Containing the Spirit, Controlling the Flesh: Performance, Positioning, and Antebellum Slaveowners as Representatives of Chowan County’s Religion, 1760-1830

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ABSTRACT

James Mark Leslie: Containing the Spirit, Controlling the Flesh: Performance, Positioning, and Antebellum Slaveowners as Representatives of Edenton, North Carolina’s Religion, 1760-1830
(Under the direction of John Wood Sweet)

Though the increasing influence of evangelical religion is often associated with participatory democracy, this thesis asserts that the rise of evangelicalism coincided with the establishment of planter hegemony. During the colonial period, many slaveowners in Chowan County North Carolina mixed civil and religious affairs in the Anglican Church. Slaveowners, however, felt threatened by parsons who attempted to preach to slaves. Former vestrymen and other slaveowners reluctantly accepted a popular movement for religious disestablishment they were unable to resist. The disestablishment of the Anglican Church had the effect of encouraging freer participation in religious fellowship, and slaveowners were even more fearful of the leveling impact of expanding participation in religious fellowship. By the 1830s, however, the slaveowning white men held a disproportionate amount of authority within evangelical and orthodox churches. As a result, evangelical and Episcopal churches increasingly embodied the refined tastes of a minority of residents in Chowan County.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the mind of Charles Pettigrew, Edenton North Carolina’s former Anglican Parson, post-Revolutionary evangelicals represented a significant threat to the hierarchical world that he cherished. In 1800, Pettigrew lamented that there were too many dissenters in Edenton whose “minds have been industriously prejudiced against rational & instructive preaching.” Itinerants’ preaching had shocking results. Their converts were “more deceitful, more lying & hypocritical than ever.” Pettigrew believed that irresponsible itinerants had inflamed the passions of their converts but thereafter failed to instruct converts in orderly religion. Pettigrew believed himself to be driven by reason, but he believed that itinerants’ converts were driven by their passions. It may not be surprising that this former Anglican parson found itinerants’ activities unsettling, but many other residents of Edenton were similarly concerned about Pettigrew’s declining religious authority. For them, the itinerant movement demonstrated the declining respect that the lower classes were willing to show to both civil and religious authorities: itinerants seemed to incite rebelliousness among slaves, encourage independence among women, and discourage poorer whites from deferring to ministers who claimed a monopoly over religious knowledge. Though Charles Pettigrew believed that post-Revolutionary religious practice was becoming corrupted by ignorant ministers, by the 1830s a minority of slaveowning residents gained the authority to

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mold the evangelical and Episcopal churches they attended according to their own interests.

Baptist and Methodist churches in antebellum Chowan County became a little less like the early itinerant movement Pettigrew decried and more like the refined ministers colonial slaveowners had wanted.

Historians of the eighteenth century have noted that Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians refused to accept the social rituals involving alcohol or the dancing upon which Southern gentlemen had traditionally demonstrated their authority to those whom they considered inferior. For Rhys Isaac, the Baptists who preached in late colonial Virginia were solemn, sober, and plain. By spurning traditional emblems of elite status, Baptists “called into question the propriety of the occasions and modes of display and association traditionally so important in maintaining the bonds of Virginia’s geographically diffuse society.” Revolutionary Baptists successfully demanded the disestablishment of an Anglican Church that had served as a venue of display for gentlemen. By the 1790s, eighteenth-century evangelicals offered an alternative cultural model that disrupted the ways in which colonial gentlemen had demonstrated their authority. Historians have generally accepted this argument about the disruptiveness of eighteenth-century evangelicalism, but they remain more divided over the political significance of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. For some historians, antebellum evangelicalism manifested the democratic demands of post-Revolutionary Americans. Americans no longer allowed religious authorities to decree religion to congregants. Instead, evangelical followers of common

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origin demanded control over their own faith. For other historians, antebellum evangelical churches provided a belief system supportive of slaveowners’ hegemony.

Historians have noted two contradictory ideas central to evangelicalism: a desire for control in order to limit social behaviors and a desire to encourage individualism through direct communication with God. As Donald Mathews has argued, the evangelical movement enveloped the South as a social process. The experiential basis of evangelicalism encouraged believers to establish a personal and independent relationship with God. The ascetic beliefs of evangelicals, however, placed believers under the direction of the church community. Evangelicals’ determination to create a divinely ordered world necessitated that they inquire “into behavior which affected only individuals” and that they regulate “antisocial behavior which threatened to disrupt the community or give it a bad name.” Evangelicals thus expelled people they considered adulterers, thieves, dancers, and blasphemers. While evangelicalism emphasized believers’ independent experiences of God, evangelicals were also characterized by a “sometimes desperate search for order.”


4Ibid., 97, 247, 248. Similarly, Cynthia Lyerly asserts that southern Methodists abandoned much of their early counter cultural rhetoric, but retained an underlying emphasis upon individualism. Lyerly asserts that Methodists changed many of their policies, and in the process nineteenth-century evangelicals limited the opportunities that had been available within eighteenth-century Methodist meetings. Despite changes in
social status could establish respect for one another. The ascetic and independent spirits that Mathews found within evangelicalism have shaped the terms of debate for historians who associate evangelicalism with political culture after the Revolution. Some historians associate the grace experience of evangelicalism with the democratic spirit of Americans after the Revolutionary War. Other historians associate the evangelical need to create a Godly order with the hierarchies of gender, race, and age that supported social distinctions beneficial for a minority of the population.

Drawing upon the written record left by leaders of four religious movements—Methodist, Baptist, Mormon, and the Disciples of Christ—Nathan Hatch asserts that after the Revolution ministers “could rarely divorce [their] message from contagious new democratic vocabularies and impulses that swept through American popular cultures.” Nineteenth-century Americans rejected the guidance of theologians and demanded an independent right to interpret religion for themselves. For those who adhered to religions of popular origin, not even God himself wielded the authority to deny democratically driven Americans the right to enter the kingdom of heaven. The Methodists were particularly adamant in “attacking the Calvinist implication that pilgrims seeking salvation had to wait for the movings of an

Methodism, however, nineteenth-century “Methodists created a public sphere in which the most powerless southerners developed their talents, spoke for themselves, and transcended worldly rankings.” When white men entered a nineteenth-century Methodist church they entered a “public space where being white and male did not automatically confer status and privilege.” Cynthia Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 185.

inscrutable and arbitrary God.” Hatch therefore asserts that the shift from Calvinist predestination to free will theology manifested the increasing popularity of the democratic spirit. Nineteenth-century Americans adopted evangelicalism, molded it for themselves, and took heaven by storm.

For many other historians, however, evangelical Christianity in the antebellum South was a movement that white men altered in order to support their authority over their dependents. Christine Heyrman agrees that the personal experience of a supernatural God at the center of early evangelicalism created more equality among believers. By focusing upon the position of black people, women, and young people within evangelical churches, however, she portrays nineteenth-century evangelical churches as organizations that abandoned eighteenth-century egalitarianism. An early evangelical movement provided opportunities for women to act independently, created environments of relative equality for black people, and allowed adept young people to claim authority as preachers. The South eventually became the Bible Belt, however, not because itinerant ministers reformed the foundations of Southern society but rather because ministers adopted the hierarchal perspectives of white men. Far from manifesting a democratic spirit among believers, Southern Baptist and Methodist churches in the nineteenth century supported the racial, gender, and age hierarchies upon which Southern white male authority depended. In the

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6 Hatch, 172.

nineteenth century, evangelicals deemphasized the sensual experience of otherworldly wonders, and contained worship within the anecdotal and unthreatening sermons of white male ministers. Baptists and Methodists, therefore, repudiated their early origins in order to make the South the Bible Belt.

In order to capture the social milieu within which residents built and revived churches, this paper has focused upon developments within a North Carolinian county, Chowan, and its largest town, Edenton. Chowan County is particularly interesting because the records of the local Anglican Church extend back into the colonial period and the records of the local Baptist churches are unusually rich. In addition, the town retains records from white men in the form of diaries and letters, and the autobiography of one of Edenton’s slaves, Harriet Jacobs, has helped to establish the significance of churches and religion for a black community that constituted half of Chowan County’s population. Focusing on a single region has helped to reconstruct changes in religious authority among a group of people who worshipped in both colonial and antebellum churches. How did the establishment of evangelical churches alter the authority that gentlemen had held in Chowan County’s colonial, established church? This paper thus attempts to explain the changes in the relationships of authority between church members as Chowan County transitioned from a community with a single established church beset by dissenters in the colonial period to an

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antebellum community in which residents chose from among several different types of churches.

Even before the Revolutionary Era, the administrators of the Anglican Church had a difficult time solidifying the presence of the Anglican Church in North Carolina. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, Quakers dominated the region. After 1701, with the establishment of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Anglican religion became more prevalent, and Anglicanism became the established faith of the colony in 1715. Despite its tax supported status, the Anglican Church was never able to rid the colony of dissenting sects. Quakers remained, and the followers of various other sects arrived and settled in North Carolina. Moravians, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists challenged the Anglican Church for the hearts and minds North Carolinians in the second half of the eighteenth century. Evangelical denominations eventually dominated the Southern landscape in the nineteenth century, but many evangelicals continued to worship alongside Episcopalians, Quakers, and Moravians. In the antebellum period, people in Chowan County attended services in Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopal churches. At the same time, residents in the area tended to abandon Quaker meetings, and white Edentonians destroyed the church in which black people had worshipped independently.

The nineteenth-century Episcopal Church, the denomination some Americans created in 1785 in order to continue Anglican styles of worship, has been described as a safe haven for hierarchically minded residents, and Baptist and Methodist churches have often been depicted as embodiments of Americans’ democratic spirit. Richard Rankin has indicated that North Carolina’s revived Episcopal Churches were places where elite men were able “to preserve much of their traditional ethos in the face of intense pressure from the dominant
evangelical culture.” Indeed the high church tradition practiced within North Carolina’s nineteenth-century Episcopal churches seems more conservative than the religious forms of evangelicals. For Rankin, the high church orientation of North Carolina’s Episcopal churches preserved a genteel culture appealing to elite men, while Baptist and Methodist churches supported an evangelical culture more appealing to women and nonelites.9 Did choosing to attend one church over another, however, so neatly reflect class perspectives? Did the establishment of Baptist and Methodist churches force elites to retreat to an Episcopal Church that more clearly represented their interests?

For the purposes of this paper, religious beliefs are seen in the context of competitions for social authority. As William James asserted over a century ago, people accept religious ideas “because we believe them to bring us good consequential fruits for life.”10 What was important about religious ideas for James was that they are efficacious. At some times and in some places, some religious ideas are useful while at other times and places other religious ideas are useful. Religious seekers choose beliefs that are useful for them in their time and place. This utility may help believers accept material realities beyond

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9Richard Rankin, Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800-1860 (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 178. Richard Rankin’s study of North Carolina’s Episcopal Church in the nineteenth-century notes that descendants of Edenton’s colonial elite revitalized St. Paul’s in order to protect their wives from the influence of itinerants. Indeed, it seems that the threats posed by an eighteenth-century itinerant movement inspired elites to revive Episcopalianism. The “gentlemen who directed the effort to revive St. Paul’s around 1815 included leaders in the town and region. Among them were one future governor and two of the greatest planters in North Carolina.” Rankin, 61. Some of Edenton’s wealthiest residents supported the restoration of the Episcopal Church, but other elites in town were also integral in the construction and governance of Edenton’s nineteenth-century Baptists and Methodists as well. Indeed, in her study of St. Peter’s Parish in the South Carolina Low country, Stephanie McCurry largely found that Baptist and Methodist churches preached a doctrine of spiritual equality but created an environment in which large slaveowners acted as leaders. Stephanie McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 202.

their control, or religious ideas may work for believers in their attempts to accrue more power unto themselves. More often, religious ideas served both material functions at the same time. Believers saw little need to separate the happiness gained from their increased ability to accept the inevitable from the happiness gained from accepting religious forms that helped the believer gain more authority within his or her community. Residents, therefore, chose from various religious values as they attempted to discursively position themselves and each other.11

The institution of slavery was integral in the shaping of residents’ religious beliefs.12 As beliefs served a social function for the believer—in both profound and mundane ways—different social structures made different religious beliefs more or less appealing to prospective converts. In Chowan County, the existence of race based slavery shaped the values of both white and black residents. The method of production in Chowan County stood on the margin between a household based economy and a market economy. Both town


12The importance of race based slavery in understanding the relationships between white North Americans has had a long historiographical tradition. In 1975, Edmund Morgan asserted that “[r]acism made it possible for white Virginians to develop a devotion to the equality that English republicans had declared to be the soul of liberty. There were too few free poor on hand to matter. And by lumping Indians, mulattoes, and Negroes in a single pariah class, Virginians had paved the way for a similar lumping of small and large planters in a single master class.” Edmund Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975), 386. The relationships between nonslaveowning and slaveowning whites in the eighteenth-century were a bit more complicated than Morgan asserts. Allan Kulikoff and Marjoleine Kars point to significant class based tensions between white residents resulting in violence. Marjoleine Kars, Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). and Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by the University of North Carolina Press, 1986).
artisans and country farmers relied upon an enslaved labor force. In Edenton in 1840, 87.3 percent of heads of households had at least one member of the household engaged in manufacturing, and 27.0 percent of heads of households had at least one member of the household engaged in agriculture. In rural Chowan County, 21.6 percent of heads of households had at least one member of the household engaged in manufacture, and 96.8 percent of heads of households had at least one member of the household engaged in agriculture. Being the head of an agricultural household, however, did not increase the likelihood that the household depended upon slave labor. While 59.1 percent of the households listing a household member engaged in manufacturing owned at least one slave, 48.4 percent of households listing a household member engaged in agriculture owned at least one slave.\textsuperscript{13} Edenton remained a community in which many residents participated in agricultural production, and many laborers—both agriculturalists and tradesmen—remained slaves within the households of their masters. Thus Chowan County never developed a bourgeois social structure, and slaveowners remained representatives of their bound laborers’ interests.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13}In Edenton, 14.3 percent of households listing members engaged in either manufacturing or agriculture had members of the household engaged in both trades. In the countryside, 18.4 percent of households listing members engaged in either manufacturing or agriculture had members of the household engaged in both trades. "Census of 1840", North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

\textsuperscript{14}According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere “may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public.” In Edenton’s antebellum churches, however, the “public” was not constituted by its private people; rather Edenton’s slaveowners represented the public interest. Jürgen Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society}, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, \textit{Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought} (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 27. Monica Najar adopts Habermas’s conception of the public sphere in order to understand how the boundaries between religious and political matters were being redefined after the Revolutionary War. Early in the Baptist movement, slavery was considered a religious issue that was debatable among church members. Abolitionist Baptists tended to blend the boundaries between religious and secular issues. For anti-abolitionists, however, “the state served a very different role, one that established a distinct authority for human behavior.” By the nineteenth-century, most Baptist congregations accepted the political rather than religious nature of slavery, and they no longer debated the issue. Monica Najar, "Meddling with
Though the development and growth of evangelical churches in the nineteenth century is often associated with America’s participatory democracy, the same class of people who attempted to control Chowan County’s colonial church eventually monopolized authority over Chowan County’s Episcopal and evangelical churches. The next chapter shows the competition for authority between vestrymen and parsons in the colonial Anglican Church—St. Paul’s. Even though both groups maintained hierarchal visions of their world, they disagreed over attempts to convert Edenton’s slaves and gentlemen’s raucous brawls. Chapter three demonstrates that the Revolutionary War encouraged a process of decentralizing control over religious practice already taking place in North Carolina. As a result of decentralizing religious authority, people in and around Edenton were free to draw upon various beliefs and values as they constructed their religious values. Chowan County’s religious environment was becoming one in which residents held relatively equal authority to construct religious ideas. The ability of visionaries and clairvoyants to innovate beliefs beyond the control of orthodox ministers, inspired anxiety among those attempting to monopolize authority. Many in Edenton in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries feared that Chowan County was descending into anarchy.

The fourth chapter shows that the Baptist and Methodist churches in and around Edenton retreated from their early egalitarianism. The role of black people and women

Emancipation: Baptists, Authority, and the Rift over Slavery in the Upper South," *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 2 (2005): 182. Similarly, Elsa Barkley Brown has adopted Habermas’s model as she attempted to understand developments in Richmond’s Reconstruction black churches. “Unlike mass meetings where many people might take the floor in planned and unplanned expositions and attendees might freely interrupt or talk back to speakers, thus allowing and building mass participation, literary forums announced discussion topics in advance; chaired individual members, apparently almost always male, to prepare a paper on the subject; and designated specific, also male, members to reply.” Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (1994): 138.
within evangelical churches declined, and the wealth of church leaders increased even as disparities in wealth for Chowan County increased as well. Yeopim Baptist Church’s leaders were not as wealthy as their Episcopal neighbors, but the church leaders who made decisions for the church in the 1820s were also more likely to be slaveowners than they had been in 1800. Though new denominations came to Chowan County, the same class of men who had been anxious about colonial Anglican parsons preaching to slaves succeeded in modeling Chowan County’s religious life after their own interests in the aftermath of the Revolution. In Chowan County, decisions about attending church in the antebellum period did not so neatly reflect class divisions. In fact, the small minority of residents who benefited from race based slavery held a disproportionate amount of authority within all of the antebellum Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopal churches in and around Edenton, and these churches became supportive of slaveowners’ interests.15

15The ritualism of a restored Episcopal Church did not necessarily indicate the class origins of communicants. In her study of a Virginian Episcopalian, Joan Gundersen notes that the moderated gospel of Episcopalians could be seen as more fun in comparison to the stoic and ascetic doctrines of Methodists and Baptists. While other denominations “denounced, drinking of alcoholic beverages, card playing, and theater as sinful, Episcopalians enjoyed themselves in moderation.” Indeed, the “moderate” attitude of Virginia’s Episcopal Church could appeal to a number of people who spurned the asceticism of evangelicalism. "To Forget All Destinctions" Ecumenism and Denominational Identity in Virginia after the Revolution, 1784-1830, (OIEAHC Conference on June 25, 2005, 2005), 6-7.
CHAPTER 2

VESTRYMEN, PARSONS, AND A SIMILAR YET CONTESTED SPIRIT

Though Edentonians began construction of St. Paul’s Anglican Church in 1728, they did not find enough enthusiasm for Anglicanism to complete construction until the nineteenth century. Gentlemen’s and parsons’ conflicting conceptions of hierarchal authority discouraged residents from spending their money on a church building that did not always defer to their wishes and recognize their preeminence. One Sunday morning, Daniel Earl, the Anglican Parson for St. Paul’s parish, approached an apt assessment of the Anglican community carved into the door of St. Paul’s Anglican Church:

A broken-windowed church,
An unfinished steeple,
A herring-catching parson
And a damned set of people.  

The descriptions of St. Paul’s critic well represented Edenton’s religious environment. Edentonians had never bothered to finish construction, and no one was willing to pay for the repairs St. Paul’s needed. The parson considered himself a gentleman but was not particularly able to make local slaveowners appreciate his services. Gentlemen were more interested in establishing their own authority than adopting the piety that Earl preached.

Drawing upon the letters and sermons of North Carolina’s missionaries, St. Paul’s parish

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records, and the letters and diaries of local gentlemen, this chapter will show that even though colonial slaveowners and the Anglican parsons supported a church that was ideologically supportive of state authority, gentlemen felt that some parsons’ methods for spreading religion threatened their authority as slaveowners and preeminence as leaders of the community.

Earl’s difficulties were not unique. Many Anglican parsons in North Carolina confronted local gentlemen whose expectations of worship differed from their own.17 As the Anglican Church was the established church of North Carolina, many Anglican parsons supported the power of civil authorities. Many locals embraced the connection between church and state, and they solidified the connections between church and state through their service as vestrymen.18 Since Earl was funded partially by English benevolent societies and partially by the local vestry, however, he found it difficult to please both English and local officials. In Edenton, vestrymen and Earl conflicted over church policy in three ways: Earl presented himself as the head of St. Paul’s, attempted to open a school for slaves, and criticized local gentlemen’s petty fights for positions of authority as improper Anglican

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17 Historians of the Anglican Church have noted that Anglican parsons experienced conflicts with their congregations in much of British North America. In the Chesapeake, Rhys Isaac notes that local gentlemen’s performances of their status within church conflicted with parson’s expectations of piety. “The parson’s dependence on the goodwill of the gentry of his parish was apt to engender a sense of insecurity and to be a source of endemic conflict.” Isaac, 145. Peter Wood notes that Anglican missionaries in early eighteenth-century South Carolina “assured slaves and owners alike that baptism contained no implication of earthly freedom” yet local slaveowners worried that “slaves might use catechism lessons to avoid work or widen earthly contacts.” Peter H. Wood, Black Majority; Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York: Random House, 1975), 134-135.

18 By the beginning of the eighteenth-century, Allan Kulikoff notes that the gentlemen in the Chesapeake had remade Anglican churches in order to establish their authority in Virginia. “Parishioners went to Sunday services to enjoy the liturgy, to affirm their position in the social hierarchy, and to conduct business.” Kulikoff, 240, 232-240. As Dell Upton notes, local gentlemen in Virginia transformed their churches in order to make parishioners feel as though they were gentlemen’s guests. The styles according to which gentlemen constructed their churches “announced that the terms of the transaction were the gentry’s.” Dell Upton, Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia (New York: Architectural History Foundation ; MIT Press, 1986), 173.
activities. The result of these conflicts was that locals lacked the motivation to complete St. Paul’s. Ironically, Earl and slaveowners held similar visions of a hierarchical society; yet Earl’s actions failed to allow slaveowners to claim the absolute authority they desired. In the end, leaders in Chowan County would rather have no worship at all in St. Paul’s than pay to have worship that they believed undercut their authority.

Many Anglican ministers presented their churches as religious arms of the state; they asserted that those who ran civil affairs did so with divine sanction. After Governor Tryon’s army defeated western North Carolinians’ yeoman army in 1771, the Anglican parson George Micklejohn praised Tryon and condemned those who defied divinely inspired civil authorities. According to Micklejohn, unruly regulators were “commanded...to be subject to the higher powers, because the authority they are invested with is from Heaven.” The magistrates who directed terrestrial affairs were thus not merely good administrators. They were marked with divine favor, and their decrees were incontrovertible. For Micklejohn, North Carolina’s colonial governors were “God’s viceregents upon earth, and instruments in the hand of his providence.”19 Anglican ministers supported civil authorities by representing them as a part of God’s divine mission for the world. Thus, the Anglican Church often functioned as a place where the sovereign’s will was expressed to the people. Rather than a place for discussion about civil or religious affairs, the Anglican Church acted as an institution that presented the will of those who ruled. Anglican doctrine was thus propaganda for the state.

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The vestrymen who served in St. Paul’s often contributed to the blending of civil and religious affairs by working as both civil and religious officials. Some vestrymen assisted in purchasing elements for worship within St. Paul’s and also mapped the boundaries of local property—they referred to the process as processioning—in order to settle legal disputes. One of Edenton’s lawyers, Abraham Norfleet, worked as land processioner, clerk for the vestry, and clerk for an outlying Anglican chapel. At one point, Norfleet filled all three positions at the same time: in 1775 the church vestry provided Norfleet “thirteen pounds for serving as clerk to the vestry, for Orders processing of the land, and for serving as clerk to Farlee Chapple for two years past.”

Church Wardens also distributed Edenton’s tithes—functionally serving as taxes—to the indigent. As a doctor, Samuel Dickenson received occasional payments from the vestry for healing sick strangers or other locals unable to pay for their own medical treatment. In a typical entry, Dickenson was “allowed his accot. of fourteen Pounds nineteen Shillings & Six Pence till the 27th of this instant for Physick administered to Sundry Poor of this Parish.”

As Anglican parsons presented the Anglican Church as a religious arm of civil authorities, vestrymen similarly treated the Anglican Church as a part of the civil state.

Though the Anglican Church and its parsons typically provided divine sanction for civil leaders who in turn contributed to religious worship by becoming religious leaders as well, the interests of the vestrymen and the parsons in Edenton occasionally conflicted.

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21 Ibid., 180.
Parsons’ and vestrymen did not always agree on their relative rankings within church.\textsuperscript{22} As North Carolina’s parsons were paid partially by England and partially by local taxes, Anglican parsons found themselves with divided interests and loyalties. As one minister for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in North Carolina reflected in 1768, ministers felt constrained by the power of vestrymen to withhold part of their salaries. Parsons were appointed by an English bishop, but “notwithstanding this the Vestries have many subterfuges, many things in their power, which it is not in the power of any Governor to foresee or prevent.”\textsuperscript{23} Anglican missionaries in Edenton routinely complained that St. Paul’s church wardens were supposed to provide their fair share in support of parsons, but the church wardens often failed in their duties. One of Edenton’s parsons noted that he was supposed to pay for his living expenses out “of ye Parish Levy, wch ought to have been raised six yrs. Agoe.”\textsuperscript{24} He was able to survive on what he earned from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, but without local payments he was unable to live as a proper, refined minister. He angrily complained that vestrymen’s intransigence was connected to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22}It is not entirely clear what the nature of the conflict between them was, but a “Mr. Blount” found Earl offensive enough to write a letter to England in order to request that Earl be disciplined for poor conduct. Unfortunately, Blount’s letter does not survive, but the letter Earl sent to exonerate himself is indicative of Earl’s difficult position. Daniel Earl to The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1 April 1774, The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, The Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
\item \textsuperscript{23}The Colonial Records of North Carolina: Published under the Supervision of the Trustees of the Public Libraries by Order of the General Assembly, ed. William L. Saunders, 28 vols., vol. 7 (Wilmington, NC: 1993-1994), 495.
\item \textsuperscript{24}Daniel Urmstone to The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 23 October 1717, The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, The Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
\end{itemize}
their lack of faith. They simply “cannot endure to be at charges upon what they so little value, Religion.”25

Parsons’ performances and locals’ beliefs, however, indicate that locals were not exactly irreligious; rather locals and Anglican parsons held different expectations for religious worship. The rituals that parsons performed in St. Paul’s demonstrated their own awesome power as God’s vicars. Anglican ministers performed the hierarchically inspired ceremonies of the Book of Common Prayer, and many of the prayers that they read were intended to inspire humility among congregants. The Book of Common Prayer instructed Earl and other parsons to read the Ten Commandments before the communion ceremony so that the congregation felt as though “God himself spoke them from Mount Sinai.” Having veiled the communion in the holiness of God’s word, the parson was then to instruct the gathered assembly in the redeeming elements and condemning elements contained in the sacrament of communion.26 For congregants with contrite hearts, communion provided forgiveness; for those with unrepentant hearts, partaking of communion inspired the wrath of God. Duly warned, those who dared to take communion knelt before the communion table at the front of the church and confessed their sins to God through the parson. It was at this point in the ritual of communion that ministers exercised “the Power given him by Christ” and pronounced “absolution in his Name, in the form of a Prayer.”27 The ritualistic forms of


27Ibid., 14-15.
Anglican worship were intended to inspire humility among congregants, and these prayers also intimated that Earl and other parsons held authority over spiritual matters.

Earl inherited many of the problems that had contributed to the short and contemptuous terms of his predecessors. When the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge encouraged Earl to open a school for instructing and converting Edenton’s slaves, Earl confronted anxious slaveowners. Earl most likely did not intend to threaten planters’ authority by baptizing and instructing slaves. Many other Anglican ministers saw little conflict between maintaining hierarchal authority and attempting to make North America’s slaves good Anglicans. Indeed, Anglican ministers asserted that converting slaves to Anglicanism would ensure their obedience and subservience. As one Anglican missionary understood the impact of Anglican fellowship, Christianity would make slaves’ “Tempers milder, and their Lives happier.” Anglican fellowship would teach slaves “Dutifulness and Loyalty.”28 Yet most attempts to convert slaves to Anglicanism met resistance from slaveowners throughout North America, and Edenton was not an exception to this common resistance. In 1761, Earl was ordered to open a “Negro school” in Edenton. Earl attempted to “Represent it in that Light that it ought to Appear to all who Profess our Holy Religion.” Unfortunately, “my Exhortations and Remonstrances have not as yet had the desired Effect.” Once again in 1763, Earl attempted to open a school for Edenton’s enslaved residents. Locals, however, continued to turn “a deaf Ear,” and Earl held “no Expectation of having it established here.”29

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Though Earl stressed that all good Anglicans should be willing to open a school for slaves, some of Edenton’s gentlemen continued to think of themselves as good Anglicans even though they opposed such a school. In fact, local vestrymen and other town officials imported religious literature and prayed to God. In 1770 vestrymen ordered that Daniel Earl be paid so that he could “provide proper Prayer Books for the Several places of Worship in this Parish.” Locals also felt the need to pray when they felt far from God. When James Iredell—Edenton’s port tax collector—feared his “Principles & Practice of Religion grow rather more loose than formerly,” he prayed and reflected on the hope of receiving “forgiveness of God.” Though some parsons who felt slighted by locals’ intransigence claimed that vestrymen and other town leaders were irreligious, it seems that local people like James Iredell valued religion.

Locals were often just as interested in the social benefits of church attendance as the piety that Earl preached. James Iredell, for example, was a praying man, but he was also

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32Richard Rankin has claimed that one “of the most plausible explanations for the decline of Episcopal orthodoxy among the genteel class was the growing popularity of religious skepticism associated with the more radical Enlightenment thought of the American and French revolutionary eras.” Rankin, 15. Certainly Revolutionary gentlemen were influenced by deistical and Enlightenment ideas, but Revolutionary gentlemen often had few qualms about uniting faith with reason. As E. Brooks Holifield notes, Jefferson and Franklin considered themselves deists but continued to attend Anglican worship, to admire Jesus, and to spend more time promoting natural theology than disproving the Bible. Indeed by the nineteenth-century, much of American religion was influenced by the Scottish enlightenment. Many nineteenth-century Americans believed that the “theologian, like the naturalist, should become an expert in taxonomy, the discipline of classifying the facts and ordering the classifications.” Holifield, 162, 175.
interested in looking for a proper and wealthy wife at church. On one rainy and cold Sunday morning, Iredell decided he did not want to brave the elements in order to attend worship at St. Paul’s. Besides, there would be “no Ladies going from Mrs. Blair’s.” Without the ladies with whom Iredell wanted to socialize, attending church seemed less attractive. Instead of sitting at home because of the poor weather, however, Iredell found where the ladies from Mrs. Blair’s were going that Sunday. He “went with Mr. Johnston whom I found there to Mr. Jones’s and staid with him there till 1, when I went to Mrs. Blair’s where I continued very happily till past 11.”

Though interested in religion, James Iredell expected to engage in more secular social activities at church as well. Iredell used church attendance to establish friendships with men and women of his social class, and he seems to have been largely successful. He managed to marry one of the wealthiest women in town. His marriage to Hannah Johnston—the sister of one of Edenton's largest slaveowners Samuel Johnston—assured his position as a local gentlemen.

Such ulterior motives hardly fit the awe-inspired humility Earl intended Anglican worship to inculcate, and Earl was not afraid to let his parishioners know that their methods for attaining prestige and authority were not what God expected of Anglicans. In one of his few surviving sermons, Earl noted that Edentonians were excessively prideful of their reputations, and he was particularly taken aback by the fact that they were willing to fight anyone who threatened their positions within the social hierarchy. According to Earl, if an Edentonian was offended by “a passionate speech or a disdainful Word” he would not rest and would “let all other business & Employments be laid asside, till thou has his life or he thine.” Earl lamented that the brawls that resulted from such name calling were the result of

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33Iredell, 206.
Edentonians’ desires of gaining “the reputation of a discreet civil temperd Gentleman.” Earl chastised his parishioners for their willingness to commit violence for something as worldly as reputations, and instead he instructed them to “proceed wth no great tempers” and forgive the offending slanderer in the future.34

As a result of the differences between Earl and many locals, locals failed to complete their church. In 1765 Earl complained that “The Church in this Town...is in a very ruinous Condition,” but he was still unable to get enough money—either from England or from local townspeople—to properly repair the church.35 St. Paul’s became so uninhabitable in winter that church services had to be conducted in the courthouse instead. Earl lamented that St. Paul’s was “so much out of Repair that neither Minister nor Congregation can Stand the Inclimency of the Weather in it without greatly Risqueing their Health.”36 Though designed to inspire awe and humility in the congregation, the appearance of St. Paul’s in the late colonial period was less awesome than pathetic. Neither does it seem that Edentonians were particularly dutiful in attending worship. James Iredell noted that on one Sunday there were

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34Daniel Earl, Charles Johnson Collection, P.C. 67.29, North Carolina State Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. Rhys Isaac has noted that fighting was an important part of maintaining one’s reputation. A colonial Virginian’s fighting ability was an important part of maintaining status in late colonial Virginia. As Rhys Isaac noted, “[t]o be forced to cry out ‘King’s cruse’ to save the sight of one’s eye…would mean a momentary taste of annihilation.” Slanderous accusations did more than injure the pride of the victim; a planter could lose his ability to maintain his livelihood without his masculine image. Isaac, 119.


so few congregants that there was “nobody to make the Responses but Mr. H[ewes] & myself.”  

The divisions caused by the Revolutionary War highlighted Earl’s weak position and his divided loyalties. In 1775 Earl complained to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel that he had “not Received a Shilling of my Sallary from my Parish for near three Years; partly occasioned by the want of Court Laws by which Collectors of Taxs are impowered to Receive them, and partly by the Difference between the Parent Country and her Colonies.”  

Earl was unable to secure the salary locals owed to him, but his position on Edentonians’ revolutionary struggle was unlikely to encourage future support. Rather than take sides in the conflict, Earl hoped to remain neutral. Earl felt that other ministers in North Carolina had erred by declaring their loyalty to Britain, and Earl therefore resolved that the best course of action was to act neutrally. Earl had “as yet kept clear of any Censure among my Parishioners, as I never Introduce any Topic into the Pulpit except Exhortations and Prayers for Peace, good Order, and a speedy Reconciliation with Great Britain.”  

Daniel Earl’s decision nicely demonstrates the difficulties that late colonial parsons confronted as they worked for local gentlemen and English officials. Earl’s neutrality seems to have pleased no one.

37Iredell, 177.


Edenton’s late colonial Anglican missionary, Daniel Earl, inherited a religious environment in which parsons and locals disagreed over religious worship. Both groups seem to have been religiously inclined, but neither side was able to get all that they desired. Indeed, several locals expressed their willingness to support Anglican worship and seem to have been religiously inclined. Local vestrymen, however, were disappointed to find that their parsons did not meet their expectations. The Reverend Daniel Earl alienated many parishioners when he presented himself as the leader of Edenton’s religious world, attempted to open a school for Edenton’s slaves, and chastised congregants for their willingness to use violence in order to achieve their social goals. As a result of Edenton’s contests over religious authority, St. Paul’s decayed and few attended worship. After the Anglican Church was disestablished in 1776, no one bothered to spend their money to support the continuance of Anglican worship.
CHAPTER 3

DISESTABLISHMENT, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, AND AN UNTAMED SPIRIT

In order to win their war against the British, Anglican congregants needed to be willing to bend to some of the demands of religious dissenters including disestablishment. By 1776 backcountry Presbyterians, having long chafed under the state-supported Anglican Church, demanded that the new state legislature end the relationship between church and state. According to Frederick Mills, Episcopalians gave in to Presbyterians’ demands. As many eastern gentlemen had recently contributed to the suppression of the western Regulation movement against taxation, many easterners were understandably concerned that backcountry farmers would not support the Patriots. Easterners were therefore willing to make sacrifices in order to ensure that Presbyterian, Piedmont farmers supported the Patriot movement. One of North Carolina’s representatives to the Continental Congress and a resident of Edenton, Joseph Hewes, noted that the Continental Congress sent two Presbyterian ministers “to the Western parts of North Carolina where some of the inhabitants we are told are pursuing measures hostile to the friends of America.” Indeed, times were hard for eastern Patriots. When Edentones feared that a British force nearing the coast might invade Edenton, they attempted to rouse

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41 Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston, 6 January 1776, Hayes Collection, The Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
the countryside in order to defend their town. Much to their dismay, the captain who “tryed
to raise some Militia” found that no “one would appear to join him.” Many of those whom
he encountered “declared it was their hopes and deseire, to see that Town & many other
places in Ruins.” Desperate times called for sacrifices, but for both the rich and poor who
had chafed under the tutelege of Anglican parsons, accepting religious disestablishment must
not have seemed like much of a sacrifice.

In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, however, many
discovered that an absence of religious authority was more than they were willing to accept.
In colonial Edenton, parsons had attempted to control theology. It was they who
monopolized knowledge of the rituals of the Anglican Church. The grace experience around
which many evangelicals centered their beliefs, however, undercut ministerial authority and
legitimated believers’ attempts to construct their own gospels. As God spoke directly to
believers, there did not seem to be much of a need for trained and educated ministers. This
sensually based message that tended to inspire believers to resist authority figures appealed
to many enslaved people. Within the itinerancy movement, enslaved people found support
from some white itinerants for establishing communion with God independently. While
Daniel Earl and other Anglican parsons had wanted to instruct slaves in a religion supportive
of hierarchal relationships, the epistemological sensualism within the itinerant movement
allowed believers to establish their own beliefs about God beyond the watchful eyes of their
ministers. The independence and diversity among believers was a cause for concern even
among some itinerants. By the beginning of the 1810s slaveowners' fears of itinerancy
forced them to reconsider their unwillingness to pay for religious services.

42 John Campbell to Joseph Hewes, 14 July 1779, Brownrigg Family Papers, The Southern Historical
Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
While colonial Anglican parsons had used their knowledge of church rituals and dead languages to claim authority within their congregations, the direct revelation at the heart of itinerant worship created a diverse group of believers who asserted that the convert could interpret God’s will for him or herself. For William Glendinning, a Methodist itinerant sent to North Carolina by the bishops of the Methodist Church, understanding God depended upon independent sensations of the Holy Spirit. Glendinning noted that “numbers may laugh at my folly, and sport themselves with what they consider as vain and empty conceits, —But be assured of this, they were more than empty conceits to me: my senses told me there was a dreadful reality in them.”

Indeed, some itinerants were a bit shocked at the diversity of religious beliefs within the Methodist Church in the late eighteenth century. At one meeting, Jeremiah Norman, an itinerant minister who regularly visited eastern North Carolina, was disturbed by the unorthodox style of preaching practiced by his fellow itinerant. According to Norman, the preacher started coughing and humming and then he spoke “as if he was conjuring up spirits.” The preacher may not have actually been conjuring spirits, but Norman’s criticism is indicative of the diversity of beliefs and practices among converts who premised their faith upon direct inspiration rather than inherited traditions.

As God spoke directly to believers, some early itinerants claimed that brothers and sisters in Christ did not require direction from religious authorities, and these itinerants resented religious leaders who claimed authority over church doctrine. Glendinning approved of most of the Methodist Church’s doctrine, but he worried about a hierarchical

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spirit he believed to be infecting some Methodist meetings. Commenting on the ecclesiastical structure of Methodism, Glendinning complained that “too much power and authority are lodged in the hands of one man, while the people are mere cyphers...deprived even of a right to complain of any measure whatever.” Years before, Glendinning could remember when it was considered persecution when anyone strove to “hurt the character of the Methodists, or hinder any from hearing them.” Unfortunately, it seemed that the Methodists’ leaders were beginning to adopt the characteristics of their former antagonists. What had formerly been done to them by violent unbelievers, Methodist leaders “now do to me.”

Glendinning lamented that Methodist leaders were often the people who prevented the people from witnessing to others about the information that God had laid upon their hearts. James O’Kelly, founder of a dissenting faction of Methodism known as the Republican Methodists, agreed that the grace experience limited the extent to which religious leaders could claim authority over believers. O’Kelly humbly thanked “the Eternal Spirit, who hath enlightened mine understanding, to discover the mystery of iniquity working in a spurious Episcopacy.”

O’Kelly denounced anyone who attempted to interpose themselves between believers and the Holy Spirit. He asserted that Francis Asbury, one of the bishops of America’s Methodist Church, was such an interposer; Asbury required “passive obedience” from the Methodist laity. O’Kelly believed that the leaders of the Methodist Church should

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45Glendinning, 99, 97. Mark Noll classifies the epistemologically sensational factions of Christianity as unamerican theologies without emphasizing the social implications of indicating that theological traditions most in line with social revolution were the same theological traditions abandoned after the Revolutionary War. Indeed, the “universal foundation of populist self-assertion was a refusal to be dictated to” and these “populists claimed the right, simply as human beings, to think for themselves.” Noll, 146. Christine Heyrman also noted the power of direct revelation in the early evangelical movement. Direct revelation from God allowed one believer to utterly “trust in the truth as revealed to his heart.” Heyrman, 41.

respect the laity’s “private judgment.” The hierarchal system of the Methodist Church “must be annihilated” as such a system “discovers the bondage of the people.” As he saw it, the essence of the itinerant movement was not to be found in the direction provided by bishops or by ministers but in the liberty of the people to discover God for themselves. O’Kelly had “more confidence in the private members [of the Methodist Church], than in their Bishops.”

Indeed, a gospel message premised upon the freedom of believers appealed to many black people in and around Edenton. When enslaved residents thought about religious issues, their conditions as slaves were rarely far from their minds. When Jeremiah Norman stayed with a supportive slaveowner in 1796, one of the slaves in the household who had been born in Africa confronted Norman and told him about African religious worship. He remembered that the religious leaders drew a circle around which “2 men goes round proclaiming to them what they aught to do as their duty.” Often, however, the worship was merely a ploy, and a company of men would come and the worshippers were “sometimes...taken” and sold into slavery. The unnamed slave probably intended his narrative as an accurate portrayal of worship in Africa, but Norman failed to recognize the story’s relevance to their current situation. Norman was a man who went around telling white and black people what it was their duty to do, and Norman was willing to support masters’ authority over their slaves. Norman saw no conflict between encouraging people to abandon their bondage to sin and his support of slavery.

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47 Ibid., 49. Norman recounts that there was at least one itinerant minister in eastern North Carolina who considered himself to be part of the Republican Methodist movement. “F. called on E. Almond a republican methodist we did cursed the Subject of his leaving the connection. I considered it but a poor reason for doing such a work as that however all men judge for themselves.” Norman, 128.

48 O’Kelly, 53.

49 Norman, 237-238.
Though many resisted a Christian faith that they perceived as the tool of their oppressors, other slaves eventually developed a belief system expressive of their hope that God would free them from their bondage. Many slaves who converted to Christianity believed that God and Christ were supportive of slaves rather than masters. Indeed, historians have noted that a Christian tradition developed among slaves that emphasized the role that Christianity would play in providing slaves’ with their much desired liberation.\(^{50}\)

Harriet Jacobs, one of Edenton’s antebellum enslaved residents, was disgusted with what she perceived to be the false religion of Edenton’s planters. For her, there was “a great difference between Christianity and religion at the south.” For Jacobs, true religion brought freedom to converts and punished those—like the planters—who abused and raped slaves.\(^{51}\)

Many other enslaved Edentonians similarly used Christianity in order to understand themselves as a free people held in bondage by devilish slaveowners. When Harriet Jacobs assisted her fellow slave Fred in his attempts to read the Bible, Fred lamented that the “[w]hite man is got all de seense.” By learning how to read, however, Fred hoped to circumvent slaveowners’ control and to gain direct contact with God. It appeared to Fred

\(^{50}\)Orlando Patterson notes that many enslaved people since the inception of Christianity have understood Christ’s atoning sacrifice as one in which “he annulled the condition of slavery in which man existed by returning to the original point of enslavement and, on behalf of the sinner about to fall, gave his own life so that the sinner might live and be free.” Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 71. Albert Raboteau has convincingly shown that many slaves throughout the South used Baptist and Methodist fellowship in order to understand themselves as God’s chosen people who looked forward to being set free by an angry God. Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" In the Antebellum South*, Updated Edition ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Eugene Genovese also asserts that slaves combined spiritual emancipation from sin with a physical emancipation from bondage. “The slaves did not draw a sharp line between them but merged them into the image of a single deliverer, at once this-worldly and otherworldly.” Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 252.

that when he “read dis book I shall be nearer to God.” Indeed, one hymn sung by Edenton’s enslaved people demonstrated their expectation of future liberation from what they considered an unjust system:

Ole Satan’s Church is here below;  
Up to Gods free church I hope to go.

Some white itinerants supported slaves’ claims to independence from their owners. These itinerants felt that slaveowning was a sin and that slaves were victims of evil masters. While on the road in northeastern North Carolina, Jeremiah Norman recalled meeting a white itinerant in the 1790s who declared that he “Preached all slave holders to Hell.” Francis Asbury declared in the eighteenth-century that he was “grieved to see slavery, and the manner of keeping these poor people.” For Asbury the “liberation of the slaves” was a pious design, and he feared that the Methodists must declare themselves against slavery or “the Lord will depart from them.” One itinerant Baptist minister, Amariah Biggs, chastised corrupted, slaveowning men like Charles Pettigrew who “put the yoke of Iron on the poor Ethiopians and get your riches by their rod of oppression.” Finding scripture supportive of his claims, Biggs noted it was much easier for a “Camel to go through the Eye of an needel then for a rich man to Enter into the Kingdom of heaven.” Establishing relationships with

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52 Jacobs, 73.  
53 Ibid., 95.  
54 Norman, 107.  
God independent from the authority of traditional religious leaders, some white itinerants and black people alike found a language of dissent from slaveowners’ authority.

More conservative evangelicals were concerned about believers’ freedom to interpret for themselves. They feared “heterodoxy” among unrestrained worshippers. For them, the sensual foundation upon which itinerants’ religion rested needed to be controlled by those who were qualified to interpret the varieties of believers’ sensations. Jeremiah Norman often expressed his frustration with what he considered to be the ignorance of his fellow itinerants. After one meeting, Norman met with a man whom he considered “one of the most stupid beings perhaps that Ever called himself a Minister for God.”

Unfortunately, not all itinerant Methodists were as learned as Norman. After examining the “language & Doctrine” of other itinerants, Norman found that many others appeared “mostly to aim at the passions.”

Neither did many of the assemblies to whom Norman preached meet his standards of orthodoxy. Suspicious that one crowd wanted to worship in ways that Norman considered heterodox, he informed his audience that he neither “spake or taught some words according to the vulgar manner.”

Francis Asbury was similarly disturbed by the varieties of gospels created by an unregulated spirit. Asbury felt that what some “people take for religion and spiritual life, is nothing but the power of the natural passions.” Individual experience needed the guiding presence of church leaders. Acting upon any “sensations without a strong disposition for holiness [was] but delusive.”

For these evangelicals, the

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57 Norman, 85.
58 Ibid., 106.
59 Ibid., 109.
60 Asbury, 90.
direct experience of grace was a little disturbing. In order to promote their visions of orthodoxy, these itinerants believed that the experience of grace needed to be contained and controlled.

Unsurprisingly, evangelicals who disapproved of the independence inspired by sensual experiences of divine will were also less willing to accept black people’s claims to spiritual emancipation. Jeremiah Norman never evinced abolitionist leanings even though he encountered abolitionist minded itinerants during his travels in North Carolina. It was with some surprise that Norman heard that some of the “Black...People had made a vow against hearing ye Methodists any more.” Norman’s actions, however, gave black Methodists little reason to return to Norman’s ministry. In 1796, Norman assisted his planter host in capturing a runaway slave. Norman and the gentleman “being informed of a supposed runaway Negro in a desolate house not far off” decided to give chase and catch him. Even Francis Asbury eventually tentatively accepted the institution of slavery in order spread the Methodist faith. Neither did the white Methodists and white Baptists who admitted slaves into Chowan County’s congregations consistently treat black people equally. Edenton’s Methodist church records indicate that its early nineteenth-century congregation was composed of 39 white people and 129 black people. In the Methodist church, however, the 129 black members went unnamed, but the 39 white members were listed by name. Yeopim Baptist Church in rural Chowan County also regularly admitted black people into the

61 Norman, 34.
62 Ibid., 171.
congregation in the 1790s and similarly listed black congregants separately from white members.63

Despite conservatives in their midst, the informality of early itinerant worship encouraged diversity among believers who established their faith independently from religious authorities. Ministers often preached in places over which Edenton’s slaveowners did not have direct control. As the Reverend J.D. Hufham remembered the Baptists’ early history in North Carolina, congregants and itinerants occupied “school-houses, private residences, or the open air, as circumstances required.”64 Wherever free room was available, itinerant ministers filled the gap and preached to whomever would attend. In the 1790s, Francis Asbury came to preach in Edenton. On one occasion he preached from the town commons and “many attended.”65 Jeremiah Norman noted that he often preached in private residences. On one occasion, Norman visited “Brot. Wills” who let Norman preach to those who had gathered in his home. Norman recalled that this was the “House where I first opend my mouth to Preach ye gospel.”66 Indeed, the early Methodist movement in Edenton was marked by the importance of worship meetings in private homes. Some of the older members recalled that “the people flocked out...to prayer meetings at Private houses, in so

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64J.D. Hufham, Memoir of Rev. John L. Prichard (Raleigh: 1867), 18. The open and free atmosphere of early itinerant meetings has been noted by several historians. Both Christine Heyrman and Nathan Hatch agree that early Baptist and Methodist movements were premised upon the popular elements of society taking religious matters into their own hands. Hatch. and Hurman.


66Norman, 53.
much that often there was not room in the house to contain all that came."[67] Preaching in open fields or private residences, many of those who did not attend itinerant meetings feared that properly trained authorities were unable to control and to contain the voices of evangelicals. The open fields outside of Edenton and the private homes of believers were beyond the reach of those who desired a more refined gospel message.

For many, it seemed that morality was in decline among those who were not properly controlled. Indeed, many in Edenton feared that the “passions” of their neighbors may have been unleashed. In 1807, *The Edenton Gazette* noted that Edenton’s women were too heavily influenced by radical, French ideas. The author complained that women wore a “cobweb vesture, lighter than the vapours of summer.” These “dampened silks” revealed more skin than the writer thought was advisable, and the lack of proper clothing caused several women to freeze to death. This deadly apparel “came from France in the wildest days of her dissipation.” The only solution for Edentonians was to adopt apparel that was “truly American, healthful and decorous.”[68] Similarly, reports from Haiti demonstrated that liberty among black people would only encourage the passions of those who were least able to control themselves. *The Gazette* reported that black governor of Haiti was consumed by his bloodlust and had raved “like a mad man.” According to *The Gazette*, he pointed to the dead body of a white person hanging from the scaffolds and ominously declared that “‘this day su [you] American shall suffer.’”[69]

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[67] Edenton Methodist Episcopal Church Record Book.


Some white men felt that itinerants contributed to the decline in moral behavior, and some itinerants appeared to be similarly consumed by their passions. Charles Pettigrew lamented the existence of an itinerant movement that met into private houses. Pettigrew noted that Jesus Christ himself preached in the “Temple and Synagogues of his nation.” Since Jesus preached in consecrated temples, all ministers should follow Jesus’s example and “should not, when there were buildings erected and set apart as sacred to the Worship of God, creep into private houses.” Those who crept into houses instead of preaching from established pulpits were “seducers” who led away “silly women—captive, laden with Sins.”

It is not altogether surprising that the former Anglican parson found itinerancy unsettling, but many others in town mirrored Pettigrew’s fears. An article tellingly entitled “Fanaticism” in Edenton’s local newspaper accused Methodists of tyrannizing over their duped followers. According to the author, “a certain popular Preacher, expressed himself to this effect in one of his late sermons — ‘My friends, if you neglect the opportunities which you enjoy under my ministry, there is no doubt but your damnation will be tenfold.’” Thus, the author concluded, the evangelical minister behaved as tyrannically as the king of Spain. According to the author, the comparison between the popular preacher and the king of Spain proved that “the religious fanaticks of the present age are as foolish, if not as malevolent as the political ones.”

The “fanaticism” of Methodist preaching, in the minds of many planters, led to corruption and tyranny.

Slaveowners’ fears of overly passionate dependents demonstrated their anxieties over their decreasing authority in Chowan County. Indeed, masters had been reluctant to allow

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71"Fanaticism," The Encyclopedian Instructor, and Farmer's Gazette, May 21 1800.
others to instruct their slaves in religious matters. As the sociologist Orlando Patterson has noted, the nature of the master and slave relationship has prevented masters from recognizing the independence of their slaves since the classical period. A religious environment in which slaves held access to interpretation contradicted slaveowners’ presumptions of mastery. According to Harriet Jacobs, slaveowners in Edenton feared slaves who dared to feel like human beings. Edenton’s black residents whom she perceived as “God-breathing machines” were no more “in the sight of their masters, than the cotton they plant, or the horses they tend.” Jacobs framed several episodes in her life around slaveowners’ determinations to make slaves accept their dependence upon their owners. For example, Jacobs recalled that when she was still a young girl her father and her master had called for her brother, John, at the same time. Not knowing what to do, John attended to his master first. Jacobs’s father was enraged by the way in which slavery denied him his right to authority as a father. He declared to John that “[y]ou are my child...and when I call you, you should come immediately.” Jacobs’s father had been indignant about the denial of slaves’ authority over their biological children, and Jacobs noted throughout her memoir that slavery consistently denied slaves any sense of independence from their masters.

Concerned about the effects of itinerants upon authority, some reacted with ridicule and even force in order to discourage independent worship among itinerants. Some of the older women in Edenton’s Methodist church recalled that in the early nineteenth century many Edentonians were “disposed to persecute” their minister. These people called him

72Jacobs, 9.

73As Christine Heyrman notes, many eighteenth-century slaveowners abused and mocked itinerants, at least in part, because the character of itinerancy threatened slaveowners’ control over their slaves. Heyrman, 46-52.
“The Babbler” and said that those who joined the Methodists were crazy. Though he was himself a supporter of slavery, even Jeremiah Norman remembered Edenton to be a dangerous place for a Methodist itinerant. Though less than lucid in describing the origins of his fear, Norman feared for his life when he passed through Edenton. While crossing the Albemarle Sound, Norman’s soul “was rushed with [Edentonians’] unlawfull deeds.” Norman believed that only God’s providential mercy had “brought [him] safe back again.”

In 1795, former vestrymen and other concerned residents attempted to form armed bands in order to regulate a religious environment that threatened slaveowners’ control over their property. During the Revolutionary Era, most Quakers recognized that their conception of the “inner light” implicitly recognized the humanity of all people, and they therefore concluded that slavery was sinful. Quakers stopped supporting slavery, and they removed slaveowning members from Quaker fellowship. Many Quakers in the region surrounding Edenton not only emancipated their own slaves but attempted to buy more slaves so that they could emancipate others’ slaves as well. Quakers’ desires to emancipate slaves made slaveowners in Edenton anxious. Many of Edenton’s slaveowners declared they were ready to arm themselves “which at present appears to be almost, if not altogether necessary” as slaveowners believed that emancipated black people made themselves a nuisance by encouraging those still enslaved to seek freedom as well. In order to prevent the ill effects

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74Edenton Methodist Episcopal Church Record Book.

75Norman, 53.

76“Presentment of Grand Jury Charging the Quakers with Enciting the Slaves to Seek Freedom”, 1795, Box 4 CRX, North Carolina State Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. Baptists and Methodists were certainly different than Quakers. Francis Asbury was continually frustrated by Quakers emphasis upon spiritual independence. On several occasions, Asbury confronted people he labeled as tainted with the “indolent spirit of Quakerism.” Despite overemphasizing individual interpretation, of which Asbury had accused many of his fellow Methodists, Asbury found the abolitionist spirit of Quakerism laudable. Asbury, The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from August 7, 1771, to December 7, 1815, Vol 1,
of black people’s freedom, Edentonians formed armed bands in order to reenslave those the Quakers had emancipated. In 1797, local slaves freed by Quakers petitioned Congress for their freedom. Edenton’s Congressman, Thomas Blount, asserted that local officials had done nothing wrong. It was, after all, illegal to free slaves without permission from North Carolina’s legislature. Free blacks without masters, he argued, were a public menace as they inspired other slaves to resist their masters. In order to prevent the dangerous effects of a free black population, former slaves who had been illegally emancipated by Quakers were subject to impoundment by town officials. For conservatives, it seemed that their world was being turned upside down. Slaves were supposed to be dependent upon their masters; yet some slaves found support for their independence among local Quakers and some Methodists and Baptists as well.

Concerned as they were with an increasingly diverse religious world, former vestrymen and others in Edenton did not want to allow Baptists to use St. Paul’s; yet since the vestry had collapsed after the disestablishment of religion in 1776 there was no one to prevent itinerants from using the building for their own public worship. Charles Pettigrew was especially concerned that Baptists were attempting to use St. Paul's for their own worship. In a letter to Charles Pettigrew, several of Edenton’s former vestrymen and other concerned citizens replied to Pettigrew’s concerns about the attempts of Baptists to use the church in 1792. The men who referred to themselves as the “Episcopal Gentlemen”—Elisha

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100, 214. Others saw similarities among Quakers and early itinerants. When Gabriel led a slave uprising in Virginia in 1800, he directed his followers to spare “Quakers, the Methodists, and [all] Frenchmen.” Gabriel believed that members of these groups were all “friendly to liberty.” Gabriel quoted in Douglas R. Egerton, Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 49.

Norfleet, Nathaniel Allen, Samuel Dickenson, Michael Payne and John Little—rejected the requests of Thomas Harmon, a local Baptist minister. These men prohibited Harmon or any “other ministers of his persuasion” from preaching in St. Paul’s. Instead they hoped to “procure an Orthodox Minister to fill the Episcopal Chair.” The former vestrymen, however, noted that after disestablishment they were “but private Citizens, and have no absolute possession in the Church, more than our being members of it as above.” Their concerns mirrored those of one of New Bern’s Episcopalians. This Episcopalian lamented that without “Church-Wardens, Vestry Men, nor any Officer to take any Charge, or Care of the Church, Whatever Meetings...We may hold will be spontaneous unbacked by proper Authority.”

Technically, it was not at all clear who directed St. Paul’s—Baptists had already procured the former Anglican chapel named Yeopim for themselves—and ministers like Harmon hoped to make St. Paul’s a place of public worship in which Baptist ministers, despite their unorthodox backgrounds, could preach.

Charles Pettigrew supported former vestrymen’s attempts to restrict Baptist ministers’ use of St. Paul’s. Pettigrew believed that St. Paul’s was a place of worship in which properly trained and orthodox ministers should preach the gospel message. Pettigrew did not doubt

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78 The letter is signed by Wm. Lowther, Nathl. Allen, Ramsay, S. Dickenson, John Little, Michl. Payne, Madett Engs, E. Norfleet, L. Ware. Episcopal Gentlemen to Charles Pettigrew, 15 July 1792, *The Pettigrew Papers, 1685-1818*, vol. 1, 2 vols., ed. Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, (Raleigh, NC: State Department of Archives and History, 1971), 113. In 1776 the state assembly ordered that “all Glebes, Lands and Tenements, heretofore purchased, given or devised for the support of any particular ministry or mode of worship; and all Churches, Chapels and other Houses built for the Purpose of public Worship, shall be and remain forever to the Use and Occupancy of that religious Society, Church, Sect, Denomination, to or for which the said Glebes, Lands and Tenements were so purchased, given or devised, or the said Churches, Chapels, or other Houses of Public Worship were built.” *The Colonial Records of North Carolina: Published under the Supervision of the Trustees of the Public Libraries by Order of the General Assembly*, ed. William L. Saunders, 28 vols., vol. 23 (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1993-1994), 986-987. The significance of this act and the place of the Anglican chapel and lands as public property or denominational property, however, would continue to be a point of contest between residents until St. Paul’s was revived.

that Harmon was “disposed to liberallity both of *sentiment & expression*,” and thus Pettigrew
would have been less worried if such a policy would only allow Harmon to preach from the
pulpit. Allowing any Baptist minister to preach in St. Paul’s, however, was far more
disturbing. There was no telling what sorts of blasphemous doctrines such a policy would
encourage. Though Harmon seemed decent enough, allowing any Baptist to preach in St.
Paul’s would only invite preachers “who may be more *conceited & petulent*” in disposition.
Pettigrew feared that these “Anabaptist” itinerants would also enjoy the privilege of speaking
from St. Paul’s pulpit.  

When Episcopalians in Edenton attempted to claim St. Paul’s for Episcopal worship,
some itinerants believed that Episcopal leaders had overstepped their bounds. Amariah
Biggs, a Baptist itinerant in the region, noted the significance of the transition to settled
worship, and he accused Charles Pettigrew of creating houses of worship that were
detrimental to the interests of the majority of the people. The dispute between the two arose
from a disagreement over the sale of the Anglican Parish’s glebe lands. Pettigrew and former
vestrymen “wished the Monies arising from the sale of said Glebe to be applied to the
Purpose of Repairing & Building Chappels.”  

Biggs’s plan to use the proceeds to defray residents’ taxes reflected his belief that the glebe lands belonged to the community rather
than the Episcopal denomination. As a resident and member of the public, Biggs claimed to
only “want my Equal parte...arising from the sale of the Glebe Land.” Biggs was “fully

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80 Charles Pettigrew to Thomas Harman, 16 July 1792, *The Pettigrew Papers, 1685-1818*, vol 1, 2

81 Ibid., 249.
persuaded [Pettigrew and the trustees] wish to defraud the publick of the hole bag.”

What many community members had attempted to use as a place of worship for self-proclaimed adepts was becoming property directed by those Biggs asserted “put the yoke of Iron on the poor Ethiopians.”

82Ibid., 262.
CHAPTER 4
TAMING THE SPIRIT

By the 1810s, *The Edenton Gazette* extolled the virtues of Methodist meetings and an Academy led in part by the Episcopal minister.\(^{83}\) *The Gazette* praised ministers who preached a gospel of moderation—who did not encourage the passions of their followers but rather properly restrained both their own tongues and the tongues of their followers. A sermon anonymously published in *The Gazette* compared sermons to the rain. The author noted that the “stormy showers that fall with violence” only destroyed corn crops. Mild and mannered sermons, however, “fall easily upon the corn ripen and fill the ear.” Thus, the author concluded that “no oratory is so powerful as that of mildness.”\(^{84}\) Writers still portrayed women as weak willed and prone to corruption. *The Gazette* lamented that women were often “ushered into the world at an age when their minds are too little improved and too tender to withstand the allurements of gay society and temptation.”\(^{85}\) Properly trained, however, women could become proper help mates for their husbands. In “An Address to the Single Ladies” in 1813, the *Gazette* asserted that proper and refined ladies did not participate


\(^{85}\)“Female Education,” *The Edenton Gazette and North Carolina Advertiser*, November 25 1817.
in gay society. Proper women dressed neatly “without excess,” and they adopted “a prudent restraint of the tongue.” Schools directed by educated ministers and churches led by ministers who preached moderation were music in the ears of planters who had desired harmony within Chowan County’s discordant religious voices. Churches in the Edenton area adopted restrained language even as those who served as leaders became wealthier and fewer in number. Antebellum churches became much less of an environment in which congregants retained power to innovate their own gospels. Instead, congregants were expected to listen.

Slaveowners had expected their churches to represent their interests since the colonial period, and some historians have argued that nineteenth-century churches solidified yeomen support for slaveowners’ authority. As Christine Heyrman has shown, nonslaveowning white men gained authority when evangelical ministers adopted racist and sexist perspectives. Nonslaveowning whites saw themselves as racially superior to enslaved people, and nonslaveowning whites used sexist ideas in order to maintain their authority within their homes. Stephanie McCurry has noted that antebellum yeomen in lowcountry South Carolina appreciated evangelicals’ conservative messages of gender and age hierarchies that increased both slaveowners’ and nonslaveowners’ authority within their private households. The nature of a slave system, however, required more than social mores respecting white men’s power over their private households. The slaveowners’

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87Heyrman notes that many white men from diverse social backgrounds resisted the itinerant movement because they saw the movement as socially subversive. Since itinerants increased the authority of women and black people, “early evangelicals met with resistance from white southern colonials of every class.” Heyrman, 22.

88Stephanie McCurry notes that yeomen’s faith “was not an ‘egalitarian’ Christian worldview. Rather, yeomen—or, more precisely, the men among them—installed their own considerable prerogatives at the heart of post-Revolutionary evangelicalism, lending it a largely conservative and nascent proslavery shape that shored up their own claims to power and authority at home and abroad.” McCurry, 147.
dependent laborers often lived and worked within the community; yet slaves remained dependents within the households of their masters. Masters’ roles as fathers thus expanded beyond the private household into the broader community. As Eugene Genovese notes, the South’s slave labor economy prevented the creation of a bourgeois society in which a separation between the private household and the public sphere developed. Southern antebellum slaveowners framed themselves as paternalistic fathers of their communities. Drawing upon the record books of Edenton’s churches, autobiographies, and the taxable records for Edenton, this chapter will indicate that churches embodied antebellum slaveowners’ paternalistic, public identities.

When Methodists in Edenton began building a permanent church, many were a little surprised by who was willing to help. Even “under the unfavourable circumstances” Enoch Jones, a Methodist itinerant, encountered in Edenton, he was able to inspire local people to build a meeting house, and “contrary to the expectation of many” he was successful in establishing a permanent home for Methodists. James Norfleet descended from a line of lawyers who had worked in St. Paul’s during the colonial period. Norfleet’s grandfather, Abraham, had served the colonial Anglican Church as clerk for Farlees Chapel, and Abraham

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89 Indeed, Eugene Genovese argues that “southern paternalism grew out of slavery and that all paternalism rests on a master-servant relationship” and that “it is incompatible with bourgeois social relations.” Genovese, 661.

90 The Methodist Record book notes the longstanding existence of a Baptist society in Edenton, and indeed some local large slaveowners had been members of the Baptist society since 1775. In 1785 Joseph Creecy, a large slaveowner in the Edenton area, after ensuring the continued wealth of his children gave to the Baptist society “all the rest of the sd. Money to be dispos’d of by the Elders for the Benefit of the sd. Church.” Joseph Creecy, The Last Will and Testament of Joseph Creecy, 1785, C.R. 024.801.7, North Carolina State Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. Even as some slaveowners supported the ministry of men like Thomas Harmon, however, the open atmosphere of eighteenth-century worship allowed more confrontational ministers like Amariah Biggs to preach as well.
had served as a processioner for St. Paul’s.\footnote{In 1775, Abraham Norfleet is listed as being paid thirteen pounds for “serving as clerk to the Vestry, for Orders processing of the land, and for serving as clerk to Farlees Chapple for two years past.” St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Vestry Minutes of St. Paul’s Parish, Chowan County, North Carolina, 1701-1776, ed. Raymond Parker Fouts (Cocoa, FL: GenRec Books, 2983), 192.} James Norfleet’s father, Elisha, had opposed “unorthodox” ministers who desired to preach in St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, and both James and his father Elisha served as clerks for the county court.\footnote{James Norfleet is listed as the clerk of the county court on the will of John Baptist Beasley. John Baptist Beasley, The Last Will and Testament of John Baptist Beasley, 1790, C.R. 024.503.5, North Carolina State Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.} James Norfleet must have seemed like an unlikely candidate for conversion, and his conversion surprised local Methodists. People like James Norfleet were believed “not to be favourable to religion,” but Methodists were generally appreciative of Norfleet’s financial assistance.\footnote{Edenton Methodist Episcopal Church Record Book.} Though those who had been Methodists since the beginning of the nineteenth-century believed that it was unusual for lawyers to become Methodists, several lawyers and other professionals joined Edenton Methodist Episcopal Church in the nineteenth century. Indeed, of the 24 men who served as leaders in Edenton Methodist Episcopal Church between 1811 and 1830, at least 6 men were lawyers, clerks, or justices of the peace for Chowan County.\footnote{The names of the men who served as leaders are taken from the Edenton Methodist Episcopal’s record book. Ibid. North Carolina’s records of men appointed as justices of the peace was invaluable. Appointment of North Carolina’s Justices of the Peace, Ca. 1851, G.O. 149, North Carolina State Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. Elisha and James Norfleet’s service as clerks of the County of Chowan is taken from the estate records of the Norfleet family. “Norfleet Estate Records”, C.R. 024.801.16, North Carolina State Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. Thomas V. Hathaway is noted as a clerk in the Beasley estate records and Thomas V. Hathaway conducted the census of 1840. “Beasley Estate Records”, C.R. 024.503.5, North Carolina State Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. and "Census of 1840".} The other leaders in the Methodist church were ministers, artisans, or agriculturalists. Indeed, Methodists tended to be townspeople rather than rural farmers. Within the Methodist Church, 70.6 percent of members claimed a home in Edenton as his or her primary residence, 17.6 percent of members claimed a primary residence in Chowan County outside
of Edenton, and 11.8 percent claimed a primary residence in neighboring Perquimans County. Though Methodists converts between 1809 and 1831 were likely to list Edenton as their primary residence, many in town also owned people who worked as agricultural laborers or they worked as agricultural laborers themselves. For example, Henry Holmes was appointed justice of the peace for Chowan County, served as a stationed Methodist minister in Edenton, and owned 41 slaves. In 1820, 24 of Holmes’s slaves were listed as having been engaged in agriculture even though Holmes was recorded as a resident in Edenton. Indeed, Holmes’ household seems to have been fairly typical of Edentonians in 1820. Of Edentonian households listing occupations, 45.1 percent listed members of the household engaged in agriculture, 51.0 percent listed members engaged in manufacture, and 21.6 percent listed members engaged in commerce. 17.7 percent of households in Edenton listed members engaged in more than one form of employment. Though townspeople, many in Edenton retained strong ties to agriculture.95

In contrast to the members of the Methodist Church, members of the Baptist Churches in the region surrounding Edenton tended to live in rural Chowan and Perquimans counties. 4.5 percent of the members of Yeopim Baptist Church claimed a primary residence in Edenton, 40.4 percent claimed a primary residence in rural Chowan County, and 55.1 percent claimed a primary residence in neighboring Perquimans County.96

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95"Census of 1820", North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Baptist Church divided over a dispute between Frederick Luton and the minister Martin Ross. Many of the founding members of Yeopim left to form Bethel Baptist Church. In Bethel Baptist, 53.5 percent of the membership came from Perquimans County, 23.3 percent came from rural Chowan County, and 23.3 percent came from Edenton.\textsuperscript{97} As Bethel Baptist was located just inside the border of Perquimans County—and farther from Edenton than Yeopim Baptist—it seems a little odd that such a high percentage of the members of Bethel claimed Edenton as their primary residence. Prior to 1806, however, Yeopim Baptist Church was more of an association than a church. Its committee meetings regularly met at various chapels in the area, and its ministers rotated between several chapels in the region. All the Baptist meetings in the region, however, were united under the Yeopim association. It appears that most of the Baptists who lived in Edenton decided to join Bethel association rather than Yeopim association when the churches split in 1806, but they likely attended meetings in Edenton led by Bethel’s ministers. In the 1810s, both Bethel and Yeopim worked to build a Baptist chapel in Edenton. After the construction of a Baptist chapel in Edenton in 1817, it became common for members of Bethel who lived in Edenton to transfer their membership from Bethel Church to Edenton Church.\textsuperscript{98} As Baptist associations divided and Baptists built more chapels, Baptist religion became less of a traveling ministry. Baptists in Chowan County increasingly relied upon stationed ministers in established churches.

\textsuperscript{97}The names of the members of Bethel Baptist Church are drawn from Bethel Baptist’s record book. Bethel Baptist Church Record Book, Wake Forest University, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The residence of members in Edenton Town, Chowan County, or Perquimans County is taken from the censuses of 1800 through 1840. "Census of 1800". "Census of 1810". "Census of 1820". "Census of 1830". "Census of 1840".

\textsuperscript{98}Bethel Baptist Church Record Book.
As Baptists developed religious worship more reliant upon stationed rather than traveling ministers, Baptists changed their style of worship. Instead of ministers who claimed legitimacy from divine inspiration and the support of a gathered crowd, leaders within the Baptist churches accepted that ministers had a divine call to worship, but they also demanded that congregations should hold the authority to legitimate traveling ministers’ claims. Part of the constitution of the Yeopim Baptist Assembly in 1791 was about restricting who would be allowed to preach to Baptists in Chowan County. The original members of Yeopim Baptist agreed that those who served as preachers should have a direct experience of God, and they agreed that God would commission those whom God desired to preach. The founding members of the Yeopim, however, also ordered that prospective Baptist ministers seek the approval of Yeopim before they preached in Chowan County, and “if a majority of the members aprove of his Gift they shall give him Leave to preach any wheare he thinks propper.”

Yeopim’s restrictions on preaching cut both ways. Ministers could not receive a license to preach in the region without first consulting Yeopim, and Yeopim’s members could be disciplined for attending the meetings of unlicensed preachers. In 1800, a conference at Yeopim declared that they found one itinerant, John Assplund, guilty of sundry immoralities and “impudences” and they therefore denied “him the privilege of Preaching or communing With us untill satisfaction be Rendered.” It is not clear why Assplund was not allowed to preach, but Yeopim Baptist reserved the right to prevent its members from listening to sermons that leaders deemed inappropriate. In 1804, Yeopim’s conference threatened to excommunicate members who attended the unlicensed preaching of an itinerant.

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99 Yeopim Baptist Church Record Book Vol. 1 1791-1882, 15.
Those who went to hear his sermon were officially accused of “disorder,” and they were required to ask for forgiveness from the conference or suffer excommunication. While itinerant Baptists and Methodists in the 1780s and 1790s had denied the power of earthly authorities to restrict the preaching of those whom God had ordained, Yeopim wanted ministers to meet more human standards in addition to receiving divine ordination.

Even as church laity increasingly restricted the preaching of unlicensed ministers, white male congregants also restricted the ability of women to influence religious worship. In 1803, members agreed “that the sisters have a vote with the male members” in electing church leaders and representatives to assemblies. By 1807, however, the men of Yeopim changed their minds. They noted that “it hath been a custom of this church to call on the Female members for their attendance at Every Conference & for their vote,” but in 1807 the men decided that the unrestricted voting of female congregants should end. Instead, women retained a limited ability to vote for church leaders. The women were only allowed “to vote In certen cases when cald upon.” In the early nineteenth century, male members of Yeopim increasingly ensured that women did not receive an independent voice in deciding church policies.

Black people similarly saw what little authority that they could occasionally claim within early evangelical meetings decline. Several black people continued to worship in the same Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopal churches that white people attended. Some even gained licenses as preachers or exhorters. After defraying his case three times in 1808, the leaders of Bethel Baptist Church agreed to consider providing a free black man, George

100 Ibid., 43, 73.
101 Ibid., 66, 99-100.
Bonner, a license to preach if he could preach adequately before Bethel congregation. Though he did preach in front of Bethel congregation, it is not clear if he ever received a license. Bonner’s case does demonstrate the increasing demand of conferences to control the style and content of those who preached. Black exhorters could be forbidden from preaching if they failed to meet the standards of white led conferences. When members of Bethel Baptist considered giving Bonner a license to preach in 1808, they also asked their minister, Martin Ross, to write a letter condemning the ministry of another black itinerant preacher named Byrd. Though it is not clear why Byrd’s ministry seemed scandalous to members of Bethel, Bethel’s actions are indicative of the effects that white led conferences had upon black worship. Black men could be commissioned as exhorters, but they had to meet white standards of preaching.

Between 1804 and 1830, black people in Yeopim Baptist Church became an increasingly anonymous part of the congregation. Before 1804, enslaved people could join Yeopim after they related their experience of grace to the congregation and they received baptism. After 1804, however, enslaved people seeking membership in Yeopim Baptist Church were required to relate their experience of grace, to receive baptism, and to submit a letter of permission from their owners. After 1818, Yeopim’s clerks did not even bother to record the names of the black people who joined the church. Between 1818 and 1830 only two black people were recorded as having joined Yeopim Baptist Church. The first woman was recorded in 1818 as “a black woman,” and the second woman who joined in 1828 was listed as a “Black woman belonging to Robert Creecy.” Both women remained anonymous, though Yeopim’s clerks continued to list the names white women and men who

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102 Ibid., 166, 188.
joined Yeopim Baptist. Though black people were increasingly anonymous within Yeopim Baptist Church, their increasing anonymity did not prevent disciplinary committees from expelling black people who failed to meet the expectations of white leaders.

Yeopim’s disciplinary committees in the nineteenth century ensured the integrity of slaveowners’ control over their enslaved laborers. A committee at Yeopim looked into the charge that sister Hinds had been “Trading With Negroes Unlawfully.” After an investigation, the committee reported that in fact she had been meeting and exchanging goods with slaves. The representatives of the church therefore “Excommunicated by the committee in the behalf of the whole church.”103 Neither were congregants who formed disciplinary committees supportive of slaves who ran away from their masters. When masters complained that their slaves—and fellow members of Yeopim Baptist—ran away, Yeopim’s disciplinary committees responded by expelling the accused. In 1814, Lemuel Haughton complained “against Lembruck (his servant) for running away without any just cause.” After an investigation the disciplinary committee excommunicated him.104 While some ministers in the eighteenth century had supported slaves’ independence from their masters, nineteenth-century Baptist and Methodist churches in the Edenton area tended to support masters’ control over their enslaved property.

Even as the position of women and black people declined within Baptist churches around Edenton, the number of slaves owned by church leaders increased. The men who became vestrymen and trustees of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church after its reformation in 1811 tended to be wealthier than either Baptist or Methodist leaders. On average, St. Paul’s

103Ibid., 40, 42.

104Another slave was excommunicated in 1817 for running away. Ibid., 142, 168.
leaders owned 40.7 slaves. The leaders of the Baptist and Methodist churches—white men who served as moderators, representatives at conferences, members of disciplinary committees, members of committees to locate new ministers, secretaries, trustees, elder deacons, or class leaders—averaged less than half that, but average slave ownership among Methodist and Baptist leaders was still well above the average of 5.4 slaves owned by heads of households for Chowan County between 1800 and 1840. In fact, the disparities between average slave ownership among church leaders and average slave ownership within the general population of Chowan County tended to increase over time (Figure 1). When Bethel Baptist and Yeopim Baptist Churches split in 1806, many of the largest slaveowners in the church left Yeopim to form Bethel Baptist Church. In the first year of monthly meetings, the average number of slaves owned by church leaders in Bethel was 27.3. As many of Yeopim’s large slaveowners left to join Bethel Baptist in 1806, the average number of slaves owned among Yeopim Baptist’s leaders approximated the average number of slaves owned by heads of household for Chowan County. By the beginning of the 1810s, however, the wealth of Yeopim’s leaders increased. The number of slaves owned by leaders of Yeopim Baptist and Edenton Methodist Episcopal are included in Figure 1. Unfortunately, a large gap in St. Paul’s records between its reorganization in 1811 and the late 1820s inhibits the usefulness of its records. Similarly, the records for Bethel Baptist Church also have large gaps in the 1820s, and its clerks often failed to give the names of those who served on committees of discipline.


\[106\] Bethel Baptist Church Record Book.
Even as the wealth of leaders within Yeopim Baptist Church increased, the number of white men who helped to lead the church decreased. Baptist committee meetings and conferences in the early nineteenth century typically included more than half of the white male membership. Gradually in the early nineteenth century, however, the number of white men who assisted in creating church policies tended to decline (figure 2). In the early nineteenth century, as many as twenty white men assisted the church by serving as committeemen, leading meetings as moderators, representing Yeopim at regional conferences, or visiting church members who had violated church rules. By the beginning of the 1820s, no more than seven white men ever served in leadership positions within the

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107 The names of Chowan County’s church leaders are drawn from the remaining records for Edenton Methodist Episcopal Church and Yeopim Baptist Church. Edenton Methodist Episcopal Church Record Book, and Yeopim Baptist Church Record Book Vol. 1 1791-1882. The number of slaves owned by these leaders and the averages for the county are taken from the censuses for 1790, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830, and 1840. "Census of 1790". "Census of 1800". "Census of 1810". "Census of 1820". "Census of 1830". "Census of 1840".
church. Even as the average wealth of Yeopim’s leaders increased in the 1810s, the number of white men who represented the church tended to decline.

![The Number of White Men Who Served as Leaders in Yeopim Baptist Church per Year](image)

**Figure 2. Number of White Men Who Served as Leaders of Yeopim Baptist Association**

As leaders in Yeopim Baptist Church and Edenton Methodist Episcopal became more likely to own more slaves, disparities between large and small slaveholders increased within Chowan County. While the number of heads of household who owned 9 slaves or more tended to increase slightly between 1790 and 1830, the number of heads of household who owned no slaves also increased, and the number of heads of household who owned between 1

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108 The names of church leaders are drawn from the Yeopim Association’s Record Book between 1800 and 1830. Yeopim Baptist Church Record Book Vol. 1 1791-1882. Before 1800, the association was still being organized and the number of leaders varied widely between 1791 and 1800. Yeopim’s church records are unique for the Chowan County region. The records begin in 1791 and extend through the nineteenth-century. Bethel Baptist Association’s records do not begin until it divided from Yeopim in 1806 and the records trail off in the 1820s. Similarly, the Edenton Methodist Church’s records do not begin until 1811, and the number of men who held leadership positions remained consistent over time.
and 8 slaves tended to decrease. Heads of households in Chowan County tended to either became large slaveholders or nonslaveholders. Between 1830 and 1840, the percentage of households owning no slaves increased slightly while the percentage of households owning between 1 and 8 slaves increased for the first time since 1790, and the percentage of heads of households owning 9 or more slaves decreased. In 1790, 13 percent of heads of households owned 9 or more slaves, 43.4 percent of heads of households owned between 1 and 8 slaves, and 43.6 percent of heads of households owned no slaves. By 1840, 15.8 percent of heads of households owned 9 or more slaves, 33.5 percent of heads of households owned between 1 and 8 slaves, and 50.7 percent of heads of households owned no slaves. Even as fewer heads of households owned slaves, the proportion of heads of households to slaves remained virtually the same. Of a total population consisting of heads of households and slaves, slaves represented 82.2 percent of the population in 1790, 80.6 percent of the population in 1800, 85.2 percent of the population in 1810, 84.1 percent of the population in 1820, 85.9 percent of the population in 1830, and 85.5 percent of the population in 1840.
Evangelical churches were taking on the character and values of the 8 to 10 percent of the population who owned 9 or more slaves. In the early nineteenth century, the status of women and black people within evangelical fellowship declined, and disciplinary committees assisted masters in controlling their bound laborers. The leaders of the Methodist and Baptist Churches tended to become larger slaveowners and the leaders in Yeopim Baptist became fewer in number. These changes occurred even as disparities in slaveowning between heads of households in Chowan County increased. Evangelical churches were becoming different from what they had been in the eighteenth century. The leaders who determined who

109 The Figures for the graph above are drawn from the census records for Chowan County between 1790 and 1840. "Census of 1790". "Census of 1800". "Census of 1810". "Census of 1820". "Census of 1830". "Census of 1840".
preached from newly constructed and revitalized pulpits came from a class of people who held interests increasingly different from the majority of the population. As a result, evangelical churches adopted some of the refined airs of their Episcopal predecessors.

Evangelical ministers were expected to behave and speak according to refined tastes. Some evangelical ministers, rather than speaking out against slavery, owned large numbers of slaves. Indeed, some historians have noted that evangelical ministers aspired to gentility and refinement. As E. Brooks Holifield found for Southern Episcopal, Methodist, and Baptist ministers, congregants in towns and cities throughout the South demanded that ministers act and preach as refined gentlemen. Nowhere did the genteel aspirations of Southern town preachers express itself more than in the genre of biographies written by town preachers. John Prichard, a Baptist minister in Wilmington, North Carolina, respected slaveowners’ refined lifestyle. In one day’s entry, Prichard reflected upon the grace and beauty exhibited by Southern wealth as he strolled through a particularly beautiful village. After having enjoyed tea with one of the town’s refined residents, Pritchard enjoyed everything in the village that had “the appearance of wealth, refinement and taste.” Leaders within the region expected their ministers to speak like slaveowners, and they were unwilling to accept ministers who spoke sermons condemning the economic system upon which they depended.

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110 Indeed, Martin Ross, minister of Bethel Baptist Church from 1806 to 1827, owned 35 slaves. "Census of 1810".


112 Hufham, 34.
In antebellum Edenton, Jacobs observed that there were a few ministers who encouraged slaves’ independence from their masters. These ministers, however, were “hated...and would be driven” from the pulpit “or dragged to prison to die, as others have been before them.” Though not imprisoned or murdered, St. Paul’s vestrymen drove the Reverend William Cairnes from the pulpit because his preaching failed to meet their standards of refinement. In January of 1836, St. Paul’s board of trustees met, and they unanimously elected the Reverend William Cairnes to become their minister. Cairnes’s sermons, however, failed to meet the board’s expectations. Cairnes was too supportive of slaves’ religious beliefs and complaints against their masters. Harriet Jacobs remembered that this “was strange doctrine from a southern pulpit” and it was “very offensive to slaveholders.” Indeed, Cairnes had apparently convinced Mary Bissell to leave all seven of her slaves to the American Colonization Society before she died in 1836, and members of St. Paul’s held Cairnes responsible for Bissell’s actions. These slaveowners—adopting critical language similar to their grandparents’ criticisms of eighteenth-century itinerants—asserted that Cairnes “preached like a fool to the negroes.” The vestrymen demanded his removal, and Cairnes left shortly thereafter. Slaveowners who led churches in and around Edenton ensured that ministers’ spoke a doctrine appealing to slaveowners.

113 Jacobs, 73.

114 March 5, 1836. St. Paul's Church, Josiah Collins Chapel Vestry Minutes, 1811-1949, Vol. 2, 3, 4 Somerset Register, Slave, 1836-1865.


116 The parish records for St. Paul’s agree with Harriet Jacob’s chronology and the dates of William Cairnes’s service even if the church records do not clearly indicate that Cairnes left because of his unpopular views on slaves. “Whereas the Board of Vestry having understood that the Rev. William D. Caines has been appointed by the Missionary Society to officiate in the town of Hertford, be it therefore. Resolved, that we do hereby respectfully invite the said Rev. Th. Cainnes to devote as much of his time as he can among us.” January
Certainly not all of the residents in and around Edenton accepted increasing power of larger slaveowners over religious affairs; yet the refinement of Chowan County’s evangelical churches made independent worship among black residents more difficult. Many black residents did not accept slaveowners’ religious authority, and they built their own chapel on the outskirts of Edenton. Four free black men—two had been born free and two had been emancipated—purchased one town lot on the outskirts of town and allowed black Christians to build a separate church and graveyard upon the land.117 Black congregants maintained Providence, the name of the church that they built, and they worshipped under the direction of a black minister. When news of Nat Turner’s Rebellion reached Edenton in 1831, however, anxious planters roused the countryside for support. Together with their slaveowning neighbors, poorer whites captured the black minister in whose home the patrol had found a few bullets, and for this, according to Harriet Jacobs, “they were going to shoot him on Court House Green.” White slaveholders and nonslaveholders also tore down Providence. Jacobs recalled that the congregation “begged the privilege of again meeting at their little church in the woods,” but their “requests were denied.” Instead planters “permitted” slaves and free black people who had attended services in Providence to “attend the white churches, a certain portion of the galleries being appropriated to their use.”118 The destruction of the independent black congregation was both an indication and a symptom of slaveowners’ public identities. Even as slaveowners retained control of worship in Edenton’s 26, 1836. Cairnes turned in his letter of resignation on March 14, 1836. St. Paul's Church, Josiah Collins Chapel Vestry Minutes, 1811-1949, Vol. 2, 3, 4 Somerset Register, Slave, 1836-1865.

117The founders included Alfred Churton, a cabinetmaker; Thomas Barnswell, a tailor; Jeffrey G. Iredell, a barber; and George Bonner, a carpenter. The name of the black Christians’ church in Edenton was Providence. Yellin, 19.

118Jacobs, 66-67.
Episcopal Church and increased their authority within Baptist and Methodist churches they
denied slaves in and around Edenton the freedom to enjoy independent religious fellowship.

Though many women, poorer whites and enslaved people attended Chowan County’s
antebellum churches, the religious landscape increasingly indicated the hegemony of white
slaveowners. The debate over St. Paul’s graveyard in 1829 demonstrates the extent to which
slaveowners’ had become representatives of Chowan County’s religious interests. An
anonymous editorialist complained that St. Paul’s Church grounds were “originally granted
to St. Paul’s Parish, not St. Paul’s Church.” If St. Paul’s was property belonging to the entire
community rather than the Episcopal denomination, however, the author wanted to know “by
what right these trustees...exercise exclusive direction over this spot.”119 The opportunity to
make Chowan County’s religious meetings places where people discussed and debated
religious issues as private and equal residents, however, had largely come to a close. Instead,
slaveowners represented the interests of Edenton’s congregations, and slaveowners made
sure that churches felt a bit more like home.

119“Communication. Mr. Editor:--,” The Edenton Gazette and North Carolina Advertiser, February 10
1829.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Slaveowners had resisted Anglican efforts to preach to their slaves during the colonial period, and evangelical itinerants seemed even more dangerous in the late eighteenth century. By the 1830s, however, evangelical as well as Episcopal churches reflected the interests of slaveowners who lived in and around Edenton. During the colonial period, many locals had confronted hierarchically minded parsons who had much in common with vestrymen but disagreed over whether slaves could be Anglicans and over proper social conduct. Due to their disagreements with parsons in the colonial period, locals showed little enthusiasm for Episcopal worship after disestablishment. A religiously based itinerant movement took advantage of this environment of decentralized authority, and some itinerants provided meeting places in which residents enjoyed relatively equal authority in restructuring belief systems in order to satisfy the diverse desires of worshippers. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the religious environment of Chowan County was one in which women found that their ability to influence decisions within churches declined while slaves became increasingly anonymous members. At the same time, the leadership of local churches became more likely to be wealthier even as disparities in wealth increased. Edenton’s antebellum slaveowners succeeded in making their churches more representative of slaveowners’ interests than their grandparents had made the colonial established church.
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