Did others object to collecting money? The early churches were commanded to give. Or to educating ministers? Yes, God is in no need of man’s education, but neither is He in need of man’s ignorance. Or to aristocratic pretensions? Surely the shoe fits both ways, for those who remain aloof claim superior holiness over those who “unite in one body

questioning whether the detractors were truly “restrained by conscientious scruples” in the fear of Christ. Brantly accused them of hiding petty rivalry and laziness behind their cries of conspiracy. To these sluggards, he explained, the General Association “makes religion too much a business, requires too many sacrifices, is quite too active and industrious, requires too much praying, too much preaching, too much money, and, in a word, makes too much noise about the interests of another world.”<sup>67</sup>

In convicting these lazy critics, Brantly appealed to the auspicious timing of God’s providence. Baptists had reached a point of crisis. Looking behind, it amazed Brantly that Baptists had achieved such uniformity in their doctrine and practice, as well as such proliferation, in isolation. But, he reasoned, if “the cause of the Baptists” had prevailed so well in isolation, how then could union fail to produce an even “brighter day?”<sup>68</sup> The choice was now before them. True, Brantly acknowledged, regardless of what men do, the “grand result” of God’s purpose would be the same; but it would not be the same to *men*, who have the responsibility to answer the appeal of events. Delicately holding to both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility, Brantly explained:

This apparent equilibrium invites our interposition, calls aloud for the interference of human agency, and strongly indicates the condescension of Heaven in admitting us to a co-operation with himself in the great work of salvation.<sup>69</sup>

While in the spheres of politics or business, men obey the call of crisis, they inconsistently deny its authority in religion and wrongly let opportunity pass. Baptists could not let this happen without provoking God’s wrath. To Brantly, the signs were clear. The new scheme of a general association—a union not of individuals, but (as the

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where no distinction, or pre-eminence can exist” (“Address, to the Associations,” in *Minutes of the General Association of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, Held at Eatonton, Putnam County, May 27th, 1825, and Continued to the 30th Instant* [Augusta: William J. Bunce, 1825], 20-22).

<sup>67</sup>“Address,” in *Minutes of the General Association of Baptists in the State of Georgia, Held at Powelton, June 26, 1823* (Augusta: The Chronicle and Advertiser Office, 1823), 6. Again, Brantly defined “usefulness” in heavenly terms (see chap. 2).

<sup>68</sup>“Address to the Associations,” *Minutes, General Association of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, 1825*, 17-18.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

Constitution said) of churches—promised nothing less than “a new era in the history of our Church.”<sup>70</sup>

Reviewing these four addresses makes it quite clear that Brantly was no mere organizer. He was a fervent believer in union for effort, and he was so for biblical and theological reasons. Even the appeals to being “consistent and reasonable”—appeals that point to Brantly’s status as a “gentleman theologian”—were appeals filled with Scripture and ardent theological reasons.<sup>71</sup> These theological reasons appear no where better than in Brantly’s first national essays.

### **Theological Justification for United Effort**

In the late 1810s, a reaction began to set in among Baptists against organized missions. Historians have generally called this reaction “antimissionism,” but Brantly often called it “anti-effort.” In part to counter the theological assumptions behind an “anti-effort” mindset, Brantly (under the pseudonym “Theophilus”) contributed nine essays to the Triennial Convention’s oldest periodical, the *American Baptist Magazine*, published in Boston.<sup>72</sup> Through these essays, Brantly revealed the close connection in his mind between united effort, sound theology, and genuine experimental religion. Through these essays, Brantly also gained national recognition. According to Manly, many American Baptists “sought for, read and re-read” the essays with “peculiar interest.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>“Address,” *Minutes*, General Association of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, 1822, 6.

<sup>71</sup>“Address to the Associations,” *Minutes*, General Association of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, 1825, 19.

<sup>72</sup>Brantly’s introductory comment in late 1817 suggests that this is his first contribution: “Rev. Sirs, Should the enclosed essay be deemed worthy of insertion in your publication, it is at your service, from one who may be an occasional contributor to your work at some future period” (Theophilus, “On Habit of Religion,” *ABM* 1 [November 1817]: 207). Brantly may also have contributed to the earlier *Massachusetts Baptist Magazine* (see Thompson, *Rice*, 90-91; M., “Dr. Brantly,” n.p., which mentions 1811). After 1822, Brantly ceased contributing essays to Boston, and sent his occasional comments and articles to the *Columbian Star*, published weekly in Washington, DC.

<sup>73</sup>M., “Dr. Brantly,” n.p.

Before considering these essays, attention should first go to the history of antimissionism itself, in order to assess not only Brantly's insights, but his short-sightedness as well.

### **The Rise of Antimissionism**

Foreign missions initially received widespread support among Baptists. Luther Rice's tour in 1813-14 generated no substantial opposition. By 1815, William Staughton claimed that almost all of the 115 Baptist Associations stood behind the Triennial Convention.<sup>74</sup> Even as late as 1818, John Mason Peck, the Convention's leading missionary to the West, found support in Illinois. But beginning in that same year, Peck experienced a rude rejection in Missouri, which he marked as "the first overt act by the antinomian . . . faction."<sup>75</sup> In 1820, Illinois Baptists also rejected Peck. Soon this reaction against the Convention appeared throughout the West, so that by 1821 in Tennessee (according to one contemporary), "Not a man ventured to open his mouth in favor of any benevolent enterprise or action."<sup>76</sup> Publications against mission societies also appeared by men such as John Taylor, Daniel Parker, and Alexander Campbell. Beginning in 1826, the reaction started capturing whole associations, such as the Kehuckee Association in North Carolina (1827), the Baltimore Association in Maryland (1832), and the Ocmulgee Association in Georgia (1836). Finally, by 1837, the reaction matured into a full institutional separation between those of the Convention and those who claimed to be the "Primitive Baptists."<sup>77</sup>

Many contemporaries and scholars have labeled this reaction movement the *antimission movement*. While the basic traits and leaders are well-known, scholars have

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<sup>74</sup>Ira Durwood Hudgins, "The Anti-Missionary Controversy Among Baptists," *The Chronicle* 14 (October 1951): 150.

<sup>75</sup>Quoted from Rufus Babcock, Jr., *Memoir of John Mason Peck* (1864) in Harry L. Poe, "The History of the Anti-Missionary Baptists," *The Chronicle* 2 (April 1939): 54.

<sup>76</sup>William W. Sweet, ed., *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists 1783-1830, A Collection of Source Material* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931; reprint, New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), 63.

<sup>77</sup>For more overview of this reaction, see McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 370-80.

disagreed on the nature and the causes of the movement. Some confusion has arisen from the coincidence of the Baptist split and the more well-known Presbyterian split, leading to inadvertent description of “Old School Baptists” in terms of “Old School Presbyterians.”<sup>78</sup> Some confusion has also arisen from the bias of the scholars themselves, whose works have recently been classified as either “a history from within” or “a history from without.”<sup>79</sup> In addition, the term “antimission” itself is a misnomer. In countering this misnomer, Ira Durwood Hudgins points to three facts: (1) Baptists have always considered themselves mission-minded and could point to their phenomenal growth as proof; (2) the first overtures of the Triennial Convention were warmly received; and (3) the “antimission” Baptists furiously denied it, claiming the controversy was not over missions but over means. Hudgins concludes, “Basically the opposition was aimed at the new organizations.”<sup>80</sup> Antimissionism was really a reactionary movement that could perhaps better be called (to borrow Charles Chaney’s term) “antisocietism.”<sup>81</sup>

Apart from the histories from both within and without, more neutral studies of the antimission movement are often based on the primary sources collected by historian William Warren Sweet. From his research into the West, Sweet delineated two general traits. First, denominational statistics show that “anti-missionism was largely a frontier movement,” confined mainly to the antebellum West and South. Second, antimissionism was “peculiar” to the Baptists, for it “did not appear in the other frontier churches.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>E.g., Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 301-28.

<sup>79</sup>Burch, *Sherwood*, 65. For recent scholarship on Primitive Baptists, see John G. Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998); James Rhett Matthias, “Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed?: The Origins of the Primitive Baptists, 1800-1840” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990); cf. Burch, *Sherwood*, 63-69.

<sup>80</sup>Hudgins, “Anti-Missionary Controversy,” 152-54.

<sup>81</sup>Chaney, “Evaluation,” 60. Against the assumption that “the controversy was anti-missionary in nature and theological in source,” Hudgins argues that “opposition was aimed at the new organizations,” and that hyper-Calvinism then presented handy arguments (“Anti-Missionary Controversy,” 147, 152).

<sup>82</sup>Sweet, *Religion*, 66, 67. In contrast to seeing denomination as the common factor, for both West and South, Bertram Wyatt-Brown roundly claims that the anti-mission movement “represents the

Based on these traits, some conclusions can be drawn about the causes of the movement. As a frontier movement, antissionism must have some roots in a rural frontier mindset. Aspects of this mindset include: democratic individualism, which rejects the Whig theory of a “national religion;” ministerial pride from having evangelized the frontier without *any* pay or formal theological education; and fear of Eastern paternalism.<sup>83</sup> As a Baptist movement, antissionism must also have some roots in historic Baptist self-identity. Aspects of this identity include: a Calvinistic suspicion of both human initiation and supposed prerequisites to Gospel ministry; a deep-seated love for congregational independence, along with a concomitant fear of centralized authority; and the regulative principle, which demands that every form of religion have scriptural precedent.<sup>84</sup> Even the concern for being a “primitive” Baptist shows the centrality of Baptist self-identity.

In sympathy to the frontiersmen, Hudgins has also pointed to some more hidden causes within the Triennial Convention itself. When the Convention first appeared, the cause was foreign missions and so was warmly embraced. But later, when the Convention treated the frontier *itself* as a mission field, multitudes of Baptists already there took offence. Home missions had usually meant missions to Indians, not to frontiersmen themselves. Then in 1820, the Convention added education to the load, dramatically increasing the need for funding. Is it any surprise that the new “money phase” of the Convention met with cries of “begging?”<sup>85</sup> These facts underscore again

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persistent southern struggle to preserve old values in an alien, changing, often self-righteous world” (“The Antission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture,” *The Journal of Southern History* 36 [November 1970]: 529).

<sup>83</sup>Chaney, “Evaluation,” 59-60, 61; Hudgins, “Anti-Missionary Controversy,” 153, 157, 158, 160; Poe, “History,” 58.

<sup>84</sup>Poe, “History,” 56, 58, 60; Chaney, “Evaluation,” 60; Hudgins, “Anti-Missionary Controversy,” 156.

<sup>85</sup>Hudgins, “Anti-Missionary Controversy,” 158-60; Eminhizer, “Rise and Fall,” 78. Even a later American Baptist historian called the actions of the Columbian College agents “begging tours” (Edward C. Starr, “William Staughton: Baptist Educator and Founder of the First Baptist Theological School in Philadelphia,” *The Chronicle* 12 [October 1949]: 176).

that antimissionism was a reaction movement. In one sense, it is easy to overlook the controversy's biggest cause—the sheer novelty of the Triennial Convention itself.

### **The Inconsistency of Antimissionism**

In his essays for the *American Baptist Magazine*, Brantly often focused on a lack of *consistency*. For example, Brantly criticized the “dissimulation” of ministers who regularly assumed “a habit of artificial severity, pathos, or affection,” but lacked the corresponding inner workings of the heart.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Brantly detected a lack of consistency in those who claimed to believe in Calvinistic experimental religion, but did little or nothing good. In an age marked by New England theology's quest for a consistent Calvinism, it is fascinating to observe how Brantly's consistency does not concern knotty theological conundrums, but rather a consistency between theology and practice. Brantly accused his opponents of at least three inconsistencies.

First, Brantly's opponents did not bring their emphasis on regeneration to its consistent conclusion. Just as taste requires sense and actively builds upon it, so consistent experimental religion not only requires a renewed nature, but builds upon it with active motives such as longings for immortality, heavenly society, and God's glory.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the essence of a new nature must express itself in action, and in action that exceeds mere mechanical habits. The contrast between habit and action comes out most clearly in an essay significantly entitled, “The Importance of Actual Preparation for Death.” The *essential* preparation for death is, of course, regeneration—a state of being, which also has “the dispositions and habits of a renewed soul”—but “actual preparation will comprehend something more than what is merely habitual.” It is to the

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<sup>86</sup>Theophilus, “On the Danger of Dissimulation in Religion,” *ABM* 3 (November 1821): 210. Brantly defines “dissimulation” as “all that excess of religious appearance in the conduct, beyond the existing state of the heart” (*ibid.*, 209). Brantly thought so much of the article, he later reprinted it in his own magazine (*CI*, 4 August 1832, pp. 65-68).

<sup>87</sup>Theophilus, “Joy in the God of Salvation,” *ABM* 2 (March 1819): 45.



*actual* preparation that the promises of future bliss are often applied (e.g., 2 Tim 4:8, “to all who have loved His appearing”).<sup>88</sup>

As a consequence of this inconsistency, many professors of religion delude themselves, thinking chiefly in terms of being in a certain state and drawing comfort from their mindless habits. According to Brantly, habit cannot sustain “solid assurance,” for “accidental rectitude is too transient and variable.” Surprisingly, Brantly claims, “It is not enough for the actions to be right.” Neither “blind formality” nor “heartless conformity” suffice, for “to be right without a reason, and to be wrong, are nearly the same thing.” In contrast, “It is the concern of a christian to act from motive and principle.” What moves the Christian is the approbation of God as exhibited in Scripture and confirmed in conscience.<sup>89</sup> True profession of religion is continual, voluntary, and solemn—an act of gratitude in which the Christian does not pay off a debt, but rather “employs the munificence of his benefactor to set forth his praise.”<sup>90</sup>

Second, in counseling the deluded, Brantly’s opponents inconsistently applied the doctrines of Calvinism. In his own essay “On Assurance” (one of his best written works ever), Brantly attempted to drive these “votaries of deception” from their “spurious faith” by exposing a “defective assurance” as “a spiritual disease.” Rather than

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<sup>88</sup>Theophilus, “Importance of Actual Preparation for Death,” *ABM* 2 (July 1819): 121-22. This essay may have been the first Brantly wrote after Anna’s death, for the same issue announces her death.

<sup>89</sup>See Theophilus, “On Habit in Religion,” 208; idem, “On Discerning Between the Righteous and the Wicked,” *ABM* 3 (March 1822): 294-95. The differentiation between sense (which is a constant state of being) and taste (which is actively developed) is made in Brantly, “Joy in the God of Salvation,” 45-46, which cites Heb 5:14 for support. In another venue, Brantly wrote that it is “not enough for a Christian that he be found in the right way, he must know why he is in that way” (“Circular Letter,” Georgia Baptist Association, 1822, in Mercer, *History*, 263).

<sup>90</sup>Theophilus, “On Profession,” *ABM* 1 (November 1818): 438. In emphasizing the activity of a renewed nature, Brantly did not deny the necessity of a renewed nature. Reflecting his belief in the doctrine of total depravity, Brantly once likened fallen nature to a “moral edifice, which . . . though in ruins, possesses many objects of admiration and curiosity. . . . But, whatever beauty and grandeur there may be in the ruins of a splendid structure, it can no longer answer the purpose of the builder . . . and . . . it will never invite a settled residence” (Theophilus, “On Discerning Between the Righteous and the Wicked,” *ABM* 3 [January 1822]: 247). In other words, the doctrine of total depravity does not teach the *extinction* of natural human excellence, but only its total perversion and unfitness for God’s intention. Similarly, God’s work of renovation is a process in which not every fallen piece is repaired at once, but at least the designs of the Builder can once again be served (*ibid.*, 293).

possessing a happy medium between presumption and despair, open doubters in actuality exclude themselves from the promises of God, for these are conditioned upon faith, not doubt. Moreover, to those teachers who countenance such doubt under the false guise of gentleness, Brantly charged that they lack integrity and injure their own cause. For who can glory in the grace of perseverance, but those who have assurance? Or who can rejoice in election but the same?<sup>91</sup> In other words, the traditional doctrines of Calvinism—election, regeneration, and perseverance—enjoin active religion, not doubting or habitual religion. Therefore, Brantly asserted that consistent Calvinism is active, and not merely habitual. True experimental religion focuses more on active motives than on essences like a renewed nature.

Third, Brantly accused his opponents of not living out their prayers. He asserted, “Fervent petitions, and cold exertions . . . is a conduct too much at variance with itself to claim the shadow of toleration in a mind studious of consistency.” The “principles of congruity and moral integrity” bind those who pray for a good to seek its attainment. Do Christians not treat work in this way? Do they not pray for their daily bread and then go to work? Therefore, Brantly infers, “The intervention of means in the economy of grace is altogether as evident as in the economy of nature.”<sup>92</sup>

The mention of means points to the theological crux of the controversy—the consistency of means with grace. This consistency undergirded much of Brantly’s essays. For example, in considering which duties could be enforced on the unconverted, Brantly set few limits, for “nearly all the requirements of God’s word are matters of duty and of grace at the same time.”<sup>93</sup> Therefore, preachers could consistently demand “immediate renunciation” of sins and “immediate compliance” with all the duties of

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<sup>91</sup>Theophilus, “On Assurance,” *ABM* 3 (September 1821): 170-72.

<sup>92</sup>Theophilus, “Exertions, As Well As Prayers, Necessary to the Prosperity of Zion,” *ABM* 1 (July 1818): 361-62.

<sup>93</sup>Theophilus, “On the Duties to be Enforced on the Unconverted,” *ABM* 3 (September 1822): 409. E.g., Brantly mentions faith (Phil 1:29), repentance (Acts 5:31), and attaining heaven (John 6:27).

mature Christianity. Moreover, preachers should make such demands, because failing to do so not only girds the impenitent with excuses, but also “limits the efforts which Christians should make for the conversion of men.” For Brantly, the congruity of means and grace was one of religion’s “ultimate laws,” resembling the sublime laws of science—laws that rest on facts, but elude definition and explanation. No one could “explain the mystery of employing active exertions for the attainment of that good which after all, must come from the bounty of Heaven” alone.<sup>94</sup>

### **Providence and Covetousness**

In Brantly’s defense of means, he seems at times to have assumed that his opponents denied the use of means altogether, when in reality the controversy focused on *which* means were legitimate.<sup>95</sup> Missing the point of the debate, Brantly boldly accused, “One who refuses his aid to plans formed for the advancement of religion, cannot make a consistent prayer.”<sup>96</sup> Though one may question the consistency of those who talk and do not give (e.g., Jas 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17-18), Brantly’s accusation presupposes both a divine attitude towards the “plans formed for the advancement of religion” and a human attitude behind the refusal to aid these plans. These presuppositions appeared publicly in Brantly’s early circular letters.

First, regarding the divine attitude towards the plans, Brantly and the leaders of the Triennial Convention presupposed providential guidance. For example, in Brantly and Johnson’s influential circular, duty is based on general benevolence, the prophecies of Scripture, and the providence of God. Regarding the latter, Scripture tells what shall take place, but providence directs when it takes place. Therefore, in light of the prophecy

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 407-09. One of Brantly’s favorite proofs seems to be Jesus’ use of “labor” in John 6:27 (e.g., “Circular Letter,” Georgia Baptist Association, 1822, in Mercer, *History*, 263).

<sup>95</sup>From the same year, Brantly wrote of some whose system warped their minds, making “the very ideas of means and grace . . . seem contradictory and inconsistent” (“Circular Letter,” Georgia Baptist Association, 1822, in Mercer, *History*, 269-70).

<sup>96</sup>Theophilus, “Exertions,” 362. In contrast to his opponents’ skepticism, Brantly had great confidence in “the vast train of means” resulting in “the good of Zion” (ibid., 366).

that “the whole earth shall be full of his glory” and the providential rise of the “Missionary spirit,” the circular concludes that the Millennium “*fast* approaches.” Therefore, the times demanded missionary exertion. But even more specifically, since “God . . . has been pleased to bring some . . . Missionaries over to the Baptist persuasion” (namely, Rice and Judson), the circular asks climactically:

Shall they present themselves in vain? Friends and Brethren, can the finger of Divine Providence, so evidently marking out the path for us, be mistaken? Can the Lord’s will, so clearly made known in this dispensation, be misinterpreted? Surely not: it cannot be.<sup>97</sup>

Therefore, if asked for a divine mandate, Brantly could cite providence. Those who opposed missionary exertions were disobeying the clear providential guidance of God Himself.

The authority of the “finger of Divine Providence” showed up quite plainly when the Triennial Convention expanded. In 1814, President Richard Furman guardedly announced that the conversion of Judson and Rice “appears to have been of the Lord and designed as a means of exciting the attention of our churches to foreign Missions.”<sup>98</sup> In 1817, the guarded language retreated. Furman asserted that the readiness of the associations and the zeal of the societies “justify the conclusion that the Head of the church is preparing to effect some glorious result.” As an axiom, Furman states, “Means are usually proportioned to the magnitude of the objects which infinite intelligence designs to accomplish.” When asked where “combined exertions” should strike first, Furman expressed his amazing confidence in providential guidance:

HE who stirs up his people to offer cheerfully of their substance, and his messengers to venture forth in his name, commonly points by the finger of his providence to the field for labour, as distinctly as he did in the apostolic age by impressive visions, or

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<sup>97</sup>The Savannah Baptist Society for Foreign Missions, “Circular Address,” 7. In emphasizing benevolent evangelism and providential guidance, Johnson and Brantly echoed the Boston constitution upon which theirs is based (see The Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel in India and Other Foreign Parts, “Foreign Mission Society,” 284).

<sup>98</sup>“Address,” *Proceedings of the Baptist Convention for Missionary Purposes*, 1814, 41.

the immediate voice of his holy Spirit. The kingdoms of Providence and grace, are, by THE HEIR OF ALL THINGS, controlled and harmonized.<sup>99</sup>

In other words, providential guidance is based firmly on the harmony of grace and nature. Moreover, the finger of providence imparts as much duty as the voice of God Himself! Therefore, those who opposed the missionary effort were actually opposing God.

Second, regarding the human attitude to refuse aid to the plans, Brantly presupposed a covetous love of money. That money lay at the center of the controversy, few will doubt, for many scholars have noted the correlation between hard economic times and the antimission movement.<sup>100</sup> But Brantly presupposed covetousness—a sinful love of money. Was this proper? Brantly’s friend W. B. Johnson had once been warned against drawing this inference by Edmund Botsford, a Baptist pastor at Georgetown, South Carolina. While in route to the 1814 Triennial Convention, Botsford warned the young minister not to misjudge of Baptists from other states, who in contrast to generous Carolinians

may seem not so generous, who yet, owing to a different education, may not be esteemed niggardly or covetous—Mind this. People, who labor hard, set more value on money than those who have others to labor for them.<sup>101</sup>

In contrast to Botsford’s wisdom, Brantly showed little to no hesitation in esteeming meager giving as covetousness. To him, social class made little difference. Since he had grown up among the poor, and now served many of the rich, Brantly seems to have gained some insight into how each class thought. In his 1812 circular letter on covetousness, Brantly explained, “A poor man sees covetousness only as a rich man’s vice, while a rich man justifies his covetousness as only prudent care.” Yet within both the rich and the poor, Brantly declared, covetousness “continually meditates on increase”

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<sup>99</sup>“Address,” *Proceedings*, General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America, for Foreign Missions, 1817, 126-27. In founding the first state convention, Furman alluded to “the call” of providence that demanded “immediate exertion” (Rogers, *Furman*, 306).

<sup>100</sup>E.g., Poe, “History,” 64; Hudgins, “Anti-Missionary Controversy,” 159-60; and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Antimission Movement,” 509-10.

<sup>101</sup>Quoted in Thompson, *Rice*, 94.

and feels no true inclination to charity. Rapacious in acquisition and tenacious in retention, covetousness is nothing less than idolatry—one's chief thought, chief trust, and chief desire.<sup>102</sup>

As proof of covetousness, Brantly's 1822 circular letter on revival pointed to the "slender and incompetent support given to ministers of religion." If Baptists really loved revival of religion more than their money, they would surely pay their *own* ministers well. To make his point, Brantly first alluded to several signs of religious declension. On the one hand, preachers neglected both "the very language of the text" and many texts altogether, in favor of "maxims and rules of conduct." On the other hand, few among the congregations remembered the Sabbath, the Lord at His table, or their baptism—and that even among *Baptists!* But how could the neglect of God's word and ordinances be corrected, when those who administer these are themselves neglected? Churches should collaborate together so that a minister could fully devote himself to "visiting and preaching daily." He chided, "Do not be afraid of making them proud by making them easy, because riches will be as great a snare to you as it is to them."<sup>103</sup> Since God has chosen men as means of giving the Gospel, churches should pay them well and "pray the Lord of the harvest, to increase the number, and improve the qualifications of labourers for this sacred field."<sup>104</sup>

These remarks showed that Brantly's chief interest lay not in mere missions but in revival, as both the seed and fruit of missions. In other words, not supporting missions bothered him both because it indicated a declension in religion and because it

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<sup>102</sup>"Circular Letter," *Minutes*, Savannah River Baptist Association, 1812, 8, 10-11.

<sup>103</sup>"Circular Letter," Georgia Baptist Association, 1822, in Mercer, *History*, 266, 258-59, 261, 263-65, 268, 272; cf. "Circular Letter," *Minutes*, Savannah River Baptist Association, 1812, 12. For a postmodern analysis of Brantly's 1822 circular as presenting a "unified vision of social imagination and practice," see Daryl Black, "'The Excitement of High and Holy Affections': Baptist Revival and Cultural Creation in the Upper-Piedmont Georgia Cotton Belt, 1800-1828," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 87 (Fall & Winter 2003): 342-43. In reality, Brantly had little need for imagination. In early 1823, he threatened to resign from the Augusta church, because the predominantly nominal membership showed no "interest in the prosperity of the church" (Church Book, Augusta Baptist Church, 23 March 1823).

<sup>104</sup>Theophilus, "Exertions," 365.

prohibited a larger revival from coming. Therefore, the initial debate with the antimission movement shows that Brantly was not just an organizer or promoter of missions. His life work was to unite men in useful effort for the purpose of a revival, and ultimately, the unending revival of the millennial Kingdom.

### **A Final Meeting in Augusta**

The 1826 meeting of the General Association of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia claims a peculiar level of historical importance in light of what lay ahead. For Brantly in particular, it was his final meeting with fellow Georgians. He had accepted the call to become the pastor of First Baptist Church in Philadelphia, thereby opening the possibility of national leadership. In gratitude of past service, the state organization that Brantly had helped to found and to defend resolved to furnish a letter of recognition to one who “has much endeared himself to us by his christian deportment, and faithful discharge of ministerial duties.”<sup>105</sup> The association also sent him north as their delegate to the national convention held in New York in the next month. This particular national convention gives another reason for the importance of the 1826 Georgia meeting. The Georgia meeting met in Augusta and included several guests, most noticeably Luther Rice, William B. Johnson, and Basil Manly. In a way both the location and the guests foreshadowed the future. Since the 1826 New York meeting marked both the beginning of disunion within the Triennial Convention and the end of Luther Rice’s long history of national prominence, union for effort would not be fully restored until Southern Baptists gathered in this same location in 1845 to form the Southern Baptist Convention under the leadership of William B. Johnson.

The 1826 meeting also commemorated the life of Richard Furman, who had died on 25 August 1825. The General Association noted “with feelings of deep regret . . .

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<sup>105</sup>*Minutes*, Georgia Baptist Association, 1826, 7.

the lamented and afflictive death of the Reverend Richard Furman, D. D.”<sup>106</sup> The death of Richard Furman, a man unquestionably “among the tallest” within the Triennial Convention, opened the possibility of drastic changes within the Convention.<sup>107</sup> In honor of Furman’s life, the Baptist Church in Charleston invited Brantly to give a funeral address, which he delivered and which subsequently received national attention in the *American Baptist Magazine*.<sup>108</sup> In a fitting way, Brantly thus closed his first Southern ministry, giving tribute to the man who more than any other influenced Baptist culture in the South and highly influenced Brantly’s own ambitions.<sup>109</sup>

### Conclusion

The example of Richard Furman and the formation of the Triennial Convention motivated Brantly to make his own contributions to united effort. His early Southern ministries focused on societies for foreign missions and ministerial education. In justifying these efforts against the rise of antimission opposition, Brantly stressed the consistency of means with grace in contrast to the inconsistent Calvinism and piety of his opponents. To Brantly, God had providentially authorized the new united efforts, making apathy an indication of some deeper sin—such as covetousness. Thus, when Brantly moved north, he took with him both his heavenly orientation of usefulness and Furman’s ideal of united effort, which characterized the early years of the Triennial Convention.

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

<sup>107</sup>Rogers, *Furman*, 260.

<sup>108</sup>Brantly, *Saint’s Repose*; William T. Brantly, “Memoir of Rev. Richard Furman, D. D., Late Pastor of the Baptist Church in Charleston, S. C.,” *ABM* 6 (March 1826): 69-77.

<sup>109</sup>Of Furman’s influence, see Benedict *Fifty Years*, 48-49; and John B. Boles, “Foreword to Reprint Edition,” in Rogers, *Furman*, vi. Brantly wrote of Furman’s ministry being “most powerful in preserving the little piety found here and there, and in kindling it where it was not” (W. T. Brantly, “The Late Rev. Dr. Furman,” *SWG*, 1 February 1838, n.p.; cf. Brantly, *Saint’s Repose in Death*, 25-26).



## CHAPTER 4

### A PEACEMAKER IN PHILADELPHIA

When William T. Brantly assumed the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, he entered the ruins of Baptist strife. Over ten years of infighting, especially between Henry Holcombe and William Staughton, had left unresolved tension among Philadelphia Baptists. On the one hand, First Baptist Church no longer belonged to the Philadelphia Association. The two had separated in 1819 over strong disagreements on matters of discipline. On the other hand, First Church itself had split, with some charging Holcombe with heresy, and then, after the controversial pastor's death in 1824, forming a new rival "First Baptist Church."<sup>1</sup> Of those days, one

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<sup>1</sup>For details about the Staughton-Holcombe controversy, which affected both the Philadelphia Association and the Triennial Convention, see Lewis Baldwin, *A Candid Development of Facts, Tending to Exhibit the Real Grounds of Difference Existing between the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Association; also between the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions and Their Late Vice-Presidents: in Letters to Henry Holcombe, D. D., William Rogers, D. D., of Philadelphia, and the Rev. Daniel Dodge, Formerly of Wilmington, Delaware* (Philadelphia: Anderson and Meeman [sic], 1819); William Williams Keen, *The Bi-centennial Celebration of the Founding of the First Baptist Church of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 88-92; and Earl Eugene Eminhizer, "The Rise and Fall of the Triennial Convention" (Th.M. thesis, Crozer Theological Seminary, 1956), 42-57 and Appendix A, vii-xi. For Holcombe's controversial theology, see Henry Holcombe, *Primitive Theology, in a Series of Lectures*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Printed for the author by J. H. Cunningham, 1823), especially chap. 7, "The Vitality of Faith," which is partially reprinted in Keen, *Bi-Centennial Celebration*, 87-89. For a declaration of the disgruntled deacons at First Baptist Church to their own faithfulness to the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, see First Baptist Church, Philadelphia, *To the Baptist Churches throughout the United States, Who Adhere to the Independent or Congregational Form of Church Government, and to the Doctrines Contained in the Confession of Faith Adopted by the Philadelphia Baptist Association, September 25, 1742* (Philadelphia: First Baptist Church, 1825). For general background on Philadelphia Baptists, see David Spencer, *The Early Baptists of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: William Syckelmoore, 1877).

For information on William Staughton (1770-1829), see S. W. Lynd, *Memoir of the Rev. William Staughton, D. D.* (Boston: Lincoln, Edmands, 1834); Edward C. Starr, "William Staughton: Baptist Educator and Founder of the First Baptist Theological School in Philadelphia," *The Chronicle* 12 (October 1949): 167; Roger Hayken, *William Staughton: Baptist Educator, Missionary Advocate and Pastor* (London: Baptist Union Library, 1965). Staughton ranked low with Brantly, who perhaps had little personal contact with the man apart from correspondence as official secretaries (e.g., *Minutes of the Savannah River Association. Held at Newington Church, Scriven County, Geo. Commencing, 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1817* [Savannah: Michael J. Kappel, 1817], 6). Brantly conceded this lack of contact, but thought that it led to a better assessment. In a eulogy, Brantly acknowledged Staughton's legacy as "one of the firmest

trustworthy Baptist eyewitness recalled how “among our ministers in the city of brotherly love, . . . it was painful, instead of pleasant, to go from one house to another, of men who were full of complainings against each other.”<sup>2</sup> In spite of the strife, Brantly succeeded in uniting Baptists. First Church regained unity and prominence among Baptists nationally. On the heels of unity a new association arose, rivaling the Philadelphia Association. By the time of Brantly’s departure in 1837, Philadelphia had become among Baptists, no longer a byword of strife, but of unity. Looking back, it was noted at Brantly’s death, “He was not only a man of peace, as Dr. Dagg has said; he was a peace-maker.”<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will examine Brantly’s successful efforts for a peaceful union of Baptists both within First Baptist Church and among Baptists in the Philadelphia area. These efforts culminated in the formation and activities of the Central Union Association. This association is significant historically, for it arose in contrast to the venerable Philadelphia Association with its famous confession of faith. As Brantly’s brainchild, the new association sheds great light on the founder’s mission of union for useful effort.

### **Unity within First Baptist Church**

In an interesting stroke of providence, Brantly twice followed the lead of Henry Holcombe. In the first instance, it was purely a recommendation, for Holcombe

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supporters of the missionary cause in this country.” Brantly also praised Staughton’s “earlier performances in the pulpit” because they produced “deep and operative convictions,” which Brantly regarded as the “fairest test of a useful ministry.” Regarding the later years, Brantly referred to “injudiciously directed resources,” stating that Staughton’s “moral opulence” never enriched the benevolent societies (W. T. Brantly, “The Late Dr. Staughton,” *CSCI*, 19 December 1829, pp. 395-96). Brantly could have said more, for he had earlier slighted Staughton’s ability to care for students. Though many attribute much to Staughton in promoting Baptist education (e.g., David Benedict, *Fifty Years among the Baptists* [New York: Sheldon & Co., 1860], 46; Robert G. Torbet, *The Baptist Ministry: Then and Now* [Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1953], 31-34), Brantly privately questioned its effectiveness. In 1819, Manly told his friend Iveson Brookes that Brantly “seemed almost to regret that [Brookes] had not consented to become a beneficiary of the Charleston Education Committee.” Elaborating, Brantly confided, “The beneficiaries of the Phil. Ed. Society live ‘from hand to mouth’—That when any of them want a horse [?], Dr. Staughton goes out and gets money to buy one.” Charleston, however, had “permanent resources,” and would even support Brookes at Philadelphia (Basil Manly, Sr., Oak Mount, Chatham County, North Carolina, to Iveson L. Brookes, Greensborough, Guilford County, North Carolina, ALS, 4 October 1819, MFP).

<sup>2</sup>Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 46.

<sup>3</sup>M., “Dr. Brantly,” *CI*, 9 May 1845, n.p.

had not been pastor of the Baptist church in Beaufort for over ten years. In the latter instance, Holcombe was naming his own successor as pastor of First Baptist Church in Philadelphia. On his deathbed, Holcombe counseled the church to call William T. Brantly as their next pastor. Holcombe died on 22 May 1824.

On the surface, Holcombe's choice seems logical. Both men shared much in common, beyond the arbitrary similarities of large body size and Southern origin. Both eschewed systems for a fresh look at Scripture. Both were ardent supporters of a variety of benevolent causes. And both were literary advocates. But how aware was Holcombe of all these similarities? Early in 1823, he testified that he had "not had the honour of the least correspondence [with Brantly] for years."<sup>4</sup> Even in those days, Furman's observation still held in large measure, that Baptists from one region of the country did not see each other often.<sup>5</sup> Probably, Holcombe's choice resulted from Brantly's warm reception of Holcombe's controversial new book, *Primitive Theology*. In the book's second edition, Holcombe quotes Brantly's stellar review of the first edition. Holcombe then adds that after Brantly's review ran in *The Georgia Advertiser*, an additional "500 copies of [the book] were subscribed for in, and near, the city of Augusta *alone*."<sup>6</sup> Holcombe may have recognized in Brantly a man to carry forward his own agenda.

One particular aspect of Holcombe's agenda may have clinched his decision—pacifism. The ex-Revolutionary War captain contended, "The Holy Scriptures, the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, the genius of his religion, and the graces of his genuine disciples, unitedly oppose all carnal WAR, and strongly tend to universal and

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<sup>4</sup>Holcombe, *Primitive Theology*, vi.

<sup>5</sup>"Address," *Proceedings of the Baptist Convention for Missionary Purposes; Held in Philadelphia, in May, 1814* (Philadelphia: Ann Coles, 1814), 42.

<sup>6</sup>On Holcombe's book, Brantly wrote, "A variety of fundamental topics is there discussed with uncommon skill and originality. Correct principles are stated and enforced in the work, with a success of arrangement and a felicity of expression, not often seen in similar treatises. The undersigned recommends the book, with sincere satisfaction, as deserving a place among the standard productions of the present day" (Holcombe, *Primitive Theology*, vii).

permanent PEACE.”<sup>7</sup> No other choice was left for a consistent Christian, for, as Holcombe recalled, not one soldier he knew acted consistently as a Christian during the Revolutionary War.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in December 1822, Holcombe founded the Pennsylvania Peace Society, whose members aspired “at the honour of being *consistent* Christians.”<sup>9</sup> In these sentiments, Brantly largely agreed, but he strongly disavowed having learned them from Holcombe. In the review already cited, Brantly wrote, “The sentiments [Holcombe’s book] contains, on carnal warfare, must accord with the *heart*, if not with the *head*, of every christian. The subscriber has long been of opinion that war, in its *fairest form*, implies a continued violation of humanity and justice; and is therefore wholly incompatible with the genius and tendency of christianity.”<sup>10</sup> Corroboration for Brantly’s claim comes from his reaction to the War of 1812. Brantly cautioned the churches of the Savannah River Association against preoccupation—especially “the eager perusal of Newspapers . . . on the Sabbath”—for “nothing will more certainly produce such an injurious diversion from the grand objects of their vocation, than an *undue* attention to the politics of the day.”<sup>11</sup> Remembering that Brantly was on the coast, exposed to the British fleet, makes this resolution all the more significant. In contrast to Brantly, the Georgia Association for that same year resolved unanimously to support the war, claiming that “this *momentous* crisis” exempted the usual rule of not intermeddling with politics.<sup>12</sup> Since Brantly and Holcombe stood outnumbered in their pacifism, the tie

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 293.

<sup>8</sup>John B. Boles, “Henry Holcombe, A Southern Baptist Reformer in the Age of Jefferson,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54 (Fall 1970): 402.

<sup>9</sup>This phrase is taken from the society’s constitution, which Holcombe republished as an appendix to *Primitive Theology* (see Holcombe, *Primitive Theology*, 295).

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., vii.

<sup>11</sup>*Minutes of the Savannah River Association, Convened at the Union Church, Barnwell District, South-Carolina, 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1813* (n.p., n.d.), 6.

<sup>12</sup>Jesse Mercer, *History of the Georgia Baptist Association* (Washington, GA: n.p., 1838; reprint, Washington, GA: Georgia Baptist Association, 1980), 52-54.

of mutual affection must have grown strong upon discovering each other. As a consequence of Brantly's support, the Pennsylvania Peace Society listed Brantly along with Adoniram Judson and Thomas Jefferson as an honorary member. At the same time, Augusta also had its own thriving peace society.<sup>13</sup>

While Brantly and Holcombe may have shared similar views, they differed considerably in ministerial style. To put it briefly, though both were men of peace, only Brantly was a peacemaker. And First Baptist Church needed peace, for Holcombe had left the church in strife. This strife made Brantly hesitate to come to Philadelphia. Brantly first came to visit the church around October 1824, at which time the church extended to him a call.<sup>14</sup> He accepted, and even started selling off property in Augusta, but he ultimately changed his mind, returning with a letter of resignation the \$1000 given to him. Two of Brantly's three reasons for resigning concerned the inner strife. First, they were "not yet a united people." Brantly had accepted the call on the condition of a resolution to remove "the existing discontents," some of whom were senior deacons. The church had done nothing, perhaps thinking that a new pastor would clear it up. The likelihood of this scenario, Brantly denied. Unity must begin with the deacons. Second, the nature of the dispute went deep, for both sides professed to be "contending for principle." While continuing to pray for them, Brantly could no longer accept the call, saying, "I would sooner suffer the loss of every temporal good than cast myself upon the troublous waters of strife."<sup>15</sup>

Sometime later, the church again called Brantly. This call sent Brantly to his knees for a week of earnest prayer in ascertaining the "course of duty." Then in early September, Brantly again responded in the negative for two main reasons. First, the

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<sup>13</sup>For an overview, see Reid S. Trulson, "Baptist Pacifism: A Heritage of Nonviolence," *ABQ* 10 (September 1991): 199-217.

<sup>14</sup>The call was given on 18 October 1824 (Keen, *Bi-centennial Celebration*, 97).

<sup>15</sup>William T. Brantly, Augusta, Georgia, to the First Baptist Church, Second Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ALS, 19 February 1825, AFBCP.

church still had not removed the “disaffected members,” who were also hostile to Brantly himself. In a bold note of honesty, Brantly confessed, “In going to a new place every man naturally wishes to have as many friends as possible, but when he knows that there are unfriendly minds to watch all his actions, and to mark with unrelenting severity every incident in his life, or in that of his family, he dreads even a puny vengeance which awaits him.” The second line of reasoning concerns Brantly’s Southern ministry. During the previous six months, thirty had been added by baptism, many of whom were “most respectable” in the community. The hidden expectation was that Brantly would be their pastor. Brantly also mentions money. For the past eight years, he had not received less than \$3000 per year. According to his own estimations, he was earning more than any of his brethren. Could Philadelphia match this, or would they accept Brantly’s part-time availability, allowing him to teach again?<sup>16</sup>

From these letters, the magnitude of Brantly’s decision appears. In the South, Brantly had risen to the crest of the wave. As a gentleman theologian, he had both respectability and property. Moreover, the expected revivals were just beginning. How could he cut loose from this port and set sail onto the “waters of strife?” Here, then, was a true-to-life test of Holifield’s theory that the gentlemen theologians succumbed to urbanity as well as rationality. Would Brantly follow the finger of providential blessing, or did the “course of duty” lie in the other direction for reasons less manifest?<sup>17</sup>

The answer apparently came when Brantly heard of “the general reconciliation of October 24, 1825.”<sup>18</sup> Having already told them at the beginning of the year that, if

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<sup>16</sup>William Theophilus Brantly, Augusta, Georgia, to The First Baptist Church, Second Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ALS, 9 September 1825, AFBCP. One son of Brantly testified, “The salary [in Augusta] (including the fees from tuition) was fully \$3,000.00 per annum, together with a house—a very extraordinary salary for those days” (“Biographical Sketches of Prominent Baptists,” 51, in an appendix of [Samuel Boykin], ed., *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia with Biographical Compendium and Portrait Gallery of Baptist Ministers and Georgia Baptists* [[Atlanta]: James P. Harrison, 1881]).

<sup>17</sup>It should be remembered that by the time of his move, Brantly had seven children to care for: Mary Ann (b. 1810), Eliza Carter (b. 1813), William Theophilus, Jr. (b. 1816), Furman (b. 1818), John Joyner (b. 1821), Cornelia (b. 1823), and Adolphus Baptist (b. 1825).

<sup>18</sup>Keen, *Bi-centennial Celebration*, 97.

they found no other man and removed the “impediments” to union, then he would come—he now came, accepting their call on 7 December 1825 for a salary of \$1600 per year.<sup>19</sup> Although this amount exceeded all other Baptist salaries in Philadelphia, it still fell short of his needs in such an expensive city. Ultimately, as one of his sons testified, the importance of the field induced him to accept the call as his duty.<sup>20</sup>

Brantly moved to Philadelphia in late March 1826. As he expected, he again taught school, but this time for only three years.<sup>21</sup> Having insisted that the church gain unity *before* coming, Brantly thus received in the midst of a wilderness, a pacific garden. Under his cultivation, this garden—even in isolation—prospered to such an extent that after six years, Brantly could report of the church:

It is the parent stock of all the Baptist churches in the city of Philadelphia; and contains a larger number of members than any other Baptist church in this region. . . . It has now a Sabbath school of about 300 children, a Bible class of 50 young persons, chiefly members of the church; and several Bible, Tract, and Missionary Societies. It has one Temperance society. The average additions per annum for the last six years, have been about 50.<sup>22</sup>

The peacemaker had gained a foothold. Now it remained to see how Brantly would form fresh connections with other Baptists in the Philadelphia area.

### **Unity among Philadelphia Baptists**

William T. Brantly loved moral momentum. When he looked at a body of men, he did not just consider its size (which could be quite impressive by itself), but also its velocity. The latter impressed him more, for as he said, “The *moral momentum* of bodies must be estimated not by their magnitude alone, but by the spirit of enterprize and

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.; *Biographical Sketches*, 53.

<sup>20</sup>“Biographical Sketches of Prominent Baptists,” 53. According to another memoir, Brantly was moved by the “large sphere of usefulness” presented to him (“Intrepid Faith,” *CR* 10 [December 1845]: 601). Regrettably, Brantly’s acceptance letter is non-extant.

<sup>21</sup>Keen, *Bi-centennial Celebration*, 97.

<sup>22</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Minutes of the Central Union Association, Formed in Philadelphia, July 31st, 1832,” *CI*, 11 August 1832, p. 82. The same report gives the church’s statistics. Seventy-six had been baptized in the previous year, bringing the total membership up to 552 (ibid.).

execution in which they act.” But the converse was also true. A church could have a lot of velocity, but in isolation it lacked the mass to gain a lot of momentum. Therefore, associations existed because “united effort is designed to accomplish what individual power could not.”<sup>23</sup> To use today’s sociological term, Brantly expected a Baptist association to look like a *movement*.

### **Initial Difficulties**

The isolation of First Baptist Church from sister churches posed a serious threat to Brantly’s ideal. When Brantly accepted the post, First Baptist Church had already been unaffiliated for eight years, having left the Philadelphia Association in 1818. The prospects of re-entering this association looked bleak. In October, 1827, the Philadelphia Association sided with the church’s excluded deacons and company by receiving them into the association under the name “First Baptist Church.” As credentials, the fifty-nine members claimed that they alone still adhered to the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. The Philadelphia Association itself had shown bad faith when it had turned down the list of New England Baptists to act as an unprejudiced council to decide on the matter, and instead chose local Baptist ministers. This injustice had led Brantly on 18 July 1827 to decline participating in a council at all. Therefore, given the injustice of the council and the insult of the church’s name, it is little wonder that on 15 October 1827 Brantly issued a call to form a new association. At the time, he got no responses.<sup>24</sup>

The only kind of success Brantly achieved among Baptists outside his church during these early years seems limited to individuals. One individual in particular deserves mention because of his future importance in Georgia to the Southern Baptist Convention—John L. Dagg (1794-1884). When Brantly first came to Philadelphia, Dagg

<sup>23</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 28 November 1829, p. 340.

<sup>24</sup>Keen, *Bi-centennial Celebration*, 90-91, 99.



had already been pastor of Fifth Baptist Church on Sansom Street for almost a year, having replaced William Staughton on 1 May 1825. Dagg found his initial years in Philadelphia difficult, for the schism at First Baptist Church nearly split his congregation as well. The congregation was about evenly divided, and partisan spirit ran high.<sup>25</sup> To top it off, Dagg was alone, being the only settled Baptist pastor in the city at that time. When Brantly arrived in Philadelphia, Dagg thought about how the relationship between their predecessors, Holcombe and Staughton, would affect the relationship between Brantly and himself. In Dagg's mind, it was Brantly's right to stand aloof until Dagg made the first move. Years later, Dagg recalled how the peacemaker handled himself:

[Brantly] did not give me the opportunity to call on him and welcome him to the city, but, in company with the venerated Mercer, neither of whom I had ever seen, came to my dwelling, and, in an interesting interview well calculated to disarm me of any jealousy had I been disposed to indulge it, laid the foundation of a friendship which no animosities ever disturbed, or coolness abated.<sup>26</sup>

This interview must have occurred early—about a month after Brantly's arrival, for Mercer was presumably accompanying Brantly to the late April meeting of the Triennial Convention in New York City.<sup>27</sup> The peacemaker had arrived!

Given Brantly's failure to achieve any union outside his church, it is understandable that Brantly seriously considered returning to the South in 1828. The catalyst for this consideration was an offer from the infant Furman Academy and

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<sup>25</sup>John L. Dagg, *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg, D. D.*, 30, in an appendix of J. L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order*, vol. 2 of *Manual of Theology* ([Charleston, SC]: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990).

<sup>26</sup>J. L. Dagg, "William T. Brantly D. D.," *CI*, 11 April 1845, n.p. Confirmation of Dagg's claim to friendship is found in the interesting way that Brantly included Dagg in his schemes. For example, when the Central Union Association met for the second time, the constitution was augmented so that "delegates from societies, having objects similar to those which are contemplated by this Association, may be admitted from time to time under its discretion." The only delegate mentioned next as falling under this proviso is Dagg, whose church belonged firmly to the Philadelphia Association (see W. T. Brantly, "Special Meeting of the Central Union Association," *CI*, 24 November 1832, p. 321).

<sup>27</sup>*Proceedings of the Fifth Triennial Meeting of the Baptist General Convention, Held in New-York, April, 1826* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1826), 4. Brantly was a delegate that year from the General Association in Georgia (*Minutes of the General Association of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, Held at Augusta, Richmond County, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1826, and Continued to the Thirteenth Instant* [Augusta: William J. Bunce, 1826], 6).

Theological Institution to become its principal and chief instructor. To sweeten the deal, Brantly was also offered the pulpit of Edgefield Baptist Church, where Brantly's protégé Basil Manly had seen huge revivals a few years earlier.<sup>28</sup> The entire package fit Brantly well. By this time in his career, Brantly's long habit of "literary, theological and miscellaneous reading, equal to the advancement of the scholars and divines of his time" was paying off.<sup>29</sup> He was well-qualified to lead a theological school. A year before, Luther Rice had suggested to Obadiah Brown that Brantly be chosen to replace Staughton as president of Columbian College.<sup>30</sup> As for Furman Institute, it needed no introduction. Brantly had often been part of a Georgia delegation at the South Carolina Baptist Convention meetings, seeking a joint effort between the two states in supporting a theological school for educating ministerial candidates.<sup>31</sup> The result was Furman Institute, located in Edgefield, so that both states could access it. The town's proximity to Augusta must have only heightened the appeal. The offer evidently enticed Brantly, for the Philadelphia church scrambled to form a committee, urging their pastor to stay.

In a very formal letter to Brantly, the committee sought to convince both Brantly and the Southern brethren that the interests of the church, the interests of Baptists in the middle states, and the cause of Christ generally all united in urging Brantly to stay. Whereas the church had previously been divided and devoid of regular ministrations, since Brantly came, "the Spirit of the Lord has been poured out," resulting in increased zeal, new members, a raised "tone of piety," and "a spirit of anxious inquiry upon the important concerns of eternity." In addition, the church had now begun to participate in

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<sup>28</sup>Joe M. King, *A History of South Carolina Baptists* (Columbia: The General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964), 189. The school had opened on 15 January 1827. The school's own instructor, Joseph Andrews Warne, principal, resigned in June 1828, inducing the board to elect Brantly as the next principal.

<sup>29</sup>M., "Dr. Brantly," n.p.

<sup>30</sup>Evelyn W. Thompson, *Luther Rice: Believer in Tomorrow* (Nashville: Broadman, 1967), 187.

<sup>31</sup>E.g., *Minutes*, General Association of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, 1826, 8.

the regional Baptist cause. Here again, there had been among the churches “a few designing and ambitious men,” who “in endeavoring to effectuate their own views had well nigh interposed a barrier to Christian feeling and fellowship;” but now, Brantly’s “amiable and conciliating deportment toward the churches” had started fresh progress. Why should these precious means then be removed so early? In comparison to Baptists in the South, Pennsylvania languished under neglect. Beyond reasons about the church or the state, the committee climaxed with the general cause of Christ—where Brantly would be “most useful” in the “general interests of the Redeemer’s kingdom.” Where, for example, in the South could Brantly find so much talent concentrated for exertion and a range as large as the world itself? Similarly, were the rural areas under attack by the antichrist, or were the cities? Even in publishing, how could the South support a national publication, since the news came to Philadelphia first? Philadelphia presented a “much larger field” than South Carolina. The church was unanimous. Brantly should stay.<sup>32</sup>

In the course of the argument, the committee revealed something about both the church’s identity and their estimation of where Brantly’s worth resided. First Baptist Church of Philadelphia was a bona fide evangelical church. They equated the Kingdom of Christ with the benevolent and missionary societies of the day, not with the regional cause of the denomination, which did not compare in worth. They were jealous for “a co-operation of effort between all denominations of evangelical Christians,” because such unity was necessary for prosperous exertion, and because prosperous exertion would eventually effect “the conversion of the world.” In this precious cause, they were highly unwilling to let Brantly go. For the first time, according to the committee, Philadelphia Baptists possessed a man who could coordinate efforts with other evangelicals:

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<sup>32</sup>First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to W. T. Brantly, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ALS, c. 22 September 1828, AFBCP. For confirmation on the poor state of Baptists in Pennsylvania, see “Circular Address,” The Baptist General Association of Pennsylvania for Missionary Purposes, 1829, as reprinted in “Baptists in Pa. and Other States,” *CSCI*, 22 August 1829, p. 116; John Thomas, “Religious Wants of Pennsylvania,” *CSCI*, 9 January 1830, p. 22.

Respected and esteemed by them, there is none of that jealousy and distrust between you, which has heretofore so unfortunately subsisted between our denomination, and others, and which has so often chilled our energies and paralyzed our efforts.

In the estimation of the committee, Brantly's real gift lay not as a pastor or even as a denominational leader, but as an organizer for useful effort. Therefore, not only did Philadelphia present a large field of service, Brantly was the right man for that field. Brantly accepted this reasoning, and ultimately stayed for nine more years. In doing so, Brantly showed that his mission of uniting men in useful effort was still his focus, and that he still saw this goal as possible in 1828.<sup>33</sup>

### **Growing Success**

For the next two years, Brantly vigorously pursued peace among his Baptist brethren. He chose three tactics. First, Brantly buried the past in silence. Second, Brantly devoted himself to corporate prayer. Third, Brantly participated in united protracted meetings.

**Forgetting the past.** Reporting in 1831 on why a "better day" had arrived, Brantly commented, "Contention, by being let alone, has nearly ceased, and the spirit of brotherly kindness seems to be gaining an ascendancy where once its pacific voice could not be heard."<sup>34</sup> Forgetting the past eventually proved effective in pacifying the minority group from First Baptist, which now met on Spruce Street.

At first, peacemaking did not appear desirable for either side. The Spruce Street congregation not only obtained admittance into the Philadelphia Association under the name "First Baptist Church," they also successfully applied for a charter from the state government for this name. (Though First Baptist Church had existed since 1698, it

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<sup>33</sup>First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to W. T. Brantly, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ALS, c. 22 September 1828, AFBCP. Brantly himself later called Philadelphia "this great fountain of influence, of trade and commerce, of art and science," a place that summoned the prayers from brethren in other places (W. T. Brantly, "Religious Appearances in Philadelphia," *CI*, 7 May 1831, p. 301).

<sup>34</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Baptists in Philadelphia," *CI*, 19 February 1831, p. 123.

had never been chartered under the government.) The larger body protested, and the case was heard before the state Supreme Court. After a tie in 1828 (due to a vacancy on the bench), the Court decided the next year against the larger body, who then incorporated on 16 May 1829 under the cumbersome title, “The First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, meeting for worship in Second Street between High and Mulberry Streets.”<sup>35</sup>

Brantly seems to have distanced himself from these actions, for he describes them as what the church did as “an independent church” in contrast to himself and his opinions, which he refrained to make public.<sup>36</sup> For his part, Brantly chose not to fix on the past, but to rejoice in God, who, he trusted, was overruling the “misunderstandings.” Instead of one congregation, there were two—both growing and both worshipping the same Lord. If there must be competition, Brantly advised the two churches to “vie with each other in charity, in prayers, in noble sacrifices for the honor of God, and all will be right in the end.”<sup>37</sup> Under such leadership, peace came quickly. The Spruce Street congregation made the first overtures in 1830 and in 1831. Finally, on 15 October 1833, the larger group agreed to give the baptismal property in exchange for the exclusive rights of the name. The deal was finalized on 8 May 1835, after which point Spruce Street Baptist Church (the new name) enjoyed lasting fellowship with the larger group, even within the Pennsylvania Baptist Convention.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>On 2 April 1853, this name was changed to its present name, “The First Baptist Church of the City of Philadelphia” (Keen, *Bi-centennial Celebration*, 97-98). The Court’s opinions are given in Appendix M of *Bi-centennial Celebration*.

<sup>36</sup>Brantly, “Baptists in Philadelphia,” 123.

<sup>37</sup>As proof, Brantly placed in “*juxtaposition*” two reports of isolated steamboat excursions to the Jersey shore of the Delaware River. There one Sunday, with “the impressive idea of 150,000 human beings” around them, First Church baptized ten; the Friday before, not far from the same place, the Spruce Street congregation had baptized four. He declared that both bodies had the same faith, the same Lord, the same baptism, and even the same shore and waters! See W. T. Brantly, “Philadelphia,” *CI*, 14 May 1831, p. 317. In response, one correspondent wrote back, “I am living to see that for which I have most devoutly prayed, that the Baptists of this city might unite their strength in the Lord, and promptly operate together” (A Baptist, Letter to the Editor, *CI*, 28 May 1831, p. 348).

<sup>38</sup>On the two churches’ transactions, see Keen, *Bi-centennial Celebration*, 90-97. On fellowship within the Pennsylvania Baptist Convention, see, e.g., *Minutes of the Convention of Delegates of Baptist Associations in Pennsylvania, for the Formation of a State Convention for Domestic Missions . . .* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman, 1837). This inaugural meeting met at First Baptist Church on Second Street;

**Prayer meetings.** In the late 1820s, evangelicals were extending their efforts at corporate prayer, both in time and in purpose. For example, by 1830, almost all Presbyterian churches devoted the first Monday night to the standard “monthly concert of prayer,” but now many were also adding the second Monday specifically for Sabbath schools.<sup>39</sup> Two years earlier, a proposal appeared in both New York and Philadelphia that the fourth Monday evening of every month be dedicated as a concert of prayer for ministers.<sup>40</sup> Some evangelicals, not content with monthly meetings, began arguing for set times each day for prayer. One correspondent to the *Index* wished “the subject agitated” and asked Brantly to “give it a shake or two.” In reply, Brantly approved, stating, “If there be reason for a monthly concert of prayer, there is reason for a daily concert.”<sup>41</sup> He himself was a frequent member of such meetings, finding particular delight to be invited—even at ten o’clock at night—to such a “worthy undertaking.”<sup>42</sup>

Revival followed closely on the heels of increased prayer, especially in the big cities. In Philadelphia, the “usual obstacles” hindering gospel conversations

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the next annual meeting met at Spruce Street (*Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Baptist State Convention for Missionary Purposes, Held in Philadelphia, April 23, 1838. And of the Semi-Annual Meeting Held at Milton, Penn. October 31 and November 1, 1838* [Philadelphia: S. Siegfried, [1838]], 3).

<sup>39</sup>See the Report to the General Assembly in “State of Religion among Presbyterians,” *CSCI*, 19 June 1830, p. 399. On monthly concerts of prayer in New York, see “Important Questions, to Which Christians Are Requested to Give a Practical Answer,” *CI*, 2 April 1831, p. 220.

<sup>40</sup>B., “Prayer for Ministers,” *CS*, 23 August 1828, p. 133.

<sup>41</sup>Moros, “A Few Questions for the Saints to Consider,” *CSCI*, 11 December 1830, p. 377; W. T. Brantly, “Daily Concert of Prayer,” *CSCI*, 11 December 1830, p. 382. Moros wrote in approving response to an article by Oligopistos, who argued persuasively for a daily concert of prayer (see Oligopistos, “Christians Exhorted to Prayer,” *CSCI*, 6 February 1830, p. 85). Brantly also approved of this article as “a most persuasive oration” (W. T. Brantly, “Oligopistos,” *CSCI*, 6 February 1830, p. 89).

<sup>42</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Solitary Hours: Zion’s Strength,” *CI*, 26 February 1831, p. 129. In the spring of 1831, Brantly reported that corporate meetings at six in the morning for “singing, reading the Scripture, and prayer” were “becoming prevalent” among Presbyterians, Baptists, and Episcopalians, having previously been “held in private families to a considerable extent” (idem, “Early Prayers,” *CI*, 30 April 1831, p. 275; see also Brantly, “Religious Appearances in Philadelphia,” p. 301; idem, “Revivals,” *CI*, 12 March 1831, p. 170). While an advocate of corporate prayer, Brantly neither regarded it successful in itself nor did he approve of all he observed. For example, without individual Christians entering their prayer closet in faithful seclusion, “revival prayer-meetings leave you as dull and cold as before” (idem, “Enter into Thy Closet.’—Matt. vi. 6,” *CS*, 2 May 1829, p. 69). Moreover, Brantly took issue with Christians, especially preachers, who misapplied Scripture in their prayers (idem, “The Use of Scripture in Praying and Preaching,” *CI*, 6 August 1831, p. 91).

“disappeared.”<sup>43</sup> On the increase were “Christian exertion, and brotherly love,” and a “spirit of deep and pious seriousness” that led to “many tears . . . scattered between the porch and the altar.”<sup>44</sup> The repercussions of urban revival stimulated Brantly’s imagination. Should the Holy Spirit continue His work in New York, he pondered, who could “measure the diverging energies and influences” from that city? “And,” he added, pondering his own city, “what if all the streams which flow from *this* city should bear nothing but sweet and fertilizing influences throughout the land, how soon would the desert bud and blossom as the rose!”<sup>45</sup> With revival also came greater Christian unity, not only between denominations, but quite significantly (in light of past strife) among Baptists, who purposefully called their prayer meeting a “Union Prayer Meeting.” After several months, Brantly reviewed all the prayer meetings and concluded, “Much harmony and good feeling prevail in these [prayer] meetings.”<sup>46</sup>

At some point, unity meetings among Baptists apparently ceased, for in late 1836 Brantly spearheaded an effort to renew monthly meetings. Brantly invited all the Baptist ministers in Philadelphia to his lecture room on a particular Monday afternoon. Around a dozen or more ministers met in private and then led a large assembly that evening in solemn “confessions, exhortations and prayers.” The success of this meeting led to a proposal to meet every month, but at a different church each time. Along with these Baptist meetings, some ministers from various denominations purposed to meet for “a united lecture” each Sunday night on a similar rotation basis. Again, Brantly stands out as a prominent leader in this peacemaking effort. He preached the first sermon, giving “a spirit-stirring appeal” from Deborah’s words to Barak, “Up; is not the Lord

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<sup>43</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Philadelphia,” *CI*, 26 March 1831, p. 203.

<sup>44</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptist Churches in This City,” *CI*, 2 April 1831, p. 218.

<sup>45</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Signs of the Times,” *CI*, 19 March 1831, p. 186. Brantly’s concept of God using the influence of cities adds further proof that Brantly did move to Philadelphia for greater usefulness.

<sup>46</sup>Brantly, “Religious Appearances in Philadelphia,” 301.

gone before thee?”<sup>47</sup> Thus from the start of his ministry in Philadelphia down to its close, Brantly supported union in prayer.

**Protracted meetings.** Ever since Beaufort, Brantly had condemned “fervent petitions, and cold exertions.”<sup>48</sup> Thus while attending prayer meetings for revival and unity, Brantly also united with Baptists to give and to preach, for in his estimation, true revival flowed naturally as “the fruits of prayer and effort.”<sup>49</sup> In addition to assisting other evangelicals and Baptists on a national level (to be discussed in later chapters), Brantly sought informal united effort among the local Baptists of Philadelphia.

Lacking associational ties, Brantly united with other Baptists in one-time, task-oriented efforts that had no organizational name or continuity. For example, on 24 June 1830, First Baptist Church hosted a meeting of several Philadelphia Baptists, both ministers and laymen, for the purpose of taking “into consideration the expediency of a more decided and vigorous co-operation with the measures of the American Sunday School Union, for the extension of Sabbath Schools as far as practicable in the Western and Southern States.”<sup>50</sup> This meeting appears to have been a favorable response to the recent anniversary meeting of the American Sunday School Union in Philadelphia, at which Francis Wayland had provided “some of the encouragements, which the present state of society offers, to an effort for the universal diffusion of Christianity.”<sup>51</sup> As chairman of the meeting, Brantly noted two specific obstacles to overcome—suspicion

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<sup>47</sup>See the notice in *SWGJ*, 10 February 1837, n.p.

<sup>48</sup>Theophilus, “Exertions, As Well As Prayers, Necessary to the Prosperity of Zion,” *ABM* 1 (July 1818): 361.

<sup>49</sup>Brantly, “Philadelphia,” 317.

<sup>50</sup>See the minutes of the Meeting of Baptists in Philadelphia for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools in *CSCI*, 10 July 1830, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup>Francis Wayland, Jr., *Encouragements to Religious Effort: A Sermon Delivered at the Request of the American Sunday School Union, May 25, 1830* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1830), 3. For Brantly’s favorable report of this meeting and of Wayland’s address, see W. T. Brantly, “Anniversaries in Philadelphia,” *CSCI*, 5 June 1830, p. 365.



and apathy. Testimonies then ensued about the non-sectarian, non-political aims of the Union, whose only object was “to induce our friends to form schools.” In response, those gathered resolved, “We deem it a sacred duty to unite with [the Union] in carrying forward their useful plans.” This resolution was then sealed with a handsome subscription of \$457.<sup>52</sup>

Brantly also united informally with other Baptist ministers in protracted meetings. Later called “revival meetings,” protracted meetings were usually held over a series of evenings at a church, if space allowed. Often several ministers converged to help a struggling church regain some members and fresh hope. Brantly assisted in several meetings, though it is difficult to ascertain how many. First Baptist Church also hosted more than one meeting, though it appears that Brantly himself did not preach on these occasions.<sup>53</sup> Two features make these meetings remarkable from today’s standpoint. First, local *pastors* generally conducted the meetings instead of evangelists. This feature does not reveal any antipathy on Brantly’s part to evangelists, for he assisted in the ordination of at least two such men; instead, it merely shows the eagerness of the pastors to join together in mutual assistance.<sup>54</sup> Second, the pastors united without the aid

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<sup>52</sup>Minutes, Meeting of Baptists in Philadelphia for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, 19.

<sup>53</sup>In the Philadelphia area, protracted meetings commenced at Blockley on 8 April 1831, at Frankford on 2 September 1831, at Lower Merion on 10 September 1831, at Blockley again on 16 September 1831, at Holmesburg on 23 September 1831, at Great Valley on 30 September 1831, at New Market Street on 7 October 1831, at First Baptist on 13 October 1831, at Fifth Baptist on 16 November 1831, at First Baptist on 2 May 1832, at Harrisburg on 25 May 1832, and at Seventh Street in the spring of 1832. Several of these meetings took place in churches belonging to the Philadelphia Association. Brantly is not expressly mentioned as participating in any of these meetings, though he described the Harrisburg meeting. See W. T. Brantly, “Two Days’ Meeting,” *CI*, 2 April 1831, p. 219; idem, “Protracted Meetings,” *CI*, 17 September 1831, p. 191; idem, “Holmesburg, Pa.,” *CI*, 1 October 1831, p. 223; New Market Street Baptist Church, “Three Days’ Meeting,” *CI*, 1 October 1831, p. 223; Brantly, “A Five Days’ Meeting in the 1st Baptist Church of Philadelphia,” *CI*, 29 October 1831, p. 284; idem, “Baptist Church, Sansom Street, Philadelphia,” *CI*, 17 December 1831, p. 398; James E. Welch, Letter to the Editor, *CI*, 4 February 1832, p. 73; Brantly, Editorial, *CI*, 2 June 1832, p. 348; idem, “Meeting for Special Worship at Harrisburg, Pa.,” *CI*, 9 June 1832, p. 353; and John R. Dodge, “A Protracted Meeting Blessed,” *CI*, 7 July 1832, p. 5.

At First Baptist’s 1831 meetings, in addition to local ministers, the guest ministers included Finlay of Baltimore, Charles G. Sommers of New York city, and Nathaniel Colver of Kingsbury, New York. At the 1832 meeting, the guest ministers included Colver again, Howard Malcom of Boston, and Brantly’s former co-worker, Adiel Sherwood of Georgia.

<sup>54</sup>On 4 November 1831 in Camden, New Jersey, at the ordination of Charles Sexton “to the work of an Evangelist,” Brantly offered the ordination prayer and charge (J. L. Rhees, “Ordination,” *CI*, 24

of any *formal organization*, such as an association. The pastors ministered in churches, many of which were, as Brantly later testified, “*unassociated churches*, and [had] no other connexion with each other than that which consists in the interchange of ministerial labors, and mutual aid among the pastors and members.”<sup>55</sup> When the time came for forming a new association, one of these previously unassociated churches stressed that they did not unite formally from any sense of failure, but considered their “fair experiment” of independent activity a success.<sup>56</sup>

By 1831, efforts were underway for more permanent and formal unions. In January, Brantly lent his support to the year-old Baptist Domestic Missionary Society of Philadelphia. This society, meeting at First Baptist Church, aimed at supplying the suburbs of Philadelphia with Sunday schools and missionary labors. While Brantly preached at the society’s initial meetings, he did not serve in any leadership capacity, except indirectly as pastor of some of the society’s leaders. The society was run by laymen. Two from First Baptist served as treasurer and secretary. A formal united effort among churches and their ministers awaited a future mishap with the Philadelphia Association.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps as a result of the prayer and protracted meetings, news spread that “there is more union than formerly among the Baptists in Philadelphia.”<sup>58</sup> In Brantly’s

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March 1832, p. 192). Then on 7 June 1832, Brantly preached a sermon at the ordination of Charles G. Wilson of Lower Dublin Baptist Church to “the work of an Evangelist,” who “shortly thereafter departed for amissionary [sic] station among the Shawanese [sic] Indians” (W. T. Brantly, “Indian Mission West of the Mississippi,” *CI*, 28 July 1832, p. 64). From Wilson’s mission, it seems that “Evangelist” may have referred to a missionary, whether to a local church planter or to a missionary to the heathen.

<sup>55</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Recent Baptisms,” *CI*, 5 November 1831, p. 289.

<sup>56</sup>“Minutes of the Central Union Association, Formed in Philadelphia, July 31st, 1832,” *CI*, 11 August 1832, p. 82.

<sup>57</sup>“Minutes of the Baptist Domestic Missionary Society of Philadelphia,” *CI*, 29 January 1831, p. 77. The society had been founded by Noah Davis, Brantly’s respected co-worker in the Baptist General Tract Society, who had recently died. Gideon B. Perry, newly-installed pastor at the rival First Baptist Church on Spruce Street, had a large presence at the meeting.

On the installation of Gideon B. Perry at Spruce Street, see *CSCI*, 14 August 1830, p. 110.

<sup>58</sup>Letter from D. D., reprinted in W. T. Brantly, “Prejudice Removed,” *CI*, 30 July 1831, p. 76.

opinion, Baptist strife now lay to the northeast. When a “very charitable brother in New York” wrote to Brantly, expressing his hope for a “cessation of ‘petty animosities’ among the *Baptists in Pennsylvania*,” Brantly replied that, while he did not know of any literal animosity between any Baptists, he did know that if the “kind brother and well-wisher means to pray for a perfect unity of spirit among the Baptists, we know of no place more in need of his petitions than his own city.”<sup>59</sup> This new center of disunity—New York—would play a key role in Brantly’s final years ministering in the North.

### **The Central Union Association**

After six years in Philadelphia, Brantly’s efforts finally resulted in establishing an institution—the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches. In many ways, this association stands as Brantly’s own legacy in Philadelphia, the special product of his particular interests. Decades later, the Central Union Association testified:

The brother who stood foremost in the organization of this body, to whom all looked for counsel and direction, and upon whom all eyes were turned in all its progressive moments, was the ever to be revered William T. Brantly, the pastor of the First Baptist Church.<sup>60</sup>

To this fact, Brantly himself would have given no apology. He knew from experience that a union of individuals will accomplish nothing good “unless well directed,” and that society itself is moved by just “a few master-spirits.” While equality of qualifications and resources may sound nice, Brantly knew it “never did and never will exist” in any association; therefore, he concluded, “Some few will constitute the eyes, and others the hands, until the body stands forth complete in all its members.”<sup>61</sup> Thus a close examination of the association over which Brantly constituted the eyes will shed light on the man himself.

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<sup>59</sup>W. T. Brantly, Editorial, *CI*, 8 December 1832, p. 366.

<sup>60</sup>*Minutes of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Session of the Central Union Association, of Independent Baptist Churches, Held with the Vincent Baptist Church, June 3d and 4th, 1856* (Philadelphia: Oliver P. Glessner, 1856), 11; cf. Keen, *Bi-Centennial Celebration*, 99.

<sup>61</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 12 December 1829, p. 369.

**The Object of an Association.** Before spearheading the Central Union Association, Brantly had already published his own views on the concept of an association. He took advantage of his role as editor of a national Baptist magazine to review all the associations, using the minutes from 1829. Brantly judged associations on their amount of good work. Some of his readers took objection, claiming that Brantly had been “actuated by a *fault-finding* spirit.” In response, Brantly affirmed his honest desire “to see all the churches and associations walking in the light and comfort of the truth.”<sup>62</sup> In reviewing the associations, Brantly also hoped to supply “running notes, embracing the most remarkable events in those Associations which furnish any materials for history.”<sup>63</sup>

Brantly was concerned with both unity and the object of unity. When the Long Run Association of Kentucky published a circular advocating Christian liberty and cited the mention of “churches” in Scripture, Brantly retorted, “Unity or oneness is the leading idea in reference to the church, whilst plurality cannot be traced in any one instance which we can detect.”<sup>64</sup> But for what purpose should churches unite? Shamefully, some churches, like those in the Bethel Association of Alabama, exhibited no object for their union.<sup>65</sup> Others, like those in the Danville Association of Vermont, united merely for fellowship, resolutions, and circulars. To Brantly, such unions resembled “some of our militia companies which meet and read the roll, and go home,” causing no alarm in the

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<sup>62</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 9 January 1830, p. 19. In a later defense against charges of having a “wrong spirit,” Brantly again asserted his “unaffected desire to promote reformation” and pointed to positive feedback (W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 6 February 1830, pp. 88-89). In assessing Brantly’s tone, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the editor at times sounded too much like the true Reviewer of churches—the One who said, “I know your works” (Rev 2:2).

<sup>63</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Minutes of Associations for 1831,” *CI*, 10 March 1832, p. 160. Reviews for this particular year never did appear.

<sup>64</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 13 March 1830, pp. 162-63. As proof, he cites Acts 5:11, 8:1, 11:26, and 15:22. This is a curious argument, for the New Testament often speaks of “churches” as well as “the church” (e.g., 1 Cor 11:16; Rev 2:7).

<sup>65</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 6 March 1830, p. 146.

enemy's camp.<sup>66</sup> The mere making of resolutions is no better, unless the resolution shifts "from capacity to energy."<sup>67</sup> Otherwise, where is "God's work?" Where is evidence of "a revival, a systematic co-operation for the accomplishment of good, or any other material fact connected with the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom?"<sup>68</sup> Instead of mere fellowship, let the churches unite for effort. Instead of "dry circular letters," let "real history" be published, because "example is always better than precept."<sup>69</sup> In fact, instead of being mere associations, let them follow the example of Dublin Association, which, Brantly reported with "decided approbation," had voted to "resolve this Association into a Missionary Society."<sup>70</sup> This transformation is precisely what the Georgia Association had done in 1815. Brantly's six-year involvement with such an organization may have given him not only positive thoughts about the idea in general, but also the seminal idea for the Central Union Association—resolving a Baptist association into a union of all the basic benevolent societies.

**The Philadelphia Association.** The formation of the Central Union Association cannot be told without first telling of Brantly's relationship with the historic Philadelphia Association. In certain respects, criticism from the old body provided one necessary catalyst for forming the new association, whose recommendation sat unheeded for five years. Another catalyst seems to have been the revival that visited Philadelphia in 1831.

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<sup>66</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Review of Associations," *CSCI*, 5 December 1829, p. 354.

<sup>67</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Review of Associations," *CSCI*, 12 December 1829, p. 370, italics original. Perhaps Brantly's idea here comes from the physical connotation of the parliamentary term "motion."

<sup>68</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Review of Associations," *CSCI*, 26 December 1829, p. 403.

<sup>69</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Review of Associations," *CSCI*, 6 March 1830, p. 146.

<sup>70</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Review of Associations," *CSCI*, 28 November 1829, p. 339. The minutes for the Salem Association of Massachusetts revealed that the Second Baptist Church of Haverhill had also "resolved itself into a Mission Society" (idem, "Review of Associations," *CSCI*, 5 December 1829, p. 356). On the resolution of the Georgia Association and its result, see Mercer, *History*, 54-59.

First Baptist Church had been independent of the Philadelphia Association since 1818. Though never reunited in Brantly's times, the church and the association did eventually settle into a calm coexistence. True, a few churches still refused to grant full fellowship to First Baptist Church, who regarded the influence of these churches "whose conduct has nearly destroyed that body" as "daily decreasing."<sup>71</sup> By 1830, Brantly could report even better signs: "The churches *associated* and those *unassociated* mutually dismiss and receive members, their ministers are generally in the habit of friendly intercourse, and act together in matters of public interest." In particular, Brantly enjoyed friendly relations with John L. Dagg, William Ballantine, and Noah Davis—all men of the Association. Knowing of "no bad feelings now residing betwixt any of the churches or ministers," Brantly held out the presumption that "by the time they all begin to follow Christ they will have fellowship with each other."<sup>72</sup>

This calm coexistence does not imply that all parties agreed with or even trusted each other. Brantly openly criticized Pennsylvania Baptists for remaining so small in number, while having such an early and rich beginning. The cause of this "sad deficiency of zeal" was clear: "The doctrines of grace have been sadly abused." Instead of fueling missionary zeal (as they should), predestination and election have become "the pretexts of lukewarmness." While not citing the Philadelphia Association in particular, Brantly did not deny that they had contributed to the general problem. On their part, the Philadelphia Association had earlier recommended the *Baptist Repository* instead of Brantly's *Star and Index*, leaving the editor to pine that "the good brethren of the Association have walked over us in silence to get to New York."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to W. T. Brantly, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ALS, c. 22 September 1828, AFBCP.

<sup>72</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Review of Associations," *CSCI*, 9 January 1830, p. 20.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 19-20. In addition to the *Baptist Repository*, the Philadelphia Association also recommended *The World*, a periodical "devoted to the History and objects of this body" and edited by one of their own ministers, C. W. Denison (*Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Held by Appointment at Southampton, Bucks County, October 2d, 3d & 4th, 1832* [n.p., n.d.], 6). In no year did the Philadelphia Association recommend the *Star and Index*.

The onset of revival in 1831 brought hope of further improvement. Early in the year, Brantly testified of Philadelphia Baptists, “At present the scenes exhibited among us are of a more quiet and kindly character. . . . We meet, and sing, and preach and pray together; and, so far as we know, there now exists no angry disputes, no blighting animosities.”<sup>74</sup> As proof, Brantly cited the united prayer meeting on February 15, when *all* the Baptist pastors of Philadelphia and much of the congregations worshipped together at the Sansom Street church.<sup>75</sup> A month later, Brantly happily reported an increase of “religious feeling.”<sup>76</sup> Then, in early April, the preacher exclaimed, “The time has at length arrived, that a bright star of hope has risen to gladden the hearts . . . of many of the friends of Zion in this city.” Specifically, Brantly testified of Philadelphia Baptists:

Feelings, better, and more in accordance with the pure dictates of the gospel, are cultivated, and the happy consequences are, we have become more united and efficient in our benevolent operations. Union prayer-meetings are held, alternately and weekly, with different Baptist churches in this city and liberties. . . . We have often felt, on such occasions to exclaim, “*Jehovah is here—This is indeed no less than the house of God, and the gate of Heaven.*”<sup>77</sup>

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Even beyond the Philadelphia Association, the *Index* received surprisingly little patronage from Pennsylvania. While being the only Baptist paper in the state, it did not possess even 200 subscribers (W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 9 January 1830, p. 20). Even more surprising, in 1830 the Baptist General Association of Pennsylvania for Missionary Purposes recommended that a new periodical be issued by the Executive Board. Brantly demurred, not because of rivalry, but mainly because “Missionary funds should not be wasted in unnecessary publications. Already much has been thrown away in such experiments” (remarks made to “Meeting of Baptists in Pennsylvania,” *CSCI*, 18 December 1830, p. 391). In contrast, Brantly operated the *Index* with his own funds. Again, the Philadelphia Association officially endorsed the state paper, which eventually appeared as *World As It Is, and As It Should Be* (*Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Held in Philadelphia, in the Meeting-House of the First Baptist Church, Spruce Street, from the 4th to the 7th October, 1831, Inclusive* [Philadelphia: T. W. Ustick, 1831], 9; *Minutes of the 126 Anniversary of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Held by Appointment in the Meeting-House of the First Baptist Church, Spruce St., Philadelphia, October 1, 2, 3, & 4, 1833* [Philadelphia: T. W. Ustick, 1833], 9).

<sup>74</sup>Brantly, “Baptists in Philadelphia,” 123.

<sup>75</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Union Prayer Meeting,” *CI*, 19 February 1831, p. 123.

<sup>76</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Philadelphia,” *CI*, 26 March 1831, p. 203.

<sup>77</sup>Brantly, “Baptist Churches in This City,” 218.

As much as Brantly rejoiced, he rejoiced “with trembling” (an allusion to Ps 2:10) and urged others to do the same, for men can misread appearances such as the “growing interest” in the Baptist Union Prayer Meeting. But even if God had allotted that Christians must return “to the cheerless formalities of past times,” Brantly nonetheless resolved “first [to] undergo a mighty agony of prayer.”<sup>78</sup> As Brantly explained that spring, “mercy *drops*” from heaven call for sustained faithfulness that God may yet “*pour* out such a blessing, that there shall not be room to contain it.”<sup>79</sup>

In disappointing contrast to Brantly’s hope that “the time that is past must suffice for the contentions of bitterness,” open controversy erupted in October 1831 at the Philadelphia Association’s annual meeting.<sup>80</sup> It began with a misunderstanding, but ended with an all out disagreement over revival measures. On the eleventh, the moderator asked Brantly, a visiting minister, to report what he had seen and felt during the recent “religious occurrences” in the region. In response, Brantly focused on the success of the protracted meetings, which, while using measures that “*some persons*” found disagreeable, nevertheless adopted “no new theory of conversion.” The only message heard was “the ancient Gospel plan of a free and sufficient salvation through Christ.” To prove the wisdom of this approach, Brantly commented that “*mere system* in proclaiming the Gospel was seldom blessed; and that . . . *the perfection of system constituted its greatest defect.*” This statement was not necessarily an attack on any within the association, but embraced any system of divinity brought to an extreme—whether the abuses of Calvinism or the convert-making systems of preachers such as Charles G. Finney, whose habit of preaching a system instead of the Gospel received Brantly’s public disapproval a year later.<sup>81</sup> Thus Brantly defended the meetings,

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<sup>78</sup>Brantly, “Religious Appearances in Philadelphia,” 301.

<sup>79</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Philadelphia,” *CI*, 26 March 1831, p. 203.

<sup>80</sup>Brantly, “Baptists in Philadelphia,” 123.

<sup>81</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Perfection of System—Its Greatest Defect,” *CI*, 15 October 1831, p. 254. For a rare reference to Finney in Brantly’s *Index*, see the article Brantly approves as “good” taken



claiming, “No system had been followed with a mere view to the making of converts.” On the following day, one of the association’s members lamented that somebody had been allowed to say, “That the *perfection* of Gospel doctrine was its greatest *defect*,” and then, that some within the association had approved of this statement! As a visitor, Brantly had to remain silent and wait three days to correct the misapprehension by means of the *Index*.<sup>82</sup>

Had this misunderstanding been the only error, perhaps controversy would have been avoided. In truth, the misunderstanding probably came from a deep-seated suspicion of some toward Brantly in general and the new measures of the protracted meetings in particular. For the association also heard a letter, which “strongly expressed” criticism toward *anxious seats*, that is, “the custom of inviting to particular seats those under anxious concern for their souls.” In Brantly’s opinion, “Those who busy themselves in applying such extinguishers to the good *feelings* of christian piety, remind us of a sort of counterpart in music in which the soft and melting treble is responded to by the cold grumbling bass.”<sup>83</sup>

Ironically, just as the Philadelphia Association’s meeting was coming to a close, Brantly was commencing a protracted meeting at the First Baptist Church that employed the anxious seat. Nine ministers from several states preached for five days and with such effect that Brantly concluded:

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from the *Vermont Chronicle*: “The Application of Metaphysics to Christianity,” *CI*, 17 March 1832, pp. 167-70. For more information on Finney’s activities in Philadelphia during Brantly’s early ministry there, see Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 74, 77-82, 90. For more general information on revivalism in Philadelphia in the 1820s, see Marion Bell, *Crusade in the City: Revivalism in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1977), 72-73.

<sup>82</sup>Brantly, “The Perfection of System—Its Greatest Defect,” 254. The minutes of the Philadelphia Association make no mention of this altercation, but only that Brantly’s original report contributed to an “interesting . . . season” (*Minutes*, Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1831, 8). Some confusion also exists over the date of this exchange, for according to the minutes, Brantly reported on October 5 (*ibid.*).

<sup>83</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Anxious Seats,” *CI*, 22 October 1831, p. 257.

No similar event ever attracted greater attention in this city. . . . On Sunday evening the crowd was beyond all example in our place of worship. After all the seats above and below in our spacious house had been filled, the aisles were supplied with benches until no more could be introduced, and the whole space was literally crowded. In this situation they remained until ten o'clock at night without manifesting the least impatience. The congregation was dismissed with a view of making room for the enquirers to come forward to occupy the front seats; but though dismissed, the people appeared unwilling to leave the house, and consequently a great proportion of them remained—whilst mourners and anxious souls to the number of about 100 came forward. The same scene was repeated on Monday evening at the conclusion of the meeting.<sup>84</sup>

Given such success, it is not surprising that Brantly did not halt to heed the gainsayers among the Philadelphia Association. Nor was First Baptist Church the only Baptist church outside the Philadelphia Association to see remarkable additions from the 1831 revival. Among just four churches—Lower Dublin, Great Valley, Frankford, and First Baptist—the new baptisms for September to October totaled over 150. Though some churches within the Philadelphia Association had also been “favored with revivals” and had even held protracted meetings, it was the skewed focus of the gainsayers that seemed to dissuade the ministers of some independent churches that the old association would ever be home again.<sup>85</sup> As an official letter from Lower Dublin Baptist Church explained, “When we first withdrew from the Philadelphia Association, we hardly contemplated a *final separation*; but the sentiments uttered, and the spirit manifested during the last session of that body, together with some recent events, have fully convinced us, that a return under present circumstances, is impracticable; for, ‘How can two walk together except they are agreed?’”<sup>86</sup>

**A “*Working Men’s Society*.”** On 14 July 1832, Brantly sent out a call on behalf of four independent churches to organize “A NEW UNION of Independent Baptist

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<sup>84</sup>Brantly, “A Five Days’ Meeting in the 1st Baptist Church,” 284.

<sup>85</sup>Brantly, “Recent Baptisms,” 289.

<sup>86</sup>“Minutes of the Central Union Association,” 82.

churches.” Brantly also spoke publicly in favor of forming a new association.<sup>87</sup> The call made no mention of the recent disagreements with some of the old association. Only numbers and proposed objectives justify the novel “expediency.” Estimating that the four churches had together approximately 1400 members, the call concluded, “The collective resources and moral strength of these churches, may be considered as fully equal to all the Philadelphia Association as it now stands.” As for the proposed objectives, the call mentioned four: financial support for ministers of small churches, measures to promote revivals, support of home missions, and regular reports on “the state of religion” in member churches. Moreover, in contrast to current practice, the new association would not entertain queries or “interfere with in any respect with the Independence of the churches composing it,” especially through establishing creeds, rules of discipline, or other such laws.<sup>88</sup>

Seven churches responded to the call and convened on 31 July 1831 at First Baptist Church to form the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches. The largest of the churches, and definitely the leading trendsetter, was First Baptist Church, which had already pledged \$800 toward the new association. Its pastor also loomed large, both writing the draft of the constitution and then being elected president of the Executive Committee. Next in size stood Lower Dublin Baptist Church, whose absence from the old association must have been auspicious, since it ranked as the oldest Baptist church in the area. Its pastor and the moderator of the meeting, David Jones, stood close behind Brantly as moral leader of the new enterprise until Jones died before

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<sup>87</sup>In 1882, Jesse Phillips, an eyewitness to a visit Brantly made to Vincent prior to the formation of the Central Union Association, testified that Brantly’s “address was on the need of a new Association and what it should do. He wished that the churches forming said Association would be co-operative, and aid each other in revivals, and special efforts, and that the strong should help the weak” (“Historical Sketch of the Central Union Association of Baptist Churches. Prepared for the Fiftieth Anniversary, Meeting with the Frankford Church, May 30th and 31st, 1882,” in *Fiftieth, or Jubilee Anniversary of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, Held with the Frankford Baptist Church, Philadelphia, May 30 and 31, 1882* [Frankford: Thomas B. Foulkrod, 1882], 7).

<sup>88</sup>W. T. Brantly, “New Association of Independent Baptist Churches,” *CI*, 14 July 1832, p. 28.

the second annual meeting.<sup>89</sup> The only notable absence was the presence of Great Valley Baptist Church, an independent “ancient and venerable body.”<sup>90</sup> But within three weeks, its newly installed pastor, Leonard Fletcher, sought associate membership for himself.<sup>91</sup> Almost four months later, the Baptist church in Harrisburg was admitted along with its pastor, George I. Miles.<sup>92</sup> Outside ministers who frequently attended the meetings included John L. Dagg and Morgan J. Rhees, Brantly’s Philadelphia protégé.<sup>93</sup>

Two main ideas governed the formation of the Central Union Association—benevolence and independence. The new association carefully delineated both of these ideas in hopes of dispelling charges of innovation, discord, or heresy. Regarding benevolence, the constitution for the new association explicitly states:

The design of this union is, to promote the cause of true religion within the several churches of which it may be composed—by domestic missions, by the education of pious and promising young men for the ministry, by aiding weak churches to support their ministers, and by other benevolent plans.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>For an eyewitness description of the Lower Dublin Baptist Church (also called Old Pennepek), see W. T. Brantly, “The Oldest Baptist Church in Pennsylvania,” *CSCI*, 18 July 1829, pp. 33-34. For more on the Welsh immigrant David Jones, see idem, “Rev. David Jones,” *CI*, 20 April 1833, pp. 241-42; David Jones, “A Biographical Sketch of the Rev. David Jones,” *CI*, 22 June 1833, pp. 385-88, 29 June 1833, 401-03. On Jones, a later report in the Central Union Association claimed, “In temper and judgment, in character and influence, in zeal and devotedness, [Brantly] was only equalled by his co-worker, David Jones” (*Minutes*, Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, 1856, 11).

<sup>90</sup>Brantly, “Recent Baptisms,” 289.

<sup>91</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Central Union Association,” *CI*, 18 August 1832, p. 110. For a full listing of delegates and their churches, see “Minutes of the Central Union Association,” p. 81. Regarding the other five churches, the church at Frankford had been close to extinction a year prior, the church at Holmesburg had just left Lower Dublin only four months prior, the Mariners’ Church was an outreach ministry to sailors, Seventh Street Baptist Church had been constituted the previous year, and the church at Camden, New Jersey was small and “discouraged” (*ibid.*, 82-83; see also W. T. Brantly, “Special Meeting of the Central Union Association,” *CI*, 24 November 1832, p. 322).

<sup>92</sup>Brantly, “Special Meeting of the Central Union Association,” 321.

<sup>93</sup>On Dagg’s admittance into the new association, see Brantly, “Special Meeting of the Central Union Association,” 321. For the relationship between Rhees and Brantly, see Sprague, *Annals*, 6:780-781; W. T. Brantly, “Ordination,” *CSCI*, 12 September 1829, p. 173; idem, “Sketch of the Sermon delivered in the meeting house of the First Baptist Church, at the ordination of MORGAN J. RHEES,” *CSCI*, 19 September 1829, pp. 177-79.

<sup>94</sup>“Minutes of the Central Union Association,” 81. The meeting’s official address later clarified that “domestic missions” referred to “this great city which may be regarded in part as missionary grounds—on account of the abandoned character of a vast number of its inhabitants, calling for our Christian efforts to do good” (*ibid.*, 83).

Here then is an institutionalized expression of Brantly's personal mission of uniting believers in benevolent effort for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The genius of this plan lies in the use put to an old, accepted institution—the Baptist association. The official letter from Lower Dublin makes this new use explicit, using words undoubtedly agreeable to the other members: “The true notion of an association . . . [is] a union of effort . . . for the promotion of the cause of good at home and abroad.”<sup>95</sup> In short, the churches declared their association to be a “*Working Men's Society*.”<sup>96</sup>

Regarding independence, the churches guarded against misinterpretation, while explaining their intentions. First, the believers at Lower Dublin made it clear that they were not joining the association because they had not prospered in independence. In fact, based on their “fair experiment” at independence, they declared that a church may “thrive in such a condition” and that the very notion of independence had become dear to them. The association merely empowered them to do more!<sup>97</sup> Second, the churches as a whole denied any design of rivalry. Though their “separation from [the Philadelphia Association] was caused by proceedings of an arbitrary and oppressive kind,” they held no grudge.<sup>98</sup> Their main objection to the Philadelphia Association concerned the dictation of forms and creeds. While confessing that “most of our churches were constituted upon the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, and still retain the fundamental articles in that Formulary,” the churches denied this power to the new association:

An Association of Delegates is not empowered, either to form, or publish  
Confessions of Faith, to be rendered obligatory upon the churches which they may

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 83. A few weeks after the initial meeting, William S. Hall, pastor at Frankford, reminded the new association by letter of how “true religion” would be promoted: (1) by paying men to plant churches in the local area; (2) by providing scholarships for educating candidates for the ministry; and (3) by supporting poor churches financially (Letter to the Editor, *CI*, 25 August 1832, p. 141).

<sup>97</sup>“Minutes of the Central Union Association,” 82.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 83.

represent. The churches are free and independent, and must, therefore, be the only source of power to establish principles for their own belief and practice.<sup>99</sup>

As Brantly later explained, referring specifically to “churches in this region” (that is, those within the Philadelphia Association), “The desirable attribute of Independence, is virtually lost by all those churches, adhering to Associations which dictate their formularies and their Creed. The churches composing Associations which do not arrogate this to themselves, are strictly Independent.”<sup>100</sup> Therefore, with such a notion of independence, it is not surprising that the Central Union Association would not entertain queries. The churches resolved to meet for “strictly religious, and devotional” objectives, especially “the special purpose of exciting a revival spirit” in their member churches.<sup>101</sup>

The response to this new association varied. Not surprisingly, some within the old association disapproved, apparently calling the new association “an Infant in its den.” This opprobrium bothered Brantly none; he, in fact, regarded it as inadvertent charity.<sup>102</sup> Others responded more favorably, even from other regions. In the West, one editor spoke highly of independence as a historic, fundamental principle among orderly Baptists:

*. . . that each church in its own government and discipline is strictly and substantially independent—holding its own keys—and accountable to no man or body of men on earth for its course.*

He especially appreciated the absence of queries in the new plan, for queries usually embraced abstract speculations, knotty questions, or practical matters that could not be reduced to absolute principles—all of which constituted the chief cause of “wrangling and unpleasant bickerings” in Western associations. To him, the Baptist ideal was

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 83. This is certainly the view of Brantly himself, who a year earlier had asserted that Baptists universally agree on “a church [being] the highest ecclesiastical power” and that all associations and societies are “*only*” grounded upon “simple expediency” (W. T. Brantly, “Correspondents,” *CI*, 5 February 1831, p. 96, italics original).

<sup>100</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Rev. Henry Keeling of Richmond, Va. and the Central Union Association,” *CI*, 22 September 1832, p. 191.

<sup>101</sup>“Minutes of the Central Union Association,” 82.

<sup>102</sup>Brantly, “The Central Union Association,” 110.

organized independence—neither anarchy, as some Western churches understood “independence,” nor uniformity, such as Daniel Parker advocated, which was “the quintessence [*sic*] of popery.”<sup>103</sup> In the South, Henry Keeling, pastor in Richmond, Virginia, especially liked the plan’s benevolent focus, which constituted the new association’s “great and peculiar characteristic.” In fact, the new association struck Keeling as an education society, Sunday school union, and foreign and home missionary society all in one! In contrast, Keeling sat appalled that Southern and Western associations of over thirty ministers and sixty other delegates could meet once a year and spend several days “doing nothing.” He only demurred on the new association’s name, as if Baptists were anything other than independent. Brantly responded that the name “Independent” stood in contrast to other churches in the Philadelphia region.<sup>104</sup>

The Central Union Association began its work with astounding success, owing in part to the ambitious leadership of the executive committee. Three young men began studies for the ministry. George I. Miles, of Harrisburg, agreed to missionary labors west of Philadelphia. The largest success resulted from protracted meetings at eight separate locations, conducted over three months chiefly by men of the Central Union Association’s Committee on Missions and Visitation: Jones, Fletcher, Brantly, Miles, Hall, John R. Dodge of Seventh Street Baptist Church, and Thomas Teasdale, an ordained minister with Brantly at First Baptist Church. Though all the meetings were blessed, the largest revivals occurred at Vincent and Great Valley, where 100 and 95 were baptized, respectively. One eyewitness from the Vincent meetings later asked the members:

How many . . . remember the time when at a protracted meeting, held not in this house, but in yonder grove, hard by, when Bro. Brantly preached to the assembled multitude from the text:—“Wo unto them that are at ease in Zion.” Who does not remember that heavenly face, wet with the tears of earnest entreaty, as he besought men to be reconciled to God? Who does not remember with joy unspeakable, that

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<sup>103</sup>Editor of *Pioneer*, “Baptist Associations,” reprinted as “Comment on Ourselves,” *CI*, 29 September 1832, pp. 194-95.

<sup>104</sup>H. Keeling, “Central Union Association,” as reprinted from the *Religious Herald* in *CI*, 6 October 1832, p. 220; Brantly, “The Rev. Henry Keeling and the Central Union Association,” 191.

the slain of the Lord were more than fifty, through the preaching of that one discourse?<sup>105</sup>

Another remarkable series of meetings took place at Norristown, which had no Baptist church and had seldom ever heard a Baptist preacher, let alone witness a scriptural baptism. The meetings started on Wednesday at the Court House. By Sunday, the crowds had to be divided between the Presbyterian church and the Court House. On Monday, sixteen were baptized in the Schuylkill River, which “for the first time [was] troubled at that point with the tread of those who were pressing the footsteps of Jesus.” The ministers, Leonard Fletcher and his brother Joshua, gave no address, but let the rite speak for itself. In all, the meetings lasted eleven days and twenty-seven were baptized.<sup>106</sup> In a month, enough souls were gathered to constitute a church. Brantly himself preached at the solemn occasion.<sup>107</sup>

The labor and success of this *Working Men's Society* is truly impressive. Between the 1833 and 1834 annual meetings, the Central Union Association held twenty-three protracted meetings, with at least another fifteen the following year. In the first four years, one thousand three hundred and fifty souls were added to churches of the Association, which itself eventually gained twelve new churches.<sup>108</sup> According to the

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<sup>105</sup>*Minutes*, Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, 1856, 11. Brantly's report refers to the trees and the prevailing “order and seriousness,” but makes no mention of himself (Brantly, “A Continued Meeting,” 172). Another eyewitness reported that twenty-five ministers were present at protracted meetings in Vincent, perhaps on this same occasion (“Historical Sketch,” 7, in *Fiftieth, or Jubilee Anniversary*).

<sup>106</sup>Brantly, “Special Meeting of the Central Union Association,” 321-23.

<sup>107</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Constitution of a Baptist Church,” *CI*, 29 December 1832, p. 402. The events at Norristown were not unique in those revival days. In Milestown, another town destitute of Baptist preaching, the Frankford pastor, William S. Hall, labored and saw thirty come to Christ (idem, “Admissions by Baptism,” *CI*, 16 March 1833, p. 174). For further results at Norristown, see “Baptism,” *CI*, 29 December 1832, p. 402. The other meetings were held at Frankford, Lower Dublin, Great Valley, Hephzibah, Milesburg, and Phoenixville. For more information on some of these meetings, see Brantly, “A Continued Meeting” [at Vincent], p. 172; idem, “Continued Meeting at Lower Dublin,” *CI*, 6 October 1832, p. 220; N. Miles, Jr., “The Revival at Vincent, Chester Co, Pa.,” *CI*, 13 October 1832, p. 225; L. Fletcher, Letter to the Editor, *CI*, 13 October 1832, pp. 225-26; “Ten Days' Meeting at the Great Valley Baptist Church, Pa.,” *CI*, 3 November 1832, pp. 273-74; Brantly, “The Hephzibah Meeting,” *CI*, 10 November 1832, p. 298.

<sup>108</sup>*Minutes*, Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, 1856, 12.



Association's own testimony and thanksgiving in 1835, these phenomenal numbers represented real conversions by-and-large:

*Resolved*, that the evident blessing of the Lord upon protracted meetings, in using them as instruments in promoting extensive revivals, and the exhibition of divine goodness in preserving the subjects of these revivals from falling, call for our fervent gratitude, and urge us to be more engaged in our attention to these important and impressive seasons of religious instruction.<sup>109</sup>

In 1856, the Association also testified to the lasting effect of those days:

Beginners in grace multiplied, with the multiplied efforts of the Churches. The young convert no longer met that cold and unfeeling reception by the Church, which chills the vital ardor of his first love. Protracted meetings, anxious seats, prayer meetings, evangelism, which the Central Union was the first to adopt and the Philadelphia Association the last to embrace, are no longer branded as new light measures.<sup>110</sup>

Both the mobility of the ministers and their numerical success give the impression that Brantly was reliving in mid-life the days of his youth amidst the Sandy Creek Association. Only this time, he himself was the preacher by the grove of trees. Truly, his mission of union for effort had begun to blossom and bear fruit. Surely, Brantly assessed correctly, in saying after the association's second annual meeting, "Few associations, we believe, have commenced their existence under such favorable circumstances."<sup>111</sup>

### Conclusion

When Brantly entered Philadelphia in 1826, Baptist strife abounded and First Baptist Church stood at the center of it. By patiently forgetting the past, taking initiative with other pastors, and holding prayer and protracted meetings, Brantly saw some of the wounds healed, especially with the rival First Baptist Church. The Philadelphia

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<sup>109</sup>*Minutes of the Third Annual Session of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, Held in the Meeting House of the Vincent Baptist Church, Chester County, Pa., May 26, 27, 28, 1835* (n.p., n.d.), 5.

<sup>110</sup>*Minutes*, Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, 1856, 12.

<sup>111</sup>W. T. Brantly, "The Central Union Association of Independent Baptists," *CI*, 15 June 1833, p. 382. Amidst all the success stories, Brantly regretted that business truncated the "religious exercises" of the meetings.

Association proved incorrigible, refusing to endorse Brantly's magazine and harboring suspicions towards new measures. As a result, Brantly and others formed the Central Union Association, which omitted a confession for the sake of church independence and adopted benevolence as its main objective.

The Central Union Association sheds great light on Brantly's own ideas about unity. As the "eyes" of the Central Union Association, Brantly wrote its constitution and presided over its affairs. Moreover, he created the association after contemplating the problems of existing associations, but without the constraints of reforming an existing institution. Thus, in order to understand Brantly's efforts for useful union on a national level, the nature of the Central Union Association must first come to light.

The examination will focus on theology and practice, which Brantly believed grounded Christian fellowship.<sup>112</sup> Chapters 5 and 6 will examine salvation and Scripture, leaving chapters 7 and 8 to examine new measures and benevolent societies. The discussion will largely rest upon editorials that Brantly wrote during the years surrounding the formation of the Central Union Association. Though Brantly's innovations may at first appear radical, a close examination of his reasons will reveal a thoughtful blend of conservatism and change.

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<sup>112</sup>In Brantly's estimation, all associations face at least these three questions: "Whether an Association shall adopt this or that Confession of Faith, or no confession; whether it shall patronize missions, or discountenance them; and what differences of opinion and practice it will allow, without breaking the union, are *constitutional* questions" (W. T. Brantly, "Review of Associations," *CSCI*, 28 November 1829, p. 340). The last question reveals the basis for fellowship.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVANGELISTIC CALVINISM

William T. Brantly ministered in Philadelphia during a time of Calvinistic decline. Though the creeds remained, the confession sounded more and more hollow. For example, in 1833, Jesse Mercer noted with concern how many Baptist ministers remained sound in doctrine, but yet would “dwell, in their preaching, almost exclusively upon duties, and upon practical topics; and rarely bring forward the unpopular doctrines of entire depravity, of divine sovereignty in converting sinners; and the vicarious character of the sufferings of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> David Benedict testified similarly. Before 1820, sermons lacking one of Calvinism’s five points were reckoned “defective” by Baptists in New York, Philadelphia, and further south—though not perhaps by practically-minded New Lights in New England. By the late 1850s, the “standard of orthodoxy [had] lowered.” On the one hand, members paid more attention to the “modes and manners” of preachers than to theology; on the other hand, preachers hid their Calvinistic beliefs in order to attract more crowds.<sup>2</sup> By mid-century, one scholar notes, Baptists had largely

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<sup>1</sup>[Jesse Mercer], “Review of the COMPLETE WORKS OF THE REV. ANDREW FULLER, with a Memoir of his Life. By ANDREW GUNTON FULLER. In two vols. 8vo. [octavo] BOSTON: published by Lincoln, Edmands & Co.,” *ABM* 13 (October 1833): 393. Mercer, as editor of *The Christian Index, and Baptist Miscellany*, ascribed this review to himself (idem, “Review of Fuller’s Works,” *CIBM*, 19 November 1833, p. 73.

One self-confessed “Particular Baptist” wrote to Brantly, lamenting how multitudes were entering Baptist churches “without having satisfactory proof that they understand the doctrines [of] Particular Baptists.” In addition, many ministers were boldly declaring that “the atonement is general, and that the creature has the power to regulate the whole of the diving procedure.” Even ministers professing that “salvation is of grace” utilized a “method of preaching . . . at variance with the sentiment” (W., “Go Set a Watchman, Let Him Declare What He Seeth.’ Isaiah xxi. 6,” *CI*, 29 October 1831, p. 278). The writer, “W.,” may be Brantly’s longtime Southern friend, William B. Johnson, who would sign his letters to the editor with this initial.

<sup>2</sup>See David Benedict, *Fifty Years among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon, 1860), 135-39, 142-43.

turned from soteriology to ecclesiology, possessing both an “obsession to defend Baptist historical credibility” and a strong desire for proper discipline.<sup>3</sup>

Brantly also ministered in Philadelphia during a time of Calvinistic diversity. Beginning in the late 1820s, a “rapid proliferation of Reformed theologies” began explaining, changing, or even challenging some of the old “doctrines of grace” or five points of Calvinism—total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints—represented so well by the acronym, “Tulip.”<sup>4</sup> The most important proliferation occurred in Congregationalism, in a movement known either as “New England theology” or as “Edwardseanism,” because it arose out of the strong Calvinistic theology of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). Fascinated by the theology of their mentor, men such as Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, and Jonathan Edwards, Jr. used the philosophical categories of Jonathan Edwards to explain the mysteries of Calvinism. Within the movement, the most radical were the Hopkinsians, or so-called “Consistent Calvinists,” who developed a tight metaphysical system called “New Divinity.” Proponents of New Divinity sought to answer Unitarian arguments against the reasonableness of Calvinism by showing the consistency of God’s sovereignty both with His goodness and human responsibility. In doing so, these proponents on the one hand emphasized disinterested benevolence and a governmental view of the atonement, and on the other hand denied imputation—either in justification or in original sin—as well as the Puritan means of grace for conversion.<sup>5</sup>

The most famous of the Hopkinsians, Nathaniel William Taylor (1786-1858) of Yale

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<sup>3</sup>W. Wiley Richards, *Winds of Doctrine* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), xi. According to Richards, “Southern Baptist theology developed out of evangelicalism” in three stages: Calvinistic evangelicalism (until 1800), ecclesiological evangelicalism (about 1800 to President Whitsitt’s resignation at Southern Seminary in 1899), and evangelistic evangelicalism (most of the twentieth century). While the dates may be questioned, the pattern of shifting emphases is valid.

<sup>4</sup>Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 293. The comment on “proliferation” begins a chapter on “The Americanization of Calvinism: Explosion, 1827-1860” (*ibid.*, 293-329).

<sup>5</sup>John R. Fitzmier, *New England’s Moral Legislator: Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 109.

Divinity School, sought a middle road between Calvinism and Unitarianism under the banner of “certainty with power to the contrary.”<sup>6</sup> Both Taylor and the great popularizer of his views, Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875), were contemporaries of William T. Brantly, who thought little of their theology.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to mid-nineteenth-century American Baptists, church historian E. Brooks Holifield has noted four diverse Calvinistic traditions:

(1) Baptist Edwardseanism, (2) a Fullerite Calvinism that was closely related to the Edwardsean strand but not identical with it, (3) the Calvinism of the Philadelphia Confession, and (4) an eclectic populist Calvinism, influenced by the hyper-Calvinists but receptive also to other Baptist impulses, as well as to older esoteric and mystical continental traditions.<sup>8</sup>

In citing examples, Holifield names several men close to Brantly. First, Brantly’s teacher Jonathan Maxcy represents Baptist Edwardseanism, espousing New Divinity distinctions about the atonement, justice, and human ability. Second, Brantly’s fellow Philadelphian John Leadley Dagg represents the Philadelphia tradition, teaching “all the doctrines that the Edwardsean tradition had hoped to replace,” such as imputation and a “limited substitutionary atonement.” Third, Jesse Mercer’s attempt to “counter mistaken readings of Fuller” illustrates the diversity of interpretation that Andrew Fuller, an English Baptist, received among American Baptists—with some drawing him closer to New Divinity, and

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<sup>6</sup>For this quote from Taylor’s sermon, “Concio ad Clerum” (1828), see Robert L. Ferm, ed., *Issues in American Protestantism: A Documentary History from the Puritans to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1969; reprint, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983), 129.

<sup>7</sup>For an overview of New England theology, see Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of New England Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907); and Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety Versus Morality: The Passing of New England Theology* (New York: Henry Holt, 1932). For information on Taylor, see Sidney E. Mead, *Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786-1858: A Connecticut Liberal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942); and Douglas Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). For information on Finney, see Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

<sup>8</sup>E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 282.

others to John Gill, another English Baptist. Finally, the populists include most of the antimission faction that remained staunchly independent both in doctrine and in polity.<sup>9</sup>

Where did Brantly fit within these four Baptist traditions of Calvinism?

Clearly he fit neither within the antimissionary Baptists, whom he opposed, nor within those of the Philadelphia Association, which opposed him. Regarding the first two options, Brantly rejected the metaphysical Calvinism of the Edwardseans for a modified Calvinism that owed much to Andrew Fuller. Just how close Brantly brought his Fullerism to either Edwards or to Gill remains for the chapter to explain.

One initial fact is certain—William T. Brantly considered himself to be a member of a Calvinistic denomination. Writing an article on Baptists for Buck’s *Theological Dictionary*, Brantly summarized, “The great body of this denomination is Calvinistic, and in doctrinal sentiment corresponds with the Presbyterians.”<sup>10</sup> Several months later, in the face of anti-Calvinistic Methodism, Brantly explained, “‘*We preach Christ.*’ We hold that the salvation of men depends, not on themselves, but upon the pleasure of God—upon the covenanted mercies of the atonement.”<sup>11</sup> With regard to “the Arminian tendencies of New England Divinity as held by some Congregationalists,” Brantly added, “We hope by no Baptists.”<sup>12</sup> Brantly also declared himself “old-fashioned enough still to cherish a profound and animated respect” for the “doctrines of grace.” To him, no other plan had such “singular wholesomeness, and masculine vigor,” nor could any match its “securities” nor “incentives.” Its decline, he attributed to the church’s “remarkable tendency to run into extremes.” He explained, “We have had our fears excited by the sound of *false Calvinism*, and *hyper Calvinism*, until we have run to the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 282-89.

<sup>10</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptists of the United States,” *CI*, 20 August 1831, p. 119.

<sup>11</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Popularity of Methodist Doctrine,” *CI*, 22 October 1831, p. 258.

<sup>12</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Methodism against New England Divinity,” *CI*, 22 October 1831, p. 258.

very verge of Arminianism, and are just ready to fall over, into the darkness of perfect *legalism*.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite Brantly’s confession, not all reckoned him orthodox. Rumors had spread of heresy and innovation. One Baptist apologized later for believing these rumors:

I am convinced that I formed a wrong opinion of you from what I heard while I was in your city. I was prejudiced in consequence of being informed that you were an Arminian, or at least leaned to that direction; and also had published a book in which you maintained the sentiment, that it was the duty of parents to bring their children to the pastor, and have him take them in his arms and bless them; and that you laid as much stress on that duty as Paedobaptists do on sprinkling infants.

Brantly published the letter to denounce ignorant “party animosity” and to dissuade others who “may be under similar impressions.”<sup>14</sup> It is highly possible that Brantly was guilty by association, inheriting the label “Arminian” through his association with Henry Holcombe and First Baptist Church. Even so, it is intriguing that for as little as Brantly is known today, he is still held suspect for his theology concerning two issues hotly debated in the 1830s—total depravity and the atonement.<sup>15</sup> Since these are the two doctrines

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<sup>13</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Doctrines of Grace,” *CSCI*, 8 August 1829, p. 91. The next year, Brantly acknowledged the waning popularity among Baptists of Calvinism by calling it “the old fashioned tenet of free and sufficient grace” (idem, “Hints to Baptists,” *CSCI*, 27 February 1830, p. 130).

<sup>14</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Prejudice Removed,” *CI*, 30 July 1831, p. 76. The letter is from Montrose and signed, D. D., which possibly stands for Daniel Dodge. According to D. D., Brantly’s writings in the *Index* proved the rumors false.

For Brantly’s innovative views on child dedication, see the first sermon in William T. Brantly, *Two Sermons, Delivered in the Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga. 1st. . . . “On Parental Duties.” 2d. . . . “The Judgment of Enemies in Favour of Religion”* (Augusta, GA: William J. Bunce, 1824). For past Baptist views in general, see R. E. E. Harkness, “The Dedication of Children,” *The Chronicle* 13 (January 1950): 39-40. According to Anna Olive Jones, “The pastor [Brantly] in 1824 initiated the tradition of parental dedication of children to God by public prayer. . . . The first and second Sundays of May were fixed as dates for this impressive ceremony” (*History of the First Baptist Church, Augusta, Georgia, 1817-1967* [Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan, 1967], 17-18).

<sup>15</sup>According to W. Wiley Richards, when Southern Baptists were leaving behind Calvinistic evangelicalism, their Calvinism underwent two changes: first, total depravity no longer presupposed “the necessity of regeneration before one could repent and believe;” and second, regarding the atonement, “the critical fact remains . . . that Fuller shifted the limitation in the effect of Christ’s death from the sufferings per se to the decree of God.” Baptists found Fuller’s “views of Christ’s death . . . more compatible with a free offer of salvation to all sinners.” Richards claims that Brantly weakened the doctrine of total depravity and equivocated on the atonement, sounding at times like John Gill and other times like Anselm of Canterbury. See Richards, *Winds of Doctrine*, xi, 51, 56-59.

Brantly himself chose to support his claim to orthodoxy, they will form the basis for examining his views on salvation.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Evangelistic Preaching of Total Depravity**

The Central Union Association faced both opposition and misinterpretation. On the one side stood “the cause of Antinomianism, under the sanctimonious plea of *Particular Baptists*.”<sup>17</sup> Brantly considered this cause quite harmful, for in his opinion there was no “error of a more baleful tendency, than that which releases men from the obligations of duty and action under the plea of predestination.” Instead of acting, these lazy predestinarians would merely wait, considering it “presumptuous in us to adopt any measures to hasten the consummation of [God’s] designs.”<sup>18</sup> On the other side stood erstwhile friends who agreed that “the original design of associations was no doubt to *accomplish* something,” and not simply to do business, sending delegates “to their homes to *wait* ‘Thy kingdom come.’”<sup>19</sup> But Brantly knew that a renewed emphasis on effort risked misinterpretation as a denial of grace, for “in the hurry of practice we may forget the respect due to principles.”<sup>20</sup> In the *Index*, Brantly carefully delineated a medial position about the proper use of means.

### **The Use of Means**

Brantly’s position rested on a “union of dependence and action,” which theologically may be termed *congruence*. Because of his created status, a man is completely dependent on God throughout his life. In his origin, before even the angels could glimpse the possibility of his creation, “even then [his] members were all written

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<sup>16</sup>Brantly, “The Doctrines of Grace,” 91.

<sup>17</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Central Union Association,” *CI*, 18 August 1832, p. 110.

<sup>18</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Dependence and Action,” *CSCI*, 21 November 1829, p. 321.

<sup>19</sup>Ro., “Central Union Association,” *CI*, 12 January 1833, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup>Brantly, “The Doctrines of Grace,” 91.



out in God's Book." In his upbringing, a "man still lies at the mercy of external influences." That Americans were not "cast on the rude care of a savage mother" but grew up under the influence of the Gospel was wonderful and unmerited. And in mature age, a man still stood buffeted within and without by natural depravity and unforeseen circumstances. With such thoughts, Brantly affirmed the declaration of the prophet, "The way of man is not in himself."<sup>21</sup> Yet for all this dependence, another prophet called men to prepare the way of the Lord (Isa 40:3). In other words, a man has the responsibility to "help on" God's purposes, by assuming "a condition suitable to the expected change." Though tricky to maintain in tension, Brantly firmly believed, "Human instrumentality should always accompany the operations of God's pre-determinations." As irrefutable proof, Brantly cited the Babylonian captivity of seventy years. Even though God had fixed and foretold the exact number of years, Daniel drew no inference of inactivity, but devoted himself to prayer and penitence.<sup>22</sup> In all God's sovereign actions involving human agency, God has appointed both the means and the ends.<sup>23</sup> To focus only on the ends leads to Antinomianism; to focus only on the means led to Arminianism; Brantly aimed for the middle.

In many respects, the idea of "means" had become the watchword for the era, just as eternal generation had been in the fourth century or justification by faith alone in the sixteenth century. On the idea of means, William Carey based his pioneering work in foreign missions, Francis Wayland praised scientific research and technology, and Charles Finney mechanized revivals.<sup>24</sup> Even then, it became evident that the idea of means ran the great risk of praising man for his effort to the detriment of God's glory.

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<sup>21</sup>W. T. Brantly, "The Way of Man Is Not in Himself.—Jer. x. 23," *CSCI*, 9 January 1830, pp. 17-18. In addition to Jer 10:23, Brantly also referred to Ps 139:16 and 1 Cor 4:7.

<sup>22</sup>Brantly, "Dependence and Action," 321.

<sup>23</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Difficult Subjects," *ABM* 8 (November 1828): 338.

<sup>24</sup>E.g., William Carey entitled his seminal work on missions *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792).

Wayland, for instance, felt the necessity to insert a lengthy footnote about divine sovereignty and human dependence in the middle of his effusion about human advances.<sup>25</sup> Finney, going farther yet, abandoned the notion of total depravity and openly declared that a revival is the “philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means” with divine blessing.<sup>26</sup> So how did Brantly keep from exalting the means too high?

Brantly maintained an insightful difference between human instrumentality in the natural and spiritual realms, which one of his most frequent correspondents missed. The correspondent wrote to the *Index* to prove that the denial of means in both regeneration and sanctification implies practical atheism. As proof, the correspondent began with the natural world, where Christians openly recognized both “the necessity of human effort” and God’s blessing:

If we see the hand of God as *it is concerned* in the natural world, we shall associate the idea of means—the idea of human agency, with the operation of Divine Power. This being done, we shall at once suspect what indeed the Bible teaches, that men must *act* in the moral world—must labor to become holy, or God will never make them so: and if they do thus labor, He will give success to their efforts. It is also true, if men *will not sow* to the Spirit, they *shall not reap* life everlasting. God leaves it to their own choice to *sow* and *reap* the increase which He is pleased to give, or to *neglect sowing* and have no harvest. *He* makes no promise to *sow* for them in spiritual more than in common affairs.<sup>27</sup>

To hear the analogy of laboring for bread was common. In fact, Brantly himself had used it, and on occasion approved of it.<sup>28</sup> But here Brantly could not pass by in silence. He objected to the correspondent’s ideas of necessity and success. From various Scriptures, such as Ezekiel 36:26-27, Zechariah 12:10, and Titus 3:5-6, it was evident that God acted

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<sup>25</sup>Francis Wayland, Jr., *Encouragements to Religious Effort: A Sermon Delivered at the Request of the American Sunday School Union, May 25, 1830* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1830), 24.

<sup>26</sup>Finney’s definition of a revival is taken from *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1835), as quoted in Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, xvii.

<sup>27</sup>C. S. A., “‘Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.’ St. Paul,” *CI*, 2 September 1831, p. 151.

<sup>28</sup>E.g., Theophilus, “On the Duties to Be Enforced on the Unconverted,” *ABM* 2 (September 1822): 409, citing John 6:27. Cf. Ro., “Central Union Association,” 24.

unilaterally in regeneration. Human action was not necessary. As for the notion of success, Brantly made this crucial distinction:

The products of the earth depend upon *natural* causes combined with effort. The products of religion depend upon *spiritual* causes combined with effort. . . . We plant and sow in the confident belief that the qualities which belong to the grain, and to the earth, and seasons which cause it to vegetate, are *inherent*, and incapable of separation from them; but we preach and pray under the confident belief, that the saving virtue is *not inherent* in the word or the prayer, but at the disposal of Him *who hath mercy on whom He will have mercy.*<sup>29</sup>

In other words, while both agriculture and evangelism use human means, the causes are radically different. To paraphrase Brantly's thoughts, regeneration is not a *blessing* added to earthly causation through human means, but is itself a special act of God. The correspondent remained unsatisfied and reasserted, "Men have JUST AS CERTAIN encouragement to labor with all their might in the vineyard of God, as in their own," for "the promises of God seem to secure his aid in both cases, if means are used in his own appointed way, and in entire dependence upon Him for their results." Otherwise, he asked, "Are the laws of the moral world less fixed than those of the natural world?"<sup>30</sup> In response, Brantly employed a proof by contradiction: If the means of conversion rest squarely in the hands of men and have as much prospect of success as agriculture, then "the salvation of every man is at his own disposal [*sic*], since the question, whether or not a man shall have bread, is one wholly at his own disposal." To Brantly, this way of reasoning turned a comparison into an identity, as if

betwixt spiritual and natural cultivation there is not merely a common *likeness* which makes the one *illustrative* of the other; but an actual *sameness* of principle which makes the intervention of God, in giving effect to the one process, precisely the same as that by which success is conferred upon the other.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>W. T. Brantly's editorial note to C. S. A., "'Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.' St. Paul," *CI*, 2 September 1831, p. 151.

<sup>30</sup>C. S. A., Letter to the Editor, *CI*, 17 September 1831, p. 182.

<sup>31</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Remarks on the Preceding Article," *CI*, 17 September 1831, p. 182.

It is precisely the appearance of this error that got Holcombe in trouble with some in his congregation, when he affirmed the *attainability* of faith.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, this error acknowledges God's sovereignty (in the necessity of blessing), while simultaneously denying God's sovereignty (in the necessity of giving the initial power to man).

Therefore, within the shifting tide of emphasis away from God's sovereignty to human instrumentality, Brantly himself took great care to stand firm, neither letting himself be swept away nor letting himself overreact and run to shore. In rightly appraising the means of grace, Brantly stressed that they were means that *God* used to accomplish His purposes. Consequently, the means of grace never signified a course of action, which if men employed, guaranteed a certain end. Such an error turned means into causation itself.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Idea of Uneasiness**

While Finney and others saw the doctrine of total depravity as damaging evangelism, Brantly saw just the reverse:

The doctrine of human impotence in the matter of salvation, appears to us fundamental. Deny it, or modify it in any degree, and you detract so much from the grace and sufficiency of Christ. In such a case you make the sinner dependent partly on God, and partly on his own volitions. The pure Gospel is abhorrent from such a mixture.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>In Holcombe's *Primitive Theology*, the chapter "The Attainability of Faith" was "the only evidence ever adduced to support the assertion that either Dr. Holcombe or [First Baptist] Church had been guilty of any departure from the faith" (Keen, *Bi-Centennial Celebration*, 87 n.1). In the book, Holcombe argued, "You may suppose, after all, that faith, acknowledged, with boundless gratitude, to be the gift of God, cannot be an object of our rational endeavours: but why not? Bread is the gift of God: yet we are not only taught to pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' but commanded to labour for it with our hands. Nothing but a compound of ignorance and vice, can say, 'If God has determined to give me faith I shall have it: but if not my efforts can have no tendency to procure it.' What! is there no connexion established betwixt means and ends! Seed time and harvest shall continue, according to an unalterable decree: but does it follow that we shall reap without sowing? . . . In a word, does common sense infer from the *fact*, faith is the gift of God, that he has instituted no medium through which he will ordinarily bestow it? Do you not know that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God?" (*ibid.*, 89). In reply, it may be asked whether a sinner's efforts have any "tendency to procure" faith.

<sup>33</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Means of Grace," *CI*, 21 January 1832, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup>Brantly, "The Doctrines of Grace," 91.

In Brantly's opinion, the "doctrine of human impotence" was fundamental to the Gospel, not only because it was true, but even more because it was useful and necessary. The very success of the Gospel depended on its public proclamation.

Brantly proved the usefulness of preaching total depravity in a remarkable article, entitled "Ability and Inability." The context for this article adds to its validity, for Brantly wrote it in the midst of the phenomenal successes of the Central Union Association's initial protracted meetings. In fact, Brantly set the doctrine in the context of a preaching environment, thereby posing it as a useful discussion, rather than a detached wandering into the ethereal world of metaphysics. The article pictures a preacher before "a mixed assembly" affirming that "an unregenerate man has the ability to repent, and believe, and do all other acts necessary to Salvation." The reader needed little imagination to picture this, for Finney and others were affirming this ability in 1832. According to Brantly, such a statement would polarize the audience into traditionalists who oppose human ability and others who would applaud the preacher as "the judicious proclaimer of the oracles of God." Which side is correct?<sup>35</sup>

Instead of answering this question directly with metaphysical arguments and biblical quotations, Brantly first pointed to the practical effects, as if saying with his Lord, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt 7:16). While telling sinners they have the ability to repent and believe may seem like a necessary incentive to action, Brantly claimed just the opposite—doing so will put them "*at ease*" in activity, for they will conclude, "If we have the Power, we will use that power at our own discretion." But why would all sinners with such knowledge *delay* coming to Christ for eternal life? Brantly pointed to the universal problem of total depravity: "The unregenerate *without exception*, regard as an evil the requirements of Christ and his Religion; and if they ever think of submission to Christ, it is only as the adoption of one evil to avoid a greater one."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Ability and Inability," *CI*, 6 October 1832, pp. 209-10.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 209, italics added.

Hence, sinners will delay conversion as long as they can still enjoy their sin. Here lies the root presupposition to Brantly's doctrine of conversion. As Brantly elsewhere explained, man stands in need of Almighty power, not only because God is sovereign over man's origin, upbringing, and circumstances, but also because man himself is blind, having the wisdom to do evil, but no knowledge to do good (citing Jer 4:22).<sup>37</sup> All individuals "are born under sin, and *are children of wrath*."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, sinners must hear that they are unable to repent and believe in Christ.

But such reasoning still seems contrary to observation, for were there not many "at ease" in the Calvinistic churches of Zion? Brantly had addressed this problem three years prior, acknowledging that none had a more plausible excuse for procrastination than those who claimed "that they *cannot save themselves*, and that their salvation can only be effected in God's time and by his methods." But even then, Brantly had again refused to posit "a latent and unexplored ability in man, if not to save himself, at least to bring himself to Christ that He may save him." Again, this approach added "an opiate to stupor," for "there is no readier a way to render men *easy* in a perilous condition, than by making them believe that it is in their power to rescue themselves at their own pleasure." The real solution was to question the sinner's integrity, for if he *really* believed what he spoke, he could not remain at ease, but in a state of great uneasiness would cry out to some outside power to save him! Thus humbled, God would hear his cry, for He gives grace to the humble.<sup>39</sup> Using scriptural terms, Brantly elsewhere identified uneasiness as

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<sup>37</sup>Brantly, "The Way of Man Is Not in Himself.—Jer. x. 23," 17-18.

<sup>38</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Hints to Baptists," *CSCI*, 27 March 1830, p. 193, quoting Eph 2:3. Brantly believed that the book of Romans taught original sin, i.e., that "the corruption of the human race . . . derived immediately from Adam" (W. T. Brantly, "Professor Stewart's [*sic*] Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans," *CI*, 20 October 1832, p. 241). As for Adam himself, "all his moral powers were ruined and corrupted by the first transgression" (idem, "The First Man," *CSCI*, 16 January 1830, p. 33).

<sup>39</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Those Who Are at Ease in Zion," *CSCI*, 18 July 1829, pp. 44-45. Brantly may have preached the substance of this article for the Central Union Association's protracted meeting at Vincent in late summer 1832 (*Minutes of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Session of the Central Union Association, of Independent Baptist Churches, Held with the Vincent Baptist Church, June 3d and 4th, 1856* [Philadelphia: Oliver P. Glessner, 1856], 11).

“the true *godly sorrow* which works a right repentance” and gives one the character of a “ready suppliant,” which is necessary for salvation.<sup>40</sup>

Anything less than making sinners feel uneasy fell short of true Gospel preaching. Indeed, the road to uneasiness ran counter to the selfish tendencies of Arminian preaching: “The method which a merciful Saviour has instituted to reconcile sinners, *first* to himself, and *secondly* to their own felicity—reverses the tendencies, tastes, desires, and affections of the natural mind.”<sup>41</sup> To clarify his position, Brantly claimed that this mode of preaching did not rule out the sinner’s own effort:

When we are taught the *worthlessness* of our efforts to save ourselves, it is not that we should therefore, make no effort, but that we should become *uneasy* and *disquieted*, to think that no effort can of itself help us.<sup>42</sup>

Nor did this mode rule out *all* human ability, in that the convinced sinner was then “able to feel *uneasy*” and “to be sensible of his own weakness.” Yet even this “ability” must be regarded as the beginning work of grace, for in their perishing condition, sinners are “ruined, undone, lost to all sense of their misery, and of the succor which they need.” The uneasiness of a convicted sinner shows that he really does believe he is entirely unable to believe; but this faith, ironically, is itself the beginning of believing the Gospel.<sup>43</sup> No other road to true conversion exists:

We humbly conceive that no sinner ever prays, until this latter conviction [of inability] is brought to his soul; and that hence the whole effort of the ministry should be directed to the accomplishment of this one object.

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<sup>40</sup>Brantly, “Remarks on the Preceding Article,” 182-83, which refers to 2 Cor 7:10.

<sup>41</sup>Brantly, “Ability and Inability,” 209.

<sup>42</sup>Brantly, “Remarks on the Preceding Article,” 182.

<sup>43</sup>These last assertions are probable constructions of Brantly’s thought. It appears that he may have been speaking rhetorically in calling uneasiness a sinner’s only ability, for how can a sinner be *able* to feel that he is completely unable? Since Brantly elsewhere refers to this uneasiness as humility, he regarded uneasiness itself as a virtue, of which he would have been loathe to say that it came from man himself. Hence, even this uneasy mindset may be implied in “the Mind of the Spirit” which subdues “the Mind of the flesh” (Brantly, “Ability and Inability,” 209). It is surprising that Brantly does not refer here to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in John 16:8-11.

While the Methodists may imagine, as one openly did, that his “Calvinist brethren appear in Methodist armor” in order to succeed in revivals, Brantly knew otherwise.<sup>44</sup> Having baptized hundreds, Brantly could say, “This method of preaching has been always found successful. To our mind it is the only true way of dealing with the unconverted.”<sup>45</sup>

Regarding the opposing position, Brantly identified the root error of Arminian thinking “in the habit of estimating the power of man, not from what he is—but from what God requires him to do; and who imagine that his Lord would not demand at his hands, a tribute which he is unable to render.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, according to Arminianism, the measure of ability is not nature, but responsibility. Brantly could not agree with this Arminian axiom. Earlier in the year, he had explicitly stated:

Although a sinner does not come to Christ without the drawings of the Spirit, yet for not doing that very thing, he is liable to eternal destruction, and that God is pre-eminently just in making him liable to such a penalty for not doing what is allowed to be out of his power.<sup>47</sup>

Such a bold assertion seemed unfair to one correspondent, who then asked Brantly to explain himself. The editor replied:

The chief power . . . of which [men] are destitute, is the WILL to come to Christ. WILL is to the soul what POWER is to the body, or if you please, WILL is POWER. Therefore, for not having this POWER to come to Christ, men are liable to punishment.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Popularity of Methodist Doctrines,” *CI*, 22 October 1831, p. 258. Brantly swiftly countered these arguments with a rapid fire of *ad hominem*, history, and theology: “‘*What men we Methodists are?*’ Was Edwards an Arminian? Was Whitfield [*sic*] an Arminian? Were all those Presbyterian and Baptist worthies who preached with so much effect in this country before Methodism was known, Arminians? . . . If Methodist doctrines choose to court the popular ear, they may do so. ‘*We preach Christ.*’ We hold that the salvation of men depends, not on themselves, but upon the pleasure of God—upon the covenanted mercies of the atonement” (ibid.).

<sup>45</sup>Brantly, “Ability and Inability,” 210. Brantly baptized around six hundred into fellowship at First Baptist Church in Philadelphia (Keen, *Bi-Centennial Celebration*, 97).

<sup>46</sup>Brantly, “Ability and Inability,” 209.

<sup>47</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Coming to Christ,” *CI*, 18 February 1832, p. 100.

<sup>48</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Answer,” *CI*, 3 March 1832, p. 132.



Whether this explanation satisfied the “Sincere Inquirer” or not, it certainly provoked a Methodist editor of *The Christian Advocate and Journal*, who claimed that “the ‘Index’ has not pointed right this time” because:

If “WILL is to the soul what POWER is to the body,” then it is self-evident that no human soul is to blame for not having the WILL to come to Christ, for no one can be to blame for being destitute of bodily power, else infants are to blame for not being men, and the weak for not being strong.

To Brantly, the Methodist pressed the analogy too far, for “in strictness, the WILL is the power that moves both the body as well as the soul.” By “WILL,” Brantly referred to the “*disinclination* to Religion, or in the language of Scripture, the *enmity* of the heart that constitutes the inability of men to save themselves.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, this disinclination was permanent. It did no good to twist the meaning of Scripture, making “enmity” a passing affection, as another correspondent alleged.<sup>50</sup> No, using the vocabulary of Paul, “The Mind of the flesh which before had the entire control of the man, must be restrained and subdued into subordination, by the Mind of the Spirit.”<sup>51</sup> Spiritual inability was just as impossible as a physical inability, though they did differ in kind.<sup>52</sup> As Brantly stated emphatically later in the year, “When this disinclination is so strong as to hold back the sinner from Christ, with a power which no natural force was ever yet known to overcome, what does signify all that can, or may be said—about *Human Ability*?”<sup>53</sup>

From this survey, it is safe to conclude that Brantly not only held firmly to the doctrine of total depravity, but also that he was in many respects a traditional Calvinistic evangelical in the legacy of the American Great Awakening. The road to uneasiness

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<sup>49</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Our Methodist Friend Again,” *CI*, 31 March 1832, p. 194.

<sup>50</sup>C. S. A., “Misapplied Text,” *CI*, 7 July 1832, p. 13. In a footnote, Brantly curtly replied, “Notwithstanding what C. S. A. here says [on Rom 8:7], we still think the passage to which he refers as a *misapplied text*—rightly applied.”

<sup>51</sup>Brantly, “Ability and Inability,” 209, which refers to Rom 8:6-7 and cites 2 Cor 5:17.

<sup>52</sup>Brantly, “Our Methodist Friend Again,” 194.

<sup>53</sup>Brantly, “Ability and Inability,” 209.

strongly resembles the firm preaching of Whitefield and his heirs.<sup>54</sup> In Brantly's opinion, those who preached inability *evangelistically* upheld the tradition of the early American Baptist preachers, who had caught "the glowing fire of Whitfield [*sic*]" and taught the doctrines of practical Calvinism. They saw no contradiction between the impotence of man and the "obligation of all men to repent and believe the gospel." Nor did they see any hindrance to preaching both grace and the necessity of persevering in holiness "as the only visible criterion of their acceptance with God." What Brantly could not stand was "that balmy theology which leaves christians in a sort of antinomian inaction, and makes heaven the privilege of confident professors."<sup>55</sup> Brantly much preferred the evangelistic Calvinism of the heirs of Whitefield to the "dormancy" of the "venerable" Samuel Jones of the old Philadelphia Association.<sup>56</sup>

Even more, Brantly's use of the term "disinclination" reveals his dependence on the Edwardsean distinction of moral and natural ability. In the treatise *On the Freedom of the Will*, Jonathan Edwards defined natural and moral inability as follows:

We are said to be *naturally* unable to do a thing, when we cannot do it if we will, because what is most commonly called *nature* does not allow of it, or because of some impeding defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the Will; either in the faculty of understanding, constitution of the body, or external objects. *Moral* Inability consists not in any of these things; but . . . it may be said in one word, that moral Inability consists in the opposition or want of inclination.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>E.g., in a sermon on Jer 6:14 entitled, "The Method of Grace," Whitefield asserted that no one could speak peace to his own heart before he was "made to see, made to feel, made to weep over, made to bewail" his actual transgressions of God's law, as well as his original sin, the sins of his best duties, and his own unbelief (George Whitefield, *Select Sermons of George Whitefield* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958], 78-83).

<sup>55</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Character of the Early American Baptist Preachers," *CSCI*, 11 July 1829, p. 19. These observations about the theology preached by the Separate Baptists help to fill out their meager confessions of faith. For instance, the 1783 confession of Abbott's Creek under George Pope has only eight articles, patterned mainly after Heb 6:1-2 (see George Washington Paschal, *History of North Carolina Baptists* [Raleigh: The General Board, The North Carolina Baptist State Convention, 1930-1955], 1:403, 2:189).

<sup>56</sup>W. T. Brantly, "The Oldest Baptist Church in Pennsylvania," *CSCI*, 18 July 1829, p. 34.

<sup>57</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *On the Freedom of the Will*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [Works], ed. Edward Hickman (1834; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1:11. For the influence of Edwards on Baptists, see Tom J. Nettles, "Edwards and his Impact on Baptists," *Founder's Journal*, no. 53 (Summer 2003): 1-18.

It is this distinction that both explained how God could justly hold men accountable for what they could not do, and enabled Calvinistic preachers to address such unable sinners as if they were able.<sup>58</sup> This distinction also highly impressed Brantly, who had written publicly, “It is of great moment, that Christians, and more especially ministers of the gospel, should clearly understand the distinction between *natural* and *moral* inability.”<sup>59</sup>

### **The Baptist Crisis over Limited Atonement**

William T. Brantly recognized that Baptists were experiencing a “crisis” concerning correct views of the atonement. Some Baptists were hailing John Gill as their champion; others Andrew Fuller. Both men advocated detailed views of the atonement, and opinions varied over how much the two leaders disagreed.<sup>60</sup> The strife became so great in areas, that some were beginning to ask whether the different parties should form different churches.<sup>61</sup> The strife and disharmony grieved Brantly, for he considered the crisis wholly unnecessary, resting on misunderstanding. Because both parties agreed to

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<sup>58</sup>E.g., see S., “Man’s Ability to Come to Christ,” *CI*, 18 February 1832, p. 100. Brantly calls this article “sufficiently strong on that branch of the subject” (W. T. Brantly, “Doctrinal Views,” *CI*, 18 February 1832, p. 111).

<sup>59</sup>Theophilus, Letter to the Editor, *CS*, 29 March 1823, p. 49; cf. Brantly, “Difficult Subjects,” 339. In using this helpful distinction, Edwardsean heirs ran the risk of equivocation. For instance, does the word “natural” refer to what men were as originally created, or to what men are now in their sinful state, i.e. “by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3)? Cf. John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defense of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius*, ed. A. N. S. Lane, trans. G. I. Davies (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 40, 186. When Bennet Tyler, the formidable Congregational opponent of Nathaniel W. Taylor, made the unqualified assertion, “Every sinner is capable of obeying the Gospel,” Brantly rose to his defense, saying that Tyler by no means implied that “every sinner is possessed of a power within himself to obey the Gospel” (W. T. Brantly, “Unqualified Assertions,” *CI*, 9 April 1831, p. 234). Even Edwards himself observed, “In the strictest propriety of speech, a man has a thing in his power, if he has it in his choice, or at his election: and a man cannot be truly said to be unable to do a thing, when he can do it if he will” (Edwards, *Works*, 1:11; cf. 1:50).

<sup>60</sup>E.g., see Pacificator, “Gill and Fuller,” *CSCI*, 27 February 1830, pp. 130-34.

<sup>61</sup>When asked whether there should be “cordial fellowship” between churches and individuals who adopt Gill’s views on the one side and Fuller’s on the other, Brantly forbade censures, reasoning, “Those two good and great men were of the same views on *eight and thirty articles*; and if we suppose their creed to have consisted only of *nine and thirty*, then there was only *one article* to separate them. Scarcely any two men who have written much ever came nearer to an exact identity of belief. It is, therefore, a most unnecessary labor for their respective friends and adherents to fall out by the way” (W. T. Brantly, “Question,” *CSCI*, 23 January 1830, p. 60). Brantly respected both of these “great and good men” in their own rights, and called on others to do the same (idem, “Human Authority in Matters of Faith,” *CS*, 23 August 1828, p. 134).

salvation by free and sovereign grace, Brantly insisted, “There is no material difference among them.”<sup>62</sup> In his opinion, both Gill and Fuller taught limited atonement, but differed only on its basis: “Dr. Gill resolves election into the provisions and capacity of the atonement. Fuller resolves it into the sovereign will and pleasure of God.”<sup>63</sup> The weighty difference between the two Baptist giants concerned their legacy in preaching:

[Gill] considered it preposterous for preachers in their sermons to address sinners, and accordingly never made any indiscriminate appeals to the unconverted, but simply delivered his message and left it with his hearers. [Fuller] insisted that it was the duty of all men who heard the Gospel to believe and obey it, and was therefore most earnest and energetic in appealing to a whole congregation on the eternal interest of their soul.<sup>64</sup>

Fuller’s insistence upon the “duty” of faith rested in part upon modifications to the doctrine of limited atonement, but more fundamentally upon the Edwardsean distinction between moral and natural ability.<sup>65</sup> Brantly clearly sided with the Fuller tradition,

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<sup>62</sup>William T. Brantly, “Correspondents,” *CI*, 15 January 1831, p. 48. For a description of the crisis, see Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 135-44.

<sup>63</sup>Brantly, “Gill and Fuller,” *CSCI*, 16 January 1830, p. 40. Fuller himself wrote of placing the “specialty of redemption . . . in the atonement *itself*, [or] in the sovereign *will of God*” (Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller [Works]*, ed. Joseph Belcher [Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988], 2:708).

<sup>64</sup>Brantly, “Gill and Fuller,” 40; cf. H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 183. Brantly traced Gill’s alleged reticence to indiscriminate appeals back to the bad tendency of his limited-by-nature doctrine of the atonement to produce false security (Brantly, “Gill and Fuller,” 40). For a more positive assessment of Gill and evangelism, see Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 73-107.

<sup>65</sup>For Andrew Fuller’s defense of the duty of faith, see *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785) in Fuller, *Works*, 2:328-93. For Fuller’s views on the atonement, see the chapter “On Particular Redemption” in *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation (Works, 2:373-75)*, the section “On the Death of Christ” in Fuller’s “Reply to the Observations of Philanthropos” (*ibid.*, 2:488-94), “The Deity of Christ Essential to the Atonement” (*ibid.*, 3:693-95), “Six Letters to Dr. Ryland Respecting the Controversy with the Rev. A. Booth” (*ibid.*, 2:699-715); cf. Nettles, *By His Grace*, 121-29. For Fuller’s connection between the Edwardsean distinction and preaching “to exhort . . . carnal auditors” to repentance and faith, see *Works*, 2:386-87, 382; cf. Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 140. For the historical significance of Fuller’s theology, see Thomas J. Nettles, “Preface to the New Edition: Why Andrew Fuller?” found without pagination at the start of volume 1 in Fuller, *Works*.

Regarding the historical significance of Fuller’s classic book, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, historian Leon McBeth summarized, “It turned Particular Baptists around, brought a new style of preaching, helped stave off the paralysis of hyper-Calvinism, developed a theology of moderate conservatism which made possible the missionary movement embodied in William Carey, and laid the groundwork for Baptist advance in the nineteenth century” (*Baptist Heritage*, 182).

wistfully saying once, “Happy will be that era in the history of the Baptist churches, when the spirit and mind of Fuller shall have become universal.”<sup>66</sup>

To promote better unity through understanding, Brantly devoted several articles in the *Index* to the atonement. These articles show that Brantly himself adhered to views similar to Fuller, but did not insist on details. Unity and usefulness ranked higher than uniformity and precision.

### **Mercer and White**

By 1830, some Baptists began using Fuller’s name to push Baptist doctrine outside traditional Calvinism. One example comes from the western counties of Georgia, where Baptists were engaged in a controversy over the atonement, leading allegedly to some being excluded from their church. Two ministers, Cyrus White and B. H. Willison, argued for a general atonement and appealed to Fuller’s authority. The latter also asserted that he believed the same as Jesse Mercer, whose doctrinal credentials had been quite high among Georgian Baptists. As a result, Mercer found himself “*strongly and generally* suspected [in western Georgia], of drinking out of *Fuller’s spring* with White and Willison,” and acting as the “abettor” of Arminianism. Mercer, for his part, had been stepping quite softly on the atonement, declining to speak of it in the Ocmulgee Association and only lightly speaking of it in the Flint River Association. When White published a pamphlet (as Brantly claimed) “to prove the unlimited scheme of atonement,”

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<sup>66</sup>W. T. Brantly, “New Publications,” *CI*, 22 June 1833, p. 398. Historian David Benedict noted that by the 1830s, Brantly’s wish had largely been fulfilled: “On the introduction of the Fuller system a very important change followed on the part of many of our ministers in their modes of addressing their unconverted hearers on the subjects of repentance and believing the gospel. Hitherto they would use circumlocution in their discourses on these matters, instead of direct appeals and exhortations” (Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 140). Mercer testified to “a considerable revolution” that had occurred in America and Europe from Fuller’s work (“*Review*,” 390). E.g., David Jones, Brantly’s coworker in the Central Union Association, read Fuller as a young man and consequently broke with the Welsh Baptist reticence towards exhorting sinners to repent (David Jones, “A Biographical Sketch of the Rev. David Jones,” *CI*, 22 June 1833, p. 388).

Mercer decided to clear himself and the “excellent Mr. F.” from suspicion by writing ten open letters to White, which Brantly reprinted in his magazine.<sup>67</sup>

The ten letters consist of a point-by-point refutation of White’s argument for a general provision in the atonement. In countering White’s assertions, Mercer quotes heavily from Fuller’s works, not because he himself necessarily agreed with Fuller, but because White hid under Fuller’s shadow.<sup>68</sup> Summarizing the arguments in depth will help to place Brantly on the theological map, for Mercer adhered to the Gillite view of the atonement, while White was proceeding on a trajectory from Fuller to Arminianism.<sup>69</sup> White, in fact, illustrates how Fuller’s controversial views could be co-opted to introduce insipient Arminianism. As shall be seen, Brantly largely adhered to Fuller’s views, but went beyond them a little in two respects, though without becoming an Arminian. Five of White’s arguments fall under Mercer’s unyielding fire.

First, White argued for what he termed a “full atonement,” by which he meant a “ransom price” offered on behalf of every individual equally.<sup>70</sup> Mercer challenged the

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<sup>67</sup>The preceding summary comes from “The Apology” prefaced to Jesse Mercer, *Ten Letters Addressed to the Rev. Cyrus White; in Reference to his Scriptural View of the Atonement. By his friend and Fellow Labourer [in the] Gospel of Christ* (Washington, GA: Wilkes County News Office, 1830). For Brantly’s reprint, see Jesse Mercer, “Letters on the Atonement,” *CSCI*, 28 August 1830, pp. 137-39; idem, “Mercer’s Letters to White on the Atonement,” *CSCI*, 23 October 1830, pp. 259-62; 6 November 1830, pp. 293-96; 13 November 1830, pp. 307-09; 20 November 1830, pp. 326-28. The *Index* pagination will be followed here for citation.

For a close analysis of Mercer’s *Ten Letters*, see Anthony L. Chute, *A Piety above the Common Standard: Jesse Mercer and the Defense of Evangelistic Calvinism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 83-92. For White’s position, see Cyrus White, *A Scriptural View of the Atonement* (Milledgeville, GA: Statesman and Patriot, 1830); cf. Jarrett Burch, *Adiel Sherwood: Baptist Antebellum Pioneer in Georgia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 90-92.

<sup>68</sup>In quoting Fuller, Mercer tried both to vindicate Fuller and to pull the rug out from under his opponent. Proof for the former comes from Mercer’s prefaced “Apology.” Proof for the latter comes from the letters themselves, where Mercer told his opponent, “You have always professed to me to be with Fuller in sentiment; but Sir, you have put yourself with Fuller’s opponents” (Letter 4, in *Ten Letters*, 260), and later, “Here I shall quote from your professed, but much abused patron” (Letter 9, in *Ten Letters*, 307). Less likely, but also a possibility, is the explanation that Mercer, a Gillite, used Fuller in order to emphasize his commonality with other missionary Baptists (Chute, *Piety*, 91).

<sup>69</sup>White later revealed his true colors in starting the “first enduring Arminian Baptist churches in Georgia” (Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], 103).

<sup>70</sup>See Letter 1, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 137; and Letter 4, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 260.

meaning of both words. Like White, Mercer too preferred the term “full atonement” over the term “limited atonement,” but for different reasons than White. Mercer asserted:

The fulness of the atonement is not to be measured by the *number saved*; but by its *competency to save one sinner*. . . . So that to talk of a limited atonement is to talk of an atonement short of the requisitions of Justice, . . . or it is to suppose it is administered by drops and that the merits of Christ can be exhausted; which I presume none will admit.<sup>71</sup>

But what of the atonement itself? Mercer offered a definition opposite to that of White’s: “Propitiation is the victim for sacrifice—atonement is the acceptance of that victim in the place of the transgressor.” Consequently, by definition, atonement cannot be a mere provision, for it itself is the application of a provision. When questioned later on this cause-and-effect differentiation between propitiation and atonement, Mercer offered this clarification:

Reconciliation is making peace between parties at variance. God and men are at variance and reconciliation relates to both parties. From God it removes the offence; from men, *sin*, the cause of it. . . . In reference to God [reconciliation] is atonement; in references to men it is regeneration and conversion.<sup>72</sup>

With this definition, it is little wonder that “limited atonement” dismayed Mercer, for “limited reconciliation” would imply no true reconciliation at all.

Second, White resembled Fuller in rejecting commercial language. According to White, sin should be considered not as a debt, but as a crime; for if sin were a debt, it would require endless punishment for satisfaction, thereby making an historical payment impossible. And even if such a payment were possible, forgiveness would disappear, for the payment had already been paid. Mercer replied that punishment is endless only because the debtors can never pay to get out. Moreover, though the debt has been fully paid, a sinner could never demand it, for only the Son has the right to bestow it by

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<sup>71</sup>Letter 2, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 138.

<sup>72</sup>Jesse Mercer, “Reconciliation and Atonement,” *CSCI*, 30 October 1830, p. 282. For confirmation, Mercer claimed that John Gill, Thomas Scott, [James?] Brown, Philip Doddridge, Charles Buck, and Matthew Henry all agreed “in reconciliation and atonement being synonymous [*sic*], as they relate to God” (*ibid.*, 283).

covenantal arrangement with the Father. Mercer himself had no trouble with commercial language, nor with its logical denial of a general provision.<sup>73</sup>

Third, White appealed to the indefinite language of Scripture, especially to terms such as “all men” and “world.” Mercer, in turn, cited texts that Fuller had used having the same terms as White. If White’s meaning of those same terms were applied to Fuller’s texts, universal salvation would be the inevitable conclusion. The tenth letter makes clear that one of Mercer’s goals was to show that White’s use of Scripture “forces universalism upon us.”<sup>74</sup>

Fourth, White appealed to the Parable of the Supper (Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24), claiming that a valid invitation required sufficient provision.<sup>75</sup> Just as Fuller would speak against the notion of sinners being “invited to what is *naturally impossible*,” so White also appealed to the logic of a valid invitation requiring sufficient provision.<sup>76</sup> Mercer questioned at first the use of a parable establishing doctrine, but then granted its use for the sake of argument, and proceeded to point out that the invitations were only made to a select group and that the house had limited capacity, for it became “filled.”<sup>77</sup> Moreover, it is an historical fact, according to Mercer, that God has sent out a limited invitation, for not all nations have yet been invited to the supper.<sup>78</sup>

Fifth, White argued as Fuller did, that natural impossibility nullified moral obligation. By this White meant, if there were no general provision, God could no longer

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<sup>73</sup>Letter 3, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 259.

<sup>74</sup>Letter 5, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 276-78; Letter 10, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 326.

<sup>75</sup>Fuller himself similarly argued, “If there were not a sufficiency in the atonement for the salvation of sinners, and yet they were invited to be reconciled to God, they must be invited to what is *naturally impossible*. The message of the gospel would in this case be as if the servants who went forth to bid the guests had said, ‘Come,’ though, in fact, nothing was ready if many of them had come” (Fuller, *Works*, 2:709).

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:709.

<sup>77</sup>Letter 6, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 278-79.

<sup>78</sup>Letter 8, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 295.



hold men accountable for their sins. Mercer denied the premise, claiming that the Atonement could add nothing to the sinner's obligation unless it also added the ability to repent and believe. But men already had the *natural* ability necessary and sufficient for accountability, even though they lacked the *moral* ability to obey. (Here Mercer explicitly invoked and explained the Edwardsean distinction between natural and moral ability.) Furthermore, Mercer argued, if White were correct, his scheme would make "the sinner's interest in the Atonement the object of faith, instead of the revealed truth of God."<sup>79</sup> Therefore, Mercer concluded in a subsequent letter, referring to the example of Christ, "It is consistent to address sinners *as such*, and call upon them to repent and believe, that they may be saved, just as if there were no purposes of God, at all, in relation to their final destiny"—and, quoting from Fuller again, regardless of whether these things can be understood.<sup>80</sup>

Mercer's letters do a service in revealing how much Andrew Fuller could be misunderstood. For example, when Fuller argued for a sufficient provision necessary for natural ability, he merely argued against the notion of a quantity of suffering offered for a specific quantity of sins and no more. Fuller never meant to say that God actually intended to provide the Son for everyone, but only that there existed "an objective fulness in the atonement of Christ sufficient for any numbers of sinners, were they to believe in him."<sup>81</sup> Fuller openly argued for a limited extent with respect to the atonement, for though the atonement is necessarily infinite in value in itself, the absolute determination of the Son to save some argues for a special design.<sup>82</sup> Later in life, Fuller reaffirmed his

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<sup>79</sup>Letter 7, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 293-94.

<sup>80</sup>Letter 8, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 296.

<sup>81</sup>Fuller, *Works*, 2:709.

<sup>82</sup>One of Fuller's main axioms was that "an *absolute* purpose must be effectual;" hence, he asked Philanthropos, "*Whether our Lord Jesus Christ had any absolute determination in his death to save any of the human race.*" If He did, those intended must certainly be saved; so arguing backwards in time, since only some are finally saved, Christ had an *absolute* determination to save only some (see Fuller, *Works*, 2:489-494).

earlier argument, adding, “Christ had an absolute and determinate design in his death to save some of the human race, *and not others.*”<sup>83</sup> White, in contrast, seemed “to admit,” as Mercer observed, “of no *special* divine operations.”<sup>84</sup>

Another example of misunderstanding Fuller comes from his reticence toward commercial language. Fuller objected to commercial language because “the principle of *pecuniary* satisfactions” suggested an atonement “not of sufficient *value* for more than those who are actually liberated by it.”<sup>85</sup> From this criticism, White promoted something similar to a governmental view of the atonement, in which Christ fully satisfied the law and bore the punishment for sin, thereby enabling God to pardon criminals indefinitely.<sup>86</sup> In White’s view there could be no true substitution, for Mercer aptly noted, an impersonal atonement cannot have imputation.<sup>87</sup> Some of the source for this misunderstanding lies with Fuller himself, as Mercer admitted:

’Tis true Mr. F. contends for the atonement, as made to law and justice, as satisfaction for a *crime*, and not as payment for a *debt*, and that it constitutes the gospel-ground on which God can be just and extend pardon to any sinner, whom he will; but he never thought of denying imputation, or even substitution. He maintained such a union between Christ and those who are finally saved, as secured their salvation in *particular.*<sup>88</sup>

As proof, Mercer points to Fuller’s letter to John Ryland on “Substitution.”<sup>89</sup> Fuller himself examined the governmental theory of the atonement and rejected it outright in 1803 based on the necessity of satisfying what sin itself deserves, not just what upholds

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<sup>83</sup>Fuller, *Works*, 2:710, italics added.

<sup>84</sup>Letter 9, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 307.

<sup>85</sup>Fuller, *Works*, 2:708.

<sup>86</sup>This is Mercer’s summary of White; see Letter 3, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 259; and Letter 10, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 326.

<sup>87</sup>Letter 9, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 308.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Fuller, *Works*, 2:706-09.

the law of God.<sup>90</sup> Mercer's agility in quoting Fuller appropriately against White leads to the question of how much Fuller had been read when Fuller was cited on the frontier.

As for Mercer himself, other than his admission quoted above, he never told White how much he himself differed from Fuller. Nor did Mercer do so in a nationally published review of Fuller's works, which appeared in the October 1833 issue of *The American Baptist Magazine*.<sup>91</sup> But a month later, Mercer quoted from this review in the *Christian Index*, which by this time he had obtained from Brantly, and prefaced the quote by listing three points of theological disagreement with Fuller:

We said, 'we [*sic*] do not fully receive all Mr. Fullers [*sic*] views of the methods of divine mercy.' Not that we considered them *armenian* [*sic*]. But we are at some difficulty to see how the sacrifice of atonement could satisfy the claims of injured justice, on account of sin, without reference at the same time to the persons, for whose sins it was offered. Nor can we perceive the ground, which its infinite value lays for general invitations, free offers and sure promises to all who will accept them, while that value is only in itself considered, and the application reserved to the sovereignty of the divine will. And although we fully accord to Mr. Fuller, that men are under obligation to God to the full extent of their relation to him, and of his gifts and callings to them; yet how to perceive, that they are bound to yield *spiritual* obedience, while they are themselves *natural*, we find not.<sup>92</sup>

All three assertions place Mercer firmly with the Gillites of his day. The first two of these animadversions actually rest on the same premise, namely, that a vicarious atonement must at all times have in view the party to be interceded. Mercer made this point early in his letters to White: "As the scriptures connect the sins and the persons of those for whom atonement is made, I choose to put the two together, where the scriptures have placed them."<sup>93</sup> This direct union of atoned sins with atoned sinners classifies Mercer as a Gillite, but not necessarily an adherent of all Gill's views. While rejecting

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<sup>90</sup>See the small tract, "The Deity of Christ Essential to Atonement" (Fuller, *Works*, 2:693; quoted in Letter 2, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 138-39). For more information, see Nettles, *By His Grace*, 128-29.

<sup>91</sup>The only clue of disagreement is the oblique clause, "Though we do not view these volumes as faultless, . . ." ([Mercer], "Review," 392).

<sup>92</sup>Jesse Mercer, "Review of Fuller's Works," *CIBM*, 19 November 1833, p. 73.

<sup>93</sup>Letter 2, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 138.

the obligation of sinners toward *spiritual* obedience, Mercer nonetheless agreed with Fuller in the Edwardsean distinction between moral and natural ability in regard to all other moral duties.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, he agreed with Fuller that the dignity of the Son necessarily gave the atonement infinite value, though he disagreed on how this value grounded the general call of the Gospel.<sup>95</sup> Mercer conceded to White that the “objective fulness in Christ” formed “the substance of the gospel message,” but added, “Whatever this is; it is in the Bible of God restricted to them that believe.” Because White’s scheme had Christ dying equally for wolves as well as sheep, Mercer called it “futile, cold and comfortless,” for “there is no subject so fraught with comfort to the Christian soul, *as the dying love of Jesus.*” Thus Mercer summons, “O Brother, blush, and repent, in deep humility for such a thought!”<sup>96</sup>

### **Brantly on the Atonement**

In printing Mercer’s letters to White, Brantly tried to maintain a neutral stance. He flatly denied, “distinctly and positively,” that he had taken sides on the matter, when some of his readers accused him of displaying “a too great partiality for Fuller’s and Mercer’s views of Redemption.” Like Mercer’s review of Fuller, Brantly’s comments on Mercer only hint at the possibility of disagreement.<sup>97</sup> In comparing Brantly’s views to both Mercer and White, four noticeable discrepancies appear, placing Brantly somewhere between the two men.

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<sup>94</sup>Mercer advised White, “It would be well to observe there is a *natural* and a *moral* ability. The one constitutes us accountable beings; the other consists in well disposedness towards God, our Maker, and fits us for duty. The loss of one destroys responsibility and frees from blame—the loss of the other makes us sinners and subjects us to guilt and condemnation” (Letter 7, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 293).

<sup>95</sup>Mercer admitted to White, “The Atonement must be of *infinite worth*, owing to the dignity of the person who made it” (Letter 4, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 260).

<sup>96</sup>Letter 10, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 328.

<sup>97</sup>Brantly, “Correspondents,” 48. Brantly admitted, “There may be expressions in the Letters which we would have omitted” (*ibid.*).

First, Brantly subscribed to Fuller's view of the foundation of mercy, whereas Mercer did not. In relating election to the atonement, Brantly confessed:

To us it does appear that the whole matter of man's salvation is to be resolved into the sovereign will of God, and that the exercise of this will, proceeds upon the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The will of God does not operate without the atonement, nor is the atonement effectual without the will of God. In point of *fact* and *application* then, there is an evident limitation in that grand provision of mercy which we denominate the *atonement*; and in point of *appeal*, the call and the proclamation are without limitation.<sup>98</sup>

A few months later, Brantly devoted an entire article to the question on the extent of the atonement, and concluded:

The Word of God makes it sufficiently evident that *Salvation* is limited, and definite. . . . The question then is, does this salvation become definite and limited, in consequence of the *definite* and *limited* nature of the Atonement, or does it derive this character from the WILL of God? In our humble but deliberate judgment, it is so constituted by the WILL and PURPOSE of God, and not by any thing in the nature of the great PROPITIATION itself. The Atonement justifies and warrants the indiscriminate proclamation of mercy to all men; but *none* are saved without the gracious interference of God to enlighten and regenerate them. The Atonement is the channel through which mercy flows; but it depends upon the unrestrained PLEASURE OF THE LORD, to fill that channel with its appropriate streams.<sup>99</sup>

As seen above, Mercer found this separation of election and atonement unconvincing.<sup>100</sup>

Second, Brantly spoke as Fuller did of an indirect substitution. Fuller shied away from full imputation, but yet tried to maintain substitution. In one definition, Fuller confessed that to the elect, Christ's "substitution was the same, *in effect*, as if their sins had by number had been literally transferred to him."<sup>101</sup> Brantly also spoke of Christ as dying for sinners *indirectly*, in that the result of Christ's death removed the results of sin for believers just as if Christ Himself had specifically paid for their particular debt fully

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<sup>98</sup>Brantly, "The Doctrines of Grace," 91. A few months later, Brantly again confessed, "[The atonement] is so far general, as to authorise and warrant, an indiscriminate proclamation of mercy to all penitents returning to God; and it is so far particular, as to limit the exercise of this mercy to the sovereign will and pleasure of God. 'On whom HE WILL, He hath mercy' [paraphrasing Rom 9:18]" (idem, "Hints to Baptists," 193).

<sup>99</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Hints to Baptists—on the Atonement," *CSCI*, 3 April 1830, p. 209.

<sup>100</sup>Mercer, "Review of Fuller's Works," 73.

<sup>101</sup>Fuller, *Works*, 2:708.

on the Cross. For example, in one sermon expressly on the atonement, after Brantly had pointed to the “atoning and expiatory character” of the cross, he then called Christ “the Substitute as having died that we might live.”<sup>102</sup> Such circumlocution seems to avoid the apostolic directness of saying that Christ died “for us,” or “for our sins” (Rom 5:8; Gal 1:4). In explaining his aversion to direct substitution, Brantly pointed to the implications:

But if [Christ], as substitute, has suffered all those penal inflictions of the law to which [believers] stood exposed, then are they exempt. . . . But believers themselves, prior to faith and repentance, *Are children of wrath even as others* [Ephesians 2:3]. If, however, the Substitute, endured all that they were liable to endure, how can they be liable, even anterior to faith and repentance? Here is a difficulty which we confess ourselves unable to dispose of, without modifying the idea of substitution.<sup>103</sup>

Since Brantly remained unwilling to attempt a modification, he offered a definition with the indirect language: “The doctrine of Substitution appears to possess an import peculiar to itself, and means only an arrest of judgment accompanied with a provision of mercy for all who may believe.”<sup>104</sup> In Brantly’s opinion, the traditional view of substitution led to the pitfall of Gill’s position—false security.<sup>105</sup>

Third, Brantly did not believe in the strict necessity of the atonement, but called it a “wondrous expedient.”<sup>106</sup> On the one hand, “the idea of pacifying the Deity by blood” could never have been demanded by human reason. Brantly explained, “Had Reason alone been consulted, it would have said, Spare the unoffending, and punish the

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<sup>102</sup>Brantly, *Themes*, 359.

<sup>103</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Difficulties Attending the Discussion of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *CI*, 1 December 1832, p. 338.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.* To Brantly’s credit, he did offer this explanation of Rom 4:25a: “From this verse it would appear that the death of Christ was the consequence of our sin, or that our *offences* was [*sic*] the procuring cause of his death. This will hardly be doubted by any” (*idem*, “Explanation of Rom. iv. 25,” *CSCI*, 6 March 1830, p. 156). Brantly may have received this explanation from a certain Bishop Horsley (*idem*, “Professor Stewart’s [*sic*] Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,” 241-42).

<sup>105</sup>Brantly, “Gill and Fuller,” 40. Moreover, if the atonement concerned only commercial justice—the payment of so much suffering for so much debt—then Fuller could no longer see room for free forgiveness, for then each sinner would come to Christ not as a suppliant, but as a claimant (Fuller, *Works*, 2:373).

<sup>106</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Atonement of Christ the Peculiar Glory of Redemption,” *CSCI*, 4 December 1830, p. 355.

guilty.” Therefore, atonement by blood sacrifice must be due to “God’s positive institution” as a type or pattern, pointing to man’s sin, God’s anger, and the sacrifice of His Son.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, who can say that the wisdom of God did not know of other ways? To those who allow for no other way, Brantly countered:

To say that God could not have found another channel through which mercy might flow, would be as irreverent as foolish. It does not become creatures of as little vision as we possess, to attempt to determine what Jehovah could, or could not do. The fact that He did select this channel, ought to convince us, that it is the best.

What better gift could God give than “*his only begotten Son?*” Though not necessary in the nature of things, the cross of Jesus, having been appointed, is now “the only way by which the great God will ever be reconciled to his offending, sinful creatures.”<sup>108</sup> On this point, Brantly clearly parted ways with Fuller. In answering objections from the governmental theory of the atonement, Fuller argued that God must “admit . . . only what is equivalent to the actual punishment of the sinner” as satisfaction. Anything less would resolve “the atonement of Christ . . . into mere sovereign appointment, and the *necessity* of it would be wholly given up.” Fuller insisted that due to the nature of sin as an infinite evil, justice demanded “an infinite atonement.”<sup>109</sup>

Fourth, Brantly differed with Mercer, and went beyond Fuller, in insisting on a general provision. In the closing paragraph of an essay entitled, “Difficulties Attending

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<sup>107</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Malcom on the Atonement,” *CI*, 30 March 1833, p. 193. Of blood sacrifice, Brantly explained, “This practice, so opposed to all the dictates of unassisted reason, must have been of divine appointment, . . . and that it was viewed by [the patriarchs] as typical we must necessarily infer, both from the nature of the thing, and subsequent revelations and institutions, intended to restore it to its primitive simplicity and significance” (Brantly, “The Atonement of Christ the Peculiar Glory of Redemption,” 356).

<sup>108</sup>Brantly, “Malcom on the Atonement,” 194. Four years later, Brantly published a similar statement: “But the cross of Christ is not to be regarded as a mere moral remedy. It is the expedient which the wisdom of God devised as a propitiation for sin. We are not allowed to say that it is the only one that could have been devised. . . . It is enough for us to know what He has actually done. From what He has told us in relation to this great matter, we may believe that in a certain sense, the expiation of sin by the blood of Christ was necessary. To what extent the necessity of the measure existed, we short-sighted mortals cannot determine. It *seems* to us that the introduction of sin into the world, made it necessary that EITHER MAN OR JUSTICE SHOULD DIE. Man dies in the person of the incarnate Saviour, and therefore justice lives; and he that died became ‘a hiding-place’” (W. T. Brantly, *Themes for Meditation, Enlarged in Several Sermons, Doctrinal and Practical* [Philadelphia: C. Sherman, 1837], 364-65).

<sup>109</sup>Andrew Fuller, “The Deity of Christ Essential to Atonement,” in Fuller, *Works*, 3:693.

the Discussion of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” Brantly asserted that “limited atonement” is poor terminology, for the atonement is by no means limited to the apparent primary object of “the salvation of the Elect,” as the Philadelphia Association had recently claimed in their 1832 circular.<sup>110</sup> Not only are the display of God’s glory and the confounding of fallen spirits encompassed in the atonement, but God also intended “to justify and warrant the Gospel proclamation of Mercy to *every creature*.” From this statement, Brantly then probed with two questions:

If the Atonement of Christ be of such a nature, and of such capacity, as to justify the making of the Gospel proclamation of Mercy, to “*every creature*,” “*to all nations*,” and to each and every individual of the human family, does it not, at least open the door of Mercy to all those to whom the proclamation is extended? And if the door of Mercy be thus opened, should there not be found within the temple a suitable provision? It will not satisfy this question to reply, that the provision is made only for those who come, or who are drawn by the Spirit of God, because the proclamation intimates that “*whosoever will, may come*.”

In Brantly’s opinion, such questions had been given poor answers from “the various theories that have obtained currency;” hence, he pointed men back to the Bible for “a patient, unbiased hearing.”<sup>111</sup>

Therefore, Brantly agreed with Fuller as to the necessity of sufficient value in the atonement in order to make the Gospel call legitimate and thus obliging, but Brantly went one step farther than Fuller. According to Fuller’s own defense to Ryland, Fuller had only conceded the objective infinite value of the Son’s sacrifice, without considering it a general provision. In mentioning that Christ designed to save some, Fuller added, “. . . and not others.”<sup>112</sup> Brantly’s language, on the other hand, intimates that the Son is truly provided for all men, or at least for all who hear the Gospel. In commenting on a

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<sup>110</sup>According to the Philadelphia Association, “Redemption purchased by the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ is *special, particular, and limited* to this one *object*,” namely, the salvation of the corporate elect (“Circular Letter,” *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Held by Appointment at Southampton, Bucks County, October 2d, 3d & 4th, 1832* [n.p., n.d.], 10; cf. A Particular Baptist, “Circular Letter of the Philadelphia Baptist Association,” *CI*, 24 November 1832, p. 326). Brantly’s article appears to be a direct response to the Philadelphia Association’s circular on the atonement, entitled, “Redemption.”

<sup>111</sup>Brantly, “Difficulties Attending the Discussion of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” 338.

<sup>112</sup>Fuller, *Works*, 2:710.



reported statement of Dr. Benjamin Rush, that, “*Being educated a Calvinist I did not know that I was included in the Atonement,*” Brantly asked:

But admitting that the Dr. did not know that he was included in the Atonement, did he know that he was not included? Might he not have had reason to believe, that inasmuch as the Gospel was preached to him, and the proclamation of mercy sounded in his ears, he was included in the Atonement? If God had *excluded* him or any other human being to whom the Gospel was sent, from the provisions of mercy, would he tantalize their wishes by mock offers of that grace which he never designed to bestow?<sup>113</sup>

Thus, everyone who hears the Gospel must have been “included in the Atonement.”

Moving beyond the Calvinistic formula of *sufficient* for all, Brantly asserted that the Atonement was *provided* for all—at least for all those who hear the Gospel.

Does Brantly’s assertion of a general provision place him in the same category as White? No. Though both men spoke of a general provision, Brantly emphasized the limiting effect of election on the atonement’s results in contrast to White, who (as Mercer claimed) seemed “to admit of no *special* divine operations.”<sup>114</sup> This difference explains why Brantly wrote of White’s “unlimited scheme of the atonement” as something that White’s pamphlet “*labors to prove*” without success.<sup>115</sup> Unlike White, Brantly also embraced more than a governmental theory of the atonement. Brantly once criticized defining the atonement as “God’s expression of abhorrence of sin,” because if nothing more were intended than that, then “no expiation was made, and the salvation of sinners may still be doubtful.”<sup>116</sup> Brantly rejected the governmental theory by deliberate choice, for his academic mentor, Jonathan Maxcy, had taught it publicly. In two sermons on the

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<sup>113</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Original Anecdotes of Dr. Rush,” *CI*, 6 October 1832, p. 216. Overall, it seems that Brantly believed in a general love of God that provided Atonement for anyone to accept, but which by His own design only the elect would accept. In a review of Howard Malcom’s discourse on the atonement, Brantly differentiated between “*the salvation of the elect* [as] the *final* cause of Christ’s assumption of the office of Redeemer” and a love for sinners as the efficient cause behind sending the Son. In explaining himself, Brantly reminded his readers that “the impulsive principle which prompts an action, is different from the design and end of that action” (Brantly, “Malcom on the Atonement,” 195).

<sup>114</sup>Letter 9, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 307.

<sup>115</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Pamphlets,” *CSCI*, 22 May 1830, p. 332.

<sup>116</sup>Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” 193.

atonement, Maxcy had asserted that the sufferings of Christ procured salvation “so far as they portrayed God’s displeasure against sin, and evinced the infinite value he set upon his own character and law.”<sup>117</sup> In quoting from this sermon in the *Index*, Brantly made it clear that he did not “fully adopt” Maxcy’s views of the atonement.<sup>118</sup> While Brantly agreed with Maxcy that the “vindication of the goodness and holiness of the law” in the cross “laid a foundation for the salvation of sinners in perfect accordance with law and justice,” Brantly went further than his mentor, who kept distributive justice separate from public justice. In contrast, Brantly combined them in his definition of justice as “that perfection and integrity of the divine nature by which all the goodness and rectitude of the universe are protected and secured [i.e., public justice], and all the sin and disorder are visited and restrained by coercive penalties [i.e., distributive justice].”<sup>119</sup> Thus Brantly connected the sin with the sinner (as Mercer did), but for reasons closer to Fuller than to Gill. Therefore, on at least two counts, Brantly did not hold to White’s views. Readers confirmed this, complaining that Brantly had sided with Fuller and Mercer.<sup>120</sup>

### **Unity and the Atonement**

Brantly’s arbitration of the Mercer-White controversy reveals three aspects of his pursuit of unity. First, Brantly did not prize unity at the expense of truth. Instead of quieting the seas of controversy by hiding Mercer’s arguments, Brantly published them. Brantly praised the letters for their “lucid exposition” and commended them for all Baptists to read. Loss of subscriptions could not persuade Brantly that he had made a

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<sup>117</sup>Jonathan Maxcy, *A Discourse Designed to Explain the Doctrine of the Atonement: In Two Parts: Delivered in the Chapel of Rhode Island College, on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 1796* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1806), 4.

<sup>118</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Solitary Hours,” *CI*, 19 February 1831, p. 113.

<sup>119</sup>Brantly, *Themes*, 159. This definition comes from Brantly’s explanation of Paul’s teaching that God “condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3).

<sup>120</sup>Brantly, “Correspondents,” 48.

mistake in publishing the letters.<sup>121</sup> Nor could criticism. When one elderly Baptist from Tennessee criticized Mercer for his ruthless manner and for bringing this controversy before lay people, Brantly defended Mercer, finding no fault in his general tone.<sup>122</sup> Brantly feared a “spirit of moderation” that degenerates into “supineness, which has the same indifference to truth and error.” He cautioned, “There is an honest, and righteous controversy for the faith, which we hope to see perpetuated. When truth loses its value, it will no longer be worth contending for.”<sup>123</sup> Brantly held firm to his principles, remarking more than once that “the wisdom that is from above” prized purity over peace.<sup>124</sup>

Second, once unity was gained on the basis of truth, unity must serve utility.

In the modern age, usefulness had become the new test for doctrine:

Every doctrine now announced, is required to answer such interrogatories as these, What are its practical tendencies? What the actual good which it imparts to bless human kind? and [*sic*] what bearing does it possess upon the best interests of the world?<sup>125</sup>

Brantly himself imbibed this spirit, exhibiting anxiety that readers of the Mercer-White controversy would understand, “A specific purpose in the Atonement in no wise fetters or restricts the Gospel ministry.”<sup>126</sup> Two years later, when controversy surrounded the 1832

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>John Hillsman, an “aged and worthy disciple of Christ” from eastern Tennessee, criticized Mercer for introducing difficult topics to unlearned ears, and then to do so in severe language that only aggravates the disease (see his letter under W. T. Brantly, “Controversial Severity,” *CI*, 9 July 1831, p. 19). Hillsman’s theology may have contributed to his antipathy towards Mercer’s tactics, for he may have been Arminian, speaking of Christ’s foresight rather than His foreordination (ibid., 20).

At times, it does appear that Mercer’s arguments are as relentless as a bulldog (e.g., Letter 10, in *Ten Letters*, 326-27). Moreover, Mercer sometimes abandoned his opponent’s definition of a term, and then argued against the straw man he had just constructed. For example, Mercer regards “have an interest” in Christ’s blood as a reference to receiving its benefits, but White intended simply having a provision made (Letter 7, in *Ten Letters*, p. 295). In the next letter, when White spoke of an invitation being limited by the quantity of food provided, Mercer spoke of the limited spread of the Gospel (Letter 8, in *Ten Letters*, 295).

<sup>123</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Changes for the Better,” *CSCI*, 1 August 1829, p. 66.

<sup>124</sup>This was Brantly’s understanding of Jas 3:17 (W. T. Brantly, “The Value of Peace,” *CI*, 8 January 1831, p. 23; idem, “Solitary Hours. Zion’s Strength,” *CI*, 26 February 1831, p. 129).

<sup>125</sup>Brantly, “Changes for the Better,” 66.

<sup>126</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Mercer’s Letters on the Atonement,” *CSCI*, 27 November 1830, p. 346.

circular letter from the Philadelphia Baptist Association on redemption, Brantly wrote an essay on “Encouragement for Effort.” Instead of focusing on the extent of the atonement, which was almost the default question of his day, Brantly pursued his usual course of focusing on what all believers would agree to and on what use can be made of this doctrine. Since it was generally believed that “the blood of Christ has not been shed in vain” (alluding to Isa 53:10), the understanding also universally prevailed that “there is no doubt or contingency upon the subject of the Saviour’s Atonement” in reference to its fruits. The result is certain. Therefore, the “active Christian” possesses “a most powerful incentive to action in promoting the extension of its fruits,” for doubt of success would hamper effort, but now “every effort . . . towards the conversion of sinners, is supported by the pledge of Omnipotence.”<sup>127</sup> No excuse remained for either disunity or sloth.

Third, Brantly published the letters because he believed that beneath the surface of the controversy, a common faith still existed. In defending himself, Brantly confessed, “We are of opinion . . . that if the brethren at variance on this great theme could understand each other, there is no material difference among them.” Brantly considered the differences to be “more in form than in substance.”<sup>128</sup> To illustrate, Brantly pointed to the differences between the creeds of the English and Scottish churches. The Anglican creed speaks of election and “asserts the universality of the purchase,” while the Scottish creed speaks of election and “dwells upon the particularity of its application.” The differences are “more apparent than real.” Brantly confessed:

In short, we believe that however much apparent opposition there may be, between the advocates of general and particular redemption, yet all the orthodox of both parties agree in this, that by his triumphant voluntary death, the Lord Jesus Christ

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<sup>127</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Encouragement to Effort,” *CI*, 24 November 1832, p. 325. The certain results of the atonement based on election seems to be the bedrock for Brantly’s belief on the atonement (cf. Brantly, “Difficulties Attending the Discussion of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” 337).

<sup>128</sup>Brantly, “Correspondents,” 48.

obtained ‘power over all flesh [*universality*], that he might give eternal life to as many’ as were given him of his Father [*particularity*].”<sup>129</sup>

In other words, if both parties adhere to “*Salvation, by free and sovereign grace, in conformity with the Scriptural view of Redemption, without works as a procuring cause, but with works as the evidential fruits,*” Brantly could see no “essential difference.”<sup>130</sup>

At first, Brantly’s denial of a material difference over the atonement seems incredible. How could the large divergence in preaching result from immaterial differences in doctrine? Did Brantly’s deep respect for Mercer unwittingly lead him to be more silent on differences? Probably not, for Brantly was not the only Baptist who disparaged the differences between Baptists in their views of the atonement. Mercer did too! Mercer himself called the difference between Gill and Fuller “a mere shade—a difference *only* in the *modus operandi* of the great plan.”<sup>131</sup> Why is this? Two observations may lead to a solution.

First, Brantly expressly identified as the chief origin of the controversy “the faulty use of terms.”<sup>132</sup> Months before printing Mercer’s letters, Brantly criticized White’s pamphlet for discussing the atonement without first defining the subject itself:

This is a pamphlet of about 20 pages, which *labors* to prove the unlimited scheme of atonement. . . . We think he errs, only in reference to the subject matter in debate. After all, WHAT IS THE ATONEMENT? . . . The writer has produced sundry scriptures to confirm his views of unlimited atonement; but under his first head in which he proposes to state the nature of the thing, he has brought no text to bear upon the point.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Churches of England and Scotland on Redemption,” *CI*, 15 January 1831, p. 37.

<sup>130</sup>Brantly, “Correspondents,” 48.

<sup>131</sup>Letter 9, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 309.

<sup>132</sup>Brantly, “Difficulties Attending the Discussion of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” 337.

<sup>133</sup>Brantly, “Pamphlets,” 332. Brantly remained silent beyond this point about White, even though he was being unfairly accused of taking sides with Mercer. Brantly denied “distinctly and positively” that he had taken sides, saying that he would have offered White ample space if he had responded in writing (*idem*, “Correspondents,” 48).

Brantly supported his neutral, pacific stance with a deep-down belief that somehow, in some way, the differences between the two parties must result from misunderstanding each other and the Scriptures. The next chapter will explore this theme further.

Second, neither Brantly nor Mercer presented the atonement as the most valuable doctrine to discuss regarding salvation by grace alone. That pride of place went to the consistency of using means in spite of a sinner's moral inability. For instance, in Mercer's national review of Fuller's works, a discussion of the atonement does not even appear, whereas Fuller's views on "the consistency between commands and promises" are identified as "the main spring of his life, and [those] which imparted to his numerous publications their highest value."<sup>134</sup> This consistency is what Mercer had expected White to have written on.<sup>135</sup> As a consequence, neither Brantly nor Mercer regarded strict uniformity on the doctrine of the atonement as crucial for denominational unity.

In contrast, the Philadelphia Baptist Association reversed the priority of doctrines. The circular letter for 1832, read and accepted without emendation, ridiculed the "Herculean effort" required to reconcile a general provision with a denial of universal salvation:

The difficulties legitimately accruing from these principles, are attempted to be obviated by many, in seizing on what may be called the popular error of the day, viz. That men have an ability to believe and accept the offers of Gospel mercy; and thus we are told it became infinite wisdom, to make a *general provision* that offers of salvation, could consistently be made to all men, that *they* that refuse might be left without excuse.

Thus far, neither Brantly nor Mercer would have disagreed with the criticism, for they both maintained that total depravity disabled sinners from believing. But the circular continues, showing how opposed many adherents of limited atonement could become towards the popular Edwardsean principle:

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<sup>134</sup>[Mercer], "Review," 390.

<sup>135</sup>Letter 1, in Mercer, *Ten Letters*, 137.

And a distinction, to them all important, is made between natural and moral ability, liberty, &c. Now what avails all this, if the implantation and exercise of every evangelical grace, be, as they assuredly are purely of God, operating in a supernatural way on the soul? *Just nothing at all!*<sup>136</sup>

Herein lay the most visible doctrinal difference between the new Central Union Association and the old Philadelphia Association. The new association minimized differences over the atonement and lauded the Edwardsean principle as the key insight in justifying a program of innovative united effort. In contrast, many in the old association prided themselves as “Particular Baptists,” giving the impression that the doctrine of limited atonement defined and maintained Baptist unity.<sup>137</sup> Not all those who denied a general provision agreed with the official assessment (though it was questioned at the time why they did not speak up against the circular).<sup>138</sup> Most notably, John L. Dagg freely participated in both associations, even though he held to Gillite views of the atonement. But even this exception proves the rule, for unless doctrinal differences over the atonement were minimized, unity in the new association could not continue.<sup>139</sup>

Transferring focus from Philadelphia to Georgia—the hotspot of the preceding discussion—what can be learned about Baptist orthodoxy there around 1830? Foremost,

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<sup>136</sup>“Circular Letter,” *Minutes*, Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1832, 10-11, italics original. The letter was written by Thomas J. Kitts, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Philadelphia. Kitts may not have been opposed to organized missions, for he did attend the Triennial Convention in 1835 (*Proceedings of the Eighth Triennial Meeting of the Baptist General Convention for Missionary Purposes. Held in Richmond, April, 1835* [Boston: John Putnam, 1835], 3).

<sup>137</sup>After visiting Philadelphia in 1835, two English Baptists left the city “with the impression, that the churches, both baptist and paedo-baptist, were considerably divided in sentiment, on what is termed high and low Calvinism.” This division reminded them of what English Baptists experienced because of Andrew Fuller’s writings, but the Americans seemed to have “exasperated” the differences. The old association emphasized doctrine, and the new, benevolent exertions and “a revival spirit” (F. A. Cox and J. Hoby, *The Baptists in America; A Narrative of the Deputation from the Baptist Union in England, to the United States and Canada* [New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1836], 23-24).

<sup>138</sup>One critic of the circular letter expressed both “grief” and “amazement” that it ever achieved universal consent (A Particular Baptist, “Circular Letter of the Philadelphia Baptist Association,” 325). For Brantly’s response to the circular, see Brantly, “Encouragement to Effort,” 325; and idem, “Difficulties Attending the Discussion of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” 337-38.

<sup>139</sup>For Dagg’s views on the atonement, see J. L. Dagg, *A Manual of Theology* ([Charleston, SC]: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990), 1:324-31; cf. Nettles, *By His Grace*, 168-78; Mark E. Dever, “Representative Aspects of the Theologies of John L. Dagg and James P. Boyce: Reformed Theology and Southern Baptists” (Th.M. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987).

of the two doctrines considered in this chapter—total depravity and limited atonement—Baptist leaders often emphasized the first, and left room for differences on the latter. When Brantly warned Baptists about “the danger of wrangling about points of speculative divinity,” he asked them, “Shall we bite and devour one another for differences on the sentiment respecting the extent of the atonement, whilst we all agree that salvation is only by grace?”<sup>140</sup> Second, the agreement over “salvation . . . only by grace” implies a general assent to the doctrine of divine sovereignty in personal salvation (cf. Rom 11:6). Together, total depravity and divine sovereignty formed the “two fundamental tenets of Calvinism” for Georgia Baptists—and arguably for Brantly himself, and for many of his contemporaries.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, when a church historian finds Baptist confessions, in which a “deviation from strict Reformed teaching on ‘limited atonement’ is allowed,” he should not necessarily conclude that such deviations display a “historic compromise of Arminian and Calvinistic views,” for total depravity and the sovereignty of God in salvation better defined the Calvinism of Brantly’s day than did the atonement.<sup>142</sup>

### Conclusion

William T. Brantly fit well within the Calvinistic tradition of Andrew Fuller. Though moving slightly beyond Fuller on the atonement, Brantly in general remained within the acceptable boundaries of Baptist orthodoxy, epitomized by Gill and Fuller. Brantly’s strong adherence to total depravity and divine sovereignty in salvation kept his indefinite doctrine of the atonement from straying into Arminianism. Like many of his

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<sup>140</sup>Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” 194. Regarding the atonement, both sides agreed in affirming the infinite value of the Son, which was, as Mercer said, “able to save *to the uttermost*, . . . [and] which forms *the glad tidings of great joy*” (Letter 10, in *Ten Letters*, 328).

<sup>141</sup>According to Gregory A. Wills, who researched church records in Georgia, “Virtually every church creed affirmed the two fundamental tenets of Calvinism: that human nature was radically depraved due to original sin and that God was the absolute author of salvation, electing individuals for salvation before the creation of the world and creating faith by the operation of the Holy Spirit” (*Democratic Religion*, 103-04).

<sup>142</sup>See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 441-42, who may be correct in that instance. The point here is simply caution.



contemporaries, he maintained that the result of Christ's redemption is certain for all the elect. Apart from the Edwardsean distinction between natural and moral ability, Brantly expressed little tolerance for the metaphysical speculations of New Divinity. This intolerance shall appear in the next chapter.

Brantly's real concern lay not with the definition of doctrine, but with the use of doctrine. Brantly valued the doctrine of total depravity because it alone made evangelism effective, driving the sinner to Christ. Brantly valued the Edwardsean distinction between natural and moral ability because it justified human effort. Brantly valued election because the prospect of success encouraged effort. By emphasizing use over precision, Brantly found in Calvinistic doctrines a motivation for effort, which in turn became a new basis for union in the Central Union Association.

CHAPTER 6  
THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

One of the most remarkable features of the Central Union Association was the deliberate absence of a confession of faith—an absence only intensified by its contrast to the Philadelphia Association, whose confession had expressed the beliefs of American Baptists for nearly a century.<sup>1</sup> At first glance, this absence appears like another example of what historian Nathan O. Hatch has called the “democratization of American Christianity.” In applying the rhetoric of the Revolution to religion, many Americans of the early republic rejected all mediating authorities—churches, clerics, and creeds—between the Bible and the conscience.<sup>2</sup> One Virginia Baptist in Brantly’s day even interpreted the new association as a product of modern independent thinking.<sup>3</sup> To what extent then did the Central Union Association reject traditional authority for modern independence?

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<sup>1</sup>Brantly estimated that most Baptists in his day still respected the Philadelphia Confession of Faith of 1742: “Although this formulary has not been officially recognised by the great body of the denomination, yet its doctrinal tenets are generally regarded as forming the prevailing creed of the whole” (W. T. Brantly, “Baptists of the United States,” *CI*, 20 August 1831, p. 120).

<sup>2</sup>See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); see also Hatch, “Sola Scriptura and Novus Ordo Seclorum,” in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 59-78. Whereas Hatch focuses on populist leaders who employed “the democratic art of persuasion” (Hatch, *Democratization*, 13), the cooperation of leaders within the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches resembles more of a federal union, than individual radicalism. Indeed, in contrast to views on ordination and church independence expressed by one correspondent (probably W. B. Johnson), Brantly asserted that the independence of a Baptist church was actually “regulated and modified” by “a kind of *federal* bond which connects all our churches” (W. T. Brantly, “Ordination,” *CSCI*, 5 December 1829, p. 364; cf. W., “Ordination,” *CSCI*, 31 October 1829, p. 275). For another contrast of Baptist cooperation to Hatch’s individualism, see Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup>H. Keeling, “Central Union Association,” *CI*, 6 October 1832, p. 220. Keeling highly praised the orientation of the new association to “noble and benevolent exertions,” but criticized the name as presumptuous, as if all Baptist churches were not independent.

In its inaugural address, the Central Union Association asserted its adherence to traditional Baptist independence in attaching “no summary of doctrinal belief” to its constitution.<sup>4</sup> Because Baptist churches are “free and independent,” they must be “the only source of power to establish principles for their own belief and practice.” Contrary to appearances, this view of church independence did not necessitate pluralism within the new association, for the constitution retained the right for delegates “at any regular meeting, [to] declare a dissolution of Union with any church, deemed corrupt, either in doctrine, or in practice.”<sup>5</sup> According to the new association, the difference between the two groups did not involve general beliefs, but the basis of unity:

Most of our churches were constituted upon the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, and still retain the fundamental articles in that Formulary. At the same time we are free to confess, that we regard the Bible, not as the handmaid of the Confession, but as its corrective, and standard. So that whenever there arises a dispute on doctrinal points, the Bible and not the Creed, must decide.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, Brantly once claimed that the Philadelphia Association had “adopted as the *basis* of its union, the Confession of Faith, and plan of Church discipline.”<sup>7</sup>

Theoretically, both associations invoked the authority of the Bible; but functionally, only the new association did so directly. Thus when the old association reasserted their signature doctrine—limited atonement—shortly after the new association formed, Brantly attempted through his own article on the atonement to “turn attention to the Word of God, and ask for it a patient, impartial, unbiased hearing.”<sup>8</sup>

In light of the fact that Brantly’s day has become famous for producing heretics who stood on “no creed but the Bible,” how did Brantly expect to maintain unity on the

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<sup>4</sup>“Minutes of the Central Union Association, Formed in Philadelphia, July 31st, 1832,” *CI*, 11 August 1832, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup>Article 5, “Constitution,” in “Minutes,” Central Union Association, 81.

<sup>6</sup>“Minutes,” Central Union Association, 83.

<sup>7</sup>Brantly, “Baptists of the United States,” 120, italics added.

<sup>8</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Difficulties Attending the Discussion of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *CI*, 1 December 1832, p. 338.

authority of Scripture alone?<sup>9</sup> Further, how much did Brantly value creeds? To answer these questions, one must first consider Brantly's theology regarding the final and sufficient authority of Scripture. Once this theology is understood, the question of a creed gains a new dimension. Instead of viewing a creed solely as a rival to the Bible, the creed also becomes a rival to human pride. Brantly valued creeds not as an authority, but as a help to limited human understanding.

### **The Final Authority of Scripture**

With respect to authority in religious belief, three options readily present themselves. A person can believe God, or a person can believe man—either himself or others. Thus there are three traditional categories of authority vying for ultimate authority: Revelation, Reason, and Tradition. Brantly firmly believed and confessed that Scripture alone—Revelation—possessed final authority over all faith and practice.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Revelation**

Brantly believed the Bible to be the word of God, and took it for granted that “Christians” did as well. By the term “Bible,” Brantly meant “the commonly received books from Genesis to Revelation.” By the term “word of God,” Brantly referred to the divine origin of the contents of the Bible. Brantly explicitly wrote that “its contents are supernatural,” that is, “beyond the capacity of uninspired man.” This fact applied to the whole Bible, to books of the Bible, and even to individual “passages which savour of inspiration,” for, as he maintained, the books of the Bible “must all stand or fall

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<sup>9</sup>Hatch has provided at least six examples of how “no creed but the Bible” led to heresy (*Democratization*, 40-43, 81; cf. *ibid.*, 181).

<sup>10</sup>For an excellent historical review of Baptist beliefs about the Bible, see L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999).

The modern appeal to “experience” as the fundamental ground of truth was just starting to emerge in Brantly's day (see, e.g., the discussion in chap. 10 on Samuel Taylor Coleridge). For Brantly's own views on the importance of religious experience, see “Memorable Thoughts, *From a Pastor's Common place Book*,” *CS*, 9 June 1827, p. 85, which had appeared as Tract No. 1 of the Baptist General Tract Society. (Evidence that Brantly wrote this anonymous article includes its appearance in Brantly's first issue of the *Star* and the testimony of R. W. Cushman, “Brief View of Tracts Published by the Baptist General Tract Society, Instituted 1824,” *The Baptist Tract Magazine* 7 [October 1834]: 123.)

together.” For example, the Old Testament prophets “prophesied at the command of God, and . . . their sacred books were all dictated by his inspiration.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the completed New Testament resulted from “plenary inspiration.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, as shall be discussed later, Brantly believed the Bible to be the word of God in that God inspired the writers of Scripture with content beyond the capacity of natural intelligence.

Authority flows naturally out of inspiration because of one crucial qualification. Brantly grounded the authority of Scripture not just in its inspiration, but in its *unerring* inspiration—its truthfulness. He wrote, “Truth . . . speaks always with a voice commanding enough to overawe the insolence of doubt. . . . Truth deals in realities, and in their application to the heart and conscience of man.”<sup>13</sup> This conviction undergirded his efforts as a preacher, especially in the face of texts that appeared contrary to common assumptions. For example, when preaching on Acts 11:24, “He was a good man,” Brantly pointed to the authority of one line of Scripture before proceeding further:

This honourable attestation came directly from the unerring voice of inspiration, and, therefore, cannot be questioned, either as to its general truth, or the propriety of its individual application.<sup>14</sup>

Prophetic details also gained their authority from the chain of inspiration, inerrancy, and authority. In commenting on Jeremiah’s prophecy of seventy years of desolation decreed for Jerusalem, Brantly again connected inerrancy to inspiration:

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<sup>11</sup>William T. Brantly, *Themes for Meditation, Enlarged in Several Sermons, Doctrinal and Practical* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman, 1837), 2, 31-33, 30. These views all come from the sermon “The Bible the Word of God,” which Brantly based on the text, “It is in truth the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13). The importance of this topic to Brantly’s theology is perhaps indicated by this sermon’s position as the first one in the collection.

<sup>12</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Pedilavium . . . or Feet Washing,” *CI*, 11 June 1831, p. 370.

<sup>13</sup>Brantly, *Themes*, 134.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 292. This sermon may have been preached much earlier than 1837 (the year *Themes* appeared), for many of the sermons were earlier productions. In particular, William Sprague mentioned the publication of a sermon, “The Good man [*sic*]: A Sermon on the death of the Rev. L. D. Parks, preached in Augusta, 1823,” which could not be found, but may have been this very sermon (see William 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 Historical Introduction*, vol. 6 of *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865), 499).

Here was a pre-determination of heaven announced under the impulse of unerring Inspiration. The desolation was made *inevitable* by the irrevocable decree of God, and the end of that desolation was *equally certain* by his declared purpose.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Brantly regarded the opening chapters of Genesis as “an authentic record by which we can trace back the generations of men to their great progenitor.” According to Brantly, “Inspiration has dictated the concise and eventful history of the FIRST MAN”—a history on which faith rests.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, because the Bible, the word of God, originated in “unerring inspiration,” it is truth, both in its details and its statements, and thus it has authority. The extent of its authority can be seen in comparison to both reason and tradition, the other two contenders to the claim of *final* authority.

### **Reason**

Brantly’s doctrine of the Trinity illustrates well his conception of the harmony of reason with faith. Two principles support the reasonableness of believing in the doctrine of the Trinity. First, faith has “an eye formed to support a brighter lustre” than reason can see. Reason can reach no farther than “the evidence which is furnished by facts and analogies.” When evidence ceases, the only reasonable thing to do is to suspend judgment, and yield to faith.<sup>17</sup> When faith then “beholds what eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart imagined,” at that point “reason dares not interpose the shadow of a negative to any of [faith’s] reports; for reason can only decide where it

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<sup>15</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Dependence and Action,” *CSCI*, 21 November 1829, p. 321. Brantly cited Dan 9 to prove his familiar theme of “the union of dependence and action” (*ibid.*, 322). Even though Daniel knew the prophecy was certain, he viewed the coordination of the news and his circumstances as an “interval for action; the moment for concerted effort, and united prayer; the happy indications of providence, seconded by the sure word of prophecy called forth the energies of devotion, and the deep agony of supplication” (*ibid.*, 321).

<sup>16</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The First Man,” *CSCI*, 16 January 1830, p. 33.

<sup>17</sup>Brantly wrote, “It is, therefore, exceedingly *absurd* to bring in reason, to set in judgment on doctrines and propositions which lie wholly beyond the scope of her utmost vision” (W. T. Brantly, “Trinitarians Rational. A Sermon delivered in the Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga., on the 8th of February, 1824,” in *The Georgia Pulpit: or Minister’s Yearly Offering. Containing Sermons and Essays from Georgia Baptist Ministers*, ed. Robert Fleming [Richmond: H. K. Ellyson, 1847], 403, italics added).

judges, and can only judge upon evidence which is intelligible.”<sup>18</sup> This conclusion leads into Brantly’s second principle: “That every thing is credible which is not known to be false.” As long as it is possible, it has credibility. For proof of this principle, Brantly summoned the apostle Paul, who had asked Agrippa, “Why is it judged incredible by you that God should raise the dead?” In other words, “Have you ascertained it to be an impossibility? . . . Do you know the contrary to be false?” Therefore, Brantly concluded, “Thus stands the doctrine of the Trinity, upon principles of reason: It is credible, because no man is competent to affirm the contrary.”<sup>19</sup>

In discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, Brantly delineated the relationship between reason and Scripture. Brantly admitted, “It would be time for us to take alarm, if we could discover that the *scriptures* were teaching what *reason* had pronounced impossible and contradictory.”<sup>20</sup> But such is not the case, for the Bible “commends to [the Trinitarians’] faith what reason cannot deny to their understanding. It demonstrates, where reason stands doubting, and supplies evidence in which reason may rejoice.” Therefore, Brantly concluded, “The dictates of reason are to be measured and tried by the word of God.”<sup>21</sup> The Bible has final authority over reason.

The question then arises, what verifies the inspiration of Scripture, if not reason itself? And if reason verifies the authority of Scripture, does reason still not trump the authority of Scripture in the end? Hence a dilemma arises, for Brantly did indeed invoke reason to verify inspiration. In discussing the “*apparent* contradiction” of the Trinitarian doctrine, Brantly asked:

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<sup>18</sup>Brantly, “Trinitarians Rational,” 403. In another sermon on the Trinity, Brantly eloquently expressed, “We have learned that there is a difference between absurdity and obscurity, between the confined range of our feeble reason, and the boundless expanse of infinity” (Brantly, *Themes*, 103; cf. E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture 1795-1860* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978], 85).

<sup>19</sup>Brantly, “Trinitarians Rational,” 403.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>21</sup>Brantly, *Themes*, 104.

Does not the Bible speak more audibly and explicitly in favour of that doctrine, than reason against it? and [*sic*] is it not more suitable to *unbiased rationality* to regard the testimony of Scripture as really and truly the voice of God, than to exalt to that dignity the suspected intimations of fallible and erring reason? We have moral certainty that the Bible is the voice of God. We also have moral certainty that true reason never contradicts that voice. Whenever, therefore, there is a contradiction, we must conclude that it proceeds from false, and not true reason.<sup>22</sup>

Thus two forms of reason seem to appear: “reason” as the faculty of understanding, and “unbiased rationality” as apparently the final court of appeals over the inspiration of Scripture itself. Since “unbiased rationality” gives one “moral certainty that the Bible is the voice of God,” perhaps “Reason” (i.e., “unbiased rationality”) reigns over the Bible.<sup>23</sup>

Such suspicions have formed a major thesis in the work of E. Brooks Holifield, historian of American theology. According to his research, “The most notable feature of American religious thought in the early nineteenth century was its rationality”—the philosophical heritage from Scottish common sense realism. Southern theologians in particular stressed the “reasonableness” of Christianity and taught a “rational orthodoxy” in order to be heard by the rising professional class. Regarding “the evidence for faith,” Holifield contends:

Every orthodox theologian in the Old South would have asserted that the foundation of faith was the Bible, but few would have rested content with the mere assertion. They wanted to demonstrate the authority of Scripture by an appeal to an external criterion, not fully recognizing that their methods subtly shifted faith’s foundation. Their rational orthodoxy had a circular logic: revelation undergirded reason, but reason verified revelation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 105, italics added. Earlier he had written, “We have learned that there is a difference between absurdity and obscurity, between the confined range of our feeble reason, and the boundless expanse of infinity” (ibid., 103).

<sup>23</sup>The idea that the verifier possesses greater authority than the verified appears in Brantly’s discussion of Scripture and Roman Catholic tradition: “If, however, what the Roman Catholic assumes, be true, then Tradition may be necessary to prove the truth of the Bible; and therefore it is older and more valid than the Bible” (W. T. Brantly, “Catholic Herald,” *CI*, 19 January 1833, p. 44).

<sup>24</sup>Holifield, *Gentleman Theologians*, 3, 49, 72; see also Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). For the background of Scottish common sense realism, see Holifield, *Gentleman Theologians*, chapter 5, “Scottish Philosophy and Southern Theology.” For a similar assessment of American theology, with more emphasis on the antebellum reliance on science, see James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 73-113.



Given the appearance of “circular logic” in Brantly’s verification of inspiration, did Brantly rely solely on rationality to prove inspiration of Scripture?

Holifield’s discussion sheds much light on the philosophical rationality of Brantly’s thought, but the discussion fails to emphasize the Reformed doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which complemented Brantly’s stress on rationality. Rationality laid the initial groundwork of evidence. Brantly listed the various rational evidences in a sermon on the verification of inspiration. He asserted that the divine origin of Scripture can be ascertained by what he called “enlightened reason.” He warned that belief without reasons will die. After dissuading his auditors from invalid reasons such as one’s upbringing, eminent examples, and inward impressions, Brantly gave six reasons why he believed in the Scriptures: the Bible’s verifiable claims, its success over fleshly lusts, Jesus’ resurrection, its sublime doctrine, the consent of its first recipients, and its supernatural production and preservation.<sup>25</sup>

The Reformed element enters here. Reasonable belief is not yet conversion. Lest anyone comfort himself with a mere belief in the inspiration of Scripture, Brantly warned that some of his auditors may “believe, and still remain with unsubdued iniquities, with unsanctified dispositions, with unregenerated hearts.”<sup>26</sup> Reason and heart may not coincide, for “after enlightened reason, acted upon by the letter, accords its assent to the word of God, and admits the propriety of immediate submission to all its requirements, there remains an *unwillingness* to submit, an awful impediment to salvation.”<sup>27</sup> The resistance ceases only when the Holy Spirit exerts “a conquering power . . . of light, of love, of persuasion . . . in accordance with the dictates of a renewed soul.”<sup>28</sup> In conversion, “a secret, mysterious, and successful energy is exerted upon our

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<sup>25</sup>Brantly, *Themes*, 13-34.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>27</sup>William T. Brantly, “Heaven Begun on Earth,” *The Baptist Preacher: Consisting of Original Monthly Sermons from Living Ministers* 1 (December 1827): 43.

<sup>28</sup>Brantly, *Themes*, 63-64.

spirits to plant the sacred conviction still deeper in our hearts, and to secure its beneficial effects.” Therefore, Brantly conceived of two necessary pillars to faith in the Bible, for “true faith . . . consists partly in a reasonable conviction of the mind, and partly in the attractions of the Spirit.”<sup>29</sup> This combination of mind and Spirit-enlivened heart forms a common theme among Reformed theologians in America.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, in content, Scripture is a higher authority than reason. In verifying the origin of Scripture, reason does judge, but its convictions rise no higher and last no longer than the secret work of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, then, faith in the Bible is the result of God’s sovereign, effectual call.

### Tradition

Brantly faced two main opponents on the issue of tradition—Roman Catholics, who exalted tradition to at least equal authority as Scripture, and Presbyterians, who advocated the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, yet appealed to tradition for their practice of infant baptism. To the Catholic objection that private interpretation produced division and heresy, Brantly not only agreed—for what else could be expected from a free “search after truth?”—but also asserted his preference for such a state. He asked:

But is it not better to take freedom of judgment and interpretation with all its vexatious liabilities, than simple submission to the dictation of others, with all the quietness and harmony with which it may be attended[?] The excitability of the vital powers, is far preferable to the morbid stillness of death.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Brantly, “Heaven Begun on Earth,” 43, 44.

<sup>30</sup>E.g., Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “Apologetics,” in *Studies in Theology*, ed. Ethelbert D. Warfield, William Park Armstrong, and Caspar Wistar Hodge, vol. 9 of *The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield [Works]* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 15. Brantly discusses the human process of holding to a belief in the Bible in “Doubts and Evidences,” *CSCI*, 28 August 1830, p. 130, which was later mistakenly reprinted in *The Religious Herald* under the name “J. Wade” (idem, “Religious Herald, Richmond, Va.,” 20 November 1830, p. 335).

<sup>31</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Private Interpretation,” *CI*, 9 February 1833, p. 90. For more of Brantly’s views on Roman Catholicism, see Brantly, “Romanism,” *CSCI*, 28 August 1830, p. 134; idem, “The Rustic Frenchman and His Wife,” *CI*, 23 April 1831, pp. 268-69; idem, “Romanism in Philadelphia,” *CI*, 21 April 1832, pp. 251-52; idem, “Popery in America,” *CI*, 22 December 1832, pp. 385-87; idem, “*The Roman Catholic True Piety*,” *CI*, 22 December 1832, p. 399; idem, “A Good Reply,” *CI*, 5 January 1833, pp. 13-14; idem, “Catholic Herald,” *CI*, 19 January 1833, pp. 44-45; idem, “Interpretation of Scripture,” *CI*, 23 February 1833, pp. 113-14; idem, “A Book for Protestants,” *CI*, 11 May 1833, p. 298; idem, “Our Roman

The Presbyterian differences proved more subtle. Both Baptists and Presbyterians claimed adherence to the principle of *sola scriptura*, and opposed the Roman Catholic pretensions of tradition. This common Protestant adherence to Scripture made dialogue possible between Presbyterians and Baptists, in contrast to the impasse with Roman Catholics.<sup>32</sup> Both denominations also shared similar Calvinistic doctrines, as Brantly and others readily acknowledged.<sup>33</sup> The chief differences were in polity and rituals. Beneath them stood a different hermeneutic, or way of understanding the nature of Scripture's authority. In considering Brantly's arguments for believer baptism by immersion, the goal will be to show Brantly's hermeneutic in contrast to his Presbyterian brothers.

The controversy over baptism had two headings—mode and subject. Regarding the first, Brantly took issue with an article from the *Philadelphian*, a paper similar to the *Index* but supported mainly by Presbyterians. The editor, Ezra Stiles Ely, had been asked by a correspondent to prove one point from Sunday's sermon regarding the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. Ely took the opportunity to assert that "the Bible furnishes nothing decisive in favour of immersion in sacred baptism." Ely called upon Baptists to "prove it, if they can, by the Bible. That is our only infallible authority on the subject of Christian ordinances and doctrines." Here, then, is the Protestant ground of disputation—the sacred field of *sola scriptura*. Brantly, who had tussled with Ely once before on baptism, took the challenge, but with a different twist. Instead of quoting Scripture this time, he quoted numerous Paedobaptist commentators, who all admitted that the Greek word *baptizo* originally signified "immersion," but that the mode really

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Catholic Man," *CIBM*, 10 August 1833, p. 23; and idem, "The Catholic Herald Once More," *CIBM*, 17 August 1833, pp. 26-27.

<sup>32</sup>In responding to the editor of the *Catholic Herald*, Brantly admitted, "At this rate there is no arguing with him, since there is no common standard to which controversy can be referred. Tradition and the authority of the Church is the main standard of the Catholic. The Bible, the Bible, is the standard of the Protestant" (Brantly, "Catholic Herald," 44).

<sup>33</sup>Many readers of the *Index* had asked Brantly to report on the 1831 trial of Presbyterian Albert Barnes because "of the similarity of doctrinal views betwixt our own church and that of the Presbyterians" (W. T. Brantly, "The Important Case," *CI*, 4 June 1831, p. 359).

was immaterial. Brantly knew that Ely was acting eccentrically, for, as he told the fellow editor, “The question as to *immersion* has been given up by the ablest critics of all ages.”<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, most educated Paedobaptists admitted “that *immersion* was the ancient mode,” but pleaded for a deviation based on “the assumed *indifference* of that mode.”<sup>35</sup>

Regarding the subject of baptism, Brantly knew that Protestant paedobaptists often made the alleged connection between circumcision and baptism “the main hinge of the whole argument.” Infants born to Christian parents should receive baptism in the new dispensation because Abraham had been commanded to circumcise his children in the old dispensation. Circumcision was the type of baptism, for both are seals of the covenant of grace. Brantly described and refuted this standard Reformed argument in his tract, *The Covenant of Circumcision, No Just Plea for Infant Baptism* (1836), which later achieved national recognition as part of *The Baptist Library*. Scripture, not tradition, seemed to ground their argument. Indeed, the tract’s lengthy section of quotations shows that paedobaptists challenged Baptists to show where the Bible in general, or the New Testament in particular, disconnected the covenant obligations of parents toward their children in administering the sign and seal of the covenant of grace.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptism by Immersion,” *CI*, 18 May 1833, pp. 205-06. For the previous dispute with Ely, see Brantly, “Believers’ Baptism,” *CI*, 23 April 1831, pp. 257-59.

On word meanings, Brantly praised Alexander Carson’s classic work, *Baptism. Its Mode and Subjects*, for “fixing and determining by reference to classic usage in the Greek language, the very words on which the controversy must turn” (W. T. Brantly, “Carson on Baptism,” *CI*, 26 May 1832, p. 324). In contrast, Brantly upbraided Moses Stuart for his silly exegetical conclusions about *baptizo* and its usage. Brantly boldly countered the learned commentator with quotes from the Septuagint and other commentators, such as Theodore Beza (W. T. Brantly, “Professor Stuart and the Baptists,” *CI*, 25 May 1833, pp. 321-22). Stuart’s article originally appeared as “The Mode of Baptism” in the April 1833 issue of the *Biblical Repository*.

<sup>35</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A Discourse on the Mode of Baptism, by the Rev. J. B. Ayars, of the Philadelphia Conference,” *CSCI*, 4 December 1830, p. 363.

<sup>36</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Covenant of Circumcision, No Just Plea for Infant Baptism,” in *The Baptist Library: A Republication of Standard Baptist Works*, ed. Charles G. Sommers, William R. Williams, and Levi L. Hill (Prattsville, NY: Robert H. Hill, 1843), 3:398-399, which originally appeared in 1836 as a tract of the Baptist General Tract Society. In this tract, Brantly conceded “the sanction of antiquity” to his paedobaptist brothers, but claimed that both Scripture and reason were on his side. To prove his position, he carefully summarized the Reformed argument for infant baptism in three points. First, by virtue of the connection between parents and offspring in the old dispensation, infants received

In defending believers as the only proper subject of baptism, Baptists clearly revealed their different hermeneutic. For example, Brantly firmly believed that “the order of Scripture” is clear. Baptism follows faith as the first duty. The examples of the New Testament prove this, for, as Brantly asserted, “So often as baptism is mentioned in the entire New Testament, so often is it preceded by the mental and moral actions of its recipients.”<sup>37</sup> In dispensing with the need for personal faith, paedobaptist arguments backfire, for they inadvertently dispense with the necessity of baptism itself!<sup>38</sup> With regard to the supposed scriptural support from circumcision, Brantly again pointed to the need for positive evidence, asserting, “Figures and types prove nothing unless commandment go along with them, or some express, to signify such to be their purpose.”<sup>39</sup> In both cases, Brantly insisted on positive evidence. He reasoned, “In view of that Scripture strictness which forbids equally, the zeal that would add to, and the supineness that would take from the word of God, [infant baptism] appears as a bold intrusion upon forbidden ground.”<sup>40</sup>

Here then is the traditional hermeneutical difference between the Baptists and the Presbyterians. Presbyterians begin with the Old Testament and ask, “Where in the New Testament is this practice canceled?” Thus the silence of the New Testament

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circumcision as the “apparent sign or seal of the covenant of grace, and henceforth became entitled to all the benefits of that covenant.” Second, the Gospel dispensation has not dissolved this connection, for the churches in both dispensations are identical, only differing in maturity—as childhood differs with adulthood. Third, it is, therefore, the duty of parents under the Gospel dispensation to have their infants baptized as “the seal of the new covenant” (ibid., 3:399). (These points paraphrase Brantly’s somewhat convoluted wording.)

<sup>37</sup>Brantly, “Covenant of Circumcision,” 3:403, 404.

<sup>38</sup>Presbyterians were not as consistent as the Episcopalians, for the latter “presumed regeneration” as the basis for baptizing the infant, whereas the former called baptism “the outward sign of an invisible grace” when “no grace is thereby imparted.” In other words, what did baptism seal, if the grace of regeneration were not assuredly present? See Brantly, “Covenant of Circumcision,” 400, 401. While Brantly clearly knew that infant baptism rose on the patristic error of baptismal regeneration (ibid., 398), it is not clear whether Brantly knew that the Reformed argument from circumcision became popular as an antidote to the ancient error (e.g., see Ulrich Zwingli, “Of Baptism,” in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. G. W. Bromily, Library of Christian Classics [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953], 130).

<sup>39</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Passages on Baptism,” *CI*, 12 May 1832, pp. 291, 289.

<sup>40</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” *CSCI*, 20 March 1830, p. 177.

justifies their position. In contrast, the Baptists begin with the New Testament and ask, “Where do Jesus and the apostles command or do this practice?” To Baptists, the silence of the New Testament justifies abstention from that practice.<sup>41</sup> Brantly considered this position necessary to upholding the perfection and sufficiency of Scripture. In his mind, infant baptism “presupposes a defect in the Divine Law and Testimony.” In contrast:

[Baptists] conceive the inspired code of the Lord to be too perfect, to leave space for any supplementary acts on their part, and therefore feel it solemnly binding on them, to abjure the presumption of practising uncommanded ordinances.<sup>42</sup>

Arguing positively, Brantly cited explicit Scripture against the Presbyterian position. The apostle Paul spoke of circumcision typifying not baptism, but “the work of moral renovation by the spirit of God.” Moreover, a believer’s seal is not baptism:

Still the sacred word is not silent respecting the seal. Believers are sealed unto the day of Redemption, and they are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, and hence derive a permanent, indelible character, which is true circumcision of the heart in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, the Baptist insistence on positive New Testament evidence justified believer baptism and explicitly refuted infant baptism.

The authority of Scripture, not of silence, led Brantly to be appalled at the laxity among some Paedobaptists. In reviewing the actions of one Congregational church that simultaneously classified infant baptism as “an ordinance of the Gospel” but

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<sup>41</sup>This Baptist hermeneutic finds fine expression in the famous Second London Confession of Faith (1689). When the Particular Baptist ministers from England had gathered in 1677 to fashion a confession, they assumed that a practice cannot be built upon an unwritten tradition, for whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom 14:23). Thus, when something did not appear plain, these ministers argued that it is safest to leave it undecided and not practiced. Using texts like 2 Tim 3:16-17, they concluded, “All instituted worship receives its sanction from the precept, and is to be thereby governed in all the necessary circumstances thereof” (Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the Baptists* [London: Printed for the author and sold by Burditt, Buxton, Hamilton, Baynes, etc., 1811-1830], 1:428-429).

<sup>42</sup>Brantly, “Covenant of Circumcision,” 3:398. For example, Jesse Mercer insisted, “In all positive Institutions, the will of the Institutor is the *sole* reason for the enactment; and respect for the authority of the Law-giver, is the *only* proper motive for its observance” (Jesse Mercer, “Reply to Queries, Examined,” *CI*, 17 March 1832, p. 163).

<sup>43</sup>Brantly, “Covenant of Circumcision,” 3:401. On another occasion, Brantly questioned whether baptism could be a seal of anything. He reasoned, “Baptism imprints nothing that remains on the body, and if it leaves a character at all, it is upon the soul, to which also the word is added, which is as much a part of the sacrament as the sign itself is.” Consequently, to truly be a seal, the recipient must have reason, or else no imprint remains. See Brantly, “Passages on Baptism,” 290.

tolerated its neglect in practice, Brantly asked, “If Infant Baptism is an ordinance of the Gospel, how can a Gospel church allow it to be slighted, nay, contemned? Has any church, or Council, the power to relax the laws of Christ?”<sup>44</sup> While paedobaptists often allowed for any mode and any subject, Baptists strictly held to one mode and one subject. Baptists regarded believer baptism by immersion as a prerequisite to membership. Brantly regarded all other laxity as a “liberality which prostrates the authority of Christ.”<sup>45</sup> For his “scrupulous and uncompromising” rigidity, Brantly felt the censure of paedobaptist brothers.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to paedobaptist laxity and error, Baptists were in principle consistent Protestants, completing the Protestant Reformation by destroying the “prominent and strong hold” of infant baptism, which “should have been abolished, [but] was left.”<sup>47</sup> Consistent application of *sola scriptura* denied final authority to tradition in all matters, for “they who reject tradition when ’tis against them, must not pretend it at all for them.”<sup>48</sup> Hence, Brantly inquired of his paedobaptist brothers:

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<sup>44</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Baptism of Children,” *CI*, 11 August 1832, p. 93.

<sup>45</sup>Brantly, “Covenant of Circumcision,” 3:403. Regarding common Baptist practice, Brantly once asked, “But is there a Baptist church in existence, which admits to fellowship . . . those who neglect conformity to the requisition of Christ, in regard to baptism, and who justify themselves in that neglect?” (Brantly, “The Covenant of Circumcision,” 3:403). Similarly, Jesse Mercer insisted that the mode was not immaterial to baptism: “The nature of Baptism consists in its symbolical character. It is an emblematic figure; which wholly depends on its mode. Thus it is used in Scripture, not only to represent the washing of regeneration, but the death and resurrection of Christ; all which is well expressed by immersion *into* water. But change the mode, and something else is represented, and its nature is lost” (Mercer, “Reply to Queries, Examined,” 163).

<sup>46</sup>W. T. Brantly, “An Address at the Administration of Baptism,” *CSCI*, 14 August 1830, p. 97.

<sup>47</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Interpretation of the Scriptures,” *CI*, 23 February 1833, p. 114. For proof that Brantly classified Baptists as Protestants, see Brantly, “A Good Reply,” *CI*, 5 January 1833, p. 13.

Regarding the practical consistency of his Baptist brothers, Brantly asked, “Have our lives been as much distinguished for an exact obedience to those commands of Christ which follow baptism, as was our baptism itself for a strict and rigid conformity to the letter of Scripture?” In other words, are Baptists as consistent in practice as in principle? Many at First Baptist Church were, in Brantly’s estimation. He congratulated them and urged, “You have continued to press close on the footsteps of the Redeemer, ever since you met him in Jordan. Go on, and display his honors.—Keep near to his paths—adorn his doctrines, and edify his church” (idem, “An Address at the Administration of Baptism,” 97-98).

<sup>48</sup>Brantly, “Passages on Baptism,” 290.

Whether it may not be easier for you to relinquish a custom which Christ has not commanded, and thus meet us upon the ground of Scripture, than for us virtually to surrender a custom which he has commanded, in order to meet you upon the ground of human tradition?<sup>49</sup>

Instead of “running after [paedobaptist] into the sandy desert of traditionary rites,” Baptists stood “by the LAW AND THE TESTIMONY,” and said, “We love Christ more than we love you.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, Baptists were simply completing the Reformation on the principle of *sola scriptura*, and achieving some success. “Immersion,” Brantly rejoiced in 1830, “is now almost universally recognized as the true, if not the only baptism; and most churches are in the occasional practice of it.”<sup>51</sup>

### **The Sufficient Authority of Scripture**

Not only was Scripture the final authority in all matters of faith and practice, Scripture was also the sufficient authority. Both doctrines are necessary for *sola scriptura*, and are intimately interrelated. In speaking against the final authority of tradition with respect to baptism, Brantly claimed to rely “upon the written word of God as sufficient to establish all true religion.”<sup>52</sup> Both doctrines stand upon the nature of Scripture itself. Just as the finality of Scripture stands square on its inspiration and concomitant inerrancy, so the sufficiency of Scripture stands upon its perspicuity. In matters of faith, Brantly asserted, “The plain Bible, after all, is the thing we need. On this we may repose with confidence, because its statements are intelligible, its reasonings conclusive, and its tendency pre-eminently holy and good.”<sup>53</sup> Further, in matters of practice, “By the clear radiance of these truths, we shall be able to expunge from the

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<sup>49</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Common Odium,” *CI*, 24 March 1832, p. 178. The Baptist “custom” to which Brantly referred is close communion (see chap. 9).

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>51</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The German Reformed Baptists at Harrisburg, Pa.,” *CSCI*, 23 October 1830, p. 269.

<sup>52</sup>Brantly, “Passages on Baptism,” 290.

<sup>53</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Application of Metaphysics to Theology,” *CI*, 3 March 1832, p. 129.



annals of Christianity all the spurious matter which has been there enrolled as its constituents.”<sup>54</sup> In many respects, the sufficient authority of Scripture is what gives the Bible its final authority.<sup>55</sup>

Brantly faced two contenders to the sufficient authority of Scripture—metaphysics and philology. Of the first, Brantly had little good to say, especially since it carried “the presumptuous aim of helping out the Scriptures.”<sup>56</sup> Of the latter, Brantly gave a qualified approval, but saw signs of the future that disturbed him. In either instance, Brantly’s criticism does not arise from ignorance, for his extant writings lend credence to his reputation as “one of the most critical linguists and profound metaphysicians which this country has ever produced.”<sup>57</sup> Not singularly impressed with human intellect, Brantly kept his eye on what was useful.

## Metaphysics

In classical terms, “metaphysics” applies to the human study of all things immaterial; the material things pertain to “physics.”<sup>58</sup> As general examples of

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<sup>54</sup>Brantly, *Themes*, 46.

<sup>55</sup>While it may seem incongruous for Brantly to assert the perspicuity of Scripture in light of the obvious fact that many portions of Scripture are not understood, Brantly thought of the perspicuity of Scripture diachronically. Like discoveries in nature that lay unexplored until their time of use had come, so also “the most that can be said of those parts of Scripture which human intelligence and skill are unable to comprehend, is that their application and use are not yet developed.” Even the “truth and beauty” of prophecies will be clear, when they shall be seen “in the light of actual fulfilment.” Therefore, things not understood in Scripture are only “partial obscurities,” for in actuality they are “not *yet* understood” (W. T. Brantly, “On Those Parts of Scripture Not Yet Understood,” *CSCI*, 14 November 1829, p. 305, italics added).

<sup>56</sup>Elaborating, Brantly stated, “There are no *Metaphysics* in the Scriptures. The views there presented are such as plain minds may be supposed capable of comprehending” (Brantly, “The Application of Metaphysics to Theology,” 129, italics original).

<sup>57</sup>J. H. Campbell, *Georgia Baptists: Historical and Biographical* (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke, 1874), 222. In ascertaining Brantly’s own thought, one has to beware of drawing conclusions from silence. Since Brantly possessed a great mind, but hesitated to go beyond the plain facts of Scripture, he probably held to certain understandings of doctrine that he seldom expressed publicly.

<sup>58</sup>As an example, Brantly classified demonic visions as “metaphysical.” In his opinion, medical doctors would fail to elucidate such phenomena, because though they may “have a technical name for the malady . . . , they contemplate such things in a *physical*, and not in a *metaphysical* light” (W. T. Brantly, “A Curious Case,” *CI*, 5 February 1831, p. 91).

metaphysics, Brantly cited “the science of the mind” and “researches on subjects, where the evidence is neither mathematical, nor historical.” But with reference to theology in particular, Brantly described metaphysics as “those definitions, abstractions, exact systems, and wordy accumulations, with which almost every subject brought to view in the Bible has been vexed and tortured in a greater or less degree.” Examples of vexed subjects included both the infinitely large “*wheels and levers* in the great mechanism of Redemption”—divine decrees, imputation, atonement, original sin, and the origin of sin—and the infinitesimally small workings of the will, even down to “the very point at which the last determining motive decides the wavering mind.” Examples included not only the creed of Nathaniel W. Taylor, but also the “learned candor of [Philip] Doddridge” and “the mental acuteness of [Jonathan] Edwards.”<sup>59</sup> Brantly himself stood solidly opposed to metaphysics for two main reasons—arrogance and uselessness.

**The arrogance of metaphysics.** Metaphysics was *arrogant*, for it overestimated the capabilities of the human mind. When Brantly heard “shallow praters talking upon the deep mysterious points of theology and metaphysics,” he regarded such behavior as “a *bad sign*, because they have launched out into the ocean, with a line too short to take soundings in the harbour from which they started.”<sup>60</sup> While Brantly recognized the desire of the human mind to understand things, and even recommended on occasion a book that may help youth grasp metaphysical terms, Brantly had long opposed the attempt to construct a perfect system of theology.<sup>61</sup> In Augusta, he had charged the

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<sup>59</sup>Brantly, “The Application of Metaphysics to Theology,” 129. The image of redemption as a large machine comes from Brantly’s rhetorical question: “Has there ever been any man or any set of men so clear sighted, that having taken a lofty position, they have been enabled to see at one view, and to describe in one book, all the *wheels and levers* in the great mechanism of Redemption?” (W. T. Brantly, “The Perfection of System—Its Greatest Defect,” *CI*, 15 October 1831, p. 254).

<sup>60</sup>“Bad Signs,” *ABM* 7 (October 1827): 296. Even though the article is unsigned, the identity of Brantly as author is almost assured by the facts that the article came from the *Columbian Star*, which Brantly edited at this time, and that Brantly used this same analogy five years later (see W. T. Brantly, “Impartial Enquiry,” *CI*, 11 August 1832, p. 92).

<sup>61</sup>For a rare example of Brantly recommending a volume of metaphysics, see W. T. Brantly, “Abercrombie on the Intellectual Powers,” *CI*, 11 August 1832, p. 94.

makers of systems with possessing a “presumptuous spirit” and “a rashness [that] would rush into the darkness with which deity has encompassed his throne, to draw away the volume of his eternal mysteries.”<sup>62</sup> Seven years later, he repeated his warning, telling the Philadelphia Association, “The *perfection* of system constituted its greatest *defect*.” By this statement, Brantly did not deny that God Himself has a perfect system, but only that man had the ability to comprehend and explain that system perfectly. In attempting the impossible, systems of divinity often “run into extremes,” for men first “make out a perfect system in their minds, and then go to the word of God to find proofs,” which are then “pressed in, willing or unwilling, until the very *perfection* at which they aim becomes the greatest blemish upon their system.” So, while God’s system is perfect, Brantly asked, “Are any of the books containing systems built professedly on this to be considered *perfect*? Do they not all *taste of the cask*?” Better to apply more constantly to the word of God than to have “*excessive confidence in human plans*.”<sup>63</sup>

In light of the arrogance of metaphysics, Brantly regarded it as “a troublesome intruder” on the holy ground of religion.<sup>64</sup> This combination of arrogance and impropriety came home to Brantly again, while he was reading an article designed to vindicate the very exercise of explaining conversion and regeneration. Immediately, his mind recalled what John Martin, a British Baptist, said when he had been asked to explain some difficult points of divinity:

You ask of me, what I am on the decrees of God, on predestination, on the doctrine of election, on the origin of moral evil, on regeneration, justification, and other weighty truths of Scripture. To all which I reply, that I am NOTHING—NOTHING—NOTHING but a believer.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Brantly, “Trinitarians Rational,” 402.

<sup>63</sup>Brantly, “The Perfection of System—Its Greatest Defect,” p. 254, italics original; see also Brantly, “Malcom on the Atonement,” *CI*, 30 March 1833, p. 194.

<sup>64</sup>Elsewhere, Brantly bemoans “the intrusive boldness with which the feeble minds of men attempt to scan the deep things of God” (Brantly, “The Application of Metaphysics to Theology,” 129).

<sup>65</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Religious Speculation,” *CSCI*, 6 November 1830, p. 302.

With this incident in mind, Brantly then sarcastically concluded, “The world must be growing much wiser than formerly, if the ‘*Philosophy of Regeneration*’ was now reduced to a Theorem capable of demonstration.” Indeed, he mused, “This truly is the age, in which GREAT THINGS are attempted, not only in practice, but also in theory.” Instead of metaphysics, the only legitimate arbiter in religion is faith, that is, a “faith which does not question, but adores—which . . . rests contented with the word of God, and looks away from the schools of philosophy” to Jesus Himself.<sup>66</sup>

The arrogance of metaphysics stands in stark contrast to the reticence of Scripture itself. Brantly observed, “The Word of God does not undertake to account for the origin of many things; but seems contented to take them as they are.” For example, the Bible “does not stop to enquire how the sin of Adam has become the sin of all his posterity. The fact is assumed, and the reasonings upon it are conformable to the fact.” In short, the Bible “has more regard to facts than to theories, urges duty rather than speculation; would sooner warm the heart with divine love, than entertain the understanding with ingenious systems.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore, because the Bible is more interested in transformation than information, it should surprise no one that God did not give His revelation as man would have expected, either as a “code of laws,” or as “moral precepts and maxims,” or as “a series of abstract principles and propositions.” In recording the *facts* of His great transactions with one people primarily, God “has enabled us to see for

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid. Richard Fuller eulogized that Brantly himself adhered to this sort of adoring faith: “He took heed to his doctrine; and knew nothing of that latitudinarianism which is more charitable than the scriptures, and presumes to mutilate eternal truth or modify any precept of revelation. He loved the Bible, and studied the Bible, and preached the Bible,—preached it as it is,—neither seeking to be wise nor orthodox above what is written. The things which are revealed he spoke, as the ambassadors of Christ should speak, plainly and boldly. But he stooped with reverence before those deep mysteries which are covered with adorable darkness—esteeming it the sublimest office of reason to submit to the lights of faith, and to bow before a Being who is not more glorious in what he discloses than in what he conceals” (*Intrepid Faith. A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. William Tomlinson Brantly, D. D.; with A Sketch of His Life and Character; Delivered at the Request of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, S. C.* [Charleston: Published by the Church, 1845], 32).

<sup>67</sup>Brantly, “The Application of Metaphysics to Theology,” 129.

ourselves the whole result of his ways and methods.” This emphasis on facts and effects leads to Brantly’s other complaint against metaphysics.<sup>68</sup>

**The uselessness of metaphysics.** Metaphysics was also *useless*, for it failed to produce faith. Faith required firm answers, not endless questions. Since Brantly recognized that it is “always easier to ask questions than to answer them,” he gave reluctant answers to inquirers who appeared “to be in deep water, where no firm ground can be obtained as the basis of any calculation.” In explaining to one such inquirer why Brantly himself would “meddle but little with metaphysics,” Brantly used an analogy from science: “There are facts enough within reach of our minds, and we need not therefore, run after theories.”<sup>69</sup> On another occasion, Brantly illustrated his point with “the simple fact” of gravitation, which can be known but not explained.<sup>70</sup> In Brantly’s opinion, facts produced faith. “A single fact,” he wrote, “often does more in producing conviction than many arguments. Facts, indeed, are the best of all arguments, and admit of no appeal to a higher source of wisdom.”<sup>71</sup> That is why Scripture itself is primarily a record of historical facts. Facts have more of an effect on man.<sup>72</sup> In contrast to the firmness of faith, metaphysics was restless. As Brantly testified of his own experience, even the best metaphysicians “have always failed to furnish to our mind a ground for entire repose.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>W. T. Brantly, “On the Method Adopted by Infinite Wisdom to Make Known His Mind and Will to Mortals,” *CI*, 2 February 1833, p. 65.

<sup>69</sup>Brantly, “Impartial Enquiry,” 92.

<sup>70</sup>Brantly, “Religious Speculation,” 302.

<sup>71</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Importance of a Knowledge of the Scriptures in the Original Languages,” *CI*, 30 July 1831, p. 65.

<sup>72</sup>Brantly categorically said, “[God’s] teaching is the teaching of *facts*, the setting forth of *effects*, the presentation to the mind of the *actual* and *effective* characteristics of his Truth” (Brantly, “On the Method Adopted by Infinite Wisdom to Make Known His Mind and Will to Mortals,” 65).

<sup>73</sup>Brantly, “The Application of Metaphysics to Theology,” 129. The following year, Brantly described the Presbyterians’ problem with George Duffield as another example of “Metaphysics and Theology” (see the article from the *Philadelphian* reprinted as “Metaphysics and Theology,” *CI*, 25 May 1833, p. 327).

Therefore, Brantly stood opposed to those who claimed to preach the Gospel, but in actuality gave out their metaphysics. Brantly compared them to a doctor who only mocked the diseased:

He who presents us a *remedy* when we are laboring under disease, does much more good to us than he who affords us a *definition* of our malady. The one confers a benefit immediate, real, and substantial; the other mocks our misery and leaves it unmitigated. This is about the difference betwixt plain, unadulterated Truth as taught in the Religion of Christ, and that talkative, unmeaning thing called *Metaphysics*.<sup>74</sup>

These comments were prompted by reading in the *Connecticut Observer* a summary of Nathaniel W. Taylor's creed, which Brantly appended to the end of his comments. The following week, Brantly gave full credence to an article from the *Vermont Chronicle*, which criticized the metaphysical preaching of Charles G. Finney by asking:

What right has Mr. Finney, or any other man, with a congregation of anxious sinners before him, to mix up the doctrines of the Gospel and his own philosophy, *which is no part of those doctrines*, in one undistinguished mass, and deal out the compound as the bread of life? . . . Indeed, what good reason can any one give for preaching such things? Preaching them is not preaching the Gospel.

In Brantly's opinion, the *Chronicle* supplied "an apposite illustration of our views."<sup>75</sup>

**The usefulness of Scripture.** In his own preaching, Brantly found Scripture more useful than metaphysics. His love for Scripture received hearty recognition at the end of his life from Southern Baptist leader Richard Fuller, who had grown up under Brantly's preaching. Fuller considered Brantly's "reverence for the Scriptures" to be perhaps his most important trait—one that separated him from the average minister:

He loved the Bible; he preached the Bible; and, as age advanced, he studied the Bible with ever deepening veneration. I never knew a man whose mind had worked itself more free from all those prejudices and formal systems, ("the mind's idols," as Lord Bacon calls them,) which cause many Christians to welcome the Sacred

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<sup>74</sup>Brantly, "The Application of Metaphysics to Theology," 129.

<sup>75</sup>W. T. Brantly, "The Application of Metaphysics to Christianity," *CI*, 17 March 1832, pp. 169, 167. The *Chronicle* wrote in response to a pro-Finney review of Mr. Rand's pamphlet, *The New Divinity Tried* (ibid., 168).

Oracles, only so far as they concur with the creeds of a sect, or the old hereditary sanctities and shibboleths of a Church.

In the face of centuries of controversies, Brantly went back to the fountain of Scripture “with perpetual solicitude after truth,” and then “purchased it *as* truth.”<sup>76</sup> In Fuller’s eyes, it took great courage on Brantly’s part not to ignore any portion of Scripture or significant perversion of Scripture, but to embrace the Gospel in all its fullness and symmetry, keeping salvation and the cross at the center. As an example of Brantly’s “intrepid faith,” Fuller pointed to one “masterly sermon” entitled, “God’s Gracious Purpose.”<sup>77</sup>

Choosing as his text the controversial passage, 1 Timothy 2:4, Brantly sought to correct the misleading phrase “irresistible grace.” Two things seemed clear to him from the text. First, God truly desires the salvation of each individual, so that there is no ground for “anxious doubt” on the part of the sinner or hesitation on the part of the saints to pray for others’ salvation. The text says that this is God’s will. In apparent opposition to the metaphysical notion of God’s secret will, Brantly affirmed this hermeneutical rule:

When it is declared that the will of God favours, or resists any particular event or occurrence, it should be remembered that the declaration is made in accordance with the expressed sense of the Bible. This is the only light by which we can see what is agreeable and what is disagreeable to the will of Omnipotence. If we go one step beyond this we are involved in profound darkness, and lost amid a thousand absurdities.

Second, the text also teaches that “the grace of God as put forth and exerted in the salvation of sinners, is not irresistible.” Since this assertion contradicted a common metaphysical notion of Calvinism, Brantly added a footnote with this careful definition:

When I say that *grace is not irresistible*, I must be understood to mean, that it does not act upon the soul by any coercive necessity, to the exclusion of rational motives and inducements; and that it does not so oblige any to be saved, as that they cannot procure final condemnation for themselves, if they please.

Since man is truly responsible, all Scriptural “commands, doctrines, and exhortations are addressed to mankind upon the ground of a capability on their part to refuse compliance

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<sup>76</sup>Sprague, *Annals*, 6:505, 506.

<sup>77</sup>Fuller, “Intrepid Faith,” 32-33.

with the divine requisition.” No excuse of inability remains. From this Brantly concluded, “Surely then the sinner can, and does resist his own salvation—all sinners do this.” True, the Holy Spirit overcomes this resistance in regeneration, but He does so by means of “the power of light, of love, of persuasion; and although resistance then ceases, it does not cease in compliance with any coercive necessity, but in accordance with the dictates of a renewed soul.” Consequently, no sinner could justly convince himself that he must wait for God to force him into salvation. In pressing this point home, Brantly asked, “Have you sought to palliate your criminality in neglecting Christ, by holding before you the pretexts of theological doubt and disputation?”<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the sermon, Brantly held firm to his aim of “the development and recommendation of simple, unadulterated Scripture truth.” While he knew that the sermon would not please “those who have made for themselves agreeable systems and theories,” he refused to follow them into the “labyrinth of metaphysics” to answer their objections. Neither predestination nor election contradicted anything he said, for while it was true that “as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48), it should not be missed that they really *believed*, that is, “acted with perfect consent of their own minds.” When pressed to explain *how* both divine appointment and genuine faith cohered, Brantly professed ignorance:

That the Holy Spirit does exert a greater influence upon some minds than upon others within the pale of the same visible administration of means; and that this greater influence must account for the conversion of some, whilst others remain unconverted, is what I fully believe. That salvation too is wholly of the grace of God, and that it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do, is a position to which my mind fully accords. But I am equally confident in the belief that all this is done without the least interference with the freedom of the human soul. *How* it can be done I pretend not to explain.<sup>79</sup>

Based on what Brantly said, it would be safe to say that if he had been forced to choose a metaphysical label for his doctrine, he would have probably chosen *effectual calling*, for

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<sup>78</sup>Brantly, *Themes*, 49-50, 70-71, 52, 61, 62, 63-64, 79, 82.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 70, 55-57, 60.



it employs the language of Scripture itself.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, Brantly nowhere intimated that this effectual call, or “greater influence,” is resisted. While all sinners resist salvation, no sinner actually does resist the Spirit’s effectual call, even though that sinner could do so hypothetically. When God freely calls a sinner, the sinner freely believes.

**The language of Scripture.** Instead of metaphysics, Brantly championed the simple language of Scripture. He agreed with Robert Hall, the famous English Baptist preacher, who once advised regarding the doctrine of hell, “On a subject so awful and mysterious, what remains for us but to use the language of Scripture without attempting to enter into any metaphysical subtleties, or daring to lower what appears to be the natural import?”<sup>81</sup> Scripture said it best.

The debate over the doctrine of the atonement manifests Brantly’s stress on scriptural terminology. Though Brantly recognized that controversies can arise from several difficulties, whether in personalities or in communication, he thought that the atonement debate “chiefly originated in the faulty use of terms.” Brantly wished that Bible expositors would imitate the expositors of nature. He reasoned, if Bible expositors would “address themselves to the work, in quest of the GREAT FACTS and PHENOMENA of Revelation,” they would then “have no dread lest they should dash against *Limited Atonement* on the one hand, or *General Atonement* on the other,” but would simply “take God’s Word just as they find it.” But by focusing on “terms and phrases to which custom has attached a specific import,” a controversy ensued, which

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<sup>80</sup>Early in the sermon, Brantly does employ the language of effectual calling: “The power which grace exerts is the power of persuasion, of illumination, or of attraction. . . . It *calls the soul effectually*, moves it by rational inducements, rouses it from the sleepy torpor of unbelief, and informs it by the teachings of the Holy Spirit; but in all this there is nothing that impairs the freedom of choice, or of action” (ibid., 53, italics added).

<sup>81</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Robert Hall’s Letters,” *CI*, 21 July 1832, p. 44. Because Brantly hand-picked the letters he wished to re-publish, without adding any prefaced warning, it is probable that Brantly agreed with Hall’s position. Brantly assumed that Hall had been referring to the doctrine of “future punishment” (ibid.).

On the importance of correct terminology in controversies, see Brantly, “Impartial Enquiry,” 92; idem, “Unqualified Assertions,” *CI*, 9 April 1831, p. 234.

was wholly unnecessary, for both parties denied universal salvation and agreed to the “*possibility* of salvation to all those to whom the Gospel invitation is extended.”<sup>82</sup>

What the controversy needed was a simple Gospel definition of the atonement. Brantly confessed, “We have never yet seen a definition of the subject in other than Scripture language, which afforded satisfaction to our mind.”<sup>83</sup> Brantly himself pointed to Romans 3:25 for his definition. “Here,” Brantly wrote, “the atonement, is defined in one word—A PROPITIATION, the *Hilasterion*, the MERCY-SEAT—the place where Mercy sits. The design of this PROPITIATION, is the setting forth of God’s equity in pardoning, through his mercy, sins previously existing.”<sup>84</sup> In urging biblical terminology, Brantly joined other Baptists who also sought unity through better vocabulary.<sup>85</sup>

### **Philology**

In advocating the use of scriptural terminology, Brantly remained cautious about the supposed power of *philology*—the scientific study of word usage in literature.<sup>86</sup> Brantly’s caution appeared in his critique of a recent commentary on the book of Romans by the Professor of Oriental Languages at Andover Seminary, Moses Stuart (1780-1852), who by 1819, according to one historian, had “probably a larger command of German

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<sup>82</sup>Brantly, “Difficulties Attending the Discussion of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” 337, 338.

<sup>83</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” *CSCI*, 27 March 1830, p. 193. Brantly, for instance, criticized Cyrus White for not defining atonement—his very subject matter—and for bringing forth “no text” when he set out to explain its nature (idem, “Pamphlets,” *CSCI*, 22 May 1830, p. 332). In contrast, Brantly praised Mercer’s letters for presenting “wholesome truth in the simple garb of Scripture” (idem, “Correspondents,” *CI*, 15 January 1831, p. 48).

<sup>84</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” *CSCI*, 27 March 1830, p. 193.

<sup>85</sup>E.g., Pacificator, “Gill and Fuller,” *CSCI*, 27 February 1830, pp. 132-33. Brantly’s friends also agreed with his counsel on biblical definitions, though not perhaps with his definition of the atonement. Mercer, for example, carefully explained to White that “atonement” should not be confounded with “propitiation,” which is exactly what Brantly believed (Letter 2, in Jesse Mercer, “Letters on the Atonement,” *CSCI*, 28 August 1830, p. 137).

<sup>86</sup>Brantly primarily had in mind studies in the original languages of Scripture, for only some of his readers had “skill enough in the original languages, to comprehend the bearing and benefit of a philological discussion” (see W. T. Brantly, “Professor Stewart’s [*sic*] Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,” *CI*, 20 October 1832, p. 241).

critical literature than any other American.”<sup>87</sup> Stuart pioneered an exegetical movement in America that emphasized language over creed. In reviewing Stuart’s commentary, Brantly commended Stuart for setting forth Paul’s mind in general, but criticized him for being “at variance with all the orthodox Creeds on the subject of original sin; and with the very Apostle whose writings he is expounding.” Nor was this the only error, for Brantly expressed apprehension that “there is, in this Commentary, an alarming departure from the old standards; and that the learned Commentator of America, symbolizes somewhat with those German Expositors, who, though generally deemed orthodox, yet build too much upon the supposed refinements and nice distinctions of Language.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, Stuart agreed with the creed of the German expositors, who went awry by relying too much on terminology.<sup>89</sup>

The irony in Brantly’s position lies in his combination of theology and hermeneutics. On the one hand, Brantly criticized metaphysics for the human arrogance in defining the mysteries of Scripture apart from biblical language; on the other hand, Brantly also criticized philology for the human arrogance of relying too much on “the supposed refinements and nice distinctions of Language” in explaining the mysteries of Scripture apart from creeds. How could these two positions cohere in one man? Two

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<sup>87</sup>Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 396.

<sup>88</sup>Regarding original sin, Brantly criticized, “[Stuart] disallows Imputation, Natural Propagation, Example, and similar ideas; and leaves us only with the knowledge that the state of things is bad, without informing us how the bad state became so universal.” Though this criticism may appear inconsistent with Brantly’s aversion to metaphysical explanations, Brantly was fundamentally criticizing Stuart for not affirming that original sin is “derived immediately from Adam.” See Brantly, “Professor Stewart’s [*sic*] Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,” 241-42.

For Brantly’s use of the phrase “symbolizes with” as identifying with a creed, see W. T. Brantly, “Popularity of Methodist Doctrines,” *CI*, 22 October 1831, p. 258. For more information on Stuart and the movement he pioneered, see Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969).

<sup>89</sup>Brantly’s criticism of Stuart should be seen neither as criticism of commentaries or of reference books. Brantly did think that the clearly-written books of the New Testament—such as the Gospel of John, and the narratives about Jesus—deserved no comment, except perhaps to explain historical obscurities. Romans also required no comment, just better translation, which Stuart himself had sought to achieve in his commentary. See W. T. Brantly, “General Views,” *CI*, 2 July 1831, p. 7. For an example of Brantly recommending a reference book, see Brantly, “Scripture Geography,” *CI*, 30 December 1831, pp. 421-22.

explanations follow—the first concerns Brantly’s concept of language; the second, his view of creeds.

**The nature of language.** Brantly’s criticism against both metaphysics and philology rested in part upon his view of the limited ability of language itself. When Brantly explained why he had changed the name of his periodical from *The Columbian Star, and Christian Index* to simply *The Christian Index*, he revealed more than just the nature of his magazine. He revealed his own reticence towards definitions in general:

In lately conning over our Hebrew, we were induced to pause upon the word which signifies HEAVENS. The constituent parts of the word when translated separately, furnish in our language, the words, *There are the fixtures, or positions!* It occurred to us, that whatever may have been the origin of the word, it comprises a meaning well suited to the rational nature of man. The term appears rather to point at the objects presented in the Heavens, than to attempt a definition of them. A descriptive phrase was not aimed at by the writer. His speech is, *There are the positions!* Examine them for yourself.<sup>90</sup>

Consequently, Brantly reminded his readers, “The most important events and objects in Providence and nature, are to be pointed out, rather than defined.”<sup>91</sup> Since words “pointed out” their referent and so *signified* meaning, words themselves do not *have* meaning. Meaning lies outside words, and thus, by extension, outside definitions as well.

Brantly’s view of the limited ability of language also applied to Scripture itself, in regard both to its contents and to its origin. In using terms to represent “the nature and actions of deity,” Brantly insisted that “all language must fail,” for the simple reason that “language can never define what reason and intellect do not comprehend.” Even simple declarations of Scripture such as “God is love” eluded definition; and attempts at definition lead men “from the way of truth and duty” only to lose them “in the gloom of destructive error.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, the meaning of the Bible transcends both language and reason.

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<sup>90</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Objects of Attention,” *CI*, 1 January 1831, p. 1. The observation about Brantly’s epistemology stands independently of his accuracy in assessing the meaning of the Hebrew term.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Brantly, “Trinitarians Rational,” 406.

In accordance with this belief, it is not surprising that Brantly believed the Bible originated not first as words, but as concepts and impressions. The Bible did not fall from the skies as a fully formed book, which would have hurt its credibility, but came through the minds of men:

The sentiments, the ideas, the thought which it contains, are said to have been imparted to the spirits of good and holy men. The Spirit of God conveyed them to the spirits of men. The Bible then first existed, not as a book, not in the regular mechanism of art as we now have it, but in the minds of holy men. There lay its whole contents.

What strikes one here is Brantly's conception of the word of God existing in the minds of men without words! If one were to object that "the human mind cannot receive ideas, without words; and that language is therefore, necessary to the completion of a mental conception," Brantly answered that "the consciousness of every man must disprove such a position." As proof, he asked, "May not the grand, and the beautiful in nature, and in art, make an impression upon the mind, which no words, either do, or can define? May not such an impression be as strong, and abiding as if reduced to the most exact forms of speech?"<sup>93</sup> Language, therefore, was only a created means for "reciprocating reasonable conceptions betwixt intelligent minds."<sup>94</sup>

Brantly used this notion of *impressions* to comfort believers. For instance, he found that his stress on the divine origin of the doctrines themselves, as distinct from the words, comforted young converts, who would often err in thinking that their faith rested upon the precision of Bible copies and translations.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Brantly maintained that believers who forget their proofs of the Bible's divine inspiration should not give ways to

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<sup>93</sup>W. T. Brantly, "For the Confirmation of Believers," *CI*, 28 January 1832, p. 50.

<sup>94</sup>This is Brantly's fundamental idea of language, for he gave this description in his essay on the first man, Adam (Brantly, "The First Man," 33).

<sup>95</sup>W. T. Brantly, "For the Confirmation of Believers," *CI*, 28 January 1832, p. 50. By pointing to concepts over language, Brantly apparently argued in a traditional fashion. Virginia Baptist, Andrew Broaddus (1770-1848), used a similar argument in his book *The Age of Reason and Revelation* against the deist Thomas Paine. Even though language is mutable, Broaddus argued that ideas are immutable and transferable across languages and cultures (see Holifield, *Gentlemen Theologians*, 54).

doubts. In quoting Jeremy Taylor's remark, that "a man may prudently hold an opinion, which he cannot defend against a witty adversary," Brantly added, "A man may prudently hold an opinion which he cannot always defend against *his own wit*." As proof, Brantly noted the difficulty philosophers and mathematicians often find in retracing their steps to a firm conclusion. Similarly, Brantly concluded of a doubting believer, "The impression of the truth he cannot forget—whilst the steps that led to that impression, may be wholly obliterated."<sup>96</sup> Infidelity, in contrast, could produce nothing that gave the same impressions as the Bible.<sup>97</sup>

Before explaining further Brantly's view of the nature of language, it must be reasserted that Brantly did believe in the verbal inspiration of Scripture—that is, that God inspired the written words of the original autographs of the Bible. In discussing the inspired conceptions of the Bible's doctrines, Brantly added parenthetically, "The spoken and the written part, which was *also* under divine direction, is a different thing from the original conception of the matter." Therefore, *both* the concepts and the words are inspired. But they are not equally important, for regarding the question of the inspired language of Scripture, Brantly admitted, "We attach no great importance to such a question. The *matter* of Revelation is beyond doubt, the result of inspiration; but the vehicle through which it comes to us, is the established utterance of human speech."<sup>98</sup>

Because words do not encompass concepts, but merely point to them, words betray both metaphysics and philology. Both these sciences use definitions, and so both

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<sup>96</sup>Brantly, "Doubts and Evidences," 130.

<sup>97</sup>On the basis of impressions, Brantly charged the skeptics of the Bible with injustice, for which of their writings compared to Isaiah or Jeremiah? He said, "We may safely challenge history for a parallel to their sublime prophecies. Who can read of the desolations of Babylon and Tyre; without *feeling* the spirit of the theme?" (W. T. Brantly, "The Illiberality of Skepticism," *CSCI*, 19 December 1829, p. 385). Brantly's argument reminds one of J. Gresham Machen's criticism of modernity: the rise of scientific utilitarianism brought great material gains, but nearly destroyed the "personal life" of the arts and civil liberty (J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* [New York: Macmillan, 1923; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 9-15).

<sup>98</sup>Brantly, "For the Confirmation of Believers," 50, italics added to the word "also." The concept of "autographs" appeared earlier in the article, and almost certainly describes what Brantly later referred to as "the written part" of revelation (*ibid.*, 49, 50).

expect more of words than words can deliver. Philology may appear better than metaphysics in that philology uses the wording of Scripture, but in treating biblical terms in an exact manner, philology actually turns the terms themselves into metaphysical definitions. Brantly sought to avoid this error in his stress on biblical language. For example, in a bold sermon on Acts 11:24, which describes Barnabas as “a good man,” Brantly cautioned against both denying the propriety of calling any man “good” and also the opposite error of connecting goodness with “absolute perfection.” Thus, Brantly concluded—based on doctrine in general—that “good” was a relative term, which must be tempered by the knowledge of God’s own perfection and man’s utter dependence upon God to receive any good thing.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, in a striking example, Brantly pointed to the lion, which Scripture applied both to the devil and to Jesus. In light of such sharp contrasts, Brantly observed, “How necessary it is for those who undertake to interpret the Oracles of Truth, to pay a strict attention to the design of the author, and the scope and connection of the passages they attempt to illustrate! By a fanciful deduction of particulars, and an injudicious adherence to an uniform explanation of figurative language, the real intention of scripture is often obscured or perverted.”<sup>100</sup> The referent, not the word, had the meaning.

This stress on the concept over the term gave Brantly great dexterity in using either a biblical term or a theological term. For instance, concerning the lack of will in sinners who refuse to come to Christ, Brantly elaborated, “It is *disinclination* to Religion, or in the language of Scripture, the *enmity* of the heart that constitutes the inability of men to save themselves.” While Brantly admitted here that he was “wandering into metaphysics,” his general use of the Edwardsean term “disinclination” shows that he

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<sup>99</sup>Brantly, *Themes*, 292, 294, 295.

<sup>100</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Scriptural Allusions to the Lion,” *CI*, 26 February 1831, p. 140. The author is probably Brantly, though the article is unsigned and not double-spaced.

valued the concept more than the specific term.<sup>101</sup> Since all language must by nature fail to encompass the reality signified, the choice of a particular term, such as a “person” of the Trinity, should not be pressed too far, for no term would be unexceptional.<sup>102</sup> Yet not all terms met Brantly’s approval. As shown earlier, he disliked the term “irresistible” with reference to grace, for he thought it was misleading at best.

Regarding the use of doctrinal terminology versus scriptural terminology, Brantly expressed one rule of thumb in his reply to a North Carolina correspondent regarding the phrase “means of grace.” On the one hand, Brantly approved of the phrase, defining it as “the ways and methods, through which God designs to bring men to the knowledge of the truth.” On the other hand, Brantly noted two potential pitfalls. First, the phrase could be misleading, as if “there are duties, actions, and instrumentalities in Religion, by the bare use and application of which, a man may achieve his own salvation, without any special aid from any other source.” Brantly flat out denied this, claiming that salvation “is of God, and of Him only.” Second, the exact “terms, *means of grace*,” did not occur in the King James Version. Not bothered by this fact, Brantly gave as his rule:

If a word, or a phrase, therefore, should convey a sound sense, and should be so understood, as not to militate against good doctrine, it must not be hastily censured, because not found in our version of the Bible. There are several words found there in *our translation*, which would be better away, and some not found, which ought to be there.<sup>103</sup>

Again, Brantly subordinated words to concepts. He valued words only so far as they conveyed “a sound sense.”

In subordinating words to concepts, but yet asserting the inspiration of both, Brantly exhibited a fine balance in a century that largely understood inspired words and inspired concepts as dichotomous positions. On the one hand, Brantly resembled Horace Bushnell in appreciating the transmission of supravocal concepts by means of verbal

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<sup>101</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Our Methodist Friend Again,” *CI*, 31 March 1832, p. 194.

<sup>102</sup>Brantly, “Trinitarians Rational,” 406.

<sup>103</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Means of Grace,” *CI*, 21 January 1832, p. 46.



symbols; but on the other hand, Brantly resembled the later Princetonians, who relied heavily on facts and taught the verbal inspiration of the original text of Scripture.<sup>104</sup> This balance of concept and word also fed diverse efforts of biblical research. On the one hand, Brantly wrote a book of sermons that he called *Themes for Meditation*, instead of *Themes for Information* or some such title.<sup>105</sup> He used to assert that “we can profit nothing until we bring our knowledge within the scope of reflection.”<sup>106</sup> Both Richard Fuller and Basil Manly greatly admired Brantly’s sermons for their ideas—what Fuller called “the grandeur of his conceptions.” According to Manly, Brantly’s secret was: “He elaborated ideas, not particular sermons.”<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, Brantly meticulously compiled and published a detailed chronology of the Bible for use in Sunday Schools.<sup>108</sup> In light of such balanced activities, Richard Fuller testified of his former pastor, “He was never guilty of the common mistake of confounding familiarity with words with a knowledge of the truth; nor of that other error, that Revelation is given to save us the toil

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<sup>104</sup>For the views of Horace Bushnell on language, see Holifield, *Theology in America*, 458-60. For the views of the Princetonians, see Mark A. Noll, “Introduction,” in *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Warfield*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 25-40.

<sup>105</sup>In one of the sermons, Brantly identified “holy dispositions” as the prerequisites for rendering to “God an agreeable theme for meditation” (Brantly, *Themes*, 78).

Of the quality of the book itself, Basil Manly disparaged, “The volume of sermons, published near the close of his residence in Philadelphia, was written amid as heavy a press of affairs as he ever encountered. I was in his house during that period, and he told me that he had tasked himself to write one sermon a week of that series, besides his other duties. These discourses are certainly not better than the average of his ordinary ministrations” (Sprague, *Annals*, 6:502).

<sup>106</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Reflection,” *CIBM*, 10 August 1833, p. 22. This editorial reveals Brantly’s love for private, “sweet” mediation of God.

<sup>107</sup>Sprague, *Annals*, 6:506, 501. Brantly summarized his own view of preaching as follows: “In our view the most useful preaching has but little of such garniture [e.g. surprising novelties, graceful composition, or fiery eloquence]. It is the sound sense, the unexpected, yet convincing applications of Scripture, the holy unction and cutting closeness of appeal in the speaker, which keep his hearers awake—which pinch their conscience and put them upon the making resolutions of amendment whilst yet his words are sounding in their ears.” Based upon this view of preaching, Brantly then counseled preachers to “guard against being *too obvious*,” having long introductions, and acting without “the refreshing breezes of the Spirit” (W. T. Brantly, “The Preaching Which Does Good,” *CSCI*, 28 November 1829, pp. 337-38). Brantly furnished example sketches of such sermons in the next issue (see Brantly, “Preaching,” 5 December 1829, pp. 353-54).

<sup>108</sup>W. T. Brantly, *Studies for the Assistance of Bible Classes* (Philadelphia: Martin and Boden, 1834).

of research.” In either respect, he searched the Scriptures.<sup>109</sup> Both its words and its concepts were inspired.

**The value of creeds.** Against the metaphysicians, Brantly stressed the need for biblical language; but against the philologist, Brantly stressed the need for doctrine. How did Brantly consistently do both? The last section gave one answer. Both metaphysics and philology, he contended, “build too much upon the supposed refinements and nice distinctions of Language.”<sup>110</sup> This section will offer another answer. Both metaphysics and philology rely too much on independent reason, as witnessed in their mutual disparagement of creeds.

At first, Brantly’s position on creeds seems paradoxical. On the one hand, Brantly criticized Moses Stuart for departing from the “old standards” in his commentary on Romans. In particular, Stuart appeared “to be at variance with all the orthodox Creeds on the subject of original sin.” In light of such criticism, Brantly appears to have disapproved of scholars who “think and reason upon the Word of God, without the bias of Creeds or Symbols.”<sup>111</sup> On the other hand, Brantly hailed the sanction of Albert Barnes as pastor of First Presbyterian Church “as a triumph gained over the dominion of Creeds and Articles,” even though Brantly admitted that Barnes’ suspicious views of the nature of man were “at variance” with the Presbyterians’ confession of faith.<sup>112</sup> Given the fact

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<sup>109</sup>Sprague, *Annals*, 6:506.

<sup>110</sup>Brantly, “Professor Stewart’s [*sic*] Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,” 241. Though referring to “German Expositors,” Brantly’s comment also fits his general criticism of anyone who relies too heavily on definitions.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid. In reviewing another work by Stuart, Brantly noticed “from [Stuart’s] expository writings on the Scriptures, that it was always [Stuart’s] aim to make the Word of God express its own meaning, without regard to human Creeds and Formularies” (Brantly, “Professor Stuart and the Baptists,” p. 321).

<sup>112</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Presbytery of Philadelphia,” *CSCI*, 10 July 1830, p. 31. For more on the Barnes controversy, see chap. 10.

that in 1835 Barnes also published a commentary on the book of Romans with similar errors as Stuart, how could Brantly disparage Stuart and yet praise Barnes?<sup>113</sup>

The apparent solution to this paradox comes from the distinction between the usefulness of creeds and the authority of creeds. Brantly considered creeds useful, just as he considered doctrine itself useful; however, Brantly rejected the authority of creeds, because the limitations of human understanding and Christian consistency precluded such finality. Brantly confessed of his Calvinistic beliefs:

We have no wish to draw up a Confession of Faith; nor would we impose upon others, our own views to the exclusion of free enquiry. A man's heart may be right when his head is wrong. Many a man is good in spite of his creed.<sup>114</sup>

In other words, those who assert the authority of creeds are also arrogant, in that they “impose upon others” their “own views” as if that were the final statement. While Brantly did not hesitate to assert his views on fundamental doctrines, and so should not be seen as lacking a definite faith, he nonetheless gloried in the fact that the whole Bible still escaped the grasp of men. To him, this fact of the Bible confirmed its divine origin, just as much as the near endless mysteries of the universe bespoke God's glory. All “difficulties in the explanation, and obscurities in the application of the divine Word” should be attributed to the expositor's “own shortsightedness” rather than “to any inherent imperfection in the divine system which he attempts to understand.”<sup>115</sup> Ironically, far from deprecating the importance of doctrine by refusing the authority of a creed, Brantly intended to promote its importance—as an object of study, saying, as he did once of the topic of free agency, “We deem the subject important, and therefore worthy of inquiry.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 467.

<sup>114</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Doctrines of Grace,” *CSCI*, 8 August 1829, p. 91.

<sup>115</sup>Brantly, “On Those Parts of Scripture Not Yet Understood,” 305-06.

<sup>116</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Free Agency of Man,” *CS*, 18 April 1829, p. 62.

Brantly grounded the usefulness of creeds upon a balance of independence and humility. Regarding independence, he wrote, “How much soever we may respect the names of good and great men, we should be exceedingly guarded against the error of following them implicitly.”<sup>117</sup> It was Brantly’s firm opinion that among Protestants, Baptists were least “chargeable . . . with the error of a blind and implicit credulity in following the opinions of mere men.” While Baptists esteemed men like John Gill and Andrew Fuller, it would be wrong to consider these men “*Fathers*” of the Baptists. As proof, Brantly pointed to the low interest in republications of Gill’s commentary and Fuller’s works. Even more, the little book of the London Confession of Faith had remained out of print in most places, except in Charleston and around Philadelphia. From this Brantly concluded, “*Human authority* in matters of faith, is at a low ebb amongst us.” Instead of being comforted, Brantly remained concerned, for as human authority sank, the authority of Scripture did not proportionately rise. Many Baptist innovators had arisen with no respect for the “*mighty dead*,” but like the ass in the fable, kicked the dead lions and pretended to be superior. To Brantly, these men ran into “the opposite extreme” of “pouring contempt upon names distinguished for uniform wisdom, piety and rectitude”—an extreme Brantly considered “to be no less dangerous to the cause of evangelical religion.” In other words, human pride and love of pre-eminence ruined true religion just as fast as abject subjection to the authority of men and creeds. By supposedly rejecting all creeds but the Bible, these proud men had actually rejected all human understanding of the Bible but their own. Instead, Brantly’s counseled, “Good men may be followed, so far as they follow Christ, and their memory too may be cherished and honored so far as that regard may subserve the cause and the glory of Christ.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Brantly, “A Good Reply,” 13.

<sup>118</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Human Authority in Matters of Faith,” *CS*, 23 August 1828, p. 134. When one correspondent proposed that Baptists should merge their periodicals into one under the direction of the Triennial Convention (Try, “A Project,” *CI*, 25 February 1832, p. 115), Brantly doubted its success, saying,

Therefore, Brantly held to a medial position on the function of creeds. On the one hand, Brantly rejected any creed held higher than the Bible, whether that creed embodied the reason of skeptics, the tradition of Catholics, the metaphysics of theologians, or even the philology of scholars—men who ironically claimed to “think and reason upon the Word of God, without the bias of Creeds and Symbols,” but who “symbolize[d]” with each other, as Moses Stuart did with the “German Expositors.”<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, Brantly received the help of creeds, appreciating the wisdom of the “good men” that had gone before him. In light of this medial position, Brantly resembled the magisterial Reformers of the sixteenth century, who championed *sola scriptura*, but also valued the tradition of the church.<sup>120</sup> Brantly carried on this Protestant tradition in the American Reformation, which is the subject of the next chapter.

### Conclusion

Brantly adhered to the final and sufficient authority of Scripture. Because God spoke the words of Scripture, they were true and possessed final authority over both tradition and reason. Little is shocking here, for church historians have amply shown the propensity of Brantly’s era to champion the Bible alone as the final authority in religion. The more interesting elements concern Brantly’s careful clarification of the sufficiency of Scripture. While the perspicuity of Scripture guaranteed that all matters of faith and practice can and should rest on Scripture alone, Brantly asserted that lone men could not readily arrive at true conclusions about Scripture. Both the systematic theologians and

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“Unlike the ants of Solomon, we baptists, evince but little disposition to GO FORTH BY BANDS. We seem inclined to separate from each other and to differ, though it should be for no other reason, than to show that we have the right and the power to differ. In the old Feudal times of England, every Baron was a little despot within his own limits. Too much of this spirit is found in our supreme independence of each other” (Brantly, “Correspondents,” *CI*, 18 February 1832, p. 110).

<sup>119</sup>Brantly, “Professor Stewart’s [*sic*] Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,” 241.

<sup>120</sup>Alister E. McGrath calls the medial position “Tradition 1,” in contrast to the Roman Catholic’s submission to a separate tradition (“Tradition 2”), and in contrast to the Anabaptist rejection of tradition (“Tradition 0”) (*Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. [Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993], 136, 144).

the new breed of exegetical philologists frequently overestimated the breadth of language and the depth of their own minds to discover and express the truth. While touting the authority of Scripture over other men, they inadvertently placed their own understanding above Scripture. The telltale sign was their rejection of creeds, as if they needed no help from past men, but superseded their predecessors in ability and insight. Brantly stood opposed to such independent arrogance, and gloried in united effort, even in understanding the Scriptures.

Baptists, in particular, disappointed Brantly, for they were too independent, whether in matters of faith or in matters of practice. While they did not need to be under the authority of a creed, independence did not imply that they had no need of each other. The Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches strove hard after both unity and independence. While it may appear that the Central Union Association devalued creeds, it is only a mirage. Each church had its own confession of faith; and the leader himself, William T. Brantly, valued creeds, but submitted to the final and sufficient authority of Scripture alone. Moreover, like the Philadelphia Association, William T. Brantly believed in salvation by grace alone; but unlike them, he did not support this belief on the legs of a creed or a system. In a sense, Brantly was calvinistic without being a Calvinist.

## CHAPTER 7

### REVIVAL AND NEW MEASURES

The Central Union Association had to face two general charges—heresy and innovation. As seen in the last two chapters, the Association’s “eyes,” William T. Brantly, answered charges of heresy with a strict confession of total depravity and a general confession of limited atonement, all based on a conservative submission to the final and sufficient authority of God in consultation with past “good men” and confessions of faith. Two facts from the last two chapters will help explain Brantly’s justification of new measures and benevolent societies. First, because Brantly held grave suspicions about metaphysical systems, he justified new measures in large part on an assertion of ignorance about the true inner workings of the soul in conversion, as shall be seen in this chapter. Second, because Brantly assessed each doctrine based on its usefulness, it is not surprising that the Central Union Association united in a commitment to useful effort over any other concern, including doctrinal fidelity. Discussion about Brantly’s specific views of benevolent societies, both within and without the Central Union Association, will await subsequent chapters. But before either new measures or benevolent societies are discussed, a discussion is in order on the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God sets the proper landscape for understanding Brantly’s personal mission of union for effort. In fact, the Kingdom of God provides the common factor for all of Brantly’s major activities, as varied as they are from the local pastorate to foreign missions, from revival meetings to the temperance cause. Therefore, in order to assess Brantly’s mission at its zenith in Philadelphia, his views on the Kingdom of God should first be examined.

## The Kingdom of God

Like most American pastor-theologians, W. T. Brantly lived in the shadow of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards's vision of the Kingdom of God remained the orthodox view for about one hundred years, before being challenged by the millennial speculations of the 1840s. Among several other places, Edwards presented his view of the Kingdom in 1739 through a series of thirty sermons, which he intended one day to expand into a book that would embrace all of theology within the framework of redemptive history. These sermons were edited and published posthumously in 1774 as *A History of the Work of Redemption*.<sup>1</sup> Nearly sixty years later, Brantly reprinted these sermons as a series in his *Christian Index*, adding study questions afterwards "for Sabbath Schools and Bible Classes."<sup>2</sup> According to Edwards, the Kingdom of God has two phases in history—its secret phase, in which the saints of God are persecuted by the visible kingdom of Satan, and then its open phase, when the Kingdom visibly *comes* and the meek inherit the earth. Since in this view the bodily return of Christ follows the coming of the Kingdom to earth, the view has been theologically dubbed *postmillennialism*. It is important to note that the postmillennialism of Edwards differed from some earlier Puritan versions and later theonomic ones in one important respect: the Kingdom will come primarily by means of revivals, not revolutions. When Edwards addresses the question as to "*how* this glorious work [of overthrowing Antichrist] shall be accomplished," he offers as the first step, "The Spirit of God shall be gloriously poured out for the wonderful *revival and propagation* of

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<sup>1</sup>The full title shows the ambitious scope of the work: *A History of the Work of Redemption, Containing the Outlines of a Body of Divinity, Including a View of Church History, in a Method Entirely New*. The posthumous edition owed its appearance to Jonathan Edwards Jr. and the Scottish minister John Erskine, who saw it to publication in Edinburgh. Subsequent American editions, beginning in the 1790s, suffered from "numerous revisions" (Stephen J. Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001], 142). While Brantly may have used one of these corrupt editions, the basic lineaments are clear, to which Brantly himself subscribed.

<sup>2</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Bible Class Instruction," *CI*, 21 April 1832, p. 253. This is the first installment of the series. Brantly also recommended using Edwards's *History of Redemption* for instructing ministerial students in English (idem, "Education of Young Men for the Ministry," *CIBM*, 24 August 1833, p. 30).



religion.”<sup>3</sup> The impressive success of the Great Awakening left the expectation in America that the view of Edwards was correct. The Kingdom was drawing nigh.

Brantly and most of his contemporaries in the Second Great Awakening echoed Edwards’ vision of the Millennium.<sup>4</sup> They were strongly postmillennial. For example, Richard Furman based his arguments for the Triennial Conventions in part on the shared presupposition of a postmillennial Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> Brantly himself, along with William B. Johnson, not only believed in a postmillennial Kingdom—a “Gospel Millennium”—but in 1813 declared its soon arrival:

Late events in Divine Providence prove, with convincing testimony, that this time *fast* approaches. Wars and rumours of wars, the overturning of nations, the rapidly increasing destruction of the man of sin, and the growing spread of divine truth, events, predicted by the prophets, and represented by them as preclusive to the general diffusion of the Gospel, clearly shew that the universal triumph of Christ, the King in Zion, is not far distant.<sup>6</sup>

In light of such ideas, Brantly customarily called success in missions “the triumphs of Christianity.”<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Brantly openly opposed premillennialism as “the offspring of

<sup>3</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [Works], ed. Edward Hickman (1834; reprint, Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1:605. The distinction between theonomic postmillennialism and Edwards’s pietistic postmillennialism came from a monthly communication of the Institute for Christian Economics. Edwards’s emphasis on revival as the *primary* means of the Kingdom’s entrance does not imply that Edwards did not fit political events into his scheme, which he did, such as the British capture of Cape Breton in 1745 (see John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987], 96).

For an overview of the content of *A History of the Work of Redemption*, see Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards*, 141-57.

<sup>4</sup>In reviewing a recent publication on the Millennium, Brantly reported, “Some hold that this reign [of Christ for a *thousand years*] is to be personal, but most, that it will be spiritual” (W. T. Brantly, “A Treatise on the Millennium, by the Rev. George Bush, A. M.,” *CI*, 22 December 1832, p. 398).

<sup>5</sup>In 1814, Richard Furman based his thesis upon the common belief that Scripture prophesied a “universal, moral change,” in which “whole nations shall be regenerated” (“Address,” in *Proceedings of the Baptist Convention for Missionary Purposes; Held in Philadelphia, in May, 1814* [Philadelphia: Ann Coles, 1814], 39). In 1817, the beginning of his address again appealed to “a state of prosperity . . . promised to the church of Christ, which as yet she has not realized” (idem, “Address,” *Proceedings of the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America, for Foreign Missions*, 1817, 123).

<sup>6</sup>The Savannah Baptist Society for Foreign Missions, to the Inhabitants of Georgia, and the Adjacent Parts of South-Carolina, “Circular Address,” *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 4 (March 1814): 7. For the phrase “Gospel Millennium,” see Brantly, “George Bush,” 398.

<sup>7</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Devoted Youth,” *CSCI*, 5 December 1829, p. 357.

Jewish error, repugnant to the genius of Christianity, and adapted to weaken the influence of every consideration drawn from the joys or terrors of the world to come.”<sup>8</sup>

Brantly himself remained a lifelong adherent to postmillennialism, but changed some of his expectations. When questioned nearly twenty years later by a correspondent who claimed that “the times bear a *striking resemblance* to the days of Noah and Lot,” and thus suggest that Christians should “look for a flood,” Brantly responded by qualifying his millennial expectations. According to the mature Brantly, the Millennium did not consist of a “golden dream” of unearthly climates and absolute peace. Rather, the Gospel Millennium consisted of:

1. An “unprecedented increase in the number of true converts;”
2. The “subservience of . . . empires, to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ;”
3. The “diffusion of Bible Truth, through all the portions of the earth;”
4. The “union of all christians, in spirit, if not in name”; and
5. The “unexampled prevalence of a liberal disinterested spirit,” in which all ordinary items will be devoted to God’s service.<sup>9</sup>

Brantly also made clear that the millennial church would still be militant, and that the Millennium would possess hypocrites, infidels, profligates, secular business, disease, and death.<sup>10</sup> From this description, it is clear that Brantly put little stock in a political Millennium. In general, he had little regard for “the religion of kings,” who often

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<sup>8</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Opinions Respecting the Revelation of St. John,” *CI*, 7 May 1831, p. 296. Brantly agreed with many church fathers that the book of Revelation could not be taken literally, but exhibits a veiled history of the church, including the church’s corruption both within and outside Protestantism (*ibid.*, 296, 280).

<sup>9</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Millennium,” *CI*, 11 February 1832, p. 93. From the second item, it appears that Brantly no longer believed in the millennial cessation of war, to which he had openly professed two years prior (see Brantly, “The Field of Waterloo,” *CSCI*, 5 December 1829, p. 361). Regarding the fourth item, preachers debated whether the Millennium would tear down the denominational fences or not (e.g., Unity, “On the Union of Different Denominations,” *CI*, 23 July 1831, p. 49). In the fifth item, Brantly referred to the millennial expectations of Zech 14:20, when “Holiness to the Lord” shall be engraved on ordinary items.

<sup>10</sup>Brantly, “Millennium,” 93.

“assume the garb of piety as a state engine, or an artifice of policy.”<sup>11</sup> Brantly fell within the Edwardsean tradition of a pietistic Millennium, which was the culmination of expanding revivals of religion.

In addition to revivals as harbingers of the Kingdom, Brantly and his contemporaries were self-consciously aware that a new day had emerged, governed by more than just the revival principle. As one of Brantly’s early essays in the *Columbian Star* asserted, “But the day in which we live is not only a day of great excitement—it is a day of enlarged exertions.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, there were great excitements—that is, *revivals*—as in the First Great Awakening, but the Second Great Awakening added great “exertions,” or *effort*. While the article later mentions only “those three mighty engines—*education, the press, and the ministry*,” the Second Great Awakening was marked by a notably large range of efforts. This range filled many of Brantly’s contemporaries with ambitious hope, as seen in the following letter to Brantly:

Yes, and this is not all, *Missionaries* will be sent; *Bibles* will be published; *Sunday schools* will be multiplied; *temperance* will be promoted; and the cause of God, with which all these subjects are most intimately connected, will be carried onward; *Revivals* will be multiplied, and extend and spread, until every dark corner of the earth shall be illuminated with radiant glory from on high. Who that loves Christ or his kingdom, does not long to labor and see, as well as agonize and pray, “*Thy kingdom come?*”<sup>13</sup>

From this one remarkable quote, the following common beliefs about the Kingdom of God are either exhibited or implied:

1. The Millennium will come through *both* effort and prayer.
2. Genuine love to Christ and His kingdom will exhibit *both* effort and prayer.

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<sup>11</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Religious Character of Alexander, Late Emperor of Russia,” *CSCI*, 10 July 1830, p. 21. As an example of a king’s “mock sanctity,” Brantly later quoted a proclamation of the new king of England (idem, “Professional Morality,” *CSCI*, 28 August 1830, p. 142).

<sup>12</sup>W. T. Brantly, “On the Aspect of the World in Reference to Christian Missions,” *CS*, 23 August 1828, p. 133. For similar opinions about the modern age, see William B. Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Daniel Appleton, 1833), 246, 301, 304, 383, 394.

<sup>13</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptist General Tract Society,” *CSCI*, 2 October 1830, p. 221.

3. Benevolent societies stand alongside revivals as holy expressions of effort associated with “the cause of God.”
4. Revivals are the explicit harbingers of the Millennium.

The author of the letter was motivated to write and to contribute to one of those efforts—the Baptist General Tract Society—after having read Francis Wayland’s speech, “Encouragements to Religious Effort.” In this speech, delivered in Philadelphia before the American Sunday School Union, Wayland surveyed the “physical and intellectual changes” taking place, and then considered “the encouragements which these facts present, to an effort for the universal diffusion of Christianity.” In closing, he challenged:

You see then, what is required of us. I ask again, Christian brethren, are you ready for the effort? Shall the kingdom of Christ come, or shall it not come? You have seen the option which the providence of God has set before us. . . .

Men, Brethren, and Fathers! Suffer me, in the name of the omniscient Saviour, to ask, what will you do? Let every minister of the cross, here ask himself, why, even during my own life time, should not the millennium commence in my congregation. . . . Christian men and women, in the Sabbath School, in the Bible Class, and in the use of all the means which God has placed in our power, let us labour to bring this world into immediate subjection to the Redeemer—or let us cease to pray “Thy kingdom come.” May God enable us to act worthily: and to his name shall be the glory in Christ. *Amen.*<sup>14</sup>

Brantly himself heard this speech in person and later commended the “masculine and dignified” thinking as what should be expected from “a powerful mind animated by true piety.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, both the preacher and his program combined *exertions* with *excitements*.

Therefore, it is the “*enlarged exertions*” that distinguished the Second from the First Great Awakening, and not simply the presence of means, which the First Great Awakening also employed. For example, Edwards expected that the work of God, by which Satan’s kingdom is to be overthrown, “will by accomplished by *means*, by the preaching of the gospel, and the use of the ordinary means of grace, and so shall be

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<sup>14</sup>Francis Wayland, Jr., *Encouragements to Religious Effort: A Sermon Delivered at the Request of the American Sunday School Union, May 25, 1830* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1830), 7, 14-15, 33, 35-36.

<sup>15</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Anniversaries in Philadelphia,” *CSCI*, 5 June 1830, p. 365.

*gradually* brought to pass.”<sup>16</sup> Brantly and his evangelical contemporaries also relied upon ordinary means such as preaching and prayer, but then added means (or “measures”) of coordinated human effort.<sup>17</sup> As Brantly once asserted, “All the children of God must put forth their fullest energies in his service, before there is ushered in the millennial [*sic*] glory.”<sup>18</sup> This expanded range of means not only affected the Millennium, but also the revivals themselves, which were harbingers of the Millennium.<sup>19</sup> Because the Second Great Awakening advocated a variety of new means, new forms were introduced into American Christianity, thereby *re-form-ing* old patterns. Because the changes were so great, the Second Great Awakening became, in one sense, an “American Reformation.”<sup>20</sup>

In general, the efforts of the Second Great Awakening concerned two broad areas: revival techniques (called “measures”), and benevolent societies. The two acted in harmony, for revivals gave new zeal for good works, while much of the activities in the benevolent societies promoted and manifested a true revival of religion. Both embraced Brantly’s personal mission, for both united Christians for effort, and both signaled the

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<sup>16</sup>Edwards, *Works*, 1:605.

<sup>17</sup>For arguments for united prayer to hasten the millennial glory, see Oligopistos, “Christians Exhorted to Prayer,” *CSCI*, 6 February 1830, p. 84; W. T. Brantly, “Oligopistos,” *CSCI*, 6 February 1830, p. 89; Moros, “A Few Questions for the Saints to Consider,” *CSCI*, 11 December 1830, p. 377.

<sup>18</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Importance of Individuals,” *CI*, 30 April 1830, p. 273. For an example of the close connection between postmillennialism and benevolent effort, see Brantly, “Deacon Jonathan Phillips,” *CSCI*, 10 October 1829, p. 236.

<sup>19</sup>A nineteenth-century book by William Cogswell on labor was actually entitled *The Harbinger of the Millennium* (see the review by W. T. Brantly, “The Harbinger of the Millennium,” *CI*, 22 June 1833, p. 399). Brantly firmly believed that revivals did lead into the Millennium and, as such, were irrefutable evidence for the truth of the coming Kingdom of God (W. T. Brantly, “Signs of the Times,” *CI*, 19 March 1831, p. 186).

<sup>20</sup>Contemporaries to Brantly certainly considered themselves reformers. Francis Wayland, Jr., in his sermon before the American Sunday School Union, explicitly compared the present age to the Reformation (Wayland, *Encouragement*, 7). Later historians have concurred, though not with Wayland’s optimism. American evangelical historian Nathan O. Hatch suggests of the Second Great Awakening, “Christendom had probably not witnessed a comparable period of religious upheaval since the Reformation” (Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989], 225).

Brantly himself did not shy from using the term “reformation” (e.g., W. T. Brantly, “Charges Denied by the Baltimore Baptist Association,” *CI*, 30 June 1832, p. 408, note). Part of his aim in reviewing the associations was “to promote reformation” (W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 6 February 1830, p. 88; cf. Brantly, “Reformation,” *CSCI*, 10 April 1830, pp. 236-37).

coming of the Kingdom of God. The present chapter will explore revival measures, leaving benevolent societies for subsequent investigation.

### Revival Measures

Brantly once described revivals as “the friends of Zion [being] enlivened . . . with the gracious effusions of the Divine Spirit.”<sup>21</sup> As the name itself implies, a “revival” is a fresh surge of life given by God’s Spirit to those already alive—true saints. They need these “showers of grace” because too often saints dwell in a “state of guilty supineness” and must be roused.<sup>22</sup> According to Brantly, many Christians never placed “the standard of piety” above habit and a good reputation.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, these same Christians regarded revivals as extraordinary events, when in fact, a revival was “nothing more, nothing less—than the prayerful, gracious, and spiritual frame of uncorrupted Christianity.” It is only in revivals, Brantly claimed, that “Christians seem to live according to the true intent of their vocation.” Then, they act as Christians.<sup>24</sup>

Because leaders in the Second Great Awakening held revivals in such high esteem, much thought went into how best to promote revivals. Interest particularly centered upon what methods, or *measures* as they were then called, best promoted revivals.<sup>25</sup> A great source for this historic discussion may be found in the appendix to William B. Sprague’s classic work, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1832), which appeared around the time Brantly himself was debating new measures in the *Index*. Sprague, a Presbyterian minister in Albany, New York, asked evangelical leaders from several denominations, mainly Northerners, to relate their experiences and opinions of

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<sup>21</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Revivals,” *CSCI*, 11 December 1830, p. 381.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*; *idem*, “Daily Concerts of Prayer,” *CSCI*, 11 December 1830, p. 382.

<sup>23</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Low Aims and Attainments in Religion,” *CI*, 7 May 1831, p. 300.

<sup>24</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Revivals,” *CI*, 16 April 1831, p. 252.

<sup>25</sup>E.g., Brantly reprinted an article from the *New York Evangelist* by Lyman Beecher, entitled “How Shall Christians Sustain Revivals,” *CIBM*, 24 August 1833, pp. 29-30. Also see the article from the *New Baptist Miscellany* entitled “Preparation for a Revival,” *CI*, 10 December 1831, p. 380.

revivals. These opinions, along with other sources, provide a useful backdrop against which to understand Brantly's position on revival measures. While Brantly held a high opinion of Sprague's book and of most of the letters in the Appendix, he thought some of the letters "might well have been spared, being rather calculated to repress all the noble excitement of the mind in genuine Revivals."<sup>26</sup> He later explained, "We are of opinion that the revival spirit in many places, is injured by needless speculations, and a squeamish delicacy, as to the propriety of certain measures."<sup>27</sup> Against these squeamish critics, Brantly reasoned, "What is said of the *abuses* to which Revivals have been subjected might with equal truth apply to the abuses of Christianity itself."<sup>28</sup>

Three measures especially grabbed public attention—protracted meetings, anxious seats, and hasty admissions. Each of these made their debut in the Second Great Awakening. Most of the evangelicals appearing in Sprague's book approved of a cautious use of protracted meetings, but many criticized anxious seats and hasty admissions. In them, Brantly recognized a "doleful squeamishness" about "that dreaded instrument of *front seats, special praying, and personal conversation*."<sup>29</sup> He himself favored protracted meetings and anxious seats, but appeared to equivocate on hasty admissions. In defending new measures, Brantly questioned traditional theological assumptions about the usual speed of conversion and the role of emotions.

## New Measures

**Protracted meetings.** Two forms of extended meetings became common during the Second Great Awakening. The camp meeting appeared first and found favor

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<sup>26</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Sprague on Revivals," *CI*, 30 June 1832, p. 401. Brantly reviewed the first edition of Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals* (1832), but not the second, which appeared the following year. See also Brantly, "The Fruits of Revivals," *CI*, 7 July 1832, pp. 1-2; idem, "Always Abounding in the Work of the Lord," *CI*, 25 August 1832, p. 115.

<sup>27</sup>Brantly, "Always Abounding in the Work of the Lord," 115.

<sup>28</sup>Brantly, "Sprague on Revivals," 401.

<sup>29</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Ten Days' Meeting at the Great Valley Baptist Church, Pa.," *CI*, 3 November 1832, p. 273.

especially among the Methodists.<sup>30</sup> Baptists, while sometimes holding camp meetings, preferred the other form—the so-called “protracted meetings,” which were normally held in towns—either in church buildings or at some public site, like a courthouse.<sup>31</sup> As seen in chapter 4, Brantly hosted and participated in several protracted meetings. Indeed, protracted meetings became the hallmark activity of the Central Union Association.<sup>32</sup>

Most evangelical leaders of the Second Great Awakening favored protracted meetings. Among Baptists in Philadelphia, some churches within the old association held “prolonged meetings” and experienced revival.<sup>33</sup> Even the traditional Presbyterian ecclesiarch of Philadelphia, Ashbel Green, whom Brantly once described as “an ancient man, and venerable withal,” having views “high toned, exclusive, and magisterial,” wrote in decided favor of protracted meetings, as long as they were “not *unduly* protracted.”<sup>34</sup> The tide of general opinion was definitely in favor of these meetings. One article, which Brantly reprinted from the *Christian Secretary*, expressed surprise that something

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<sup>30</sup>The camp meeting had a powerful influence on American evangelical Christianity. Brantly acknowledged that many second-generation “pillars” of the Second Great Awakening had come to Christ through camp meetings (W. T. Brantly, “Encampments for Worship,” *CI*, 8 January 1831, p. 30). Some of these “pillars” presumably supported protracted meetings. Baptists held camp meetings, but often emphasized their solemn and orderly cast, apparently in contrast to the Methodists (see, e.g., Brantly, “Encampments for Worship,” 30; idem, “Another Baptist Camp-Meeting,” *CI*, 13 August 1831, p. 108; and Abner W. Clopton, “The Recent Baptist Camp Meeting at Winn’s Creek Meeting House, Halifax County Va.,” *CI*, 19 November 1831, p. 322, in which Clopton admits his former prejudice against camp meetings). Brantly assumed their “immense benefit,” but later had to question their “universal expediency” in light of criticism from another brother (see Brantly, “Encampments for Worship,” 30; idem, “The Camp Meeting,” *CI*, 22 January 1831, p. 64).

<sup>31</sup>On the urban nature of protracted meetings, Brantly commented that they were “in the custom of being held in many places, but especially in cities” (W. T. Brantly, “Revivals,” *CI*, 12 March 1831, p. 170; cf. Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biography [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 114). For an example of using a courthouse, see Brantly, “Special Meeting of the Central Union Association,” *CI*, 24 November 1832, pp. 321-23.

<sup>32</sup>E.g., see the 1856 report on the history of the Central Union Association in *Minutes of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Session of the Central Union Association, of Independent Baptist Churches, Held with the Vincent Baptist Church, June 3d and 4th, 1856* (Philadelphia: Oliver P. Glessner, 1856), 11-12.

<sup>33</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Recent Baptisms,” *CI*, 5 November 1831, p. 289. For one such protracted meetings, see Brantly, “Baptist Church, Sansom Street, Philadelphia,” *CI*, 17 December 1831, p. 398.

<sup>34</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Presbyterian Difficulties,” *CI*, 2 June 1832, p. 337; Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals*, 348. In contrast to Green’s reserve, an article in the *New York Observer* figuratively proposed to make 1832 a 365 days’ meeting (“A 365 Days’ Meeting,” *CI*, 21 January 1832, p. 33).



“productive of so much good” could ever draw criticism. In his opinion, protracted meetings furnished “something of a *Shibboleth* whether [men] hate the truth and despise religion, or not.” If religious professors, including clergy, were truly religious, they would not oppose these meetings.<sup>35</sup>

When the unassociated Baptist churches in the Philadelphia area started experiencing revival in 1831 through protracted meetings, Brantly reflected on the nature of their success. The protracted meetings seldom originated “religious concern,” but were “abundantly useful in eliciting and bringing forth the dormant impressions of former times from the hearts” of attendees, and thereby becoming “the means of bringing them to a determination.” These halters and backsliders found themselves “no longer able to restrain their impressions,” once they “came into the scope of that kind of prayer and preaching which are ordinarily witnessed at protracted meetings.”<sup>36</sup> A year later, the same phenomenon occurred in Lower Dublin Baptist Church, a key member of the new association. According to Brantly’s official report, “The conversions in some instances were of an interesting character, embracing some of long standing in the congregation, who had remained for years in a halting, hesitating mood; but were induced to stand forth on the Lord’s side, under the exciting influence of the protracted meeting.”<sup>37</sup>

Brantly seems to have clarified the specific purpose of the protracted meetings in light of the unbounded enthusiasm of others for this extraordinary measure. One correspondent in 1831 reported his experience of a revival and effused, “The great means which gave it an astonishing impulse, was a *three days’ meeting*.” He later commented, “I have attended a *three days’ meeting* every week, (excepting two or three,) for more

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<sup>35</sup>Amicus, “Who Oppose Protracted Meetings?” *CI*, 30 December 1831, pp. 423-24.

<sup>36</sup>Brantly, “Recent Baptisms,” 289. Brantly may be referring to the special exhortation given to the “anxious” at the close of the meeting, instead of the regular service and its sermon (see, e.g., W. T. Brantly, “Meeting for Special Worship at Harrisburg, Pa.,” *CI*, 9 June 1832, p. 353, which is quoted below).

<sup>37</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Special Meeting of the Central Union Association,” *CI*, 24 November 1832, p. 322.

than two months past. *In every case* the blessing of God has followed to a greater or less extent. Whenever we have found a church awake in any measure to the subject, we have witnessed astonishing displays of the mercy of God.”<sup>38</sup> Brantly agreed, but took the idea of “impulse” one step further. He reminded his readers, “Protracted meetings are useful to give a good impulse. They may be the means of exciting a spirit of Reformation within the Church, and out of it. But let it be remembered that this is no more than an *impulse*. To continue the gracious movement must be the deep and anxious concern of the ministry and of the Church.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, protracted meetings could both bring to decision those with impressions, and give fresh excitement to a church, but they could never replace the consistent, faithful ministry of a church.

**Anxious seats.** The climax of one of the protracted meetings was often the occupation of the so-called “anxious seats” by those worried over the state of their soul. Brantly once described the practice, after participating with George I. Miles in a four-day meeting at the Baptist meeting house in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. During these meetings, “at the close of the sermon, persons under anxiety of mind were invited to occupy separate places,” for the purpose of “special prayer.” On the last day, Brantly observed:

In the evening of that day the number of persons found on the separate seats, was nearly twice as many as had been before in that situation. This being the closing scene, it was attended with much feeling and earnest prayer. The ministering brethren present took leave of mourning souls in an address to each one. There were arranged on the two rows of seats across the house, so as to leave a passage in between; and in the conclusion, one of the ministers began a farewell exhortation at one end of the passage, and taking them by the hand one by one, encouraged them that *With purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord*. Many of them did solemnly give in their adherence to Christ, declaring in decided terms that they could never forget the convictions and impressions of that moment.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Revival Incidents,” *CI*, 23 July 1831, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup>W. T. Brantly, Editorial, *CI*, 2 June 1832, p. 348.

<sup>40</sup>Brantly, “Meeting for Special Worship at Harrisburg, Pa.,” 353. Because the final minister is left anonymous, it is probable that Brantly is veiling his own identity.

Brantly himself had been using anxious seats at First Baptist Church in Philadelphia since at least 1831, and made allusions to their use there through the *Index*.<sup>41</sup>

The anxious seat was perhaps the most controverted new measure of the Second Great Awakening. Brantly certainly felt the heat of this controversy, hearing, for example, a letter read against the new measure during the session of the Philadelphia Association in late 1831.<sup>42</sup> At that time, the anxious seat was a very recent innovation. Though similar to the altar call of Methodist camp meetings, urban evangelicals did not use the anxious seat until the late 1820s. Even Charles Finney, whom history cannot remember apart from this measure, did not add the anxious seat to his stock measures until the 1830-1831 Rochester revival meetings.<sup>43</sup> But the controversy did not primarily concern its innovation, for evangelicals were already using an innovation—the so-called “inquiry room.” For example, the evangelist and opponent to anxious seats, Asahel Nettleton, used to call anxious sinners to a subsequent meeting in a separate “inquiry room,” where they could ask the grand inquiry, “What must we do to be saved?”<sup>44</sup> But though the “inquiry room” also represented an innovation of the Second Great Awakening, it still allowed the anxious sinner to seek salvation privately, as had been the practice during the First Great Awakening.<sup>45</sup> Hence, the main controversy over the

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<sup>41</sup>E.g., W. T. Brantly, “A Five Days’ Meeting in the 1st Baptist Church of Philadelphia,” *CI*, 29 October 1831, p. 284. When the report speaks of dismissing the congregation to make “room for the enquirers to come forward to occupy the front seats,” it is possible that this was designed simply to be a makeshift inquiry room; however, since the congregation did not leave, the net result was an occurrence of anxious seats, because “mourners” came down front in *public*.

<sup>42</sup>Brantly had also read an article in the *Southern Religious Telegraph* giving similar criticisms (see W. T. Brantly, “Anxious Seats,” *CI*, 22 October 1831, p. 257). At that time, “unkind remarks” on anxious seats were common (Resh, “Anxious Seats,” *CI*, 12 January 1833, p. 27).

<sup>43</sup>Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 108. According to his biographer, Finney had previously “on occasion, perhaps inspired by the Methodist practice of an altar call, . . . invited those ‘anxious for their souls’ to stand or to come forward for special prayer” (*ibid.*).

<sup>44</sup>Sprague, *Lectures on Revival*, 275. The description of the “great inquiry” comes from Heman Humphrey, who had contact with Nettleton (*ibid.*, 329).

<sup>45</sup>E.g., George Whitefield never called on sinners to rise or distinguish themselves in public assembly. Even when they inquired of him personally, he would often send them to evangelical pastors (Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth Century Revival* [Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970, 1979], 1:137, 353; 2:196).

anxious seat was not necessarily innovation, but whether to call on sinners to distinguish themselves *publicly* during the meeting.

Both opponents and supporters alike zeroed in on the public nature of the anxious seat. For opponents, this public display tempted the vainglory of man and led to deceitful conclusions, as if the public act now saved the soul or was necessary for salvation.<sup>46</sup> In the eyes of one leading Presbyterian, such measures wielded too much power over the imagination and passions, and promoted “a boldness and forwardness which deform religion, give an injurious warp to the character, especially of young females, and greatly encourage false hopes.”<sup>47</sup> To supporters, the public nature of the anxious seat gave it its peculiar power of breaking pride and sealing a decision. At one protracted meeting held at First Baptist Church in Philadelphia, national Baptist leader, Howard Malcom, pastor of Federal Street Baptist Church in Boston, addressed the congregation on “*Indecision as to religion*” and then called the indecisive to come forward. According to Brantly’s own testimony:

On the benefit of persons making known their first serious impressions, by presenting themselves in a public manner, to receive the prayers and admonitions of God’s people, Mr. Malcom observed, “That he considered it highly important to serious enquirers to make early manifestations of their impressions. Let them come up to the *anxious seats*. Let them take this first step in the ways of the Lord, and thus break down the bridge behind them, so that they might not leave to themselves any facilities, for going back to the world and sin.”<sup>48</sup>

In truth, the anxious bench fit the protracted meeting perfectly, for what could better

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<sup>46</sup>E.g., Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals*, 234-35, 240, 246.

<sup>47</sup>These are the words of Dr. Benjamin Griffin in a letter to a Mr. Eddy, of Canandaigua. Brantly apparently transcribed the letter from the Presbyterian paper *The Philadelphian*, for he affixed the reply by its editor, Ezra Stiles Ely: “On the subject of *calling on sinners to rise up in public assemblies both to pray and to be prayed for*, we have been in the habit of doing it, from time immemorial, in all our Presbyterian churches, whenever the minister says to all the people, ‘Let us pray’” (“Calling on Sinners to Rise,” *CI*, 27 October 1832, pp. 261-62).

<sup>48</sup>W. T. Brantly, Editorial, *CI*, 2 June 1832, p. 348. Malcom’s presence in New England is intriguing, for one New England pastor, Leonard Bacon of New Haven, warned Finney in 1831 to leave the anxious seat out west and use only the inquiry room in New England (Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 117).

answer the meeting's purpose of sealing impressions in a permanent decision than an immediate public profession?<sup>49</sup>

Brantly had little time for arguments against the anxious seat. In his mind, the anxious seat was nothing more than a means of public profession, and what Christian could possibly oppose a public profession? Writing in response to those in Sprague's *Lectures on Revival* who appeared "very timid and particular in admitting enquirers to any sort of profession," Brantly asked:

But do not the same persons admit and urge, the duty of confessing Christ before men? Would they not have a timely separation betwixt those who are on the Lord's side, and those who are not? What danger which may be apprehended in praying publicly and specially for persons seeking religion, does not belong to any public confession? Is there danger in the former case, of encouraging those who are naturally forward and assuming? It is not less in the latter. Is there reason to fear, that in the former case, persons may prematurely commit themselves? In the latter, there is the same ground of fear.<sup>50</sup>

In other words, any abuse or danger associated with the anxious seat applied equally to any initial profession of Christianity. If anything, regular Christian sympathy demanded that "penitents and mourners" not be left alone, to suffer in silence, secluded from the tearful eyes of Christians.<sup>51</sup> As a consequence, Brantly continued to employ both anxious seats and inquiry rooms, despite the rumblings of his more conservative brethren.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Cf. "Anxious Seats," *CI*, 20 April 1833, p. 251; Theophilus, "On Requesting Seekers of Religion to Distinguish Themselves by a Public Act," *CI*, 27 October 1832, p. 261. This "Theophilus" is probably not Brantly, for the author mentions the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, with whom Brantly presumably had little contact.

<sup>50</sup>Brantly, "Always Abounding in the Work of the Lord," 115; see also Brantly, "Sprague on Revivals," 401. About a year earlier, Brantly had told a Southern opponent that "all the objections which he urges against *special locations*, *front benches* and *anxious seats*, may be applied with equal force against any *professions* of seriousness" (idem, "Anxious Seats," *CI*, 22 October 1831, p. 257).

<sup>51</sup>Brantly, "Always Abounding in the Work of the Lord," 115.

<sup>52</sup>For example, the protracted meetings at First Baptist Church in late October 1831 employed both anxious seats and inquiry meetings (see Brantly, "A Five Days' Meeting in the 1st Baptist Church of Philadelphia," 284). See also the report on the protracted meeting at First Baptist Church in May 1832 (idem, Editorial, *CI*, 2 June 1832, p. 348).

For more information on Brantly's estimation of profession, see his early essay, Theophilus, "On Profession," *ABM* 1 (November 1818): 438-42, which emphasizes consistent Christian conduct and climaxes in an exhortation for Baptists to inculcate "the practical uses of our scriptural, authentic, and significant mode of baptism" (ibid., 441). Brantly never replaced baptism as the primary mode of initial profession—when Christians give in "by baptism their adherence to the Saviour of sinners"—and he

**Hasty admissions.** At first glance, Brantly seems to have changed his opinion about hasty admissions to baptism and church membership. In 1829, he expressed alarm at the alleged practice in Kentucky of admitting candidates to baptism upon the “callow professions” of simply stating, “I believe.” He asked, “What sort of an experience is this?” While not wanting to hear all the candidate’s “dreams, and frights” or to subject him to “inquisitorial scrutiny,” Brantly nonetheless wanted at least the criterion of the first Baptist, who said, “*Bring forth fruit meet for repentance.*”<sup>53</sup> A month later, he explicitly stated his “solemn disapprobation,” when he published the defense from Kentucky that no such practice predominated out there.<sup>54</sup> Two years later, however, Brantly seems to have relaxed his “disapprobation” against hasty admissions. In a short essay on the topic, Brantly asked three important questions:

How long does it require the Lord to convert a soul? How long should one hopefully converted delay a public profession? What evils are our churches likely to encounter from the large and rapid additions which are made in many places?<sup>55</sup>

In asking these questions, Brantly made it appear that he questioned all criticism laid against hasty admissions. Indeed, one correspondent drew this conclusion, for he anonymously wrote Brantly under the pseudonym “Particular Baptist” to answer the questions decidedly against hasty admissions. Brantly, for his part, published the reply (with animadversions!) and included in this same issue of the *Index* a notice, that on the previous Sunday the Lord’s Supper had been given to fifty-one persons, who all had

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continued to urge its practical application to baptized Christians (see W. T. Brantly, “A Continued Meeting,” *CI*, 15 September 1832, p. 172; idem, “An Address at the Administration of Baptism,” *CSCI*, 14 August 1830, pp. 97-98). Brantly even spoke that new converts “put on Christ by baptism” (idem, “Admissions by Baptism,” *CI*, 16 March 1833, p. 174).

<sup>53</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptists in Kentucky,” *CSCI*, 1 August 1829, p. 76.

<sup>54</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Hasty Admission to Baptism,” *CSCI*, 5 September 1829, p. 155.

<sup>55</sup>W. T. Brantly, “On Hasty Admissions into the Church,” *CI*, 5 November 1831, p. 302.

“been baptized in less than one month prior to the time of their admission.”<sup>56</sup> Had Brantly switched sides on this important issue?

Brantly’s answer to “Particular Baptist” offers a probable solution to this apparent shift in conviction. Fundamentally, both men agreed that no one should be baptized without proper evidence of regeneration. When the correspondent asserted that it would be better for ministers not to accept the claims of new professors at face value, but to set before them the true nature of sin, repentance, and faith and then to let the candidates conclude for themselves about the true state of their soul, Brantly agreed. He had not reneged on his former opposition to mere claims to faith apart from hearing a candidate’s experience. Later Brantly asserted, “We are not ourselves the advocates of precipitation and carelessness in the admission of new converts into the Church of Christ—evidence of Regeneration should certainly be exhibited.”<sup>57</sup>

The two men also agreed that the speed of admission rests upon one’s theology about the proper evidence of conversion. They differed on what constituted sufficient evidence. The “Particular Baptist” believed that “generally the evidences of piety come along to the heart by *degrees*, and usually through the medium of human means,” by which he meant Christ’s “word, his providence and his ministers.” Therefore, he asserted, “If there is no *doubt* in the case of the candidate, certainly there can be no *danger* in a delay; and if there is doubt, then there is danger in a hasty reception.”<sup>58</sup>

Brantly found two things faulty with the correspondent’s theology. First, Brantly criticized his view of evidences. He countered, “The word of God brought home

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<sup>56</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Admissions to Membership,” *CI*, 19 November 1831, p. 334. The correspondent’s letter appears in Brantly, “Hasty Admissions into the Church,” *CI*, 19 November 1831, pp. 321-22. Brantly regarded admission to baptism and admission to the church as almost the same thing, for the latter could only proceed upon the former (*idem*, “The Query,” *CI*, 14 July 1832, p. 32).

<sup>57</sup>Brantly, “Hasty Admissions into the Church,” 321-22. Among the satisfactory proof necessary for each candidate, Brantly listed “the submission of the soul to Christ, . . . contrition and godly sorrow, . . . the renunciation of sin, and . . . adhesion to the ways of God” (*ibid.*). The Harrisburg meetings show that Brantly’s view of valid hasty admissions assumed the Baptist custom of “hearing of experiences” (*idem*, “Meeting for Special Worship at Harrisburg, Pa.,” 353).

<sup>58</sup>Brantly, “Hasty Admissions into the Church,” 321.

to the conscience by the divine Spirit, is the only substantial evidence of regeneration of which we are aware.” Candidates should ask themselves, “*Does the word of God authorize me under the present impressions and convictions of my mind, to believe myself a genuine convert to Christ?*” As proof, Brantly pointed to Zaccheus and others in the New Testament who experienced no delay in knowing of their conversion. To the objection that times have changed—that is, that candidates in the New Testament could be received instantaneously because the threat of persecution kept hypocrites from entering the church—Brantly denied any new tests of evidence, citing the apostle’s example that even martyrs could be hypocrites (1 Cor 13:3).<sup>59</sup> Second, Brantly criticized his correspondent’s rigidity in demanding “full assurance of faith” before admission. While Brantly did demand evidence of regeneration and accordingly asked candidates to relate their experience, he did not require *full* assurance of faith, but believed that baptism itself as well as the Lord’s Supper were “realizing ordinances” designed “for the confirmation of our imperfect faith.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, this had been his experience thirty years prior in the waters of Deep River.

In conclusion, Brantly’s apparent favor toward hasty admissions was really more of a disfavor toward delayed profession of faith. Revivals were swelling the churches, and critics feared a rise in impurity and apostasy. Yes, Brantly agreed that the danger existed, but he denied that delaying profession solved the problem. He pointed to crops with chaff and nets with fish, and claimed, “The converted *tens* and *fifties* have no greater *proportion* of defections, than the converted *units*.” In Brantly’s eyes, the dangers of delayed obedience outweighed the dangers of hasty action.<sup>61</sup> The critics, some of whom contributed to Sprague’s book, struck Brantly as uncaring. By appearing “very

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid. For a fuller description of Brantly’s view of experience generated from feeling the power of the word by the Spirit, see W. T. Brantly, “Differentiating between Speculative and Experimental Religion,” *CSCI*, 23 January 1830, p. 58.

<sup>60</sup>Brantly, “Hasty Admissions into the Church,” 321.

<sup>61</sup>Brantly, “On Hasty Admissions into the Church,” 302.



timid and particular in admitting enquirers to any sort of profession,” they left “the *bruised reed* to itself” and gave “the smoking flax . . . no breath of encouragement.”<sup>62</sup> As for the alleged instances of apostasy, Brantly pointed to the sad fact that “most churches are too much in the habit of neglecting young converts.” Who could really know the dangers of so-called “hasty admissions” if churches were not watering their “tender plants,” and nursing their “newly adopted children?”<sup>63</sup> Instead, the “Particular Baptist” correspondent appeared to Brantly as a “*dry nurse* to some of those tight-laced, over-straight, self-approving churches, which spin divinity into cob-webs, convert souls as they build houses, by the square and compass—and prescribe Rules for taking the dimensions of a passion.”<sup>64</sup> In contrast, Brantly knew of one Baptist church having received 238 new members from revivals, with only sixteen of them having later suffered exclusion. So little chaff, he pronounced, from so large a crop of “hasty admissions!”<sup>65</sup> After eleven years in Philadelphia, Brantly himself “baptized 600 persons into the fellowship of the First Church.”<sup>66</sup>

### **The Liturgy of New Measures**

Many have noted the compatibility between New Measures and New Divinity. Albert Dod, an Old School Presbyterian critic of Charles Finney, generalized, “Nothing can be more evident than that these new measures are remarkably adapted to form and

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<sup>62</sup>Brantly, “Always Abounding in the Work of the Lord,” 115; see also Brantly, “Hasty Admissions into the Church,” 321. For opposing views, see Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals*, 263, 282, 305, 314-15, 319, 322, 329-31, 352-53, 358, 386-88, 396.

<sup>63</sup>Brantly, “On Hasty Admissions into the Church,” 302; idem, “Water Your Tender Plants,” *CI*, 3 November 1832, p. 284. In 1856, the Central Union Association contrasted its quick adoption of new measures with the reluctance of the Philadelphia Association. Regarding the results of new measures, the new association boasted, “The young convert no longer met that cold and unfeeling reception by the Church, which chills the vital ardor of his first love” (*Minutes*, Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, 1856, 12).

<sup>64</sup>Brantly, “Hasty Admissions into the Church,” 321.

<sup>65</sup>W. T. Brantly, “What Evil Is There in Revivals?” *CI*, 8 September 1832, p. 157.

<sup>66</sup>William Williams Keen, ed., *The Bi-Centennial Celebration of the Founding of the First Baptist Church of the City of Philadelphia (1698-1898)* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 97.

propagate a false religion,” namely, that of New Divinity.<sup>67</sup> In many respects, the New Measures represented the liturgy of New Divinity. One of Finney’s recent biographers aptly described the anxious seat as the evangelical’s “public liturgy of repentance and rebirth.”<sup>68</sup> Broadening this, it could be said that all the new measures, as an interlocking system, formed a new liturgy of conversion—the official liturgy of the American Reformation. Like all liturgies, this new system embodied some core theological assumptions—this time concerning the nature and causes of conversion.<sup>69</sup> Codified by Finney’s *Lectures on Revival of Religion* (1835), this new “theory of revivalism . . . became the accepted basis for one hundred years or more of evangelistic work in the Protestant churches of the United States.”<sup>70</sup>

Brantly at times denied this connection of new measures with new theology. Before the Philadelphia Association, Brantly noted that “*some persons* had found fault with the measures pursued at the [recent protracted] meetings . . . and that they seemed to regard the whole as a *new theory*, which ought to be suspected and questioned.” In response, Brantly “maintained that no new theory of conversion had been adopted—that

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<sup>67</sup>Quoted in William G. McLoughlin, “Introduction,” in Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1960), xxxv. The anxious seat, in particular, aroused suspicions of heretical denials of supernatural agency in conversion (Resh, “Anxious Seats,” 27).

<sup>68</sup>Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 109.

<sup>69</sup>For example, the usefulness of protracted meetings rested upon the assertion that first impressions could be induced into true conversion under the right kind of excitements. The anxious bench assumed that conversion could happen rapidly—even instantaneously—and that preachers had the obligation to make the demand of immediate repentance. Finally, hasty admissions were possibly valid, because the proper evidence of regeneration could appear almost immediately after conversion. In general, as shall be shown below, belief in the immediacy of conversion greatly promoted the new measures. As one leading historian of revivals concluded, “The New Divinity called upon men to change their own hearts ‘at once’ and the new measures provided the stimulus and the procedures by which they were to do it” (McLoughlin, “Introduction,” xxxvi).

The united nature of protracted meetings, anxious seats, and hasty admissions is manifest at the Harrisburg meetings. Each meeting appears to have closed with an invitation to come to the anxious seats. At the close of the last meeting, Brantly reported that time “did not permit the church to come together for the hearing of experiences; but we may rationally conclude that there will be a *speedy* ingathering of souls to the church of God in that place” (Brantly, “Meeting for Special Worship at Harrisburg, Pa.,” 353, italics added).

<sup>70</sup>McLoughlin, “Introduction,” xxxviii.

the ancient Gospel plan of a free and sufficient salvation through Christ” had been preached.<sup>71</sup> He had followed this tactic a few months earlier, when these same meetings had led one minister, apparently a Presbyterian in western New York, to remark how they resembled revival meetings there, in which Finney had participated with similar success. In republishing the letter, Brantly claimed no responsibility for “the *theory* of conversion which it implies.”<sup>72</sup> Later, in response to a letter from England that warned of a permanent shift among American Baptists from “the doctrines of grace and common sense” to the “rant and Arminianism” so common at protracted meetings, Brantly again denied the charges, merely admitting that “plain, cogent, Bible-truth, [was] not always urged and enforced, as [he] could desire to see it.”<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of Brantly’s repeated denials, his own defense of new measures revealed that new theology was emerging. The 1830-31 revivals brought two issues to the fore—immediate repentance and the usefulness of emotion. Brantly promoted both ideas, but mixed them with older

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<sup>71</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Perfection of Sytem—Its Greatest Defect,” 15 October 1831, p. 254, italics original.

<sup>72</sup>Brantly, “Revival Incidents,” 61. This letter helps place Brantly’s ministry within the spiritual landscape of his day. The letter writer noted a strong similarity between the “the manner . . . in which the Gospel was preached” at a recent meeting of Baptists in Philadelphia and “the character of the preaching, or the means used throughout this region.” The revival there, which began in a Sabbath school connected with his own congregation and continued for seven weeks through the labors of Charles G. Finney, demanded immediate, “unreserved submission.” While not endorsing the letter fully, Brantly justified its importance, saying, “None can estimate the importance of one moment in the operations of the human mind when directed by the Spirit of God” (ibid.).

Brantly’s article keeps both the author and recipient of this letter anonymous. Regarding the recipient, the letter mentions “remarks you made in your paper of June 17<sup>th</sup>” about the Baptist meetings and how the author and Finney “received with no small degree of pleasure, your numbers on *regeneration*,” which the author opined “perfectly corresponds with that of Mr. Finney.” Since the *Index* was published on June 18<sup>th</sup> and contained no series on regeneration during the spring of 1831, Brantly does not seem to be addressed. Regarding authorship, the author speaks of Baptists, Methodists, and a Second Presbyterian Church in the third person. Presumably, he is a Presbyterian like Finney (ibid.). In the spring of 1831, Finney left Rochester in late February, spent much of March and April in Auburn, then labored in Buffalo from early May to early June before heading east to Utica, Albany-Troy, and New York City (Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney*, 114-117). Of these areas, Hambrick-Stowe mentions Joseph Penney of Rochester’s First Church and Sylvester Eaton of Buffalo (ibid., 104, 115).

<sup>73</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A Cautionary Compliment,” *CI*, 16 March 1833, p. 162. The author of the letter praised Baptists for resisting “the domination of Bishops,” but warned of a new “reign of ignorance and will-worship.” He urged “Mr. Index” to call upon learned ministers “not to give place to enthusiasm.” In closing, he warned, “The possession of the public mind . . . is not easily recovered when once it is lost” (ibid.). For more on this shift from Calvinistic ministry to popular sovereignty among American Baptists, see Hatch, *Democratization*, 93-101.

ideas, thereby showing the consistency between his theology and his participation in the new measures movement.

**Immediate repentance.** In examining the causes for successful revivals, Brantly and his contemporaries believed that they had discovered factors making one preacher successful and another one not. Two of the leading factors were prayer and the demand for immediate repentance.<sup>74</sup> The first, of course, had a long-standing tradition, though the new leaders emphasized praying expectantly, agonizingly, and even specifically for individuals by name.<sup>75</sup> The other factor hinted at a departure from the Puritan means of grace, which assumed sinners passed through definite steps en route to Christ. Brantly openly criticized “all counsel that supposes a long process of unregenerate doings” before a sinner comes to Christ. Each sinner stood under the obligation to submit to Christ *now*.<sup>76</sup> As stated earlier, this doctrine found fertile soil in protracted meetings, where many hesitating sinners felt the weight of this duty and did “solemnly give in their adherence to Christ.”<sup>77</sup> Given the success of all these meetings, who could doubt the doctrine? The snowball steadily grew.

Although Brantly and Finney both used protracted meetings with anxious seats ready for immediate repentance, Brantly tempered the stress on immediacy with his strong belief in God’s sovereignty over salvation. True, both men believed that sinners

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<sup>74</sup>For example, the Rev. H. P. Arms, pastor of the Congregational Church in Hebron, Connecticut, attributed a revival of several months duration to two principal means blessed of God: “*prayer, persevering agonizing PRAYER . . . [and] the necessity and PRACTICABILITY of immediate repentance*” (reprinted from the *New York Evangelist* in “Four Days Meetings,” *CI*, 13 August 1831, p. 109).

<sup>75</sup>See “Four Days Meetings,” p. 109; W. T. Brantly, “Places Which Are Not Visited with Revivals,” *CI*, 20 August 1831, p. 126; idem, “Ten Days’ Meeting at the Great Valley Baptist Church, Pa.,” *CI*, 3 November 1832, p. 273. In the last article, Brantly cites two examples of conversions through specific prayer: a brother’s request for his sisters’ salvation, and one of three Hicksite Quaker brothers, who witnessed the conversion of his other two brothers while he was praying for them in their presence (idem, “Ten Days’ Meeting,” 273-74).

<sup>76</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Immediate Repentance,” *CI*, 28 May 1831, p. 340.

<sup>77</sup>Brantly, “Meeting for Special Worship at Harrisburg, Pa.,” 353.

had the duty to repent *now*, and that they should hear of this duty; however, only Finney believed that sinners had the ability to comply.<sup>78</sup> Despite the appearance of inconsistency, Brantly carefully defended the preaching of *immediate repentance* in light of God's sovereignty and man's depravity.

Both words—immediate and repentance—carried significance. First, to be successful, a preacher must expect results from his preaching. Too many preached as if they would be surprised should sinners respond. In Brantly's opinion, a preacher had just as much right to be expect success in using the Gospel as any doctor in using his medicine, or any farmer in planting his seed. While results were not absolutely guaranteed every time, the means were so fitted to the end that each one should anticipate results. In explaining why one preacher could go years without results while another preacher nearby succeeded, Brantly refused to blame the sovereignty of God. Brantly reasoned that God did not operate so arbitrarily with any of his other means, so why should He with the Gospel? In Brantly's opinion, "The Lord needs not such a display of sovereignty as this." Almost assuredly, the problem lay with the preacher, whose "coldness or unbelief—for which he, and he alone, is to blame—may be the obstacles to the display of Almighty grace, in the case supposed."<sup>79</sup>

Second, to be successful, a preacher must use arguments suited for a rational being. As in all changes, the mind must see "*sufficient reason*" for doing the "work" of repentance, which Brantly defined as a sinner "chang[ing] his mind from the love and pursuit of sin to the love and pursuit of holiness." The preacher's arguments of "*sufficient reason*" would prevail, were it not for unbelief. But just because the removal of unbelief requires God's sovereign grace, this fact did not permit the preacher to forego

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<sup>78</sup>According to one of Finney's biographer, who based his conclusions on Finney's *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1835), Finney advised that "every sermon was to include this note of urgency: 'Will you submit to God tonight—NOW?'" (Hambrick-Stowe, *Finney*, 109).

<sup>79</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Aims and Expectations," *CI*, 21 May 1831, p. 321; idem, "Places Which Are Not Visited with Revivals," 126.

rational argument, as if preaching itself were unnecessary, or as if God were most glorified working apart from means. Neither Jesus nor the apostles left such an example. Therefore, the obedient preacher will urge upon sinners “the motives which the Bible presents.”<sup>80</sup> Thus by several means—a sermon’s “sound sense, the unexpected, yet convincing applications of Scripture, [and] the holy unction and cutting closeness of appeal”—the successful preacher will not only keep his hearers awake, but will “pinch their conscience and put them upon the making of resolutions of amendment whilst yet his words are sounding in their ears.”<sup>81</sup> Brantly himself became known for “melting rhetoric” that backsliders and sinners found hard to resist.<sup>82</sup>

To illustrate his views on immediate repentance, Brantly described two recent inquiry meetings. In one of the meetings, near its close, “the pastor proposed, that all who were willing to submit to God immediately . . . should signify it by rising” to receive appropriate prayer. After time, several rose; but others, who “appeared deeply exercised,” remained seated. The latter were again addressed as a group, first by a pastor, who “most evidently” had the Spirit with him, then by another speaker, who told them “they would never have occasion to regret their choice if they adopted the resolutions proposed.” According to Brantly, “several immediately arose,” whose fruits have born signs that they “are now true followers of Christ.” In another inquiry meeting, the ones who remained were pressed by reminders of their mad rejection of the only escape, their preference for death over life, and their fearful prospect of grieving the Holy Spirit away forever through “a single moment’s more resistance” of Him, for which they alone would

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<sup>80</sup>Brantly, “Aims and Expectations,” 321; idem, “Immediate Repentance,” 340, where Brantly defined repentance, based on the original Greek, as “the change of mind called the new birth.” Brantly called repentance “a work yet to be done” in “Reflections in View of the New Year,” *CI*, 5 January 1833, p. 16.

<sup>81</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Preaching Which Does Good,” *CSCI*, 28 November 1829, p. 338. Basil Manly also referred to pinching the conscience (see A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South*, Southern Biography Series [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000], 50, 117, 188).

<sup>82</sup>“Intrepid Faith,” *CR* 10 (December 1845): 606.

be to blame. Again Brantly reported, “Several of those thus addressed arose, and are now hopeful converts to Christ.”<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, based on cases such as these, Brantly confidently asserted the fact, that God “can, and does, let down into the human heart his converting mercy, in an instant of time.”<sup>84</sup> Skeptics should recognize the unbelief hidden in their hesitations to admit the validity of sudden conversions. To one such hesitant, though respected correspondent, Brantly asked, “If we believe that the Holy Spirit is the active agent in producing the conversion of the human heart to God, and that the divine Word ministered with the accompanying affections, sympathies, prayers and tears of men, is the instrument, then why may not conversions be sudden, and almost instantaneous?”<sup>85</sup>

Brantly’s stress on immediacy should not be misunderstood as excluding any acknowledgment of a process of conversion. He tempered his stress on the duty of immediacy with his strong belief in moral inability and the necessity of divine initiation. As a result, Brantly cautioned against immediate pressure:

The preacher must use such preliminary measures as seem calculated to subdue the impenitent heart, not because the sinner can be excused for a moment’s delay in coming to Christ, but because his blindness and obstinate self-will can only be removed by the influence of Truth and the Spirit of God.

No preacher should act as if they were God, possessing the power to change men’s hearts.

Brantly compared the situation to parenting:

A stubborn, disobedient child is *required* to become quiet and dutiful, and no apology is allowed for a moment’s continuance in its rebellion; but still the parent resorts to various artifices and often consumes much time before an obedient temper is produced. In the case of the impenitent sinner, his business is with the obligation

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<sup>83</sup>Brantly, “Immediate Repentance,” 340. On another occasion, Brantly related how a gentleman was “brought to serious and anxious reflection, and as we trust, to a solemn determination to make the service of God his choice,” by the visit of “a perfect stranger” who sought children for Sunday School and ended up placing on the gentleman “the urgent demands of eternity” (idem, “Instant of Mercy,” *CI*, 22 October 1831, p. 257).

<sup>84</sup>Brantly, “On Hasty Admissions into the Church,” 302.

<sup>85</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Sudden Conversions,” *CI*, 13 August 1831, p. 108.

that rests upon him to obey the Gospel of Christ—the minister must proceed in view of the known fact of the case.<sup>86</sup>

In other words, sin often necessitates a process. Yet, even slow conversions possessed an element of immediacy. Brantly ventured, “It is probable, too, that if we could know the exact beginning and progress of every work of grace, we should find most cases so strongly marked by a *first impression*, as to induce the belief in our minds, that such work is instantaneous.”<sup>87</sup>

The bottom line is the sovereignty of God. Because God is sovereign, faith will not deny the possibility of sudden conversions, nor admit the necessity of “preliminary measures” or any other means of grace. Yet, because God is sovereign and sinners are morally unable, the preacher may have to use “preliminary measures” and wait patiently for a response. In other words, the sovereignty of God shows that immediate repentance is indeed a possibility, but only a possibility—not guaranteed by any method.

**The usefulness of emotion.** Not all of Brantly’s opponents to new measures were men opposed to revivals. One correspondent, in comparison to whom Brantly could not find “a sincerer friend to the cause of Christ,” expressed his aversion to “sudden conversions” both on the suspicion that the various denominations were just seeking numbers, and on the claim that no better plan existed “to fill the visible church with stony-ground, or nominal professors.” This reference to “stony-ground . . . professors” comes from Jesus’ parable of the sower and the seed, in which some of the seed fell on shallow soil, quickly sprouted, and then died under the sun due to its lack of root. In Jesus’ explanation, which compares a heart to soil, He Himself emphasized the emotional nature of the stony-ground response, saying, “The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and

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<sup>86</sup>Brantly, “Immediate Repentance,” 340.

<sup>87</sup>Brantly, “On Hasty Admissions into the Church,” 302.



in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13). Here sits the chief suspicion against calling for immediate repentance. Many quick responses do not endure, because they are emotional decisions without true understanding. As Brantly had to admit, sudden conversions “sometimes originate in the excitement of those inferior passions.”<sup>88</sup> Given the emotional nature of much preaching during the Second Great Awakening, were these preachers not guilty of playing on emotions to gain quick numbers at the anxious bench?

Brantly marveled at fear of excitement, citing three reasons in favor of religious excitement over logical deadness.<sup>89</sup> First, stirring up emotions was absolutely necessary for any action to occur. Preachers who gave “cold, unimpassioned addresses,” which Brantly considered were “best calculated to extinguish all feeling,” betrayed their own position by their sorry results:

We have generally remarked, however, that those preachers who are so immeasurably alarmed at the idea of moving the passions of men, never move their judgments to any good purpose. Only warmth can produce action. In the frozen regions every thing is ice-bound. There nothing moves, nothing grows.<sup>90</sup>

Second, the dangers from overexciting the emotions were less than those associated with deadness. When Brantly received news from the Rev. N. W. Hodges of the almost unprecedented success of “Gospel Truth” in several districts of South Carolina, just north of his old home in Augusta, Georgia, Brantly chided his opponents to explain these events. He asked, “What spirit can possess the young men, and the middle aged men, and the grey-headed fathers, to induce them to fall so suddenly under the control of Gospel Truth?” Should opponents point to “heated imaginations” or “wild enthusiasm,” Brantly still saw no cause for alarm. If enthusiasm changed sinners, such as making “the churl [man] liberal,” then Brantly wanted enthusiasm:

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<sup>88</sup>Brantly, “Sudden Conversions,” 108. For other examples of hesitant evangelical leaders, see Sprague, *Lectures on Revival*, 232, 234, 260, 239-40, 368.

<sup>89</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Fear of Excitement,” *CI*, 11 May 1833, p. 289.

<sup>90</sup>Brantly, “Always Abounding in the Work of the Lord,” 115.

Give us the holy warmth that moves them into action in the service of God, rather than the chilling indifference which leaves them in possession of good theories, and bad practices—of perfect systems of belief, and defective systems of morality—of imposing forms of godliness whilst the power is wanting. We consider it much safer in regard to religious duty, to be hot, than to be cold, to have a fervid heart that incites to speed with some eccentricities, than a cold head only, which looks, but never runs the way of God's commandments.<sup>91</sup>

Third, and most fundamentally, Brantly questioned, with qualification, the traditional assumption that “the *head* must be informed before the *heart* is set to work.”<sup>92</sup> The traditional assumption is well expressed by Jonathan Edwards, in his classic treatise on *Religious Affections*, where he said of genuine regeneration, “Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge.” If affections did not arise from “light in the understanding,” Edwards reckoned they were not spiritual in nature, even if they were of great proportion. In this opinion, he claimed to have “the concurring voice of all orthodox divines.”<sup>93</sup> In apparent contrast to the traditional order, Brantly set fact against fact. He asked, “Admitting what may be fact—that *sudden conversions*, sometimes originate in the excitement of those inferior passions, the impressions of which are transient, is not the Lord able to sanctify and turn to good account even these short lived transports?” Grief, for example, often starts with “selfishness” before turning later into “penitence and godly sorrow.”<sup>94</sup>

By questioning the order of head and heart, Brantly appears to have partially conformed to the growing Romanticism of his day, which emphasized “the intuitive perception of truth through the feelings or emotions of the heart.”<sup>95</sup> In general,

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<sup>91</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Mr. Hodges’ Letter,” *CI*, 22 October 1831, p. 259; cf. Theophilus, “On Requesting Seekers of Religion to Distinguish Themselves by a Public Act,” p. 261.

<sup>92</sup>Brantly, “Sudden Conversions,” 108.

<sup>93</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *Works*, 1:281, 282, 246.

<sup>94</sup>Brantly, “Sudden Conversions,” 108.

<sup>95</sup>William G. McLoughlin, “Introduction,” in *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900: An Anthology* (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 14. According to McLoughlin, the second third of the nineteenth century witnessed the effects of Romanticism on evangelicalism.

evangelicalism's dispute over solemnity and passion resembled the general culture's shift from rationality to romance. Without a doubt, the Second Great Awakening itself witnessed a rise of emotional religion. Given such a context, was Brantly saying that genuine conversion resulted from exciting the emotions before informing the intellect?

In answering this question, it is important to keep two things in mind. First, Brantly's aversion to metaphysics allowed him room to experiment with new measures. In contrast to preachers whose methods were hemmed in by a tight theological system, Brantly asked, "But who can tell how, or where, or when the Lord begins to work upon the soul of man in conversion?"<sup>96</sup> For example, Brantly could perhaps attribute much to the "excitement" of protracted meetings because he believed in the sovereign freedom of the Holy Spirit. Between the two extremes of either means alone or the Holy Spirit alone, Brantly asserted:

We are of [the] opinion that *means* accomplish nothing independently of God's Spirit; but we may reverse the proposition, and say with general truth, that so far as we know, the Spirit of God, accomplishes nothing in the salvation of men, independently of *means*.<sup>97</sup>

The term "*means*" included more than simply the Word, for Brantly later disagreed with

the idea that the influence of the Holy Spirit in producing the conversion of sinners, is something *inherent, and intrinsic*, in the Word, and that there is no influence except that which is thus incorporated into the Word. We have always thought that there is an *extrinsic* influence which, though not ordinarily separable from the Word, is yet not necessarily blended with, and dependent upon it.<sup>98</sup>

In the words "not ordinarily" perhaps lies the possibility of the Holy Spirit using excitement towards a conversion.

Second, it is also important to keep in mind that Brantly often praised enthusiasm more in opposition to opponents of emotion in religion, than in actual support

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<sup>96</sup>Brantly, "Sudden Conversions," 108.

<sup>97</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Correspondence," *CI*, 11 February 1832, p. 94.

<sup>98</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Doctrinal Views," *CI*, 18 February 1832, p. 111; see also Brantly, "Impartial Enquiry," 11 August 1832, p. 92. In discussing the Spirit and means, Brantly was interacting with P., "How a Sinner Is Converted," 4 February 1832, p. 75; R., Letter to the Editor, *CI*, 18 February 1832, 100-01; and S., "Man's Ability to Come to Christ," *CI*, 18 February 1832, p. 100.

of enthusiasm itself. He usually had those of a “high church party” in mind, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio, who, meeting in session on Trinity Sunday, 1833, condemned new measures for their “tendency to beget . . . fanaticism and disorder” in direct contrast to the apostolic injunction that everything be done “decently and in order.”<sup>99</sup> Brantly marveled at their “squeamishness,” sarcastically concluding:

From their great dread of excitement one would be induced to imagine that they are the most discerning and logical heads to be found on human necks; and that they are too cool and sober ever to have felt the kindling power of any incentive.

But their lack of converts betrayed their claim to intelligence, for if they used arguments, they would actually find success, but “where light is sparingly used, heat will be scarce.” Here, Brantly sounded like Edwards. Indeed, in answering his high-church opponents, Brantly defined Christianity as “a holy excitement of the soul,” and love as “a sanctified excitement of the inner man in pursuing the glory of God, and the happiness of his reasonable creatures.” Such definitions strongly resemble Edwards’ own characterization of true religion as consisting, “IN GREAT PART, . . . IN HOLY AFFECTIONS.”<sup>100</sup> Moreover, in this essay, Brantly agreed with Edwards’ order of head before heart, carefully qualifying his emphasis on excitement by stating “it should be produced and elicited by proper objects and occasions.” The “chief means of excitement” was “truth plainly told, argument forcibly urged, fact strongly exhibited.” Both “noisy declamation” and “violent appeals to the passions” failed to give the mind lasting effect.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, “representations in a theatre, or a secular celebration” were also unfitting means of excitement.<sup>102</sup> The bottom line was speaking the truth, which “must always leave the mind excited” and so produce what Brantly somewhere called “rational feeling.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Protracted Meetings and Revivals,” *CIBM*, 10 August 1833, p. 22. The Scripture quote is from 1 Cor 14:40.

<sup>100</sup>Edwards, *Works*, 1:236.

<sup>101</sup>Brantly, “The Fear of Excitement,” 289.

<sup>102</sup>Brantly, “Sudden Conversions,” 108.

<sup>103</sup>Brantly, “The Fear of Excitement,” 289.

So how could Brantly question the traditional order of head and heart in 1831, while asserting in 1833 that light precedes heat? Besides the obvious possibility that an uninspired man can be inconsistent over the span of two years, it seems probable that Brantly merely questioned the *chronological* order of head before heart, but not its *logical* order of causation. In other words, preachers did not need to fear arousing the passions first before the intellect really understands, for though truth must always precede *holy* excitement, God may first use mere carnal excitement to incline a soul to listen to the truth, which will in turn cause true religious excitement. In Brantly's opinion, the real reason behind much of the high-church opposition to new measures consisted not in the desire to obey the apostles, but in a fatal adherence to tradition and a dreadful aversion to spending extra time in the service of God. "We are awfully fearful," Brantly concluded, "that godliness, and even Heaven itself will be a *new measure* to such persons."<sup>104</sup>

### **Conclusion**

William T. Brantly fully participated in the new measures of the Second Great Awakening, but he did so with thoughtful balance, remembering the limitation of all means under the sovereignty of God. For example, he recognized the use of protracted meetings in giving a divine impulse to former impressions, but he cautioned against relying on such meetings for permanent reformation and thus neglecting regular ministry. With regard to anxious seats and hasty admissions, Brantly saw these as logical means of public profession. He saw no need for delay, and chided critics for neglecting their young converts. In defending these measures, Brantly refuted the notion that a process is necessarily involved in conversion, and instead defended the duty of immediate repentance, citing the sovereignty of God as both the possibility of such a repentance and the refutation that any means can guarantee such a repentance. Brantly also questioned the traditional opposition to exciting passions, though he himself stressed the propriety of

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<sup>104</sup>Brantly, "Protracted Meetings and Revivals," 22-23.

exciting these passions ultimately through the truth. Therefore, while Brantly may at first appear to have been quite radical in his apology for new measures, in reality he was a true reformer, retaining the prayer and preaching of the past, and adding new measures in accordance with careful theological reasons, and all done in the beliefs that the Kingdom of God brings more light and that the sovereignty of God should not be prejudged by limited human understanding.

Beyond his defense of new measures, Brantly remained concerned about a preoccupation with revivals themselves. Ultimately the goal was not revival—that is, a *re-enlivening*—but rather, life itself. Achieving this steady state involved a process called “reformation,” which had its own peculiar methods. In rough terms, just as revivals had new measures, so reformation had benevolent societies. Both worked together to bring in the Kingdom of God. The next chapter will explore Brantly’s own reasons for involvement in benevolent societies.

## CHAPTER 8

### BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES

William T. Brantly ministered in Philadelphia during an era known for its “benevolent societies.” These societies consisted of volunteers who formally organized to meet a specific need. While the concept of a society had been with English-speakers since the late 1600s, when the Anglicans started forming their own societies, the early 1800s marks “the heyday of societies,” both in England and in America. According to cultural historian Herbert Schlossberg, “This was a great age for organizing, and it was hard to find a significant need that did not have its collection of sympathizers forming a society to provide help.”<sup>1</sup> The *Index* alone filled page after page with reports from societies promoting missions, temperance, tracts, Sunday schools, education, Bible distribution, relief of the poor, and so much more. One prominent society, the American Bible Society, actually parented an auxiliary “Young Men’s Bible Society” to enlist youthful aid in funding missionary translations, such as one for Burma.<sup>2</sup> While some of these societies operated solely in the name of humanity, most were religious in character.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2000), 180-82. Sydney E. Ahlstrom stresses the new voluntary nature of the societies, which were usually “chartered and governed independently” and “carried on without church or state control” (*A Religious History of the American People* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972], 422-23). For general information on the evangelical benevolent societies, see Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Fred J. Hood, *Reformed America: The Middle and Southern States, 1783-1837* (University: The University of Alabama Press, 1980); and John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South*, Contributions to the Study of Religion, no. 7 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Proposed Extension in the Operations of the American Bible Society,” *CI*, 31 March 1832, p. 200. Brantly himself attended the meeting held in Philadelphia on 23 March 1832.

<sup>3</sup>Brantly preferred agencies that added “the wisdom and mercy of moral and religious renovation” (W. T. Brantly, “Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor,” *CSCI*, 10 October 1829, p. 232).

In general, the religious benevolent societies of Brantly's day can be divided into two categories. First, several societies strove to be strictly nonsectarian, inviting any evangelical Christian to participate as an individual, usually for specified dues. By the early 1830s, seven types of local societies had proliferated enough to achieve national prominence through mergers and subsequent auxiliary societies. The names of their national organizations, along with the year of their founding, are as follows:

. . . the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810), the American Bible Society (1816), the American Education Society (1816), the American Colonization Society (1816), the American Sunday School Union (1824), the American Home Mission Society (1826), and the American Temperance Society (1826).<sup>4</sup>

Together, these and several other societies enjoyed national success “for about a decade preceding the economic and ecclesiastical distresses of 1837”—a decade about coterminous with Brantly's ministry in the North.<sup>5</sup> Second, several societies began as strictly denominational unions. Baptists in particular chose this option for missions and tract publications. In general, the nonsectarian and denominational societies functioned harmoniously, with members freely participating in both types of societies, thereby facilitating evangelical unity across denominational fences—a topic of grave importance for the events of 1837.

Given this historical context, the present chapter aims to complete the picture of the Central Union Association as a *Working Men's Society*. In contrast to the older associations, the new association embodied the new benevolences in committees on foreign missions, domestic missions, protracted meetings, ministerial education, Sunday

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<sup>4</sup>Hood, *Reformed America*, 116. In addition, the American Tract Society formed in 1825. For a long list of American and British benevolent societies, see Foster, *Errand of Mercy*, 275-80.

Officially, the American Temperance Society was not only nonsectarian, but also secular; however, evangelical participation was so heavy, especially from the Calvinistic denominations, that one Methodist publication smelled Calvinism in temperance societies. Brantly doubted the accuracy of the Methodist “olfactories” (W. T. Brantly, “Temperance Societies and the Methodists,” *CSCI*, 3 October 1829, p. 219; see also Othniel Alsop Pendleton, Jr., “The Influence of the Evangelical Churches upon Humanitarian Reform: A Case-Study Giving Particular Attention to Philadelphia, 1790-1840,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 16 [March 1947]: 45).

<sup>5</sup>Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize*, 63.



schools and Bible classes, and temperance.<sup>6</sup> Of these six concerns, two have already received adequate examination—protracted meetings and missions, which by this time no longer needed defense in Brantly’s estimation.<sup>7</sup> Two others will become the focus of this chapter—ministerial education as an example of a strictly denominational cause, and temperance as a general evangelical cause. In promoting ministerial education, Brantly grew somewhat disillusioned with theological education, and began in some cases to argue for manual labor schools taught entirely in English. In promoting temperance, Brantly became a moral crusader. His involvement in this officially secular, but quasi-religious society not only sheds light on his own personal mission, but also raises a question regarding his later opposition to abolitionism. In contrast to many in the temperance movement who later participated in the abolitionist movement, Brantly did not. Understanding this paradox will help explain why Brantly eventually left the North and its “Benevolent Empire” for his old homeland of the South. Before these discussions are engaged, a preliminary look at the importance of benevolent societies to Brantly personally is in order.

### **Brantly and Benevolent Societies**

While Brantly highly esteemed revivals, he did not consider them the best way of permanently establishing religion. During the early days of the 1831 revival, Brantly read “with deep emotion” a small book on revivals written by his English acquaintance and kindred soul, the Baptist minister John Howard Hinton. In recommending the book, Brantly pointed to something better than revivals:

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<sup>6</sup>This organized expression of priorities figured prominently in “Historical Sketch of the Central Union Association of Baptist Churches. Prepared for the Fiftieth Anniversary, Meeting with the Frankford Church, May 30th and 31st, 1882,” in *Fiftieth, or Jubilee Anniversary of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, Held with the Frankford Baptist Church, Philadelphia, May 30 and 31, 1882* (Frankford: Thomas B. Foulkrod, 1882).

<sup>7</sup>W. T. Brantly, “To the Readers of the Star,” *CS*, 9 June 1827, p. 86; cf. Baptist, “Education of Ministers,” *CI*, 16 July 1831, pp. 37-38.

Mr. Hinton has touched the *true* spring of useful action in the Christian church; and has developed with much clearness, the genuine method of extending the influence of Gospel principles. He does not undertake to show the means by which an extraordinary excitement may be produced for a time, nor to lay down rules for the direction of those special events which distinguish the periods usually denominated revivals; but his plan is to point out the easiest and the surest way of making true Religion universal.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the “true spring” of benevolence is not found in temporary seasons of excitement or in the measures used to produce such seasons. The Kingdom of God is best furthered through steady ministry and diligent labor, as seen in the two samples Brantly inserted into the *Index* from Hinton’s book: “Home Labor” and “Personal Effort.” While Brantly defended excitements against the fears of strait-laced clergymen, his real heart lay in the consistency of effort. In either case, whether through seasonal revivals or consistent effort, the true result of religion was *benevolence*.<sup>9</sup>

The benevolent society takes benevolence one level higher by uniting Christians in useful effort. The aim in union was greater strength and efficiency. Watchwords such as “Union is strength” appeared from pens as far away as Burma, where Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson used such logic to urge his sisters in America to organize “Plain Dress Societies.”<sup>10</sup> The same prospects of greater effectiveness motivated churches to join the Central Union Association, which, in associating together as independent churches “for the accomplishment of general and important objects,” represents a special form of a Baptist society—a society not of individuals (as Francis Wayland later espoused), but of churches (similar to the later Southern Baptist

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<sup>8</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A Little Book May Prove a Great Blessing,” *CI*, 21 May 1831, p. 329, italics added; see also Brantly, “Hinton’s Active Christian,” *CI*, 11 May 1833, p. 289.

<sup>9</sup>A principal effect of true revival is benevolence. When Brantly noticed “a growing spirit of deep and pious seriousness” among Baptists in Philadelphia, he rejoiced that these Gospel feelings made them “more united and efficient in our benevolent operations” (W. T. Brantly, “Baptist Churches in This City,” *CI*, 2 April 1831, p. 218; see also Brantly, “Revivals,” *CI*, 16 April 1831, p. 252).

<sup>10</sup>Judson exhorted his American sisters to obey 1 Tim 2:9 and then to use the savings for charity, because he had difficulty convincing Burmese Christian women to adopt modesty in contrast to American women wearing jewelry (see Adoniram Judson, “Rev. Mr. Judson’s Letter. To the Female Members of Christian Churches in the United States of America,” *CI*, 19 May 1832, p. 317).

Convention).<sup>11</sup> Thus the Central Union Association, as a society of churches, represents the quintessential ideal of Brantly's personal mission of uniting Christians in useful effort for the Kingdom of God.

Not all were happy with the united strength of the so-called "Benevolent Empire" of the Second Great Awakening. One of Brantly's "quondam subscribers" from Tennessee quit the *Index*, charging, "You worship Tract, and Missionary, and Sunday schools, and (are) always a wanting money. . . . You make religion of men's actions; and publish falsehoods of some taking fire from drinking spirituous liquors."<sup>12</sup> The backwoods nature of this charge raises the question, Were the benevolent societies actually a *malevolent* means of social control, with urban elites such as Brantly patronizing the lower classes for ulterior motives? Modern historians have certainly suspected as much.<sup>13</sup> Brantly would have strongly disagreed with such an assessment. He was keenly aware that union in benevolent effort would require "some plan which precludes, not only the fact, but even the appearance of a systematic control of individual judgment and resources."<sup>14</sup> Defensively, he reasoned, "If the associations of our day, professedly benevolent, be a conspiracy against the liberties and happiness of men, they certainly travel a most singular way to the fulfilment of their design." He noted how these societies operated openly and published the reports of their meetings. As to results, the

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<sup>11</sup>On the Central Union Association, notice W. T. Brantly's comment on "collective resources and moral strength" in "New Association of Independent Baptist Churches," *CI*, 14 July 1832, p. 28, and notice the comments by Lower Dublin Baptist Church in "Minutes of the Central Union Association, Formed in Philadelphia, July 31st, 1832," *CI*, 11 August 1832, p. 82. For Wayland's extreme emphasis on individual representation and the society model, see Winthrop S. Hudson, "Stumbling into Disorder," *Foundations* 1 (April 1958): 60-61, 70-71. For the Southern Baptist Convention's model, based on the original state conventions and on W. B. Johnson's principle of "judicious concentration," see Robert Baker, "Reflections on the Southern Baptist Convention," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 6 (April 1964): 19-20.

<sup>12</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Anti-Effort," *CI*, 4 August 1832, p. 78; see also Brantly, "Granville County (N.C.) Bible Society," *CI*, 20 August 1831, p. 123.

<sup>13</sup>For an overview of this popular theory and a response, see articles by Lois Banner, especially "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973): 23-41.

<sup>14</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Missionary Bank," *CSCI*, 14 November 1829, p. 314. Brantly wrote this in response to a correspondent's proposal for establishing a bank to handle funds for Christian benevolence.

societies “make mankind too wise to be cheated out of their rights, and too good to need the restraints of arbitrary power.” If such were a conspiracy, then Brantly exclaimed, “*God speed them in their way.*” To him, the benevolent societies offered real proof that the goodness of God’s men exceeded mere profession.<sup>15</sup>

Brantly himself gladly participated in benevolent societies, believing, “A useful life is the noblest designation of man.” He looked with disdain upon the “pampered harpies” in the city—those wealthy drones whose “*lives* are but little better than *death*, and which lie festering upon the vitals of society.” None of these could claim to be right with God, for, though salvation is not by works, “branches of the TRUE VINE” refresh men with their fruit. In contrast, Brantly extolled the great founders of various benevolent institutions, such as Robert Raikes for Sunday school and Andrew Fuller for mission societies. While considering himself far beneath these men in usefulness, Brantly nonetheless reckoned it a great honor to become “the hands and feet” beneath their eyes, and so to “second with subsidiary movements, the lofty plans of active benignity which they have discovered and pointed out.”<sup>16</sup> How could any Christian, Brantly marveled, indulge in “slothfulness and stupidity,” in light of all that he professed of Judgment Day and future glory!<sup>17</sup>

As a preacher, Brantly considered it his duty not only to participate in, but also to promote the benevolent societies. He fondly cited one preacher in New Jersey, whom he saw handing out tracts to “plain honest farmers,” who, though having “no great interest in the study of books,” nonetheless devoured the “*little fugitive leaves*” from the

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<sup>15</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Let Me See Your Works,” *CI*, 9 July 1831, p. 17. For a similar defense in England, see Schlossberg, *Silent Revolution*, 248. Brantly himself did not blindly praise benevolent societies. He recognized that a good object justified neither the spirit nor the means used in pursuing that object (W. T. Brantly, “On the Love of Praise,” *CSCI*, 31 January 1830, p. 49).

<sup>16</sup>W. T. Brantly, “On Moral and Religious Usefulness,” *CSCI*, 11 July 1829, pp. 27-28. For other articles promoting benevolence, see Brantly, “Mutual Good,” *CSCI*, 11 December 1830, p. 381; idem, “Importance of Individuals,” *CI*, 30 April 1831, pp. 273-74.

<sup>17</sup>W. T. Brantly, “*Be Astonished, O Ye Heavens, at This, and Be Horribly Afraid, Be Ye Very Desolate, Saith the Lord. Jeremiah*,” *CI*, 18 June 1831, p. 396.

preacher's hands. Why could not every country preacher do the same for those having little time to read?<sup>18</sup> He himself devised his own means of promoting the benevolent causes. For example, after attending a meeting at First Presbyterian Church for the promotion of Sabbath schools in "the great valley of the Mississippi," Brantly stood amazed at the resulting \$26,000 in pledges. Since the goal of planting a school in every town and settlement would require four times as much money, he called on his Baptist brethren to help. But how? Baptists were often poor. Brantly challenged each reader to send him a dollar, reminding them, "The very Ocean is made up of drops, [and] that the great Orb on which we tread is formed of countless particles."<sup>19</sup> Four Sabbath School teachers from the South immediately complied and urged other readers to do the same.<sup>20</sup>

### **Ministerial Education**

In the midst of the 1831 revival, Brantly called on his readers to pray for America's colleges, of which both Yale and Princeton had recently been visited with fresh outpourings of God's Spirit. Because such "seats of science" and "fountains of power and influence" would "doubtless" produce many of the church's new leaders, the church should pray for all the colleges, "lest the harvest perish because the laborers are few" (cf. Matt 9:37-38). Therefore, one of the greatest, though easily overlooked, means for sustaining revival was men; and one of the greatest measures for providing qualified men was ministerial education.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in Brantly's estimation, ministerial education was the greatest benevolence.

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<sup>18</sup>Brantly, "On Moral and Religious Usefulness," 28. In contrast, Brantly reported about one preacher, how an infidel could not have done more in opposing benevolent societies than he had done (idem, "Most Lamentable," *CSCI*, 31 July 1830, p. 78).

<sup>19</sup>W. T. Brantly, "A Noble Effort," *CSCI*, 12 June 1830, pp. 369-70.

<sup>20</sup>W. T. Brantly, "The Fruit of Our Suggestion," *CSCI*, 3 July 1830, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Signs of the Times," *CI*, 19 March 1831, p. 186; idem, "The Harvest Is Great," *CI*, 26 March 1831, p. 203; see also Brantly, "Baptist Seminaries for Ministerial Education," *CSCI*, 13 November 1830, p. 317; idem, "When Has a Minister Done His Duty to the Heathen," *CS*, 18 April 1829, p. 61. On the mission field, even more "dexterity in the use of argument" was required (idem, "Missionaries Should Have Well Disciplined Minds," *CSCI*, 4 July 1829, p. 8).

The need for men was nothing new to Baptists, who had always had a class of ministers, but the value of a formally educated ministry was new. When David Benedict first traveled among the Baptists around 1810, he encountered few learned ministers.<sup>22</sup> In the next two decades, leaders in the Triennial Convention put forth efforts, both nationally and regionally, to improve this situation. But by 1830, Brantly remained dissatisfied. While Baptists were the largest denomination in the United States at that time, most of their numbers were in the countryside. Baptist influence remained disproportionately small in towns and cities. The “principal cause of this inequality [was] the want of a larger number of well educated ministers.” While the “unprepossessed and candid minds of country people” would continue to receive “a plain and simple religion,” the mindset of city people, having been sophisticated through trade and commerce, required more art.<sup>23</sup>

The Central Union Association aimed to offset this deficiency of formally educated ministers. In 1832, the framers included “the education of pious and promising young men” among its aims.<sup>24</sup> At first, only three men received aid, with two pursuing studies in New York and one under the tutelage of David Jones.<sup>25</sup> On the first anniversary, Brantly, as head of the committee on education, made a passionate plea for *men*. Above all, the churches needed men.<sup>26</sup> A call went forth, soliciting the churches “to

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<sup>22</sup>David Benedict, *Fifty Years among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon, 1860), 33.

<sup>23</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” *CSCI*, 13 March 1830, p. 161. About that same time, perhaps in an effort to save face, Brantly wrote of the Baptists in general, “They do not admit that a knowledge of the Ancient Languages, of Mathematics and Philosophy, is indispensably requisite to the exercise of the ministerial function. They allow, however, the great benefit of learning as a qualification for usefulness in preaching, and encourage learned men with a liberality equal to that of any other denomination” (idem, “Baptists of the United States,” *CI*, 20 August 1831, p. 119). This article originally appeared in Buck’s *Theological Dictionary*.

<sup>24</sup>“Minutes of the Central Union Association,” 81.

<sup>25</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Special Meeting of the Central Union Association,” *CI*, 24 November 1832, p. 321.

<sup>26</sup>*Minutes of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, Held in the Meeting House of the First Baptist Church, Philadelphia, May 28, 29, 30, 31, 1833* (n.p., n.d.), 8.

inquire of [their] best youthful talent with a view of directing them to gospel ministry and affording them education.” In 1834, the Association sought to form a bond of “co-operation, on just and equitable principles” with the directors of Haddington Institute, a school sponsored by the Philadelphia Association. Negotiations failed, so the Central Union Association sought to care for their own trainees, first at Holmesburg under Henry K. Green and then by sending them to a new school at Burlington, New Jersey, where Green joined Samuel Aaron as a professor.<sup>27</sup>

Three principles at least governed Brantly’s campaign for ministerial education. In his March 1830 article on “Hints to Baptists” about ministerial education, Brantly asserted that ministerial education must be useful, enforced as a perpetual duty, and made a priority in the denomination over missions and any other benevolence.<sup>28</sup> Other articles elaborate on these three reasons. Regarding usefulness, Brantly denied the absolute necessity of formal education, but argued that Baptist ministers should receive “a good knowledge of their English Bible, and a correct use of their native tongue.”<sup>29</sup> Perhaps, he reasoned, Baptist schools should combine manual labor with studies, for not only does “labor [make] the study sweet, and study . . . [soften] labor,” but among

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<sup>27</sup>“Historical Sketch,” 8-9, in *Fiftieth, or Jubilee Anniversary*. The “Historical Sketch” reports that the Burlington Institute was “under the direction of the Central Education Board, appointed by a Convention formed out of the Baptist Churches in the Middle States, held in Philadelphia in December, 1834” (ibid., 9). Since two British visitors to Philadelphia in the spring of 1835 understood Brantly as the principal force behind the Institute, perhaps Brantly served on the Central Education Board (see F. A. Cox and J. Hoby, *The Baptists in America; A Narrative of the Deputation from the Baptist Union in England, to the United States and Canada* [New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1836], 17).

<sup>28</sup>Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” 161; see also Brantly, “Education of Young Men for the Ministry,” *CIBM*, 24 August 1833, p. 30, which has a proposed curriculum. For a debate over ministerial education in Georgia, regarding English versus classical languages, see Baptist, “Education of Ministers,” *CI*, 16 July 1831, pp. 37-38; E. Battle, “Education of Ministers,” 13 August 1831, pp. 107-08.

Brantly’s enthusiasm for theological education as the normal means of ministerial education waned as he matured. Based on his observations, Brantly claimed that most seminary graduates had “to commence their preparations for the pulpit, after they leave the Institutions” (“Seminaries for Candidates for the Ministry,” *CIBM*, 3 August 1833, p. 19; e.g., see Brantly, “It Wants Salt,” *CI*, 24 December 1831, p. 415). Looking to Germany, Brantly noticed “a tendency in Theological Seminaries to become speculative and literary—to refine away the sense and beauty of divine truth—to rest in the deadness of the letter, and thus stop short of the life and vividness of the spirit.” In contrast, Brantly asserted, “The true Theology is the teaching of God; and he is wise who is *taught of God*” (idem, “Professor Knowles’ Address,” *CI*, 5 January 1833, p. 12, quoting John 6:45).

<sup>29</sup>Brantly, “Seminaries for Candidates for the Ministry,” 19.

“Baptist ministers, it is ordinarily a *manual-labor system*, throughout their ministry.”<sup>30</sup>

Regarding the duty of continued improvement, Brantly chided the Presbyterians, who often boasted of their requirements of a classical education for ordination, that “very few of them can be termed *learned*. It is only here and there one that keeps pace with the Science and Literature of the age, and the remainder are usually contented with their collegiate attainments.”<sup>31</sup> Instead, Brantly exhorted:

It is the duty of every one who may be entrusted with the responsible office of teacher in the Lord’s house, to make the most of his talent; to seek as far as possible, all knowledge, and all tongues; to lay under contribution to his object every art and every science, and to avail himself of all aids which Providence may bring within his grasp.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, regarding the priority of ministerial education, Brantly explained:

Gratuitous education to *help* preachers, but not to *make* them, is an object of more importance than that of Missions, Tracts, Sabbath Schools, or any thing else. Much as we love these interests, we would postpone every one of these to education.<sup>33</sup>

In Brantly’s estimation, gratuitous funding ranked higher than building schools. When Kentucky announced that that \$50,000 had been raised unsolicited for the incorporation of a new college at Georgetown, Brantly reminded them, “It is not buildings, nor libraries, nor philosophical apparatus, nor even moneyed endowments that constitute a College,—but MEN.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Brantly himself not only promoted colleges, such as Columbian College in Washington, D.C., but also continued to advise churches to fund

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<sup>30</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Union of Labor and Study,” *CSCI*, 20 November 1830, p. 334; idem, “The Furman Academy,” *CSCI*, 13 November 1830, p. 317. For more on manual-labor schools, see Brantly, “Manual Labor and Education,” *CSCI*, 21 November 1829, p. 323; idem, “Efforts in South Carolina to Promote Education,” *CI*, 14 May 1831, p. 318; Robert Rittenhouse, “Study and Labor,” *CI*, 14 April 1832, p. 238; Baptist, “Education of Ministers,” 37; and Jarrett Burch, *Adiel Sherwood: Baptist Antebellum Pioneer in Georgia*, Baptists: History, Literature, Theology, Hymns (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 133-44.

<sup>31</sup>W. T. Brantly, “General Assembly,” *CSCI*, 29 May 1830, p. 348; see also Brantly, “Georgia Abused by Misrepresentation,” *CS*, 18 April 1829, p. 63.

<sup>32</sup>Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” 161. Regarding the excuse of busyness, see Brantly, “I Have No Time to Study!” *CI*, 9 June 1832, p. 361.

<sup>33</sup>Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” 161.

<sup>34</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Prospects for Education,” *CSCI*, 1 August 1829, p. 76.



fully their candidates for the ministry.<sup>35</sup> In keeping with this ideal, the Central Union Association established such a fund.<sup>36</sup> Even if funds could not be provided, Brantly advocated in-house education, citing how one Philadelphia minister set apart one hour each evening for several teens—mostly apprentices and hirelings—teaching them Latin and Greek for free.<sup>37</sup> Brantly himself did this (and could very well have been the minister cited), for as Dagg later reported, “Amidst his pastoral and editorial labors, he found time to meet and gratuitously instruct a class of young men whom he had selected from his church, as possessing talents that promised usefulness.”<sup>38</sup>

### **The Temperance Movement**

Of all the benevolent causes, the temperance movement perhaps impressed Brantly the most. He regarded the changes in drinking habits as “a momentous revolution in public opinion.” According to one Virginian, who was serving as the United States’ ambassador to France, the “best circles of society” now regarded using ardent spirits “vulgar and ungenteel.” Within the church, the change was no less momentous. Brantly reminisced and confessed, “Not many years have passed since the custom of loading tables with inebriating drink, was just as common as to load them with nourishing food. We have ourselves sat down at table with some dozen Ministers of the Gospel, among whom the wine was wont to circulate freely after the cloth was removed, without suspecting at the moment that there was the least impropriety in the thing.” By 1829, Brantly would have been “shocked at such a sight, and much more to be partaking

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<sup>35</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Education,” *CSCI*, 21 November 1829, p. 323. This article claims that South Carolina Baptists in 1755 were the first Americans “to set an example of liberality in the support and instruction of beneficiaries” (*ibid.*, 322).

For Brantly’s continued support of Columbian College, which he served as a trustee, see Brantly, “Columbian College,” *CS*, 9 June 1827, pp. 86-87; *idem*, “Columbian College,” *CSCI*, 1 August 1829, p. 76.

<sup>36</sup>William S. Hall, Letter to the Editor, *CI*, 25 August 1832, p. 141.

<sup>37</sup>Brantly, “Manual Labor and Education,” 324.

<sup>38</sup>J. L. Dagg, “William T. Brantly D. D.,” *CI*, 11 April 1845, n.p.

of such entertainment.”<sup>39</sup> That year, the Triennial Convention, meeting in Philadelphia, boasted for the first time of abstaining entirely from strong drink.<sup>40</sup> In 1834, the Committee on Temperance in the Central Union Association declared it

MORALLY WRONG IN ALL, BUT ESPECIALLY IN A PROFESSOR OF RELIGION, *to manufacture, vend, or use [intoxicating liquors] as a common article of luxury or living*; SINCE SUCH PRACTICE IS A MANIFEST VIOLATION OF THE SPIRIT OF THE BIBLE.

The Association resolved to “reclaim” the drinking sinners among them, or if that failed, not to let them remain.<sup>41</sup> At some point, First Church formed its own temperance society, and eventually adopted “the total abstinence principle to church membership.”<sup>42</sup> Truly, as Brantly stated in 1830, the temperance movement grew with “astonishing rapidity.”<sup>43</sup>

### Historical Background

The temperance movement owed its remarkable success in large part to revivalistic pastors of the Second Great Awakening.<sup>44</sup> The movement had begun in the

<sup>39</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Changes for the Better,” *CSCI*, 1 August 1829, p. 65; see also Brantly, “The Completion of 1830,” 25 December 1830, p. 402. Fellow Philadelphian minister, John L. Dagg, also testified to ministerial drinking. The ministers of the Philadelphia Association met every three months to hear a sermon, eat together, and offer helpful criticism. At such a meeting around 1825 or 1826, Dagg was “pained to see ardent spirits set out on the [host] pastor’s side-board, and the guests partaking freely” (John L. Dagg, *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg, D. D.*, 29, which forms an appendix of J. L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order*, vol. 2 of *Manual of Theology* [[Charleston, SC]: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990]).

<sup>40</sup>Abner W. Clopton, “Remarks on Wisdom’s Voice and the Temperance Question,” *CSCI*, 4 July 1829, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup>*Minutes of the Second Annual Session of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, held in the Meeting House of the Baptist Church at Lower Dublin, Philadelphia County, May 27, 28, 29, 1834* (Philadelphia: T. W. Ustick, 1834), 9.

<sup>42</sup>“Historical Sketch,” 11, in *Fiftieth, or Jubilee Anniversary*. First Baptist Church allegedly lagged behind the Association, recommending in 1836 that “no member use or traffic in ardent spirits and those who are engaged in the traffic discontinue the same as soon as it can be done without too great sacrifice on their part” (William Williams Keen, ed., *Bi-Centennial Celebration of the Founding of the First Baptist Church of the City of Philadelphia (1698-1898)* [Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899], 175, as quoted in Pendleton, “Influence,” 31). In 1838, the church “drafted a new by-law refusing to admit any new member who drank, manufactured, or sold intoxicating liquor” (Pendleton, “Influence,” 31-32).

<sup>43</sup>Brantly, “The Completion of 1830,” 402.

<sup>44</sup>This is the thesis of Othniel Alsop Pendleton, Jr., whose research furnished much of the following survey (see Pendleton, “Influence,” 24, 26, 43-45).

medical community during the final decades of the eighteenth century. Rum had been the main liquor of colonial days, until the reduction of trade during the Revolutionary War increased the output of domestic distilleries. The War itself only increased consumption. In the wake of the War, Dr. Benjamin Rush published his *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind* (1785), and then called on clergy to preach against using strong drink.<sup>45</sup> (Until then, only the Quakers had been strongly opposed to drinking.) Though resolutions were made, the use of strong drink only increased. One preacher recalled how in the fields “it was as customary to take the whiskey jug as it was to take the scythe [*sic*] or the rake. . . . Thursday was fixed as washing-day, and on that day a quart of cordial was regularly provided for the females to drink during the washing.”<sup>46</sup> The average annual consumption of spirits increased from about two and a half gallons in 1792 to seven and a half in 1823.<sup>47</sup> Despite appearances, the deciding lot had been cast. Rush’s gift of a thousand copies of his *Inquiry* to the Presbyterian General Assembly eventually produced both the “Society for the Reformation of Morals” (1812), which Lyman Beecher championed as an early influential leader for temperance, and the very influential “Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance” (1813), which later birthed the “American Society for the Promotion of Temperance,” better known as the American Temperance Society (1826). From that point on, medicine and evangelicalism united to fight alcohol.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>This appeal against not only the abuse, but also the use of strong drink appeared three years later in Rush’s *Address to the Ministers of the Gospel of Every Denomination in the United States, upon Subjects Interesting to Morals* (1788). Pendleton reports how Rush’s *Inquiry* enjoyed phenomenal success through 1850, due mainly to distribution by the American Tract Society (Pendleton, “Influence,” 17-18).

<sup>46</sup>This recollection is taken from an appendix in George Duffield, Jr., *Samson Shorn . . . The History of Spirituous Liquors in Pennsylvania* (1855), 37, as quoted in Pendleton, “Influence,” 15. In contrast to this habit, Brantly republished a report how farmers successfully experimented at harvesting without a drop of strong drink (W. T. Brantly, “Temperance,” *CSCI*, 5 September 1829, p. 156).

<sup>47</sup>Pendleton, “Influence,” 15.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 24, 29. Brantly asserted that the temperance movement probably owed its success to physicians more than to any other class of men, and that physicians did so disinterestedly, for curbing drinking hurt their business (W. T. Brantly, “Physicians,” *CI*, 7 May 1831, p. 293).

The temperance movement progressed in four stages. First, the early societies advocated moderation in all drinking, which had been the traditional position of colonial churches. The advent of the American Temperance Society and its remarkable success signaled a second stage—the total abstinence from all distilled liquors, which Brantly called either “ardent spirits” or “intoxicating liquors.” The understood exceptions were medicinal uses. This society sprouted hundreds of auxiliaries nationwide, including in July 1827 the so-called Pennsylvania Temperance Society, which Brantly served for a time as a vice-president.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, the American Temperance Society remained a loose-knit fellowship without a national structure. The first national temperance gathering took place in Philadelphia’s Independence Hall during late May 1833. Brantly opened the meeting with prayer. While the men unequivocally resolved that “the traffic in ardent spirits as a drink, and the use of it as such, are morally wrong, and ought to be abandoned throughout the world,” the convention speedily voted down a proposal for teetotalism, which condemned the use of fermented liquors, both vinous and malted. Brantly’s group, the Pennsylvania Temperance Society, in 1831 had become the first state society to advocate teetotalism.<sup>50</sup> Brantly himself had published one of the first teetotalism addresses, *Total Abstinence from All Intoxicating Liquors the Only Safe-Guard*.<sup>51</sup> Teetotalism did not gain favor nationally until the second national convention, held at Saratoga Springs, New York in 1836, when the American Temperance Union was formed. That year marks the third stage—teetotalism. The fourth stage—the push for

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<sup>49</sup>Pendleton calls this society by several different names, in part due to an official name change in 1834 (“Influence,” 31, 32, 35).

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>51</sup>W. T. Brantly, *Total Abstinence from All Intoxicating Liquors the Only Safe-Guard* (Philadelphia: P. J. Gray, 1833). Brantly delivered this address on 8 May 1833, perhaps before the Pennsylvania Temperance Society.

prohibition—began in the 1840s and crested with some legislation in the early 1850s, with Maine taking the lead.<sup>52</sup>

Even though the temperance movement owed much of its success to evangelical preachers, patriotism formed the base of the movement more than Gospel principles. In light of the tyranny of drunkenness, Brantly called the friends of temperance “a band of Christian patriots,” and a group “laboring to become the *second founders* of American liberty.” They alone celebrated the Fourth of July consistently, in contrast to those shouting “the plaudits of freedom, from lungs inflamed with strong drink.”<sup>53</sup> To emphasize this consistency, evangelical preachers often gave temperance orations on the Fourth. Examples in Philadelphia included Presbyterian minister Albert Barnes in 1835, and Episcopalian minister Stephen H. Tyng in 1838.<sup>54</sup> These efforts display the distinctive traits of the temperance movement in the mid-1830s: male leadership, especially preachers; evangelical predominance, which one researcher has identified as “the ‘revived’ Protestant denominations;” the preference for “moral suasion” and voluntary enlistment over coercive legislation; and a clearly defined grand objective—to labor “till the manufacture, the sale and the use of ardent spirit, that ruinous

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<sup>52</sup>See Pendleton, “Influence,” 43; and Robert G. Torbet, *A Social History of the Philadelphia Baptist Association: 1707-1940* (Philadelphia: Westbrook Publishing, 1945), 81. For a contemporary account of the history of the temperance movement, see the American Temperance Society’s fourth and fifth reports, each of which were written to become a “*permanent document*,” rather than simply an annual report (American Temperance Society, “Periodical Circular,” *CI*, 22 December 1832, p. 389).

<sup>53</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Fourth of July,” *CSCI*, 4 July 1829, pp. 11-12. The Fourth of July had become a high holiday for strong drink. By 1832, change was under way. The *Religious Telegraph*, of Richmond, Virginia, reported how one boy in Scottsville had visited twelve or thirteen stores in search of whiskey, but went home with an empty jug (“Where Will These Things End?” *CI*, 28 July 1832, p. 60).

Brantly himself did not like to concede that temperance was primarily an American phenomenon. When an English immigrant complained of American temperance societies, and opined that drunkenness was not as extensive in England or as injurious as Americans claimed, Brantly relentlessly pressed home to this subscriber almost every notice he subsequently found of temperance societies in England (W. T. Brantly, “Mischiefs of Temperance Societies,” *CI*, 20 August 1831, p. 125; idem, “Temperance Societies in Great Britain,” *CI*, 27 August 1831, p. 143; and idem, “London Temperance Society,” *CI*, 17 September 1831, p. 184).

<sup>54</sup>The orations were entitled “The Connexion of Temperance with Republican Freedom” (Barnes), and “Temperance and the American Revolution” (Tyng). For more on these customary celebrations, see Pendleton, “Influence,” 34, 40. For a Georgia Fourth of July address, see “Extract from an Address Delivered by David S. White, Esq. Before the Temperance Societies of Elbert Co. Georgia, Convened at Elberton, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1832,” *CI*, 6 April 1833, pp. 214-16.

and destructive poison, as a drink, shall have universally and entirely ceased.”<sup>55</sup> In American parlance, the object remained “the emancipation of the ministry—the church—a nation—from the heaviest yoke ever *voluntarily* worn by a people *called* free.” In defining the object this way, Abner W. Clopton, Brantly’s Baptist friend from Virginia, summoned his brethren, “Fear not the Anakims—the Lord Jehovah is on our side.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Brantly’s Involvement**

Brantly zealously devoted himself to the cause of temperance, eventually becoming “a popular figure at temperance gatherings.”<sup>57</sup> In May 1833 alone, he oversaw the publication of his address to the state society, and later opened the national meeting in prayer. Under Brantly’s leadership, the *Index* almost doubled as a temperance magazine. Essays and notices periodically appeared. Reports from auxiliary societies were dutifully reprinted. Even an allegory entitled “The Marvellous Doings of Prince Alcohol” appeared in serial form, which Brantly later printed as a tract at his own risk.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the most interesting articles involve a debate among Georgia Baptists, which Brantly finally ceased to print, saying that he aimed “to point at higher arguments than those which may be found in the spunky employment of *accusing* or of *excusing one*

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<sup>55</sup>Pendleton, “Influence,” 45; “Circular of the American Temperance Society,” *CIBM*, 12 October 1833, p. 55. The American Temperance Society officially endorsed “moral suasion” (see Pendleton, “Influence,” 27).

<sup>56</sup>Clopton, “Remarks on Wisdom’s Voice and the Temperance Question,” 12. On Clopton’s conversion to temperance views and subsequent influence in the South, see Burch, *Sherwood*, 36-40. Brantly later mourned the loss of his friend, who had died at age fifty on 20 March 1833 (W. T. Brantly, “An Afflictive Event,” *CI*, 30 March 1833, p. 206; cf. Amicus, “Letter to the Editor from Charlotte County, Virginia, on 26 March 1833,” *CI*, 13 April 1833, p. 228; Brantly, “The Death of the Righteous,” *CI*, 27 April 1833, p. 268).

<sup>57</sup>Pendleton, “Influence,” 31.

<sup>58</sup>Brantly ran more than one of these types of allegories, and agreed that they would make good tracts, since many would read them “who would never look into more grave and didactic discussions” (W. T. Brantly, “Correspondents,” *CI*, 15 January 1831, p. 48). Brantly told one critic, “The staple of allegorical machinery which pervades them, is generally natural and proper, whilst the biting sarcasm, and acrimonious irony seem to us, not unsuitable weapons for such an enemy” (idem, “Strictures,” *CSCI*, 6 November 1830, p. 302). When Brantly printed the tract “at considerable expense,” he was disappointed, for contrary to the original “solicitation of many,” few called for them (idem, “The Anti-Alcohol Pamphlet,” *CI*, 10 December 1831, p. 382).

another.”<sup>59</sup> When later requested to print articles against temperance societies, in an effort to present both sides, Brantly responded that he would, if mischief in temperance societies were possible; but “verily,” he confessed, “we cannot see the possibility of evil in the Temperance Society.”<sup>60</sup>

Brantly advocated teetotalism, which, as stated earlier, anticipated the national movement by several years. Contrary to the *Journal of Humanity*, the organ for the American Temperance Society, Brantly saw no difference between the alcohol of distillation and that of fermentation, whether in wine or malted grains.<sup>61</sup> His stance provoked many objections. First, no creation of God should be rejected (cf. 1 Tim 4:4). Brantly replied that intoxicating drink came not from the hand of God, but from the art of man. No fruit in its natural state could intoxicate. Even the miracle at Cana proved nothing, for the wine there may not have been intoxicating; and even if it had been, the specifics of Jesus’ miracles established no moral precedent.<sup>62</sup> Second, good came from strong drink. Brantly acceded the medicinal use of spirits, likening them to poisons such as calomel and arsenic, but denied all other claims. Since many drinkers and most drunkards did not love the taste of strong drink, but only “the train of emotions and spirits which are excited by it,” then moderation was highly unlikely, “because one indulgence carries another with it.” Total abstinence was the only cure.<sup>63</sup> Third, godly men had used

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<sup>59</sup>Brantly wrote this in response to Jesse Mercer, Letter to the Editor, *CSCI*, 19 September 1829, pp. 188-89.

<sup>60</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Pro and Con,” *CI*, 28 April 1832, p. 263; see also Brantly, “Mischief of Temperance Societies,” *CI*, 20 August 1831, p. 125; idem, “Moderate Drinking and Temperance Societies,” *CI*, 10 September 1831, p. 174). In 1829, Brantly had challenged his opponents to give “one good reason” either against total abstinence, or in favor of rum and whiskey (idem, “Temperance Societies Admonished,” *CSCI*, 11 July 1829, pp. 29-30).

<sup>61</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Alcohol Different from Alcohol,” *CI*, 6 August 1831, p. 93.

<sup>62</sup>Brantly, “Mischief of Temperance Societies,” 125; idem, “Moderate Drinking and Temperance Societies,” 174. Brantly seems to have solicited a professor of chemistry and pharmacy to communicate an article on alcohol as “a product of art,” rather than “a good creature of God” (“The Origin of Alcohol,” *CI*, 26 May 1832, pp. 325-26).

<sup>63</sup>Brantly, “Mischief of Temperance Societies,” 125; Brantly’s response to Mercer, Letter to the Editor, 188-89; and Brantly, *Total Abstinence*, 15. Brantly considered teaching dram-drinkers to partake temperately amusing. In his opinion, it had been already tried for fifty years, with the result that

spirits moderately their whole lives, but saw and received no harm. To this, Brantly responded that good men are not infallible, and that the number of catastrophes far outnumbered those who had escaped. Exceptions did not disprove the rule.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, the only safe course was total abstinence. As he told one objector, “It is a truth clear, and incapable of refutation, that *temperance* in drinking always precedes INTEMPERANCE.” Therefore, shut the trap door, and one is sure to avoid a fall.<sup>65</sup>

Positively, Brantly preached teetotalism not only as the safe course, but also as one’s duty. He would not admit the cavil that abuse did not forbid use. On the one hand, the word of God forbids entering into temptation, and declares that it is better to pluck out an eye than to be ensnared in any sin. The word of God also forbids causing strife and corruption through lawful things, and partaking in the sins of others.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, wisdom forbids the cup. “Of the two sides to any question,” Brantly contended, “wisdom selects the *safest*.”<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, by extension, the sale of alcohol was also forbidden, for, as Brantly reasoned, “if it be my duty to abstain totally, it is sin in my brother to offer it to me.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore, duty forbade both the use and traffic of all intoxicating liquors.

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“thousands have been made drunkards, vagabonds and felons.” In contrast, total abstinence was “the enlightened decision of more than 300,000 American citizens” (W. T. Brantly, “A Temperance Society of a New Order,” *CI*, 6 August 1831, pp. 89-90).

For alcohol as poison, see also Burch, *Adiel Sherwood*, 43. By “poison,” Brantly seems to have referred to the insatiable nature of illicit substances. One circular letter, addressed to the head of each family in America, explained, “Unlike the appetites which God gave for water, for bread, and for nourishing food and drinks, appetites which may be gratified daily, and yet will not increase in their demands, [alcohol] cries, continually, ‘Give, give’” (“Ardent Spirit,” *CI*, 28 April 1832, p. 263, which alludes to the leech of Prov 30:15).

<sup>64</sup>Brantly, *Total Abstinence*, 14, 12.

<sup>65</sup>Brantly, “Mischief of Temperance Societies,” 125; see also Brantly, “Temperance Societies Admonished,” 29.

<sup>66</sup>Brantly, “Mischief of Temperance Societies,” 125. At the end of his “temperance” address, Brantly argued for insisting upon total abstinence, reasoning, “I assume here that the use of intoxicating liquor exposes many to sin. If this be true, then the liberty to sin should not be reserved to any. I have no right to reserve to myself the liberty of sinning. I *should* endeavor to avoid it, and never to join in the way of it” (*idem*, *Total Abstinence*, 14, italics added).

<sup>67</sup>Brantly, “Moderate Drinking and Temperance Societies,” 174.

<sup>68</sup>Brantly, *Total Abstinence*, 15; see also Brantly, “Can Christians Consistently Become Retailers of Ardent Spirits?” *CSCI*, 7 August 1830, p. 92.



In arguing these points, Brantly received perhaps his greatest conquest, in what has become the most famous incident of his life. In 1829, Georgia Baptists were upset over the tone of some of Brantly's correspondents. For instance, one correspondent alleged that temperance societies would eventually find favor among Baptists "except where individuals are fatally wedded to their bottles." This intemperate speech burned the Georgians, and smacked of inconsistency for a self-avowed "temperate" man. One Georgian likened the correspondent to "the Indian's tree," which stands "so straight that they rather lean over."<sup>69</sup> It was during this time that Jesse Mercer came forward, explaining through the *Index* why he had not become a member of a temperance society. Grieved that his example had been arming the enemy, Mercer decried intemperance and "the tipping shops," which since his early conversion days he had "ever avoided . . . as *the snares of death*." He had not joined a temperance society for two reasons: first, he remained unconvinced that "the *use* of spirits is *in itself* a sin;" and second, he himself regularly used Cogniac brandy for the sake of his intestines. In response, Brantly expressed his high esteem for his elder colleague, and confessed that he "might be almost tempted to pick up, and preserve, the very errors which he *lets fall*." But this time, Brantly asserted, Mercer had "dropt from the rear wallet, more of this commodity than we can honestly pocket." He granted Mercer the right for medicine, but reminded him of the power of example:

I have a good vessel and steerage, and am an expert sailor, and can therefore cruise about in *Brandy Bay* without being drawn into the whirlpool of intemperance, but some of my less skilful neighbors, seeing me sail so pleasantly, may be tempted to go a pleasuring upon the same deceitful Bay and may be lost. If my example, encouraged them to the venture, I should have cause of regret.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Brantly, "Temperance Societies Admonished," 29. Elisha Battle, another Georgia minister and member of a temperance society, planned to quit advocating the temperance societies until these "temperance brethren will exercise as much charity and good feeling toward those whom they call 'wedded to their bottles,' as I think a Christian, temperate in all things should" (Letter to the Editor, *CSCI*, 19 September 1829, p. 188).

<sup>70</sup>Brantly wrote this in response to Mercer, Letter to the Editor, 188-89.

Mercer became convinced, giving up all use of ardent spirits and eventually publishing a temperance journal in 1834.<sup>71</sup>

In assessing Brantly's involvement in temperance, two issues must be considered—salvation and the church. Regarding the former, what is the use of “reforming a drunkard” without saving his soul? Was there not a risk in thereby making a proud hypocrite? One Puritan writer, familiar to Brantly, warned preachers:

It is their duty to plead with men about their sins, to lay load upon particular sins, but always remember that it be done with that which is the proper end of law and gospel;—that is, that they make use of the sin they speak against to the discovery of the state and condition wherein the sinner is; otherwise, haply, they may work men to formality and hypocrisy, but little of the true end of preaching the gospel will be brought about. It will not avail to beat a man off from his drunkenness into a sober formality.<sup>72</sup>

This possibility of reformation without salvation has implications for American religious history at large. If reforming one man's behavior without the Gospel could produce a hypocrite, what would be the result of reforming a whole society? The benevolent societies of the Second Great Awakening laid the groundwork for the social “gospel” of the twentieth century, which disparaged traditional salvation, but hailed the success of temperance doctrines as “the breaking down of the social authority of a great evil,” namely, alcoholism.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>For more information on Mercer's change of mind, including the famous quote on Brandy Bay, see Charles Dutton Mallary, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer* (New York: John Gray, 1844), 223-35. On this incident and the Georgia temperance movement in general, including its founder, see Burch, *Sherwood*, 32-48.

<sup>72</sup>John Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *The Works of John Owen [Works]*, ed. William H. Gould (London: Johnstone & Hunter, 1852; reprint, Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 6:38-39; cf. the summary of Clement Read, *Reasons for Not Joining the Temperance Society* (1838), in Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 141-43. Brantly once printed a review from the *Presbyterian Review* on John Owen (“Preachers of Former Times,” *CI*, 13 April 1833, pp. 231-32).

<sup>73</sup>Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Library of Theological Ethics (New York: Macmillan, 1917; reprint, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 64. This chief spokesman for the social gospel, claimed that the “individualistic gospel” had failed to give “an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of the social order and its share in the sins of all individuals within it.” In contrast, he claimed, “The social gospel seeks to bring men under repentance for their collective sins” and to evoke “faith in the will and power of God to redeem the permanent institutions of human society from

Sometimes Brantly seems to have attempted reformation without salvation. He was not adverse to non-evangelistic appeals based on getting a job or on the power of example to achieve “entire reformation” in others.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, during one visit in the South, Brantly had stayed at a house where several men drank the night away in “horrid obstreperousness” to Brantly’s sleepless dismay. In the morning, Brantly approached one of the men and “attempted to remonstrate against his habits, and point out their evil tendencies.” The man responded with a story about two friends of his, who, after drinking all the liquor in the house, found a small decanter of spirits used to preserve a snake. The men downed the spirits and left the snake “*high and dry*.” “Now, sir,” the man concluded, “if the love of liquor will cause man to drink such a draft as this, how can you think that your talk will do me any good?”<sup>75</sup> Defeated, Brantly left speechless. Even if he had succeeded, how would his words have done the man’s soul everlasting good?

Brantly never seems to have set temperance in opposition to the Gospel. His temperance address, for example, discusses whether using ardent spirits is “consistent with Christian morality.” Even though Brantly seems to have assumed a Christian audience, his address lacks evangelical reasons for obedience, such as gratitude for the cross or union with Christ. It smacks of moralism, aiming at nothing higher than the eradication of one vice—drinking spirits, which is condemned on the visible evidence

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their inherited guilt of oppression and extortion.” In short, the social gospel sought “the salvation of nations” (ibid., 5-6).

The organic link between the early benevolent societies and the later social gospel would make interesting research. In the 1950s, revival historian, Timothy L. Smith, offered a seminal “evangelical explanation of the origins of the social gospel.” He argued that after 1842, “the quest for perfection joined with compassion for poor and needy sinners and a rebirth of millennial expectation to make popular Protestantism a might social force long before the slavery conflict erupted.” In other words, evangelists “helped prepare the way both in theory and in practice for what later became known as the social gospel” (Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* [New York: Abingdon Press, 1957; reprinted with new afterword, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980], 149, 8). Brantly’s millennial hopes and societal aspirations suggest that the origins of the social gospel reach back before 1842.

<sup>74</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Elberton, Ga. Temperance Society,” *CSCI*, 25 September 1830, p. 207; and idem, “How to Reform Drunkards,” *CI*, 1 June 1833, p. 345, which reprinted three anecdotes from the American Temperance Society.

<sup>75</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Snake and the Bottle,” *CI*, 7 May 1831, p. 293.

within “the drunkard’s habitation, the abode of misery and wretchedness—trembling and bleeding from brutal violence.” Brantly finished by appealing to young men, “Oh, keep away from the awful precipice. . . . Cease to do evil—learn to do well.”<sup>76</sup> The address, therefore, illustrates that Brantly really did believe that Christian and non-Christian share the same standard of morality.<sup>77</sup> Temperance was a question of morality.<sup>78</sup>

Since Brantly himself gave no explicit harmony of moralism and evangelism, conjecture is necessary. Several factors in Brantly’s ministry should be noted. First, Brantly often spoke of his message as being broader than the Gospel. This breadth is well illustrated by the full name of his weekly paper: *The Christian Index, a Religious and Moral Miscellany, Devoted to the Diffusion of Truth and Piety*. Brantly gave the temperance address because the consciences of many in every community had “not yet become enlightened to this matter,” and so they had “not yet yielded to the force of truth, to the claims and considerations of duty and righteousness.”<sup>79</sup> Second, Brantly knew by experience that drunkenness affected the progress of the Gospel. Negatively, Brantly once recounted a spontaneous preaching service in Warrenton, Georgia, in 1825:

The service was begun with singing and prayer, and the text had been announced, when a company of drunken fellows, yelling like savages, and blowing a trumpet, surrounded the house, and continued their profane vociferations till they succeeded in breaking up the meeting. The people went home without a sermon. The officers of the peace, who were present at the attempted meeting, and who would gladly have restored quiet, were afraid to interfere, lest a mob should be the consequence.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Brantly, *Total Abstinence*, 14, 16.

<sup>77</sup>All specifically Christian duties, such as baptism and the Lord’s Table, applied to non-Christians indirectly, in that they were obliged to repent and believe, bringing with them subsequent duties. See W. T. Brantly, “Do more duties rest upon christians, than upon those who make no pretensions to the christian name and character?” *CSCI*, 8 May 1830, p. 301; cf. Theophilus, “On the Duties to Be Enforced on the Unconverted,” *ABM* 3 (September 1822): 407-10.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. Brantly, “Alcohol Different from Alcohol,” 93.

<sup>79</sup>Brantly, *Total Abstinence*, 6.

<sup>80</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Morality and Temperance,” *CS*, 5 September 1829, p. 155; cf. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, 138-39. By this time, news had reached Brantly that a revival had completely changed the temper of the town.

On a simpler lever, those who waste money on liquor could purchase religious literature instead (idem, “Temperance Post Office,” *CSCI*, 5 June 1830, p. 367).

Positively, Brantly reported a sermon delivered by Ka-ne-kuck, a Kickapoo chief, who, having reformed of his earlier intemperance, now preached the Gospel to his tribe. Because of his influence, all of his tribe (around two hundred) and about one hundred Potawatamies had left the bottle completely.<sup>81</sup> Third, Brantly included opposition to all vice within the church's mission. Legislators may act as they are able, but "the interference of churches" should leave no vice alone, but pass "general sentence against all vice and criminality."<sup>82</sup> Like Holcombe before him, Brantly himself opposed a gamut of vices, such as theatre, dueling, betting, and novels.<sup>83</sup> Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Brantly often emphasized the extent of the violence issuing from drinking spirits. When reporting how two drunk Kentuckians fought over a penknife, with one beating the brains out of the other, Brantly asked, "Which is the most rational feasible plan for preventing such bloody and fatal acts as that just recorded?" Was it "moral discussion" on "moral temperance," or abstinence from ardent spirits, which destroy "the feeling and consciousness of moral responsibility?"<sup>84</sup> Simple Christian compassion seems to have moved Brantly to advise the easiest solution—remove the catalyst, and reduce the violence. Who could argue that such "reformation" was not good in itself?

If Brantly seems to have justified temperance reformation as an immediate good, how did Brantly square a temperance society with the church? Again, it must be

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<sup>81</sup>W. T. Brantly, "An Indian's Mission," *CI*, 10 September 1831, p. 168.

<sup>82</sup>Brantly, *Total Abstinence*, 13.

<sup>83</sup>For these vices, see W. T. Brantly, "Theatre," *CSCI*, 19 September 1829, p. 187; and introductions to the following articles: "Betting," *CSCI*, 3 October 1829, pp. 212-13; "The Theatre," *CSCI*, 31 October 1829, pp. 286-87; "The Mysteries of Duelling," *CSCI*, 28 November 1829, p. 351; "The Late Duel," *CSCI*, 10 April 1830, pp. 238-39; "Magnanimous Enormities," *CSCI*, 28 August 1830, p. 139, which is on novels; and "Fatal Duel," *CI*, 14 January 1832, pp. 20-21. On Holcombe's strong moral crusades in Savannah and subsequent threat to his life, see William 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 Historical Introduction*, vol. 6 of *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865), 217.

<sup>84</sup>W. T. Brantly, "A Quarrel and Its Mode of Adjustment," *CI*, 7 January 1832, p. 11; cf. "A Maniac," *CI*, 8 June 1833, p. 368, which reports how one maniac on rum stabbed four people in Williamsburg, Pennsylvania before being subdued. Using today's language, Brantly treated liquor as the modern church treats drugs.

noted that temperance societies were secular institutions with heavy Christian involvement. Brantly recognized that temperance societies were “composed . . . of men of all churches, and of no churches.”<sup>85</sup> This composition repulsed many Baptists. One Georgia correspondent testified:

I find many of my brethren who think it rather degrading to a Baptist to join himself to a society of this kind. They are of opinion that every religious society is a temperance society, and are therefore desirous that the religion of Christ should have all the credit for making people temperate.

Brantly could not understand this reasoning. He practically scoffed, “Is it ‘degrading to Baptists’ to deprive themselves of the liberty of sinning?”<sup>86</sup> He reasoned that if a lake near a city were infecting the atmosphere with “pestilence and death,” would not all the citizens unite to drain the lake? Brantly jabbed, “What would be thought of those who should say, We belong to a Christian society, and are earnestly engaged in praying against this calamity, it will therefore be a degradation to us to unite in this *working* scheme?” To him, the whole issue resolved into the question: “Should christians unite with others in the expulsion of pestilence, in ridding society of an enemy which sits preying upon its vitals, in resisting an evil which not only kills the body, but is instrumental in killing the soul?”<sup>87</sup> On this issue, Brantly saw two parties—on the one side, “those who love virtue” and try to keep the use of strong drink in check; on the other side, “many individuals whose consciences have not yet become enlightened.”<sup>88</sup> Again, as with the tension between reformation and salvation, Brantly saw no tension between the church and temperance societies. How could he maintain such a stance?

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<sup>85</sup>Brantly, “Temperance Societies and the Methodists,” 219. See also the comments by “Mr. Rice” (Luther?) of Washington, DC, at the 1833 national convention (“Temperance Convention,” *CI*, 1 June 1833, p. 339; cf. “National Temperance Meeting,” *CI*, 4 February 1832, pp. 69-71).

<sup>86</sup>Brantly, “Temperance Societies Admonished,” 29.

<sup>87</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Christian Prudence,” *CSCI*, 17 October 1829, p. 251.

<sup>88</sup>Brantly, *Total Abstinence*, 6.

The best answer to this question comes from Brantly's view of the Kingdom of God. From the earlier quotes, it is apparent that Brantly and his cohorts sought not simply to rescue individuals from strong drink, but society as a whole. At the very least, patriotic love for country demanded the effort. But more than that, Christians were motivated by the Kingdom of God. Since the Kingdom involved the salvation of earthly nations, the mission of the church and the salvation of society coincided. Hence, even Adoniram Judson, the Baptist pioneer missionary of the Gospel, could speak in terms of temperance societies "rescuing a nation from the brink of destruction."<sup>89</sup> In addition, this social and patriotic duty did not mean that temperance societies were political. Brantly, as a Baptist, could work through temperance societies and still adhere to the traditional Baptist stance of non-interference with politics, because temperance societies advocated "moral suasion" only (at least before the 1840s).<sup>90</sup> In a sense, the temperance movement paralleled the revivals, using many of the same techniques as the "new measures," such as using a pledge card instead of an anxious seat.<sup>91</sup> Brantly certainly conceived of temperance and revival as one mighty movement of the Kingdom of God. He included among the signs of a healthy church in the South "the increasing respect among

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<sup>89</sup>Judson, "Letter to Female Members," 317. The "Fifth Report of the American Temperance Society" reported how one octogenarian, upon reading the constitution of a temperance society, said, "That is the thing to save our country; I will join it" ("Temperance Anecdotes," *CI*, 5 January 1833, p. 9).

<sup>90</sup>For the official stance of the American Temperance Society, see Pendleton, "Influence," 27. Baptist historian Robert G. Torbet has illustrated the Baptist principle of "non-interference in politics" with the issue of Sabbath-breaking. Though Baptists, like other Protestants, had vehemently opposed Sabbath-breaking, they were slow to join societies for Sabbath observance, apparently (supposed Torbet) due to the non-interference principle. Brantly and fellow-Southerner John L. Dagg were exceptions, freely participating in an auxiliary society to the General Union for Sabbath Observation. The society enjoyed success in asking steamboat companies to desist running between New York and Baltimore on Sundays. However, when Baptists were urged to ask Congress to stop running mail on Sundays, Brantly strongly demurred: "Ask not the Legislature to interpose its puny arm to hold up the ark of God. . . . Lean not upon such a staff, for it will break and pierce through your hand" (alluding to Isa 36:6). See Torbet, *Social History*, 168-69; cf. W. T. Brantly, "The Sabbath Day," *CSCI*, 31 October 1829, pp. 282-84; idem, "Reprehensible," *CSCI*, 22 May 1830, p. 332; Richard R. John, "Taking Sabbatarianism Seriously: The Postal System, the Sabbath, and the Transformation of American Political Culture," *Journal of the Early Republic* 10 (Winter 1990): 517-67.

<sup>91</sup>Brantly defended public pledges in his 1833 address (Brantly, *Total Abstinence*, 14-15). On the mutual influence of revivalism and temperance, see "Anxious Seats," *CI*, 20 April 1833, p. 251; Schlossberg, *Silent Revolution*, 306; and Foster, *Errand of Mercy*, 167-68. Hence, one Georgia Baptist called temperance societies "new measures" (Brantly, "Temperance Societies Admonished," 29).

Christians, to Missionary and Temperance doctrines.”<sup>92</sup> The wise course for reforming America was to unite; its hope of success, the Kingdom of God.

### Conclusion

The benevolent societies expressed in concrete form Brantly’s personal mission of uniting Christians for useful action. The two examples explored above—ministerial education and temperance societies—showed the American nature of these endeavors. The first showed signs of populism; the latter, patriotism. Underneath lay the larger motives of ushering in the Kingdom of God. The two aims cohered because of Brantly’s postmillennialism—God planned to save the nations, including America. In addition, the benevolent societies also pointed to Brantly’s status as an American evangelical. The next two chapters will explore this theme, especially in light of Brantly’s steadfast commitment to the Baptist cause. Understanding Brantly’s conception and practice of evangelical unity will round out the picture of his personal mission, leading to a greater understanding of his position in the Bible controversy of 1837.

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<sup>92</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Always Abounding in the Work of the Lord,” *CI*, 25 August 1832, p. 115; see also Brantly, “Correspondents,” 48.



## CHAPTER 9

### BRANTLY AS A BAPTIST

William T. Brantly was both an American evangelical and a Baptist. His evangelical traits included his beliefs about Scripture, new birth, and the Kingdom of God, as well as his commitment to revivalism and social reform.<sup>1</sup> His Baptist colors shone bright through denominational concerns such as the *Christian Index*, tracts, and foreign missions; but none shone brighter, than his adherence to close communion, which barred other evangelicals from Baptist observances of the Lord's Table. From this odd mix, two questions arise. First, how did Brantly consistently maintain both his evangelical and Baptist convictions? Second, which identity ranked first in his own mind? Was he an evangelical Baptist or a Baptist evangelical? To answer these questions, one must explore the dimensions of Brantly's concept of evangelical unity. Specifically, true evangelical unity possesses three elements: a denominational identity, a doctrinal boundary, and active benevolence. The present chapter will examine the first of these traits, showing how Brantly's motives and manners as a denominational leader and apologist expressed his evangelical commitments. The next chapter will examine the

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<sup>1</sup>For definitions of evangelicalism, see D. G. Hart, ed., *Reckoning with the Past: Historical Essays on American Evangelicalism from the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 18-19; William G. McLoughlin, "Introduction," in *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900: An Anthology* (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 12; Grant Wacker, *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 17, as quoted in George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 125; and George Marsden, "Contemporary American Evangelicalism," in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 30. For a description of British evangelicalism in Brantly's day, see Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 286, 292-309.

For a great example of the interconnection between postmillennial hopes, missions giving, total abstinence, theological belittling of so-called antinomian fears of Arminianism, and pride in the unique "simple charities" of the age, see One of the Working Men, "Why All This Disturbance?" *CI*, 3 November 1832, pp. 274-75. The vocabulary used suggests that Brantly wrote this satirical piece.

final two traits, seeking to understand which identity ranked first in Brantly's mind—Baptist or evangelical.

### Denominational Leader

On the surface, Protestant diversity appears to contradict evangelical unity, for how could evangelicals be united, when they worshipped in separate houses? Americans solved this paradox by speaking of Christians worshipping under different names, called “denominations.” This idea appealed to democratic Americans, who valued religious toleration in light of Old World bloodshed.<sup>2</sup> Baptists shared this idea, and for a long time considered themselves an evangelical denomination. For example, the *Baptist Manual* (1835), published under Brantly's leadership, introduced Baptists as follows:

Agreeing with the great body of evangelical Christians of other denominations, in the fundamental principles of doctrinal belief, the Baptists yet differ from many of them in their views of church order; and in one important respect, that of Christian Baptism—they differ from them all.<sup>3</sup>

Two features here deserve notice. First, evangelical denominations agreed on the fundamentals, so their differences did not concern heresy. Later on, the *Manual* identifies belief in *sola scriptura* as the ground of this unity.<sup>4</sup> Second, Baptists considered baptism as their chief reason for separate existence as a denomination. This fact will become important later in discussing close communion.

Brantly took up national leadership in three denominational arenas—editing, publishing, and foreign missions. This chapter will consider only the first two, paying

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<sup>2</sup>Justo L. González, *The Reformation to the Present Day*, vol. 2 of *The Story of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 242; cf. Unity, “On the Union of Different Denominations,” *CI*, 23 July 1831, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>*The Baptist Manual: A Selection from the Series of Publications of the Baptist General Tract Society, Designed for the Use of Families; and As an Exposition of the Distinguishing Sentiments of the Denomination* (Philadelphia: Baptist General Tract Society, 1835), 3. Brantly may have written this preface, for it resembles his style.

<sup>4</sup>The *Manual* testifies, “[Baptists] believe, with their Protestant brethren of every name, that the Bible is a sufficient, and the *only* rule of faith and practice” (*Baptist Manual*, 4).

close attention to Brantly's words about other denominations.<sup>5</sup> In each, Brantly sought to square his leadership as a Baptist with his convictions of evangelical unity.

### *The Christian Index*

In June 1827, shortly after settling in Philadelphia, William T. Brantly took over the faltering Baptist weekly, *The Columbian Star*. First published on 2 February 1822, the *Star* was the one of the oldest continuous religious weeklies in the nation, ranking among Baptists alongside *The Christian Watchman* of Boston (1819-), *The Christian Secretary* of Connecticut (1822-), and *The Baptist Register* of New York state (1823-).<sup>6</sup> In starting the paper, Luther Rice and the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions had desired a more frequent and broader outlet for the Board's varied concerns than their monthly journal, *The Latter Day Luminary*, which broadcast news of foreign missions alone and whose mission was eventually nullified by the *Star*. From the first issue, the *Star* sought mainly to report religious news, especially of missions, and to inculcate sound doctrine and morals. In addition, the *Columbian Star* also promoted callow Columbian College. From 1822 to 1825, the weekly flourished, surpassing a thousand subscriptions under the editorship of James D. Knowles; but in 1826, Baron Stow assumed the editorship and started publishing accusations against Luther Rice. After Rice repeatedly pleaded with Stow's pastor, Obadiah B. Brown, to deal with Stow, Rice apparently claimed the *Star*'s equipment as his own, leading to two separate issues of the *Star* on 30 September and 7 October 1826—one by Stow, the other by Rice. The Board eventually stepped in, announcing on 2 December 1826 its full ownership of the paper,

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<sup>5</sup>Brantly's views on Baptist missions in light of evangelical unity may be inferred from W. T. Brantly, "Presbyterian Generosity," *CSCI*, 22 May 1830, p. 321; idem, "The Venerable Carey," *CSCI*, 3 July 1830, p. 9; idem, "A Concise View of the Baptist Mission in Burmah," *CSCI*, 16 October 1830, p. 251; idem, "What Should Be Thought of a Baptist Mission to Germany?" *CI*, 7 April 1832, p. 209; and idem, "New Publications," *CI*, 22 June 1833, pp. 398-99.

<sup>6</sup>R. E. E. Harkness, "The Evolution of a Great Baptist Newspaper," *The Chronicle* 17 (October 1954): 207, 208; cf. "Review of Baptist Periodical Literature in the U. States," *Baptist Memorial* 1 (January 1842): 24-26. In 1825, the *Register* had purchased the older *Baptist Western Magazine*, started around 1814 (Harkness, "Evolution," 208).

and leaving Stow as editor.<sup>7</sup> Many of the *Star*'s supporters began desiring a transfer of publication to Philadelphia, and so "inquired" of possible candidates there for editor.<sup>8</sup> On 9 June 1827, presumably after some agreement with the Board, W. T. Brantly replaced both Baron Stow as editor and the Convention as owner, thereafter giving the *Star* "a stature and respect it had not known before."<sup>9</sup>

Setting the wishes of others aside, Brantly himself had a strong personal interest in the *Star*. When he assumed editorship, he denied that the search for a new editor in Philadelphia had placed any constraint on his free choice. Instead, he had "been influenced wholly by the dictates of his own mind," desiring simply to "be useful," under the "impression" that this mode suited him.<sup>10</sup> For over six years, Brantly persevered against fickle subscribers, unreliable mail service, and uninsured finances. Regarding subscribers, some readers shunned anything amusing or sought only to confirm their prejudices, liking "every vessel with a handle only on one side," while others expected Delphic wisdom, or novel fascinations.<sup>11</sup> One brother even complained of not finding the price of cotton!<sup>12</sup> Regarding irregularities in the mail service, Brantly felt the *Index* received more than the usual share. After receiving several complaints of missing issues,

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<sup>7</sup>Jack U. Harwell, *An Old Friend with New Credentials: A History of the Christian Index* (Atlanta: The Christian Index, Executive Committee of the Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia, 1972), 27-29, 41, 44-48.

<sup>8</sup>W. T. Brantly, "To the Readers of the Star," *CS*, 9 June 1827, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup>Harwell, *Old Friend*, 50. Harwell only speculates why the *Star* transferred to Philadelphia (*ibid.*, 49-50). Regarding ownership, Brantly apparently became sole proprietor, or at least sole manager, upon the agreement that profits would go to the Convention or to some other charity (cf. the report from the Committee on Religious Publications in *Proceedings of the Sixth Triennial Meeting of the Baptist General Convention, Held in Philadelphia, 1829* [Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1829], 32). James Adams Lester, who studied the early years of the *Star*, concluded that the "nominal ties" with the Convention remain unclear (*A History of the Georgia Baptist Convention 1822-1972* [Atlanta: The Executive Committee, The Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia, 1972], 104-05; see also Lester, "A History of *The Christian Index 1822-1954*" [Th.M. thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1955]).

<sup>10</sup>Brantly, "To the Readers of the Star," 86.

<sup>11</sup>W. T. Brantly, "An Editor and His Readers," *CSCI*, 17 October 1829, p. 251; see also Brantly, "Are You Tired of Reading?" *CI*, 25 June 1831, p. 401.

<sup>12</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Interesting," *CSCI*, 12 June 1830, p. 380.

and even one report of a large parcel of the *Index* discovered on the road between Camden and Columbia, South Carolina, Brantly started personally supervising each shipment, and issuing formal complaints to the Postmaster General, Obadiah B. Brown, with whom Brantly was acquainted.<sup>13</sup> None of these measures availed.<sup>14</sup> Brantly suspected that the post office on other end behaved no better than one rural post office he had once visited, where a disappointed citizen left without his paper, after the postmaster pulled out “a small drawer . . . of the little counter in the shop . . . where the lovers of whiskey are in the habit of assembling to take their Saturday’s toddy.”<sup>15</sup> Brantly attributed most of his discontinuations to irregular mail.<sup>16</sup> The biggest difficulty concerned the faithlessness of many readers. Many sent their discontinuance notice too late in the year to travel the 500 to 1000 miles to Philadelphia before new issues were sent out. One hundred such cases occasioned a \$100 loss, which unfairly exceeded the individual subscription rate of \$2 per annum.<sup>17</sup> Often discontinuance notices required Brantly to pay the postage.<sup>18</sup> Others simply sent no notice, and often, no money! This really hurt Brantly, for he tried to sell the weekly at cost, donating almost all profits to missions and education.<sup>19</sup> But at \$300 a month in expenses, Brantly fought apprehensions that “pecuniary damage will befall [*sic*] him.” Often Brantly appealed to

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<sup>13</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Circular Address to the Friends and Readers of the Christian Index,” *CI*, 19 November 1831, p. 336.

<sup>14</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Is There No Remedy?” *CI*, 15 September 1832, p. 174, which describes in detail how Brantly oversaw the whole process of delivering the 11 August 1832 issue of the *Index* to Virginia and North Carolina, addressing by hand the name of each subscriber.

<sup>15</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A Country Post Office,” *CSCI*, 26 June 1830, p. 407.

<sup>16</sup>Brantly, “Circular Address to the Friends and Readers of the Christian Index,” 336.

<sup>17</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Correspondents,” *CI*, 29 January 1831, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup>Brantly called this “miserable treatment” (W. T. Brantly, “Notice to Subscribers,” *CSCI*, 20 November 1830, p. 335).

<sup>19</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Personal,” *CSCI*, 7 November 1829, p. 304; *idem*, “Are You Tired of Reading?” 401; e.g., the report of the Committee on Religious Publications in *Proceedings*, Baptist General Convention, 1829, 32. Brantly seems to have kept the price of the *Index* low in part to prove his genuine benevolence (e.g., see Brantly, “The Millennial Harbinger,” *CSCI*, 13 March 1830, p. 174, which compares the *Index* with Alexander Campbell’s *Millennial Harbinger*).

his friends for help, and then expressed gratitude to men like Abner W. Clopton, who without commission had brought in \$500 of subscriptions over two-and-one-half years.<sup>20</sup> While other publications were thousands of dollars in debt, Brantly credited his faithful readers—now “friends and fellow-workers”—with keeping the *Index* debt-free.<sup>21</sup> Eventually, Brantly may himself have suffered financial loss, confessing in mid-1833 that what readers presently owed him exceeded all the profits he had ever made.<sup>22</sup> When these strains are added to Brantly’s other cares and duties, six years appears quite a feat, and lends testimony to both the grace of God and a true labor of love.

Throughout his editorial labors, Brantly remained acutely sensitive to the dangers that a denominational paper posed to evangelical unity. For instance, Brantly joined an alleged chorus of Baptists and Presbyterians in accusing the Methodist paper, *The Christian Advocate and Journal*, of having “done more to estrange and alienate the Methodists from their sister denominations, than it ever did to promote the pacific virtues of the Christian name and character.” As proof, Brantly cited a recent attack on the *Index*. The *Advocate* alluded to an analogy by Samuel Johnson, which stated that small shot may be harder to avoid than a cannonball, but only the latter is deadly. The *Advocate* then claimed that the *Index* and others could only fire “small shot,” because they had “nothing *very weighty* to lay to our charges.” The *Advocate* then finished by misquoting a short story from the *Index* and asking Brantly arrogantly, “Did he ever *seek*

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<sup>20</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Our Own Cares,” *CSCI*, 5 December 1829, p. 384.

<sup>21</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Our Proposal,” *CI*, 4 August 1832, p. 75; see also Brantly, “To the Friends and Patrons of the Christian Index,” *CI*, 2 June 1832, p. 352.

<sup>22</sup>W. T. Brantly, “To the Readers of the Christian Index,” *CI*, 29 June 1833, p. 416. Earlier that year, he had complained, “Some individuals have received this paper six years without the payment of *one cent*.” He then appealed, “We depend upon what is due us, to pay what we owe. If our dues are withheld, distress and reproach must befall us” (idem, “A Serious Matter,” *CI*, 20 April 1833, p. 255). Regarding his future finances, it is known that disastrous “embarrassments” came upon Brantly financially by 1835 (William T. Brantly, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to First Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ALS, 23 February 1835, AFBCP). Surely the delinquencies distressed Brantly, who considered prompt payment a Christian duty (idem, “Are You Tired of Reading?” 401).

the kingdom of God, &c.; and if he did, did he *find* the objects of his pursuit?" Brantly responded with jabs and questions of his own:

Now we beg to inform the Advocate, that it was a *small pebble* that David used in slaying *an ancient boaster*—that it was a *small sword* which Titus Manlius used in slaying the gigantic Gaul—and that a small truth is too strong for a large error. . . . The *Advocate* asks us several questions. . . . We reply by asking other questions. Did you seek the Lord before he sought you? Did you ask him to make you MAN? Did you insist upon being made a *large vessel*, or a *small one*?

If the Methodists as a whole did not want to be tagged with the “idle *bullyings*” of the *Advocate*, then Brantly challenged them to “exact from the conductors of their leading paper . . . a tone and temper, somewhat more in unison with the mediocrity of their talents and learning.”<sup>23</sup> The next month, the *Advocate* thanked the *Index* for “the very gentlemanly and Christian-like manner” of its answer.<sup>24</sup>

One solution to the dangers of denominational arrogance was to publish a strictly nondenominational religious weekly. This idea appealed to Brantly, who once cautiously recommended a new weekly from B. Badger, a former coeditor of the *Advocate*. Brantly noted that Badger’s *Weekly Messenger* “intended to advocate the peculiarity of no sect, put [‘but’] to support the principles on which most sects are agreed, to be a religious paper, combining moral and literary matter, as also intelligence of public affairs.” Brantly approved the paper for the general reader, and even for all denominations “should no haze of Methodism gather about it.”<sup>25</sup> In early 1829, Brantly himself proposed such a magazine, *The Genius of the Age*, which he planned to keep “entirely free from all sectarian views of religion.”<sup>26</sup> This proposal failed to draw enough interest, but Brantly seems to have incorporated its design into the *Columbian Star*,

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<sup>23</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Calvinism and Arminianism,” *CI*, 24 December 1831, p. 401. Happily, when the *Advocate* again attacked the *Index* three months later, Brantly recognized “much improvement in the *matter* and *manner*” of the article (idem, “Our Methodists Friend Again,” *CI*, 31 March 1832, p. 194).

<sup>24</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Successful Reproof,” *CI*, 21 January 1832, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup>W. T. Brantly, “New Publications,” *CI*, 13 August 1831, p. 107.

<sup>26</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A New Periodical Proposed,” *CS*, 18 April 1829, p. 64.

which in July 1829 he renamed *The Columbian Star, and Christian Index*, changing it from a newspaper sheet to a sixteen-page “Octavo form.”<sup>27</sup>

The transformation of the *Star* into the *Star and Index* reflected Brantly’s belief that a denominational paper could both serve Christians in general, and profitably report facts that did not at first appear religious in nature. Two convictions made this editorial agenda possible—first, a conviction about leadership manners, and second, a strong belief in divine providence.

Regarding leadership manners, the *Star and Index* embodied Brantly’s own principles of how to attain unity among Christians upon the truth. He began his editorial labors with this precise goal in mind, and with a distinct view of how to achieve this goal. As for the goal, Brantly proposed to make the *Star* a vehicle for edifying discussions, which turn “attention from unprofitable controversy to the cultivation of charity and the milder graces, [discussions] which inspire a virtuous ardor in the prosecution of noble ends, and tend to cement the integrity of union by the diffusion of correct sentiments.” In other words, union for useful effort fueled the enterprise. As to means unto that goal, Brantly firmly believed that the age of “invective and recrimination” had gone, for now, he declared, “a good life is the strongest argument.” While this would appear as compromise to “bigots and high sectarians,” Brantly denied any intention to be “liberal in a very abused acceptation of that term,” and professed no hesitation “to lend a strenuous support to those views, which form the distinctive features of the denomination to which he belongs.” In order to achieve evangelical unity without doctrinal compromise, Brantly proposed the following course:

[The editor] will feel it incumbent on him to embrace every proper occasion to assert the claims of Apostolic usage, in reference to the constitution of the church, and the administration of the ordinances; but he would wish even on these points to maintain only that regard to the truth of Scripture, which may accord with a sober

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<sup>27</sup>Brantly, “Are You Tired of Reading?” 401.



respect for the conscientious opinions of others, and may not imply the acrimony of party spirit.<sup>28</sup>

Three and a half years later, when Brantly shortened the paper's title to *The Christian Index*, he again reiterated his goal of union. While wishing to address "all the friends of the Saviour," he still intended that the *Index* remain a Baptist paper:

At the same time we wish it to be understood that we do not depart from the confident design of continuing to publish such facts, views and sentiments as are held dear by the great body of our Baptist brethren. With them we in the main concur. But we do not arrogate to ourselves any claims to uncommon consideration. We do not wish to take the lead in giving tone to religious sentiment—but rather to follow up in the correct steps of those who have preceded us, adopting what is right and shunning what is wrong. But if we must ever assume the lead, it will not be to head a faction. We are "UNIONISTS." We feel too weak and dependent to attempt to work alone. Our life is too short to be wasted in the construction of novel schemes, and licentious deviations from the OLD PATHS.<sup>29</sup>

This statement, which comes about the closest of anything Brantly uttered to a personal manifesto, exhibits two key facts about Brantly's manner of leadership. First, Brantly identified himself not as a Baptist primarily, but as a "unionist," a term probably borrowed from politics.<sup>30</sup> Second, as a unionist, Brantly was more concerned about faithfulness than leadership. By his description, a unionist would not seek out leadership unless he must; and even then, a unionist would lead without starting a faction. In Brantly's opinion, factious men, such as Joshua Lawrence (allowing his case to be generalized), sought "notoriety."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Brantly, "To the Readers of the Star," 86. Brantly added that he would specifically exclude "all principles . . . leading to disorganization" as well as "all those projects on which their authors have placed the spurious stamp of primitive discipline, in order to make them more specious" (ibid.).

<sup>29</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Objects of Attention," *CI*, 1 January 1831, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup>The quotation marks around "UNIONISTS" (Brantly, "Objects of Attention," 2) perhaps indicate that Brantly was referring to a known source, or at least to a common title used in an unusual way. In one speech reprinted by Brantly, Daniel Webster proclaimed, "I am a *Unionist*, and, in this sense, a National Republican" ("Review of Congressional Proceedings," *CSCI*, 13 February 1830, p. 112). For Brantly's description of a religious unionist, see W. T. Brantly, "A Unionist," *CI*, 8 October 1831, p. 229. For his description of the opposite, see Brantly, "A Party Man," *CI*, 8 October 1831, p. 229.

<sup>31</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Published by Request," *CI*, 29 September 1832, p. 198.

Besides leadership as a unionist, the belief in divine providence made a Baptist paper useful for all denominations. Since according to providence, all events occur by divine appointment, all events then express something about God and can benefit every Christian. This belief moved Brantly to change the name of his paper from *The Columbian Star*, which he had “always considered . . . not suited to the character of a religious paper,” to *The Christian Index*, referring to a finger that may not be able to explain events, but at least pointed them out for Christian meditation.<sup>32</sup> In light of providence, the objects of the *Index* were “unlimited,” including changing empires, national morals, heathen ignorance, benevolent efforts, the arts, and literature. In light of the Gospel, the *Index* would “direct its primary indications to the kingdom of Christ; and show the subordination of all the events of time, to that one supreme controlling POWER.” In pointing thus, Brantly hoped the *Index* would “make out a fair epitome of the passing history,” and place “before [its] readers facts and documents adapted to their improvement and confirmation in the principles of truth and righteousness.”<sup>33</sup>

By combining union with providence, Brantly expressed a concept of evangelical unity that was rooted in the doctrines of the Reformation. This concept came out explicitly in Brantly’s call for a truly religious daily paper. While several weekly religious papers existed, Brantly knew of no daily paper, whose “tone and tenor . . . are *religious*.” Not only were some of the contents “*anti-religious*,” including news about theaters, lotteries, and political strife, but even the manner of reporting common news denied divine providence: “Events are huddled together, without any respect to the interference of the great Governor of the universe, in their production and direction; and

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<sup>32</sup>Brantly, “Objects of Attention,” 1. Brantly also criticized the title of one Kentucky paper, *The Cross and Banner*. In commending a reconsideration, he explained, “The application of the word CROSS to the head of a newspaper, seems to us hardly agreeable to the feelings and sentiments of evangelical Christians” (idem, “The Cross and Banner,” *CI*, 3 November 1832, p. 286).

<sup>33</sup>Brantly, “Objects of Attention,” 1-2; idem, “Things Which Have Been,” *CSCI*, 13 February 1830, p. 104; see also Brantly, “An Editor and His Readers,” 251; idem, “Our Proposal,” 75.

the mind is, therefore, turned off from God, or else permitted to remain unobservant of his righteous dispensations.”<sup>34</sup> In light of such conditions, Brantly asked:

Are there not Christians enough in every community to support a daily paper which would occupy a moderate ground in politics; would publish all that is now placed on the columns of the daily prints, with the omission of immoral advertisements; and would at the same time so interpret the passing history, as to lead the mind of all readers to the acknowledgement of God in the government of the world?

Should any object to mixing the secular and the sacred in print, Brantly responded that providence invested all news with a moral duty: “If we contemplate the events of the world, our eye should be turned at the same time to the wise, invisible hand that controls their course and results.” But how could one daily paper serve the entire Christian community? In Brantly’s opinion, the paper “should have no sectarian cast in religion; but should be based upon the principles of the Reformation, and be generally acceptable to all denominations of evangelical protestants.”<sup>35</sup> Obviously, Brantly assumed that evangelicals believed in divine providence, and that evangelical unity presupposed “the principles of the Reformation.”

One of the most striking proposals for united effort concerned a so-called “Union Periodical.” Under this proposal, originally suggested by Milton B. Cushing of Putnam, Ohio, Baptists would have one national paper, similar to the Methodists. To accomplish this, Brantly suggested two plans—either that all the Baptist editors assemble to choose both a place and an editor for a new periodical, or else (for the first seemed unlikely) let the “enlightened portions” of Baptists from all states choose one existing periodical to patronize, and give it wider circulation. In either case, one periodical would help add to “the uniformity of the denomination in faith and practice.” At present, he

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<sup>34</sup>Brantly seems to be referring to the news-reporting, and not just to the editorial columns, which he had just mentioned in the previous sentence.

<sup>35</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Daily Papers,” *CI*, 12 March 1831, p. 161. Brantly apparently directed these comments in part to Willis Gaylord Clark, who had previously assisted Brantly in editing the *Index* and whose new role as editor of the daily newspaper, *Philadelphia Gazette*, appears later in the same issue (idem, “Philadelphia Gazette,” *CI*, 12 March 1831, p. 176; cf. Leslie W. Dunlap, ed., *The Letters of Willis Gaylord Clark and Lewis Gaylord Clark* [New York: The New York Public Library, 1940], 25).

complained, Baptists disregarded the apostle James, who warned against “*many masters*” (Jas 3:1), and as a consequence, Baptists suffered, for “the multiplication of petty periodicals certainly has a tendency to diminish the weight and respectability of such works.”<sup>36</sup> Three weeks later, Brantly announced that the proposal had fallen dead. Only two editors responded so far, and neither were happy.<sup>37</sup> Worse than that, Uriel B. Chambers, editor of one of those “petty periodicals” (the *Baptist Chronicle* of Kentucky), later accused Brantly of condescension and conniving to become the “ONE MASTER” among Baptist editors. Brantly denied any such motive, claiming his other duties ruled out such a candidacy. In defending himself, Brantly revealed his heart as an editor:

By the insinuations which you make, . . . I might say with truth that you wrong me. But with more propriety I may say, you wrong yourself. Epithets of this sort will do me no harm. You who handle such sharp edges may be injured by them. I have nothing to boast, either as an editor, or minister, beyond the humblest of the Lord’s people. The Lord has provided a goodly number of brethren who have treated me with kindness and liberality for many years; and such are the frailties and defects of which I feel conscious, that I am often inclined to believe that it must have cost them much self-denial to love one so little attractive.<sup>38</sup>

In closing, Brantly asked his readers to spare him any more proposals for “union Periodicals,” and expressed the hope of someday “uniting in prayer” with Chambers, should he ever travel in that direction. In reply, Chambers reiterated this hope and dutifully accepted Brantly’s apology, notwithstanding “its interminglement with sarcastic and oblique allusions.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Importance of a Standard Periodical,” *CI*, 14 July 1832, pp. 28-29.

<sup>37</sup>Brantly, “Our Proposal,” 75. One of the periodicals was the *Religious Herald*.

<sup>38</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Much Sensibility,” *CI*, 8 September 1832, p. 157. On an earlier occasion, Brantly had requested his supporter’s prayers, that he might “be endowed with wisdom and moderation, watchfulness and zeal, and all other qualifications suitable for the successful prosecution of such a work” (idem, “Circular Address to the Friends and Readers of the Christian Index,” 336).

<sup>39</sup>Brantly, “The Cross and Banner,” 286. *The Cross and the Banner* was at least the third periodical Chambers had begun, in addition to the *Georgetown Baptist Herald* and the *Baptist Chronicle* (idem, “Georgetown Baptist Herald,” *CSCI*, 20 February 1830, p. 126). Chambers also goaded Brantly by saying that he preferred *The World*, another Baptist periodical in Philadelphia, to the *Index* (idem, “Much Sensibility,” 156).

Brantly certainly desired a “Union Periodical,” but it is doubtful he expected the proposal to succeed. Just three months prior, Brantly had written a sarcastic editorial, “On the Benefits of Multiplying Periodicals,” which pinned the blame of proliferation on human conceit, the love of novelty, and party-spirit.<sup>40</sup> He had little time for airy publications like the Episcopalian *Churchman*, which, in reproving Brantly for slighting an English duke’s “gorgeous baptism,” acted as if it were “responsible for the church of England as well as that of America.” Such “upstarts and dandies” gave their denomination a bad name.<sup>41</sup> Instead of trying to build the *Index* into the national Baptist publication, even though it may have had the highest readership of any Baptist weekly, Brantly entertained for a long time the possibility of moving the *Index* southward. In May 1831, Brantly wrote to Jesse Mercer:

I have, of late, thought much of the state of things in South Carolina and Georgia, in reference to *The Index*. The time has come when a Southern paper of the kind that I am editing, will be required for Carolina, Georgia and Alabama. As mine is already taken there, and the difficulties of mail transmission are many, I have thought it probable that it would be acceptable to the brethren in that central point in one or other of the states.”<sup>42</sup>

The move seems natural, for it is remarkable how much Brantly’s magazine already served Baptists in the South. Though Brantly claimed that the *Index* had “hundreds of readers diffused through every State and Territory in this Union,” most of his subscribers had to have been in the deep South.<sup>43</sup> One researcher estimated that well over a third of

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<sup>40</sup>W. T. Brantly, “On the Benefits of Multiplying Periodicals,” *CI*, 7 April 1832, p. 222. After mentioning the “benefits” of new articles and new authors, Brantly finished by alluding to “the augmentation of readers, who can never be induced to look into a Religious Periodical, until they hear of something new, and something too which promises to suit their taste and Creed; and which displays, by no means occasionally, the well known *initials*, of all the candidates for renown” (ibid.).

<sup>41</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Churchman,” *CI*, 11 May 1833, p. 208. Brantly mockingly apologized for “the temerity of the Index” in throwing such “an offensive paragraph” in the way of the *Churchman*, but then noted “from the manner in which the Churchman flinches, that the Index laid his finger upon a sore place. There was salt in the application and the *galled horse doth wince*” (ibid.).

<sup>42</sup>Lester, “History of *The Christian Index*,” 25, as quoted in Harwell, *Old Friend*, 56.

<sup>43</sup>Brantly, “Much Sensibility,” 157. It was openly known that the *Index* was patronized well in the South (e.g., see the correspondent quoted last in Brantly, “Interesting,” 380).

the *Index*'s agents were Georgians (eighty-eight names).<sup>44</sup> In addition, most of Brantly's correspondents, especially the weighty names, wrote from the South. Some indeed were from nearby Pennsylvania and other vicinities, but precious few were from New York or New England.<sup>45</sup> As for the West—both North and South—Brantly noticed that they did “not appear inclined to bestow much patronage upon our Atlantic publications.”<sup>46</sup>

Two years later, Brantly and Mercer worked out a deal. After a brief notice on 22 June 1833, the *Index* fully announced the following week a transfer to Washington, Georgia, where Jesse Mercer would become editor as soon as arrangements could be made. In the meantime, Brantly made the new orientation clear:

It should be understood that the Southern *destination* of the Christian Index commences with the next No. Its Southern *location* will follow as soon as possible—when it will go on without any change of form or spirit.

Under Mercer, Brantly expected the *Index* to “acquire a claim upon Southern readers far beyond its present pretensions.” To those readers south of Virginia, which possessed the *Religious Herald*, Brantly hoped they would regard the *Index* as “an old friend coming to them with new credentials.”<sup>47</sup> On 14 September 1833, Mercer assumed editorial responsibilities, and Brantly retired as editor until several years later.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Lester, “History of *The Christian Index*,” 23, as quoted in Harwell, *Old Friend*, 50. Brantly's former ties with Georgia surely aided this connection. On one occasion, Brantly tells how a box of bound volumes of the *Index*, as well as one thousand copies of the temperance allegory, *Marvellous Doings of Prince Alcohol*, had been sent for pickup to Dr. William H. Turpin of Augusta, Georgia (W. T. Brantly, “Bound Volumes of the Christian Index,” *CI*, 1 October 1831, p. 220; idem, “Marvellous Doings of Prince Alcohol,” *CI*, 1 October 1831, p. 220).

<sup>45</sup>In reporting failures in mail delivery, Brantly mentioned several Southern states, and then spoke of Pennsylvania and New Jersey as secondhand information (“Circular Address to the Friends and Readers of the Christian Index,” 336).

<sup>46</sup>Brantly, “Georgetown Baptist Herald,” 126.

<sup>47</sup>Brantly, “To the Readers of the Christian Index,” 416.

<sup>48</sup>Brantly apparently received no money in the transfer (Harwell, *Old Friend*, 59). In light of the *Index* moving south, the Central Union Association planned to send to subscribers in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and farther east, a “new paper in place of the Index, to be especially devoted to the interest of Religion, in Pennsylvania and New Jersey” (W. T. Brantly, “A New Religious Periodical,” *CI*, 22 June 1833, p. 400). These hopes were presumably fulfilled in the *Christian Gazette*, ed. R. W. Cushman (1834–35), which the Association recommended in 1834 (see *Minutes of the Second Annual Session of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, Held in the Meeting House of the Baptist Church at Lower Dublin, Philadelphia County. May 27, 28, 29, 1834* [Philadelphia: T. W. Ustick, 1834], 13).

## The Baptist General Tract Society

The history of the Baptist General Tract Society closely epitomizes the shift within the denomination itself from an evangelical focus with a denominational bias towards sectarianism by 1840, when the society reorganized itself as the American Baptist Publication and Sunday School Society. Though unmentioned by most histories of the Society, William T. Brantly held intimate connections to this society, serving first as vice-president (1827-1829), then as president (1830-1837). During these years, the Society remained small, often struggling with great debt; but as the Society later became a great arm of the Baptists in the nineteenth century, serving both the North and the South long after the 1845 split, Brantly's persevering presidency at its beginnings represents one of his greatest honors, and displays well his vision of Baptist evangelicalism.<sup>49</sup>

The Society began as an idea in Philadelphia before reaching fulfillment among the Baptists of Washington, D.C. Sometime before April 1820, John Meehan, a Baptist printer and Sunday School teacher in Philadelphia, became frustrated with the "anti-Baptist tendencies" of the tracts he desired to give to children. In response, he proposed the idea of a Baptist General Tract Society, with "general" specifying a national organization. The idea met the approval of several associated with William Staughton's theological institute, but did not materialize until Meehan and the institute transferred to Washington D. C., where Meehan printed the *Columbian Star*. In the *Star*, letters began to appear on a proposed society. The first came from Noah Davis, a newly-ordained

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<sup>49</sup>The present summary owes much to the following general histories: J. Newton Brown, *History of the American Baptist Publication Society, from Its Origin in 1824, to Its Thirty-second Anniversary in 1856* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1856); Golden Century Committee, *Top Notches of Ten Decades: 100 Years of Service* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1924), 5-8; Daniel Gurden Stevens, *The First Hundred Years of The American Baptist Publication Society* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1925), 1-18; and L. C. Lemons, *The American Baptist Publication Society and American Baptist Churches—Partners since 1824 in "Spreading the Light"* (n.p., 1957), 1-9. For more information, see Noah Davis, "Origin of the Baptist General Tract Society," *The Baptist Tract Magazine* 1 (February 1828): 193-95; and "Origin and Progress of Tract Societies," *The Baptist Tract Magazine* 2 (15 October 1829): 240-45; cf. Schlossberg, *Silent Revolution*, 208-09. Brown himself recommends the annual report of 1840, which sketches the early years of the Society in eleven pages (*History*, 105).

Much of the early contributions to the Society came from the South (Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 9).

minister, who proposed that a Washington tract society could “hold the same place among Baptists that the American Tract Society [of Boston] does among the Congregationalists.”<sup>50</sup> In response, James Knowles, the *Star*’s editor and Davis’ college friend, along with Meehan and Grant Wood, another Washington resident, called for a meeting at Wood’s house on 25 February 1824. Twenty-five appeared, including Staughton, Luther Rice, and Obadiah Brown, pastor of the city’s Baptist church. Knowles presented a constitution, which passed with modifications; Grant Wood became the agent. Thus, the Society joined Rice’s plan for national influence at the capital.<sup>51</sup>

The Society exhibited early an interesting mix of evangelical and denominational elements. Since the idea arose in frustration over “anti-Baptist tendencies,” one would expect the *Baptist* tract society to have mainly promoted Baptist views. On the contrary, the original constitution stated that the Society’s “sole object shall be to disseminate evangelical truth, and to inculcate sound morals, by the distribution of tracts.”<sup>52</sup> Yes, the Society printed “Baptist tracts,” but as one correspondent from Rhode Island told the *Star*, “However we may wish men to become

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<sup>50</sup>Quoted in Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 9. For a fuller quote from the 14 February 1824 issue of the *Star*, see W. T. Brantly, “An Address in Commemoration of the Late Rev. Noah Davis,” *CSCI*, 7 August 1830, p. 83. This “American Tract Society” was not truly a national organization, but simply the old New England Tract Society under a new ambitious name (since 1823). In 1825, a northeastern merger occurred to bring about an organization befitting the name (John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South*, Contributions to the Study of Religion, no. 7 [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982], 15).

<sup>51</sup>Many of the histories record an incident involving Samuel Cornelius, pastor of the Baptist church in Alexandria, Virginia, in which the well-dressed preacher removed his top hat at a Baptist meeting, but forgot about the tracts he normally kept there. The tumbling tracts caused amusement and provoked thought about the need for a Baptist tract society. The histories disagree on when this incident took place and who received stimulus from the “perambulating tract depository” (Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 6).

<sup>52</sup>“Minutes,” Baptist General Tract Society, 1824 as quoted in Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 5. Similarly, the Society’s Pennsylvania charter states, “The object of this Corporation shall be to promote evangelical religion by means of the Bible, the Printing-press, Colportage, Sunday schools, and other appropriate ways” (quoted in Golden Century Committee, *Top Notches*, 6).

The coordination of morals with evangelism highlights the evangelical nature of the early Society. For instance, the second tract on the Society’s list for 1826 is “Dwight on Drunkenness.” The Society also obtained plates in 1830 from another publisher for the book *Wisdom’s Voice to the Rising Generation on Intemperance* (see Lemons, *American Baptist Publication Society*, 7).



*Baptists*, we wish all to become *evangelical Christians*.”<sup>53</sup> In another letter to the *Star*, Brown justified the new society in light of the failure of the American Tract Society to reach Baptists in the South and West. Of the existing society’s ninety-two depositories, only six were in Virginia, Kentucky, and South Carolina, where Baptists were particularly strong, and none in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Therefore, to supply “Evangelical Tracts” to the South and West, especially to the Baptists there, Baptists should form their own society, and “show themselves equal to other denominations in evangelical effort.” Surely such good work would not provoke to jealousy “the liberal and enlightened men” of the existing society.<sup>54</sup>

When Brantly first joined, the Baptist General Tract Society had just moved for financial reasons to Philadelphia, which provided both the plating for printing and the center for shipping. The move occasioned the need for new leadership, including a new agent, for Wood had to resign in order to overcome Rice’s opposition to the move.<sup>55</sup> At its first meeting in Philadelphia on 3 January 1827, the new Board of Directors consisted of president John L. Dagg and vice president William T. Brantly, who along with two others gave an address that presumably contributed to the “lively interest” generated by the services. In all, the new leaders took charge with “considerable spirit.”<sup>56</sup>

Almost immediately, the new Board faced two questions—the first relating to evangelical unity and the second to funding. In early 1827, the American Tract Society, which had recently formed through large northeastern mergers, proposed that the new

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<sup>53</sup>See the letter to the editor of the *Star* from Providence, Rhode Island (ca. February 1824) in Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 5. Meehan himself called the alternative “Baptist tracts” (Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 8).

<sup>54</sup>O., “Baptist Tract Society,” *CS*, 21 February 1824, p. 31, as quoted in Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 1. The author also claimed that tracts contained “nothing sectarian” (*ibid.*). In light of the unusual initial “O.” and the location of the discussion, Obadiah Brown is likely the author.

<sup>55</sup>Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 10. The initial tracts were not stereotyped, so editions ran out quickly; but making plates could not be done in Washington, so tracts and plates were constantly being sent to Philadelphia (*ibid.*).

<sup>56</sup>Brown, *History*, 31.

Baptist society become an auxiliary. The Board declined, lacking power in their constitution to do so. The following year, Brantly read the annual report he had written, describing the Board's unashamedly Baptist stance towards evangelical societies:

Whilst we feel unaffected respect and goodwill towards those institutions which are designed to embody and harmonize the powers of several denominations, we are bound by the feeling of honorable consistency to cherish a warmer approbation of those plans, which stand responsible for the protection of our peculiarities as a denomination.

Having given his apology, Brantly then granted this same right to other denominations, claiming they would never be thought less of by the Baptist General Tract Society, so long as they pursued their course with "the meekness of wisdom, and with the charity which the Gospel enjoins." Thus by means of liberty and charity, Brantly concluded, all denominations would love each other and benevolence would increase.<sup>57</sup> As proof of goodwill, it should be noted that both Dagg and Brantly also served as managers of the Philadelphia City Tract Society, an auxiliary of the American Tract Society.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to evangelical unity, the Board also faced the question of funding. Hopeful of a "new impulse" due to a new location, Brantly and Elisha Cushman sent out the call for more money, citing "friends" who wanted tracts before they sent money.<sup>59</sup> The ultimate solution came primarily through a new agent—the youthful and winsome Noah Davis (1802-1830). In just three years, receipts climbed from about \$3200 to over \$5500.<sup>60</sup> Davis himself combined good business sense with strong piety. He loved his vocation, having seen in the tract cause his own contribution to the missionary cause. After Davis's unexpected death near the age of twenty-eight, Brantly testified, "We have

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>59</sup>"Circular," *The Baptist Tract Magazine* 1 (July 1827): 14-15. The circular is dated 14 May 1827.

<sup>60</sup>"Seventh Annual Meeting of the Baptist General Tract Society," *The Baptist Tract Magazine* 4 (January 1831): 6-7.

seldom known an instance in which the *spending*, and *being spent* for God, were more in accordance with true Christian devotedness.”<sup>61</sup>

Davis’s early death placed upon Brantly a great burden, which he bore voluntarily as the Tract Society’s newly elected president. In the midst of his labors in 1830 as pastor, editor, and leader in various societies, Brantly for nearly six months assumed Davis’s duties as agent and editor of the *Baptist Tract Magazine*. Brantly also comforted the grieving family, even conducting the funeral instead of Dagg, Davis’s pastor, who had been absent from Philadelphia and was recovering from a life-threatening disease. According to Dagg’s reminiscence, Brantly “gratuitously performed, those [duties] of the vacated Agency, that the salary might be continued to the widow and children.”<sup>62</sup> Near the close of 1830, Ira M. Allen, a successful editor from Vermont, accepted the position as agent, joined Fifth Baptist Church, and within a few years started publishing a more rigorous Baptist register than either the Society or the *Index* had published previously.<sup>63</sup> Together, Allen and Brantly wrote many of the Society’s occasional pieces until Brantly resigned as president in late 1837.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Brantly, “An Address in Commemoration of the Late Rev. Noah Davis,” 83, citing 2 Cor 12:15. This address was later enlarged and published as Tract No. 106 in the Baptist General Tract Society’s collection. For the comment on Davis loving his vocation, see the reprint of Tract No. 106 in *Memoirs of Distinguished Christians* (Philadelphia: Baptist General Tract Society, [1839]), 176; cf. Brown, *History*, 106. For more on Brantly’s view of Davis, see Brantly, “The Death of Rev. Noah Davis,” *CSCI*, 24 July 1830, p. 59. Davis was also the principal founder of the Baptists’ city mission, The Baptist Domestic Missionary Society of Philadelphia (idem, “City Mission,” *CI*, 29 January 1831, pp. 77-78). In an interesting turn of providence, Davis’s advice saved the health of his own pastor, John L. Dagg, who in turn married Davis’s widow and raised his children (see John L. Dagg, *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg, D. D.*, 31-33, in an appendix of J. L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order*, vol. 2 of *Manual of Theology* [[Charleston, SC]: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990]).

<sup>62</sup>J. L. Dagg, “William T. Brantly D. D.,” *CI*, 11 April 1845, n.p.; cf. “Seventh Annual Report of the Baptist General Tract Society,” 9. Dagg’s *Autobiography* makes no mention of Brantly.

<sup>63</sup>The Baptist General Tract Society began soliciting minutes from all the associations in 1827 (Brown, *History*, 39). For the fuller registers, see Ira M. Allen, *The United States Baptist Annual Register and Almanac* (Philadelphia: T. W. Ustick, 1833); idem, *The Triennial Baptist Register* (Philadelphia: Baptist General Tract Society, 1836). According to one source, both the *Tract Magazine* and the *Index* had furnished tabular data on Baptist associations (Lemons, *American Baptist Publication Society*, 8).

<sup>64</sup>E.g., the circular letter of 1837 is signed by Brantly and Allen (see Board of Managers of the Baptist General Tract Society, “Circular to the Baptist Churches in the United States,” as found in *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 17 [March 1837]: 69).

The unexpected loss of Davis also burdened the Society itself, for the agent had been unusually persuasive. According to Brantly, Davis had possessed the ability “to impart to others the noble impulse of his own mind; and by this means, never failed to conduct his hearers to those convictions of truth and duty that had impressed his own heart.”<sup>65</sup> But now, receipts plummeted. One correspondent to the *Index* expressed astonishment that sales in July 1830 only totaled \$130.66, and so warned his brethren of “the curse denounced upon *Meroz*, because they come not up to the help of the Lord.”<sup>66</sup> By the end of the year, the Society was so broke that Brantly reported, “Our press has been idle much of the time, and our plates laid up in boxes.”<sup>67</sup> Several schemes for fundraising failed. Branch societies, though numbering 322 in 1830, often failed to reach their second summer. Distant depositories required maintenance. *The Baptist Tract Magazine*, a 24-page monthly started in 1827 as a source of income at a subscription rate of fifty cents a year, often ran at a loss.<sup>68</sup> Beyond all the failed schemes, Brantly reckoned broken faith as the greatest problem. In early 1832, he warned, “Let it not be thought that this [debt] has been the result of bad management or of extravagance. Our Tracts have gone out, but the returns upon them have not been received.” If all dues had come in, Brantly claimed that a surplus would have resulted.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, the Society

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<sup>65</sup>Brantly, “The Death of Rev. Noah Davis,” 59.

<sup>66</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptist General Tract Society,” *CSCI*, 2 October 1830, p. 220; see also Brantly, “The Barrel of Wheat and the Tracts,” *CI*, 31 March 1832, p. 195. The reference is to Judg 5:23.

In contrast to poverty of the Baptist Tract Society, the American Tract Society reported an annual income for 1830-31 of \$42,922.59, averaging well over \$2000 per month (see “Sixth Annual Report of the American Tract Society,” *CI*, 23 July 1831, p. 54). The same year, figures for the Baptist Society reached only a little more than one-half of the reasonable anticipation of \$5830 (“Seventh Annual Report of the Baptist General Tract Society,” 7).

<sup>67</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptist Tract Society,” *CI*, 15 January 1831, p. 43. In 1832, the *Tract Magazine* was cut in half, and only seven new tracts appeared (Golden Century Committee, *Top Notches*, 8).

<sup>68</sup>For these schemes, see Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 11-12. Eventually *The Baptist Tract Magazine* became the *Monthly Magazine* (1837) and finally *The Baptist Record* (1838-), edited by Ira M. Allen (*ibid.*, 12).

<sup>69</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptist General Tract Society,” *CI*, 14 January 1832, p. 31. In 1837, Brantly claimed that the managers of the Tract Society abided by the following maxims: “A prudent economy of their means—exactness in the calculation of small items—promptness in answering the calls of distant

requested that all orders come with money or the strong assurance of money, in order “to protect the Society from those random operations which are more like waste than usefulness.”<sup>70</sup>

Brantly certainly felt that the quality of the Baptist tracts did not justify such contempt from the denomination. When the Society published the first ninety-two tracts in four volumes, Brantly called special attention to their variety and low price. He lauded the selection and claimed, “The publications of the Baptist General Tract Society will not, in any respect, suffer by comparison with those of any other society. All denomination prejudice apart, we can easily discern that there are reasons why, as a whole, they should be even superior.”<sup>71</sup> In justifying this same claim the year before, Brantly had answered some Baptists who thought that the American Tract Society needed only supplementation or could wholly do the job itself. First, Brantly had noted that every tract from the evangelical society suffered “a rigid reduction in relation to every sectarian peculiarity,” including Calvinistic doctrines. In the process, tracts “originally pointed and forcible . . . lose much of their peculiar excellence.” Examples cited were the memoirs of Mrs. Adoniram Judson and some productions from Andrew Fuller.<sup>72</sup> When the American Sunday School Union inquired about Brantly’s criticism of their reproduction of Mrs. Judson’s memoirs, Brantly cited a prime omission, but did not offer a complaint, saying that such omissions were necessary to suit general readers, even if they would not suit

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friends and correspondents—and an anxious care to accomplish all the good of which the resources at their command were capable” (“Annual Report,” Board of Managers of the Baptist General Tract Society, 1837, as quoted in Brown, *History*, 84-85). Brantly also claimed that the Tract Society did not take away from the larger works of benevolence, but helped “to fill up the interstices in more stated and weighty ministrations” by relieving them of unnecessary complexity (ibid., 82). Brantly’s concern over unnecessary duplication in funding probably arose in light of the American & Foreign Bible Society’s encroachment on missions money (see chap. 13).

<sup>70</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Relief of the Baptist Gen. Tract Society,” *CI*, 10 March 1832, p. 160.

<sup>71</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Tracts of the Baptist General Tract Society,” *CI*, 18 February 1832, pp. 104-05. This article enumerates the tracts Brantly considered most valuable.

<sup>72</sup>Brantly, “Baptist Tract Society,” 43.

“distinct classes of readers.”<sup>73</sup> Second, tracts from the evangelical society would not serve all the purposes of the Baptists; and if Baptists must print some tracts, why should they not make a complete collection?<sup>74</sup> In reality, Brantly felt confident that the Baptist tracts were the best *evangelical* tracts in that they aimed “to utter the unmutilated language and sentiments of the Bible, on all its doctrines and ordinances.” In doing so, the tracts were also the best *Baptist* tracts, for Baptists had always pled “for the whole light and truth of God’s holy word.”<sup>75</sup>

Three reasons fueled Brantly’s own enthusiasm for tracts. The first, of course, concerned the converting, confirming, and comforting power of one tract.<sup>76</sup> One striking example concerned a Baptist minister in the South, who was “known in the Index as a writer.” On 8 July 1831, he “fell into very gloomy fears of being damned forever.” In pleading for mercy to the Lord, the reply would apparently return, “*I won’t.*” Becoming more alarmed, his “imagination became disordered.” He even felt “sensations similar to the burning of the sparks of fire coals . . . on the naked skin . . . all over the body.” Then, on 3 November 1831, after having quit the ministry and on the point of despair, he read in a tract the Scripture, “The blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Being “enabled by faith to lay hold of this precious word of God,” life returned and darkness fled away permanently. In joy, he authorized the American Tract Society, which had

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<sup>73</sup>W. T. Brantly, “An Exemplification,” *CI*, 29 January 1831, p. 80. In general, Brantly defended the American Sunday School Union, claiming once in 1830 that the Union recognized “no religious distinctions among orthodox protestants,” but aimed simply to educate youth “not in the doctrines and peculiarities of a sect, but in the principles of Scripture truth, and the sentiments of piety” (idem, “A Noble Effort,” *CSCI*, 12 June 1830, pp. 369-70). When another Baptist paper, *The Christian Watchman*, accused the Union of retaining a passage on infant baptism in Mrs. Sherwood’s *Infant Progress*, Brantly jumped to the Union’s defense, claiming that the Union’s paedobaptist committee had expunged the paragraph (idem, “The American Sunday school [*sic*] Union Vindicated,” *CSCI*, 17 July 1830, p. 44).

Brantly had earlier complained that Mrs. Judson’s memoirs had been ignored by American paedobaptists, but had “commanded almost universal attention among evangelical christians in England” (idem, “Mrs. Judson and the Spirit and Manners of the Age,” *CSCI*, 3 October 1829, p. 214).

<sup>74</sup>Brantly, “Baptist Tract Society,” 43.

<sup>75</sup>Board of Managers of the Baptist General Tract Society, “Circular to the Baptist Churches in the United States,” 69. William T. Brantly and I. M. Allen wrote this plea for money.

<sup>76</sup>“Annual Report,” Board of Managers of the Baptist General Tract Society, 1837, as cited in Brown, *History*, 82-83.

published the tract he had read, to award \$100 to the best tract written on the cleansing blood of Jesus—a tract that would also include his narrative.<sup>77</sup> Brantly served on the committee to judge the merits of submissions. After the initial four had been turned down and the deadline extended six months, Brantly himself and Barnas Sears tied for first place, splitting the premium.<sup>78</sup> Second, anyone could distribute tracts. To prove the “Importance of Individuals,” Brantly cited a Norwegian farmer, whose tract distribution, according to the *London Missionary Record*, contributed to the conversion of fifty thousand peasants.<sup>79</sup> If a farmer could do such good, it is not surprising that Brantly later could not see how preachers could “clear their consciences in thus indirectly stifling the voice of truth” by not distributing those little tracts which had “no power of local motion” on their own.<sup>80</sup> Thus in both power and distribution, tract distribution resembled Bible distribution; but contrary to Bibles, tracts were, thirdly, inexpensive both to print and to transport.<sup>81</sup> The tract that consoled the despairing preacher cost less than a cent!<sup>82</sup> In the first decade, tracts were almost all that the Baptist General Tract Society did. By the time of expanded publications in 1840, the old Tract Society had issued over 3,500,000 copies of 162 titles.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>I. J. R., “The Blood of Jesus Christ Cleanseth from All Sin,” *CI*, 23 June 1832, pp. 390-91. In commenting on the narrative, Brantly himself did not claim that the despairing soul had previously been a genuine believer, but only “a professor of religion, and a preacher of the Gospel” (W. T. Brantly, “Premium Tract,” *CI*, 26 January 1833, p. 62).

<sup>78</sup>T. Meredith, “Premium Tract,” 9 November 1836, n.p. Brantly served on a committee with G. T. Bedell and G. R. Livingston (Brantly, “Premium Tract,” 62). Brantly’s tract was later published by the Baptists as *The Troubled Conscience, and the Peace-Speaking Blood of Christ*, Part 1 (Philadelphia: Baptist General Tract Society, 1836). Brown reports that in 1837, one of the two tracts was “translated, by the Missionary who had offered the premium, into the Chinese language for circulation in that vast empire” (*History*, 88).

<sup>79</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Importance of Individuals,” *CI*, 30 April 1831, p. 273. Though both the figures and even the story itself are questionable, Brantly’s point is clear.

<sup>80</sup>“Annual Report,” Board of Managers of the Baptist General Tract Society, 1837, as quoted in Brown, *History*, 83.

<sup>81</sup>Lemons, *American Baptist Publication Society*, 7.

<sup>82</sup>I. J. R., “The Blood of Jesus Christ Cleanseth from All Sin,” 390.

<sup>83</sup>Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 13.

One large impetus for expanded publications concerned the needs and prospects of the Sunday School. This area of service had already caught the attention of the Tract Society as early as 1830. One issue that year of the *Tract Magazine* had predicted, “The time may come when the number of schools in our denomination will be so great as to require the Tract Society to publish a series of Sabbath-school books suited to their wants.”<sup>84</sup> In 1832, the Tract Society resolved to “convince Baptist churches of the value of the Sunday school movement as a means of evangelism,” pledging themselves to organize and to improve schools.<sup>85</sup> The following year, the agent privately expressed the need for specifically Baptist Sunday school material.<sup>86</sup> None of these statements necessarily implies sectarianism, for since its early years, the Baptist General Tract Society had distributed both Baptist and evangelical tracts. Indeed, in 1835, the Society published *The Baptist Manual*, containing tracts of “special denominational interest,” which the Society desired to give to every willing family in the Mississippi Valley, in order that “every where in that vast field there might be found ‘a faithful representative of the sentiments of the denomination.’”<sup>87</sup>

That same year, in 1835, some Baptist ministers from New York urged the Tract Society to extenuate its denominational bias. Referring to themselves as the New York City Conference of Baptist Ministers, these men petitioned the Triennial Convention to form a “Baptist Publication Society,” which would issue books as well as tracts.<sup>88</sup> According to these ministers, the time had come “to have a Society to publish and circulate valuable Books, particularly of a denominational character, for family use,

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<sup>84</sup>Quoted in Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 14; cf. Brown, *History*, 49.

<sup>85</sup>Quoted in Lemons, *American Baptist Publication Society*, 4.

<sup>86</sup>Stevens cites, but does not quote, a letter from Ira M. Allen to J. L. Holman of Aurora, Indiana, written sometime in April 1833 (see *First Hundred Years*, 15).

<sup>87</sup>Lemons, *American Baptist Publication Society*, 7; Brown, *History*, 75; cf. Brown, *History*, 88-90.

<sup>88</sup>*Proceedings of the Eighth Triennial Meeting of the Baptist General Convention for Missionary Purposes. Held in Richmond, April, 1835* (Boston: John Putnam, 1835), 8.



Sunday Schools, &c.” Accordingly, they had apparently resolved that “the Baptist General Tract Society be requested so to alter its constitution . . . to include such publications; and that the publication of Books and Tracts by that Society should be *confined chiefly* to such as set forth the peculiar, and, as they are believed to be, scriptural principles of the denomination.”<sup>89</sup> The idea of confining publications to Baptist peculiarities certainly ran contrary to Brantly’s earlier emphasis on a complete package of evangelical doctrines.<sup>90</sup> In essence, the society that had started as a reaction to anti-Baptist tracts was now asked to promote pro-Baptist material almost exclusively.

Sources indicate that the Tract Society did not comply with the New Yorkers’ wishes. The petition at the Triennial Convention was sent to a committee, who later recommended a separate meeting in Richmond, because the matter did not pertain to foreign missions.<sup>91</sup> The Convention approved, but the meeting may not have occurred, for one historian reports:

A committee was appointed to visit Philadelphia, and obtain the concurrence of the Board of the Tract Society. But owing to various engagements, including the appointment of its Chairman, Rev. Howard Malcom, as a deputation to Burmah, the Committee never met.<sup>92</sup>

According to another historian, long before the Convention, some Baptist leaders—presumably the same New Yorkers—had already “exerted pressure upon the Baptist General Tract Society to devote itself to sectarian matters, but the secretary, Ira Allen, [had] refused to yield on that point.”<sup>93</sup> It seems that as long as Brantly and Allen

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<sup>89</sup>Brown, *History*, 113, italics added; cf. Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 15. Brown’s claim that the Triennial Convention made these resolutions lacks verification in the official proceedings. Therefore, it seems best to assume that what Brown reports as the resolutions of the Triennial Convention were actually resolutions presented by the New York City Conference of Baptist Ministers to the Triennial Convention.

<sup>90</sup>See Brantly, “Baptist Tract Society,” 43.

<sup>91</sup>*Proceedings*, Baptist General Convention for Missionary Purposes, 1835, 74.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 11; Brown, *History*, 113-14.

<sup>93</sup>Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 249. (As proof, Foster cites the 1835 annual report of the Baptist General Tract Society.) Having failed in 1834, the New Yorkers may have banked on added pressure from the whole Triennial Convention.

controlled the Tract Society, these sectarian wishes did not succeed. The Society's final transformation into the American Baptist Publication and Sunday School Society did not occur until 1840, long after Brantly had left both the Society and the North.<sup>94</sup>

### Denominational Apologist

It is clear from Brantly's Baptist efforts that he justified the existence of a separate Baptist denomination. Given his great love of evangelical unity, what reason could possibly be great enough to justify continued separation? Certainly not simply a Baptist party, but Baptist views. He reckoned that "the importance of our views as a sect" was "entitled" to an "ascendency" in towns and cities.<sup>95</sup> In particular, antipaedobaptism—opposition to infant baptism—justified separation. Brantly freely confessed, "If *anti-Paedobaptism* be abolished, we could have no sufficient reason for perpetuating any sort of sectarian distinction." Brantly regarded infant baptism as "a sore evil."<sup>96</sup> He thought that perpetuating infant baptism destroyed true Christian unity, for "Infant Baptism has a tendency to secularize the church of Christ, and to fill it with *'unreal members.'*"<sup>97</sup> But perpetuation is exactly what the paedobaptist denominations did. "They regard it," Brantly charged, "as the very pillar of the Church, . . . lying at the very foundation of their church-polity."<sup>98</sup> Brantly himself had no intentions of

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<sup>94</sup>The Society's first Sunday school periodical, *The Sabbath School Gleaner*, appeared in 1841 (Lemons, *American Baptist Publication Society*, 8).

<sup>95</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Hints to Baptists," *CSCI*, 13 March 1830, p. 161.

<sup>96</sup>W. T. Brantly, "The Common Odium," *CI*, 31 March 1832, p. 193. For the first part of the article, see Brantly, "The Common Odium," *CI*, 24 March 1832, pp. 177-79. Brantly also considered this article suited for his book of sermons (see William T. Brantly, *Themes for Meditation, Enlarged in Several Sermons, Doctrinal and Practical* [Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Co., 1837], 203-17).

<sup>97</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Infant Baptism," *CSCI*, 26 June 1830, p. 410. Brantly based this comment on a statement in the *British Critic* that summarized, "One main cause of the calamitous decay of Christian unity, is the practice of Infant Baptism" (ibid.). One contributor to the *Index* called this secularization the "forced and spurious growth of the infant crop" (Unity, "On the Union of Different Denominations," 49).

<sup>98</sup>Brantly, "The Common Odium," 193. When asked for proof by a Congregationalist magazine, Brantly noted that Episcopalians thank God for the regeneration of the baptized infant, and that Presbyterians make infant baptism a duty of all Christian parents. Brantly then chided the Congregationalists for their inconsistency in permitting "their members to treat, what they think an ordinance of God's house, with contempt" (idem, "The Vermont Chronicle," *CI*, 5 May 1832, p. 287).

minimizing believer baptism, for he regarded himself under “a sacred duty to contend for the faith once delivered to the Saints; and the rites of the Church of Christ are considered a part of the Faith.”<sup>99</sup>

Brantly contended for the faith by opposing infant baptism in two ways. First, Brantly defended the traditional Baptist practice of close communion, which he recognized as one of the chief offences that paedobaptists cited to bring odium on the Baptists.<sup>100</sup> Second, Brantly considered infant baptism important enough to speak against, and too important to use mere words.<sup>101</sup> In all, as the last section will make clear, Brantly sought a higher goal than uniting Christians under the Baptist flag. It is subtle, but “*anti-Paedobaptism*” is not the same thing as “pro-Baptist.”

### **Close Communion**

In 1837, when Brantly addressed Baptists for the last time on behalf of their Tract Society, he called “special attention” to the tracts that “stated our reasons for declining communion at the Lord’s table with our Pedobaptist brethren.” This practice, commonly called “close communion,” had come under constant paedobaptist assault, with the result that many of the strongest English Baptists, Brantly lamented, had “not only withdrawn from the defence, but have joined the assailants.” Of the ultimate end of the English course, Brantly declined to predict. To him, the “course of duty” was clear:

Break down our strict communion in this country, and you break down our churches. Communion is a church act, and the church is composed of baptized believers. We deny not that the Lord may have churches of unbaptized believers. He has not so taught US.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Brantly, “The Common Odium,” 193.

<sup>100</sup>Brantly, “The Common Odium,” 177.

<sup>101</sup>Infant baptism was one of the few Protestant disagreements that Brantly considered important enough to speak out against. On other Protestant disagreements, see W. T. Brantly, “Practical Heresies,” *CI*, 18 June 1831, p. 397.

<sup>102</sup>“Annual Report,” Board of Managers of the Baptist General Tract Society, 1837, as quoted in Brown, *History*, 84. Brantly had been aware of proposals to unite English Baptists and Independents (Congregationalists) since at least the spring of 1831 (see W. T. Brantly, “Union of Baptists and Independents,” *CI*, 28 May 1831, p. 364).

Survival, in other words, depended on close communion.

The history of the English Baptists provides a necessary background for appreciating Brantly's concern. In both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, English Baptists by and large practiced close communion, but experienced several in-house debates about its validity.<sup>103</sup> The most celebrated debate of the 1600s involved William Kiffin (1616-1701) on the side of close communion, and on the side of open communion, John Bunyan (1628-1688), the famous author of *Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>104</sup> In 1778, Abraham Booth (1734-1806) published a landmark book on the side of close communion, entitled, *An Apology for the Baptists. In which they are Vindicated from the Imputation of Laying an Unwarranted Stress on the Ordinance of Baptism; and against the Charge of Bigotry in refusing Communion at the Lord's Table to Paedobaptists*. According to one Baptist historian, Booth's real concern lay with the church: "He feared that if the Lord's Supper, the primary spiritual privilege of church membership, were extended to the unbaptized, it would lead to contempt for baptism and ultimately for the church."<sup>105</sup> Many of Booth's arguments appeared in the next century, especially in the work of Joseph Kinghorn (1766-1832), who debated Robert Hall, Jr. (1764-1831), the author of *On Terms of Communion* (1815). By the end of the nineteenth century, many English Baptist congregations "followed the lead of Robert Hall" into open communion, with some going further yet into open membership.<sup>106</sup>

Brantly was familiar with the English debate over communion, and promoted some of its writings in defense of close communion. For example, Brantly urged his

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<sup>103</sup>According to the *American Encyclopedia* of Brantly's day, the debate over "mixed communion" represented the only "material dispute" Particular Baptists had ever experienced amongst themselves (see W. T. Brantly, "The American Encyclopedia," *CSCI*, 30 January 1830, p. 75).

<sup>104</sup>For this debate, see H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 81-83.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>106</sup>A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1947), 205, 207-08; cf. Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage*, Christian Training Programme ([Didcot, England, UK]: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1990), 101-06.

fellow Baptists to read Abraham Booth's *Apology*, which the Tract Society sold, though Brantly himself preferred the title "Vindication" over the poor connotations of an "Apology."<sup>107</sup> One Baptist from Great Valley, Pennsylvania, read it, became convinced, and thanked Brantly publicly, recommending the volume for paedobaptists and anti-paedobaptists alike.<sup>108</sup> Brantly also reprinted much of the arguments from Kinghorn and Hall, carefully alternating excerpts from each other's books to give the feel of a true debate.<sup>109</sup> Though Brantly held Hall in great respect, praising him for his "humble, unostentatious deportment of christian meekness and modesty" despite the applause of men, the American asked, "But what shoulders are strong enough to carry on successfully—a cumbrous paradox?"<sup>110</sup> In another reprinted article bearing the marks of a British origin, an anonymous Baptist argued for close communion under the regulative principle of a strict Baptist hermeneutic—positive commands require both a text and an apostolic example. Syllogistically, the argument can be summarized as follows:

1. *Major Premise:* In the New Testament, only baptized believers partook of the Lord's Table.
2. *Minor Premise:* The New Testament only recognizes the immersion of believers as true baptism.
3. *Conclusion:* Those not immersed as believers should not be admitted to the Lord's Table.

The author concluded by first noting how *visible* unity in the New Testament church was often associated with baptism, then warning his brothers that "the spirit of *laxity*"

<sup>107</sup>Brantly explained, "The popular idea of an apology, is a plea in extenuation of the offensive character of any thing. The truth has nothing offensive to well regulated minds, and therefore needs not any apology" (W. T. Brantly, "Open Communion," *CSCI*, 12 June 1830, p. 380).

<sup>108</sup>D. E. F., Letter to the Editor, dated 31 July 1833, in *CIBM*, 10 August 1833, p. 23, which was later reprinted in *The Baptist Tract Magazine* 6 (December 1833): 146-47.

<sup>109</sup>Brantly found excerpts from *On Terms of Communion* in a two-volume edition of Hall's works. As for the other side, Brantly related, "An intelligent gentleman, a member of Mr. Kinghorn's church, has recently placed in our hands a complete set of Mr. K.'s publications on the *Terms of Communion*" (W. T. Brantly, "Carvill's Edition of Robert Hall's Works," *CI*, 1 January 1831, p. 11). The interchange begins with Robert Hall and Joseph Kinghorn, "Terms of Communion," *CI*, 8 January 1831, pp. 17-18, and continues in later issues.

<sup>110</sup>Brantly, "Carvill's Edition of Robert Hall's Works," 11.

represented a leaven which could eventually leaven away all the authority of Christ in doctrine and in discipline. “There is no consistent standing,” said James Dore of London, “between being a strict baptist, and returning to the Church of Rome.”<sup>111</sup>

Brantly himself contributed one of his most eloquent compositions ever to the communion debate. He wrote his defense with regard to converts, whom paedobaptists often dissuaded from joining the Baptists by accusations of bigotry and pride. Instead of answering these charges by minimizing communion, as Daniel Sharp of Boston did, Brantly put positive importance on communion.<sup>112</sup> To him, close communion represented “a tacit, but not unmeaning rebuke of *Infant Baptism*.” Through close communion, Baptists told paedobaptists:

Brethren, though you are dear to us, yet truth is dearer. We sanction your error by admitting you to this Table. If this were our own Table you should be welcomed to it. But it is the *Lord's Table*, and we have no right to make it accessible to those who . . . are practicing for Religion what the Lord has not instituted.

In contrast, open communion merely “covers over error with the blandishment of soft words, and leaves it as deeply rooted and luxuriant as ever.”<sup>113</sup>

Baptists faced two main objections to close communion. The chief concerned “its alleged tendency to *unchristian* all other denominations.” Citing a favorite proof text, paedobaptists would ask, “If Christ has received us, why should not you receive us also?” (cf. Rom 15:7). In response, Brantly admitted that a bar to communion implied fault, but he denied that it classified paedobaptists with heretics. Such “invidious

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<sup>111</sup>“A Scripture Manual of the Terms of Communion in the Primitive Churches,” *CI*, 19 February 1831, pp. 119-21; 26 February 1831, pp. 132-35. The British authorship seems likely based on the final sentence, which refers to a remark from “the Rev. James Dore, of London, to me” (*ibid.*, 135).

<sup>112</sup>For Sharp’s views, see W. T. Brantly, “Unjust Imputations Refuted,” *CSCI*, 26 December 1829, p. 402.

<sup>113</sup>Brantly, “The Common Odium,” 178. The idea of a “tacit censure” appeared in the 1832 Triennial Convention, when the body there decided that they should approve the course taken by their missionaries to the Indians, even if this approval indirectly censured others, for a avoiding a “tacit censure” did not justify disobedience (*idem*, “The Late Meeting of the Triennial Convention,” *CI*, 12 May 1832, p. 289).

Abraham Booth allowed a Baptist to receive the Lord’s Supper in a paedobaptist assembly as long as the Baptist notified the minister ahead of time that his participation in no way implied that he considered their infant baptism to be Christian baptism (see Brantly, “Open Communion,” 380-81).

comparisons” would have caused him pain, he confessed, for he recognized, “The general excellence and piety of Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Methodists, are universally known and admitted.” But since the Lord commanded His church to maintain order through visible ordinances, no church had the right to commune with those not baptized. Added Brantly, “Though He may know how to commune with them, he has not informed us how we may do it.”<sup>114</sup> The other objection concerned inordinate zeal—making too much of baptism. Using his opponents’ own standards, Brantly asked them whether they would ever hold communion with someone not baptized.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, did they not require children to be baptized? Thus Baptists and paedobaptists both considered baptism “indispensable,” but disagreed on its definition. Turning tables, Brantly charged paedobaptists with making too much of their manmade ordinance in opposition to the clear teaching of the Bible. If these brethren really wanted unity, Brantly challenged:

If you think us hard, and uncompromising in setting up a bar against you for such a cause as this, permit us to enquire of you, Whether it may not be easier for you to relinquish a custom which Christ has not commanded, and thus meet us upon the ground of Scripture, than for us virtually to surrender a custom which he has commanded, in order to meet you upon the ground of human tradition?<sup>116</sup>

While making too much of an ordinance is a fault, making too much of obedience is not.

At the close of the article, Brantly sounded the same alarm he would give five years later about the English Baptists. Open communion would jeopardize the very existence of a Baptist denomination. If close communion went, so would closed membership and more:

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<sup>114</sup>Brantly, “The Common Odium,” 178, 179. On another occasion, when Brantly noted that the independence of a Baptist church was actually “regulated and modified” by “a kind of *federal* bond which connects all our churches,” he excluded Paedobaptist churches from this bond because they lacked “the same scriptural qualifications” as Baptists to being true churches of Christ (W. T. Brantly, “Ordination,” *CSCI*, 5 December 1829, p. 364). He seems to have been saying, that though believing paedobaptists were part of the invisible church, there was no Scriptural warrant for including them within the visible church.

<sup>115</sup>Brantly once made special mention of the Presbyterians’ decision that “an *unbaptised* person does not belong to the visible kingdom of the Redeemer” (W. T. Brantly, “Minutes of the Presbyterian General Assembly for 1830,” *CSCI*, 21 August 1830, p. 126).

<sup>116</sup>Brantly, “The Common Odium,” 179, 178.

We [Baptists] should hardly dare to name our scruples about baptism if it be no longer considered a Term of Communion. Let it be understood that Christians may commune without it, and its claims to observation are at once weakened. For if it may be passed over by those seeking the Lord's Table, it may be omitted from the pre-requisites to church membership, and by parity, laid aside wholly from the duties of the Christian life and profession.<sup>117</sup>

By extension, Brantly may also have had in mind the flip consideration. Given the existence of the Baptist denomination, was not the question of close communion essentially moot? Why should one object to separation at the Table when Baptists already met in separate houses of worship?

Brantly's grave concern over the existence of the Baptist denomination sheds much light on his concept of evangelical unity. On the one hand, evangelical unity would be based on Truth—the clear, authoritative Scriptures. Second, love for brothers did not remain silent about the Truth, but issued rebukes—even tacit rebukes such as close communion. None of this meant, however, that Brantly wanted all Christians to become Baptists *per se*. That proposition he had specifically denied in the “UNIONIST” declaration quoted earlier. In a sense, Brantly seems to have isolated a principle—antipaedobaptism—and defended a practice in its support. For now, Baptists took the lead. In the future, once this point was cleared, others may take the lead, “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).

### **Polemics over Baptism**

**Verbal arguments.** As an editor, Brantly faced many controversies. When he acted as referee, he followed two main principles. First, arguments should be brief. From experience, Brantly knew that the contests of “many theological disputants . . . degenerate from a struggle for truth to a struggle for victory, and end in a mere strife for the last word.”<sup>118</sup> Second, arguments should avoid heat. Brantly warned, “When

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>118</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Last Word and the Last Argument,” *CI*, 21 January 1832, p. 48; see also Brantly, “On Publishing Both Sides of a Controversy,” *CSCI*, 21 August 1830, p. 113; idem, “More



disputants are once soured towards each other, little good cometh out of their controversy.”<sup>119</sup> Even with these two rules, Brantly advised that Christians should pray more and argue less, for every Christian can pray, but “not more than one in twenty can argue with great ability.”<sup>120</sup>

To explain his own polemics, Brantly took occasion from a fine apology of Baptist doctrine given by Daniel Sharp of Boston. For Brantly, tone implied weight: “Bold slander and insidious sarcasm, are the ordinary weapons of attack or defense, when the juster panoply of sound argument and truth fails to be effectual.” Should such attacks be answered? It depends. “To go after all these idle imputations,” Brantly warned, “would be a chase of phantoms; but that the more confident and specious ones should be met and rebuked into shame and silence, can hardly admit a question.”<sup>121</sup> This principle readily applied to the debate over infant baptism, which Brantly often battled with satirical irony. He reasoned, “When we seriously consider the puerile evasions, deceptive glosses, ridiculous [*sic*] quibbles, and unfounded assertions to which grave men resort, for the support of that spurious baptism . . . , it is not strange that the friends of truth . . .

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Light,” *CI*, 22 January 1831, p. 61. Elsewhere, Brantly remarked, “Truth is usually short and simple, but error delights in mazy prolixities” (idem, “An Amicable Discussion,” *CSCI*, 8 May 1830, p. 294).

Lamenting the usual course of church business, Brantly warned against expecting the end of a discussion when no new light can be shed upon a topic, for “the first grist must be ground over, on both sides, and pounded, and pulverized until it fills the eyes of all with dust, and hinders them from seeing.” Instead, Brantly advised those “who have a thirst either for being heard or read—*Either to keep silence, or to say something better than silence*” (idem, “We Must All Say Something,” *CI*, 29 January 1831, p. 77). When Brantly anticipated endless “replies and rejoinders,” he would sometimes decline to print the first blow (e.g., “A Case in the Flint River Association, Ga.,” *CI*, 1 January 1831, p. 16).

<sup>119</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Disputation,” *CI*, 3 November 1832, p. 276. He himself was “pained when brethren have their feelings *hurt*” (idem, “Answers to Correspondents,” *CI*, 1 January 1831, p. 16, italics original). As a pleasing example of “the frankness and charity of Christian minds, eagerly engaged in the pursuit of truth,” Brantly cited the baptism controversy waged between Congregationalist Leonard Woods and Baptists David Jones and John L. Dagg (idem, “Controversial Comity,” *CSCI*, 26 June 1830, p. 407).

<sup>120</sup>Brantly, “Disputation,” 276.

<sup>121</sup>Brantly, “Unjust Imputations Refuted,” 401. In reference to political arguments over the Tariff Bill, Brantly observed that strong expressions “may answer a good purpose when truth and suitable occasions justify them. At other times they are as injurious as ill-judged” (idem, “Strong Expressions,” *CI*, 2 February 1833, p. 71; see also Brantly, “Grave Senators,” *CI*, 16 February 1833, p. 112).

should try the effect of repelling levities with levities. A grave argument employed in exploding quibbles, is like the using of a crow bar, to lift away straws.”<sup>122</sup>

One occasion for “levities” came from the writings of J. B. Ayers of Harrisburg, a Methodist preacher of the Philadelphia Conference. Having been galled by the recent immersion of over two hundred people in Harrisburg, Ayers attacked immersion in his pamphlet “A Discourse on the Mode of Baptism,” originally delivered on 2 September 1830.<sup>123</sup> While Brantly apologized that one “should never enter upon [religious disputations] without grievous provocations,” he left no doubt that “this florid invective against the New Testament,” which represented “so stupid a piece of vulgar insolence,” did in fact provoke him, leading him to try, “if so hot a vengeance is approachable[,] . . . to discuss and dispel the smoke which surrounds it.” From this introduction onward, sarcasm reigns. In response to Ayers assertion that *apo* in Matt 3:16 and Mark 1:10 means “from” and not “out of” because *apo* is translated “from” more times than “out of,” Brantly mocked:

We have here quite a display of learning upon a Greek preposition. This wondrous word, “*apo*,” will, after all, prove fatal to us Baptists, in the hands of such a champion as Mr. Ayars. This Greek particle will brain us as effectually as if we had been knocked down, one by one, with a crowbar.—We have heard of various methods among philologists for fixing the meaning of words, such as etymology, induction, analogy, &c., but we never before knew a critic to resort to Arithmetic to obtain aid in such an investigation. The “*out of*,” it seems, has been fairly out voted by the “*from*.” *Apo* is translated “*from*,” three hundred and sixty times, and “*out of*,” only forty-eight times; and it is therefore “*the more likely to be correct*.” This is as splendid a victory as if it had been obtained by augury. Mr. Ayars has seen three hundred and sixty vultures, and the Baptists have seen only forty-eight.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A New Resort,” *CI*, 19 January 1833, p. 46; e.g., Brantly, “New Heresy in Alabama,” *CI*, 10 September 1831, p. 172. Brantly wrote his rationale on “levities” in defense of *Philoherdus*, a Baptist who had written an ironic “defense” of infant baptism for the *Index*.

<sup>123</sup>The immersions were received by former paedobaptists and were administered through the ministry of the pastor of the German Reformed Church, Rev. Winebrenner. See, e.g., W. T. Brantly, “The German Reformed Baptists at Harrisburg, Pa.,” *CSCI*, 23 October 1830, p. 269.

<sup>124</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A Discourse on the Mode of Baptism, by the Rev. J. B. Ayars, of the Philadelphia Conference,” *CSCI*, 4 December 1830, pp. 361, 362.

The next week, Brantly not only sliced up more of Ayars' arguments, which any "tyro" to Greek could see through, Brantly also introduced a new opponent: "A *Theologist* in this city, who is really in many respects a liberal man, and much of a gentleman, but who betrays some marks of hallucination . . . , has lately informed the world, through the medium of the press, *that there never yet was an instance in which one man immersed another.*" This gentleman argued, that since the candidate waded into the water, the administrator only immersed the top half! To which, Brantly responded:

We beg pardon for having said that there has been nothing new recently offered on the Baptismal controversy. This is something new. It must now be conceded that unless the Baptists can raise up a generation of giants, who will possess sufficient bodily strength to take up all candidates in their arms and bear them dry above the water until they may have attained a sufficient depth, then to plunge them, *all at once*, they must renounce the vain idea of every immersing any one. Truly this is imposing a heavy task on us, and must be considered one of the most overwhelming difficulties ever submitted to our discussion.

More soberly, Brantly pointed out that on this reasoning, paedobaptists also do not baptize infants, since some other person holds the child.<sup>125</sup>

Perhaps something more than principle also lay behind Brantly's sarcasm. In speaking on Brantly's temper, Manly offered this explanation of his mentor:

In his intercourse with his scholars, whether literary or theological, there was a certain roughness and severity of manner that seemed magisterial, and, to some, tyrannical and repulsive. Those who understood him . . . were neither offended nor grieved; and presently learned to bear it with as little of emotion as might be. To such he was gradually softened, familiarly putting on the kindness of a parent, *his natural temper*. The manner above referred to was assumed, it is believed, from the abhorrence, which was extraordinary in him, toward pertness, forwardness, insubordination, or self-conceit, in official inferiors; nor did he relax, while there remained a probability that any of these tempers yet existed to require his severe discipline.<sup>126</sup>

Manly's insight offers three helpful hints about Brantly's witty words. First, the person he attacked had called them forth. Not unlike his God, who to the pure shows Himself pure but to the crooked shows Himself shrewd (Ps 18:26), Brantly gave sincere answers

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<sup>125</sup>W. T. Brantly, "The Harrisburg Methodist, on Baptism," *CSCI*, 11 December 1830, p. 369.

<sup>126</sup>M., "Dr. Brantly," *CI*, 9 May 1845, n.p.

to sincere inquirers, but pricks to prigs. When one of “his quondam subscribers” in Tennessee accused Brantly of worshipping benevolent societies, loving money, lying about the effects of alcohol, and basically “mak[ing] religion of men’s actions,” Brantly first cleaned up the man’s spelling and grammar, and then pulled rank, “Truly, brother, this is a hard accusation to bring against *an Elder*. You should not suppose that because you have escaped burning from rum, that you will always escape. Let me warn you now at parting, to fly from the volcano.”<sup>127</sup> Second, just as Brantly expected much of scholars, so he also placed high expectation on editors, preachers, and other men of public discourse. When the editor of the Presbyterian *Philadelphian*, Ezra Stiles Ely, whom Brantly regarded as “generally a candid and liberal man,” denied that *baptizo* originally signified immersion, Brantly expressed surprise, then countered with the learned statements of another Presbyterian, and finally sorrowed to “see our valuable friend, so regardless of his safety, as to impale himself upon that sharp point, which his own Presbyterian brother fixed for reckless blunders in criticism.”<sup>128</sup> Third, in the final analysis, it was Brantly’s personality to *abhor* self-conceit. Even church members who “appeared to him conceited or unruly . . . received pretty much the same sort of treatment he gave to his grown-up boys,” which led to permanent misunderstanding.<sup>129</sup>

**Silent arguments.** In conducting his own debates, Brantly often preferred silence. For example, Brantly generally ceased trying to convince antimissionary Baptists, having concluded, “They would not be persuaded, *‘though one should arise*

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<sup>127</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Anti-Effort,” *CI*, 4 August 1832, p. 78, italics added.

<sup>128</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptism by Immersion,” *CI*, 18 May 1833, pp. 205-06.

<sup>129</sup>M., “Dr. Brantly,” n.p. Manly’s remark does not imply that Brantly lacked all social grace. Regarding his Philadelphia ministry, Brantly was remembered as “that courteous, devoted and able minister of the New Testament” (David Spencer, *The Early Baptists of Philadelphia* [Philadelphia: William Syckelmoore, 1877], 195). Elsewhere, a certain Judge Conrad (overly) commended Brantly for possessing “the mild benevolence of the Christian gentleman” as well as a “spirit touched with the finest impulses of humanity, and an affability of demeanor, which, while it imparted grace to his manner, made him in all circumstances, easy and accessible” (Lewis Gaylord Clark, ed., *The Literary Remains of the Late Willis Gaylord Clark. Including the Ollapodiana Papers, the Spirit of Life, and a Selection from His Various Prose and Poetical Writings* [New York: Burgess, Stringer, & Co., 1844], 8).

*from the dead.*”<sup>130</sup> Brantly also did “not profess to be friendly to public disputations on subjects of Divinity.” He believed, “Those high and sacred themes generally suffer in public estimation by the expedients on which dexterous argumentation, is generally forced.”<sup>131</sup> Sometimes a word to the conscience was better than answering an objection. Regarding one man who “stoutly maintained” that Judas would occupy one of the “twelve thrones,” Brantly strongly suspected that the man did not really believe this position, but only wished it so, for his “immoral conduct needed *such a salvo*.”<sup>132</sup>

Silence over baptism could also plead eloquently. For example, in the remarkable revival in late 1831 at Norristown, where there had been no Baptist church, Brantly’s co-workers, Leonard and Joshua Fletcher, made no speech at the baptismal waters. Brantly reported, “The ordinance of Christ was left to speak for itself. Its silent eloquence was permitted to have free course to the heart, without any of the hinderances which controversial statements might have created.” In Brantly’s opinion, no argument could have been better in “vindicating the way of the Lord.”<sup>133</sup>

In general, Brantly favored a life of good deeds as the greatest Baptist apologetic. He began his work as editor announcing that the days of strong invective were over. In the new age, he claimed, “a good life is the strongest argument.”<sup>134</sup> In saying this, Brantly seemed to foresee the coming Millennium, when the “good effects of

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<sup>130</sup>Brantly, “Published by Request,” 198. Brantly quoted Jesus’ words in Luke 16:31.

<sup>131</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Theological Debate,” *CI*, 29 January 1831, p. 70.

<sup>132</sup>Brantly, “Disputation,” 276.

<sup>133</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Special Meeting of the Central Union Association,” *CI*, 24 November 1832, pp. 322-23. In the presence of Christians, Brantly did speak, taking the opportunity on one occasion to remind Christians of their baptismal commitment (see Brantly, “An Address at the Administration of Baptism,” *CSCI*, 14 August 1830, 97-98).

<sup>134</sup>Brantly, “To the Readers of the Star,” 86. At a later date, Brantly seems to have contradicted himself, saying, “The best argument with which a Christian can reply to a wicked error, is to hold up the truth.” But even here, Brantly closed the article quoting the command of God: “*By well doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*” (idem, “More Light,” 61). The Scripture is 1 Pet 2:15. For an example of a good life backing a tough polemic, see Brantly’s commendation of Clopton and his polemic against Alexander Campbell (idem, “Mr. Clopton’s Controversy,” *CI*, 12 February 1831, p. 112).

the Gospel” will make “ten thousand objections now made against the Scriptures . . . vanish, without any need of arguments at all, like mist before the sun.”<sup>135</sup> Therefore, instead of viewing cooperation in evangelical united effort as a compromise or as a rival to Baptist identity, Brantly viewed such cooperation as the best argument, both for Baptist beliefs and for truth in general.

### **Conclusion**

Through his denominational identity as a national Baptist leader, William T. Brantly promoted evangelical unity upon the Reformation’s principles of truth without ignoring the denominational differences over baptism. On the one hand, he eschewed the idea that Baptists should lead a faction, because Baptists were too weak in his estimation to proceed alone. On the other hand, he tolerated the separate identity of Baptists as a temporary necessity, forced upon them by their biblical adherence to true baptism, despite the reluctance of other Protestants. While not wanting to lead a faction or party, Brantly stood firm against infant baptism, believing that this errant practice eventually secularized the church. The significance of this error justified both the separate existence of the Baptists and their complementary practice of close communion. In defending these positions, Brantly selected his weapons carefully, sometimes using perhaps too much wit, but in general keeping discussions civil and courteous. In everything, he considered action the best argument—both in the rite itself and in a life of benevolence. The next chapter will continue to examine Brantly’s view of evangelical unity, focusing on its doctrinal boundary and its active benevolence.

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<sup>135</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Opinions Respecting the Revelation of St. John,” *CI*, 7 May 1831, p. 296.

## CHAPTER 10

### BRANTLY AS AN EVANGELICAL

William T. Brantly identified himself with both the Baptists and with evangelical Christians at large. The last chapter explored both his initiatives and defenses as a Baptist. The present chapter exposes the limitations of this identity. In Brantly's mind, the true boundaries of Christianity did not coincide with a denominational identity. On the one hand, some within the denomination either defected as doctrinal heretics or remained as spiritually dead members. Such were not genuine evangelical Christians. Similarly, on the other hand, some from other denominations more strongly adhered to the goals and aspirations of Christ's kingdom than many within the denomination. Therefore, in addition to a denominational identity, true evangelical unity also possessed a doctrinal boundary and active benevolence.

#### **Doctrinal Boundary**

William T. Brantly believed in boundaries—in “discriminating lines” and in “distinctive terms,” which he asserted “are in nothing more important than in Christianity.” He spoke of three main lines. First, in the so-called “Christian world,” a line separated professing Christianity from infidelity, which, as one article in the *Index* explained, is the “unavoidable” byproduct of the spread of the Gospel. According to this article, which Brantly endorsed, after the Gospel has swept away heathen superstition, no alternative remains between embracing and rejecting Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Second, a line

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<sup>1</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Infidelity,” *CI*, 5 March 1831, p. 156. These views are found in an excerpt from the January 1831 issue of the *Eclectic Review*, which Brantly asserted “well expressed” his views on infidelity.

For proof that “infidelity” referred to views making no profession of Christianity, see Brantly, “Experimental Religion,” *CSCI*, 27 March 1830, pp. 194-95. On the infidel’s “specious display of

separated “evangelical religion” from the larger “christendom,” which included all professing Christians—Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, German liberals, as well as Unitarians, Universalists, and rationalists. In contrast, evangelical Christians were those “whose views coincided” on “Gospel principles.” According to his estimates, friends of evangelical religion comprised only one sixteenth of the world’s population. Third, among the “millions who are the outward advocates of Evangelical religion,” a line also marked off false professors from “true Christians,” the ones destined for Heaven. Estimating their numbers would be, in Brantly’s opinion, “unwarrantable.”<sup>2</sup> With these boundaries in mind, the next two sections will examine both sides of the line between evangelical religion and the rest of professing Christianity, leaving distinctions within evangelical religion for the remainder of the chapter.

### **Defining “Evangelical”**

While Brantly gave no explicit definition of the term “evangelical,” perhaps because controversy did not exist then over this term, his usage shows that he defined “evangelical” in terms of *beliefs*, which he called “Gospel principles.” Teachers outside evangelical religion were “enemies of truth.”<sup>3</sup> Many of the same groups that he listed outside evangelical religion he elsewhere identified as teaching heresy, which he defined as “any open and obstinate deviation from those truths of the Bible which have been

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liberality,” and his secret persecuting, proselytizing, and creed of materialism, see Brantly, “The Illiberality of Skepticism,” *CSCI*, 19 December 1829, p. 385. For an example of an infidel humbled by questions about historical dates, see Brantly, “The Hunting-Shirt-Man and the Infidel Coxcomb,” *CSCI*, 20 November 1830, p. 333. For an example of Brantly’s own apologetics against skeptics, see the second sermon in Brantly, *Two Sermons, Delivered in the Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga. 1st . . . “On Parental Duties.” 2d . . . “The Judgment of Enemies in Favour of Religion”* (Augusta: William J. Bunce, 1824).

<sup>2</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Evangelical Religion,” *CSCI*, 22 August 1829, p. 121. For a similar definition of concentric circles, defining Baptists as orthodox, evangelical, and separate, see Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 14-28. With regard to evangelicalism, see Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church before the Watching World: A Practical Ecclesiology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), 61-81, 83-87.

<sup>3</sup>Brantly, “Evangelical Religion,” 121.



always considered *fundamental*.”<sup>4</sup> Examples of heresy included the denial of the inspiration of the Bible, of the deity of Christ, of the Spirit’s influence in regeneration and sanctification, and of the sinner’s justification before God on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone. Such deviations run contrary to “the common sense of Christians in all ages.” Therefore, in Brantly’s usage, an “evangelical Christian” is one who believes all the fundamentals of the faith, which are necessary for going to Heaven and which have been believed by true believers throughout the centuries.<sup>5</sup>

The fundamental truths of the Bible thus formed a fence around evangelical religion. Within the fence, Brantly encouraged union. Since their numbers were small, evangelicals should stand closely together and “suppress their jealousies.” He noted, “They have enemies enough to break their ranks without voluntary defections against each other.” If they must compete, let them compete in good works (cf. Heb 10:24).<sup>6</sup> Within the fence, Brantly also discouraged using the word “heresy.” Too often evangelicals accused their true brother of heresy simply “because he may happen to espouse and profess some sentiment contrary to the views of a particular community of Christians—but not contrary to the principles of the great body.” For example, calling a believer in unlimited atonement a heretic surely ran contrary to “the spirit of Christianity,” for most Christians would say that the atonement was “general in its nature, and limited in its application.” Should both general nature and general application be

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<sup>4</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Heresy, Antichrist, and Similar Expressions,” *CSCI*, 14 August 1830, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* For Brantly’s list of basic Baptist doctrines, see Brantly, “Reformation,” *CSCI*, 10 April 1830, p. 236. For the phrase “evangelical christians,” see Brantly, “Mrs. Judson and the Spirit and Manners of the Age,” *CSCI*, 3 October 1829, p. 214.

Brantly’s day did not invent the idea of fundamentals of the faith. The Second London Confession (1677) affirmed its agreement with both the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists “in all the fundamental articles of the Christian religion” (quoted in Nettles, *By His Grace*, 22). For a statement of evangelical fundamentals in Brantly’s day, see Lyman Beecher’s sermon “The Faith Once Delivered to the Saints” (1823), reprinted in *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900: An Anthology*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 70-85. McLoughlin suggests that this sermon “may be taken as the essence of the Evangelical creed so far as it had one” (“Introduction,” in *American Evangelicals*, 6).

<sup>6</sup>Brantly, “Evangelical Religion,” 121; see also Brantly, “A Very Excusable Emulation,” *SWG*, 1 February 1837, n.p.; W. [William B. Johnson], “Hints to Baptists,” *CSCI*, 8 May 1830, p. 290.

asserted, that would be heresy, for such an assertion lies outside the fence, in the camp of the Universalists.<sup>7</sup> Another example of possibly misapplying the word “heresy” concerned new doctrines. Since doctrinal development is possible, Brantly urged examination first. Moreover, since no one stood as the infallible expositor of the infallible Standard, Brantly cautioned against quick excommunication: “When the body and the head are firmly held, let love cement the rest.” Within the fence, union should prevail.<sup>8</sup>

Outside the fence, no union should be tolerated. When John Kerr, pastor of First Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, invited Alexander Campbell—a Baptist heretic—into his pulpit and thereby incurred a schism within the body, Brantly took opportunity of the calamity to warn other churches:

If the church in Richmond, using the knife of excision, had rid itself at once, of the corrupting gangrene which Mr. Campbell spread in it, much less confusion and mischief would have followed. And here we take occasion to remark, . . . that no unnecessary delay of discipline should allow such to remain festering like a disease upon the body. If, after admonition faithfully ministered, they do not publicly recant their *Anti-Christian* sentiments, they should be immediately expelled, as schismatics and disturbers of the peace of the church.

Then, after citing how First Church of Richmond merely let the followers of Campbell withdraw, rather than expel them, Brantly affectionately asked them to reconsider, saying, “If [avowed errorists] were too corrupt in doctrine to remain, much more are they too corrupt to form a church by themselves.” Merely allowing them to separate offered a

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<sup>7</sup>Brantly may have had in mind Elhanan Winchester, who, he elsewhere said, “maintained nearly the same views of the Bible, as those held by Calvinists, with this exception, that he made the Atonement to be certain, effectual, and irresistible in its application to the whole human race.” Winchester also posited “a limited duration of punishment in a future state, with a disciplinary purpose.” Citing the apostle Paul, who wrote that the damned will suffer “*everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord*” (2 Thess 1:9), Brantly asserted, “Their perdition then must be as perpetual as the PRESENCE OF THE LORD, from which it shall emanate.” In Brantly’s mind, Universalists did not compose a sect of their own, but had much variety in their creeds, and were found amongst “Unitarians, Necessitarians, Materialists, Free-thinkers, and the like” (W. T. Brantly, “The Doctrine of Universal Salvation,” *CI*, 18 February 1832, pp. 97, 98).

<sup>8</sup>Brantly, “Heresy, Antichrist, and Similar Expressions,” 109. Brantly further cautioned, “It becomes us to condemn with modesty and diffidence—even whilst we do it with firmness and decision” (*ibid.*).

“very pernicious” example, resting upon no “principle of Church-discipline, or Gospel order.”<sup>9</sup>

### Heretics

Behind bold eccentricities in religion, Brantly smelled pride. Without humility, many ministers overbalanced the good of their “transcendent talents” by the “evil attendant upon their eccentricities.” Like noble soldiers, they fight with bravery and perseverance, but do so out of rank; thus, their “lawless bravery . . . threatens the whole company with confusion and dismay.” Superior talent often walked aberrant paths. Such sad facts made Brantly “almost afraid to hear of a *great man*,” for, as an aged minister once told him, improved gifts without improved grace will prove a snare in the end.<sup>10</sup> The case of Robert Robinson, the former Baptist minister in England, who fell from the piety of the hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” to the “cold delusion of Unitarianism,” struck Brantly as “sufficiently alarming to all who now hold the Faith.”<sup>11</sup>

Heresies in particular often originate in pride. Geniuses often grow tired of the old paths and therefore seek “ways of their own.” They even “make the Bible an engine to overthrow religion, and again bring in religion to modify the Bible.”<sup>12</sup> Isolated and divisive, the true heretic “boldly selects a creed for himself, to the disregard of unity of Spirit in THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.”<sup>13</sup> As an “advocate of error,” he delights in dialogue, for, as Brantly wrote, “The more people are bewildered, the better for him.”

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<sup>9</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Division in the First Baptist Church in Richmond, Va.,” *CI*, 24 March 1832, p. 186. Regarding “gangrene,” Brantly seemed to have had 2 Tim 2:17 in mind.

<sup>10</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Talents Often Spoiled by Eccentricities,” *CSCI*, 13 November 1830, p. 305. As living examples of bold eccentrics, Brantly cited Edward Irving, who ascribed to Jesus a sinful nature, and “Baptist Noel,” who taught a thousand-year reign of Christ in Jerusalem.

<sup>11</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Once Sound in the Faith,” *CI*, 8 October 1831, p. 235.

<sup>12</sup>Brantly, “Talents Often Spoiled by Eccentricities,” 305; cf. Brantly’s source for this idea: “Neologism,” *CSCI*, 25 September 1830, p. 202.

<sup>13</sup>Brantly, “Heresy, Antichrist, and Similar Expressions,” 109.

Therefore, Brantly warned, “The spirit of error is no harmless fairy, but a mischievous emissary from congregated fiends.”<sup>14</sup>

Regarding eccentricities, Brantly believed that Baptists suffered more than other denominations.<sup>15</sup> When persecuted, they stood bold; but now as “great and honorable,” they apostatize.<sup>16</sup> By apostasy, Brantly did not refer to Baptists like James Macaboy of Pittsburgh, who conscientiously left and joined the Presbyterians.<sup>17</sup> True apostasy concerned jumping the fence, and shaking the very foundations with heresy. Such apostasy was causing dissension both in the West and in the South. In Kentucky, Brantly noted how “churches have suffered much from divisions, and much, we apprehend, from disorderly preachers.” In light of “heresy [having] shaken them all to the foundation,” he rejoiced to hear of a state convention to regulate affairs.<sup>18</sup> Similar things happened in the South. In Alabama, one correspondent complained, “Our churches are now mixed up into such a heterogeneous mass, that it is hard telling what is their faith and practice. Anti-missionary, Anti-Sunday school, are the themes of some. Some believe in Universalism, and some that there is no devil.”<sup>19</sup>

In dealing with those outside the evangelical fence, Brantly sought to maintain communication through dispassionate conversation. Heresy did not justify heat. For example, when Brantly read of the 1831 anniversary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, at which members discussed in “hot and contentious” speech amending the

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<sup>14</sup>W. T. Brantly, “On Publishing Both Sides of a Controversy,” *CSCI*, 21 August 1830, p. 113.

<sup>15</sup>Brantly, “Talents Often Spoiled by Eccentricities,” 305.

<sup>16</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” *CSCI*, 27 February 1830, pp. 129-30.

<sup>17</sup>W. T. Brantly, “An Unusual Recantation,” *CSCI*, 27 November 1830, p. 346.

<sup>18</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Convention of Baptists in Kentucky,” *CI*, 21 January 1832, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup>W. T. Brantly, “What May Be Next Expected?” *CI*, 9 June 1832, p. 364. For troubles in Georgia, see Brantly, “A Case in the Flint River Association, Ga.,” *CI*, 1 January 1831, p. 16; e.g., “The Secession of Churches from Associations,” *CI*, 13 August 1831, pp. 102-05. These troubles probably did not involve what Brantly considered to be heresy, for he closed his initial notice by exhorting, “*Sirs, ye are brethren, let there be no strife*” (idem, “A Case in the Flint River Association, Ga.,” 16).

constitution so as to exclude Socinians, he deplored “the vehemence of confusion which pervaded the meeting.”<sup>20</sup> Closer to home, Brantly admitted, in dealing with the errors of the Universalists, Christians may “have manifested less kindness and charity for their persons than severity towards their alleged corruptions.” He reminded his readers:

They are men, as well as we. They too, have conscience, judgment and sensibility. We should desire their welfare, and pray for them. By unkind imputations, we should not drive them from us so far, as to place them beyond the reach of our friendly admonition, and fair reasonings out of the Scriptures. We have the Word of God, which they profess to believe, and in some cases, at least, to receive as the result of divine inspiration. If we cannot turn them from their errors by a dispassionate appeal to this, we may not expect to do it by harsh censure, and irritating opprobrium.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, Brantly subordinated tone to truth. For example, when Theophilus Fisk, a Universalist from Reading, Pennsylvania, sent the *Index* an “angry and personal” letter, Brantly refused to publish the whole, but excerpted and printed its main argument. He even sympathized somewhat with the error, believing that no Christian “contemplates with pleasure the everlasting misery of any of his fellow men, otherwise than as that misery may be necessary to vindicate the ways of God; and even then he has more of astonishment and dread in the contemplation than pleasure.”<sup>22</sup> When a Unitarian lady criticized Brantly for repeating the commonplace “Unitarianism is only a half way house to Deism,” and offered an eleven-point creed of Unitarianism, Brantly responded to his “fair correspondent” with “a respect that shall correspond with its tone and temper.” He calmly pointed out that while none of the eleven articles directly opposed Scripture, they also did not tell “the *whole* truth,” for in leaving out articles on the Holy Spirit, original sin, justification, and “complete salvation by grace,” and in speaking “ambiguously”

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<sup>20</sup>W. T. Brantly, “British and Foreign Bible Society,” *CI*, 18 June 1831, p. 385.

<sup>21</sup>Brantly, “The Doctrine of Universal Salvation,” 97.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 97, 98.

about Christ, the production fell far short of a sufficient creed.<sup>23</sup> In this way, Brantly kept the fence up, but avoided trench warfare if possible.

Brantly fought several heresies. Two stand out for their historical importance. The first, German liberalism, appeared in Brantly's day as a foreign phenomenon, but by the turn of the century threatened the unity of American evangelicalism.<sup>24</sup> The second, Campbellism, menaced Baptists mostly in the West and South, having a similar outward form, but denying the old truths of experimental religion.

**German liberalism.** In general, the fundamentals of evangelical doctrine roughly correspond to the doctrines of the Reformation. From this fact, the temptation appears of equating the fence of fundamental truths with the boundaries of Protestant denominations, such as Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists, as well as Methodists. Brantly did not equate evangelical religion with Protestantism, for he recognized the presence of heresy within Protestant denominations, especially in Germany. In 1830, German theologians were on the cusp of theological apostasy, creating a philosophical and religious movement that has been dubbed "Liberalism." Along with others, Brantly called it "Neologism"—a *new* doctrine. He considered German liberals heretical because they were "mostly denying the divinity of Christ, the eternity of future punishment, and the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures."<sup>25</sup> This latter denial especially led Brantly in another place to charge German "neologism" with "HERESY, and ANTICHRISTIAN sentiments."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Unitarianism," *CSCI*, 12 September 1829, p. 172. Brantly classified Unitarians as heretics, for they denied "the divinity of the Saviour, the expiatory character of his sufferings and death, and the whole doctrine of regeneration" (*ibid.*).

<sup>24</sup>See McLoughlin, "Introduction," 22-25.

<sup>25</sup>Brantly, "Evangelical Religion," 121.

<sup>26</sup>Brantly, "Heresy, Antichrist, and Similar Expressions," 109. For Brantly's thoughts about German theological seminaries, see Brantly, "Professor Knowles' Address," *CI*, 5 January 1833, p. 12.

This condemnation of German “neologism” did not mean that Brantly automatically condemned all expressions of new theological movements. One striking example is Brantly’s qualified recommendation of English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection* (1825; American ed., 1829), which became “a central document in the whole Romantic movement.”<sup>27</sup> Coleridge defended Christianity on the basis of inner experience. He appreciated traditional doctrines of sin and atonement, but categorized biblical inerrancy as “bibliolatry” and a hindrance to true apologetics.<sup>28</sup> Brantly recommended *Aids to Reflection* on two provisos. First, the presence of evangelical doctrines such as incarnation, atonement, regeneration, and even election made profitable use of the book a possibility.<sup>29</sup> Second, Brantly reoriented the book to suit his own purposes. Coleridge aimed at a backwards proof of Christianity. In answer to the skeptics of Christianity, Coleridge merely said, “TRY IT,” and pointed to several hundred years of satisfied experimenters. In contrast, Brantly suggested that this method worked best at confirming existing believers. Thus Brantly defined the book as “*Mental philosophy applied to christian experience, . . . designed to shew what evidence of the truth of Religion, a sincere believer may find within himself.*”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Brantly did not submit to Coleridge’s Romanticism, but used it to support the Baptist emphasis on

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<sup>27</sup>McLoughlin, “Introduction,” 14-15. Romanticism claimed to offer “a higher intuitive Reason into a realm of eternal truth” than Scottish common sense realism (E. Brooks Holifield, *Gentleman Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1978], 66).

<sup>28</sup>For these facts and more on Coleridge, see Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 144-46.

<sup>29</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Aids to Reflection,” *CSCI*, 17 April 1830, pp. 241-42.

<sup>30</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Aids to Reflection,” *CSCI*, 24 April 1830, p. 257; see also Brantly, “Aids to Reflection,” *CSCI*, 17 April 1830, p. 241. Possible examples of Romantic traits in Brantly’s own weekly include his reference to “sublime prophesies” (idem, “The Illiberality of Skepticism,” 385), his quotation of a poem mentioning the “still small voice” (idem, “Consolation,” *CS*, 18 April 1829, p. 61), and his republication of the first Baptist tract, which begins with an emphasis on inner experience and feeling (“Memorable Thoughts, from a Pastor’s Common Place Book,” *CS*, 9 June 1827, p. 85). For a superb instance of a Baptist using the concept of the sublime, see Francis Wayland, Jr., *The Moral Dignity of the Missionary Enterprise* (Boston: Lincoln and Edmands, 1827).

experimental religion—an emphasis that helps to explain Brantly’s vehement reaction to the supreme Baptist heretic of his day, Alexander Campbell.

**Campbellism.** As editor of a Baptist weekly, William T. Brantly encountered several *Baptist* heretics. His animadversions upon Daniel Parker, the antimissionary originator of an odd doctrine about “two seeds in the spirit,” earned Brantly coverage in Parker’s new “duodecimo publication,” the *Churches’ Advocate*.<sup>31</sup> In facing Joshua Lawrence of North Carolina, another opponent of missionary “*priest craft*,” who talked as if he and those like him were “the only pure Christians remaining in the world,” Brantly tried to ignore the vituperative Fourth-of-July speech, in order to keep its author from achieving desired notoriety; but upon request, Brantly published the strictures of Obadiah Echols of Georgia.<sup>32</sup> In general, the antimission arrogance of so-called “Old School Particulars” really bothered Brantly—to think, “They alone are left, and even they are in danger of falling before the innovative spirit of the age.” He doubted the integrity of their claim, for he asserted, “Had our ancestors [*sic*] . . . been such Baptists as these, we should not at this day have had an existence.”<sup>33</sup> But of all the Baptist heretics, Brantly regarded Alexander Campbell as “the great champion of modern Baptist defection.”<sup>34</sup> Nor was Brantly alone in this estimate. The Muscle Shoal Baptist Association of Alabama warned its churches to avoid all the “efforts now in operation, calculated to produce schisms in the Baptist church.” Campbell in particular is cited as “the most conspicuous” in “this

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<sup>31</sup>After noting the paper’s poor grammar, as Brantly often did, he then minimized grammar in light of content, saying, “We do not, therefore, find fault with Elder Parker for being illiterate, but for being *anti-Christian* in his spirit” (W. T. Brantly, “Churches’ Advocate,” *CSCI*, 21 November 1829, p. 332). Baptist historian Leon McBeth speculated of Parker, “Perhaps no person did more to fix antimissions upon Baptists” (H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* [Nashville: Broadman, 1987], 373).

<sup>32</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Mr. Joshua Lawrence,” *CSCI*, 11 September 1830, p. 171; *idem*, “Published by Request,” *CI*, 29 September 1832, p. 198.

<sup>33</sup>Brantly made these remarks about the claims of a new publication, the *Signs of the Times* (W. T. Brantly, “Signs of the Times,” *CIBM*, 24 August 1833, p. 30).

<sup>34</sup>W. T. Brantly, “New Publications,” *CI*, 17 September 1831, p. 190.



disorganizing work,” due to his “literary attainments” and his magazines, in which “the fundamental principles of pure and vital christianity [were] artfully undermined or secretly pulled down” for another “ISM.”<sup>35</sup> In Kentucky alone, historians estimate that half the Baptist churches defected to the new movement.<sup>36</sup> Even James Shannon, who had taken over the Augusta church after Brantly left, and whose sermon on Proverbs 13:15 Brantly once praised, eventually defected to the Campbellites.<sup>37</sup>

Educated in Scotland, Alexander Campbell (1788-1886) left both his native land and its Presbyterianism to emigrate in 1809 to Pennsylvania, where he quickly took the lead in his father’s fledgling restorationist movement. Even though the two Campbells labored for a decade among the Redstone Baptist Association, with Alexander editing his periodical, the *Christian Baptist*, from 1823 to 1829, they eventually renounced all denominational ties and sought to restore primitive Christianity to “the ancient order of things,” under the motto, “Where the holy Scriptures speak, we speak; and where they are silent, we are silent.” From 1829, Alexander Campbell vigorously argued his position in his new periodical, the *Millennial Harbinger*, which attacked Brantly’s *Index* and many other religious periodicals. Ironically, this nondenominational reformer eventually founded a new denomination called the “Disciples of Christ,” which in 1832 joined with Barton Stone’s older “Christian” movement to become a large and

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<sup>35</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A Seasonable Caution,” *CSCI*, 27 November 1830, p. 343. Although it is tempting to think Muscle Shoal should be spelled “Mussel Shoal,” the spelling is correct (see also Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 6 March 1830, p. 146).

<sup>36</sup>McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 377. For more information on strife in Kentucky, see Brantly’s notice on John Taylor’s pamphlet, *History of Clear-Creek Church, and Campbellism Exposed* (W. T. Brantly, “Pamphlets,” *CSCI*, 22 May 1830, p. 332).

<sup>37</sup>For Brantly’s commendation of one of Shannon’s sermons, see W. T. Brantly, “Baptist Preacher,” *CSCI*, 18 July 1829, p. 45. For more on Shannon, see Barry C. Poyner, *Bound to Slavery: James Shannon and the Restorationist Movement* (Fort Worth: Star Bible Publications, 1999); cf. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant, and D. Newell Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), s.v. “James Shannon (1799-1859),” by Barry C. Poyner.

influential movement in the Ohio River basin.<sup>38</sup> As Brantly so wryly noted, when Campbell devoted the *Harbinger* to “the destruction of Sectarianism,” the word “sectarianism” really meant “all denominations of Christians except his own party.”<sup>39</sup>

Alexander Campbell certainly fit Brantly’s category of eccentricity. Church historian Sydney Ahlstrom has characterized Campbell as “a curious compound of the rationalistic theologian on one hand and the eccentric and legalistic sectary on the other.”<sup>40</sup> Brantly recognized his foe as a “cunning editor,” who had such “insufferable egotism” that he thought nothing about listing his own achievements alongside great American patriots or the king of Great Britain.<sup>41</sup> In arguments, Campbell “never appear[ed] to write or think in a serious mood,” making his real views sometimes hard to ascertain.<sup>42</sup> As a leader, this “hero of word-fighting renown” managed to “lead his blind admirers upon the implicit faith which his authority alone challenges.”<sup>43</sup> For about two years, Brantly openly challenged that authority in the *Index*, through both his own editorials and through articles by men such as Abner W. Clopton, Robert B. Semple, and Andrew Broaddus. These contributions leave no doubt about Campbell’s status. Brantly flat-out calls “what is now known as ‘*Campbellism*’” a heresy, seeing how Campbell “so

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<sup>38</sup>For the details behind this summary, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 447-52; E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 291-305.

<sup>39</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Millennial Harbinger,” *CSCI*, 13 March 1830, pp. 174-75. When Brantly encountered the ex-Methodist Theophilus R. Gates of Philadelphia, editor of *The Reformer* and another opponent of “the christian efforts of the present time,” Brantly criticized the man’s autonomy: “He is under the watch care of no church, in communion with no society, and bound by no discipline” (idem, “Vindication,” *CSCI*, 19 December 1829, pp. 396-97).

<sup>40</sup>Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 448.

<sup>41</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Christian Baptist,” *CSCI*, 22 August 1829, p. 124.

<sup>42</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Moral Law and the Christian Baptist,” *CSCI*, 29 August 1829, p. 139. In one essay, Campbell attributed the “looseness of the style” to the rush for the press. Brantly found this appalling, expecting that the author of a document that challenged “nine-tenths of the christian world” would “inform us of the pains and attention which he had bestowed upon the subject” (idem, “Baptismal Regeneration,” *CSCI*, 18 September 1830, p. 186).

<sup>43</sup>Brantly, “The Millennial Harbinger,” 175; idem, “The Moral Law and the Christian Baptist,” 139.

boldly impugned” many “fundamental doctrines.”<sup>44</sup> In referring to Broaddus’ pamphlet, Brantly noted how this one-time admirer of Campbell had “detected his *quondam brother* attempting to subvert the truth, and thinks it time now to call him *Mr.*”<sup>45</sup> After partially reprinting this pamphlet in 1831, Brantly himself ceased firing, declaring that his “most judicious readers” thought the *Index* had “successfully refuted” Campbellism.<sup>46</sup>

Heresies can resemble a diseased tree, in which a very conspicuous sickness in the leaves may only be a symptom of poison in the roots. In Campbellism, the most conspicuous heresy concerned baptism.<sup>47</sup> Relying upon patristic testimony, Campbell began to affirm around 1830 that “the act by which we come to Christ, . . . receive the pardon of our past sins, [and] . . . come into the actual enjoyment of the salvation of Christ in this present life—is the *act of immersion into the name of Christ*: which act presupposes faith in him.” In other words, as Brantly translated Campbell, “Immersion is a saving act.”<sup>48</sup> When a sinner undergoes immersion, he passes from one state to another state, just as crossing the Ohio River brings a man from one state to another. Before immersion, the sinner may have had a change of views about Jesus, and so also a change of heart towards him; but unless the man then receives a change of state through immersion, Campbell asserted that the man would remain “unpardoned, unjustified, unsanctified, unreconciled, unadopted, and lost to all christian life and enjoyment.” Upon immersion, all these epithets switch, assuming the man has faith.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Correspondents. Mr. Clopton’s Controversy,” *CI*, 12 February 1831, p. 112.

<sup>45</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Mr. Broaddus’ Pamphlet,” *CI*, 24 September 1831, p. 195. For more on Broaddus, who had published articles under the pseudonym “Christianos,” see Brantly, “Rev. Andrew Broaddus of Va.,” *CI*, 22 January 1831, p. 64; idem, “New Publications,” 190.

<sup>46</sup>Brantly, “Mr. Broaddus’ Pamphlet,” 195.

<sup>47</sup>Of the “Eight Items of Heretical Doctrine” (Campbellism) enumerated by a Baptist association meeting in Woodford County, Kentucky in 1829, five mention baptism (see W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 13 March 1830, p. 162).

<sup>48</sup>Brantly, “Baptismal Regeneration,” *CSCI*, 27 March 1830, p. 194.

<sup>49</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptismal Regeneration,” *CSCI*, 18 September 1830, p. 186.

Brantly certainly did not believe this heresy, and found much poison beneath the roots of Campbell's baptismal regeneration.<sup>50</sup> First, Brantly accused Campbell of making religion consist not of character, but of "a state." When Campbell denied ever saying or insinuating that religion is a state, Brantly accused him of trying "to slip through the meshes of ambiguity in the term '*religion*,'" for Campbell had said that being sanctified represented a state, and (as Brantly asserted) "to be *truly* religious, and to be sanctified, are considered one and the same thing the world over."<sup>51</sup> Second, Brantly criticized Campbell for making a change of heart the result of a change of views, instead of "the result of the Holy Spirit's acting in conjunction with the Word of God."<sup>52</sup> Within this charge lies the accusation of Sandemanianism, which asserted that faith is nothing more than mental assent to the facts of the Gospel, or in Campbell's own words, faith did not "consist in any thing else, more or less, than the persuasion that the gospel is true." In Brantly's opinion, this view made the devil "a believer of the right kind."<sup>53</sup> Going deeper, Brantly's criticism also contained the accusation of Arminianism. When a correspondent to the *Christian Baptist* once ridiculed the "*Calvinistic Baptists*" of Kentucky, Brantly noticed how Campbell—the "cunning editor"—criticized not the matter, but only the manner and terms of the correspondence.<sup>54</sup> Finally, as implied in the ideas about a state, Brantly elsewhere cited how Campbell's view of the Law of Moses as

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<sup>50</sup>An example of Brantly's own belief comes from his summary of the Burman mission. Regarding the total number of converts, Brantly reported, "In addition to the number baptized—three others who had not received the ordinance, but who gave satisfactory evidences of piety, had died" (W. T. Brantly, "A Concise View of the Baptist Mission in Burmah," *CSCI*, 16 October 1830, p. 251).

<sup>51</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Baptismal Regeneration," *CSCI*, 18 September 1830, p. 186; idem, "An Uncivil War," *CSCI*, 13 November 1830, p. 317.

<sup>52</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Baptismal Regeneration," *CSCI*, 18 September 1830, p. 187.

<sup>53</sup>Brantly, "The Millennial Harbinger," 175. For more information on the British roots of Campbell's ideas, and especially his connection to the reform movement of John Glas (1695-1773) and Robert Sandeman (1718-1771), see Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 448 n.17. For a Baptist critique of Sandemanianism, see Andrew Fuller, "Strictures on Sandemanianism, in Twelve Letters to a Friend," in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller [Works]*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 2:561-646.

<sup>54</sup>Brantly, "The Christian Baptist," 123-24.

a mere political constitution led Campbell into antinomianism. Brantly exclaimed, “See how extremes meet! Excessive *Arminianism*, and *Antinomianism* are more nearly allied than at first we should imagine.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Campbell had been suspected of heresy on this matter since 1816, when he preached to a Virginian Baptist association that the Gospel replaced the entire Old Testament, in all its judicial, ceremonial, and moral laws.<sup>56</sup>

The fundamental root of poison, tying all these errors together, was Campbell’s denial of *experimental religion*.<sup>57</sup> By this term, Baptists chiefly meant the workings of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, bringing conviction of sin, regeneration, and assurance of salvation:

It is believed amongst us [Baptists] that there is a HOLY SPIRIT OF PROMISE, by which Christians are sealed *after* they may have come to the exercise of faith, that this same Spirit presides over, and produces every instance of regeneration which occurs in the world; and that he ordinarily employs the Word of God as the instrumental action in regeneration.<sup>58</sup>

Based on the operations of the Holy Spirit, Baptists required recent converts to tell “their

<sup>55</sup>Brantly, “The Moral Law and the Christian Baptist,” 139.

<sup>56</sup>Holifield, *Theology in America*, 295. For Brantly’s own defense of the Decalogue’s authority in a Christian’s life as the moral law, see the following series of articles: W. T. Brantly, “The Moral Law and the Christian Baptist,” *CSCI*, 29 August 1829, p. 139; idem, “Christian Morality,” *CSCI*, 26 September 1829, pp. 193-94; idem, “The Law of Ten Commandments,” *CSCI*, 26 September 1829, pp. 202-03; idem, Editorial Reply to A Subscriber, Letter to the Editor, *CSCI*, 3 October 1829, pp. 218-19; idem, “The Moral Law,” *CSCI*, 14 November 1829, pp. 310-14; idem, “The Rule of Life,” *CSCI*, 16 January 1830, pp. 43-44; idem, Editorial Reply to Alabamian, Letter to the Editor, *CSCI*, 23 January 1830, pp. 60-62; idem, Editorial Reply to Alabamian, Letter to the Editor, *CSCI*, 6 February 1830, pp. 85-88; idem, “The Rule of Life,” *CSCI*, 20 February 1830, pp. 123-24; idem, Editorial Reply to Alabamian, Letter to the Editor, Dated 29 March 1830, *CSCI*, 1 May 1830, pp. 276-78; idem, “Bishop Heber and the Rule of Life,” *CSCI*, 1 May 1830, p. 285; idem, Remarks on Alabamian, “The Authority of the Old Testament,” *CSCI*, 7 August 1830, pp. 87-88.

On the Sabbath in particular, see Brantly, Editorial on the Sabbath, *CSCI*, 28 November 1830, p. 347; idem, “Sabbath Breaking,” *CSCI*, p. 78; idem, “The Sabbath, Moral Law, &c.,” *CSCI*, 7 August 1830, pp. 84-85; idem, “The Sabbath,” *CI*, 22 January 1831, p. 61; idem, “*Query*,” *CI*, 28 May 1831, p. 364; idem, “The Lord’s Day,” *CI*, 19 January 1833, p. 46.

<sup>57</sup>Andrew Broaddus gave a similar analysis: “The great error which lies at the bottom of Mr. Campbell’s theory, of the actual forgiveness of sins in baptism, appears to consist in *an undervaluing of the exercises of the heart, and attaching to external conduct or action, the importance which really belongs to those exercises*” (quoted in Brantly, “Mr. Broaddus’ Pamphlet,” 195).

<sup>58</sup>Brantly, “Reformation,” 236.

experience” before admitting them to baptism.<sup>59</sup> In this way, baptism merely symbolized the completed transaction of the heart:

Immersion in the name of the Trinity, is regarded as nothing more than the figure, the symbol of salvation. It is not a moral purgation, *but the answer of a good conscience*. To the question—*Dost thou believe with all thine heart*, Baptism answers, yes. It is a most significant answer.<sup>60</sup>

Campbell, in contrast, had no time for such spiritual religion. He wrote, “All men who believe and preach Christ, should be able to give a reason of the hope which they entertain, by adducing the evidences of the gospel—not by telling their experience, which will never convince any body but an enthusiast.” Moreover, he asserted (in reference to the Baptist use of 1 Cor 2:5), “A *demonstration* that cannot be seen or heard, is, in our mother tongue, no demonstration at all; and a faith that rests upon any thing called demonstrations of the Spirit, and of power which are only felt in the heart, is a faith resting upon itself.”<sup>61</sup> To make his point, Campbell told of a slave who would supply “*experiences*” for applicants to the local church for the price of a chicken. The levity of the story appalled Brantly. If an infidel had published the story, Brantly would not have marveled at its wittiness; but to “find, the conscientious scruples and practices of 3000 baptist churches, thus caricatured, and exhibited to derision, in a work styled *Christian*” left no restraint to his “grief and detestation.” He strongly concluded, “Such an effort to discredit all experimental religion, deserves more severity of rebuke than we can permit ourselves to administer.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>In at least two articles, Brantly associated “experimental religion” with converts relating their experience: Brantly, “The Millennial Harbinger,” 175; idem, “Experimental Religion,” *CSCI*, 27 March 1830, p. 194. See also the section, “Hasty Admissions,” in chap. 7.

<sup>60</sup>Brantly, “Reformation,” 236. Brantly here quoted from 1 Pet 3:21 and Acts 8:37.

<sup>61</sup>Quoted in Brantly, “The Millennial Harbinger,” 175.

<sup>62</sup>Brantly, “Experimental Religion,” 194; see also Brantly, “Baptismal Regeneration,” *CSCI*, 18 September 1830, p. 189; and Brantly’s footnote in “An Amicable Discussion,” *CSCI*, 8 May 1830, p. 296. For Brantly’s defense of experimental religion, see “Doubts and Evidences,” *CSCI*, 28 August 1830, pp. 130-31.

Alexander Campbell hit at a fundamental doctrine among traditional American Baptists when he denied experimental religion. The Muscle Shoal Association of Alabama declared experimental religion to be “that which Baptists ever cling to.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, one modern Baptist historian has called experimental religion not only “a fundamental tenet” of early Baptists, but “their *raison d’etre*.”<sup>64</sup> In this light, Brantly seems justified in having identified Campbell not as a *reformer*, which the latter liked to claim, but as a *revolutionary*. In Brantly’s mind, a reformer held to both the past and the future; but a revolutionary did damage to the foundation:

Revolutionists, either in civil or religious matters, are often to be suspected. In their harsh attempts to repair the building, they frequently subvert the very foundation. . . . As they act under a plausible pretext, they can take advantage of public credulity, and proceed to almost every extravagance. Another misery with religious revolutionists, is that they never know when and where to stop.<sup>65</sup>

By subverting the foundation “under the plausible pretext of restoring the ancient order of things,” these so-called “*Reformers* and innovators” prove themselves to be heretics and dangerous. Their followers “are left engulfed in the mire of debasing error.”<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, Brantly seems to have considered schism necessary and, by inference, perhaps even beneficial to Baptists. Like the apostle Paul, who wrote that factions must occur in order that “those who are approved may be recognized” (1 Cor 11:19), Brantly believed that Campbellism flushed out the false professors among Baptists:

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<sup>63</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A Seasonable Caution,” *CSCI*, 27 November 1830, p. 343.

<sup>64</sup>Edwin S. Gaustad, “Baptists and Experimental Religion,” *The Chronicle* 15 (July 1952): 111. While Gaustad claims that his concept of experimental religion as *mere* private religious experience expresses the essence of being a Baptist, it fails to account adequately for close communion and historic Baptist confessions of faith (*ibid.*, 115, 117). In reality, Baptist churches judged the validity of internal experience upon the objective authority of an external Bible (Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], 12-13, 30).

<sup>65</sup>Brantly, “Reformation,” 236. As an example of not stopping, Brantly cited Campbell’s new version of the New Testament, *The Living Oracles* (1826). For background, see Holifield, *Theology in America*, 297.

<sup>66</sup>Brantly, “On Publishing Both Sides of a Controversy,” 113, italics original.

Who are the Baptists that have been converted to his new creed? They are such, as were previously Arminians, or Sandemanians, such as never stood firm on the basis of truth, such as were ready to take up with the first leader of discontent and faction, such as always opposed united effort in promoting the spread of the Gospel, and the advancement of education, and those who through ignorance, become an easy prey to greedy error.<sup>67</sup>

Brantly made it clear that he referred here to “thorough converts,” not just those who partially fell in with Campbell’s views. When the Black Rock Baptist Association demurred, claiming that they had embraced Campbell’s views, but had retained their former Calvinism, Brantly remained unconvinced, saying of these “Baptists”:

They have embraced [Campbell’s] *baptismal regeneration*, his *intellectual faith*, and his *renunciation of Calvinism*, and still continue to be old fashioned Calvinistic, close communion baptists! They are still four-cornered vessels, though they have rounded off every one of their corners! It would take a Chinese philosopher to tell how this can be.<sup>68</sup>

Just as heresy and truth do not mix, but are mutually exclusive, so heretics eventually flee the fold for “reformers” like Campbell, who will give them what they want. Doctrinal truth implies ecclesiastical separation—the complement to Brantly’s evangelical unity.<sup>69</sup>

### Active Benevolence

Within the fence of evangelical fundamentals, Brantly sought a unity greater than either doctrine or denomination. He also sought a unity greater than peace, which he spoke of as the mere absence of strife. Brantly sought a unity of action—a unity empowered by the presence of the revival spirit. Evidence for this search comes from Brantly’s insistence on purity over peace, and from his respect for “good men” of other evangelical denominations.

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<sup>67</sup>Brantly, “The Moral Law and the Christian Baptist,” 139.

<sup>68</sup>W. T. Brantly, “To Our Correspondents,” *CSCI*, 3 April 1830, pp. 222-23. Cf. 1 John 2:21.

<sup>69</sup>Regarding the future of Campbellism and heresy in general, Brantly predicted, “In a few years what now is known as ‘*Campbellism*’ will be merged in the more vulgar corruptions, of *Universalism, Arianism, Sabellianism, Unitarianism, &c. &c.* There is seldom any thing new in error. Heresy has exhausted its invention, and hence most of its modern conceptions, are little else than the long exploded theories of ancient corruptions of the Truth” (W. T. Brantly, “Correspondents,” *CI*, 12 February 1831, p. 112).



## Purity over Peace

Brantly ranked purity higher than mere unity. Indeed, effective unity required purity. These convictions surfaced in an essay on prayer, written after an early morning prayer meeting. During the meeting, Brantly had been contemplating the possibility and effect of uniting all true Christians in such devotional exercises. Then the thought struck him, based on the command, “Put on your strength, O Zion” (Isa 52:1): “ZION never more evidently assumed her STRENGTH, than when she resorted to the earnest beseechings of prayer.” Elaborating in the essay, Brantly conceded that prayer may not produce miracles, such as stilling the stormy ocean, but God may providentially use the stormy wind to blow the man of prayer into safe harbor. To assume such prayer—such strength—Christians needed to unite. Brantly asserted, “A little band united can carry terror to the enemy’s camp.” However, only a *pure* union could wield such power. Uniting errors and corruption would only bring weakness and misery.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, putting it positively, Christians must unite in the purity of truth and righteousness.<sup>71</sup>

Truth and righteousness remained inseparable in Brantly’s theology. According to one sermon, “evangelical piety” consisted not in transient feelings or excitements, but in “the mind’s retention and digestion of the truth as it is in Jesus; in obeying the dictates of the Holy Spirit, in the denial of self in all things, and in the love of God and man.” In other words, truth and righteousness together constituted genuine piety. On the one hand, genuine righteousness required truth:

There will be neither durability nor consistent action in your religion, unless it be based upon the truth. Without such a foundation it will become a whimsical alteration of cold and hot fits, or else will be superseded by inevitable apostacy. It is only when you know the truth and love the truth, that the truth can make you free.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Solitary Hours. Zion’s Strength,” *CI*, 26 February 1831, p. 129.

<sup>71</sup>Brantly advised Christians “to comply with the delightful teachings of the Spirit of God, [and] to obey the dictates of charity” (Brantly, “Solitary Hours. Zion’s Strength,” p. 129; see also Brantly, “Things Which Have Been,” *CSCI*, 13 February 1830, p. 104).

<sup>72</sup>William T. Brantly, *Themes for Meditation, Enlarged in Several Sermons, Doctrinal and Practical* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman, 1837), 133.

On the other hand, genuine truth implied righteousness. In proving the holy Trinity from 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Brantly generalized from the passage's practical aim: "The Scripture seldom speaks with a manifest intention of asserting a particular doctrine, but, as it were undesignedly, blends its doctrines with its rules of practice."<sup>73</sup> This blended nature, in turn, carries an obligation: "Christ commands us to search the Scriptures, and we ought therefore to study them with humility, diligence, devotion, and a spirit of practical obedience." Regarding obedience, Brantly added, "The doctrines and duties of Christianity are inseparable; and as the former are learned the latter must be practised."<sup>74</sup>

As proof of purity before unity, the essay on prayer cited James 3:17, which states, "The Wisdom from above is *first* pure, *then* peaceable."<sup>75</sup> The peculiar order within this text weighed heavy in Brantly's mind. Because the purity of truth surpassed peace in value, Brantly mocked those who sought peace by excluding the truth: "*But all colors look alike in the dark.*"<sup>76</sup> He himself categorically declared, "Much as we love UNION, we love the TRUTH more."<sup>77</sup> Also, because the purity of righteousness surpassed peace in value, church discipline could justify disturbing the peace in order to maintain purity. Moreover, Christians should pursue "efforts for a revival of religion" even if they should disturb the peace, for the importance of conversion justified the risk of division. In concerns over purity, Brantly asserted, "The all-determining question is, *what is the end in view?*"<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 107-08. Another sermon states that Romans 7 deserves consideration "not merely for controversy and speculation, but for its deep experimental character" (ibid., 307).

<sup>74</sup>W. T. Brantly, "How the Scriptures May Be Rendered Profitable to Us," *CI*, 26 February 1831, p. 138. Presumably, the author is Brantly, even though the anonymous article is single-spaced.

Behind this article stands perhaps the language of the apostle Paul, who wrote, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable" (2 Tim 3:16).

<sup>75</sup>Brantly, "Solitary Hours. Zion's Strength," 129. The Scripture quotation is taken from the article.

<sup>76</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Those Who Do Not Read," *CI*, 29 January 1831, p. 80, italics original.

<sup>77</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Correspondents," *CI*, 19 February 1831, p. 128.

<sup>78</sup>W. T. Brantly, "The Value of Peace," *CI*, 8 January 1831, p. 23.

As another proof of purity before unity, Brantly pondered the opposite. What would happen if peace were the ultimate virtue? Revival and reformation would disappear. If everything that disturbed the peace were condemned, the current state of the church would become the standard for all time. But did Luther pursue such a course? Or Whitefield? If such a course were pursued to its logical end, the “love of peace” would become “a mere synonyme [*sic*] for the love of slumber; and the very sleep which ought to be disturbed . . . a plea for its own perpetuity.” In bold contrast, Brantly asserted:

It is much better to have half the members of a church awake, though the other half are fretting at them, than to have them all asleep together, though in as sweet a sleep as ever was enjoyed . . . . That which the more lively members must give up for peace, is what they cannot resign if they would, and what they ought not to resign if they could. They have nothing to do but to seek more spirituality for themselves, and to use their utmost endeavors to impart it to those around them. If it should split churches and denominations to atoms, the spark which we hope is graciously kindled ought to be fanned into a flame.<sup>79</sup>

But how could Brantly the “Unionist” speak so lightly of division, even within denominations? He himself later testified, “Religious disputes are always painful to pious minds when they tend to disunion and jealousy.”<sup>80</sup> How could he disparage unity?

Despite temporary strife, Brantly envisioned a new kind of unity rising out of lively purity. He confessed:

We think the revival spirit bids fair to produce a more valuable christian union than has existed since the apostolic age, and such a one as may be hopefully ranked among the signs of the latter day glory; we mean a union of heart and hand in the conversion of sinners, not among ministers merely, or bodies of christians, but among christians individually; a union which well be felt powerfully, not withstanding all denominational separations, and much more powerfully than all denominational conjunctions. Baptists, independents, methodists, &c. &c. &c. have been hitherto united among themselves by little more than *a name*; the revivalists, if God in mercy should scatter a number of them through his church, in whatever sects, will every where be united by manifest character and effort, in heart and in soul.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Important Case,” *CI*, 4 June 1831, p. 359.

<sup>81</sup>Brantly, “The Value of Peace,” 23.

Here is true evangelical unity—a “union of heart and hand in the conversion of sinners,” a union of “manifest character and effort.”<sup>82</sup> In the face of such potential union, denominational ties were just a name, and splits over purity were justified.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, Brantly sought union with all those who possessed the same benevolent *purpose* as him, upon the same pure *foundation* of evangelical piety—truth and righteousness. Citing Psalm 37, which (according to Brantly) deserved more attention than the declaration of an archangel, Brantly insisted: “Not the Roman catholic, not the Protestant, not the Presbyterian, not the Episcopalian, not the Baptist, or Methodist, or any denominationalist, but the *meek*, those who wait upon God, those who make all their designs coincident as far as possible, with his designs, they shall inherit the earth. More of these inheritors may come from one denomination than another, but the promise is to no persons by name, altogether by character.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, Brantly sought union with all “good men” from other evangelical denominations.

### **A Union of “Good Men”**

Brantly often applied the term “good men” to those in other denominations who possessed the necessary qualifications for a pure unity. In a sermon on Acts 11:24, which describes Barnabas as a “good man,” Brantly defined this distinction as “a dignity which connects man with both worlds, which removes far from him every thing base and sordid, fills his temporal space with usefulness, and occupies the period of his probation with works which shall impart a true glory to his name.” In this definition, Brantly eschewed two extremes. On the one hand, he denied the appellation to those whose

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<sup>82</sup>The essay on prayer described this purity as “the grace of inward purity,” which would bind Christians together with “the strong ties of mutual affection and kindness.” Again, Brantly’s view of evangelical unity involved the inner affections that bind true Christians together in the “common cause” of the Kingdom of God (see Brantly, “Solitary Hours. Zion’s Strength,” p. 129).

<sup>83</sup>E.g., see Brantly’s counsel to one Alabama pastor, who had been excluded from his own church for keeping a Sunday school and “the Missionary system contrary to the orders of the church” (W. T. Brantly, “What May Be Next Expected?” *CI*, 9 June 1832, p. 364).

<sup>84</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Denial of Any Particular Truth Does Not Destroy That Truth,” *CI*, 25 June 1831, p. 411.

“goodness” consisted of “not being as abandoned as others, a few acts of imposing generosity, [and] some occasional displays of nominal goodness.” On the other hand, Brantly denied that the label “good” required perfection, for God measured His own gift of goodness by “that scale of moderation, which the frailty of sinful beings points out as the only correct standard.” The true qualifications for goodness include low self-esteem, contrition over sin, a high esteem of Jesus and His work, a love for missions and for all God’s people, and a persevering faith that overcomes the world.<sup>85</sup> In other words, a good man is a truly regenerate man, who from his inner spirituality brings forth, by the Holy Spirit, much useful activity.

The two denominations most mentioned by Brantly were Methodists and Presbyterians. Of these two, the Methodists might seem disqualified from any pure union due to their Arminian beliefs. Worse, Brantly considered them proud—“in the main a worthy people, who would deserve much greater commendation from others, did they assume less of themselves.”<sup>86</sup> Still, Brantly insisted that good Methodists possessed the purity of truth and righteousness. For example, Brantly once asked the Methodist Bishop Hedding, “Why cannot Methodists and Baptists agree about the doctrine of Election? The *Election* which we maintain is merely this,—*Salvation by Grace*.” The bishop replied, “That is the *Election* which I too maintain.” Using this interchange, Brantly generalized, “The truth is this—all good Methodists are Calvinistic in their prayers. It is only when they talk about their Creed that they change their tone.”<sup>87</sup> Elsewhere, Brantly denied that “good” Christians truly disagree:

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<sup>85</sup>Brantly, *Themes*, 292-302.

<sup>86</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Calvinism and Arminianism,” *CI*, 24 December 1831, p. 401.

<sup>87</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Popularity of Methodist Doctrine,” *CI*, 22 October 1831, p. 258. Not all Methodists agreed with this assertion (e.g., see Brantly, “Calvinism and Arminianism,” 401). On not exaggerating the doctrinal differences between Baptists and Methodists, see Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 442, 438.

Noticing that the term “creed” is not synonymous with “truth” helps to explain the following exaggerated claim, which Brantly made with respect to Universalists: “There is many a good man, who is good in spite of a bad creed—and there is many a bad man, who is bad, in spite of a good creed.” In saying this, Brantly may not be referring to the true goodness of Barnabas, but only to the *practical*

We have generally found that good men, when they perfectly understood each other, are of the same belief on all the grand doctrines of the Bible. Their disputes are caused, either by the imperfection of language, . . . or by its misapplication, . . . or by its total unfitness to convey a just impression of the meaning which one mind intends to present to another; or by prejudice . . . ; or finally by some crookedness of vision occasioned by the undue influence of the passions.<sup>88</sup>

Of Brantly himself, Richard Fuller testified, his “religious creed . . . was not the faith of a sectarian, but a christian.”<sup>89</sup> Given such convictions, Brantly asked rhetorically, “Why should good men quarrel about the amount of Christ’s achievements,—about the extent and capacity of his atoning sacrifice—about the nature of grace and decrees of election, provided they possess the consoling assurance of an interest in his great salvation?”<sup>90</sup> Good men should look beyond creeds to the pure unity in truth and righteousness.

Regarding the Presbyterians, Brantly’s category of a good man helps to explain his preference for New School proponents of revivalistic measures over their Old School opponents.<sup>91</sup> The Presbyterians presented a somewhat opposite case than the Methodists, for Presbyterian doctrine stood much closer to Baptists than the Arminian Methodists. Because of the “the similarity of doctrinal views” between Baptists and Presbyterians, Brantly’s readers desired to know more of the controversy threatening Presbyterian unity.<sup>92</sup> As a pastor in Philadelphia, Brantly stood in a perfect position to watch the

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tendencies of beliefs in one’s conduct within society. But regardless of how strict “good” is defined here, truth and righteousness did remain inseparable, for Brantly also said that heresy had a “bad tendency,” which, if followed out, would make its professors bad too. Though Brantly did not regard all Universalists as “bad men and women” at that time, in classifying them as “*heretics*,” he made no guarantees about their future level of goodness. See Brantly, “The Doctrine of Universal Salvation,” 97; idem, “Heresy, Antichrist, and Similar Expressions,” 109.

<sup>88</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Difficulties Attending the Discussion of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *CI*, 1 December 1832, p. 337.

<sup>89</sup>Richard Fuller, *Intrepid Faith. A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. William Tomlinson Brantly, D. D.; with A Sketch of His Life and Character; Delivered at the Request of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, S. C.* (Charleston: First Baptist Church, 1845), 32.

<sup>90</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Hints to Baptists—on the Atonement,” *CSCI*, 3 April 1830, p. 209.

<sup>91</sup>For a quick overview of the New School controversy, see David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, vol. 1, *Faith and Learning 1812-1868* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 242-53.

<sup>92</sup>Brantly, “The Important Case,” 359.

controversy unfold, not only because the city annually hosted the three to four-week session of the Presbyterian General Assembly, but also because the controversy itself centered on the city's presbytery.<sup>93</sup>

On 30 November 1830, a minority of the Philadelphia Presbytery pressed heresy charges against Albert Barnes, the New School pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, for his views on original sin and human ability, especially as these appeared in his sermon "The Way of Salvation" (1829). Having failed both then and on 19 April 1830 to remove Barnes from office, the minority party then petitioned the General Assembly of 1831 to try Barnes on "doctrinal questions," which they "deemed . . . fundamental."<sup>94</sup> The General Assembly condemned some of Barnes' phrases as "unguarded and objectionable," but exonerated both him and First Church. The Assembly also recommended a division within the Philadelphia Presbytery.<sup>95</sup> By 1832, the presbytery had not yet divided because the Synod of Philadelphia wanted to make it along geographical lines, while several New School pastors sought "elective affinity." In turn, this New School minority complained to the General Assembly of 1832 that they could no longer pray with the other party, nor even call them "brother" due to the oppression they felt. The Old School party stood unwilling to lift their restraint on these rascals, lest they should form their own heterodox presbytery.

Brantly witnessed most of the debates in the 1832 General Assembly. In the Old School camp stood the "ancient" and "venerable" Ashbel Green, who coolly, yet determinedly, conducted himself "as an aged gentleman in the Christian ministry."

Alongside him stood William L. McCalla, who came fresh from a number of

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<sup>93</sup>The ministers of the Assembly would take lodging among the "wealthier and more hospitable families" of the city, and would also supply the pulpits of the city, not only among the Presbyterians, but also in "most of the Baptist places of worship." As a result, Brantly reported that Philadelphia's "religious community . . . are generally delighted and animated by these annual visits from the distant Heralds of Gospel Truth" (W. T. Brantly, "General Assembly," *CSCI*, 29 May 1830, p. 348).

<sup>94</sup>W. T. Brantly, "General Assembly of Presbyterians," *CI*, 28 May 1831, p. 346.

<sup>95</sup>W. T. Brantly, "The Adjustment of the Case," *CI*, 4 June 1831, p. 367.

controversial battles and exhibited a temper more in keeping with “the hot strifes of political clubs, than to the grave sanctity of a Christian assembly.”<sup>96</sup> Among the New School plaintiffs stood the principal speakers, Thomas McAuley and Thomas Skinner, along with their compatriots Albert Barnes, Ezra Stiles Ely, and John L. Grant.<sup>97</sup> Even before the debates, Brantly knew that two obstinate parties stood before him. He had foreseen a division coming during the Barnes trial the year prior, and had even regarded Barnes’s installation as “a triumph gained over the dominion of Creeds and Articles.”<sup>98</sup> Brantly now acknowledged that the division ran deeper than strife over some doctrines; it also involved new measures and evangelical unity. Perhaps borrowing the language of one of his correspondents, Brantly dubbed Ashbel Green “the leading patron of *High Church* prerogatives,” saying that he seemed honestly to think that “Presbyterianism should be set above every other form of the Christian Religion.” On the other side stood men whose churches had been “greatly blessed by the spirit of Revivals” during the past year, and whose “whole aim appear[ed] to be the advancement of the Saviour’s cause on earth.” They were “more accommodating in sentiment, and more abundant in charity, towards the brethren of other persuasions, than those who claim to be the exclusive advocates of high church principles.”<sup>99</sup> Here then stood Brantly’s two types of union—

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<sup>96</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Presbyterian Difficulties,” *CI*, 2 June 1832, p. 337. McCalla had earlier debated Alexander Campbell and a Unitarian, Mr. Lane. Brantly did not sanction McCalla’s “bullying style” or debates on divinity (see W. T. Brantly, “Theological Debate,” *CI*, 29 January 1831, p. 70).

<sup>97</sup>Brantly, “Presbyterian Difficulties,” 337. For a review of some New School Presbyterian churches in Philadelphia, see Ezra Stiles Ely, “Narrative of the State of Religion in Several Churches under the Care of the Presbytery of Philadelphia,” *CI*, 26 May 1832, pp. 322-23, which was taken from the *Philadelphian*. Ely notably left out Second Church, where Green ministered.

<sup>98</sup>Brantly, “General Assembly of Presbyterians,” 346; *idem*, “Presbytery of Philadelphia,” *CSCI*, 10 July 1830, p. 31. Brantly admitted that as far as he could judge “the *Presbyterian Confession* of faith and Mr. Barnes are at variance” (*idem*, “Presbytery of Philadelphia,” 31.).

<sup>99</sup>Brantly, “Presbyterian Difficulties,” 337-38. Brantly may have taken his terminology from a Presbyterian correspondent, whose letter appeared later in the same issue. The correspondent described the “elective affinity” as a choice “regulated chiefly by views of ecclesiastical policy and the measures to be pursued for the *conversion of sinners*.” Elaborating, he claimed, “A sort of high and low-churchism is now the prominent division among Presbyterians.” Regarding the General Assembly, he added, “Nearly all the members of the present Assembly, who are known as revival men, are in favor of the division of the Philadelphia Presbytery, and of liberal measures generally. They appear to set the kingdom of Christ above every *ism* on earth” (Letter to the Editor, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, *CI*, 2 June 1832, p. 349).



the denominational union and the new union of revival spirit. His final assessment of the two parties bears quoting in full, for it strongly resembles his category of a “good man”:

If the *High-toned* party be struggling for the fundamental principles of the Gospel; and if they, in doing so, are maintaining the very grounds on which we as Baptists love to stand, then it should grieve us, to see that party losing favor. But if the other side should happen to have the Lord more manifestly with them, and if their spirit and action, have, in our view, a stronger affinity with the truth, then it becomes us to rejoice at their success. *By their fruits we may know both.*<sup>100</sup>

In other words, if the question is really one of heresy, in crossing over the evangelical fence of Gospel truth, or in deviating from Calvinistic doctrines, then Brantly approved the controversy. But if (as he really did believe) no heresy appeared, then Brantly favored a new union around the “spirit and action” of true revival. Between the two lay no middle ground, for Brantly recognized that the Philadelphia division must also divide the whole denomination, if not formally, then for sure substantially.<sup>101</sup> The Philadelphia Presbytery did divide in 1832, and so did the entire denomination in 1837.

In assessing Brantly’s early endorsement of some New School Presbyterian pastors, caution should be exercised about its precise meaning. On the one hand, Brantly’s endorsement did not imply that he adhered to New School theology. What Barnes allegedly denied, Brantly affirmed. Moreover, as seen in chapter 6, Brantly openly criticized New Haven metaphysics.<sup>102</sup> Apparently, the New School variants fell within the evangelical fence, for Brantly did not break fellowship with the New School men as if they were heretics. On the other hand, Brantly did react strongly to Green’s denominational bigotry. Brantly fully sympathized with the New School zeal for active benevolence. Thus, the real division lay not with doctrine or even denominations, but with favor or opposition to the revival spirit of benevolent, active goodness.

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<sup>100</sup>Brantly, “Presbyterian Difficulties,” 338.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>102</sup>E.g., W. T. Brantly, “The Application of Metaphysics to Theology,” *CI*, 3 March 1832, pp. 129-30; cf. Ashbel Green, “Classification of Presbyterians, in Regard to Doctrine,” *CI*, 17 September 1831, p. 183; and “Metaphysics,” *CI*, 25 May 1833, pp. 327-28, which Brantly reprinted from the *Presbyterian*.

Here lie the historical roots of modern American evangelicalism. Two parties existed at that time within the Protestant denominations—the “high church” party of denominational pride and the “evangelical” party of revival spirit and activity. Albert Barnes called these divisions “hierarchical” and “evangelical.” Robert F. Baird, another contemporary, classified all American denominations as either “Evangelical” or “Unevangelical,” with the former divided by Calvinistic or Arminian theology.<sup>103</sup> In Brantly’s eyes, “*High Churchman*” seemed to correspond automatically with “*laziness*.”<sup>104</sup> In viewing the present denominations, Brantly lamented “the constant tendency of the human mind to withdraw its attention from the essential parts of religion and fix it upon circumstances.” How amazing that Protestants drew swords over “mock devotions” and “a few ceremonies,” when lectures on moral philosophy and “cold and unmeaning prayers” drew no notice! Christians should be shocked to see “all the members of a particular church [living] in a state of inactivity, *doing* nothing at all for the advancement of the Redeemer’s kingdom.”<sup>105</sup> True *evangelical* unity arose from a pure heart’s desire to join with other Christians in prayers and efforts to further the Kingdom of God.

Interestingly, for all his defense of new measures and benevolent societies, Brantly did not fundamentally labor for outward reformation. When Alexander Campbell once called on Brantly to define publicly his idea of “reformation,” seeing how Brantly appeared inconsistent in advocating the “good old way” while also complaining about the

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<sup>103</sup>McLoughlin, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>104</sup>Brantly made this comparison in reference to *The Churchman*, an Episcopal paper in New York (W. T. Brantly, “The Churchman,” *CI*, 11 May 1833, p. 298).

<sup>105</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Practical Heresies,” *CI*, 18 June 1831, p. 397, italics original. Even within his own denomination, Brantly spoke of two parties. Regarding 1831 statistics, Brantly praised Baptists in New York where “the record of practical effort has been ample,” but he lamented the “inertness” of states like Delaware where “the *anti-effort* spirit is dominant.” His conclusion was simple: states exerting effort grew dramatically larger in percentage than the anti-effort states. By their fruits, he knew them. See Brantly, “State of the Churches for 1831,” *CI*, 17 March 1832, p. 161.

“inefficiency” of the “present order of things,” Brantly responded by first sketching the faith and practice of the Baptists, before concluding:

This is a concise view of that “*Order of things*” to which we are attached, not merely because it is old, but because it is true. The “*inefficiency*” of which we complain, does not originate in any defect of our system, but in its defective use and application . . . .

The reformation which we should be pleased to see, and to which we endeavor to make these pages subservient, consists barely in one article; and that is, the more exact conformity of Christian practice, to that “*present order of things*” which has been briefly sketched above. It is not new systems that we need, it is new hearts.

In other words, by “reformation,” Brantly desired a permanent revival. The doctrine and denominational obedience were present; but where was the revival spirit, which would carry evangelicals along to a reformation of active benevolence?

Brantly did not live to see such a reformation among American Baptists.

Among them, some of the same tendencies appeared that had already begun to destroy the evangelical unity among the Presbyterians. The “High Church” mentality of Ashbel Green, which set Presbyterianism above other evangelical denominations, now appeared among the Baptists and division ensued. The final chapters will seek to explain the twofold nature of that division, which eventually sent William T. Brantly, the Southern unionist, back home with a troubled heart.

### **Conclusion**

At the beginning of the last chapter, two questions were asked—the first pertaining to Brantly’s conception of evangelical unity, and the second, to his primary identity. Answers now appear for both questions.

First, Brantly saw no unity possible outside the fence of fundamental doctrine. All heretics must be excluded from the church. Within the fence, Brantly saw very little that demanded separation. The glaring exception was infant baptism, which must be vigorously opposed, both in the press and at the Lord’s Table, because of the rite’s bad tendency to undermine the fundamentals of salvation. But even in opposition, Brantly remained acutely sensitive to his tone and manners. He recognized that true spiritual

unity went way beyond common rituals or the fundamentals of the faith, on which unity built. True unity was a positive achievement—a pure unity of revival spirit in truth and righteousness—a unity that produced good works. Union with “good men” of revival spirit excited Brantly, regardless of their denomination.

Therefore, regarding Brantly’s primary identity, he was not first or foremost a Baptist. He himself chose the identity “Unionist”—one who shunned party spirit and all high-churchmanship, in order to labor wholeheartedly with other “good men” in the good works of the Kingdom, regardless of who received the honor as leader. In truth, Brantly’s “Unionist” ambitions outweighed his denominational allegiances; therefore, Brantly may justly be called a *Baptist evangelical*.

## CHAPTER 11

### SECTIONALISM AND SLAVERY

Three changes among American Baptists prepared the way for open disunity in 1837. First, the Triennial Convention reorganized in 1826, becoming essentially a national missionary society under the control of Baptists around Boston, Massachusetts. This reorganization did not cause disunion, for the Convention rebounded remarkably well; but the Board's relocation to New England and the full adoption of the society plan created the possibilities for the organizational strife of 1836 and 1837. Second, despite the ostensibly strong revivals of 1830-31, Brantly thereafter lamented the growing decline of genuine piety and the rise of discord among Christian brothers. Third, beginning in 1833, agitation about slavery threatened to capsize the American Baptist ship. By means of a policy of silence, the Triennial Convention appeared to weather the storm, only to be damaged unexpectedly on the shoals of sectarian pride.<sup>1</sup>

Against this background of sectionalism and slavery, William T. Brantly faced some large questions. As a moral crusader against temperance, would he join with the abolitionists against slavery? Or, as a Southerner ministering in the North, would he

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<sup>1</sup>For information on American Baptists and slavery, see C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985); John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987); Mary Burnham Putnam, *The Baptists and Slavery, 1840-1845* (Ann Arbor, MI: George Wahr, 1913); Thomas Richard Cheatham, "The Rhetorical Structure of the Abolitionist Movement within the Baptist Church, 1833-1845" (Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 1969); and Ricky McClatchy, "The Demise of the Antislavery Movement among Baptists in America, 1783-1830" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990). For more general overviews of the slavery controversy, see Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Victor B. Howard, *Conscience and Slavery: The Evangelistic Calvinist Domestic Missions, 1837-1861* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1990); Arthur Young Lloyd, *The Slavery Controversy: 1831-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939); and Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse 1830-1844* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1933).

follow the Board's policy of silence? He chose the latter, viewing temperance as a moral issue, and slavery as a political issue. In doing so, Brantly followed the line of reasoning he had already manifested in other political issues—namely, of basing unity on a “spirit of compromise.” He later repeated this course in 1837, but failed to achieve his goal.

### **Initial Sectionalism**

#### **The “Great Reversal” of 1826**

American Baptists in the early republic had two basic structures for organized effort—associations representing churches, and societies representing individuals. The Triennial Convention, despite its name, began as a society for foreign missions, having no authority to represent churches.<sup>2</sup> Individuals became members by paying dues, which were often furnished for them by smaller, local societies. Over time, the Convention's sole agent, Luther Rice, along with several friends, began pushing for a genuine denominational structure, centralized in the nation's new capital city.<sup>3</sup> To achieve this centralization, several entities sprang up in Washington, D.C.—a tract society, two publications, and, most notably, Columbian College, the showcase of the 1823 Triennial Convention in that city.<sup>4</sup> That year, the Convention requested William Staughton, the corresponding secretary and president of the College, to move to Washington. This move in effect brought the Board to Washington.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the 1823 Triennial Convention also urged the formation of state conventions, leading many to expect that the next

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<sup>2</sup>Winthrop S. Hudson, “Stumbling into Disorder,” *Foundations* 1 (April 1958): 46; G. Thomas Halbrooks, “Francis Wayland and ‘The Great Reversal,’” *Foundations* 20 (July-September 1977): 201-02. William H. Brackney contends that the Triennial Convention was a convention, which was “more than a mass gathering, less than a legislature, and it carried the fullest popular support” (“The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination, 1814-1845: An American Metaphor,” *BHH* 14 [July 1989]: 14).

<sup>3</sup>Brackney, “General Missionary Convention,” 13-15. Regarding Washington, DC, Brackney notes, “Baptists were pioneer denominationalists, realizing the peculiar advantages of that city” (*ibid.*, 15).

<sup>4</sup>William H. Brackney, “Triumph of the National Spirit: The Baptist Triennial Conventions, 1814-1844,” *ABQ* 4 (June 1985): 172.

<sup>5</sup>Frank K. Means, “History of the Triennial Baptist Convention,” TMs (photocopy), p. 18, Special Collections, Jenkins Research Library, International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Richmond, Virginia, 1946.

Triennial Convention would form a true *general* convention, in which local associations and state conventions would form a hierarchical structure of equal representation.<sup>6</sup>

Instead of achieving united support, the convention idea faced opposition from both New York and Massachusetts, beginning in 1824. In New York, two organizations competed for missionary dollars—the Hamilton Baptist Missionary Society (1807) and the state convention (1821). Instead of duplicating efforts, the state convention proposed a union under its auspices. Surprisingly, the opposite occurred. The state convention adopted the constitution of the Hamilton Society, but kept the convention label. Three characteristics apparently made the society model more appealing: superior fund-raising, control by the few, and the continued independence of the fledging Hamilton Literary and Theological Institution.<sup>7</sup> In Massachusetts, a regional standing committee of the Triennial Convention became alarmed over the exhausted mission treasury. Because Rice seemed preoccupied with Columbian College, the committee refused to let Rice raise funds in their area unless they received full control of foreign missions. The Board complied, authorizing both a treasurer and corresponding secretary as well. Eventually, Massachusetts concluded that the fault lay not only with Rice, but also with the idea of a convention, for a convention divided interests too thin, leaving foreign missions to suffer. Together with New York, which had held a pre-convention meeting in Utica, these two states comprised just over half of the approximately seventy delegates to the 1826 Triennial Convention—the very first that Brantly participated in personally.<sup>8</sup>

Two men stood out in the 1826 Triennial Convention, which met from April 26 to May 9 at Oliver Street Baptist Church in New York City. The first, Luther Rice, faced a cloud of suspicion. For years he had managed the finances for both Columbian

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<sup>6</sup>Hudson, “Stumbling into Disorder,” 47-48.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 48-50.

<sup>8</sup>G. Thomas Halbrooks, “Francis Wayland and ‘The Great Reversal,’” *Foundations* 20 (July-September 1977): 203, 205, 207. Hudson reports an even greater percentage (“Stumbling into Disorder,” 51).

College and the Triennial Convention, often taking money from the latter to keep the former afloat. In the last year, he had become involved in “some risky real estate ventures,” which also failed.<sup>9</sup> Thus, with embarrassing debts, with a convention not located in Washington (as originally planned), and with the recent deaths of his supporters—Thomas Baldwin and Richard Furman—Rice faced the Convention severely disadvantaged. Even Staughton had joined the opposition in September 1825, the same year that the College’s theological department moved to Newton, Massachusetts.<sup>10</sup> The leader of the opposition was Francis Wayland, Jr. (1796-1865), the youthful pastor of First Baptist Church in Boston and author of the celebrated sermon “The Moral Dignity of the Missionary Enterprise” (1823). At first, Wayland had supported the idea of a convention, advocating it under the pseudonym “Backus” in the *American Baptist Magazine*. Later, as a member of the standing committee in Boston, he had drafted a report, suggesting that Rice be removed and the Board moved to Boston. Later still, he had concluded that the Convention must cut off extraneous endeavors and become once again a one-purpose society.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, at the Convention, “Mr. Wayland earnestly participated,” as one witness testified, “and by his cool, conclusive reasonings, contributed largely to the wise results which were ultimately reached. . . . In fact, he did more than any other man to secure the separation of the college from the Convention.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Brackney, “Triumph,” 173.

<sup>10</sup>For Rice’s disadvantages, see Halbrooks, “Francis Wayland and ‘The Great Reversal,’” 206-07; and John C. Hillhouse, Jr., “Caucus Politics: Obadiah Brown’s ‘Heath Group’ at the Baptist Triennial Convention of 1826,” *Foundations* 16 (January-March 1973): 16. Hillhouse argues that Brown and political favors were also responsible for the scandalous dealings, but that Rice willingly became a scapegoat to keep the College out of the courts (Hillhouse, “Caucus Politics,” 15-20).

<sup>11</sup>Halbrooks, “Francis Wayland and ‘The Great Reversal,’” 197-98, 203-04, 205. To explain Wayland’s apparent inconsistency in changing positions so fast, Halbrooks points to Wayland’s intense concern for success (*ibid.*, 200) and to his pragmatic experimentation upon a few basic principles (*ibid.*, 212). In short, Wayland was not a theologian, but a pragmatist, whose “unique moralistic and individualistic point of view” led him to believe that “proper organization would result in success” (*ibid.*, 212). Both Halbrookes and Hudson agree that the changes of 1826 proceeded not from “biblical or theological precepts” (*ibid.*, 212; cf. Hudson, “Stumbling into Disorder,” 59).

<sup>12</sup>This quote of Baron Stow comes from Hudson, “Stumbling into Disorder,” 55.



Rice faced the opposition boldly, asking on the Convention's opening day that a committee inspect both his personal life and his conduct towards both the Convention and the College. Appointed to this committee were eleven men, including not only the Convention's president, Robert B. Semple, but also the three Georgia representatives, Abner Davis, Jesse Mercer, and William T. Brantly, who had recently moved to Philadelphia. The committee reviewed Rice, but did not report until the end of the following week. One historian claims that "delaying tactics" kept most of the committees from reporting, in order that "behind-the-scenes maneuvers" could insure that report after report discredited Rice.<sup>13</sup> The committee investigating Rice eventually reported, and the Convention subsequently declared Rice guilty of "many imprudencies [*sic*]" and of being "a very loose accoutant [*sic*]," but cleared him of all charges of "immoral conduct."<sup>14</sup> In the end, the accusations worked. The Northern axis apparently achieved all their goals: Rice became agent for Columbian College alone; all ties were severed with Columbian College; the Board relocated to Boston; and the Convention once again became a society, concentrating only on foreign missions.<sup>15</sup> On the final day, in the face of antimission fears of centralized domination, the Convention resolved, "In accordance with its former views, and with well known and long established Baptist principles, this Convention cannot exercise the least authority over the government of the churches."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the so-called "great reversal" had succeeded.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 56-57. Hudson marvels, "It is difficult to believe that any group of Christians could have set out in cold blood to blacken the reputation of one of their colleagues, but it is equally difficult to read the evidence concerning the attack upon Rice and reach any other conclusion" (ibid., 56).

<sup>14</sup>*Proceedings of the Fifth Triennial Meeting of the Baptist General Convention, Held in New-York, April, 1826* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1826), 18. For the committee's report, see p. 29 of those proceedings. Brantly himself later described Rice as having an "improvident *head*, and by no means a wrong *heart*" (W. T. Brantly, "Hints to Baptists," *CSCI*, 27 February 1830, p. 129).

<sup>15</sup>For the three objectives, see Hudson, "Stumbling into Disorder," 55-56; Halbrooks, "Francis Wayland and 'The Great Reversal,'" 205-06; cf. Brackney, "Triumph," 173.

<sup>16</sup>*Proceedings*, Baptist General Convention, 1826, 20.

At least two results came from the 1826 Convention that strongly affected Brantly's career. First, 1826 marked a new beginning of sectionalism within the Convention. Leadership switched from a national center to several regional hubs. As proof, one historian has pointed to the Boston Board, the Philadelphia tract society, and the New York home mission society, which began in 1832.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the *Latter-Day Luminary* ceased and the *Columbian Star* relocated to Philadelphia, where Brantly became editor. Regarding the new sectionalism, the question remained, would the regional hubs work in harmony, or would they occasion future strife? Second, along with a new era in the Convention came a new set of leaders—a second generation in the Convention. Instead of Furman, Baldwin, and shortly thereafter Staughton and Semple, new leaders arose—most notably, Francis Wayland, Jesse Mercer, and Spencer Cone, the host pastor of the 1826 Convention, who was another “strenuously active” proponent of separation from Columbian College.<sup>18</sup> Though not as prominent as these leaders, Brantly and Dagg certainly qualified as two outstanding new leaders from the Philadelphia hub.<sup>19</sup>

### **Sectional Harmony despite Southern Unrest**

After the disruption of 1826, Baptists once again achieved unity—this time by means of sectional harmony, instead of national unison. For illustration of this fact, one might compare the fates of Columbian College and home missions, both excised in the “great reversal.” Regarding the first, the 1826 Triennial Convention sought to restore

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<sup>17</sup>William H. Brackney, “Two Sides of the Coin: The Interplay of Regional Leadership in Baptist National Life,” *ABQ* 8 (March 1989): 26-27.

<sup>18</sup>Edward W. Cone and Spencer W. Cone, *Some Account of the Life of Spencer Houghton Cone: A Baptist Preacher in America* (New York: Livermore & Rudd, 1856), 307.

<sup>19</sup>Previously, Brantly had served on the Standing Committee in the South, along with Jesse Mercer, William B. Johnson, Adiel Sherwood, I. Milner, Iveson L. Brooks, and Abner Davis (Means, *History of the Triennial Baptist Convention*, 18). Brantly's newfound status achieved national recognition through the publication of his sermon before the 1828 Board for Foreign Missions. Based on Phil 2:16, Brantly had argued, “The spirit of Christianity, and the desire of its extension, are inseparable.” The editor, after “careful perusal,” decided he could not abridge any of its “important matter,” and so recommended that it to be read in churches lacking a regular minister (see “Rev. Mr. Brantly's Discourse,” *ABM* 8 [August 1828]: 225-31).

“public confidence” in the College by appointing a committee of five over the school’s financial concerns.<sup>20</sup> William T. Brantly, one of the five, later added his pen to the peacemaking rescue, revealing in his inaugural editorial his desire to promote both education and missions. Instead of overreacting to past failure, he wrote that Baptists should “appropriate the truth which has been bought at so dear a rate, to plans of future usefulness.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, instead of starting fresh, which would be easier, Baptists should fast and pray for the College, as some South Carolinians have done. Finally, instead of laying “the whole heft of the odium . . . upon any individual” (namely, Luther Rice), the whole denomination should rise to life the shame.<sup>22</sup> At first, the rescue appeared successful. In 1829, Brantly reported that the College had manageable debt and two excellent professors, but only lacked students.<sup>23</sup> A sufficient number of students never came, for regional schools in the North took preeminence and Southerners found more appeal in practical manual-labor schools than in classical literary institutions.<sup>24</sup> Eventually Baptists relinquished control of the College to the United States government, who rescued it and later renamed it George Washington University.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to Columbian College, home missions fared well, receiving its primary sponsorship from John Mason Peck of Illinois and Jonathan Going of Worcester, Massachusetts. “These two men,” according to one historian, “saw that the task of domestic missions was too large for the Massachusetts Society and that the principle

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<sup>20</sup>*Proceedings*, Baptist General Convention, 1826, 42. While the report speaks of “five,” only four are named: R. B. Semple, L. Bolles, William T. Brantly, and James Thompson. The missing name may have been Elon Galusha, who appeared with the other four the following year (see W. T. Brantly, “Columbian College,” *CS*, 9 June 1827, p. 87).

<sup>21</sup>W. T. Brantly, “To the Readers of the Star,” *CS*, 9 June 1827, p. 86.

<sup>22</sup>Brantly, “Columbian College,” 86-87.

<sup>23</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Columbian College,” *CSCI*, 19 December 1829, p. 396.

<sup>24</sup>For a short account of the demise of Columbian College, including mention of “regionally jealous anti-Columbian forces,” see Brackney, “General Missionary Convention,” 17-18.

<sup>25</sup>Bill J. Leonard, ed., *Dictionary of Baptists in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), s.v. “Columbian College,” by T. R. McKibbens and A. M. Manis.

interest of the General Missionary Convention was ‘foreign’ missions. They, therefore, rallied support for a home society that won the particular attention of New York Baptists, . . . [including] Archibald Maclay, William Colgate, Nathaniel Kendrick, and William R. Williams.”<sup>26</sup> This organizing effort merits close attention, for it poses an instructive foil to the Bible society later formed in New York city. In contrast to the quick formation of the latter society, Peck and Going proceeded cautiously, carefully garnering broad support through holding exploratory meetings in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Seeing “indications of the Divine will,” the leaders formed a provisional society in New York and summoned a convention to meet concurrently with the 1832 Triennial Convention at another meeting house in New York city. In the summons, Going explicitly affirmed unity, stressing the new society’s intention “to encourage efficiently all sectional efforts to supply the destitute with a preached Gospel, without the least degree of interference with them.”<sup>27</sup> As a result, the new society—the American Baptist Home Mission Society—received commendation from the Triennial Convention, who regarded its formation with “unusual satisfaction.”<sup>28</sup> Through sectional harmony, a regional society could attain national support.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the new sectional harmony came from political unrest in the South. Two matters of states’ rights gripped national attention in the early 1830s—Indian removal and tariff legislation. The latter precipitated the well-known Nullification Crisis, in which South Carolina asserted its right to pronounce a federal tariff “null and void,” and if necessary “to secede peacefully from the Union,” despite

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<sup>26</sup>Brackney, “Triumph,” 175.

<sup>27</sup>W. T. Brantly, “American Baptist Home Mission,” *CI*, 5 May 1832, 273, p. 274. For the historical background of Massachusetts to Baptist home missions, see William H. Brackney, “Yankee Benevolence in Yorker Lands: Origins of the Baptist Home Missions Movement,” *Foundations* 24 (October-December 1981): 293-309.

<sup>28</sup>*Proceedings of the Seventh Triennial Meeting of the Baptist General Convention, for Missionary Purposes, Held in New York, April, 1832* (Boston: Putnam & Damrell, 1832), 13.

threats from President Andrew Jackson.<sup>29</sup> As editor of a magazine whose readers were mostly in the South, Brantly kept a close eye on developments in South Carolina, calling on Christians to pray, to exhibit a spirit of moderation as citizens of Heaven, and to practice Christian virtue despite distressing times.<sup>30</sup> He printed correspondences that shuddered at the thought of Christian brothers fighting each other in a civil war over money.<sup>31</sup> Brantly himself supported peace.<sup>32</sup> Earlier, he had hoped that “the spirit of compromise” would appear, for, he explained, “The same principle which is necessary to sustain the union of christian communities, is requisite to preserve our confederacy—and that is—*To bear, and forbear.*”<sup>33</sup> In the end, Brantly rejoiced to see the required compromise.<sup>34</sup> But more than that, he rejoiced all along that South Carolina Baptists appeared to live above the party strife, and that, perhaps as a result, they experienced the outpourings of the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

Not as remembered as the Nullification Crisis of South Carolina, the question of Indian Removal in Georgia posed a greater threat to American Baptists as a whole. The controversy began in December 1828, when Georgia passed a series of laws that

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<sup>29</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Debates in Congress,” *CI*, 19 January 1833, p. 48.

<sup>30</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Christian Duty in Reference to the Present Crisis of Our Country,” *CI*, 5 January 1833, pp. 3-4; idem, “Affairs of the Nation,” *CI*, 2 February 1833, p. 78.

<sup>31</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Affairs of South Carolina,” *CI*, 12 January 1833, p. 28; idem, “Affairs of South Carolina,” *CI*, 9 February 1833, p. 90; A Citizen of the United States, “War,” *CI*, 16 February 1833, p. 103.

<sup>32</sup>W. T. Brantly, “On the Aspect of Public Affairs at the South,” *CI*, 16 February 1833, p. 103.

<sup>33</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Public Matters,” *CI*, 17 December 1831, p. 399; cf. “First Principles,” *CI*, 20 April 1833, pp. 252-53, for another comparison of civil and religious unity.

<sup>34</sup>Brantly twice noted the role of Henry Clay, whose agenda at first exhibited “nothing like compromise” (W. T. Brantly, “Public Affairs,” *CI*, 28 January 1832, p. 63), but later changed, much to the satisfaction of John C. Calhoun (idem, “Public Matters,” *CI*, 23 February 1833, p. 126; see also Brantly, “Public Matters,” *CI*, 9 March 1833, p. 158).

<sup>35</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Alarming State of Things in S. C.,” *CI*, 16 June 1832, p. 381; idem, “Christian Duty in Reference to the Present Crisis of Our Country,” 4. In one article, Brantly left a hint that he favored states’ rights (idem, “The Great Debate,” *CI*, 9 February 1833, p. 90). In general, Brantly held fast to his principle: “We of course have no concern with politics, other than that which belongs to every Christian citizen” (idem, “The Late Anti-Tariff Convention,” *CI*, 15 October 1831, p. 250).

essentially revoked the existing federal treaties with the Cherokee Indians. If the Cherokees did not remove west of the Mississippi River by January 1830, Georgia would assume jurisdiction over Cherokee land and revoke tribal law. This policy, encouraged by Jackson's campaign promises, subsequently received not only his full support, but also that of Congress, who in the spring of 1830 granted the Chief Executive authority "to negotiate with the Indians an exchange of lands."<sup>36</sup> Brantly himself supported the President, exonerated Georgia, and openly favored the legislation as an act of mercy, and even atonement for previous wrongs.<sup>37</sup> In his opinion, the Indian question did not concern "Georgia justice, and administration measures," but preservation—the "existence or non-existence, to the native tribes." As things stood, keeping two or more "sovereign bodies" next to each other would ultimately lead to the destruction of one or the other.<sup>38</sup> Since Indians, in Brantly's opinion, could not make wise judgments on their own, the government should remove them—not by force, but by "*reasonable inducements*" of friendship. In taking this position, Brantly differed from many editors and endured some heat, but returned none. For confirmation, he cited both the decision of Triennial Convention in 1829 and the basis for that decision, the testimony of the Baptists' main Indian missionary, Isaac McCoy.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Final Passage of the Indian Bill," *CSCI*, 5 June 1830, p. 364, which reprints the act of Congress. On the Georgia legislation and Jackson's response, see William G. McLoughlin, *Champions of the Cherokees: Evan and John B. Jones* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 122. This book describes the same crisis from the Indians' point of view by means of their advocates, Evan Jones and his son John B. Jones.

<sup>37</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Removal of the Indians," *CSCI*, 13 February 1830, p. 107; *idem*, "Indian Colonization," *CSCI*, 12 September 1829, pp. 171-72; *idem*, "Report of the Committee in the Senate of the United States on Indian Affairs," *CSCI*, 6 March 1830, p. 151; *idem*, "Removal of the Indians," *CSCI*, 8 May 1830, p. 302. Regarding Andrew Jackson, Brantly dropped his original skepticism and found great satisfaction in meeting him personally (*idem*, "President Jackson," *CSCI*, 19 December 1829, p. 396). Brantly later described the disposition of Jackson's mind as having "*a pious cast*" (*idem*, "Public Matters," *CI*, 17 December 1831, p. 399). As for the policy of colonization, Brantly attributed it to James Monroe (*idem*, "Indian Colonization," 171).

<sup>38</sup>Brantly, "Indian Colonization," 171.

<sup>39</sup>Brantly, "Removal of the Indians," *CSCI*, 13 February 1830, pp. 106-07; *idem*, "Final Passage of the Indian Bill," 364. Regarding opponents to Indian removal, Brantly accorded them "the purest motives of christian integrity," even though they acted "under the impulse of erring zeal" (*idem*, "Mr. Lumpkin's Speech on the Indian Bill," 19 June 1830, p. 399). Federal funding of Baptist

Most missionaries working with the Cherokees disagreed with Jackson's policy, and many eventually voiced their disapproval. Evan Jones, a Baptist missionary to the Cherokees in North Carolina, expressed his disapproval to the Boston Board by a letter, dated 7 December 1830. Instead of publication, per custom, the letter remained a secret. To quell disapproval, Georgia made the missionaries swear that they would uphold the laws of that state. Several missionaries refused and were arrested in the summer of 1831. Two Congregationalist missionaries, Samuel A. Worcester and Elizur Butler, disregarded the oath, and purposely accepted four years of hard labor in the state penitentiary as a test case for the Supreme Court. The arrests ushered a torrent of invective against Georgia from Northerners. Even the *American Baptist Magazine* declared the proceedings "disgraceful."<sup>40</sup> In response, Jesse Mercer wrote to the *Index*, complaining that these know-nothing "*busy-bodies in other men's matters*" faulted a "sovereign state" for enforcing what every Christian should willingly do—submit to the government. Instead of condemning Georgia, the managers of the *American Baptist Magazine* should have given notice to their own missionary in Georgia, Duncan O. Bryant, who took the oath and complied with removal.<sup>41</sup> Brantly also had marveled how newspapers professing to be "*religious*" could encourage the Indians to remain and thus oppose the federal government.<sup>42</sup> He had openly reproved those "self-made arbiters" in Massachusetts and New York, who presumed to teach Georgia about "justice" and

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missionaries to the Indians may also have inclined Baptists to support the government's policies (see Brackney, "General Missionary Convention," 16). The Baptists openly acknowledged this funding, justifying it by the secular nature of Indian missions—in teaching Indians the "arts of civilization" in addition to the Gospel (see the report of the 1829 Triennial Convention's Committee on Indian Missions as quoted in Brantly, "Removal of the Indians," 106).

<sup>40</sup>McLoughlin, *Champions of the Cherokees*, 122-23, 125-29.

<sup>41</sup>Jesse Mercer, "Imprisonment of the Missionaries to the Cherokees," *CI*, 7 April 1832, pp. 220-22.

<sup>42</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Creek Indians," *CSCI*, 29 August 1829, p. 139.

“humanity.”<sup>43</sup> Now, in facing the possibility that two missionaries threatened the Union, while some pushed for justice whatever the consequences, Brantly answered:

Admitting justice to be in this question, it belongs to both parties; and surely it will be getting justice at a dreadful cost, to have obtained it at the expense of all happiness, Union, and whatever else we hold dear.<sup>44</sup>

(His reasoning here could easily fit the later slavery question.) In the end, the *Magazine* apologized and thereafter avoided the subject; but the Executive Committee of the Baptist Board, perhaps due to Jones, eventually approved of Cherokee removal sometime between 1830 and 1832.<sup>45</sup>

Mercer’s letter about Georgia appeared in April 1832, the same month of the Triennial Convention in New York city’s Oliver Street Baptist Church. Three years prior, the delegates had worked hard “to achieve unity in the midst of growing diversity.”<sup>46</sup> According to eyewitness Brantly, the 1829 Convention had effectively erased the “painful and portentous” aspects of the 1826 Convention, including both the strife at home and failure abroad. Instead of “sinking into dissolution,” as some had concluded from 1826, the Triennial Convention had witnessed “a union of brethren cordial and sanguine” and had heard reports of missionary success.<sup>47</sup> Now in 1832, the delegates faced an issue with racial and sectional dimensions, almost as a precursor to the coming debates on slavery. Upon hearing the report on Indian Missions, two reactions appeared in the Convention. The majority wanted to commend the Baptist missionaries for submitting to the government, but the minority feared that such commendation would indirectly censure another denomination and unduly meddle in politics. After prolonged debate, the Convention decided to commend their missionaries, arguing among other

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<sup>43</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Movements,” *CSCI*, 30 January 1830, p. 76.

<sup>44</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Missionaries and Georgia,” *CI*, 7 April 1832, p. 220.

<sup>45</sup>McLoughlin, *Champions of the Cherokees*, 129 n.30, 127 n.24.

<sup>46</sup>Brackney, “Triumph,” 174.

<sup>47</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Triennial Convention,” *CS*, 2 May 1829, p. 70.



things, “Though our conformity to Rule, conveyed a tacit censure upon those who did not conform, yet we should not hence derive a plea to justify our deviation from the path of plain Christian duty.”<sup>48</sup> In effect, this decision toward evangelical unity followed the same course as close communion, which tacitly censured infant baptism. In the end, Brantly commended the Convention for its “good degree of harmony” in deliberations:

Forbearance, and a spirit of compromise, were evident, even in small matters; but in all those points which involved a contrariety of sentiment and feeling, there was an effort which must have been obvious to all, to protect sensibilities by the concessions of courtesy and love.

Brantly also noted how both the rise of “Missionary spirit” among the Baptists and an overflow of fifty thousand dollars in the treasury encouraged “the immediate enlargement of Missionary effort.”<sup>49</sup> In resolving the Indian question, Baptists showed the ability to separate political questions from religious matters, maintaining unity through Brantly’s “spirit of compromise” and sectional harmony.

Overall, during the early 1830s, Brantly exhibited strong confidence in the integrity of the Triennial Convention, even though it had still failed to incorporate perhaps even half the denomination in foreign missions.<sup>50</sup> In answer to an inquiry from western Georgia about the Convention’s leaders, Brantly claimed, “The world would not hesitate to place all its Banks under just such men: They are *trustworthy*.” Regarding the missionaries, Brantly ridiculed accusations about seeking riches. Adoniram Judson, for example, “could have made ten times the money by staying home.” As to mischief caused by supporting missions in church, Brantly wryly named: near-constant revival,

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<sup>48</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Late Meeting of the Triennial Convention,” *CI*, 12 May 1832, p. 289.

<sup>49</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Meeting of the Triennial Convention,” *CI*, 5 May 1832, p. 287; *idem*, “The Late Meeting of the Triennial Convention,” 289. In contrast to the lament in 1828 of having only two foreign missions and a few scattered missionaries to the Indians, the 1835 Convention approved “a *carte blanche* resolution called for ‘establishing stations in every unoccupied place’ and hiring every available missionary candidate, securing \$100,000 to make it all possible!” (Brackney, “General Missionary Convention,” 19). In 1838, the Convention reported twenty-three missions and ninety-eight missionaries. For the statistics, see Means, “History of the Triennial Baptist Convention,” 26, 40.

<sup>50</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptists of the United States,” *CI*, 20 August 1831, p. 120. He added, “The convention . . . is supported by no more than the thinking, pious, intelligent” (*ibid.*).

more praying members, ceasing dissension, apostolic zeal in leadership, and godly youth.<sup>51</sup> Regarding the antimission movement as a whole, Brantly predicted that antimission churches would soon be visited by God's calamity, for though God winks at the times of ignorance—and so should His children—those “times of darkness are fast passing away.” Great light was bringing great guilt on those who willfully chose to remain behind.<sup>52</sup> The facts from heathen lands, of the end of Hindu suttee practices and other such abominations, were speaking “a language which cannot be misunderstood.”<sup>53</sup> What Brantly called “the great missionary enterprise” was simply too great to ignore.<sup>54</sup>

### **Stamping Out the Abolitionist Fire**

#### **The Loss of the Millennial Dream**

Two changes in the early 1830s affected antislavery and, as a consequence, Baptist unity. First, antislavery shifted from an elitist movement, which originated in Pennsylvania and lobbied the government for gradual colonization, to an egalitarian movement based in Massachusetts, which sought to rouse the masses in favor of immediate emancipation.<sup>55</sup> This shift created three positions regarding slavery: proslavery, antislavery gradualists (often colonizationists), and antislavery abolitionists.

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<sup>51</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Replies to the Foregoing Queries,” *CI*, 26 May 1832, pp. 328-29; see also Brantly, “Letters from the Late Rev. Geo. Burder,” *CI*, 1 September 1832, p. 140.

<sup>52</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Gospel Must Be Preached to Every Creature,” *CSCI*, 3 April 1830, p. 221. Brantly still suspected the antimission Baptists of hypocrisy. One western Baptist, in particular, caught Brantly's fancy. Having been allegedly sent out by a Baptist association to oppose foreign missions, this traveling Baptist appeared to be the pioneer of a “NEW MISSION,” whose “faithful and determined *Missionaries*” perhaps received money or some sort of hospitable remuneration along the way (W. T. Brantly, “A New Mission,” *CSCI*, 27 March 1830, p. 204). Similarly, one Philadelphian objected to talk about money on the Sabbath, as if the “missionary cause” were not “the Lord's business” to be done on “the Lord's day” (idem, “The Dialogue,” *CSCI*, 20 March 1830, p. 189).

<sup>53</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Missionary Facts,” *CI*, 29 September 1832, p. 193. In the latter article, Brantly seems especially keen on arguing against the idealization of “untutored nature,” so admired by Rousseau (*ibid.*). On the abolition of suttees in India, see idem, “Figure Explained,” *CSCI*, 25 September 1830, pp. 194-95).

<sup>54</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Origin and History of Missions,” *CI*, 16 February 1833, p. 106.

<sup>55</sup>For evidence of this claim, see Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002). The thesis, summarized above, may be found on p. 2 of Newman's book.

In appealing directly to the masses, the abolitionists posed a great threat to national unity, in both civil and religious spheres. Second, the masses themselves changed for the worse, according to Brantly. Because this change in the masses created tinder for the incendiary rhetoric of the abolitionists, a brief look at Brantly's opinions will help set the backdrop for considering the abolitionist threat to Baptist unity.

Before 1831, millennial optimism fueled Brantly's mission of union for useful effort. In tracing "the signs of the time," he noticed several unprecedented "CHANGES FOR THE BETTER" in general society: the increase of general knowledge, the "momentous revolution in public opinion" regarding temperance, and especially the harmony, practical spirit, and global orientation of Christians.<sup>56</sup> Baptists in particular showed signs of increasing unity. In commenting on an unusual consent among Baptist associations in all sections to set apart the first day of 1830 for fasting and prayer, Brantly called upon them to don the affections they wished to carry to the final day. Then he called upon all Christians to "unite with us in the solemnities of that day" and to "forget our sectarian animosities."<sup>57</sup> Brantly also reckoned new technology, such as railroads, helpful to Christian unity, for he believed, "The kindly feelings and regards which the

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<sup>56</sup>W. T. Brantly, "Changes for the Better," *CSCI*, 1 August 1829, pp. 65-66. Brantly's belief in progress manifested itself in his citation of *unprecedented* facts, such as the increase of general knowledge, Christian harmony, moral enterprise, and outward means of religion (Brantly, "Changes for the Better," pp. 65, 66; idem, "A Grand Moral Revolution in Progress," *CSCI*, 28 November 1829, p. 344; idem, "Where Religion Achieves Its Greatest Conquests," *CSCI*, 17 July 1830, p. 33). The presupposition of progress is quintessentially a modern idea, built largely upon notions of organic development and scientific advancement, especially in technology. Brantly's presupposition of progress rested on both of these ideas, thereby showing his affinity to modernity (see Brantly, "Cousin's Introduction to the History of Philosophy," *CSCI*, 17 August 1833, p. 27; idem, "Changes for the Better," 65; idem, "A New Light," *CI*, 11 February 1832, p. 91; cf. Francis Wayland, Jr., *Encouragements to Religious Effort: A Sermon Delivered at the Request of the American Sunday School Union, May 25, 1830* [Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1830], 7-23). This tie between technology and a belief in progress collaborates the thesis of historian Paul Johnson, who presented "the fifteen years 1815-30 as those during which the matrix of the modern world was largely formed," for then "the immense new resources in finance, management, science and technology which were now available could be put to constructive purposes" (Paul Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830* [New York: HarperCollins, 1991], xvii). For further study on the modern notion of progress, see J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth* (London: Macmillan, 1920).

For the phrase "to trace the signs of the times," see W. T. Brantly, "The Harbinger of the Millennium," *CI*, 22 June 1833, p. 399.

<sup>57</sup>W. T. Brantly, "The First Day of January, 1830," *CSCI*, 12 December 1829, pp. 379-80.

inhabitants of one section must cherish for those of another, will depend upon that reciprocal knowledge which always originates in friendly intercourse.”<sup>58</sup> In general, Brantly admitted no possibility of harm coming from new measures—they either did good or they failed through lack of blessing.<sup>59</sup> With such thoughts, Brantly began the 1830s hoping to witness “a great progress . . . in that *overturning*, and *overturning*, until He shall come whose right it is to bear rule.”<sup>60</sup> Until then, both church and state needed “*more of the spirit of compromise to preserve us, as a happy, and united people.*”<sup>61</sup>

After 1831, Brantly began to question any millennial hopes for the Second Great Awakening. In February 1832, he confessed:

We have thought for some time, that the Church was now enjoying the Millennial dawn. The increase of knowledge, of benevolence, of missionary effort, of civil and religious liberty, may be regarded as precursive intimations of the approaching day of Gospel light and liberty. At the same time, we must confess that there are many things in the present aspect of the Church, that forbids the confidence of a near approach of the Millennium.<sup>62</sup>

As proof, Brantly pointed to at least three facts. First, he pointed to an excessive “worldly spirit among professors of religion.”<sup>63</sup> Instead of being “strangers in the earth” like their fathers, modern professors treated religion as a “*business*”—as something to be

<sup>58</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Completion of 1830,” *CSCI*, 25 December 1830, p. 402.

<sup>59</sup>With regard to the success of the Sabbath School and modern education, Brantly noted (as one of his “facts”) that few inmates in prison had experience in the new means of education. Tempering this correlation, Brantly merely acknowledged, “Knowledge of itself will not regenerate the world, but it will place the world in circumstances to receive the propositions of regenerating mercy” (Brantly, “Changes for the Better,” 65). Omitted is the possibility that acquiring knowledge could lead to evil (e.g., 1 Cor 8:1). In 1828, Brantly did acknowledge that “the depravity of man and the malice and power of the enemy” could hypothetically corrupt the “state of excitement and exertion,” but he quickly dismissed the threat, pointing to the inevitability of divine providence (idem, “On the Aspect of the World in Reference to Christian Missions,” *CS*, 23 August 1828, p. 133). See also Brantly, “The Completion of 1830,” 402.

<sup>60</sup>Brantly, “The First Day of January, 1830,” 379-80, which cites Ezek 21:27. Brantly’s hopes do not necessarily imply predictions, for Brantly chided the prophecy-watchers of his day, “To arrogate . . . the wisdom of prophecy, is always a proof of self-sufficiency and precipitation in judging, which by no means accords with the blindness of poor mortals” (idem, “Foreign News,” *CSCI*, 3 October 1829, p. 219).

<sup>61</sup>Brantly, “The Completion of 1830,” 402.

<sup>62</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Millennium,” *CI*, 11 February 1832, pp. 93-94.

<sup>63</sup>This and the following two “facts” are reasons Brantly himself gave (ibid., 94).

“endured” to escape hell, but not “enjoyed” above all earth’s best. Instead of praying with the ancient sage, “Give me not riches,” they pray just the opposite. Therefore, Brantly feared that “modern professors of religion will fail in great numbers, to reach the same heaven with David and Paul.”<sup>64</sup> Second, Brantly pointed to excessive “heart idolatry.” He confessed, “Our devotion to the cause of God is not sufficiently unreserved.”<sup>65</sup> Despite “unprecedented” numerical growth and outward means, Brantly warned against resting in “the external, and instrumental action, to the neglect of inward grace and righteousness.”<sup>66</sup> He wrote, “Religion achieves its greatest conquests” when it “goes with the man into his retirements, accompanies him in his public walks, deepens the awful tones of providential admonitions, whispers good counsels to his heart, and carries on the work of gradual conquest.”<sup>67</sup> Finally, Brantly pointed to excessive “contention and sectarian jealousy.”<sup>68</sup> As citizens of the United States, having “mild laws, light taxes, the best government on earth, and . . . the invaluable treasures of the Gospel,” they should have shown gratitude, not “DISCONTENT, and even DISCORD.”<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, despite the “spirit of compromise” exhibited at the Triennial Convention of 1832, Brantly had already concluded that a worldly, idolatrous, and contentious spirit inhabited many professors of religion. Religion did indeed enjoy

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<sup>64</sup>W. T. Brantly, “What is the Cause?” *CI*, 9 April 1831, pp. 234-35. The order of Brantly’s reasons have been switched around in the summary above. Brantly had personally witnessed in the lives of professors how the love of money had led to the loss of piety without the loss of church attendance (*idem*, “Why are Those Professors of Religion Who Are Advancing towards Wealth, Generally Retrograding in Piety?” *CSCI*, 17 July 1830, p. 45; cf. 1 Tim 6:9-10).

<sup>65</sup>Brantly, “Millennium,” 94.

<sup>66</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Events of the Year,” *CI*, 30 December 1831, p. 416; in contrast, compare the closing comments of Brantly, “The Completion of 1830,” 403; *idem*, “Where Religion Achieves Its Greatest Conquests,” 33.

<sup>67</sup>Brantly, “Where Religion Achieves Its Greatest Conquests,” 33. As an “illustration of the power of the Gospel on the mind,” Brantly pointed to one physician’s letter, which imparted “the truths and consolations of the Gospel” to another “brother physician” (*idem*, “Where Does Christianity Achieve Its Brightest Conquests?” *CI*, 11 August 1832, p. 90).

<sup>68</sup>Brantly, “Millennium,” 94.

<sup>69</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Thou Crownest the Year with Thy Goodness,” *CSCI*, 17 July 1830, p. 44.

popularity, but it was not “the *Christian* religion.” If professing Christians would only “oppose sin, as much as the Bible does,” they would lose their popularity.<sup>70</sup> Into this state of inward declension and outward sectionalism came the inflammatory question of slavery—the question that eventually ended “the high-water mark of Baptist cooperative life in America.”<sup>71</sup>

**The English delegation and silence over slavery.** In the spring of 1835, Brantly traveled to Richmond, Virginia, to participate in the eighth Triennial Convention. The city was somewhat familiar to him. Two years before, Brantly had visited Richmond to assist in the ordination at First Baptist Church of Isaac Taylor Hinton, the British immigrant brother of Brantly’s favored author, John Howard Hinton. At the time, Brantly was impressed by stately mansions and repulsed by tobacco spitting in church.<sup>72</sup> In 1835, the question of slavery and Baptist unity may have occupied his mind. Scheduled to attend was an official delegation from the British Baptist Union, James Hoby of Birmingham and Francis A. Cox of London, president of the Union. Ostensibly, the two men came to gather information and to fraternize, as their official letter stated, but both carried antislavery convictions. To complicate matters, 1835 was the first year that a Southern city hosted the Triennial Convention.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>W. T. Brantly, “What is the Cause?” *CI*, 9 April 1831, p. 234. Brantly almost certainly put together John 7:7 and 15:18-19 to argue in this manner. As to the popularity of religion, Brantly commonly remarked, “The men of this world will pay a decent respect to Christianity, provided it keeps at a respectful distance from them” (idem, “It Must Not Come Too Near,” *CI*, 6 August 1831, p. 91).

<sup>71</sup>Brackney, “General Missionary Convention,” 13.

<sup>72</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Observations Made during a Late Visit to Richmond, Va.,” *CI*, 22 June 1833, p. 398. Also participating in the ordination were John Kerr, the retiring pastor at First Church, J. B. Taylor, pastor of Second Church, and William F. Broadus. On the Hinton brothers, see Kenneth R. M. Short, “The Road to Richmond: English Baptists and American Slavery, 1834 to 1837,” *Foundations* 7 (April 1964): 129 n.21.

<sup>73</sup>For information on the British delegation, see Short, “Road to Richmond,” 111-29, which is the basis for the following summary. For more information on Cox, see John H. Y. Briggs, “‘Active, Busy, Zealous’: The Reverend Dr. Cox of Hackney,” in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, ed. William H. Brackney, Paul S. Fiddes, and John H. Y. Briggs (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 223-41. For Cox and Hoby’s own account of their American visit, see F. A. Cox and J. Hoby, *The Baptists in America; A Narrative of the Deputation from the Baptist Union in England, to the United States and Canada* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1836).

The British delegation threatened the policy of silence that the Board of Foreign Missions had adopted for the Triennial Convention in the face of two public disturbances among American Baptists over slavery. The first occurred in the Spring of 1834, when the *American Baptist Magazine* reviewed a speech given on 24 February 1834 before the Anti-Slavery Society of Salem, Massachusetts. The speaker, Cyrus Pitt Grosvenor, an avid abolitionist, had ironically been ordained in a service on 19 June 1823 at First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, where Richard Furman gave the charge from 1 Timothy 4:16 and Brantly himself, after preaching from Deuteronomy 32:31, “presented the Bible, and gave . . . the right hand of fellowship.”<sup>74</sup> The reviewer, J. Newton Brown, congratulated Grosvenor for his piety and “generous spirit of liberty,” adding at the close, “May God speed the right!” This positive review aroused suspicions that the Boston Board of Foreign Missions might also favor abolitionism, especially in light of the fact that Lucius Bolles, the magazine’s editor and the Board’s secretary, also served as president of the Salem society. To quell fears, the magazine immediately announced a ban on all further discussion of slavery in its pages.<sup>75</sup>

The second disturbance occurred when news leaked that an antislavery letter from English Baptists had been kept secret from the denomination for about one year. In December 1833, the Board of Baptist Ministers In and Near London had sent a letter to the Boston Board, urging all American Baptist pastors to imitate the English Baptists, who had just successfully petitioned the British government to end West Indian slavery. The Americans suppressed the letter, which Howard Malcom dubbed “a firebrand for our churches,” and referred it to a special committee, which resolved that the Boston Board

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<sup>74</sup>Ordination Notice, *ABM* 4 (September 1823): 192. Brantly’s sermon may be the second one in William T. Brantly, *Two Sermons, Delivered in the Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga. 1st. . . . “On Parental Duties.” 2d. . . . “The Judgment of Enemies in Favour of Religion”* (Augusta, GA: William J. Bunce, 1824).

<sup>75</sup>Both quotes from the *ABM* are reprinted in A. T. Foss and E. Mathews, *Facts for Baptist Churches* (Utica, NY: American Baptist Free Mission Society, 1850), 24, and are summarized in Short, “Road to Richmond,” 113. Much of Short’s material comes from Foss and Mathews, *Facts*, which Short warns “must be read with caution” as “the official history of the Baptist abolitionist bloc” (Short, “Road to Richmond,” 128 n.1).

could not “interfere with a subject that is not among the objects for which the Convention and the Board were formed.” Citing this report, Bolles sent the English a very discerning letter, dated 1 September 1834, which gave two further reasons why the Boston Board would not speak on slavery. First, the circumstances in England differed dramatically from those in America, where both the Constitution prohibited interference in slaveholding states, and the proximity and poverty of over two million slaves urged preparation for freedom. Would not the English themselves “think somewhat differently,” he asked, if this “moral volcano” imperiled their heads? Second, and more importantly, Baptists were experiencing “*a pleasing degree of union . . . throughout the land.*” This union included many generous Southerners, who were generally slaveholders, but “not,” the letter claimed, “because they all think slavery right, but because it was firmly rooted long before they were born, and because they believe slavery cannot be instantly abolished.” The Boston Board regarded these “slaveholding brethren” as true Christians, and could not, therefore, use language or measures that might rend the union and “array brother against brother . . . in a contest about slavery.”<sup>76</sup>

This private letter pleased neither the London ministers nor the American abolitionists, who finally heard of the interchange in February 1835 via American reprints from the *London Baptist Magazine*. In November 1834, the London group again sought to influence the Americans. This time, they pledged finances toward a delegation to America proposed by the Baptist Union on 18 June 1834, hoping thereby to convince some American brothers to “adopt every means consistent with Christian principles” for the immediate abolition of slavery. This delegation, originally designed as a fraternal and fact-finding visit to the next Triennial Convention, had just recently begun to solicit funds on the promise that, among other things, the delegates would “promote most zealously, and to the utmost of their ability, in the spirit of love, of discretion and fidelity, but still

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<sup>76</sup>Foss and Mathews, *Facts*, 20-23, which transcribes the entire letter from the *London Baptist Magazine* of January 1835.



most zealously, . . . the sacred cause of Negro emancipation.” Officially, the delegation’s public letter of introduction “*carefully avoided*” the subject of slavery, and Cox himself threatened to withdraw if he were not given freedom to speak as circumstances demanded. Thus, with both private and public agendas, the delegation departed on 12 March 1835 for New York.<sup>77</sup>

Before reaching Richmond, Cox and Hoby spent several days in Philadelphia, learning about the state of the Baptist churches. Two churches especially were prospering in large houses of worship: the congregation at New Market Street, under the pastorate of Joseph H. Kennard; and First Baptist Church, where, they reported, “more than one revival has occurred.” Indeed, First Baptist had recently rebounded from their “languishing state” in May 1834 to a state of great blessing by May 1835, having welcomed in that span one hundred and two additions to the church.<sup>78</sup> At Brantly’s house, where the delegation spent the afternoon of 16 April 1835, they also met Richard Fuller, “a baptist minister of celebrity from Carolina.” These two Southern natives apparently expressed some “apprehensions” regarding the purpose of the delegation, regarding which Cox and Hoby reported, “We were enabled to present the subject in a view which we had every reason to conclude inspired confidence, while it involved no compromise of sentiment.” After preaching at several churches—perhaps even at First Baptist Church—and visiting some sites, the delegation left for Richmond.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Short, “Road to Richmond,” 111-14. For a copy of the letter, see F. A. Cox and J. Hoby, *Baptists in America*, 69-73. For the delegation’s own stated agenda for visiting the Triennial Convention, see Cox and Hoby, *Baptists in America*, 47. Not all English Baptists agreed on this agenda. J. P. Mersell of Leicester decried the absurd inconsistency of the mission—to fraternize, but also to declare loudly against slavery! (Short, “Road to Richmond,” 116).

<sup>78</sup>*Minutes of the Second Annual Session of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, Held in the Meeting House of the Baptist Church at Lower Dublin, Philadelphia County, May 27, 28, 29, 1834* (Philadelphia: T. W. Ustick, 1834), 14; *Minutes of the Third Annual Session of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, Held in the Meeting House of the Vincent Baptist Church, Chester County, Pa., May 26, 27, 28, 1835* (n.p., n.d.), 6.

<sup>79</sup>Cox and Hoby, *Baptists in America*, 21. Since Cox and Hoby also spent time that day at a certain “Mr. Walter’s” house, where they “enjoyed interviews with many other friends,” there is some doubt regarding the source of the “apprehensions” and the target of the delegation’s reassurance (ibid.).

On Wednesday, 29 April 1835, the first day of the Convention, the delegates again had to dispel fears. Before reading the public letter from the Baptist Union and other communications, the two Englishmen made a sharp distinction between the Baptist Union they represented, and the London Board of Ministers. By thus separating themselves from the earlier communication over slavery, the delegation seemed to disarm suspicions, and were thus warmly welcomed into Christian fellowship.<sup>80</sup> That afternoon, Spencer H. Cone preached on Acts 9:6, and William T. Brantly joined James Hoby in leading the assembly in “devotional exercises.” Brantly also chaired the committee appointed to consider the communications from Great Britain. The following afternoon, the committee’s report expressed wonder that the Baptists of England and America had not exchanged “charities” much sooner, considering how they were “in a strict and endearing sense, BRETHREN—holding the unity of the faith, of the ordinances, and of the hope of our calling in Christ Jesus.” Therefore, the committee offered resolutions, which the Convention subsequently accepted, to regard the visit “a most gratifying event,” to send American delegates early in 1836, to reply officially through the Boston Board, and to establish annual correspondence. By Saturday evening, 2 May 1835, the Convention adjourned, officially thanking God for “the harmony and union which have so delightfully marked our present triennial session, and [for] the manifest presence of the Spirit of our God, in directing our discussions and decisions.”<sup>81</sup> According to Virginian Jeremiah B. Jeter, the year 1835 marked the last harmonious Triennial Convention.<sup>82</sup>

Many in England suspected that Cox and Hoby had been led not by “the Spirit of our God,” but by a spirit of cowardliness.<sup>83</sup> In defense, the two men cited the silence

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>81</sup>*Proceedings of the Eighth Triennial Meeting of the Baptist General Convention for Missionary Purposes. Held in Richmond, April, 1835* (Boston: John Putnam, 1835), 5, 6, 55-56, 12.

<sup>82</sup>Quoted in G. Thomas Halbrooks, “Francis Wayland: Influential Mediator in the Baptist Controversy over Slavery,” *BHH* 13 (October 1978): 25.

<sup>83</sup>For English reaction to the delegation’s behavior, see Short, “Road to Richmond,” 122-28; e.g., A Country Pastor [Richard Whately], *A Letter to the Rev. Drs. Cox and Hoby, the Deputation from the*

of the Union's public letter as well as the circumstances in Richmond, where not only was any public discussion over slavery illegal, but the American Baptists themselves would have voluntarily dissolved the Convention, which had been instituted for missionary purposes only. What else could "*uninvited*" visitors do?<sup>84</sup> As it turned out, Cox and Hoby found it very difficult to remain silent on slavery. In New York, they were coerced by insinuations from a fellow English abolitionist, George Thompson, to profess abolitionism before the American Anti-Slavery Society. In Massachusetts, although they avoided a meeting under Grosvenor and Elon Galusha of fifty ministers, which later became the basis for the American Baptist Anti-Slavery Society, Cox and Hoby did approve the meeting's resulting document at the home of Baron Stow. Later, in New Hampshire, Cox openly spoke against slavery at the annual meeting of the Freewill Baptists in order to clear up any misunderstanding over the New York affair.<sup>85</sup> Even in Richmond, the two had met privately with Baptists interested in abolition. Thus the two men did contribute to the growing "agitation," which they themselves reported, "was beginning to spread over the surface of American society in consequence of the rise of anti-slavery discussions."<sup>86</sup>

The British Baptist Union made one final attempt to persuade the American Baptists to oppose slavery openly. Having in June 1835 received the Boston Board's official reply to the delegation's communications, which made no mention of slavery, the Union passed resolutions censuring the Americans, and then in the cover letter took issue with the American resolution on silence by asserting, "Our language is—fellow Christian, and, if, a fellow Christian, man of benevolent spirit, of universal love, Will you hold a

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*Baptist General Union to the American Baptist Triennial Convention: Containing Strictures on Their Conduct, Relative to the Question of Slavery in America* (London: Ball, 1836).

<sup>84</sup>Cox and Hoby, *Baptists in America*, 73-74.

<sup>85</sup>Short, "Road to Richmond," 118-22.

<sup>86</sup>Cox and Hoby, *Baptists in America*, 47. For the Richmond meetings, see Cox and Hoby, *Baptists in America*, 79-80.

slave?” The Boston Board remained unmoved. Bolles told the British, “Our constitution limits us to one subject. The Board will not even *publish* your *communications* upon this subject.”<sup>87</sup> Even though, at this point, the Baptist Union turned much of its attention away from America to the West Indies, where earlier hopes of success over slavery lay partially fulfilled, it is fair to conclude that English meddling contributed to the eventual division of American Baptists. Many English associations threatened disfellowship with the Americans if they tolerated slavery. What pressure this meddling exerted on key leaders in the North, remains for future research to reveal, should God permit.<sup>88</sup>

### **Brantly and Abolitionism**

#### **Brantly on Slavery**

Amidst these threats from overseas, Brantly had also been facing the problems of growing abolitionism at home. In 1834, the Board of the Baptist General Tract Society learned of Southern suspicion that the “Society has interfered with the agitating question of slavery.” On 6 September 1834, the Board resolutely denounced these suspicions as “utterly groundless,” and declared that the question of slavery “*ought* never, and so far as those, who at present control the operations of the Society are concerned, *shall never in any way* be intermeddled with the Baptist General Tract Society.” The following year, two Georgia brothers received by mail “an incendiary abolition paper, called ‘Human Rights,’ . . . circulated by the American Anti-Slavery Society of [New York].” The two subsequently complained to the Baptist General Tract Society, seeing that they alone received the material in their neighborhood, and that they alone were on the Society’s mailing list. They professed that their names were not “on any other subscription list at

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<sup>87</sup>Short, “Road to Richmond,” 125-27.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 123-25. One Northern leader feeling pressure was Spencer H. Cone. In defending the British delegation, Cone wrote to the Baptist Missionary Society on 30 September 1835, “Did Englishmen know that the question *as now presented*, is equivalent to the question—‘shall the Union be dissolved?’ they would see that foreigners could not safely enter upon its discussion” (as quoted in Short, “Road to Richmond,” 123).

the north, or in any other way known to the northern fanatics, who would involve the South in scenes of blood and carnage to gratify a morbid philanthropy.” In response, I. M. Allen, the Society’s general agent, confessed, “One of our travelling agents on his return from the South in the early part of 1833, so far yielded to the solicitations of some abolitionists in the city of New-York, as to give them the address of several individuals in the South, and yours probably among them.” Then, trying to restore confidence, Allen affirmed that neither the Board nor the Depository had ever sent antislavery publications to the South. Moreover, Allen professed that “no member of the Board, to my knowledge, is friendly to the abolitionists.” Though he himself in principle opposed slavery, he declared, “I have not, and never had any fellowship with the measures of the abolitionists, believing that they are interfering in an unjustifiable manner with the rights of the South.” On 27 October 1834, the Society’s Board resolved that all future agents would “abstain from all interference with the agitating question of slavery,” and that all current agents must furnish “a pledge that they will in no way intermeddle with that question while in the commission of this Society.”<sup>89</sup>

Brantly, the Society’s president, was certainly not “friendly to the abolitionists,” nor was he, in contrast to the general agent, opposed to slavery in principle. As for the abolitionists, Brantly suspected them of hypocritically condemning the South, while ignoring Northern ostracism. When strife erupted in New Haven, Connecticut, over a proposed college “for the education of negroes,” Brantly seized the moment to express again, “The blacks as *a cast* [*sic*] and separate order of society, are considered in the non-slave holding States to be as much degraded, if not more so, than in

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<sup>89</sup>I. M. Allen, “Baptist General Tract Society, and the Slavery Question,” *The Baptist Tract Magazine* 8 (November 1835): 164-67. Allen’s letter is dated 28 October 1835. The agent in question may have been Samuel F. Phoenix, who had spent the winter of 1832-33 in the South, writing from Augusta on 28 April 1833 (see the “Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Baptist General Tract Society, Presented at its Tenth Annual Meeting, Jan. 8th, 1834,” *The Baptist Tract Magazine* 7 [January 1834]: 11). The Society continued the policy of silence at least to 1840 (see *Baptist Record* 5 (1840): 3, as quoted in Othniel Alsop Pendleton, Jr., “The Influence of the Evangelical Churches upon Humanitarian Reform: A Case-Study Giving Particular Attention to Philadelphia, 1790-1840” [Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1945], 178-79, hereafter cited as “Influence [Ph.D. diss.]” to distinguish it from an article by the same name).

those States where slavery exists.” In reality, Brantly presumed that “all good men in every State,” in both the North and the South, desired the best for “the colored people,” without admitting them to “equal marriage and equal privileges of citizenship.” True, he admitted, “*God is no respecter of persons,*” but equality in acceptable devotion did not justify confounding “the existing distinctions betwixt [the blacks] and the whites” in society.<sup>90</sup> In contrast to Northern prejudice, Brantly once pointed to the Sunbury Association in Georgia, whose largest churches were “composed wholly of colored people, the great proportion of whom are slaves.” He boasted:

The master and servant meet upon that sort of good fellowship and equality which all in Christ must recognize. And what is worthy of notice, is the fact, that colored brethren, and even slaves who sustain a pious character, are received and treated, with a cordiality and kindness which can rarely be found betwixt white and colored professors of religion in the states where there are no slaves.

From these facts, he concluded, “True religion makes good masters and good servants.”<sup>91</sup>

In Brantly’s mind, the solution to slavery problems lay not in abolition, but in obedience to God within one’s allotted station. Under abolitionism, the removal of slavery would only cast upon former slaves “the chains and galling yoke of a degradation from which they could never recover.”<sup>92</sup> More extreme measures, such as urging insurrection, would bring even worse repercussions, as states acting in self-defense would “bind yet closer the coercive cord.”<sup>93</sup> In contrast, Brantly asked, “Were the Gospel universally obeyed what a happy world should we have?” Specifically, Brantly

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<sup>90</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The New Haven Excitement,” *CI*, 1 October 1831, p. 220.

<sup>91</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 20 February 1830, p. 115.

<sup>92</sup>Brantly, “The New Haven Excitement,” 220.

<sup>93</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Virginia Insurrection,” *CI*, 10 September 1831, p. 174. Brantly made these remarks with reference to Nat Turner’s rebellion in tidewater Virginia, which he correctly apprehended to be unparalleled in American history. His informant wrongly supposed that insurrectionists schemed the rebellion, but Brantly later ruled this out, describing the event as “a desperate and atrocious robbing and murder, by run-away slaves” (idem, “Horrible Massacre,” *CI*, 2 September 1831, p. 154). To reduce the threat of rebellions and “fanaticism,” Brantly stressed not abolition, but “the unspeakable importance of giving the black population of our Southern country, sound religious instruction” (idem, “Massacre Prevented,” *CI*, 21 January 1832, p. 45). For more on this and other slave rebellions, and the lack of evidence linking these to Northern abolitionists, see Samuel Eliot Morison, *Oxford History of the American People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 508-10.

delineated the duties of masters and servants, men of business and workmen—in some respects, the working classes of South and North.<sup>94</sup> Beyond this clear teaching of Scripture, “prudence” seems to have cautioned Brantly not to discuss the slavery question much in public or in the pages of the *Index*.<sup>95</sup>

### **Abolitionism and Temperance**

For a man who habitually stressed *consistency* in moral actions, Brantly’s justification of slavery seems inconsistent with his participation in the temperance movement. As scholars have noted, the temperance movement led to and, in some respects, prepared the way for later abolitionists. One scholar in particular classified both total abstinence and immediate emancipation as forms of “teetotalism.”<sup>96</sup> In Philadelphia, Cox and Hoby found that “slavery and Temperance Societies formed prominent topics of conversation.”<sup>97</sup> By 1838, the general populace of Philadelphia linked temperance men with abolitionists.<sup>98</sup> Both movements targeted one vice and sought the eradication of it.

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<sup>94</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Exhortations to Various Classes,” *CI*, 1 October 1831, p. 221; cf. Brantly’s answer to A Professor, “On the Treatment of Religious Servants,” *CI*, 23 February 1833, p. 127.

<sup>95</sup>This seems to be a legitimate conclusion from the scarcity of articles on slavery in the *Index*, and from Brantly’s dislike of discussions over slavery in the Virginian legislature following the Nat Turner Rebellion (W. T. Brantly, “Negro Slavery in Va.,” *CI*, 28 January 1832, p. 63). Exceptions to this silence include Brantly’s opinion about polygamy among slaves who had been separated from their former spouse through sale (W. T. Brantly, “A Hard Case,” *CSCI*, 5 December 1829, p. 364; see also Brantly’s response to A Professor, “On the Treatment of Religious Servants,” 127). His answer, that polygamy was absolutely forbidden and merited expulsion, provoked a censure from Benjamin Lundy, editor of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, published in Baltimore (Pendleton, “Influence [Ph.D. diss.],” 131 n.54). Pendleton reports that Brantly supported the Colonization Society of the State of Pennsylvania in sending two hundred and twelve emigrants to Liberia (see Pendleton, “Influence [Ph.D. diss.],” 134-35, based on the Society’s paper, *African Repository*).

<sup>96</sup>Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 173. Foster’s discussion requires caution, for he uses psychology to explain religious conversion. In a passing comment, Anne C. Loveland noted the consistency of logic between temperance and abolitionism (*Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1980], 153).

<sup>97</sup>Cox and Hoby, *Baptists in America*, 21.

<sup>98</sup>Othniel Alsop Pendleton, Jr., “The Influence of the Evangelical Churches upon Humanitarian Reform: A Case-Study Giving Particular Attention to Philadelphia, 1790-1840,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 16 (March 1947): 39. For a fairly complete chronological overview of the history of colonizationism and abolitionism in Philadelphia among evangelicals, see idem, “Influence [Ph.D. diss.],” 109-88.

The similarity led Thomas Meredith, the tenacious editor of North Carolina's *Biblical Recorder*, to remark in light of Paul's commendation of Philemon, a Christian slaveholder:

The truth is, the abolitionists have made precisely the same mistake, that was made a little time ago, by some of the friends of temperance.—The latter undertook to denounce the use of *wine* as immoral. They therefore immediately convicted both Christ and his apostles of immorality! . . . The former denounce the slave holder as living in sin, for owning a slave. They therefore straightway convict Christ and his apostles of conniving at sin; for it cannot be denied, that they allowed the existence of slavery in the primitive churches, and even *commended* slave holders, as men of rare piety and benevolence!!<sup>99</sup>

Both movements also exhibited a similar judgmental tone. Just as Baptists in the South suffered at the hand of the antislavery societies, so one Pennsylvania Baptist in 1831 complained of the treatment he received from the temperance societies:

In my own happy country [i.e., America], there are various Societies instituted for the encouragement of piety and virtue, and for the suppression of vice and immorality. But I never knew or heard of a society, since civil and religious liberty have been properly understood, assuming to itself the prerogative of sitting in judgment on the consciences of their christian brethren and of making that a *test* of Christianity or of Christian character, which is *not authorized by the Word of God*. Your self-styled "Temperance Societies" go much further in this respect, than the Scriptures authorize them to do; and, as it appears to me, take a savage pleasure in ridiculing and defaming the characters and motives of those who cannot see either reason or propriety in conforming to their rules.<sup>100</sup>

The logic of extreme duty pressed both movements forward.

Given the similarities, why did Brantly not follow the logic from temperance to abolitionism? He knew that his views on drinking resembled abolitionism. In 1833, Brantly had publicly accused of having a "compromising spirit" those who resorted to wine as a substitute to ardent spirits. Deep down "a hankering" for the old stuff remained. The same spirit regulated moderate users. No middle position remained between use and disuse. Therefore, in Brantly's mind, temperance societies were

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<sup>99</sup>T. Meredith, "Abolitionism," *BRSW*, 15 February 1840, n.p.

<sup>100</sup>A Constant Reader, Letter to the Editor from Wilkesbarre, Pennsylvania, in W. T. Brantly, "Mischiefs of Temperance Societies," *CI*, 20 August 1831, p. 125.



misnamed, for they were “not designed to regulate the use of intoxicating liquors, and promote temperance in the enjoyment of these things, but entirely to do them away—they are abolition societies.” Moreover, should Christians derive their living from the sale of such liquors, Brantly apologized for the appearance of “unfeeling intrusion” and censure, but he condemned their avocation and hinted that church discipline should eventually follow.<sup>101</sup> In light of such “abolition,” how could Brantly hold to the “total abstinence from all intoxicating liquors,” but not the total emancipation of slaves?

Light on this question comes from the proceedings of the United States’ Temperance Convention of 1833. Three hundred seventy-three members assembled at Independence Hall in Philadelphia on 24 May 1833 to discuss how better to promote temperance across the country. Many delegates were acutely aware that the existing national body, the American Temperance Society, had failed to secure nationwide acceptance, especially in the South. Too many Yankees gave the Society the smell of aristocracy, according to one self-confessed “American Yankee,” a certain Mr. Graham of New York. The pressing problem seemed to be rumors in the South, spread by enemies of temperance, that the Society and even the Temperance Convention itself secretly planned to stir the slavery question. Such rumors endangered the union, according to Mr. Graham, for unlike other controversial matters, such as masonry, slavery was a sectional issue. To lift suspicion, most in the assembly seemed to have desired a public disclaimer, but could not decide between a general disclaimer (having met only to promote temperance) or a specific one (having no “intention to interfere in the slavery question”). In discussing the matter, Brantly spoke up and revealed his thoughts on potential sectional strife in 1833.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>W. T. Brantly, *Total Abstinence from All Intoxicating Liquors the Only Safe-Guard* (Philadelphia: P. J. Gray, 1833), 8-9, 12-14.

<sup>102</sup>“Temperance Convention,” *CI*, 1 June 1833, pp. 337-39. The delegate who moved for a specific disclaimer was a certain “Mr. Rice, of Washington City,” who could be Luther Rice (*ibid.*, 339). For the Temperance Convention’s official call, see W. T. Brantly, “Temperance Movements,” *CI*, 23 February 1833, p. 127.

Brantly opposed issuing any specific disclaimer for two reasons. In principle, Brantly believed that “minds conscious of right, feel no disposition to make disclaimers of such imputations.” In this, Brantly resembled Mr. Hunt, the temperance agent for North Carolina, who considered answering empty charges “beneath the dignity of a gentleman, the purity of a patriot, and simplicity of a christian.” In addition, Brantly did not regard the situation with any alarm in 1833. While several saw the situation as critical, possibly leading to separate temperance societies in the North and South, Brantly questioned the facts. On the basis of his “extensive correspondence with intelligent and influential men in the South,” Brantly claimed that he had “heard nothing from them of any suspicion of political designs entertained by the temperance society.” True, he had recently heard of some Georgians privately complaining that some Northern temperance papers had admitted some antislavery articles; but this, he judged, could not be classed “an excitement.” He simply hoped the Temperance Society would embrace all sections and all sects, and “would not regard the snappings and barkings of the malignant.”

In giving his reply, Brantly revealed two aspects of his thought, which may have contributed to his separation of temperance from abolition. First, Brantly agreed with many of the delegates in regarding temperance as a moral issue and slavery as a political one. The Temperance Convention was primarily a moral meeting. Brantly himself gave the opening prayer. While the assembly resolutely encouraged all legislatures to form temperance societies and applauded the military’s discouragement of using ardent spirits, the great body sought no legislation against drinking, with many citing the separation of church and state.<sup>103</sup> In this regard, antebellum evangelicals differed significantly from their later heirs, whose agendas have often incorporated political aims. Second, Brantly still identified himself with the South, even after seven years of ministry in the North. He appeared at the Convention, not as a Philadelphian,

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<sup>103</sup>Regarding slavery, a gentleman from Washington, DC, strongly urged against “connecting the cause of temperance with that of emancipation, or with any political object whatever” (“Temperance Convention,” 337).

but as one having “the honor to represent in part, two Southern states.” In dealing with temperance, a cause common to all Americans, Brantly hoped for unity among all sections and all sects; but with regard to slavery, Brantly held his Southern views.

### **Conclusion**

By the start of 1836, neither sectionalism, nor the return to the society method, nor even controversy over Indian removal and slavery had destroyed the visible unity of the Triennial Convention. The policy of silence appeared to work. In public debates, the “spirit of compromise” prevailed, bringing continued cooperation, just as Brantly had hoped. Thus Baptist unity was saved—temporarily.

## CHAPTER 12

### THE BEGINNING OF THE BIBLE CONTROVERSY

The 1830s marks the end of the Second Great Awakening and of one of its most notable traits—evangelical unity. Early in the decade, American cities appeared to experience remarkable revivals, especially through the success of new measures such as protracted meetings and the anxious seat. Hopes ran high that the millennial Kingdom of God was about to come through the united efforts of His servants. Soon, however, cracks appeared. Aggressive abolitionists began agitating the slavery question. Doctrinal conservatives began stressing denominational hallmarks. Together, slavery and doctrine—sectional and sectarian peculiarities—overcame evangelical unity. Bonds of union began to weaken both within denominations and between denominations. In 1837, organizational rifts appeared that persisted through the Civil War.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most well-known separation of the decade concerned the Presbyterians. As described in chapter 10, Presbyterians were deliberating yearly in

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<sup>1</sup>Many scholars have noted the importance of the year 1837, which witnessed the end of Jackson's presidency, a large economic collapse, and the end of the nation's first "evangelical united front," to borrow Charles I. Foster's terminology (*An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front 1790-1837* [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960], viii). Though Foster calls the end of visible evangelical unity a "collapse" (*ibid.*, 249), other scholars have chosen less drastic terms. Looking before 1837, Fred J. Hood has summarized, "The period from 1826 to 1837 was as eventful in religious developments as it was in political, social, and economic areas. . . . In national terms, . . . the most significant development was an evolution in the religious mode of social control from indoctrination to salvation," i.e., from benevolent societies to revivalism (*Reformed America: The Middle and Southern States, 1783-1837* [University: The University of Alabama Press, 1980], 169, 201-02). Looking beyond 1837, John W. Kuykendall acknowledged "a period of crisis" for the national benevolent societies, but warns against any "shortsighted" view that forgets their modified comeback in the 1850s (*Southern Enterprise: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South*, Contributions to the Study of Religion [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982], 98, 116 n.2, where he cites Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States 1800-1865* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960], 89-95). Arguably, the "evangelical united front" has returned periodically in American history, first around the Civil War, then in the progressive era, and finally in post-World War II "New Evangelicalism" (e.g., regarding the Civil War, see George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970], 181-83).

Philadelphia whether the theology of some New School advocates of new measures fell within or without the denomination's creed. At first, many Old School leaders, such as Princeton's Samuel Miller, advocated peace, believing that brothers could not remain separate for long "in this day of noble catholic enterprise."<sup>2</sup> Later, they changed their mind, but did not command the majority in the General Assembly until May 1837, when Southern fears over New School antislavery elicited sufficient numbers to excise four western synods, composed mainly of New School ministers.<sup>3</sup> Thus slavery and doctrine together led to open disunity in "The City of Brotherly Love." Perhaps more importantly, this denominational disunity coincided with the end of evangelical unity. The Presbyterian split effectively abolished the evangelical Plan of Union, under which Presbyterians and Congregationalists had been planting churches together since 1801.<sup>4</sup> The Old School Presbyterians abandoned "the whole revival and moral reform program of the 'Evangelical United Front'" in favor of denominational purity and independence.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, though less known, evangelical unity essentially ceased among missionary Baptists in 1837, when a great Bible Convention of Baptists meeting in Philadelphia decided to fund their own translations of Scripture through a Bible society of their own, instead of relying further on the American Bible Society, one of the most popular institutions of the evangelical Benevolent Empire. As with the Presbyterians, the

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<sup>2</sup>Samuel Miller, "Dr. Miller on Difference of Opinion," *CI*, 2 February 1833, p. 68. In the end, Baptists followed wisdom that Miller also expressed: "A quiet separation would certainly be better than a mere nominal union with protracted strife" (*ibid.*).

<sup>3</sup>Sydney E. Ahlstrom noted, "In one blow 553 churches, 509 ministers and between sixty and a hundred thousand members were lopped from the rolls" (*A Religious History of the American People* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972], 468). On southern fears and turnout, see Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (Richmond: John Knox, 1963), 1:392. On the shifts in Miller and other moderate Old School leaders, see David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, vol. 1, *Faith and Learning 1812-1868* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 244-52.

<sup>4</sup>Even though the Plan of Union between New School Presbyterians and Congregationalists lasted until 1852, the Old School separation should be seen as the first rejection of the Plan, since many of the rejected churches, often snubbed as "Presbygational," had been planted under the Plan. As a result of 1837, the Old School returned not only to a narrower creed, but also to "a more exclusive reliance upon strictly denominational organization for carrying on its benevolent program" (Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 1:412). For an overview of the Plan of Union, see Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 456-69.

<sup>5</sup>Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Experience*, 58, 71, 123.

end of evangelical unity also coincided with denominational disunity. Although a formal breach between the North and South did not occur until 1845, when the Southern Baptist Convention began, the Bible Convention of 1837 displayed the first open signs of sectional disunity. Even though the Bible Convention was the largest convention of Baptists until that point in American history, the convention attracted few Westerners and even fewer Southerners.<sup>6</sup> Most notably, South Carolina chose to stay away *en bloc*, as a silent protest to New York city, whom they considered had acted presumptuously in starting the new Bible society. Suspicions soon surfaced of a hidden slavery agenda as well. By 1838, Brantly himself—the self-declared “Unionist”—had moved to South Carolina, where he declared that the Triennial Convention existed in name only.<sup>7</sup> Richard Furman’s dream of Baptists “uniting in one common effort” was coming to an end.<sup>8</sup>

What did Brantly witness within the Triennial Convention that led him to such a drastic conclusion seven years before that Convention formally dissolved? Many scholars attribute the Convention’s dissolution to sectional differences over slavery and church order.<sup>9</sup> Without minimizing either factor, it should be noted that neither caused open disruption until sectarian concerns entered the mixture. Before 1836, a policy of

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<sup>6</sup>One source reported 269 representatives from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in contrast to 120 from all other locations (T. Meredith, “The Late Bible Convention,” *BR*, 5 July 1837, n.p.). Brantly reported, “The number [of delegates] was upwards of 400, of which more than a third was from the city and State of New-York. A large portion came from New-Jersey as delegates from Churches: some small churches in that State, sending from eight to twelve delegates. South of this were but few, and from New-England not many” (“The Great Bible Convention,” *SWG*, 26 May 1837, n.p.).

<sup>7</sup>William T. Brantly, “A. and F. Bible Society,” *BR*, 27 January 1838, n.p.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Furman, “Address,” in *Proceedings of the Baptist Convention for Missionary Purposes; Held in Philadelphia, in May, 1814* (Philadelphia: Ann Coles, 1814), 42.

<sup>9</sup>For example, one leading historian of Southern religion, following Walter B. Shurden, wrote, “Under strain for some time, the old Triennial Convention of Baptists . . . came apart. Sectionalism-related causes were the largest part of the story. Whether it was permissible for ministers, or secondarily lay people, to own slaves arose as a sharply contested point. A second factor contributed to the breakup as well: the trend that had been developing in the South toward forming a more centralized denominational structure” (Samuel S. Hill, *One Name but Several Faces: Variety in Popular Christian Denominations in Southern History* [Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996], 18). For a survey of the changing historiography about the causes behind the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention, see Walter B. Shurden and Lori Redwine Varnadoe, “The Origins of the Southern Baptist Convention: A Historiographical Study,” *BHH* 37 (Winter 2002): 71-96.

silence kept sectional differences under control. After 1836, New Yorkers, waving a Baptist flag, led American Baptists to abandon evangelical cooperation in the name of the Bible and liberty of conscience. Resisting this retreat stood several conservative Baptists, including William T. Brantly, host pastor for the Bible Convention. For three days, Brantly brought many of his longtime convictions to the table, in an effort to save evangelical unity. He lost. In less than a year, he returned to the South—never to participate actively in national leadership again. In doing so, he seems to have abandoned hope of ever receiving his ideal of a national unity that would “embrace people from all parts of the country, and of all denominations.”<sup>10</sup> Both sectionalism and sectarianism led to the breakup of the Triennial Convention.

The Baptist Bible controversy of the 1830s and beyond has been largely forgotten.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, an overview is necessary. The current chapter will describe the external and internal tensions that Baptists experienced following the actions of the American Bible Society. The next chapter will examine the resulting disunity. Each chapter will end with an overview of Brantly’s conservative reactions, which proved in the end to be a mixture of evangelical unity and Southern identity.

### **External Tension with the American Bible Society**

On 6 August 1835, at the American Bible Society’s House in New York City, the Society’s Board of Managers received a request from two English Baptist

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<sup>10</sup>Brantly revealed this concept when he was addressed the United States’ Temperance Convention on potential sectional strife over temperance (“Temperance Convention,” *CI*, 1 June 1833, p. 339).

<sup>11</sup>In one rare article on the subject, Northern Baptist historian Edward C. Starr admits how “time has almost obscured” the American Bible Union, the final organization formed by Spencer H. Cone to produce a new English version. In contrast to this obscurity, Starr speculates that this organization “in its day caused more stir among the Baptists than we of the present may believe possible” (“A Sectarian Bible,” *The Chronicle* 17 [January 1954]: 33). Starr himself mentions the Bible Convention of 1837 in less than one sentence (*ibid.*, 35).

For a satisfactory overview of the whole version controversy among nineteenth-century American Baptists, see Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists: Traced by Their Vital Principles and Practices from the Time of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to the Year 1886* (New York: Bryan, Taylor, and Co., 1887), 893-918.

missionaries, William H. Pearce and a coworker named Yates, to aid in printing their new version of the Bengali Bible. The two were writing the American board, because they had already been turned down by both the Calcutta Bible Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society, for translating the Greek word *baptizo* as “immerse,” instead of simply transliterating (then called “transferring”) it as “baptize.” Since the American society had already funded Judson’s Burmese version, which followed the same rule, the two Englishmen were emboldened to ask. News of the character of the Burmese version startled most of the Board, who later claimed that, had it not been for this news, they might have dismissed the Englishmen’s request as out of their jurisdiction. Knowledge of funding a *sectarian* Bible called for a reexamination of the Society’s principles regarding foreign translations.<sup>12</sup>

The Board of the American Bible Society took careful, conscientious steps in reconsidering its principles over the next six months. Based upon the recommendation of the Committee on Distribution, the Board on 3 September 1835 chose a special committee of seven men, one from each denomination represented in the Society, to “settle a principle in relation to the translation of the Greek word *Baptizo*.”<sup>13</sup> On 1 October 1835, the majority report of the special committee acknowledged the facts about the Bengali and Burmese translations, and denied any prior awareness that “such translations were made and approved by any denomination of Christians in India, or other heathen countries.” In later justifying this ignorance, the Board explained, that they had been “taking it for granted that none would ask them to aid denominational versions.” In

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<sup>12</sup>For these facts, see W. H. Wyckoff, *The American Bible Society and the Baptists; or, The Question Discussed, Shall the Whole Word of God Be Given to the Heathen?* (New York: John Barker, 1841), 1, 18-19. This book, which gives the Baptist side of the story, nonetheless contains transcripts of important minutes and letters, including the American Bible Society’s official defense of 1841, followed by a detailed rejoinder from the Baptists. William H. Wyckoff, William Colgate, and Spencer H. Cone formed a tight threesome in favor of a new English translation that would not transliterate *baptizo* (see John Thornbury, *A Pastor in New York: The Life and Times of Spencer Houghton Cone* [Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2004], 134-35).

<sup>13</sup>Wyckoff, *American Bible Society*, 2. The committee consisted of “a Presbyterian, an Episcopalian, a Baptist, a Methodist, a Moravian, one of the Reformed Dutch Church, and one from the Society of Friends [Quakers]” (ibid., 20).



their eyes, joining the union implied a tacit agreement to nonsectarian Bibles—versions that all denominations involved could unite in using. The committee itself asserted, “It is not competent for the American Bible Society to assume any sectarian attitude by favouring the denominational views of any particular church either at home or abroad.” They reasoned that not translating *baptizo* imposed no difficulty on any denomination, whereas translating it would “necessarily embarrass, if not wholly exclude” non-Baptist missions in areas using that version. Therefore, the committee resolved not to fund the Bengali version or any like it, which did not “comport with . . . the obvious intention of the authorized English version.”<sup>14</sup>

One member of the special committee strongly disagreed—Spencer Houghton Cone (1785-1855), pastor of Oliver Street Baptist Church in New York City, and current president of the Triennial Convention. Converted at age twenty-eight after success in acting and political journalism, Cone quickly achieved prominence as a preacher, first dazzling audiences in Alexandria, Virginia, before moving to New York in 1823. Here, Cone commanded a strong influence in many benevolent and missionary societies, often holding the office of corresponding secretary. His late-life controversies over Bible translations seemed to run contrary to his general character and course. “In many areas of theology, politics, and practical Christian endeavour,” notes a recent biographer, “[Cone] was for the most part moderate, flexible and given to peace. But on the question of the purity of the Bible, for him there could be no compromise. This was a hill he was willing to die on, and arguably that hill provided him his fatal wound.”<sup>15</sup> He mounted this hill in 1836, when he wrote the counter report of the select committee and presented it to the American Bible Society’s Board.

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<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 3, 23, 22, 23-24, 3-4.

<sup>15</sup>Thornbury, *Pastor in New York*, 134. For a concise and helpful overview of Cone’s life, see William 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 Historical Introduction*, vol. 6 of *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865), 642-56.

In his counter report, Cone accused the Society of injustice, tyranny, and illiberality. First, based upon both the Society's resolution of May 1834 "to distribute the Bible among all the accessible population of the globe, within the shortest practicable period," and upon the subsequent circular, which encouraged missionaries to expect that every portion of the Bible "correctly translated" would receive aid, Cone claimed that it was "unjust to refuse their request . . . *until it is first proved that the translations are unfaithful and inaccurate.*" Second, Cone claimed the Society had no right "to control the consciences of well qualified evangelical missionaries" in their translation work, as if, instead of pleasing God, they must also "consult primarily the views and wishes of earthly patrons." Similarly, Cone found it strange that the Society had placed as its standard the "*sense of the authorized English version*" instead of the "sense of the Spirit of inspiration." Third, the Society was unfairly stigmatizing Baptists, who had been received initially as *Baptists* and had given generously for more than eighteen years. Several old European versions had translated *baptizo* as "immerse" and been reprinted without stigmatization, but when Baptists did so, they Society branded it "*sectarian.*"<sup>16</sup> Thus, in seeking to avoid sectarianism in the eyes of the paedobaptists, the Board received this opprobrium from the Baptists themselves.

Letters from several Baptists, including an influential one from Francis Wayland, president of Brown University, sent the matter back to the same special committee, who offered two reports on 19 November 1835. The majority withdrew their earlier report, and presented instead the following "*general principle*":

By the constitution of the American Bible Society, its Managers are, in the circulating of the Holy Scriptures, restricted to such copies as are without note or comment, and in the English language, to the version in common use. The design of these restrictions clearly seems to have been to simplify and mark out the duties of the Society; so that all the religious denominations, of which it is composed, might harmoniously unite in performing those duties.

As the Managers are now called to aid extensively in circulating the Sacred Scriptures in languages other than the English, they deem it their duty, in conformity

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<sup>16</sup>For the complete counter report, see Wyckoff, *American Bible Society*, 4-9.

with the obvious spirit of their compact, to adopt the following resolution as the rule of their conduct in making appropriations for the circulation of the Scriptures *in all foreign tongues*.

1. *Resolved*, That in appropriating money for the translating, printing, or distributing, of the Sacred Scriptures in foreign languages, the Managers feel at liberty to encourage only such versions *as conform in the principle of their translation to the common English version*; at least so far as that all the religious denominations represented in this Society, can consistently use and circulate said versions in their several schools and communities.

In the counter report, Cone claimed that if the Baptists had originally known this rule, they would never have asked for money; but now, since Baptists had given both donations and legacies, they should be funded.<sup>17</sup> A defensive tone appears here. While the Board adamantly claimed that Cone “had repeatedly solicited funds for the Burmese version” long before he first informed them of its peculiar character in the aftermath of the Englishmen’s request, Cone himself (in the words of Rufus Babcock, Jr.) “responded that he had laid on their table, along with applications for continued aid to the Burman Mission of Dr. Judson, the Resolutions of the Baptist Board of Foreign Mission, fully instructing all their missionaries, in their translations, to transfer no words susceptible of a literal translation.”<sup>18</sup> At any rate, several of the Bible Society’s Board members tried to table the decision or call for another committee, but on 17 February 1836, the majority resolution passed by a vote of thirty to fourteen.<sup>19</sup> Only final approval at the Society’s annual meeting remained.

In the meantime, several Baptists on the Bible Society’s Board selected a committee to draft a formal protest, which eleven subsequently signed, with one more endorsing it partially. The protesters charged the majority with violating the Society’s constitution, both in unfairly excluding Baptists in favor of paedobaptist sensibilities, and in making the English version a general standard, which the original constitution nowhere

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 10-13.

<sup>18</sup>Wyckoff, *American Bible Society*, 19; Sprague, *Annals*, 6:649.

<sup>19</sup>Wyckoff, *American Bible Society*, 12-13.

did, but implicitly denied. Amid the protesters' fourteen reasons, some of which Cone had already argued, the final stood tall:

Because a *measure* which withholds from the heathen, the Word of Life, and suffers them to hasten to the retributions of eternity without the knowledge of God and the way of salvation, simply because the volume it is proposed to give contains the translation of a single term, to which only Pedobaptists object, but which, by the admission of all, *cannot lead to any fundamental error*, nor to a single invalid administration of a Christian ordinance, is obviously inconsistent with the benevolent character of the American Bible Society, and with the spirit of Christianity.

Here the protesters laid aside the technical charges and appealed to what one of them called "Christian courtesy . . . and the claims of the heathen." Here was an evangelical appeal, based on the fundamentals of the faith and concerted benevolent action. At the very least, the protesters argued that no "constitutional obstacle" prohibited funds for the Baptists' translations, especially if they were the *only* translations. In justice, Baptists deserved a refund of capital. The protesters presented their document on 7 April 1836 and again at a subsequent meeting. The Board allegedly refused to let it be read, leaving these Baptists with "very painful" emotions as "outcasts from our brethren."<sup>20</sup>

Having faced the pain, five of the protesters—Spencer H. Cone, Alexander Maclay, Jonathan Going, Charles G. Sommers, and William Colgate, who were all New Yorkers at the time—joined other Baptist leaders at Hartford, Connecticut on 27 April 1836 for the annual meeting of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions, anticipating some action regarding the American Bible Society.<sup>21</sup> Also assembled were several members of the Bible Society's Board, who had not protested, but had even voted for the measure, including Wayland and his brother-in-law, Heman Lincoln, both from New England. In

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<sup>20</sup>*Constitution of the American and Foreign Bible Society, Formed by the Bible Convention which Met in Philadelphia, April 26-29, 1837; a List of Their Officers and Managers; a Report of Their Operations during the Year of Their Provisional Organization, Together with an Appendix, Containing Extracts of Correspondence, and the Names of Auxiliary Societies, Life Directors, and Life Members* (New York: John Gray, 1837), 29-33. Full subscribers were Spencer H. Cone, Archibald Maclay, Jonathan Going, Charles G. Sommers, William Judd, William Colgate, Charles C. P. Crosby, William Winterton, Octavius Winslow, Luke Barker, M.D., and Samuel Bernard. Partially subscribing was Timothy R. Green.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

official action, the Baptist Board considered a letter from John C. Brigham, corresponding secretary of the American Bible Society. After hearing the letter, the managers referred it to a committee of seven and Brantly closed in prayer. The committee consisted of the following: two Southern friends—Brantly and Manly; three New Englanders—Wayland, James D. Knowles of Newton Institute, and Levi Farwell, the Board's assistant treasurer; and two New Yorkers—Colgate and Cone, the chairman. In their report of the following morning, the committee declined the \$5000 extended by the American Bible Society towards any translation without "immerse." Justifying their decision, the committee referred back to the Board's dual resolution of April 1833, which on the one hand, pledged themselves to "give to the heathen the pure Word of God in their own languages," that is, a translation having "as exact a representation of the mind of the Holy Spirit, as may be possible," and on the other hand, obliged their missionaries to exact meaning and languages, especially "to transfer no words which are capable of being literally translated." In accepting this decision and in thus striking out alone, the Board faced what Brantly called "increased demands on the treasury." Accordingly, he moved, Cone seconded, and the Board approved that these demands "be promptly and cheerfully met by increased liberality." The evening ended with "able and impressive addresses" from Brantly and Cone, as well as from Wayland and Manly, who had earlier moved for prayer on behalf of the mission stations.<sup>22</sup>

Unofficially, and with no record given in the official minutes, the Board met separately on both days to consider specifically the Bible Society crisis. In these meetings, known later as the "Hartford Conference," William T. Brantly presided as chairman. After much discussion, the following resolutions passed—the first unanimously, and the second with only five nays:

*Resolved*, That, should the American Bible Society, at its approaching anniversary, ratify the resolutions of their Board of Managers, passed February 17,

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<sup>22</sup>"American Baptist Board of Foreign Missions, Twenty-second Annual Meeting," *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 16 (June 1836): 121-23, 125.

1836, it will be the duty of the Baptist denomination in the United States, to form a distinct organization for Bible translation and distribution in foreign tongues.

*Resolved*, That it is expedient to call a Convention of delegates from churches, and associations, and other religious bodies, to meet in Philadelphia, in the month of April, 1837, to adopt such measures, as circumstances, in the Providence of God, may require.

The negative votes toward the second resolution most probably came from the New York protesters, who, as later explained by one of them, disagreed not with calling a convention, but only with delaying one year. Whether Brantly, as chairman, favored the proposed convention is not known.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps Brantly anticipated no division among the Baptists. At any rate, the Conference appointed Brantly, Cone, Babcock, Going, and Dagg to a committee for making arrangements in Philadelphia for the following year.<sup>24</sup>

As so often happens in the affairs of men, several from the Hartford Conference later changed their mind and joined with those who desired immediate action. As explained later, these members had in Hartford wanted “to avoid collision” with moderate Baptists, but now they “became fully convinced that this would be an unnecessary delay, injurious alike to the cause of truth, and to the souls of the perishing heathen.” Cone, specifically, felt no binding obligation from the *ad hoc* conference.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>When antimasonry raged in the late 1820s, Brantly had criticized the Otsego Association of New York for hold special meetings on a single topic: “It was injudicious, however, to recommend a meeting for the discussion of the subject. Good seldom comes from those discussions which are prompted by hot strife, and party spirit. Whilst the *Masonic controversy* is going on, the cause of Christ is neglected, the interest of precious souls disregarded, and the pacific attitude of the church turned into a hostility truly *militant*” (W. T. Brantly, “Review of Associations,” *CSCI*, 26 December 1829, p. 404). In contrast, Brantly commended the prudence of the New London Association of Connecticut in letting the churches decide for themselves (idem, “Review of Associations,” *The CSCI*, 12 December 1829, p. 370).

<sup>24</sup>No minutes of the Hartford Conference were consulted. There may be none. Information comes from *Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 35-36; cf. the preamble to the call (ibid., 40).

<sup>25</sup>In a letter to John L. Dagg, Cone compared the Hartford Conference to the Oliver Street Meeting. Since the latter had more numbers and church representation, it carried more weight. Besides, the Baptist Board, which was the “only organized Baptist body, of a general character, in the United States,” passed by the Bible question in silence. Cone also confided, “The eight or ten brethren who were in Oliver street as well as at Hartford, never dreamt of being so pledged, by the resolutions of one conference, as to prevent their acceding to those of the other. We have committed no sin against our brethren, but acted according to the light given to us” (Edward W. Cone and Spencer W. Cone, *Some Account of the Life of Spencer Houghton Cone: A Baptist Preacher in America* [New York: Livermore and Rudd, 1856], 330-31).

Accordingly, a new convention was called.<sup>26</sup> Immediately after the American Bible Society ratified the odious resolutions at the annual meeting on 12 May 1836, one hundred and twenty Baptists, mainly New Yorkers, assembled in Oliver Street Baptist Church to form a new organization. The pastor, Spencer Cone, presented letters from associations, churches, and individuals, that all urged “the adoption of immediate measures for the formation of a Bible Society in the Baptist Denomination.” Appealing to the proceedings at Hartford, the convention declared that forming a new organization was a “duty.” They then summoned a committee to draft a constitution, which was read and adopted the following morning. After choosing officers, the new society—the American and Foreign Bible Society—resolved to hold its first annual meeting in Philadelphia, in conjunction with the Bible Convention, in order to submit the actions of the new Society to the assembled Baptists “for the purpose of securing the combined and concentrated action of the denomination in the Bible Cause.” Accordingly, on 27 May 1836, Brantly’s committee on arrangements included in the call for the Bible Convention a notice not only of the American Bible Society’s fateful decision, but also of the new American and Foreign Bible Society as “an important measure,” that ostensibly planned on “conforming its organization to the wishes of the Delegates who shall be there assembled.” Donations for foreign Bibles could now be sent to either the New York society, or to the Board of Foreign Missions in Boston.<sup>27</sup>

Before leaving the topic of the American Bible Society, consideration should be given to the first article of the Baptist Society’s constitution, since it holds the predominant justification for the new organization:

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<sup>26</sup>*Constitution, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 36.*

<sup>27</sup>*Constitution of the American & Foreign Bible Society, Formed by a Convention of Baptist Elders and Brethren, Held in the Meeting House of the Oliver-St. Baptist Church, in the City of New-York, May 12, & 13, 1836: Together, with Their Address to the Friends of the Bible Throughout the United States; a Notice of Their Proceedings; and a List of Their Officers and Board of Managers* (New York: American and Foreign Bible Society, 1836), 3-6, 9, 16.

The designation of this Society shall be the AMERICAN AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY, the single object of which shall be to promote a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures, in the most faithful versions that can be procured.<sup>28</sup>

The two words “most faithful” probably came from the opening address of the American Bible Society, written by John M. Mason and published in 1816. Because this address accompanied the original constitution, Baptists used the address as the official interpretation of the constitution.<sup>29</sup> In giving the dimensions of the new American Bible Society, Mason had explained:

Local feelings, party prejudices, sectarian jealousies are excluded by its very nature. Its members are leagued in that, and that alone, which calls up every hallowed, and puts down every unhallowed principle—the dissemination of the Scriptures in the received versions, where they exist, and in the most faithful where they may be required. In such a work, whatever is dignified, kind, venerable, true, has ample scope, while sectarian littleness and virulence can find no avenues of admission.<sup>30</sup>

In this intriguing twist of fidelity and charity, the Baptists had seized on the phrase “most faithful” and had then charged the Society with not living up to its stated purpose.<sup>31</sup> In response, the Society’s managers later asked, “Now, what versions, in view of such a body, composed of six or eight denominations, can be viewed as ‘most faithful?’” Surely, it must be a version that all participants could judge as faithful—a version as “equally faithful” as the authorized English version. In their opinion, they could not understand why Baptist translators could not follow this precedence, seeing how transferred words cannot teach error, but only require explanation, just as many words in

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<sup>28</sup>*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1836, 7.

<sup>29</sup>E.g., the Baptists protesters within the American Bible Society had used Mason’s address as an interpretive key (*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 31).

<sup>30</sup>Wyckoff, *American Bible Society*, 15.

<sup>31</sup>E.g., in defending the American and Foreign Bible Society, Rufus Babcock, Jr. plainly asserted, “With almost unprecedented unanimity the voice of the denomination called for the formation of this institution, when the American Bible Society made itself sectarian by changing its original policy” (as stated in the preface to Wyckoff, *American Bible Society*, vi). An allegation of this kind also seems to lie behind the American and Foreign Bible Society’s italicized assertion that Baptist missionaries’ “versions are ‘most faithful’” (*Constitution*, American & Foreign Bible Society, 1836, 12).



Scripture do. Instead, the Society faced “an amount of opposition not very common among the professed sons of peace.”<sup>32</sup>

In retrospect, it is hard to assess the decisions of the American Bible Society. On the one hand, Baptists continued to question the Society’s plea of ignorance and to point out the pernicious effects of obscuring the truth in foreign translation simply for the interests of peace.<sup>33</sup> One Baptist strongly doubted that the Society could continue its neutral policy: “It will be forced either to relinquish foreign distribution, or to allow each denomination to make such versions as it may choose.”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the Society seemed to act according to the accepted rules of previous evangelical benevolence. In self-defense, the Society’s managers asked, “Is it the practice in ANY Society, where different denominations unite, to allow one part of the union to make sectarian books? How is it with the Sunday School or the Tract Society? Are any of their common funds used to make such books, at home or abroad, as only one sect can use?”<sup>35</sup> Brantly certainly understood this principle, as seen earlier in his defense of both the American Tract Society for “general readers” and the Baptist General Tract Society for Baptist readers. In maintaining this balance, Brantly had kept his denominational interests from

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<sup>32</sup>Wyckoff, *American Bible Society*, 17-18, 24, 22.

<sup>33</sup>For an attempted refutation of the plea of ignorance, see Wyckoff, *American Bible Society*, 35-36. For examples of the pernicious effects, see “Principles of Translation,” *CR 2* (December 1837): 600-03.

<sup>34</sup>“Principles of Translation,” 601.

<sup>35</sup>Wyckoff, *American Bible Society*, 15-16 note. The managers recognized the theoretical possibility of funding *any* translation, but asserted that such a policy would require a constitutional amendment (Wyckoff, *American Bible Society*, 24). Francis Wayland, a Baptist Life Member of the Society who had allegedly “suggested” the final resolution, later reflected, “I cannot perceive how, consistently with the principles of its constitution, the Bible Society could have adopted any other rule. It is equally required by the dictates of justice and common sense, and it breathes the spirit of fraternal equality in a Christian country” (Starr, “Sectarian Bible,” 35).

One exception to the Society’s claim may have occurred when the London Tract Society complied with the request of the Baptist General Tract Society to help in printing Burmese tracts. In notifying the Americans that twenty-four reams of paper had been granted, the London committee expressed the feeling, “We are engaged in *one* cause, . . . though laboring in different parts of the vineyard, we have but *one* great object before us, the advancement of our blessed Saviour’s kingdom” (W. T. Brantly, “Good Feelings among Christians,” *CSCI*, 27 November 1830, p. 347; cf. Daniel Gurden Stevens, *The First Hundred Years of The American Baptist Publication Society* [Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1925], 16, which mentions \$245 raised for Burmese tracts on some occasion).

destroying his love for evangelical unity. Almost assuredly, Brantly's experience and personal mission helped to guide him as he opposed the New York push for the American and Foreign Bible Society.

### **Internal Tension among Baptists**

The New York convention caused two points of controversy among American Baptists. First, the quick action of the New Yorkers seemed to preempt the purposes of the Bible Convention. Were Baptists called upon merely to stamp their approval on the American and Foreign Bible Society, or was sincere deliberation still to occur? Second, the stated purpose of promoting "a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures, in the most faithful versions that can be procured," left some doubt whether a new English version was also in view. Many Baptists wanted to replace the King James Version of the Bible with a new one that translated *baptizo* as "immerse." Brantly gave a vocal opinion on the latter concern, but held his thoughts about the former until after the Bible Convention.

### **New York Haste**

The hasty formation of the American and Foreign Bible Society gave many Baptists the impression that the New Yorkers had acted presumptuously. The problem did not primarily concern one section of the country taking initiative, for, as in the case of the formation of the American Baptist Home Missionary Society in 1832, such an initiative may still meet the universal approval of the denomination.<sup>36</sup> The problem really concerned insubordination. In the words of one Southern minister, the new society was "an unauthorized and unnecessary organization, . . . formed, in direct opposition to the expressed opinion of our denomination in the Convention at Hartford." Worse yet, by still endorsing the Bible Convention, the new society ran the risk of prejudging the

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<sup>36</sup>The 1832 Triennial Convention approved of the formation of the American Baptist Home Missionary Society (*Proceedings of the Seventh Triennial Meeting of the Baptist General Convention, for Missionary Purposes, Held in New York, April, 1832* [Boston: Putnam & Damrell, 1832], 13; cf. W. T. Brantly, "American Baptist Home Mission," *CI*, 5 May 1832, pp. 273-74).

outcome and coercing free Baptists. This thought in particular moved one “highly distinguished and influential” minister in New England to confess, “I have never been so thoroughly disgusted and displeased with any thing that has ever been done. It is arrogant and overbearing beyond any thing that I have ever known.” Against such “Popery,” he refused to submit.<sup>37</sup>

In its official circular, the New York society justified itself as a necessary expediency. The infant society pointed to perishing souls and to the wisdom of capitalizing on “pious zeal.” In addition to these reasons, the circular claimed that “immediate and concentrated action” had the support of not only “a large portion of the denomination,” but also of the committee on arrangements for the Bible Convention.<sup>38</sup> In its own zeal, the new society aimed first at forming auxiliary societies. To do so, the Board employed at least three agents—Edward Kingsford, Archibald Maclay, and Daniel Hascall, who sought not to solicit funds as much as to inform Baptists of the causes behind the new society. Brantly later expressed his fear that these agents had employed “specious and plausible representations (not, I fear without some misrepresentation) of the February resolutions of the American Bible Society, in persuading our brethren at a distance to believe, that we as a denomination had been ill-treated and oppressed.”<sup>39</sup>

Whether Brantly’s allegations were true or not, the early efforts of the new society quickly garnered both supporters and dollars. In New England, only the Boston and Warren Associations remained opposed to the New York society.<sup>40</sup> Boston’s paper,

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<sup>37</sup>These letters were originally written to Basil Manly, who included excerpts of them in his editorial, “The American and Foreign Bible Society,” *SWG*, 31 March 1837, n.p.

<sup>38</sup>*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1836, 11. Regarding perishing souls, the circular asked, “Shall we wait another year, and permit one thirtieth part of our race to die, while we are discussing a question of expediency?” Regarding pious zeal, the circular assured, “‘Concentrated action is powerful action,’ and what we might fail to achieve by isolated zeal, God will enable us to accomplish by co-operation” (ibid., 14). Similarly, before the annual meeting of the American Bible Society, Cone had asserted the need for Baptists to continue on the providential “tide” that if “taken at the flood leads on to fortune” (Cone and Cone, *Some Account*, 323).

<sup>39</sup>Brantly, “The Great Bible Convention,” n.p.

<sup>40</sup>Manly, “The American and Foreign Bible Society,” n.p.

the *Christian Watchman*, lamented how the zealous agents of the new society had visited nearly half the Union and had collected from New York state alone about double what that state had ever given to the Boston Board for Foreign Missions—and all at a time when New York’s own theological institute verged towards bankruptcy. Such zeal appeared to come from the natural desire for self-vindication.<sup>41</sup> In general, dissenting voices were few.<sup>42</sup> By February 1837, \$2500 had been given to the Bengali translation, with an additional \$2500 given to the London Baptist Missionary Society and \$10,000 to the American Baptist Board for Foreign Missions.<sup>43</sup> According to one Southern participant at Hartford, many Baptists already considered the American and Foreign Bible Society a “*denominational thing*, and approve it without question accordingly.”<sup>44</sup>

One dissenting voice was Basil Manly, temporary editor of the *Southern Watchman* in Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>45</sup> Having participated in the Hartford Conference, Manly still agreed with the original intent of the proposed Bible Convention, which, he asserted, was to decide whether the Baptists needed a new organization, and if so, what it would be. He claimed that all present had “tacitly agreed” that such a convention would issue “the law of the whole.” But now the New Yorkers had “prejudged the whole subject of organization,” for they intended to present their society as a whole, leaving the remaining Baptists no room to do more than merely approve or censure. He anticipated that free and independent discussion would now suffer embarrassment, for too many personal considerations enter in. Therefore, Manly

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<sup>41</sup>Quoted in B. Manly, “Bible Convention in Philadelphia,” *SWG*, 17 March 1837, n.p.

<sup>42</sup>Dagg recollected only a “few exceptions” to the society’s general support, once the initial “question as to the time of organization . . . was amicably settled” (quoted in Cone and Cone, *Some Account*, 332).

<sup>43</sup>*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 17.

<sup>44</sup>B. Manly, “Bible Convention in Philadelphia,” *SWG*, 10 February 1837, n.p.

<sup>45</sup>Manly changed the name of the weekly newspaper from the *Southern Baptist*, which had been edited and partially funded for two years by William Brisbane, the later abolitionist. The new name accorded with the wishes of the state convention. See B. Manly, “To Subscribers,” *SWG*, 7 January 1837, n.p.

concluded, Baptists should “*stay at home,*” and spare themselves the toil and expense. Going would only present “either the unpleasant alternative of contention and censure, or the degrading one of humbly conforming to the arrangements established,”—and in either case, the delegate would then go home having incurred “a kind of implied obligation, by being of the meeting, to abide by the decisions of a fixed and certain majority.” Such opinions, Manly claimed, were the views of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, who in the interests of independence, prudence, and peace “*refused, by a deliberate and nearly unanimous vote, to send delegates to the proposed Convention.*”<sup>46</sup>

Manly’s comments sparked a reaction. The editor of the *American Baptist Magazine* strongly denied that the issue had been prejudged, stating his expectation that the American and Foreign Bible Society would be not simply approved, but also amended, making it acceptable to the denomination at large.<sup>47</sup> The editor of North Carolina’s *Biblical Recorder*, Thomas Meredith, did not differ in Manly’s assessment, but only in his conclusions. Meredith accused his Carolina counterpart of prejudging the future course both of the New York society and of the Bible Convention. Should all who disapprove stay away, then “partial counsels will rule the body, and general disunion and defection will follow.” Meredith himself planned to go, desiring to see “the denomination . . . fairly and fully represented.”<sup>48</sup> By this point, Meredith had already been appointed to a vice-presidency in the New York society, and had already proposed a plan to form a state auxiliary society in North Carolina.<sup>49</sup>

In defending his prejudice, Manly pointed to the actions of the new society. If they had no national pretensions, why did the new society reject “New York” as a replacement for “American” in its name? Or why do they not issue a resolution denying

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<sup>46</sup>B. Manly, “Bible Convention in Philadelphia,” *SWGJ*, 10 February 1837, n.p.

<sup>47</sup>“Philadelphia Convention,” *BR*, 22 March 1837, n.p.

<sup>48</sup>T. Meredith, “Remarks” on B. Manly, “Bible Convention in Philadelphia,” *BR*, 8 March 1837, n.p.

<sup>49</sup>See T. Meredith, “The Bible Society,” *BR*, 22 June 1836, n.p.

such pretensions, and “set their distant brethren at ease?” Instead of doing so, they continue to collect funds and to form auxiliaries, whose representatives will surely pose a sizable voting block within the Bible Convention. Besides, the Bible Convention possessed “no prescribed ratio of representation.” If the new society desired to dominate the Bible Convention, Manly claimed, “the city of New-York alone could supply the necessary recruits in a few hours.” The South Carolinian still resolved to stay home, in silent protest against the “Spiritual domination” that now violated the rights of Baptists, who once had been characterized by “the ancient spirit of liberty.”<sup>50</sup>

In hearing of such reservations, Brantly, Cone, and the rest of the committee on arrangements issued another invitation, denying that the original purpose of the Bible Convention had been “forestalled,” and asserting instead, “The whole subject of a Bible organization for the Baptist denomination, is entirely open for the deliberation and action of the proposed Convention.” Manly did not flinch. He knew that the majority on this arrangement committee had opposed the formation of the American and Foreign Bible Society. Though he greatly respected these men, he charged them with abandoning their duty, for they should have called the Convention without any regard to alien initiatives. Instead, the committee called representatives to Philadelphia in order to “stand God-Fathers to a fat and hearty baby, prematurely, illegitimately born, and well enough provided for by its natural parents, without them.” Not believing in “*christening*” himself, Manly felt quite “excused from attending . . . the proposed ceremonial.” If this spiritual domination were not checked, there would be no more need for Baptists to ever convene again after the next Triennial Convention. Just let New York handle matters.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>B. Manly, “Bible Convention in Philadelphia,” *SWGJ*, 17 March 1837, n.p. Later, Manly claimed that the charter members of the New York society had at its formation been warned of its unauthorized character, urged to adopt a title of local representation, and told of jealousies the general title would create—all to no avail (idem, “The American and Foreign Bible Society,” n.p.).

<sup>51</sup>B. Manly, “Philadelphia Bible Convention,” *SWGJ*, 24 March 1837, n.p. Manly later admitted that the tyranny of the New York society had “roused certain feelings, which have caused us to speak with more freedom and excitement . . . than we are accustomed to speak” (idem, “The American and Foreign Bible Society,” n.p.).

Manly's reference to private views poses an historical dilemma. The American and Foreign Bible Society later claimed that the Hartford Conference had *unanimously* regarded the formation of a new society as a duty.<sup>52</sup> Manly now declared that several members of the Conference had opposed the formation of the New York society in particular. He himself, also present at Hartford, saw "no need as yet for a separate organization, beyond that which exists in the Board of Missions."<sup>53</sup> Had some men changed their minds, just as the New Yorkers who formed the new society? One anonymous contributor to the *Christian Watchman*, who opposed any new Bible society as both "unnecessary and impolitic," blamed much of the present confusion on the rash and emotional character of the Hartford Conference itself. He claimed, "There was a determination in the minds of several brethren, who believed that the denomination had been hardly dealt by, to form an American Baptist Bible Society." Apparently, this idea had not yet occurred to other Board members. From a regard to "the feelings of brethren, who were known and loved as the liberal friends of missions," and from a desire to act in concert, several acquiesced in calling for a new organization, who later, in their "sober judgment," reconsidered and thought the existing Board for Foreign Missions would suffice. So claimed the anonymous contributor.<sup>54</sup>

In the end, Manly's fears materialized. Members of the American and Foreign Bible Society met just one hour before the Bible Convention began—in the same room as the Convention itself. Thus members of the one became constituents of the other.<sup>55</sup> In addition, Brantly reported how the agents of the new society had "prepared the minds of a great majority in the Convention to endorse the Anti-Conventional proceedings at New-

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<sup>52</sup>*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 35.

<sup>53</sup>Manly, "The American and Foreign Bible Society," n.p.

<sup>54</sup>Eumenes, "American and Foreign Bible Society," *SWGJ*, 31 March 1837, n.p.

<sup>55</sup>This was Manly's fear upon hearing of the short meeting called by the American and Foreign Bible Society (see Manly, "The American and Foreign Bible Society," n.p.).

York of the prior year.”<sup>56</sup> What Manly perhaps did not foresee was the influence of another issue on attendance. One delegate from New Hampshire overcame hesitations like Manly’s when he heard the possibility of discussing a new English version.<sup>57</sup>

### A Baptist Bible

Early American Baptists were often sticklers for exact terminology—a scruple that later reappeared in the debate over a Baptist New Testament. For example, many thought the customary title of “Reverend” made Baptist ministers “too sacred and holy.”<sup>58</sup> By 1830, opinions appeared in most Baptist papers against the term, conceiving its application “an abuse which requires immediate correction.”<sup>59</sup> Oddly enough, some corrected this abuse by addressing all ministers as “Bishop.” Brantly considered this novelty “*ridiculous*.” Since the term “bishop” was not a “*translation*” of the Greek word *episkopos*, but rather a “*corruption*” of it, and meant in English someone far more pretentious than the original meaning of “*overseer*,” Brantly wrote it off as an Episcopalian term, which appeared in the King James Bible because that version “was made by *Episcopalians* . . . and . . . has an Episcopal dress.” Brantly suspected that Alexander Campbell ultimately lay behind this temptation “to plume one’s self with borrowed feathers.” Personally, he recommended “the abolition of all titles” in favor of simply using names.<sup>60</sup>

One center for agitation about correct terminology seemed to have been New York city. In late 1831, Brantly reported how it had become “fashionable” there and “in

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<sup>56</sup>Brantly, “The Great Bible Convention,” n.p.

<sup>57</sup>A Delegate from N. H., “The Meeting at Philadelphia,” *BR*, 22 March 1837, n.p.

<sup>58</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Term Bishop,” *CSCI*, 9 January 1830, p. 26.

<sup>59</sup>W. T. Brantly, “On Using the Term Reverend,” *CSCI*, 13 February 1830, p. 102. Instead of entering the fray, Brantly published both sides of the argument from London’s *Baptist Magazine*.

<sup>60</sup>Brantly, “The Term Bishop,” 26. Apart from titles, Brantly normally called preachers as a *class*, “ministers.” He once corrected a correspondent: “The word *Clergyman* belongs rather to English than to American church history. We call them ministers of the Gospel” (editorial footnote to A. C. E., “Clergymen Monopolising the Rights of Others,” *CI*, 14 January 1832, p. 27).



some other places eastward” to drop the “u” in “Saviour.” Brantly objected to this innovation for two reasons—not only on the basis of its grammatical propriety, but more importantly, on the basis of its sacred character, representing “a name which should, if possible, be as invariable, as it is dear.”<sup>61</sup> Less than two years later, Brantly noticed that some New York Baptists were contemplating a Baptist edition of Matthew Henry’s commentary on the Bible—an edition that would replace all paedobaptist passages with Baptist material. In seeing the names Spencer H. Cone, Archibald Maclay, and Charles G. Sommers attached to the proposal, Brantly at first hesitated to write anything. But after further thought, he wondered whether the names had been given “incautiously” or perhaps without full knowledge of the “character of the undertaking.” He, therefore, resolved to warn his brothers about the dangers of a Baptist Henry. Two reasons moved him. First, how could Baptists maintain consistency in now approving of a Baptist Henry, after having already complained about Adam Clarke’s mutilation of Butterworth’s *Concordance*, or of a recent Congregationalist’s undressing of Bunyan’s *Works*? Conversely, how would Baptists feel about “a Paedobaptist edition of Dr. Gill’s Commentary?” Second, Brantly urged Baptists to use the existing Henry in the Baptist cause, for “his arguments, though they prove nothing more, do prove the want of better ones.”<sup>62</sup> After making these remarks, Brantly must have been pleased that neither the *Vermont Telegraph*, the *Religious Herald* in Virginia, nor the *Christian Watchman* in Massachusetts, which reprinted his article, approved of the New York plan.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Omission of *U* in the Word Saviour,” *CI*, 12 November 1831, p. 305.

<sup>62</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A Baptist Edition of Henry’s Commentary Contemplated,” *CI*, 2 February 1833, p. 76. At some point, Brantly learned that alterations were to be made by Maclay, an ex-Presbyterian. He also learned from the New York *Baptist Repository*, that Francis Wayland and a certain Caswell approved the plan; even so, Brantly’s own views remained “unaltered” (*ibid.*, 76-77). For the details concerning Clarke’s revised edition of Butterworth’s *Concordance*, see A., “Butterworth’s Concordance,” *CI*, 26 January 1833, p. 49.

<sup>63</sup>W. T. Brantly, “The Baptist Henry,” *CI*, 23 February 1833, p. 126. Two other proposals for a Baptist commentary appeared about the same time, each seeking subscriptions. The first, proposed by Alexander Towar of Philadelphia, would consist of a “royal octavo” publication of Henry’s *Commentary* with a supplement, containing a Baptist commentary on pertinent passages under dispute. See Brantly, “Baptist Edition of Henry’s Commentary,” *CI*, 9 March 1833, p. 158; Alexander Towar, “Baptist

Whether originating in New York or somewhere else, Brantly began noticing a rise of agitation among American Baptists about the English word “baptize.”<sup>64</sup> In 1833, for instance, Brantly received a letter from J. H. T. Kilpatrick, a longtime friend and brother from the Hephzibah Association in Georgia, regretting Brantly’s use the phrase “baptism by immersion.” Kilpatrick thought the phrase improper for Baptists to use, not only because it was tautological, but primarily because it implied the existence of other baptisms than immersion, thereby tacitly conceding the question of mode to the paedobaptists. “Mode,” as he defined it, was not essential, for the real question was not how you enter the water—“backwards, or how else”—but that a real baptism (that is, immersion) occurred.<sup>65</sup> In his reply, Brantly defended the strict propriety of the phrase, comparing it to “*Ordination . . . performed by imposition of hands.*” He strongly doubted any paedobaptist would interpret use of the phrase as a concession. Nor did he consider the supposed error all that important. In reality, though the phrase was not strictly *necessary*, it was nonetheless proper, because many counterfeit baptisms did exist in other denominations.<sup>66</sup> This reply offended Kilpatrick, who sent the *Index* a rejoinder, part of which Brantly kindly suppressed. The Georgian claimed, among several things, “Baptists *all* agree that baptism is immersion [*sic*], and that immersion is baptism.”

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Commentary,” *CI*, 16 March 1833, p. 176. The second, proposed at Boston, would consist of excerpts from several commentaries and be called *The Comprehensive Commentary* (see the editorial reply from the *Baptist Repository* in Brantly, “A Baptist Edition of Henry’s Commentary Contemplated,” 76-77). To raise subscriptions for *The Comprehensive Commentary*, agents were carrying around “a sample of the intended work, consisting of a chapter or part of a chapter in Genesis.” Brantly hoped Baptists would not fall for this “specious bait.” He likened the action of the agents to “carrying a sample-brick, or stone, or board, of a house offered for sale, that the purchaser being satisfied with the sample may buy the house” (Brantly, “Comprehensive Commentary,” *CI*, 25 May 1833, p. 334). Thus, America’s three major cities—New York, Philadelphia, and Boston—each proposed a Baptist commentary in early 1833.

<sup>64</sup>[William T. Brantly], “Baptist Version of the New Testament,” *CR* 2 (March 1837): 21.

<sup>65</sup>J. H. T. Kilpatrick, Letter to the Editor, *CI*, 2 February 1833, p. 77. In a subsequent letter, apparently before reading any of Brantly’s remarks, Kilpatrick lamented a “bitter” taste in reading the fourth article of the Georgia Association’s confession of faith, which confessed of baptism, “Dipping is the *mode*.” He heartily desired that “so grand an error” be removed from “so respectable a body” at their next meeting (*idem*, “Look Here Again,” *CI*, 16 February 1833, pp. 108-09).

<sup>66</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Remarks” to J. H. T. Kilpatrick, Letter to the Editor, *CI*, 2 February 1833, p. 77. The idea of counterfeits comes from Brantly, “A Matter in Dispute,” *CI*, 23 March 1833, p. 178. This article also summarizes Kilpatrick’s points well (see Brantly, “Matter in Dispute,” 179).

Parenthetically, he also noted that the Greek word *baptizo* and its cognate *baptismos* were “improperly” translated in “our English version.” On the latter point, Brantly agreed, conceding, “The word *baptise* [*sic*] should have been translated *immerse* in all cases.” On the former, Brantly strongly demurred, “Baptism is a more comprehensive term than immersion. Every baptism contains an immersion; but it cannot be said that every immersion contains a baptism.” To buttress his case, Brantly included quotes from John Gill, Andrew Fuller, and Richard Pengilly, who all used the phrase “baptism by immersion.” While giving these quotes, the editor wryly quipped, “It is time then to have a *Baptist edition* of Gill’s Commentary.”<sup>67</sup>

In each of these encounters, Brantly displayed a thoughtful conservatism that valued the concept of a thing more than its term. This conservatism also affected his defense of the King James Version of the Bible. In his day, Brantly found that charges made against the standard version often aggravated the fears of young converts, who were afraid of not understanding the mind of God due to the imperfections of translators or of language itself. To confirm their faith, and in accordance with his own views of inspiration, Brantly stressed the importance of doctrine over wording:

The *mind of Christ*, which constitutes the chief matter of the Bible, stands out bold and conspicuous on the very face of the most imperfect translation ever made. The dull forms of the most beclouded dialect any where found among the nations of the earth, cannot hinder from shining out, the intense light of *excellent glory*. We should, therefore, by no means submit to discouragement, because we have inspired Truth—the incomparable Word, in a form which impairs its native lustre.

In addition, perhaps referring to the charges mentioned earlier, Brantly stressed, “We need not dispute and cavil about the obscurities of translation, when there stands forth

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<sup>67</sup>Brantly, “A Matter in Dispute,” 178. About translating *baptizo* from the Greek into English, Brantly offhandedly commented in 1829, “The word *immerse* or *immersion*, cannot be found there [in the Authorized Version of the Bible]; though both should have occurred, scores of times” (idem, “Means of Grace,” *CI*, 21 January 1832, p. 46). In his tract against infant baptism, Brantly again asserted, “It must be a mind addicted to quibbling, and exceedingly unhinged by the oscillations of doubt, which can find uncertainty in the meaning of the word baptism. . . . The word in English most nearly equivalent to it, is immersion, and though every immersion is not baptism, yet every baptism is immersion” (W. T. Brantly, “The Covenant of Circumcision, No Just Plea for Infant Baptism,” in *The Baptist Library: A Republication of Standard Baptist Works*, ed. Charles G. Sommers, William R. Williams, and Levi I. Hill [Prattsville, NY: Robert H. Hill, 1843], 3:404-05).

amidst all the manglings of bad versions, the fair and lovely form of that Wisdom which is from above”—citing thus a favorite text, James 3:17. Consequently, in any version, a believer will find “enough to admire, enough to imitate and enough for life and godliness.”<sup>68</sup>

By denying the *necessity* of an exact translation, Brantly did not devalue the task of translation, when properly understood. In his opinion, translation aimed at imparting understanding, and if possible, to do so without added comment. In a fascinating article on some New Testament genres, Brantly differentiated between the work of a commentator and the work of a translator. The Gospel of Luke required “historical and chronological comment” along with some explanations on harmonization, the parables, and customs of the East. The Gospel of Matthew required comments about Old Testament citations, the “axiomatic and paradoxical style of Oriental teaching,” the parables, the figurative nature of prophecy, and brief historical allusions. But neither Gospel required annotation on everything, for:

The matchless simplicity of the narrative can scarcely require the aid of comment to render it intelligible to the humblest understanding. . . . The critical or philological difficulties are few and inconsiderable.

Consequently, Brantly concluded, “The Authorized Version, or indeed, almost the rudest version, is adequate to convey the sense of the Evangelists with sufficient clearness and precision.” In contrast to the Synoptics, John’s Gospel “seems to repel the impertinence of frigid verbal criticism.” Not even Calvin satisfied Brantly here. The greatest need for translation concerned the “dialectical treatises” of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Instead of commentaries, which seemed so out of place, for “nothing can be more awkward and unsuitable than a treatise upon a treatise,” a “more efficient translation” should come forth, for it is “the proper business of a translator to make intelligible and

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<sup>68</sup>W. T. Brantly, “For the Confirmation of Believers,” *CI*, 28 January 1832, p. 50.

perspicuous by equivalent, rather than literal renderings.” Without such a translation, especially for Romans, Brantly could only foresee “endless logomachy.”<sup>69</sup>

With firm views on both terminology and translation, Brantly faced his last Northern controversy—his opposition to a Baptist Bible. In early 1837, Brantly wrote an anonymous article for the *Christian Review*, an American Baptist literary journal, in which he declared his “sincere, and unchanged attachment to the good old English version made by the order of king James I.” He wrote not simply in vindication of the common version, which he praised for its purity of style and accuracy, but in opposition to the “loud and strong” complaint that not translating *baptizo* did “much injustice” to the Baptists. The plaintiffs contended that a Baptist Bible would secure “a more faithful and consistent sense,” while simultaneously vindicating the Baptist cause. To this proposal, Brantly objected “with all the earnestness of deprecation.” As a consequence, he and other conservative opponents of the new version were “regarded as very lukewarm advocates of the denominational faith, and as the authors of a policy at once temporizing and spiritless.” Thus, an open breach appeared among Baptists one month before the Bible Convention, with its Philadelphian host having a leading voice.<sup>70</sup>

Brantly gave three main reasons in opposition to a proposed new version. First, the word “baptism” is an English word, having “a fixed and determinate sense.” In his mind, Baptists labored under a gross misconception, as if transferred words were somehow unintelligible. Did Latin words such as *sanctification* and *redemption* require emendation? Should “the blessed name of CHRIST” be expelled too? After centuries of use, these terms had become “naturalized” on their foreign soil. To replace them now,

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<sup>69</sup>W. T. Brantly, “General Views,” *CI*, 2 July 1831, pp. 7-8. Brantly especially disliked the translation of Romans in the Authorized Version. Brantly whimsically imagined, “Were St. Paul to rise from the dead, and to translate his own epistle into English, we have no doubt that his version would produce not a little surprise, if it even escaped condemnation from Biblical critics and commentators” (*ibid.*, 8). Presumably Brantly is the author.

<sup>70</sup>[Brantly], “Baptist Version of the New Testament,” 21-23. It later became widely known, both by his own admittance and by later reference in the *Christian Review*, that Brantly was the author of this article (cf. William T. Brantly, “On a Proposed New Version of the Bible,” *BR*, 3 May 1837, n.p.).

would resemble parting with old friends, leaving the reader of the Bible wondering where the “rightful tenants of the habitation” had gone. In facing the objection why a word capable of proper translation should be retained, Brantly seemingly departed from the concession he had given Kilpatrick four years earlier:

We are, consequently, of opinion, that the idea contained in the word *baptism*, as used in the New Testament, cannot be *adequately* expressed by any other single word in our language. It means more than *immersion*. It contains the idea of immersion, and, at the same time, gives a character to that idea, stamps a sacredness upon it, confers a religiousness upon its import.

In other words, the connotation of the word “baptism” is larger than the strict denotation of “immersion.” As proof, Brantly cited many medieval and early English writers, often from William Wall’s *History of Infant Baptism*, to show that “all the versions in languages using the Roman character or alphabet, were made with the express understanding, that βαπτίζω was transferred and not translated, because there did not appear to be, in those languages, words of an import fully equivalent.” Significantly, this transfer occurred despite the fact that up until the Westminster Assembly, the English church regularly immersed their infants at baptism. Thus no predilection in favor of sprinkling led the translators of the King James Version to transfer *baptizo* as “baptize.” In an interesting twist, what Brantly had earlier called the “Episcopal dress” of the common version now stood in his favor! True, he acknowledged, other denominations abused the word and claimed it had secondary meanings. But no word stood above such abuse; consequently, new vocabulary provided no safety. Even if all parties were to use the word “immerse,” Brantly claimed, “The inventive talents of our *affusion brethren* would discover something in immerse less than immersion, as they have found out that something is baptism, which is less than baptism.”<sup>71</sup>

Second, translating *baptizo* as “immerse” would give Baptists no material advantage in their polemics. In using a Baptist Bible, how could a Baptist deflect the

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<sup>71</sup>[Brantly], “Baptist Version of the New Testament,” 23-35.

accusation of begging the question? In addition, would not an argument over how to baptize simply turn into an argument over how to translate *baptizo*—which is really the same question—thus making the Baptist resemble a “canine quadruped, coursing a circle in quest of his own tail?” What “utter imbecility”! Conversely, using a Baptist Bible would deprive Baptists of a choice argument in their favor—the very fact that the common version came from paedobaptists. Brantly remained confident that the whole question of mode could be settled by any unprejudiced reader of the common English version. He imagined them concluding, “Those Pedobaptists, . . . have made a Baptist book; and what is it, but . . . an acknowledgement of undeniable facts?”<sup>72</sup>

Finally, and most importantly, Brantly felt Baptists were in danger of “laying too much stress upon an external rite.” By no means did Brantly mean to “undervalue baptism,” and surely his conduct in defense of Baptist views and close communion proved he did not, but he boldly asserted of baptism:

It is not regeneration,—it is not faith,—neither is it holiness. It is neither brotherly-kindness, nor charity. It is not the vital principle of Christianity. It must not, therefore, be insisted on, to the exclusion of any of these.

Should Baptists persist, Brantly warned that heresy might lie ahead. Surely the patristic heresy of baptismal regeneration warned against abusing baptism. Even in Brantly’s own day, the followers of Alexander Campbell had succumbed to the same abuse, and, Brantly reminded, “Those who abet and defend it, have a *new version*.” This fact in particular bothered Brantly. For more than two centuries, Baptists had “agreed with all Protestants using the English language, that the translation . . . made in the fifth year of James I., shall be a standard of scripture truth for us in common with them.” To recede now, he declared, “would carry with it the implication of at least a qualified defection from the protestant ranks.” Worse, Baptists would resemble Unitarians and Universalists, who

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 35-39; see also Brantly, “The Sufficiency of the Bible,” *CSCI*, 15 May 1830, p. 312, which excerpts from the *Christian Observer* for support.

have made new versions in agreement with their principles, “thus making *their notions* of divine truth the standard of translation.” Such company was unacceptable.<sup>73</sup>

At the very least, the article reveals that Brantly viewed the Bible controversy through his earlier perceptions of evangelical unity. In the past, Brantly had prided his denomination on its frank appeal to “the simple Bible, without note or comment,” which was exactly the kind of English Bible demanded by the constitution of the American Bible Society.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the Baptist appeal to “Thus saith the Lord” made their denomination the most likely candidate, in Brantly’s mind, to support Bible societies.<sup>75</sup> Now, however, Baptists began to resemble the heretics! Instead of taking the lead in union with other denominations, as Brantly had hoped in his *Index*, Baptists were now defecting from Protestant ranks. And for what cause? Not simply for baptism, but for the *mode* of baptism! In contrast to the importance of the *subject* of baptism, which by itself justified close communion, the mode of baptism ranked far lower in Brantly’s estimation. At the close of his article, he reminded his Baptist brethren, “Our greatest difficulty with them is, that they are Pedobaptists. And this difficulty would be in no wise lessened, by their universal adoption of immersion as the only mode of baptism.”<sup>76</sup> In short, Brantly was warning his brethren of sectarian bigotry, a fault which occurred, according to one Baptist tract, whenever one’s “right, too rigid, hardens into wrong.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>[Brantly], “Baptist Version of the New Testament,” 39-40, 36-37, 38. Brantly once identified a disrespect for “the Old Version of the Scriptures” as Campbellism’s first trait (idem, “Hints to Baptists,” *CSCI*, 27 February 1830, p. 130).

<sup>74</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Baptists of the United States,” *CI*, 20 August 1831, p. 120.

<sup>75</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Hints to Baptists,” *CSCI*, 6 March 1830, p. 145. Brantly also noted how the British and Foreign Bible Society began from a suggestion by a Baptist minister, Joseph Hughes. This made sense to Brantly, who had “always maintained . . . that our views and sentiments could never suffer detriment when the Bible was permitted to speak.” W. B. Johnson agreed, saying, “Baptists profess an implicit submission to the commands of this Leader. A ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ is the warrant under which they go forth to victory and the Victor’s crown” (W., “Hints to Baptists,” *CSCI*, 8 May 1830, p. 289).

<sup>76</sup>[Brantly], “Baptist Version of the New Testament,” 40.

<sup>77</sup>This quote comes from Tract no. 89, on bigotry, as excerpted in the “Seventh Annual Report of the Baptist General Tract Society,” *The Baptist Tract Magazine* 4 (January 1831): 3. Similarly, Daniel Sharp defined, “Bigotry is a blind zeal; an unreasonable attachment to certain opinions or practices” (W. T. Brantly, “Unjust Imputations Refuted,” *CSCI*, 26 December 1829, p. 401).



### **Conclusion**

By the spring of 1837, Baptists faced potential disunity on two fronts. Externally, Baptists faced the question of how far to exert their independence of the American Bible Society, a premiere symbol of evangelical unity. Internally, Baptists faced the difficulties created by the New Yorkers' haste to form a new Bible Society. The great Bible Convention of 1837 dealt with both of these matters, as did its host, William T. Brantly, who stood resolute against Baptist commentaries and Baptist Bibles.

CHAPTER 13  
EVANGELICAL AND BAPTIST DISUNITY

External and internal disunity among Baptists in 1837 proceeded along two axes. First, the Bible Convention provisionally ratified Baptist independence from the American Bible Society, thereby effectively ending Baptist endorsement of evangelical unity. Second, sectarian concerns intensified sectional differences, making the Bible Convention the first visible break of unity among missionary Baptists and a portent of events to come. Amid the controversy, William T. Brantly occupied a central position, reviewing the ruling of the American Bible Society, chairing the Hartford Conference, and hosting the Bible Convention itself. More importantly, Brantly provided a minority dissenting position through several articles and through objections at the Bible Convention itself. In short, Brantly's strong stand for evangelical unity along with his subsequent defeat and southward retreat shows that sectarianism joined with sectionalism in breaking up the Triennial Convention.

**The Bible Convention and Evangelical Disunity**

In late April 1837, over four hundred Baptist delegates descended upon Philadelphia for a variety of annual meetings, but most notably for the great Bible Convention. Brantly estimated, "Philadelphia never before witnessed so large an assemblage of Baptists, and probably no other place was ever favored with an equal number in one deliberative body at the same time."<sup>1</sup> Delegates were told to repair to the Baptist General Tract Depository at 21 South Fourth Street, whence they would be

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<sup>1</sup>William T. Brantly, "The Great Bible Convention," *SWGJ*, 26 May 1837, n.p.

“conducted to lodgings” previously arranged.<sup>2</sup> The Convention would begin at four o’clock, Wednesday afternoon, 26 April 1836, in the meeting house of First Baptist Church.<sup>3</sup> The host pastor, of course, was fifty-year-old William T. Brantly.

It is evident from the roster that the distribution of delegates failed to fulfill the intended goal of “full representation.” Brantly estimated that one-third came from New York state, with another large group from New Jersey. Very few came from the South and from New England. As expected, South Carolina stayed home, except for a certain Thomas Mason. From Georgia, only Brantly’s former coworker Adiel Sherwood attended. Sherwood and Baron Stow were chosen secretaries. For president, the Convention elected Rufus Babcock, Jr., a delegate sponsored by First Church’s old rival congregation on Spruce Street. Beyond geography, it became quickly apparent that the great body consisted of two groups: the minority, who, like Brantly, allegedly came to deliberate; and the majority, who, according to Brantly, “had come for a specific object,” and so were not disposed to long arguments and discussion.<sup>4</sup> Even the very minutes of the meeting reflected these two groups, for the American and Foreign Bible Society published no record of discussions, just resolutions; whereas the version published by the Baptist General Tract Society, which is followed closely here, gave detailed synopses based on the transcript of W. E. Drake, a reporter in the United States Senate.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>William T. Brantly and I. M. Allen, “Baptist Meetings in Philadelphia—for the Last Week in April, 1837,” *BR*, 29 March 1837, n.p.

<sup>3</sup>See the Circular Letter from the Committee on Arrangements in B. Manly, “Philadelphia Bible Convention,” *SWG*, 24 March 1837, n.p.

<sup>4</sup>Brantly, “The Great Bible Convention,” n.p.

<sup>5</sup>For the New York version, see *Constitution of the American and Foreign Bible Society, Formed by the Bible Convention which Met in Philadelphia, April 26-29, 1837; a List of Their Officers and Managers; a Report of Their Operations during the Year of Their Provisional Organization, Together with an Appendix, Containing Extracts of Correspondence, and the Names of Auxiliary Societies, Life Directors, and Life Members* (New York: John Gray, 1837), 1-16. For the Philadelphia version, see *Proceedings of the Bible Convention, Held in the City of Philadelphia, April 26-29, 1837, with the Constitution of the American and Foreign Bible Society, Organized by the Convention* (Philadelphia: Baptist General Tract Society, 1837).

After registering on Wednesday, the Bible Convention sat for three full days, often sensing that something more than methodology was at stake. The established patterns of evangelical unity were questioned, with many Baptists urging their brethren to strike out boldly on their own. In opposing this rashness, Brantly gave full vent to his conservative views as a unionist. Even in the minority, Brantly remained an unashamed Baptist evangelical.

#### **Thursday, 27 April 1837**

The Bible Convention opened with a motion from James D. Knowles, to the effect that Baptists had the duty to form a new organization for Bible distribution in foreign languages. In echoing the Hartford Conference, Knowles assumed all agreed. He was wrong. After Spencer Cone substituted a similar motion to the one from Knowles, who then acceded, Brantly rose to oppose any new organization. Cone objected, but several delegates signaled for Brantly to continue. He cited three reasons against a new organization and in favor of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions:

1. A new organization would unnecessarily complicate Baptist benevolence, like having too many domestic servants in the house.
2. Bible distribution in foreign tongues is properly a missionary work, and so should be left in their hands.
3. By supporting a new organization, the old one will probably suffer support. If so, how can a new organization be the course of duty?

In closing, Brantly pledged to acquiesce to any measure relating to the foreign field, but he deemed any work at home as “utterly inadmissible.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>*Proceedings, Bible Convention, 1837, 5-8.* Brantly’s opposition may have surprised many, for the initial circular of the American and Foreign Bible Society had claimed that the new society had received “the sanction” of the committee calling for the Bible Convention (see *Constitution of the American & Foreign Bible Society, Formed by a Convention of Baptist Elders and Brethren, Held in the Meeting House of the Oliver-St. Baptist Church, in the City of New-York, May 12, & 13, 1836: Together, with Their Address to the Friends of the Bible Throughout the United States; a Notice of Their Proceedings; and a List of Their Officers and Board of Managers* [New York: American and Foreign Bible Society, 1836], 11). Since Brantly had presided at the Hartford Conference, it is possible that his opposition to a new organization may not have had a chance for formal expression.

Cone strongly disagreed with Brantly. Citing a line from Jesus that Francis Wayland had once used so eloquently in his famous address “The Moral Dignity of the Missionary Enterprise” (1823), Cone asserted, “The field was the world.”<sup>7</sup> By this slogan, Cone and his organization referred to Bible distribution at home and abroad.<sup>8</sup> In giving his reasons for a new organization, Cone argued, “Baptists were under as much obligation to give the pure version in print as to preach it.” Compliance with the American Bible Society was not an option. In contrast to this closed door, divine providence had opened a new door, which must be entered, for, as his colleague Charles G. Sommers later wrote, “Capacity and opportunity to do good, not only give a right to do it, but make the doing it a duty.”<sup>9</sup> This duty, Cone continued, especially applied to American Baptists, who “ought to act unshackled and fearlessly” because America was “the land of the Baptists”—the land where “Roger Williams [had] contended successfully . . . for the voluntary principle, that a man cannot be born into a system of faith—that he must make the Bible his only guide.” Then, in specific challenge to Brantly’s pessimism, Cone asserted that “five times as much could be done by a distinct organization than by leaving the matter to Missionary Societies,” for Bible societies were the most popular benevolent organization. In this assertion, he felt justified, for his own experimental society in New York had raised \$21,000 in one year for the Bible cause. In all, the only real objection Cone gave Brantly involved an allusion to the overloaded staff at the Board of Foreign Missions. Perhaps unconsciously, Cone assumed that overall giving would increase enough to cover both the Bible and missionary organizations.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 8. The connection to Wayland became explicit later, when Elon Galusha spoke out in favor of home distribution (*ibid.*, 38). For Jesus’ words, see Matt 13:38.

<sup>8</sup>For proof, see *Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 19, and *Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 44-45.

<sup>9</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 8-10; *Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 51.

<sup>10</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 8-10.

At this point, Cone came under personal attack. Heman Lincoln of Boston accused Cone of calling the Hartford Conference. In defense, Cone said that he had not called for it, but had merely asked that the entire Baptist Board attend. Unshaken, Lincoln proceeded to remind Cone of their continued obligation to help the American Bible Society “supply the whole world with the sacred Scriptures in the shortest time practicable,” which summarized a resolution Cone himself had introduced. Lincoln then asserted that Baptists nationwide did not call for a new organization. At this, several members from various states testified to a general call for a new organization. Charles Sommers, the corresponding secretary of the American and Foreign Bible Society, who several years before had assisted Brantly in a protracted meeting in the very same church building, also chimed in, dismissing the opinion from Pennsylvania (i.e., Brantly’s) as just one man’s, and calling for another opinion, which Brantly declared to be “not speaking to order.” Amid the affirmations, Cone read letters from both W. B. Johnson and J. L. Dagg that appeared to argue for the necessity of a new society. Therefore, the question came and the motion passed. These Baptists wanted a new organization.<sup>11</sup>

The Convention next considered whether the new organization would conduct only foreign distribution. In light of conflicting opinions about the American Bible Society, Wayland commended the limitation as a means to a united convention. After some brief remarks by Cone, Knowles declared that the Convention had “arrived at the Rubicon.” Unanimity was impossible; therefore, he moved that the resolution be referred to a select committee, who would report the next day. Cone strongly opposed this motion, saying, “The Committee might be a month before they reported.” He also declared his opposition to limiting the society to foreign translations. After adjourning

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 10-13. Brantly did not follow Lincoln’s tactics in questioning the general call for a new organization, but merely asserted that most delegates present had already made up their mind for one.

For the letters from Dagg and Johnson, see *Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 70-71, 72-73. Brantly later confessed “regret” over the course his “old friend and brother W. B. Johnson” had taken in endorsing ahead of time whatever might transpire, but Brantly hoped Johnson would yet see clearly the “actual conspiracy” that occurred in Philadelphia (Brantly, “The Great Bible Convention,” n.p.).

and reconvening in the evening, having also tabled Knowles's motion, the Convention then heard John S. Maginnis of Portland, Maine—another member of the minority—explain the implications of the Rubicon. He declared that they had convened because of a grievance over foreign distribution, and thus had no authority to proceed one step further. If they did, they would “pass censure” on the American Bible Society beyond what the circumstances warranted. Were they prepared to do this? Maginnis then reminded the Convention of the blessings of evangelical unity: “The Bible Society had been the means of joining heart to heart, and breaking down prejudices which formerly existed between denominations.” If the Baptists rejected this cordiality at home, the world would say, “Why, look at those Christians. Where can they unite, if they *cannot* unite in circulating the Bible?” In other words, were Baptists prepared to end evangelical unity?<sup>12</sup>

Before this question received a deeper look, and after J. Dowling of New York spoke at length, Cone again defended himself. He avowed his desire for open discussion, but he also wished to be cleared of the imputation that he had done wrong. Let brethren tell him what he did. Brantly agreed with open discussion, but remarked that “his brother CONE need not evince so much sensibility, for he (Mr. B.) did not believe that he had been misrepresented.” Then as Brantly started asserting how each delegate had his rights to deliberate, Cone interrupted, saying that he had been lying for a whole year under the imputation that he had misrepresented the Baptist denomination before the American Bible Society. Brantly called this speaking off the subject, but Babcock admitted it, leading Brantly to interrupt the president, declaring his mortification that the subject had not been directed to committee, as would have been done in any deliberative body. Brantly then “entreated his brethren to refrain from making loud proclamations, or allowing their feelings to get the better of their judgment.” In reply, Ebenezer Thresher,

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<sup>12</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 13-15.

Jr. declared that no question connected with the Baptists had ever “entered so much into our feelings as the present.”<sup>13</sup>

Having chosen not to refer the proposed restriction to a committee, the Convention again faced the Rubicon. At first, Boston and New York volleyed their views. One Bostonian favored verbal censure of the American Bible Society if necessary, but not disfellowship. Another opposed any new organization, but acceded so long as home distribution were excluded, since the American Bible Society had already pledged to supply every American family with a Bible. The New Yorkers advocated freedom. Leave all Baptists free to decide for themselves whom to support, declared Daniel Hascall, one of the new society’s agents. Based on his travels in New York state, he testified that Baptists there wanted nothing more to do with the American Bible Society. Perhaps as an example, Bartholomew T. Welch of Albany spoke up, opposing the restriction as unlawful fettering of future generations, and accusing the American Bible Society of leaving the Baptists. Further, if adherence to the truth and allegiance to Jesus be sectarianism, then Welch declared, “Let sectarianism be written on my brow in indelible characters,—then let bigotry be connected with it in all its odious forms. And, I would wear the stigma till death should obliterate it.” Should anyone erect an alter to peace, he seriously doubted that any Baptist would sacrifice Truth on that alter or officiate there as priest.<sup>14</sup>

At the close of the day, Maine again spoke up for evangelical unity. Thomas Curtis of Bangor (who later relocated, as Brantly did, to Charleston, South Carolina) had no doubts that New York would push a new version if home distribution were allowed. For this reason and for the sake of authorization, he supported the restriction to foreign languages only. Before he sat down, he wanted to say something about the American

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 17-20.



Bible Society's principles of "conciliation, without compromise between all Christian sects." He warned the delegates:

If we established the new Society proposed, we should dig the grave of these principles. . . . Brethren should remember that if they cut themselves off from Bible Society principles, they sever that union between Evangelical Christians which has been the high honor of the age.

With this warning about evangelical unity still in their minds, the Convention adjourned for the day.

In the deliberations of the first day, Brantly seems to have purposely spoken up in an effort to keep the American and Foreign Bible Society from presenting their organization early in the Convention. Indeed, the Society had convened in the very same building just one hour before the Convention began, and had resolved to present an abstract of their proceedings right away in the Convention.<sup>15</sup> Though not publishing an official roster, their members must have formed a sizable portion of the overall Convention. According to Sherwood, the existing society failed to present their society as a package because "there were so many talkers." Sherwood also commended Brantly for his firmness.<sup>16</sup> In opposing the New Yorkers, Brantly acted in concert with several New Englanders, who formed the vocal core of the minority party in favor of evangelical unity. Having stated both their case against a new organization and their willingness to accede to the majority, provided both the name and the purpose of the new organization be restricted to foreign activities, the minority hoped to draw the majority out to "meet them in the spirit of compromise," as Brantly explained later in a letter to Manly. The next day, Cone did not budge, but resolutely pushed his own organization.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 17.

<sup>16</sup>Letter to the Editor, Eatonton, Georgia, 10 May 1837, *SWGJ*, 26 May 1837, n.p.

<sup>17</sup>Brantly, "The Great Bible Convention," n.p.

**Friday, 28 April 1837**

In the morning, the Convention considered an additional amendment that had been proposed the night before. Instead of opposing home distribution simply to advert a new English version, J. Dowling of New York had proposed adding the restriction “and the version in English, now in common use.” Octavius Winslow, also a New Yorker and one of the original protesters to the American Bible Society, hailed the appearance of this amendment “as the dawning of a bright and cloudless day,” for now all could agree and be rid of “the foul stigma upon them of getting up a Baptist version.” As an Englishman by birth, he could not understand why these Americans hesitated to use their liberties to the fullest. Boston remained unconvinced. Like Brantly, Thresher saw only a limited number of donors among Baptists. Why abstract money to extend one society when others stood in great need? Along a different line, John S. Jenkins of the Philadelphia Association urged caution, lest the denomination be forced to repent later of adding too many restrictions.

At this point, the Convention turned—or rather was turned—in favor of the American and Foreign Bible Society. Spencer Cone, whose patience had apparently worn thin, stood up to support Dowling’s amendment to the amendment, if only it would hasten things along. In scope, the proposed amended amendment fit the breadth of the American and Foreign Bible Society, whose very name implied distribution at home and abroad. If, however, the proposal failed, then he and his friends would be defeated. But not only them, Cone asserted, for all Baptists would be robbed of “one of the greatest enterprises in which the Baptist denomination had ever engaged.” In defending his claim, Cone again revealed his “strong convictions on spiritual freedom and voluntary religion,” which one recent biographer sees behind Cone’s deep involvement in the Bible society.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, his reasoning displays an intriguing blend of American patriotism with Baptist

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<sup>18</sup>John Thornbury, *A Pastor in New York: The Life and Times of Spencer Houghton Cone* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2004), 128.

liberty of conscience. Cone opposed transferring words, not only because of its evil fruit in general, but specifically because the result of transferring words had been “to unite church and state.” As Americans, his reasoning seemed to imply, should we not want a new version, instead of holding on to the version of a king who obscured the truth by royal edict? And if so, why should “American” not be included in the name of the new society? Even England soon expected a new version, according to communications from Cox and Hoby. Why not America too?<sup>19</sup>

Again, as soon as Cone finished speaking, Brantly spoke up. He first of all commended his brother, saying, “He certainly could never feel any thing but pleasure in hearing his sentiments.” Brantly remained sure that on less divisive issues, they would both exhibit “that spirit of liberality and Christian kindness which became them as ministers of the gospel.”<sup>20</sup> (Little reason exists for doubting the sincerity of these words, in light of Brantly’s habitual style of polemics and in light of his previous contacts with Cone, who, interestingly, had given the opening prayer and a sermon at the first anniversary of the Central Union Association in 1833.)<sup>21</sup> Having said this, Brantly declared he would treat him as any other brother, approving “of what was right in his brother, but not of what was wrong.” Specifically, Brantly claimed that he had heard lots of declamation and poetry, but not one “solitary reason” for the *necessity* of extending the proposed society beyond the foreign field. His main objection to home distribution was:

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<sup>19</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 23-25. According to his sons, the “VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE was the key to [Cone’s] action in this matter, as in all others relating to human associations.” A great chain of causation stood poised. Translating the Bible would spread Baptist views, which in turn would spread “of necessity, with them the pure principles of human freedom, or the VOLUNTARY SYSTEM in civil government.” Cone allegedly believed, “Those sentiments were a lever able to lift the world, if a fulcrum only could be found. The United States of America was that fulcrum.” See Edward W. Cone and Spencer W. Cone, *Some Account of the Life of Spencer Houghton Cone: A Baptist Preacher in America* (New York: Livermore & Rudd, 1856), 337-38; see also p. 347 of the same account.

<sup>20</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 25.

<sup>21</sup>*Minutes of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, Held in the Meeting House of the First Baptist Church, Philadelphia, May 28, 29, 30, 31, 1833* (Philadelphia: Samuel W. Neall, 1833), 1, 6. Cone may have been visiting his good friend, John L. Dagg, who was also present. Brantly, in turn, was sent to open up correspondence with the Hudson River Association, in which Cone participated (*ibid.*, 5).

It drew the line of demarcation betwixt us and others engaged in the same work of Christian love. He was a Baptist, but he loved the name of Protestant more than that name, because it stood opposed to one of the greatest abominations that the sun ever beheld. . . . He did not want a line to be drawn betwixt us and other churches. He was altogether opposed to this.

Here is the Baptist evangelical—the unionist! Going further, Brantly joined his brothers from Maine in predicting the end of an era:

[Mr. B. said,] “But look at the consequences: here, in this city, we have a Philadelphia Bible Society, which is the mother of all the societies in America. It was the first that was established in this country. And it has ever since—from its commencement—pursued a consistent course.” Mr. B. then adverted to the various auxiliary societies connected with it, and then went on to show that the inevitable consequences of the Society’s undertaking *home* operations, must be to introduce almost endless confusion among them, as the Society would of course come in contact with the auxiliary bodies, and compel them to re-organize so as to prevent collision in the prosecution of their benevolent Christian labors.

Here again lay Brantly’s deep concerns over useful effort. He closed by praising the American Bible Society, hoping that the amended amendment would not prevail.<sup>22</sup>

Since Brantly had requested facts, Sommers, the corresponding secretary of the New York society, rose to communicate “a single fact.” (Here Brantly interjected, “For reasons, too.”) He read a letter from Dr. Roberts of Robertsville, Beaufort District, South Carolina—Brantly’s old area of pastoral ministry—explaining how the local society there had already changed their constitution, separating from the American Bible Society and joining with the American and Foreign Bible Society. There, Sommers concluded, stood proof that the New Yorkers were not governed by “excited passions,” but by “sober motives.” Following Sommers were two more New Yorkers. The first, William Williams, expressed his fear that separating from the American Bible Society would “beget a schism in the denomination.” He then maintained that the Hartford Conference had not been properly called. When Cone briefly explained its circumstances, Williams expressed satisfaction, but testified that many brethren still considered both the Hartford Conference and the present Convention illegitimate. Following him, Nathaniel Kendrick,

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<sup>22</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 25-26.

president of Hamilton Theological Institute, spoke in favor of a new version, but against home distribution—the exact opposite pair of fellow New Yorker, J. Dowling. Kendrick simply could not believe that so much confusion would have prevailed if *baptizo* had not been translated. With these statements, the New Yorkers paused. Having a motion to table the amendment to the amendment, the nays prevailed and the Convention seemed to stand still in exhaustion.<sup>23</sup>

Fresh light came from an unexpected source—Robert W. Cushman, a young ordained minister under Brantly at First Church, who disagreed with his elder colleague. He first revealed that he did not know of “three persons in the Baptist community of this city and vicinity” who agreed with Brantly. By Cushman’s observations, Philadelphian Baptists heartily concurred in demanding a new organization and had even become reconciled to the New York society:

Although we felt like complaining of our brethren in New York, when we heard that they had presumptuously—as we, in the warmth of the moment, were disposed to say—anticipated the deliberations and forestalled the decisions of the Convention; yet it has appeared to us that the exigencies of the denomination and the cause of truth, demanded such an organization.

As to ending the stalemate, Cushman recommended discarding both the amendment and its amendment. If the fears of other denominations must be allayed, he advised, let a resolution be made to that effect, but keep the society unencumbered for the sake of posterity and their freedom.<sup>24</sup>

After Cushman came several opinions for or against the American Bible Society. Dowling offered simplicity as one “reason” demanded by brother Brantly. J. B. Jeter of Virginia opposed all further connections with the American Bible Society, for any donation would fund that Society’s *foreign* translations as well as its domestic distributions. In Virginia, revealed William Carey Crane, the state auxiliary to the

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 26-29.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 29-31.

American Bible Society had already refunded one-fourth of their funds to the Baptists and their new Bible society. Timothy Green, one of the original New York protesters, still favored union with the old society. When the vote was called, the amendment to the amendment lost, leaving only “in foreign languages” as a restriction. This decision resolved nothing, for Cone immediately moved to strike out the words “in foreign languages.”<sup>25</sup>

The Convention became impatient. Morgan J. Rhees, Brantly’s former pupil who had been ordained at First Baptist Church in Philadelphia, tried to express his own opposition to Cone’s motion:

He wished every member of the Convention to feel that it was the test question—the very substance of the controversy between the Baptist denomination and the American Bible Society, whether we should confine our operations to foreign lands *only*, or embrace our native country in the field of labor of the Society, and thus conflict with our brethren.

If the question were now forced upon them, Rhees demanded a vote on whether to allow further discussion. Cries of “Question!” resounded in the church. Sherwood defied the call and demanded to speak. He too considered the motion “the test question,” and could not go farther than foreign distribution in keeping with the intentions of his constituents.<sup>26</sup>

At this point, Wayland took the floor for a long time, questioning the authority of the convention and asserting that only a unanimous decision would carry any weight outside. Moreover, each delegate had no more power than his original instructions regarding foreign distribution. He deprecated any attempt at hierarchy, and claimed Baldwin and Furman for his ancestry of liberty and independence. Regarding the American Bible Society, Wayland sought to vindicate their actions, by confessing his responsibility for the idea behind their final resolution. Perhaps having “more zeal than prudence,” he had attempted a reconciliation by pointing to the American Tract Society

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 32-33.

as a model. “There,” he summarized, “the well known principle is, that whatever is objected to by any one denomination, shall not be published.” But in supplying Bibles to America, Wayland confessed that the Baptists were bound to cooperate with the American Bible Society, unless some strong and good reasons argued against it.<sup>27</sup>

In continuing his statements, Wayland leveled some hard accusations. Here perhaps occurred some of the “unpleasant feelings” that Sherwood later spoke of—how “the sores of old wounds had the scabs rubbed off.”<sup>28</sup> Most notably, Wayland charged the president of the Triennial Convention with having said that he represented the Baptists in the American Bible Society. Wayland, in contrast, claimed to represent himself in the Society and no one else. When he started to explain that Cone had acted “unconsciously” in this manner, the accused New Yorker broke in, explaining his unique role as liaison between the two bodies and his grave sense of responsibility. As president of the Triennial Convention, the only power he possessed was that of calling a meeting, which he admitted that he had done in addressing “a Circular to the members of the Baptist General Convention, asking their opinion and their attendance at the meeting of the Board in Hartford.”<sup>29</sup> Taking Cone at his bare word and nothing more, Wayland then proceeded to castigate what occurred at Hartford, for the President had called the meeting one way, but then another—the “Hartford Conference”—was held. Concerning this Conference, Wayland charged, “There were a great many mistakes about it, and some hard feelings.” Then, after criticizing anonymity in submitting articles, which perhaps included Brantly, Wayland commented some more on “this delicate and unpleasant subject” before the Bible Convention adjourned for the afternoon.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 33-36.

<sup>28</sup>Letter to the Editor, Eatonton, Georgia, n.p.

<sup>29</sup>For this circular letter, see Spencer H. Cone, “To the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions,” *BR*, 27 April 1836, n.p.

<sup>30</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 36-37.

In the evening, Cone and his friends, perhaps smarting from their “old wounds,” proceeded to act with great tenacity. After singing and prayer, Sommers immediately claimed that he possessed “a document, which in his opinion neutralized five-eighths [*sic*] of all the brethren had said!” Babcock called him to order, since Sommers seemed to start in on a speech; but before he sat down, he managed to let it escape that the letter came from Washington, Georgia, the home of Jesse Mercer. Next Cone stood up and offered several resolutions, which he posed as “middle ground, on which brethren could all consistently meet.” Brantly thought otherwise, as he later reported to Manly:

The next resolution introduced was one of a series prepared and offered by Mr. Cone of New-York.—It was this: “This Society shall be known as the *American and Foreign Bible Society!*” This developed at once the whole secret of the *then* existing *American and Foreign Bible Society*, so hastily and objectionably commenced at New-York, last year. When this title was urged upon those of us, who had withdrawn our opposition from the first resolution, and we were informed in no very obscure terms, that this must be the name and title of the new Society, we perceived that our concessions were not likely to be met, and that we were to be placed under a sort of necessity of legalizing the New-York production of the preceding year, which had been ushered into the world in despite of a conventional understanding!<sup>31</sup>

The minutes record only one argument—an extended declamation from Elon Galusha of New York state, the later abolitionist leader and alleged Millerite, who now rose to vindicate the “seventy thousand” members of the American and Foreign Bible Society, whose character had been misrepresented. Wrongly charged with bigotry and sectarianism, Galusha exclaimed that these members had been moved by “a God-fearing, a Bible-loving, and a Christ-honoring spirit.” Stopping them would be as impossible as blocking “the thundering cataract of Niagara.” The true culprits were both Wayland, who sought to govern the Convention “by a single flourish of the wand of his interpretation,” and the American Bible Society, who had “invaded the empire of Christian conscience, and the high prerogative of Heaven.” The true “Bible Society principles,” to borrow

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<sup>31</sup>Brantly, “The Great Bible Convention,” n.p.



Curtis's phrase, were "liberty of conscience—and the amenability of the translators to God and not to man or an association of men."<sup>32</sup>

Towards the end of the day, the Convention approved a rash of resolutions. They struck out the words "in foreign languages," then approved the new society's name and indefinite scope, but resolved separately to confine efforts to the foreign field for one year, until the will of the denomination became known at the new Bible society's annual meeting for 1838.<sup>33</sup> According to Brantly, the majority regarded this delay as a concession to the minority.<sup>34</sup> He, in contrast, regarded their actions as railroading the evening:

When the question upon the style of the new Society, came before the meeting, as it did late on Friday night, those of us who regarded the title as improper and offensive, were actually silenced by the vociferations of *question, question!* In this manner the very *test question* of the meeting was hurried through on Friday evening.<sup>35</sup>

In defeat near the close of the meeting, Brantly still moved, "That the members of this Convention cordially concur with their brethren of sister denominations, to secure from desecration the Lord's day, and to secure its due observance."<sup>36</sup> The resolution, of course, passed unanimously; but in it, did Brantly insert one last reference to evangelical unity?

### **Saturday, 30 April 1837**

On the Convention's final day, the minority requested a reconsideration of the society's name—the American and Foreign Bible Society. To the minority, this name posed two problems. First, it seemed to assume home distribution, which supposedly

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<sup>32</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 37-39. For the allegation that Galusha later became a follower of William Miller, see T. Meredith, "Turned Millerite," *BR*, 20 January 1844, n.p.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>34</sup>Brantly, "The Late Bible Convention," n.p. The Convention's official circular called the delay a "compromise" (*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 49).

<sup>35</sup>Brantly, "The Great Bible Convention," n.p. The minutes do not record this interchange.

<sup>36</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 39-40.

awaited decision. Second, in resembling the American Bible Society, the new name implied a spirit of rivalry.<sup>37</sup> For this latter reason especially, Brantly strongly opposed the name as “an imputation on the good sense of the American Baptists.” Wishing to identify with them, Brantly urged his brothers to “present themselves in a respectable attitude before the world.” If this name were adopted, Brantly threatened to publicize how it had been introduced so hastily the night before.<sup>38</sup>

Instead of “American,” Brantly offered the word “Baptist,” believing that this substitution would reconcile the Convention. This suggestion seems odd at first, for here the advocate of evangelical unity seems to have suggested a sectarian term. Brantly did so, to be sure, because he loved the term, but also to avoid competition with the interdenominational organization.<sup>39</sup> Conversely, his opponents eschewed the term, claiming (as one prominent New Yorker did) that “Baptist” was a Greek term, unintelligible to the common people.<sup>40</sup> The irony did not escape Brantly, who later jibed, “These kind and generous brethren, are so well affected towards the American Bible Society, and towards the Protestant ranks, and towards their paedo-Baptist brethren, as to be unwilling to work under the sectarian name of *baptists!*” Behind this inconsistency, Brantly suspected an “actual conspiracy” to deprive the denomination of its title. He claimed, based on “many intimations both in and out of the Convention,” that the conspirators were moved not solely by competition, but by the “ulterior design” of publishing a new English version in the near future.<sup>41</sup> Apparently, the logic ran this way: If the word “baptize” must leave the Bible, how can it remain as a denominational title?

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<sup>37</sup>Brantly, “The Great Bible Convention,” n.p.

<sup>38</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 40.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>40</sup>Brantly, “The Late Bible Convention,” n.p.; *idem*, “The Great Bible Convention,” n.p. The remark may have come from Sommers, whose annual report for the New York society makes such a point (*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 23).

<sup>41</sup>Brantly, “The Great Bible Convention,” n.p.

The reconsideration of the name lost, after what the minutes discreetly summarized as “a desultory debate . . . that was rather of an embarrassing description.” The majority had grown impatient, with more than one man commenting on the “indulgence” afforded the minority. Several of the minority declined to speak further. Brantly, who still deplored the name, chose to withhold his ultimate decision, under the assurances of a pending resolution the following year. Then, after Sherwood and others spoke, officers were chosen, and thanks rendered to both the secretaries and the president, who closed the meeting with a soaring speech about Christian love cementing differences, and healing “slight wounds.”<sup>42</sup> Overall, Brantly agreed, testifying later of “no acrimoniousness, and very little ill-feeling.”<sup>43</sup>

In the final analysis, the Rubicon had been crossed. Baptists would go it alone, despite the pleas of Brantly and others for evangelical unity. Even though the American and Foreign Bible Society agreed to wait one year before finalizing home distribution, its very own name essentially answered the “test question” already—the field was *the world*. Despite these signs, Brantly refused at first to give up, but waged a fresh war in print.

### **Cone, Brantly, and Baptist Disunity**

#### **Spencer H. Cone and the North**

Upon order of its elected president, Spencer H. Cone, the new American and Foreign Bible Society convened on Monday, 1 May 1837, within the large meeting-house on Sansom Street in Philadelphia. Whether the choice in location resulted from merely its size—reported at a capacity of three thousand—or for more personal reasons, the

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<sup>42</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 40-45.

<sup>43</sup>Brantly, “The Great Bible Convention,” n.p. Other testimonies to this cordial ending include Sherwood (Letter to the Editor, Eatonton, Georgia, n.p.); T. Meredith, “The Philadelphia Convention,” *BR*, 10 May 1837, n.p.; and James D. Knowles (quoted in Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists: Traced by Their Vital Principles and Practices from the Time of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to the Year 1886* [New York: Bryan, Taylor, and Co., 1887], 898).

minutes do not say.<sup>44</sup> After a treasurer's report, a speech by the president, and the annual report, the society resolved to merge the "provisional organization" into the new "American and Foreign Bible Society, organized by the Bible Convention which met in Philadelphia, April 26, 1837." This resolution Rufus Babcock hailed as redeeming "the pledge" of the New York society against insinuations that it was not truly provisional. In rapturous strains, he blessed the society, which gave the Bible "*faithfully translated*" to the heathen and which rejoiced to have Cone at its president. The Society then adjourned with prayer by Thomas Meredith of North Carolina.<sup>45</sup>

The speech by Spencer Cone provides some insight into his motivations and themes, some of which contrast sharply with Brantly's. Two central doctrines governed Cone's policies. First, the doctrine of inspiration demanded the translation of every word. In contrast to Brantly, who stressed doctrine over wording, Cone's address stresses the importance of "the *very words* of Jehovah." Dismissing speculations about "different degrees and kinds of inspiration" as arrogant falsehood, Cone observed, "The scriptures claim for every jot and tittle of themselves, the same plenary and verbal inspiration." Consequently, missionaries and translators must study diligently, for under the influence of the doctrine of inspiration, Cone asserted, "Not a single word can be neglected, obscured, or perverted."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, both Brantly and Cone believed in the inspiration of both wording and doctrines, but because Brantly diminished the importance of wording, he could tolerate impure versions, whereas Cone could not.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>For an estimate of the building's size, see Francis A. Cox and James Hoby, *The Baptists in America: A Narrative of the Deputation from the Baptist Union to the U. S. and Canada* (London: T. Ward, 1836), 22.

<sup>45</sup>*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 17-18, 20, 54-55.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>47</sup>The contrast between Cone the Northerner and Brantly the Southerner is intriguing, for one scholar has recently asserted that Northern antebellum Baptists stressed figurative language and worried less about translations than Southerners (Edward R. Crowther, "'According to Scripture': Antebellum Southern Baptists and the Use of Biblical Text," *ABQ* 14 [September 1995]: 297).

Second, Cone asserted that the voluntary principle of the Baptists opposed all compulsory systems, including both the Roman Catholic papacy and the American Bible Society. Regarding the first, Cone maintained that in their desire to dominate men, the “Papal Hierarchy” obscured the meaning of the Bible by transferring instead of translating terms. Against this domination, Baptists of the Piedmonts down to Roger Williams of New England had resisted compulsion, scorning (in the words of another Baptist) “every attempt to subdue reason by enforcing the dogmas of a party.” It was attachment to this “great Bible principle, LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE THE INALIENABLE BIRTHRIGHT OF MAN,” that now caused a separation from the American Bible Society. That society’s managers had “interfered with the consciences of Baptist missionaries, . . . requiring them to make versions that might be consistently used by the several denominations composing the society, *as the indispensable condition of future patronage.*” This action “constrained” and “impelled” Baptists to form a new society.<sup>48</sup>

This doctrine—liberty of conscience—surfaced rarely, if ever, in Brantly’s writings, notwithstanding all that he had said about the “independence” of the Central Union Association. Nowhere, it seems, did Brantly ever voice an opinion, such as the following by Sommers in the annual report: “When in the course of human events, the rights of a nation or a community are invaded, it becomes a solemn duty, by all peaceable and proper means to guard and to support those rights.”<sup>49</sup> Such language sounds like another Declaration of Independence—this time, from fellow Christians!

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<sup>48</sup>*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 18-20. According to a recent biographer, the “depth” of Cone’s involvement in the Bible controversies can perhaps only be explained in light of his “strong convictions on spiritual freedom and voluntary religion” (Thornbury, *Pastor in New York*, 128; cf. the comments of Rufus Babcock, Jr. in William 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 Historical Introduction*, vol. 6 of *Annals of the American Pulpit* [New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865], 649).

<sup>49</sup>*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 21.

Two corollaries resulted from Cone's emphasis on liberty of conscience. First, his accusation of tyranny virtually ruled out all future cooperation with the American Bible Society. In the speech, Cone openly desired home distribution, hoping that "the *name* of our Society will fitly describe *the field* of its future operations!"<sup>50</sup> This independence befuddled Brantly. He questioned accusations that the American Bible Society had violated its constitution, or even if they had, that they had done so knowingly. Until that could be proven, how could Baptists distribute Bibles at home and not acknowledge the paedobaptist distributors as "fellow-laborers?" Such hubris struck him as seeking "separation for separation's sake." He, for one, declared, "I cannot rend myself from their society, and remain at the same time true to my principles."<sup>51</sup> Second, Cone gloried in America as "the land of the Baptists," in contrast to Europe, where versions arose by "THE POPIH ARTIFICE OF TRANSFER!" American freedom, in turn, encouraged bold action, despite the "disappointments and difficulties" in the way (evidently referring to the preceding Convention).<sup>52</sup> Brantly rarely spoke in such patriotic encomium, unless he was promoting temperance. In contrast to Cone, who may have had several reasons for retaining the term "American" in his society's name, Brantly had openly objected the Saturday before to "all nationalities, as improper" for the name of the new society.<sup>53</sup>

In Brantly and Cone, two different sets of principles were at work, despite doctrinal and ministerial similarities. Admittedly, both men were Calvinists, Baptists, and adherents to the inspiration of Scripture. Both men worked hard in revivals and the benevolent societies. But in the end, their respective emphases became their predominant working principles. Cone favored themes of liberty and purity. Brantly stressed activity

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>51</sup>Brantly, "The Late Bible Convention," n.p.

<sup>52</sup>*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1837, 19, 20.

<sup>53</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 41.

and unity. Cone told the American Bible Society that he loved his “regiment” of Baptists better than the larger evangelical army.<sup>54</sup> Brantly told the Bible Convention that he loved the name of “Protestant” more than “Baptist.”<sup>55</sup> Cone did not even believe Baptists were Protestants!<sup>56</sup> No wonder they parted ways at Philadelphia.

Cone had difficulty recovering from the controversy. He greatly appreciated what Cushman and Welch did at the Bible Convention, but he remained vexed that the same Convention did not deter Manly or Brantly in particular from opposing the new Bible society.<sup>57</sup> Over three months after the Bible Convention, Cone confessed his lack of “quiet calmness” in a personal letter to John L. Dagg, who now resided in Alabama. Amid the “exciting” circumstances, Cone admitted that he had taken “the opposition,” which bordered on “persecution,” too personally, and that he was still trying to cool down. He complained that Manly had kept South Carolina from helping. Cone hoped that Manly’s “Anti-Baptist-Bible doctrine” would never succeed in Alabama as well. Regarding the Southerner’s behavior, Cone sighed, “I grieve over the course he has taken, and wonder how he can think he is doing God service, by abusing his brethren.” In response, Cone took comfort in the unconquerable sovereignty and presence of God.<sup>58</sup>

The following year, Brantly did not attend the annual meeting of the American and Foreign Bible Society, even though he was reportedly in New York then for the

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<sup>54</sup>Cone and Cone, *Some Account*, 323.

<sup>55</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 25.

<sup>56</sup>Cone’s sons claim that their father was the first to inform them that “Baptists were not Protestants, that they came in a direct line from the apostolic churches, and as they never consented to the iniquities of Rome, they had not to come out from here and protest” (Cone and Cone, *Some Account*, 347).

<sup>57</sup>Cone and Cone, *Some Account*, 357, 333. Cone’s sons list Brantly among the two “most uncompromising opponents” in the Bible Convention, who maintained “extreme opposition views” (ibid., 349). (The other name listed is William R. Williams, son of the former minister at Oliver Street Baptist Church; see Bill J. Leonard, ed., *Dictionary of Baptists in America* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], s.v. “William R. Williams (1804-1885),” by H. W. Pipkin.) Cone’s sons characterize Brantly as having “vainly endeavored to sneer away” the debate “by stigmatizing it as ‘poetry’—‘rhetoric’—‘declamation,’ &c.” (Cone and Cone, *Some Account*, 352).

<sup>58</sup>Quoted in Cone and Cone, *Some Account*, 333.

Triennial Convention held at Oliver Street Baptist Church, where Cone served as pastor.<sup>59</sup> The Bible Society voted to retain its name and to include home distribution—but only of the common version, until otherwise specified at an annual meeting.<sup>60</sup> This so-called “restrictive resolution” eventually split the Bible Society. After some dubious intrigue in 1849 and an “acrimonious” annual meeting in 1850, the Society resolved permanently to distribute in English only the King James Version, forcing Cone and his friends to start a new interdenominational organization—the American Bible Union—for the purpose of “the most faithful versions of the Sacred Scriptures *in all languages*.”<sup>61</sup> Cone chaired this Union until his death in 1855. Perhaps not since Rice’s campaign for Columbian College had American Baptists witnessed such singular dedication as Cone’s zeal for a new English version—a campaign that one biographer suggests, may have ended his life.<sup>62</sup>

### **William T. Brantly and the South**

In the months following the Bible Convention, William T. Brantly showed uncharacteristic tenacity in arguing against a new version. As the discussion progressed, his position became more extreme and his accusations broadened, leading to comments about Brantly’s character. Eventually, Brantly carried the discussion to Charleston,

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<sup>59</sup>The minutes for the 1838 Triennial Convention list Brantly as present, representing the Charleston Association along with James L. Reynolds (“Meeting of the Ninth Triennial Convention,” *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 18 [June 1838]: 123). Reynolds himself was one of the few from Alabama, Georgia, and North and South Carolina present at the American and Foreign Bible Society anniversary. Others included W. B. Johnson, A. Woods, and Thomas Meredith. For the roster, see *First Annual Report of the American and Foreign Bible Society, Presented April 28th, 1838, with an Appendix, Containing Extracts of Correspondence, &c. together with a List of Auxiliary Societies, Life Directors, and Members* (New York: John Gray, 1838), 2-3.

<sup>60</sup>*Annual Report*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1838, 5-6; cf. Cone and Cone, *Some Account*, 348-49.

<sup>61</sup>Edward C. Starr “A Sectarian Bible,” *The Chronicle* 17 (January 1954): 36-39. Eventually, a second Bible Convention, held at Saratoga, New York, on 22-23 May 1883, dissolved both Bible societies and then assigned the work of foreign translations to the American Baptist Missionary Union and the work of an English translation to the American Baptist Publication Society (*ibid.*, 46).

<sup>62</sup>Thornbury, *Pastor in New York*, 134.



South Carolina, where he announced the end of the Triennial Convention before retiring completely from national leadership.

**Thomas Meredith and Brantly's last stand.** On 15 March 1837, a review of Brantly's *Christian Review* article appeared in the North Carolina state paper, *The Biblical Recorder*, by its editor, Thomas Meredith (1795-1850).<sup>63</sup> Born in Pennsylvania and trained by Staughton, Meredith soon moved to North Carolina, where his course somewhat paralleled Brantly's in Georgia, helping to found the state convention and writing its constitution.<sup>64</sup> From correspondence, it is evident the two men held each other in friendship and respect.<sup>65</sup> On the version debate, Meredith differed sharply, advocating a new version. He thus provides an instructive foil against which to judge Brantly's behavior in 1837.

Until the crisis with the American Bible Society, Meredith confessed that he had never considered the need for a new version.<sup>66</sup> In a series of interactions with the *Christian Watchman*, Meredith gave four reasons for a new version. First, the King James Version is "materially and confessedly defective" in its obscurities, vulgarities, and poor rendering of *baptizo*.<sup>67</sup> Like many, including Judson and Malcom, Meredith

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<sup>63</sup>See William T. Brantly, "On a Proposed New Version of the Bible," *BR*, 3 May 1837, n.p., where this review is mentioned. The issue with the review was not on the microfilm consulted.

<sup>64</sup>Bill J. Leonard, ed., *Dictionary of Baptists in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), s.v. "Meredith, Thomas (1795-1850)," by H. L. McBeth; cf. James W. Moffitt, "Thomas Meredith," *The Chronicle* 2 (April 1939): 74-80.

<sup>65</sup>When Meredith announced his intentions to begin publishing the *Baptist Interpreter*, his first paper, Brantly complimented the new editor as "eminently qualified to conduct it in the best spirit, and with the soundest judgment" (W. T. Brantly, "A Baptist Periodical for North Carolina," *CI*, 19 January 1833, p. 48; see also Brantly, "Associational Correspondence," *CSCI*, 21 November 1829, p. 328; idem, "Baptist Interpreter," *CI*, 16 February 1833, p. 106). Of Brantly, Meredith testified, "There is not a brother in all the church, in whose christian character we have more confidence. . . . Nor is there one on whose personal friendship we seat a higher value" (T. Meredith, "The Late Bible Convention," *BR*, 12 July 1837, n.p.; see also Meredith, "On a Proposed New Version of the Bible," *BR*, 3 May 1837, n.p.; idem, "Death of Dr. W. T. Brantly," *BR*, 12 April 1845, n.p.).

<sup>66</sup>T. Meredith, "The New Version," *BR*, 1 February 1837, n.p.

<sup>67</sup>T. Meredith, "The New Version," *BR*, 11 January 1837, n.p.

attributed the strife over baptism in some measure to this faulty rendering.<sup>68</sup> Second, for “the interests of truth” and to remove all appearance of irresolution among Baptists, *baptizo* should be translated.<sup>69</sup> Third, veneration for the old version is making it a new Vulgate. Since a version is not the Bible, but a translation of the Bible, a version is human and should not be esteemed unduly.<sup>70</sup> Finally, the “laws of common consistency” demand that Baptists practice at home what they dictate to their missionaries regarding translation.<sup>71</sup> This reasoning had probably induced the New York leaders to call for a new version. Meredith later cited an address from Alexander Maclay, in which the New Yorker felt the charge of inconsistency from his opponents, but expressed both innocence over the current Episcopalian version and the possibility that a Baptist version would soon appear.<sup>72</sup> With these convictions, the North Carolina editor attended the Bible Convention, but found little discussion about a new version because advocates did not wish to excite “the few, who still clung to the skirts of the American Bible Society.”<sup>73</sup>

When Meredith returned from the Convention, he learned through a letter from Brantly, that this “old and particular friend” was the author of the *Christian Review* article that Meredith had critiqued using “two or three unfortunate expressions.”<sup>74</sup> In a series of three letters, all written before the Bible Convention, Brantly had tried to clear Meredith’s apparent misunderstanding, with reasoning that often echoed the *Christian*

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<sup>68</sup>T. Meredith, “The New Version,” *BR*, 19 April 1837, n.p.

<sup>69</sup>T. Meredith, “The New Version,” *BR*, 1 February 1837, n.p.; idem, “Rejoinder” to “New Version,” *BR*, 26 April 1836, n.p.

<sup>70</sup>T. Meredith, “The New Version,” *BR*, 1 February 1837, n.p. According to Meredith, this third reason alone justified a new version.

<sup>71</sup>T. Meredith, “The New Version,” *BR*, 1 March 1837, n.p.

<sup>72</sup>T. Meredith, “The New Version,” *BR*, 19 April 1837, n.p.

<sup>73</sup>T. Meredith, “The Philadelphia Convention,” *BR*, 7 June 1837, n.p.

<sup>74</sup>T. Meredith, “Remarks” to William T. Brantly, “On a Proposed New Version of the Bible,” *BR*, 3 May 1837, n.p.

*Watchman*.<sup>75</sup> The letters reveal three technical differences between the two friends. First, Brantly defined the English word “baptism” by its usage in church history; Meredith defined it by contemporary usage, as a general act of water initiation—a usage that Brantly regarded as an abuse of the term.<sup>76</sup> Second, Brantly claimed that the masses generally understood the English word “baptism” as immersion—a claim Meredith flatly denied.<sup>77</sup> Third, Brantly dismissed the alleged inconsistency between America and India, stating the obvious difference that in contrast to India, America already had a fine version. Explaining himself, Brantly made the analogy, “It is better to cross a river which intercepts the progress of our journey upon a raft, than not to cross it at all. . . . But we who have an ancient, substantially arched bridge to cross the stream withal may not betake ourselves to the raft.”<sup>78</sup>

Beneath the technical differences lay three larger differences in opinion regarding modernity, providence, and evangelical unity. First, Brantly exhibited less admiration for the new age than he had around 1830. Just as Octavius Winslow, in adding reasons to a reprint of Brantly’s article, had attributed the desire for a new version to the “the religious Radicalism of the age,” so also Brantly cited the “the alarming indifference to the venerable Standard, which Divine Providence has caused to be erected in the Church.”<sup>79</sup> He sensed arrogance, and challenged Meredith to cite one English

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<sup>75</sup>As published, these three letters are: W. T. Brantly, “On a Proposed New Version of the Bible” [“Letter 1”], *BR*, 3 May 1837, n.p.; idem, “New Version” [“Letter 2”], *BR*, 10 May 1837, n.p.; idem, “The Translation Question” [“Letter 3”], *BR*, 7 June 1837, n.p. The letters were dated 6 April 1837, 8 April 1837, and 20 April 1837, respectively.

<sup>76</sup>See Brantly, “Letter 1,” followed by Meredith’s “Remarks.” For Meredith’s position, see T. Meredith, “Rejoinder,” to “The New Version,” *BR*, 19 April 1837, n.p.

<sup>77</sup>See Brantly, “Letter 2,” followed by Meredith’s “Remarks.”

<sup>78</sup>Brantly, “Letter 2.” It is fascinating to see how the two men use the same data to justify opposite positions. For example, regarding the literal translation “dip” in Luther’s Bible and the nonexistence of immersion in Lutheranism, Brantly cited this fact as proof that a mere word cannot secure right practice (Brantly, “Letter 2”), whereas Meredith cites it as proof that words lose their meaning and should be replaced with a better translation (T. Meredith, “Rejoinder” to “The New Version,” *BR*, 19 April 1837, n.p.).

<sup>79</sup>Brantly, “Letter 3.” For Winslow’s conservatism, see William T. Brantly and Octavius Winslow, *Objections to a Baptist Version of the New Testament; with Additional Reasons for Preferring*

version that was superior to the “Standard.” Regarding Alexander Campbell’s hodge-podge version taken from Doddridge, MacKnight, and George Campbell, Brantly claimed that he “could make [Meredith’s] readers laugh an hour, by contrasting the ridiculousness of that version with the sober simplicity of our venerable Standard.”<sup>80</sup> In reply, Meredith refused to call a human translation “the *standard*,” but rather rejoiced over the agitation for a new version.<sup>81</sup> He took comfort in what he earlier had called “the spirit of the times,” in which “human authority, in matters of religion more especially, is prone to be set aside.”<sup>82</sup> Regarding Brantly’s raft analogy, Meredith simply could not believe that Baptists, using all the literary aids of “the present enlightened age,” could not produce a better version.<sup>83</sup> Brantly claimed that even if Baptists wanted to attempt a new version, the most qualified to do so would “be the last men among us, to engage in it.”<sup>84</sup>

Second, Brantly considered that providence had made the King James Version the “venerable Standard.” In contrast, Meredith had earlier followed the same line of reasoning that Brantly had once used against the antimissionary Baptists in Georgia. The “indications of Providence” were at work in the rejection by the American Bible Society to motivate Baptists “steadily onward” until they provided their own language with an “improved version.” Meredith denied enthusiasm, reasoning, “If any thing is ever to be learned from the dispensations of Providence, a lesson may be derived thence on the point now in question.”<sup>85</sup>

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*the English Bible As It Is* (New York: J. P. Callender, 1837), 55-56, 63-66. Winslow, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York, was one of the original Baptist protesters within the American Bible Society. An immigrant from England, Winslow later returned and became a prolific author there as a nondenominational pastor.

<sup>80</sup>Brantly, “Letter 3.”

<sup>81</sup>T. Meredith, “Remarks” to Brantly, “Letter 3.”

<sup>82</sup>T. Meredith, “The New Version,” *BR*, 1 March 1837, n.p.

<sup>83</sup>T. Meredith, “Remarks” to Brantly, “Letter 3.”

<sup>84</sup>Brantly, “Letter 2.”

<sup>85</sup>T. Meredith, “The New Version,” *BR*, 1 March 1837, n.p.

Third, Brantly identified the King James Version with evangelical unity. In his final letter, written just days before the Bible Convention, Brantly revealed his pleasure:

Whilst too, [the Baptists] have witnessed the wide extension of their peculiarities, it has been their honor and happiness to unite with other good men in general principles and doctrines as derived from the Standard common to them and to others. This adopted and retained Standard, may be regarded as the connecting link betwixt us and our fellow Christians. It has been often urged as one of the special glories of the Bible Society, that it united on common ground the whole protestant family.

With these thoughts in mind, Brantly asked, “Shall [Baptists], by seeking a new Standard, virtually reject the old, and thus set themselves off from the great confederation of protestant denominations?” Perhaps sensing the week ahead, Brantly wished that such a “precipitation so reckless and ruinous” would stay a long ways away.<sup>86</sup> Meredith saw no problem conducting debates with multiple versions, but reminded his older brother, “The version contemplated is not intended for the use of controvertists and opponents.”<sup>87</sup>

After the Bible Convention, Brantly tried once more to convince Baptists about the meaning of *baptizo*. In September, Meredith reported that Brantly had been writing a series of articles for the *Gospel Witness*, the New York amalgamation of three prior papers. In his review, Meredith noted how Brantly now maintained that *baptizo* included “the acts both of *immersion* and *emersion*,” whereas last spring he had written that “immersion” and “baptism” were equivalent.<sup>88</sup> Brantly demurred, claiming that in equating the two words earlier, he had been assuming the opponent’s position for the sake of argument. He also demanded that Meredith reprint the whole article from the *Gospel Witness*.<sup>89</sup> In this article, Brantly had weakly pointed as proof to Colossians 2:12, which

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<sup>86</sup>Brantly, “Letter 3.”

<sup>87</sup>T. Meredith, “Remarks” to Brantly, “Letter 3.”

<sup>88</sup>T. Meredith, “Translation Question,” *BR*, 6 September 1837, n.p. The *Gospel Witness* combined the *American Baptist* and *Gospel Light* with the *Christian Secretary* of Hartford, Connecticut. Nathan N. Whiting edited, but his notes were not “spicy” enough for Meredith (idem, “The Gospel Witness,” *BR*, 2 August 1837, n.p.; cf. “Amalgamation of Papers,” *SWGJ*, 4 August 1837, n.p.).

<sup>89</sup>William T. Brantly, “The Misapprehension,” *BR*, 4 October 1837, n.p.

states that Christians were also raised with Christ *in* baptism.<sup>90</sup> Meredith rightly countered that while every baptism *implies* emersion, the word itself only means “immersion,” as evidenced by usage and the commonly attached prepositions “in” and “into.”<sup>91</sup>

The larger significance of this article concerns Brantly’s estranged reputation. In his estimation, the *Christian Review* had placed him in “a very singular position.”<sup>92</sup> Having published his earlier article on *baptizo*, the *Review* later acknowledged the article’s mixed reviews, and confessed regret that Brantly had chosen such an innovative position, so contrary to Baptist tradition.<sup>93</sup> In reading this, Brantly did not take it personally or regard it as malicious, but he did confess, “I am there met by some ugly objurgations which create rather awkward sensations.”<sup>94</sup> Instead of retreating, Brantly added innovation to innovation, in apparent contradiction to all he had said in the *Index* about listening to “good men” of the past. Cone, for one, confessed that his “spectacles [did] not magnify sufficiently to discern the *modesty* of the man who boldly declares that *baptizo* is untranslatable”—especially in the face of the united testimony of Baptist missionaries and commentators alike.<sup>95</sup> Meredith noted how his friend contended for the

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<sup>90</sup>William T. Brantly, “On a Baptist Version of the New Testament,” *BR*, 11 October 1837, n.p.

<sup>91</sup>T. Meredith, “Baptizo—Immerse,” *BR*, 11 October 1837, n.p.; idem, “Baptizo—Immerse,” *BR*, 25 October 1837, n.p.

<sup>92</sup>Brantly, “On a Baptist Version of the New Testament,” n.p.

<sup>93</sup>Though not in favor himself of a new version, the reviewer disagreed with Brantly, explaining that “baptize” possessed solemnity not in its original Greek, but because of usage over time. As a matter of policy, the reviewer agreed: “The word *baptize* is now an English word; and it is too late to translate it in our version” (“Literary Notices,” *CR* 2 [June 1837]: 301-02). Because the reviewer mentioned having read Brantly’s manuscript, the reviewer may have been the editor, James D. Knowles. For an example of tradition, Abraham Booth once said, “*Baptism* and *immersion* are terms *equivalent*” (quoted by Octavius Winslow in Brantly and Winslow, *Objections*, 59).

<sup>94</sup>Brantly, “On a Baptist Version of the New Testament,” n.p. Brantly also alluded to some thoughts by the same reviewer that appeared in the Baptist General Tract Society’s *Monthly Magazine*.

<sup>95</sup>Cone and Cone, *Some Account*, 334, italics original. In this letter to Dagg, Cone refuted Brantly’s position by pointing out how Brantly’s argument assumed that the Savior had originally spoken the Great Commission in Greek. In other words, *baptizo* itself was probably a translation of “some Hebrew word which may mean to *dip*” (ibid., 333-34).

term “baptism” with “the desperation of a martyr.” Similar to Brantly’s earlier warning about metaphysics defining the disease instead of curing it, Meredith now warned against contending for the primitive meaning of the English word “baptism,” saying, “While the physician is striving for his theory, and demonstrating the effects which his medicine *ought* to produce, the patient takes it, and dies.” No Baptist could control the flow of language. Nor should any argue over words (cf. 2 Tim 2:14). As long as the words are correctly rendered, arguments over terms are like choosing to wear “shoes with buckles” or modern-day boots.<sup>96</sup>

Brantly’s extreme position is at once inconsistent and consistent. On the one hand, Brantly appears inconsistent, letting his own position get so rigid in the face of his earlier counsel against bigotry. On the other hand, Brantly appears totally consistent, for the Baptist abolition of evangelical unity struck deep into his personal mission, making him act like the “martyr” of a dying cause.

**Basil Manly and Brantly’s return south.** Throughout 1837, William T. Brantly kept close contact with Basil Manly, pastor of First Baptist Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Even though the younger man, also a vice-president in the Convention, had criticized his mentor in late March of capitulating to the New York pressure, Brantly vindicated himself in two open letters, which Manly reprinted as editor of the *Southern Watchman*.<sup>97</sup> In the first letter, Brantly accused the majority of arriving with closed minds and of refusing to compromise for the sake of union. Worse, Brantly detected an “actual conspiracy . . . to deprive us of *baptist*, as our denominational title.” It was his “deliberate opinion” that those most tenacious for the new society’s name did so partly out of rivalry towards the old society, and partly out of an “ulterior design” to introduce a

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<sup>96</sup>Meredith, “Baptizo—Immerse,” n.p.

<sup>97</sup>For the criticism, see Manly, “Philadelphia Bible Convention,” n.p.

new version.<sup>98</sup> In the second letter, Brantly repeated some of his charges, but also lauded the good effect of the American Bible Society on evangelical unity, claiming that the Bible cause is “necessarily anti-sectarian work.”<sup>99</sup> Based on these letters and other information, Manly felt “pleased” to associate with the minority, and further accused the Bible Convention of disproportionate representation, citing for consideration how a “noisy majority” tried to silence Georgia’s only representative, Adiel Sherwood, who demanded to speak amidst cries for “*question.*”<sup>100</sup>

Not all Southerners took pleasure in Brantly and Manly’s comments. Just to the north, Meredith flatly denied witnessing a “conspiracy” or a “noisy majority” intentionally shouting poor Sherwood down.<sup>101</sup> He could not understand South Carolina’s gripe about representation when they themselves had refused to show up.<sup>102</sup> He himself enjoyed evangelical Bible societies, and had gone to Philadelphia to “resist the apprehended encroachments of the New York brethren,” whose hasty actions he had “condemned.”<sup>103</sup> But he was surprised to find the majority patient and conciliatory, while the minority had come with a closed mind, threatening the Bible Convention with “secession.” He, therefore, had read Brantly’s letter with wonder—that a minister, whose “christian character,” reputation, and “personal friendship” remained so dear to him, could make such accusations!<sup>104</sup> Similarly, another brother remarked, “Those letters . . .

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<sup>98</sup>Brantly, “The Great Bible Convention,” n.p.

<sup>99</sup>Brantly, “The Late Bible Convention,” n.p.

<sup>100</sup>B. Manly, “The Late Bible Convention,” *SWGJ*, 9 June 1837, n.p. Manly apparently shared Brantly’s approbation of the Bible societies, for Manly and Presbyterian Benjamin Gildersleeve in May 1837 called a statewide convention to reassess the need of Bibles due to the mobility of the population (see “Circular,” Charleston Bible Society, May 1837, in “Proposed Bible Convention,” *SWGJ*, 23 June 1837, n.p.).

<sup>101</sup>T. Meredith, “The Late Bible Convention,” *BR*, 5 July 1837, n.p.; idem, “Bible Convention,” *BR*, 26 July 1837, n.p.

<sup>102</sup>T. Meredith, “The Late Bible Convention,” *BR*, 5 July 1837, n.p.

<sup>103</sup>T. Meredith, “Explanation,” *BR*, 12 July 1837, n.p., which mentions the Newbern Bible Society; idem, “The Late Bible Convention,” *BR*, 12 July 1837, n.p.

<sup>104</sup>T. Meredith, “The Late Bible Convention,” *BR*, 12 July 1837, n.p.



do not breathe that spirit of charity which their writer himself, I know, esteems the loveliest of Christian graces.”<sup>105</sup> But as Meredith resigned, even “the wisest and best men” make mistakes, especially when “their feelings are interested.”<sup>106</sup>

Regardless of whether Manly and Brantly were mistaken or not, the *Southern Watchman* sensed danger, and kept sounding the alarm. The main accusation concerned representation—especially the lack of involvement from state conventions, now a key Southern idea.<sup>107</sup> Without proper authorization through the Triennial Convention, which most nearly possessed representative power for American Baptists, the newcomers trespassed on the Boston Board’s prerogatives in missions. Manly personally would only send money to Boston.<sup>108</sup> Without proper representation, Manly could only foresee division. He explained, “Hitherto the missionary work of the denomination had been conducted with unexampled harmony and oneness of feeling;” but now, Baptists—those “sticklers for independence, for liberty, and equal rights”—had grown weary of their “burdensome independence,” and had “adopted, not constituted a great central Society,” which puts the whole work of missions in the hands of sixteen men in New York! Since the new society can contribute \$20,000 to the Board from *one* treasury, the original donors have lost their distributed representation to the power of a few. Manly had warned New York to desist early, but in vain. Unless they repent, he declared, “*The union and harmony of the Denomination, in its Missionary work, are gone!*”<sup>109</sup>

To convince his South Carolina readers, Manly speculated what the New York men might do in their “giddy height of power.” He asked, “Shall we have a new Baptist Bible manufactured for us? Shall we have the English Baptists called over to discuss in

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<sup>105</sup>O., Letter to the Editor, 14 June 1837, *SWG*, 30 June 1837, n.p.

<sup>106</sup>T. Meredith, “The Late Bible Convention,” *BR*, 12 July 1837, n.p.

<sup>107</sup>O., Letter to the Editor, n.p., which mentions the state conventions.

<sup>108</sup>B. Manly, Editorial Reply to O., Letter to the Editor, 14 June 1837, *SWG*, 30 June 1837, n.p.; idem, “The Late Bible Convention,” *SWG*, 9 June 1837, n.p.

<sup>109</sup>B. Manly, “Our Consistency—And the New Bible Society,” *SWG*, 28 July 1837, n.p.

the Convention the question of domestic slaves in the Southern States?” Lest any deny this possibility, Manly noted that some of the papers that had blamed the Board for its prudent policy of silence over slavery now strongly favored the new Bible society. He closed by confessing his indignation that men were unnecessarily “spoiling one of the fairest unions in Missionary labor known to modern times.” This he felt “in some sort, as a personal injury.”<sup>110</sup> In turn, as stated earlier, Cone suffered too, marveling how Manly as a Christian could thus abuse other Christians and reckon it service to God.<sup>111</sup>

These two themes—slavery and love for the Triennial Convention—kept sounding from the *Southern Watchman*, even as the editorship passed from Manly to Brantly. In late 1837, Manly accepted the presidency of the University of Alabama. On 10 November 1837, Brantly tendered his resignation in Philadelphia on account of his health and replaced Manly as pastor in Charleston and as editor.<sup>112</sup> In his inaugural editorial, Brantly sounded quite different than his initial editorial for the *Columbian Star*. Confident and perhaps condescending, Brantly defended the idea of a state paper on par with a state convention, citing his past failure at editing an interstate paper and that “a Baptist paper for South Carolina, should differ rather more than *somewhat*, from those known already to exist in any of the neighbouring States.” In the midst of these comments, Brantly revealed his strong Southern orientation:

The Baptists of the South, though agreeing in fundamental principles with those of the North, are now in many important respects a distinct and separate people. On some very exciting questions they are becoming every year more and more distant from each other. And while I heartily deprecate all uncharitableness, or even rivalry among brethren, I cannot fail to perceive that independent action on the

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Cone and Cone, *Some Account*, 333.

<sup>112</sup>William Williams Keen, ed., *The Bi-Centennial Celebration of the Founding of the First Baptist Church of the City of Philadelphia (1698-1898)* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 98.

part of those who have their domestic institutions to protect and vindicate in conformity with the word of God, is the course of sound wisdom.<sup>113</sup>

Several facts leap out of this pregnant statement, besides the obvious observation of growing sectionalism. First, Brantly denied that the sectional differences implied heresy, for “fundamental principles” found agreement. Second, more than slavery was “exciting” separation, for Brantly mentioned “questions.” Perhaps he had the Bible debate in mind. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Brantly recommended an institutional separation because of slavery. While not the first to recommend a Southern Baptist Convention, since Meredith, for example, had earlier suggested one after the pattern of the Western Baptist Convention, Brantly may have been the first to recommend publicly a full Baptist *separation* from the North over the issue of slavery.<sup>114</sup>

Thomas Meredith was astonished. “Indeed!” he wrote, “The Baptists of the South and those of the North a distinct and separate people! And every year becoming more distant! This is certainly all new to us.” He only knew of *one* divisive issue—slavery—and based on “five or six years” of participation in “all the general meetings,” he had never heard anything on that matter to justify Brantly’s claim. Also feeling affronted by Brantly’s talk about state papers, Meredith now took the role of peacemaker as an “advocate of political and religious union,” warning his brother against statements that would “mar” the feelings enjoyed by adjoining states.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>William T. Brantly, “To the Patrons of the Southern Watchman,” *SWG*, 24 November 1837, n.p. Regarding republicanism (and perhaps slavery, by extension), Brantly said that it was undoubtedly God’s will “to perpetuate the institutions under which we live” (idem, “Christian Duty in Reference to the Present Crisis of Our Country,” *CI*, 5 January 1833, p. 3).

<sup>114</sup>In July 1837, Meredith noted that “several periodicals” were discussing the possibility of a Southern Baptist Convention, perhaps somewhat patterned (as he desired) on the Western Baptist Convention, which had already convened and had received the approbation of the 1835 Triennial Convention (T. Meredith, “Southern Baptist Convention,” *BR*, 5 July 1837, n.p.; *Proceedings*, Baptist General Convention, 1835, 12). Similarly, a “Convention formed out of the Baptist Churches in the Middle States” had met at Philadelphia in December 1834 (“Historical Sketch of the Central Union Association of Baptist Churches. Prepared for the Fiftieth Anniversary, Meeting with the Frankford Church, May 30th and 31st, 1882,” in *Fiftieth, or Jubilee Anniversary of the Central Union Association of Independent Baptist Churches, Held with the Frankford Baptist Church, Philadelphia, May 30 and 31, 1882* [Frankford: Thomas B. Foulkrod, 1882], 9).

<sup>115</sup>T. Meredith, “The Southern Watchman,” *BR*, 6 December 1837, n.p.

Then, as if the original assertions were not enough, Brantly wrote an editorial against the American and Foreign Bible Society, divulging “his firm conviction from the first, that the Society in question was to be made the instrumental in unsettling the views of the denomination on two important points”—namely, the standard version and slavery. In proof of the first allegation, Brantly alluded to what “he had heard” (without specifying private or public conversation) and to the Bible Convention. In proof of the second, Brantly noted that the new society’s use of the *Gospel Witness*, which carried “some of the most scandalous and revolting falsehoods of the Abolitionists,” as “the organ of communication” for the new society “tacitly sanctioned . . . the offensive doctrines,” which neither the Society nor its managers revoked in any explicit statement. But now, since the “acting agent” of the Society, Alexander Maclay, in visiting South Carolina had “pledged that body” to correct these suspicious actions, Brantly waived further comments about the Society. He merely added, in closing, a reference to his pain in learning of the near financial destitution of the Triennial Convention. He blamed the new Society, which (in his words) “swallows up and annuls the triennial Missionary Convention in which he has always felt a deep interest.” In his estimation, the Triennial Convention was “no longer existing but in name.”<sup>116</sup>

In response, Meredith called Brantly to account for these “very serious charges.” On little evidence, Brantly had come to “the *decided belief*” that the American and Foreign Bible Society was actually not a benevolent society, but in truth a clandestine organization cherishing “nefarious” objects! In rebuttal, Meredith noted that the new Society had its own periodical, and as far as he knew, the Triennial Convention was

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<sup>116</sup>W. T. Brantly, “A. and F. Bible Society,” *BR*, 27 January 1838, n.p., which reprinted this article from an issue of the *SWGJ* that was not obtained. In light of Brantly’s open suspicions about the American and Foreign Bible Society, it is interesting to note that the Society’s corresponding secretary months later claimed, “I have traveled considerably through *Georgia* and *S. Carolina* during the present fall and winter, and I have not met one baptist minister or private member, who expressed any other than the most cordial feelings towards the A. & F. B. S., and a wish that in relation to home distribution, it should be left to its own discretion—untrammelled” (*Annual Report*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1838, 22-23).

“alive and well.” Even if the Convention were to fall short financially, it would not be strange nor would it be necessary to explain it by referring to the new Society, which at any rate, probably gave enough to keep the Convention in the black. In light of these accusations, Brantly had little right in the future to complain of antimissionary opponents, like Joshua Lawrence. Meredith knew undoubtedly that Brantly was “a friend of the cause of active benevolence,” but he lamented how that cause had received “an unfortunate thrust from the hand of a friend.” If only Brantly had recognized how the enemies were “ready to take advantage of his statements, to assail afresh the institutions of the age, he would have been among the last to have made them.” But Brantly “erred,” committing an “indiscretion.”<sup>117</sup>

From the previous altercations, three observations are in order. First, regarding the Triennial Convention, Brantly may have been correct in his assessment. In early 1838, he noticed a circular from Lucius Bolles, stating that the Board’s expenditures since April 1837 had been “*more than double*” their income. He commented, “The alarming state of things was anticipated as one of the inevitable results of the American and Foreign Bible Society—which is accumulating its *tens of thousands*, while the Missionary Treasury is exhausted.” He added, “It may not yet be too late to hearken to reason.”<sup>118</sup> At the 1838 Triennial Convention in New York, the Board reported a deficit of over \$44,000 against expenditures of over \$107,000 for the past fiscal year. Unless these funds were “replenished IMMEDIATELY,” the Board warned of reductions in missions. It is little wonder the last day of the Convention saw “a discussion of much interest . . . touching the alarming state of our finances.”<sup>119</sup> The replenishment did not come—at least, from individuals. As one historian reports, the Triennial Convention

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<sup>117</sup>T. Meredith, Remarks on W. T. Brantly, “A. and F. Bible Society,” *BR*, 27 January 1838, n.p.

<sup>118</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Verified Predictions,” *SWG*, 18 January 1837, n.p. The circular letter is dated 15 December 1837, and was taken from the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*.

<sup>119</sup>“Meeting of the Ninth Triennial Convention,” 126, 134.

“continued to operate in arrears through 1841, saved from insolvency largely by a subvention from the American and Foreign Bible Society, totaling \$50,000 over a three-year period.”<sup>120</sup> In light of subsequent history, therefore, it is hard to question Brantly and Manly’s foresight. Brantly may have foreseen this shift in finances immediately, for the day after the unofficial Hartford Conference, Brantly “inquired whether it was true, as he had heard, that the Board have [*sic*] more *money* than *men* for the missionary work.” (Did he hear this from Cone or from others the day prior?) The treasurer Heman Lincoln responded, “While we have funds sufficient for the exigencies, yet at the present rate of expenditure there will soon be a deficiency, unless the rate of income is considerably increased.”<sup>121</sup> While the financial panic of 1837 surely contributed to the Board’s deficit in 1838, such hard straits only accentuate Brantly’s reasoning for *one* mission agency.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, in light of the Board’s anticipated deficit in 1836, Cone’s boast of a successful experiment of raising \$21,000 for his new organization sounds hollow.<sup>123</sup>

Second, Brantly had good reason to fear that the new American and Foreign Bible Society would usurp and weaken the Triennial Convention. At its inception, the Society had vaunted itself as the premiere means of “united effort” in Baptist missions.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>William H. Brackney, “The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination, 1814-1845: An American Metaphor,” *BHH* 14 (July 1989): 20.

<sup>121</sup>“Annual Meeting of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions,” *BR*, 18 May 1836, n.p. The Boston account makes no mention of this interchange (see “American Baptist Board of Foreign Missions. Twenty-Second Annual Meeting,” *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 16 [June 1836]: 121-25).

<sup>122</sup>Cf. Brackney, “General Missionary Convention,” 19. Aware of the danger of doubling operations, Brantly in January 1837 defended the existence of the Baptist General Tract Society by its auxiliary role: “As it is easy when any given space is filled with large materials, to introduce many smaller ones without increasing the visible bulk, so the introduction of such means of usefulness as your Society employs, will strengthen and brace the more important systems of well-doing without rendering them unwieldy and complex” (J. Newton Brown, *History of the American Baptist Publication Society, from Its Origin in 1824, to Its Thirty-second Anniversary in 1856* [Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society], 82).

<sup>123</sup>*Proceedings*, Bible Convention, 1837, 9.

<sup>124</sup>In its first circular letter “to the Baptist churches, and friends of the Bible in the United States,” the new Society claimed to be “a magnificent enterprise; in which, more than in any other measure, we may confidently hope to witness the harmonious concurrence of the whole denomination” (*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1836, 15). By “unity of effort” in this Society, Baptists would “attain to undisputed pre-eminence in the moral conversion of the world” (*ibid.*, 12).

The Society had also claimed that the Great Commission could not “be more effectually accomplished, than by disseminating throughout the world, the original words of the Holy Spirit, faithfully and literally translated into the languages of *all nations*.”<sup>125</sup> In making such claims, the Society seemed to confound disseminating the word through preaching with disseminating the copies of the Bible, and also disseminating the Bible with disseminating a version. The success of missions, and even the Millennium itself, were hung on the coattails of the Bible cause.<sup>126</sup>

Third, both Brantly and Manly expressed personal pain over the perceived injuries done to the Triennial Convention. As Meredith noted, this pain helps to explain the quick judgments of the *Southern Watchman*. While Brantly especially had more insider information on the North and its leaders, which perhaps justified some of his allegations in contrast to Meredith’s optimism, his statements and position were extreme, contrary to the general tenor of his previous ministry.

In the end, Brantly’s long-established Southern allegiance goes far in explaining his behavior. In contrast to Meredith, who was born in Pennsylvania and moved to North Carolina, Brantly was born in North Carolina and moved to Pennsylvania, where he carried on a national conversation with his Southern brethren. While some Baptists abandoned both the location and mindset of the South—for example, William Brisbane, editor of the *Southern Watchman* before Manly—Brantly definitely did not.<sup>127</sup> As editor of the *Southern Watchman*, Brantly repeatedly referred to the South as a distinct people, both in hospitality and in idle mischief.<sup>128</sup> In moving to the South, Brantly reasserted his Southern identity—surprisingly, over his Baptist identity.

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<sup>125</sup>*Constitution*, American and Foreign Bible Society, 1836, 11, italics original.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>127</sup>For information on Brisbane, see Wallace Alcorn, “Rev. William Henry Brisbane, M.D. (1806-1878): A South Carolina Baptist Enigma,” *JSCBHS* 25 (November 1999): 10-28.

<sup>128</sup>W. T. Brantly, “Generous and Hospitable to a Fault,” *SWG*, 11 January 1837, n.p.; *idem*, “The North and the South,” *SWG*, 11 January 1837, n.p.

Brantly's days as editor were short-lived. Subscriptions, which had risen by four hundred the previous year, now plummeted—for every one added, two dropped.<sup>129</sup> Brantly quit, sullenly commenting, “We had hoped for a long conversation with many of our Southern brethren in relation to Southern interests; but they withhold their assent, and we, of course, cease to press them.” He added, “For ourselves nothing remains but to retire as humbly and modestly as we can.”<sup>130</sup> Retire he did, but only from national public life. Meredith, for example, who subsumed the *Watchman* and whose friendship with Brantly had once been “most intimate and agreeable,” now saw his old friend only one more time.<sup>131</sup> For the next six years, Brantly served in relative isolation as pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston and President of the College of Charleston, until he suffered a stroke on 13 July 1844, while listening to class recitations.<sup>132</sup> Carried to Augusta, Georgia, William Tomlinson Brantly, Sr. died on 28 March 1845 in the house of his son, W. T. Brantly, Jr., pastor of the Augusta church.<sup>133</sup> In reporting the event, the son testified, “His mind appeared to be perfectly happy in the prospect of dissolution. To the question which I asked him a few minutes before he died. Do you know your situation? He immediately replied, *O Yes*. Are you resigned? *O yes*, was the emphatic answer.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Editorial, *SWGI*, 13 October 1837, n.p.; William T. Brantly, Editorial, *SWGI*, 8 February 1838, n.p.

<sup>130</sup>William T. Brantly, Editorial, *SWGI*, 8 February 1838, n.p.

<sup>131</sup>T. Meredith, “Death of Dr. W. T. Brantly,” *BR*, 12 April 1845, n.p. On the amalgamation of the *Southern Watchman* and the *Biblical Recorder*, see T. Meredith, “Recorder and Watchman,” *Biblical Recorder and Southern Watchman*, 3 March 1838, n.p.

<sup>132</sup>“Intrepid Faith,” *CR* 10 (December 1845): 604.

<sup>133</sup>For biographical information on Brantly's final days, see Sprague, *Annals*, 6:499.

<sup>134</sup>“A Great and Good Man Fallen,” *CI*, 4 April 1845, n.p. Richard Fuller would probably not have put much stock in this saying, for he reported of Brantly, “Although he still retained his consciousness, his mind was quite shattered, and never rallied so much as to warrant me in attaching much importance to conversations in which he sometimes took part by signs and one or two feeble articulations” (Richard Fuller, *Intrepid Faith. A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. William Tomlinson Brantly, D. D.; with A Sketch of His Life and Character; Delivered at the Request of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, S. C.* [Charleston: First Baptist Church, 1845], 27).



## Conclusion

Two stories run through this chapter—one of the Baptists and another of a Baptist. Of the first, the American Bible Society forced upon the Baptists a momentous decision in 1836. The question did not concern whether to fund their own foreign translation or not, for their principles had already been decided in 1833, but rather, how far to go in their independence. Some wanted only foreign translations; others desired home distribution too, but only of the common version; and others argued for a complete new English version in keeping with the principles of foreign translations for the “most faithful” version possible. In their zeal for Baptist independence, the latter group, led by several New Yorkers, preempted the proposed Bible Convention by creating their own society with a national name. This apparently foolish move unnecessarily introduced sectional elements into the discussion. Now, instead of a common mission or at least a common foe galvanizing the Baptist ranks, the 1837 Bible Convention visibly displayed sectional disunity for the first time among the missionary Baptists. Much of the West and especially the deep South stayed home. Moreover, the 1837 Bible Convention displayed evangelical disunity, for despite the complaints of a vocal minority, American Baptists separated from the most popular evangelical benevolent society of its day—the American Bible Society. Therefore, in one meeting, American Baptists experienced both sectarian and sectional disunity.

The chapter also closes the story of a Baptist, William T. Brantly, by comparing him to one Baptist in the North and to one Baptist in the South. In contrast to Northerner Spencer H. Cone, who emphasized verbal inspiration and American liberty of conscience, Brantly emphasized conceptual doctrines and evangelical unity. In short, Brantly was a unionist. In contrast to Southerner Thomas Meredith, who took the New Yorkers at face value and optimistically believed in American Baptists as a whole, Brantly joined Manly in suspecting a sectarian and abolitionist conspiracy. Brantly emphasized his Southern identity and called for independent Southern action. Therefore,

Brantly was more than a unionist—he was a *Southern* unionist. At the end of his life, he may have been more of a *Southerner* than a unionist. Ultimately, only the Great Day will make us fully known (1 Cor 4:5).

## CHAPTER 14

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation has sought to answer the question, what light does the ministry of William T. Brantly shed for understanding the breakup of the Triennial Convention? To answer this question, both the man and his environment—the ministry and the Triennial Convention—have intertwined within this dissertation. To understand the larger implications of Brantly’s career, let us first review Brantly’s ministry and then set him against his environment.

By now, it should be apparent that Brantly really did strive to unite Christians in useful effort for a moral revolution—the millennial Kingdom of God. Evidence of this personal mission comes especially from two institutions. First, Brantly’s bold support of the state convention in Georgia shows his wholehearted allegiance to Richard Furman’s ideal of “uniting in one common effort for the glory of the Son of God.” Second, the Central Union Association embodies Brantly’s personal mission, for he explicitly formed an association as a benevolent society—a “*Working Men’s Society*.” The close proximity of the Philadelphia Association only accentuates the boldest feature of Brantly’s mission—uniting Christians around effort instead of rallying them around an historic creed. This antithesis by no means implies that Brantly simply acted pragmatically, with little theological justification. Beneath the surface are two strong theological reasons for his course of action. First, the congruity of God’s sovereignty with human effort, based largely on the Edwardsean distinction between moral and natural ability, gave him confidence not only to organize men and institutions, but also to expect success eventually. The Kingdom will come! Second, his careful denial of metaphysical systems

enabled him to remain open both to new modifications in doctrine, such as resistible grace and a general provision in the atonement, and to new measures that would affect both revivals and the morals of society.

The largest objection to his personal mission comes from his strictly Baptist activities—ministerial education, missions, publications, and especially close communion. Brantly carefully justified each of these activities based on a larger view of evangelical unity having a base of fundamental doctrine and a goal of active benevolence. In some measure, denominations were temporary expediences that arose because the pursuit of truth and righteousness changed leadership from time to time, based on various levels of Christian maturity. For now, Brantly considered the Baptists in the lead and even receiving God's providential sanction, for the Baptists were completing the Reformation, removing the last vestige of popery—infant baptism, the secularizer of the Church. Others may lead in the future. The important point remained keeping evangelical Protestants together. Proof of Brantly's allegiance comes out clearly in the 1837 Bible Convention, when he stood like a martyr for maintaining ties with other evangelicals through the American Bible Society and the common version of the Bible.

As a minister, Brantly exhibited both strong traits and some questionable inconsistencies. First, Brantly marvelously combined the roles of revival preacher and urbane scholar. He resembled both George Pope the revival preacher and Jonathan Maxcy the spiritual scholar. In this combination, Brantly strongly resembled Richard Furman, though Brantly at times fell short of his respected model in the consistency of winsome manners. Second, Brantly would have made a strong abolitionist. The all-or-nothing logic behind his moral crusade against temperance strongly resembled the abolitionist mindset. While he himself reckoned temperance a moral issue and slavery a political one, the laws of consistency suggest that his Southern roots may have built the compartments that kept these issues separate. But which Christian can claim to be so heavenly-minded as to have fully escaped the confines of his upbringing before the return

of Jesus? Third, Brantly's resistance to breaking with the American Bible Society seems unnecessary based upon his own justification for the Baptist General Tract Society. The correlation between the two publication ventures did not escape notice in Brantly's generation. If there could be Baptist tracts alongside general evangelical tracts, why could there not be a Baptist Bible alongside the common version? Perhaps if this issue had come up in 1827 instead of 1837, Brantly would have agreed; but the extreme separatism of the New Yorkers seems to have pushed Brantly to a similar extreme on the other side of the issue.

As for the Triennial Convention itself, the year 1826 proved decisive. Once the national vision of Rice and Furman disappeared with different sections assuming leadership in separate ministries, the door opened for one section to act independently of the others, or even to foist their agency upon the others. In 1832, the American Baptist Home Missionary Society avoided bad feelings by first holding meetings in various sections before forming. In contrast, the American and Foreign Bible Society, also located in New York, not only acted quickly and independently in 1836, but did so in the face of a proposed meeting to gather the thoughts of the whole denomination. By their imprudence, the New York leaders alienated the South especially—and Brantly and Manly in particular. Two other factors made matters worse. First, in contrast to the Home Missionary Society, the new Bible society posed as a foreign mission endeavor and so rivaled the Triennial Convention for mission funds. Second, since 1833, several of the New York leaders had started advocating strict denominational publications such as a Baptist Henry, Sunday School material, and a Baptist Bible. As a Southerner, a Baptist publisher, and an advocate of evangelical unity, Brantly faced New York sectarianism on many fronts. The 1837 Bible Convention and subsequent debate over a new version began to isolate Brantly, even though he was a key national leader. The tide had turned. Together sectionalism and sectarianism were ruining the Triennial

Convention, which Brantly loved dearly since the days that Luther Rice had first appeared in Beaufort, South Carolina.

The South provided the only retreat left for the defeated Southern unionist. Even though he ostensibly returned to the South for the sake of his health, his early editorials in Charleston reveal a strong pull of Southern identification. There he cast an early vision for “independent action,” which later saw fulfillment in the Southern Baptist Convention as a separate denomination. Even though he did not live to see the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention, he contributed materially towards it in other ways. First, the state conventions, one of which he helped to form, kept Furman’s vision alive of an associational hierarchy that would handle all benevolences under one centralized board. Second, Brantly influenced the Southern Baptist Convention indirectly through several of his former students and trainees, most notably Richard Fuller and Basil Manly, the author of the Alabama Resolutions of 1844.<sup>1</sup> Even in Charleston, Brantly taught James P. Boyce, founder and president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859. Therefore, in light of these indirect influences, it seems fitting that in early May 1845 the Southern Baptist Convention formed at Augusta, Georgia, amid the congregation Brantly had constituted, in the building he had dedicated, under the host pastor he had reared—his very own son, W. T. Brantly, Jr.—and with the pulpit draped in black in memory of William T. Brantly, Sr.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>These resolutions demanded a clear statement whether the Triennial Convention would recognize the equal status of slaveholders as members and eligible candidates for foreign missions (see *A Baptist Source Book: With Particular Reference to Southern Baptists*, ed. Robert A. Baker [Nashville: Broadman, 1966], 106-08; cf. A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South*, Southern Biography Series [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000], 223-24).

<sup>2</sup>Robert G. Gardner, *A Decade of Debate and Division: Georgia Baptists and the Formation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 36.

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Southern Baptist Convention, Richmond, Virginia, 1946.

## ABSTRACT

### WILLIAM T. BRANTLY (1787-1845): A SOUTHERN UNIONIST AND THE BREAKUP OF THE TRIENNIAL CONVENTION

Robert Arthur Snyder, Ph.D.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004  
Chairman: Dr. Thomas J. Nettles

This dissertation seeks to answer the question, what light does the ministry of William T. Brantly shed for understanding the breakup of the Triennial Convention? The dissertation argues that Brantly's longtime mission of uniting Christians in useful effort for a moral revolution exemplified the early vision of the Triennial Convention and that his inability as a Southerner to maintain this mission nationally among Baptists indicated grave disunity within the Convention as early as 1837.

After chapter 1 introduces Brantly in light of current historiography, the dissertation consists of three parts—early history, theology, and later history.

In the first part, encompassing the chapters 2 through 4, Brantly's personal mission is defined in the early South, illustrated in his first two Southern ministries, and climaxes in his efforts in Philadelphia. Two mentors and the death of his first wife influenced his personal mission. Two pastorates illustrated his twofold goal of organizing Baptists for missions and ministerial education. In Philadelphia, Brantly attained peace at First Baptist Church and then embodied his ideals in the formation of the Central Union Association.

The formation of this new association in contradistinction to the venerable Philadelphia Association raises the question of heresy in doctrine and innovation in practice. These concerns lead into the second part—a theological examination of

Brantly's thought. Chapters 5 and 6 examine his views on Calvinism and the authority of Scripture. Chapters 7 and 8 explore his justification of revivalistic new measures and benevolent societies. Chapters 9 and 10 demonstrate that Brantly's idea of evangelical unity possessed a denominational identity, a doctrinal boundary, and an even greater emphasis on active benevolence.

The third part examines Brantly within the Triennial Convention. Chapter 11 discusses the Convention's transitional period (1826-1835), when sectionalism risked disunity, but compromise and silence nullified political strife and British interference. Chapters 12 and 13 examine the sectional and sectarian causes behind the visible disunity of the great Bible Convention of 1837. Brantly's stand for evangelical unity and subsequent defeat indicated grave disunity eight years before the Convention broke up.



## VITA

Robert Arthur Snyder

### PERSONAL

Born: May 25, 1969, St. Cloud, Minnesota

Parents: Ronald and Nancy Snyder

Married: Jinna Lee Beckman, June 2, 1990

### EDUCATIONAL

Diploma, Willmar Senior High School, Willmar, Minnesota

B.S., Mechanical Engineering, North Dakota State University, 1992

B.S., Mathematics, North Dakota State University, 1992

M.Div., Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Plymouth, Minnesota, 1998

### MINISTERIAL

Pastor of Youth and Christian Education, Paynesville Evangelical Free Church,  
Paynesville, Minnesota, 1995-96

Pastor, Spring Branch Baptist Church, Vevay, Indiana, 1999-2003

### ACADEMIC

Bible and Science Teacher, Oldham County Christian Academy, LaGrange,  
Kentucky, Spring 2003

Bible and Math Teacher, Cornerstone Christian Academy, Shelbyville,  
Kentucky, Spring 2004