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THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF JOHN BACHMAN: FROM NEW YORK YANKEE TO SOUTH CAROLINA SECESSIONIST

Peter McCandless*

ON THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 20, 1860, DELEGATES TO THE South Carolina Secession Convention and about three thousand spectators crammed Institute Hall in Charleston to sign the Ordinance of Secession. An elderly Lutheran clergyman delivered the opening prayer, an odd choice perhaps in a state in which Lutherans were a small minority, numbering only five thousand communicants in 1860. He bowed his head, raised his hands, and beseeched God's blessing on a cause he declared was forced on a reluctant people by "fanaticism, injustice, and oppression." He appealed to God for peace; for victory, if war came; and for "prosperity to our Southern land."¹

The clergyman, John Bachman, is perhaps best known today for his work as a naturalist, notably his collaboration with John James Audubon on *The Quadrupeds of North America* (1849–1854). He was also a leading figure of the Lutheran church in South Carolina and the South. Bachman's work as a naturalist has been richly examined by Lester Stephens and Jay Shuler. His clerical career is the subject of a dissertation by Raymond Bost.² All three discuss—Stephens most extensively—Bachman's defense of slavery and his decision in 1860 to support secession. But in none of the works is his political outlook and evolution the main focus. Claude Henry Neuffer, who wrote an admiring biography of Bachman, called the convention's choice of Bachman to give the prayer "a genuine tribute to an esteemed citizen and a high compliment to his unquestioned loyalty to

* Peter McCandless is Distinguished Professor of History at the College of Charleston.

¹ *The Christopher Hoppoldt Journal, His European Tour with the Rev. John Bachman (June-December, 1838)*, edited with preface and biographies by Claude Henry Neuffer (Charleston, S.C.: Charleston Museum, 1960), 102; *Journal of the Convention of the People of South Carolina, Held in 1860-61* (Charleston, 1861), 48; *A History of the Lutheran Church in South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, 1971), 259.

² See Jay Shuler, *Had I the Wings: The Friendship of Bachman and Audubon* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Lester D. Stephens, *Science, Race, and Religion in the American South: John Bachman and the Charleston Circle of Naturalists, 1815-1895* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Raymond M. Bost, "The Reverend John Bachman and the Development of Southern Lutheranism" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1963). See also the extensive biography of Bachman by Claude Henry Neuffer in *Hoppoldt Journal*.

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South Carolina."³ It was indeed quite an honor for a man born in a village in the Hudson Valley of New York in 1790, who did not come to South Carolina until he was twenty-five years old.

As a transplanted northern clergyman who defended slavery and supported secession, Bachman was hardly unique. Moreover, most of his educated southern clerical colleagues, whatever their origins, did the same, especially in the Deep South.⁴ Yet the question inevitably arises, by what process did Yankee-born Bachman become a prominent supporter of southern secession? Bachman, like most people, held multiple loyalties, to his family, community, church, state, region, and nation. These loyalties can coexist harmoniously, but if they come into conflict, which will prevail depends on a variety of circumstances and calculations.⁵ Jay Shuler argues that Bachman was forced to support secession in 1860: "Committed to the Union and loyal to the South and the institution of slavery, Bachman faced an excruciating choice: should he support the southern states—or the Union? There was never really any question which choice Bachman must finally make. . . . After the election of Abraham Lincoln, in 1860, with secession a foregone conclusion, Bachman was at last forced to choose the South."⁶

Was Bachman *forced* to choose secession in 1860? What does "forced" mean in this context? To say he was forced somehow robs him of human agency and responsibility, and it implies coercion and intimidation. The evidence does not support the conclusion that Bachman was forced in that sense. Yet Shuler was right in part. Bachman's choice of secession was not forced upon him in 1860, but it was predictable. Bachman's road to secession was paved with the bricks of earlier choices he had made: to make South Carolina his home and to accept and defend its institutions and outlook.

³ *Happoldt Journal*, 102.

⁴ Other northern clergymen who became proslavery leaders included Moses Ashley Curtis, Elisha Mitchell, and Thomas Smyth. See Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 64-67; Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 128-31, 158. On the southern clergy's advocacy of slavery and secession, see Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); James O. Farmer, Jr., *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1986); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁵ On the issue of loyalties in relation to secession and Unionism, see Thomas G. Dyer, *Secret Yankees: The Union Circle in Confederate Atlanta* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

⁶ Shuler, *Had I the Wings*. See also Stephens, *Science*, 217.

After he moved to Charleston in 1815, Bachman quickly became assimilated to the city and state. Before long he began to refer to the local inhabitants as "my people." By the late 1830s, he was publicly defending them against abolitionist attacks. By the early 1850s, he was declaring that if his people chose to leave the Union, he would go with them.

Then who, exactly, was choosing his secession in 1860, Bachman or his people? Was he a leader or a follower? It is not easy to decide. His political views in 1860 were in large part the product of decades of living in a milieu in which support of slavery was essential to anyone who laid claim to leadership and active opposition could compromise one's physical and economic well being. They were shared by most of his neighbors and clerical peers. But Bachman was not a coward, nor was he an intellectual lightweight who would automatically follow others. He was a strong and intelligent personality, not easily swayed by popular prejudices or arguments not based on empirical evidence. Nor was he afraid of controversy, as his spirited defense of the unity of the human race and his fiery denunciation in 1843 of P. T. Barnum's fraudulent "Feejee Mermaid" showed.⁷

Bachman's self-proclaimed motto as a naturalist was "Nature, Truth, and No Humbug," and he normally observed it in his scientific writings. In one of his essays, he humorously proclaimed his devotion to logical argument based on sound evidence: "In regard to personal attacks, we are preparing to discipline our feelings in unison with those of an old clergyman, of whom we have somewhere read an account. [He was reasoning with a young man who] . . . lost his temper, and for lack of argument spat in his face. . . . The old man coolly wiped his face [and remarked], 'Young man that was a digression—now for the argument.'"⁸

Bachman's claim that disciplining one's feelings was essential to effective argument was surely sincere. As a naturalist, Bachman held firm to his insistence on calm, logical arguments supported by empirical evidence. When his writings engaged issues of religion, politics, social institutions, race, and slavery, however, he sometimes abandoned his usual high standards of proof and adopted arguments weak in logic and evidence. At times he resembled the young man in his story, using increasingly intemperate and even scurrilous language to describe the motives and reasoning of his opponents. Bachman strongly defended the individual's right to freedom of thought and expression. Freedom of inquiry, he once said, was liable to

⁷ On the mermaid controversy, see Lester D. Stephens, "The Mermaid Hoax: Indications of Scientific Thought of Charleston, South Carolina, in the 1840s," *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (1983): 44-45; Kenneth S. Greenberg, "The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South," *American Historical Review* 95 (1990): 57-74.

⁸ John Bachman, *Continuation of the Review of "Nott's and Gliddon's Types of Mankind"* (Charleston, 1855).

abuse, but was far less dangerous than its opposite: "the slavery of the human mind."⁹ But he also defended a social order that effectively prohibited free discussion of slavery. If he saw the inconsistency, he never acknowledged it.

Bachman's defenses of slavery and sectionalism probably had several motivations. His economic self-interest as a slaveholder cannot be overlooked, but this was probably of minor importance, as he only held a few household slaves. He may have felt pressure to support slavery and secession as a clergyman. Especially after the upsurge of immediate abolitionism among northern clergy in the 1830s, many slaveholders suspected the clergy of harboring secret antislavery impulses. Mitchell Snay argues that the southern clergy had no choice but to defend slavery once abolitionists attacked it on religious grounds: "The assumed complicity of religion with abolitionism forced Southern clergymen to disavow any connection with the movement."¹⁰ Bachman did exactly that, but whether he felt pressured to do so or acted solely out of conviction is unclear. What one can say is that Bachman, like many southern clergymen, seemed genuinely outraged by abolitionist claims that slavery was a sin and anti-Christian. This was not only an attack on his state and region, but on the morality of those, like himself and his family and friends, who owned slaves.

In championing the southern cause, Bachman may also have been influenced by the history of his church. Much like the Confederacy, the Lutheran church originated in a local rebellion against the encroachments of central authorities. The princes who supported Martin Luther alleged that their rights were threatened by high-handed imperial and papal interference in their local affairs. The Peace of Augsburg of 1555, the religious settlement between Catholics and Protestants in the Holy Roman Empire, was based on the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose region, his religion). It allowed the prince of each state to determine the religion of his people.¹¹ Bachman was a fervent defender of the Lutheran Revolt and may have seen parallels in the South's struggle for states' rights. In 1848 he suggested that the liberal revolutions then occurring in Europe were inspired in part by the example of Luther and his supporters:

Is not the mind insensibly led to inquire how far these exhibitions of moral courage, in the investigations and declarations of religious truth, may not

⁹ John Bachman, *The Design and Duties of the Christian Ministry* (Baltimore, 1848), 22.

¹⁰ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 34-37; Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy*, 215.

¹¹ Patrick Collins, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2004); Lewis W. Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation, 1557-1559* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); Rolan H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

have contributed to give an impulse to that spirit of free inquiry into the theory of government which is now convulsing the continent of Europe, . . . breaking asunder . . . the long chains of despotism, and asserting in the face of heaven the right of nations to self-government?¹²

Bachman's personal circumstances, social milieu, profession, and intellectual outlook all made his support for slavery and secession highly likely. It is safe to assume that had Bachman decided to remain in New York in 1815, his opinions and actions in 1860 would have been different—if he had lived that long.

CHOOSING SOUTH CAROLINA

Of course, there was an element of historical contingency in Bachman's decision to move to South Carolina in the first place. He would probably not have gone there had he not been suffering from tuberculosis. A warm climate and sea air were common prescriptions for consumption, as the disease was then commonly known, and Charleston promised both, as well as the opportunity to share in the intellectual life of one of America's most cultured cities. The prospect of having only one church to serve (instead of three as in New York) also must have been alluring.¹³ Bachman was assured a warm personal welcome in Charleston, as well, and not just because of the city's legendary hospitality. St. John's Lutheran Church had been without a pastor for several years, and its congregation was extremely eager to fill the vacant pulpit.¹⁴ The vestry's concern for their new pastor's well being was evident from the first. They advised him to come in December, the "most favorable season for a journey to Charleston." This was a euphemistic way of saying that the fever season would have subsided by then, and he would have six or seven months to become "seasoned" to the climate before the risk from yellow fever or malaria returned.¹⁵ After his arrival, the president of the congregation took him to his house and treated him "as an honored guest."¹⁶ The young clergyman bonded quickly to his congregation and

¹² John Bachman, *A Sermon on the Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Charleston, 1837), 17-22. See also Bachman, *A Defense of Luther and the Protestant Reformation against the Charges of John Bellinger, M.D. and Others* (Charleston, 1853); Bachman, *Design and Duties*.

¹³ Philip M. Mayer to B. A. Markley, Sept. 30, 1814, St. John's Lutheran Church Files, Charleston, S.C. (hereinafter cited as SJLC), typescript in Shuler Collection; Catherine Bachman, *John Bachman* (Charleston, 1888), 20-27.

¹⁴ Bachman, *John Bachman*, 26; Philip Mayer to Vestry, Sept. 30, 1814, SJLC, typescript in Shuler Collection; Shuler, *Had I the Wings*, 34-35; Stephens, *Science*, 6.

¹⁵ Vestry and Wardens to John Bachman, Oct. 14, 1814, SJLC, typescript in Shuler Collection.

¹⁶ Bachman, *John Bachman*, 27.

Charleston's small, but growing, German community. He was almost immediately involved in planning a new church building for St. John's, which was opened in 1818. Shortly after he arrived in Charleston, the German Friendly Society asked him to deliver the sermon at its annual anniversary meeting and then invited him to join. He became a member in April 1815 and was soon a recognized leader of the local German community.¹⁷

When a yellow fever epidemic broke out during Bachman's first summer in Charleston, the vestry urged him to leave until the danger passed. As a newcomer, he was highly vulnerable to the virulent disease locals called "Stranger's Fever." Bachman initially refused to leave and insisted on caring for the victims. But during the summer, he received a letter stating that his father was seriously ill, and he left for New York. While at home, his old New York congregations pleaded with him to return to them, but he declined. He assured a worried leader of St. John's that "though my native spot is dear to me, yet nothing would induce me to remain." Charleston, he declared, was now his home "and unless its inhabitants treat me with greater neglect than they have heretofore done, they will have to keep me for life." Soon he cemented another bond to the community. A few months after his return from New York, in January 1816, he married Harriet Martin, the granddaughter of a previous pastor of St. John's, with whom he had fourteen children. Two years after Harriet's death in 1846, he married her sister Maria.¹⁸ Bachman's warm reception in Charleston was followed by continuing good relations with his congregation and vestry. In a sermon preached in 1858, he declared that the vestry had always "anticipated my every wish and want. I have spent a long life of anxious labor and of pleasant duty among you . . . and so may it be until this connection is severed by the hand of death."¹⁹

Although Bachman lived a long life (1790–1874), he was all too familiar with death. During his sixty years in Charleston, yellow fever was a regular visitor, cholera epidemics struck several times, and malaria was both endemic in the surrounding lowcountry and occasionally epidemic in the city. Bachman suffered from various life-threatening ailments, including

¹⁷ *Lutheran Church in South Carolina*, 164-65; Michael E. Bell, "'Hurrah fur dies Susse, dies Sonnige Leben': The Anomaly of Charleston, South Carolina's Antebellum German-America" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1996), 48-49; George J. Gongaware, *The History of the German Friendly Society of Charleston, South Carolina, 1766-1916* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1935), 75-77, 90-92, 97-99, 160-61, 173-75.

¹⁸ Bachman, *John Bachman*, 31-36 (quotation on pp. 34-35); Stephens, *Science*, 36, 56, 217.

¹⁹ John Bachman, *A Discourse Delivered on the Forty-Third Anniversary of his Ministry in Charleston* (Charleston, 1858), 12.

recurrent tuberculosis, cholera, malaria, and perhaps yellow fever.²⁰ His family was devastated by disease. Five of his fourteen children died in infancy. Three of his daughters died from tuberculosis in their twenties, possibly contracted from their father. Both of his wives, the sisters Harriet and Maria Martin, also died of tuberculosis.²¹

Bachman's sufferings and family losses must have been mitigated to some extent by the solicitousness his congregation and friends showed for him and his family. When he became dangerously ill on a visit to New York in the summer of 1827, his Charleston friends were intensely anxious about his condition. His student and temporary replacement, John G. Schwartz, wrote him on his recovery: "To every member of your congregation your illness has been an affliction, and your recovery a blessing. I think I could die easy and happy, if I had such a congregation weeping for me, and praying for my welfare."²² In 1838 his health had deteriorated to the point that his doctors urged him to take a long sea voyage and rest, a common prescription for consumption. The vestry willingly granted him six months' leave to travel to Europe. On his return, his health was improved, but clearly not restored. The vestry appointed an assistant pastor to aid him and urged him to take a leave during the summer of 1839.²³ There is little reason to doubt that Bachman felt a compelling sense of loyalty to people who had given him such proofs of their devotion. In turn, he worked hard to earn and retain their esteem.

Bachman's periodic health crises were probably related to his strenuous work ethic and stern sense of duty to his congregation and his community. Frequent epidemics of yellow fever and cholera, added to endemic malaria, ensured that Bachman was kept busy ministering to the sick. Nor was he content merely to serve as a parish clergyman. In addition to his renowned work as a naturalist, he was a leading figure in organizing and advancing the Lutheran church in South Carolina and the South. He played a key role in the development and work of the South Carolina Synod, of which he served as president from 1824 to 1834 and during several other years. He also helped to establish and oversee the state's Lutheran Seminary in Lexington, opened in 1831.²⁴

Bachman's argument for a local seminary illustrates the extent to which he had assimilated to the southern environment and outlook by the late

²⁰ Bachman, *Discourse*, 12; Bachman, *John Bachman*, 31-35, 62-64, 139-42, 161-65, 177, 200, 353.

²¹ Stephens, *Science*, 14; Shuler, *Had I the Wings*, 40.

²² Bachman, *John Bachman*, 62, 64 (quotation is on p. 64).

²³ Stephens, *Science*, 32-33; Bost, "John Bachman," 355-56; Bachman, *John Bachman*, 162-66, 177.

²⁴ Bachman, *John Bachman*, 31-32, 41-43, 161, 200-01; *Lutheran Church in South Carolina*, 163-75.

1820s. He told the South Carolina Synod meeting in 1829 that the differences between the sections necessitated training local men for the ministry: "From the nature of our climate and domestic institutions, it is not probable that missionary aid can be obtained from our northern Synods."²⁵ In a discussion of the creation of the seminary some thirty years later, he recalled that Lutherans in the South could not rely on "emigrants from abroad" to build up the church.²⁶ What did Bachman mean by "the nature of our climate and domestic institutions?" Why were there not more "emigrants from abroad?" Harriet Bachman neatly summed up the reasons in a letter to her husband in 1827, when she lamented the "the two evils which our unfortunate country is doomed to have, the yellow fever and the Negroes."²⁷ In effect, Bachman predicted that few European or northern-trained ministers would be attracted to South Carolina because of its unhealthy reputation and its slave majority. These things had not deterred Bachman from coming to the state in 1815. But in 1829, he claimed that they would deter others. This may have been partly because yellow fever epidemics had become more frequent and violent in the interim. But something else had changed, too. Anti-slavery sentiment was growing in the North. Bachman's sensitivity to this change is evident in his argument for a seminary, as well as his defense of slavery.

CHOOSING SLAVERY

Despite his northern origins, Bachman does not seem to have ever questioned slavery, at least publicly. In part, this may have been because it was part of his world from birth. His father, a prosperous farmer, owned several slaves. Slavery was still legal in New York when he left for South Carolina in 1814, and he took one of the family slaves, Lydia, with him.²⁸ In addition to Lydia, Bachman acquired several slaves through his marriage to Harriet Martin.²⁹ Perhaps Bachman was shocked by the plantation labor system and the sheer number of slaves he found in the Carolina lowcountry, but he never said so. Probably he already sincerely believed that slavery was part of the natural order, as he would later argue. One can only speculate about whether he would have continued to think this way had he stayed in New York.

As a slaveholding southern clergyman, it was inevitable that Bachman would have to confront slavery as a moral and ultimately a political issue

²⁵ *Happoldt Journal*, 15-16.

²⁶ Bachman, *Discourse*, 9.

²⁷ Harriet Bachman to John Bachman, Aug. 8, 1827, Bachman Papers, Charleston Museum, cited in Bost, "John Bachman," 379.

²⁸ Bachman, *John Bachman*, 10, 17, 26, 356.

²⁹ Shuler, *Had I the Wings*, 40; Stephens, *Science*, 15.

once the abolitionist movement began to gain momentum. The debate over slavery divided Lutherans, as it divided other Protestant churches, and Bachman found himself involved in dispute with his northern Lutheran colleagues.³⁰ He stood with the vast majority of southern clergymen, Lutheran and non-Lutheran, in choosing to defend slavery.³¹ Clerical condemnations of slavery were rare in the antebellum South, especially after the rise of immediate abolitionism in the 1830s, and they were virtually non-existent in South Carolina. One reason is that in South Carolina blacks were a majority of the population, and in some lowcountry parishes, more than 80 percent of the inhabitants were black. Slavery was not only the main source of labor on the rice and cotton plantations, most whites considered it essential to the social order. Abolition, most Carolinians agreed, would lead to black domination, massacre, pillage, and rape, a view given credence in their eyes by the alleged Denmark Vesey conspiracy in 1822 and Nat Turner's rebellion in 1830.³²

This outlook helps explain the rather hysterical reaction of Carolinians when abolitionists decided to take their campaign into the heart of the South in 1835. On July 29, a large shipment of abolitionist pamphlets arrived at the Charleston post office, many addressed to clergymen. The white elite reacted furiously. With the approval of the city's postmaster, they prevented the delivery of the offending pamphlets, and then burned them. For good measure, the state legislature made teaching blacks to read and write a crime.³³ The South Carolina Lutheran Synod, in which Bachman had great influence, also reacted strongly against the abolitionist "invasion." At its 1835 meeting, the synod approved a series of resolutions against abolition. The first declared abolitionists "enemies of our beloved country." The second prohibited correspondence with abolitionists and the possession of abolitionist publications. The third urged the pastors "never to countenance such doctrines."³⁴ In effect, the Lutheran clergy had voted to declare abolition treason. They also had agreed to censor themselves and restrict their freedom of inquiry and opinion. The synod's action was not unusual. All over South Carolina and the South, religious organizations passed similar resolutions. Mitchell Snay refers to this reaction as "the first step toward

³⁰ Bost, "John Bachman," Summary and 380.

³¹ Douglas C. Stange, "Our Duty to Preach the Gospel to the Negroes: Southern Lutherans and American Negroes," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 42 (1969): 176.

³² Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 70-73.

³³ Walter J. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 212-13; George Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 163; Bost, "John Bachman," 404-05; Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 19-20.

³⁴ Stange, "Our Duty to Preach," 177.

secession" for many clergymen. It may have been for John Bachman, as well.³⁵

In 1837 Bachman's dispute with the abolitionists became highly personal. A northern Lutheran minister accused him and other slave-owners of "cruelty and luxury." Bachman took the accusation as an insult: "I have lately been held up in bold relief as 'one who luxuriated from the sweat and blood of the slave.'" Bachman apparently believed he was being accused of profiting from slavery in the mode of a planter. He declared that the slaves in his household were merely "domestics" inherited by his wife, and they were "her private property." He did not mention the family slave he had brought from New York. He also appealed to the judgment of his community: "My people, at least, will neither accuse me of *idleness*, nor *luxury*."³⁶ Bachman's angry reaction and his reference to "my people" indicate his growing identification with his social milieu. His people would never insult him in this way; but northerners did, and he was ceasing to view them as "his people."

The reaction of southern clergymen to the abolitionist offensive went beyond denunciations of abolitionism. Abolitionist clergymen had branded slavery as un-Christian and sinful. Southern clergy responded by seeking to sanctify slavery, to show that it was justified by Scripture and was a Christian and moral institution. To demonstrate this, ministers declared that their churches must do more to affect the salvation and moral improvement of the slaves. Like many of his clerical colleagues in the South, Bachman advocated a patriarchal and paternalistic form of slavery aimed at civilizing and Christianizing the slaves.³⁷ By 1835 he had been engaged in this work for nearly two decades. A special conference of the Lutheran churches in South Carolina declared in 1816 that it was the duty of the clergy to preach the Gospel to the black population. Bachman immediately requested and received the permission of the vestry to admit blacks to services at St. John's, though segregated in the gallery. In the following years, he also aided the efforts of several black men to prepare for the ministry. One of them, Daniel Payne, a free black, often came to Bachman's house, discussed zoology with him, and studied his collections.³⁸ Bachman took the "ministry to the Negroes" seriously. He attracted more blacks to his church than any other southern Lutheran minister during the antebellum era. In 1835, of fifty-four blacks baptized as Lutherans in South Carolina, he was responsible for forty-four. In 1860 his black congregation was the largest among

³⁵ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 19-20, 34-38, 44-46, 49 (quotation).

³⁶ Bachman, *John Bachman*, 358.

³⁷ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 70-100.

³⁸ Stange, "Our Duty to Preach," 174-75; Bernard E. Powers, *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1865* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 60.

Lutheran churches in the South, numbering almost two hundred communicants, and St. John's Sunday school for blacks enrolled 150 students.³⁹

Bachman also publicly defended the benefits of slavery. In 1857 he was to write what Raymond Bost called "probably the most extensive defense of slavery to come from the pen of a Lutheran clergyman in the South." The South Carolina Synod requested him to write a reply to the antislavery resolutions of the Middle Conference of Lutherans at Pittsburgh. His critique of religious abolitionism at this time largely repeated the main elements of the proslavery argument that had been elaborated during the previous three decades.⁴⁰ Much of it was also contained in a work he wrote seven years before. Ironically, it was one of his most important and respected scientific works, *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race* (1850).

Bachman wrote *The Unity* after he became involved in a bitter controversy with advocates of polygenism, or pluralism: the idea that there was not one human species, but multiple species, each having a separate origin. As both minister and scientist, he opposed the idea of separately created races. Like most antebellum southern clergymen, he argued that the scriptural account of human origins in Genesis was correct and that only one human species existed. Negroes, Caucasians, and Mongolians were merely varieties that had a common ancestry in Adam and Eve. Polygenesis, most southern clerics agreed, must be combated as a threat to biblical truth.⁴¹ But in *The Unity*, Bachman sought to demonstrate this truth through scientific evidence alone. Like many clergymen-naturalists of his day, Bachman argued that the "two books" of Nature and Scripture could not contradict one another when properly interpreted. If the evidence from Nature seemed to contradict Scripture, then one or the other was being interpreted incorrectly. Advocates of this view believed that investigators of Nature who relied on Baconian induction and avoided speculative deductive theory would reach conclusions in accord with Revelation.⁴²

³⁹ Bachman, *Discourse*, 8; Bachman, *John Bachman*, 354-55; *Happoldt Journal*, 35-36; Stange, "Our Duty to Preach," 174-75.

⁴⁰ Bost, "John Bachman," 417-25, details Bachman's reply to the Middle Conference. The conference's resolutions and Bachman's reply appeared in *The Missionary* 2 (1857).

⁴¹ Reginald Horsman, *Josiah Nott of Mobile: Southerner, Physician, and Racial Theorist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 114-15. The best discussion of Bachman's role in the controversy over the unity of the human race is in Stephens, *Science*, chapters 9 and 10. On the southern clergy's concern about scientific attacks on Genesis, see E. Brooks Holifield, "Science and Theology in the Old South," in Ronald L. Numbers and Todd L. Savitt, eds., *Science and Medicine in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 139-40.

⁴² Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 75; Walter H. Conser, *God and the Natural World: Religion and Science in Antebellum America* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 8-9, 14-18, 76-78; Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy*, 88-99; James A.

Drawing on his vast knowledge of zoology, anatomy, and physiology, Bachman showed both that the varieties of humans were more similar to each other than the varieties of other mammalian species and that varieties of all kinds were the result of adaptations to different environments. He demolished the pluralist claim that human hybrids, the offspring of parents of two human races, were infertile and that racial mixing would lead to the extinction of the human race. He ridiculed the claim of polygenists that Negro hair was not human hair, but a kind of wool, and suggested that the many Caucasians with curly hair would be upset to learn that this "was enough to transform them into an inferior species." He chided polygenists for being unable to agree on the number of separately created human species. Their estimates varied from five to one hundred. Finally, he accused them of being unscientific. Unable to explain the origins of human variations, they embraced the idea of multiple separate creations, and thus a series of miracles not testable by scientific evidence.⁴³

Anyone presented with the foregoing arguments might expect Bachman to declare for racial equality. But at the very beginning of *The Unity*, he announced that human unity did not mean human equality. Nature, he declared, "has stamped on the African race the permanent marks of inferiority."⁴⁴ Bachman reiterated the "permanent inferiority" of the Negro race throughout the book. Negroes would retain their current characteristics "until the end of time, because they have now attained to the constitution, feature, and color best adapted to their climate." He argued that climate, "the peculiar miasma of [sub-Saharan] Africa," was one of the causes "that have produced inferior and peculiar races in that country." Only a major climatic change in Africa, he suggested, could change the racial characteristics of the population, and then only after "generations and centuries" and "admixture with the existing races."⁴⁵ In fact, one reason Bachman attacked polygenesis was that he believed it could *weaken* the proslavery position and undermine much stronger Biblical arguments for black slavery. He warned

Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 107-08, 116-17.

⁴³ Bachman, *Unity*, 22-39, 127, 136, 146-49, 199 (quotation on p. 37); John Bachman, *An Examination of Professor Agassiz's Sketch of the Natural Provinces of the Animal World* (Charleston, 1855); Bachman, *An Examination of the Characteristics of the Genera and Species as Applicable to the Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race* (Charleston, 1855); William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes towards Race in America, 1815-59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 135.

⁴⁴ Bachman, *Unity*, 8.

⁴⁵ Bachman, *Unity*, 208. Bachman was equally confident that he came from a superior race: "I rejoice that I have come from excellent stock; for good pure blood shows itself in men, as well as in animals, and thus far I prize it." See Bachman, *John Bachman*, 9.

the pluralists: "The advocates of a plurality of races should especially be on their guard lest the enemies of our domestic institutions should have room to accuse them of prejudice and selfishness, in desiring to degrade their servants below the level of those creatures of God to whom a revelation has been given, and for whose salvation a Saviour died, as an excuse for retaining them in servitude."⁴⁶

In contrast to his evidence for human unity, Bachman's evidence for black inferiority was neither original nor well supported by facts. He derived most of it from proslavery arguments others had articulated over the previous decades. One of these arguments—which had *some* basis in fact—was that Negroes were immune to the fevers of the southern subtropics. But Bachman took this argument well beyond the evidence. Because they originated in tropical Africa, Bachman held, blacks were naturally adapted to the warm, moist climate of the South, especially the coastal lowcountry. They did not need to be acclimated, because they were "constitutionally at home" in areas "adapted to the cultivation of indigo, cotton, and rice, where a similar exposure would prove fatal to the life of a white man." He added—incorrectly—that Negroes in the lowcountry enjoyed better health than those in the upcountry.⁴⁷

The idea that blacks were constitutionally (or naturally) more suited than whites to labor in the southern climate went back to colonial days.⁴⁸ Moreover, since at least the early nineteenth century, southern doctors had been arguing that blacks were immune, or virtually immune, to specific diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. In 1825 Charleston's Dr. Thomas Simons stated it as a simple fact:

In [the South Carolina lowcountry], intersected with immense bodies of swamp lands, and reserves of water kept back for the culture of rice, all who are exposed to the miasma, arising from these sources, are victims of

⁴⁶ Bachman, *Unity*, 8.

⁴⁷ Bachman, *Unity*, 209. On the extremely high mortality rates of blacks on lowcountry rice plantations, see William Dusinger, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 50-55, 70-75, 80; Jeffrey R. Young, "Ideology and Death on a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1833-1867: Paternalism amidst a 'Good Supply of Disease and Pain,'" *Journal of Southern History* 59 (1993): 673-706; Richard Steckel, "Slave Mortality: Analysis of Evidence from Plantation Records," *Social Science History* 3 (1979): 86-114; Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Knopf, 1974), chapter 3.

⁴⁸ Clarence ver Steeg, ed., *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia by Pat. Tailfer and Others* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1960), 50-51, 79, 139; Alexander Hewatt, *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of South Carolina and Georgia*, 2 vols. (London, 1779), 1: 120; Robert L. Brunhouse, ed., *David Ramsay, 1749-1815: Selections from His Writings* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1965), 65; John Drayton, *A View of South Carolina* (Charleston, 1802), 146-47, 160.

remittent and intermittent fevers, and their sequelae diseased liver and spleen. . . . It is somewhat singular that this state of things is confined to the white population. While the white man is seen shivering with ague, his countenance cadaverous and his temper splenetic, the black, is fat, plump and glossy, in the full enjoyment of health and vigor."⁴⁹

In 1826 another Charleston physician, Philip Tidyman, claimed that blacks suffered little from yellow fever and "intermittent and remittent bilious fevers" in swampy terrain "extremely inimical to the white inhabitants." In a passage that Bachman seems to have borrowed almost exactly, Tidyman claimed that the slaves "on large rice plantations and other places in the vicinity of stagnant water, generally enjoy through the hot months as good health as they would do if placed in the mountains."⁵⁰

To Bachman, the alleged difference in racial immunities was no accident. It was part of God's benevolent plan: "We see in it evidences of design—we regard it as a merciful provision of the Creator in imparting to the human constitution the tendency to produce varieties adapted to every climate."⁵¹ Bachman believed in Aristotle's idea of "natural slaves"; that is, that some men are born to be slaves. Everything existed for a purpose, and the purpose of African Negroes was to be slaves. Bachman once argued elsewhere that it was the misfortune of American Indians that Europeans had not enslaved them. (In fact, Europeans did enslave Native Americans in some places, including South Carolina.) Slavery, he claimed, would have taught them the value of labor and improved their morals, strength, intellect, and manliness.⁵²

Bachman incorporated other elements of the proslavery argument into his discussion of the African "variety." He declared that blacks in the South had benefited from slavery. They were living better lives than they would have been in Africa, because their masters instructed them in Christian faith and morals: if "we give them the consolations and hopes of a future life, then we are their benefactors."⁵³ Bachman also declared that southern slavery was more successful than northern emancipation in improving the Negro. Northern philanthropists mistakenly believed that they could improve blacks by freeing them. Such misguided efforts produced the "degraded" free Negroes of the northern cities, a lazy, drunken, and diseased class. White southerners better understood the "peculiarities of the African char-

⁴⁹ Thomas Y. Simons, "Case of the Derangement of the Spleen and Liver," *Carolina Journal of Medicine and Science and Agriculture* 1 (1825): 141-42.

⁵⁰ Philip Tidyman, "A Sketch of the Most Remarkable Diseases of the Negroes of the Southern States," *Philadelphia Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences* 12 (1826): 315-316 (quotation), 318.

⁵¹ Bachman, *Unity*, 209.

⁵² *Magnolia, or Southern Appalachian*, n.s., 2 (1843): 16.

⁵³ Bachman, *Unity*, 209-10.

acter," because their slaves "are a portion of our household" and "have been the nurses of our mothers and wives, and are the playmates of our children." Southern masters also accepted that they had a responsibility to promote the slaves' "usefulness and comfort" and furnish them with the knowledge needed for salvation. The proportion of Christians Negroes in the South, Bachman claimed, was at least three times greater than in the North. He offered no evidence for this sweeping claim beyond "personal knowledge."⁵⁴

Bachman claimed that his argument for the inferiority of the African race was based on many years' observation of Negroes.⁵⁵ It is more likely that his opinions were formed by many years of living among people anxious to justify their ownership of slaves. One can see this in a letter from his wife, Maria, in 1851, when the couple was in Detroit: "All the servants that waited on us at breakfast were colored men—very genteel niggers it is true, but I should like to ask their white brethren how it is, that, while they are so clamorous for equality we never find any of them elevated to higher status than barbers and waiters; the truth of the matter is, they must find their level."⁵⁶ Was Maria echoing Bachman here, or was it the other way around? It is more likely that the racial ideas of Bachman and his wife were the product of their common social milieu. But Bachman presented his "facts" about slavery and race as if they were as valid as his "facts" about birds or mammals.

Bachman used another questionable, if familiar, argument to defend the South, one that dated back to the American Revolution. He claimed that white southerners were not responsible for bringing slaves to America; the British (and northern merchants) were. Charleston planter Henry Laurens had blamed the British for slavery in 1776 to justify the Revolution—and possibly to salve his own conscience. Laurens had been the biggest slave trader in colonial America.⁵⁷ Soon thereafter, in the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson blamed George III for bringing Africans to America. Whatever one thinks of Laurens and Jefferson's use of this argument, there was a curious illogic in Bachman's—for if slavery was natural and a positive good, as he and many antebellum southerners claimed, then why blame the slave traders, wherever they came from? Were they not part of the benevolent design?

In *The Unity of the Human Race*, Bachman declared that he was searching for "truth alone." He told his readers that he would demonstrate the truth

⁵⁴ Bachman, *Unity*, 210-11.

⁵⁵ Bachman, *Unity*, 212.

⁵⁶ Maria M. Bachman to My Dear Girls, June 18, 1851, typescript in Shuler Collection.

⁵⁷ Joseph P. Kelly, "Henry Laurens: The Southern Man of Conscience in History," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 107 (2006): 82-123.

of human unity using evidence "entirely from nature, without any reference to the authorities contained in Scripture."⁵⁸ In most of the book that is exactly what he did, and the scientific evidence he employed showed him to be one of the finest naturalists of his time. But he showed his clerical hand at times. He could not resist mentioning one of the biblical stories that clerical defenders of slavery cited frequently, Noah's curse of Ham and his son Canaan, who they alleged to be the progenitor of the Negro race: "Canaan, the son of Ham . . . is still everywhere 'the servant of servants.'"⁵⁹ After emancipation, Bachman continued to hold the same views. Whites and blacks, he wrote, could not coexist peacefully unless the law placed the black man "in the situation for which God intended him—[as] the inferior of the white man."⁶⁰

Besides bringing up the biblical story of Ham, Bachman also assumed a miracle, if only one. God had created all the existing species as fully formed adults, and no new species had developed: "The creation of the first human pair, as well as that of all living plants and animals, it must be admitted by all who are not atheists, was a miraculous work of God." At that point, he claimed, miracles ceased. Variations of the original species (such as Caucasians and Negroes) had developed naturally as the result of adaptation to different environments.⁶¹ In insisting on this one miracle, Bachman committed the same error he accused the pluralists of: relying on a scientifically untestable argument. In *The Unity* and other works he wrote to combat polygenesis, Bachman used arguments that came close to stating the theory of natural selection before Darwin published *The Origin of Species*. But it is difficult to see how Bachman could have taken such a step, even if he contemplated it. It would have required him to drop his literal belief in the creation story of Genesis, and defending that was one of his main reasons for attacking polygenesis.⁶²

Bachman may not have advocated a theory of natural selection, but his arguments about racial inferiority were a crude form of what later became

⁵⁸ Bachman, *Unity*, 8.

⁵⁹ Bachman, *Unity*, 292; Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 26-27. For a discussion of proslavery thought and the story of Ham, see Thomas Virgil Peterson, *Ham and Japheth: The Mythic Worlds of Whites in the Antebellum South* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978).

⁶⁰ *Charleston Daily News*, Sept. 14, 1865, Sept., 15, 1868, cited in Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 72-73, 245.

⁶¹ Bachman, *Unity*, 37 (quote), 38-39, 119.

⁶² Bachman, *Unity*, 9; Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy*, 101; Shuler, *Had I the Wings*, 216. According to Ronald L. Numbers and Lester Stephens, Bachman "condemned Lamarckian evolution but apparently remained silent about Darwin's theory." Ronald L. Numbers, ed., *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 72.

known as Social Darwinism. He was a rigorous thinker when he stuck to evidence from the natural world, where his opponents could seldom match his combination of encyclopedic knowledge and logical rigor.⁶³ When he tried to justify the human institution of slavery, however, he left the world of facts and logic and entered one dominated by the idealistic and biased arguments of the slave interest. His devotion to his motto of "nature, truth, and no humbug" unfortunately did not apply to his defense of the peculiar institution. His description of the "natural character" of blacks reflected the interests and prejudices of the slave-owning class he belonged to.⁶⁴

Josiah Nott, one of his pluralist opponents, shrewdly pointed out that in practical terms, there was little difference between Bachman's position and his. Both agreed that black inferiority was real and permanent; the only difference was whether Negroes were to be considered a "separately created species" or merely a "permanent variety" of one species. Nott was right: for blacks, at least, it could make little difference whether whites saw them as one or the other. Either way, slaves they were, and slaves they must remain. In a few years, Nott and Bachman would stand united in favor of secession as the only means to preserve the "natural" institution of slavery.⁶⁵

Bachman's defense of monogenesis undoubtedly required courage. Antebellum southern clergymen, as mentioned before, were often suspected of harboring secret abolitionist tendencies.⁶⁶ Although some polygenists were antislavery, their racialist arguments appealed to many slaveholders. When pluralist Samuel G. Morton died in 1851, Dr. Robert Wilson Gibbes, a prominent South Carolina naturalist and physician, wrote a memorial for the *Charleston Medical Journal* in which he declared that southerners "should consider him as our benefactor, for aiding most materially in giving to the negro his true position as an inferior race."⁶⁷ Moreover, Bachman was alone among the Charleston circle of naturalists in opposing polygenesis. The faculty of the Medical College of South Carolina did not support him either. For some years after 1851, he was alone among American scientists in openly opposing the plurality of races. Many of the local supporters of polygenesis were part of Bachman's intellectual circle, and opposing their views must have caused him some anguish, as it brought him some ridicule.⁶⁸ It is true that some Charlestonians may have been

⁶³ Stanton, *Leopard's Spots*, 126.

⁶⁴ Bachman, *Unity*, 8, 158, 209; Stanton, *Leopard's Spots*, 143; Stephens, *Science*, 214; Farmer, *The Metaphysical Confederacy*, 217; Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 67-70, 99.

⁶⁵ Stanton, *Leopard's Spots*, 158; Stephens, *Science*, 217; Horsman, *Josiah Nott*.

⁶⁶ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 35-38.

⁶⁷ Robert Wilson Gibbes, "Death of Samuel George Morton, M.D.," *Charleston Medical Journal* 6 (1851): 594-98, cited in Stanton, *Leopard's Spots*, 144; O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 248.

⁶⁸ Stephens, *Science*, 198.

bothered by Bachman's combative style more than by his argument. A member of the circle, Frederick Augustus Porcher, recalled that there "was so much acrimony in [Bachman's] writings [about polygenesis] that I knew not how to reconcile so much bitterness with the apparent genial disposition of the man." Porcher suggested slyly that Bachman's ill-temper on this occasion was related to his occupation. Clergymen, he noted, were habituated to a dictatorial style. Used to preaching to a silent audience, they did not know how to deal with opposition.⁶⁹

But Bachman's main antagonists in the pluralist debate were not local. With one exception, they were not even southern. Samuel G. Morton was a Philadelphia scientist; Louis Agassiz, a Swiss-born Harvard professor; and George Gliddon, an Englishman. Only Josiah Nott lived in the South and owned slaves. Perhaps more important, some of the polygenists were not orthodox Christians, or perhaps not even Christians at all. Nott and Gliddon took great delight in bashing Christian doctrine and the clergy. In letters Nott often referred to his clerical opponents as "skunks." He called Bachman "the old skunk" and "the old hyena."⁷⁰ The anti-Christian views of Nott and Gliddon ensured that Bachman's attack on the polygenists would not leave him isolated. It enhanced his standing in the eyes of devout southerners, clerical and lay, who saw polygenesis as a danger to scriptural literalism. Another Charleston minister, the Presbyterian Thomas Smyth, also wrote a book against polygenesis in 1850, using arguments from Scripture, reason, and science.⁷¹ Had Bachman's racial unity argument been anathema to slave-owners in South Carolina, it is unlikely that their leaders would have chosen him to deliver the prayer when they signed the Ordinance of Secession. Yet the controversy over polygenesis coincided with Bachman's first expressions of secessionist sentiment. Perhaps he felt the need at this time to make his loyalties to his state and section absolutely clear. But other developments were pushing him in the same direction.

CHOOSING SECESSION

Bachman never expressed any anti-Unionist sentiments before 1850. He was certainly a Unionist at the time of the Nullification Crisis of the 1830s, which fractured South Carolina's elite. Two of his friends at the time, James

⁶⁹ Samuel G. Stoney, ed., "Memoirs of Frederick Augustus Porcher," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 47 (1946): 219; O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 435.

⁷⁰ John Bachman, *A Notice of the "Types of Mankind"* (Charleston, 1854), 3-6, 18; Horsman, *Josiah Nott*, 114-22, 172-75, 199-200; Stanton, *Leopard's Spots*, 144, 172-73; Stephens, *Science*, 165, 173, 198; Bost, "John Bachman," 438; Shuler, *Had I the Wings*, 212; William Sumner Jenkins, *Proslavery Thought in the Old South* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1960).

⁷¹ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 54-67; Horsman, *Josiah Nott*, 114-22; Stephens, *Science*, 214; Stanton, *Leopard's Spots*, 194; Jenkins, *Proslavery Thought*, 253.

Louis Petigru and Joel R. Poinsett, were Unionist leaders.⁷² His former Pennsylvania mentor, Rev. Philip Meyer, told him that nullification was "treasonous." Bachman probably agreed. Yet he resisted pressure to declare his views publicly. His discomfort with the situation shows in a letter to John James Audubon: "Oh, what an enjoyment it would be for me to escape, just for one week, from the hydra-headed 'Nullification,' and sit by your side and talk of birds!"⁷³ Bachman was irritated with the politicians for interrupting his beloved work as a naturalist!

At the height of the crisis, South Carolina's governor declared a day of fasting, prayer, and humiliation. Some ministers preached sermons on nullification, but Bachman refused. He told one of his students, "I will not disgrace my pulpit by preaching a political sermon."⁷⁴ Most South Carolina clergymen agreed; they refused to be drawn into what they saw as a purely political battle. As we have seen, many of the same men, including Bachman, publicly defended slavery after 1835, but they argued that their justification was religious and moral, not political. They had to counter what they saw as the abolitionists' distortions of Christian doctrine and southern Christianity and demonstrate the biblical foundations of slavery.⁷⁵ Bachman clearly agreed with their distinction between the purely political nullification and the religious and moral issue of abolitionism, as his strong reaction to antislavery in the mid 1830s indicates. But his dislike for the abolitionists did not transform him into a political anti-Unionist for more than a decade.

In 1851 Bachman declared that he would support South Carolina if it seceded from the Union. Several developments may explain the timing. As we have seen, he was then in the midst of the polygenist controversy, which had strained relations with some of his local intellectual circle, and he may have felt the need to make a strong show of loyalty to his community. The pressure to do so was increased by the sharpening of sectional tensions over the admission of California to the Union as a free state and the first secession crisis in South Carolina. It may also be significant that Bachman's strongest remaining tie to the North was broken in 1851 with the death of his best friend and in-law, John James Audubon.

About this time, Bachman drew increasingly close to another friend, Edmund Ruffin of Virginia, one of the South's most outspoken advocates of slavery and secession. Among other things, Ruffin campaigned for a re-opening of the African slave trade, which had been illegal since 1808. Yet Ruffin did not find Bachman's argument for the unity of the races politically suspect. He recorded in his diary that he had read Bachman's *Doctrine of the*

⁷² *Happoldt Journal*, 48.

⁷³ Bachman, *John Bachman*, 109.

⁷⁴ Bachman, *John Bachman*, 75-76; *Happoldt Journal*, 48.

⁷⁵ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 44-45.

Unity of the Human Race twice and that it was "a very strong argument for the unity of the human race in its origin."⁷⁶ David F. Allmendinger contends that Bachman moderated Ruffin's views on race and prevented him from embracing polygenesis. But Allmendinger also notes that in the late 1850s, Ruffin "dragged out divinity, biology, and geography to explain racial inferiority," arguing that "God had designed blacks to be inferior in intellect, but to possess ability to endure the heat and miasmatic air of tropical climates." What Allmendinger does not say is that all these arguments are laid out in Bachman's *Unity of the Human Race*, a book that supposedly moderated Ruffin's ideas on race.⁷⁷

Bachman and Ruffin first met in 1840 as a result of a mutual interest in agricultural improvement. In 1843 the South Carolina legislature appointed Ruffin to undertake an agricultural survey of the state. To Ruffin, agricultural innovation was essential to the continuation of slavery, and he viewed South Carolina with its large slave majority as the perfect test of his thesis.⁷⁸ Bachman was convinced that agricultural reform was essential to South Carolina's economic prosperity, although he was critical of the legislature's approach to the survey. An article he published on the subject in 1843 also indicates that Bachman was beginning to see himself as a South Carolina patriot. True, he criticized South Carolina for its failure to adopt principles of scientific agriculture.⁷⁹ But Bachman assured his readers that his criticisms were constructive and affectionate. He was moved by a "deep and unmingled regret, that the State of my early choice, whose institutions I love; with whose prosperity my best interests are associated, and for which my most fervent aspirations ascend, should, by a neglect of her agricultural interests, have permitted her neighboring States, possessing fewer natural resources, to outstrip her in the race of improvement."⁸⁰ Bachman described South Carolina as if it were a beleaguered nation surrounded by hostile forces: "With so many enemies preying on the vitals of her prosperity—under a system of husbandry that is yearly rendering her soil more sterile—confining herself to the culture of cotton, which has greatly fallen in price, and of which more is grown than the world can consume . . . how long will

⁷⁶ *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, ed. William K Scarborough, 2 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 1: 67, 290.

⁷⁷ David F. Allmendinger, Jr., *Ruffin: Family and Reform in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 147.

⁷⁸ William M. Mathew, ed., *Agriculture, Geology, and Society in Antebellum South Carolina: The Private Diary of Edmund Ruffin, 1843* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), xiii-xiv.

⁷⁹ John Bachman, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Benefits of an Agricultural Survey of the State of South Carolina* (Charleston, 1843), 8-9, 11.

⁸⁰ Bachman, *Agricultural Survey*, 42-43.

it be before South Carolina will become wholly impoverished?"⁸¹ Here, Bachman seems to have been adopting the siege mentality that became increasingly common among the South Carolina elite during the antebellum decades.

During his frequent trips to Charleston, Ruffin always called on Bachman. He occasionally attended services at St. John's and often dined and stayed at the Bachman home.⁸² Bachman's close friendship with Ruffin was an indication of his increasing political radicalism. But did the relationship draw Bachman towards secession, or did Bachman and Ruffin become drawn to one another because they shared a common outlook? Either way, around 1850 Bachman's political perspective shifted from Unionist to secessionist.

At first, Bachman spoke of secession as something he hoped could be avoided, but that might be inevitable. In August 1851, Bachman traveled to Washington to plead the southern case with the politicians. He unexpectedly received attention from many northern Congressmen and an audience with President Millard Fillmore. He told the president that the federal government only had to follow "the letter of the constitution," if it hoped to pacify the South. In a letter written a few days later, Bachman told Henry Summer of Newberry that the best course for the South at the moment was to fight for its rights within the Constitution, but he was not sure if such a strategy would be possible much longer. He declared that he was opposed to secession by South Carolina alone. Southerners should be patient, unify, and agitate for their rights. But, he added, "if we do not receive justice in the Union, we can secure it out of it."⁸³

A week later, Bachman wrote Victor Audubon that if secession happened, and he seemed to think it increasingly likely, he would support it: "I am growing every day less attached to the Union as it now exists, and if South Carolina declares for secession, I will, for weal or woe, go with her." The onus of secession, if it came, would be on the North: "If . . . New York and Massachusetts [keep sending men like William Seward and Charles Sumner] to Washington to read abolition petitions and abuse and insult the institutions, the morals, and [the] religion of the South, then it is high time to look out for ourselves." He did not believe that the Union would last many more years. As for himself: "If we are not to live as equals in the Union I would rather preserve my independence with a crust of bread and be out of it. . . . At present we are under the tyranny of an interested and an unscrupulous majority, and have no security for the future." Then, reveal-

⁸¹ Bachman, *Agricultural Survey*, 41.

⁸² Mathew, *Private Diary of Edmund Ruffin, 1843*, xiii-xiv, 15, 73, 75-76, 82, 84, 93, 300; Ruffin, *Diary*, 1: 64-66, 71, 425, 496, 512, 514, 562, 575.

⁸³ Bachman to Henry Summer, Sept. 6, 1851, Bachman Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

ing how far he had strayed from the path of Christian meekness and national sentiment, he told Victor that South Carolina did not fear the abolitionists coming there, "for if they do we hang them." What Carolinians feared more, he claimed, was the abolitionist petitions to Congress and the pamphlets they sent by mail. By keeping the slavery issue under heated discussion, abolitionists raised false hopes of freedom and encouraged slave insurrection. The failure of northerners to stifle these abolitionist tactics, he argued, deprived Unionists like himself "of all arguments to soothe the irritated feelings of the South." Bachman viewed South Carolina as a potential martyr to be sacrificed for southern redemption. The only reasonable federal response to secession, he declared, would be to let South Carolina go, but starve her into submission by restricting her trade: "We would be starved and ruined but the Government would be sure to do justice to the neighboring states and enter into some permanent arrangement to give security to the property of the South."⁸⁴

Victor Audubon replied that he was shocked by "the real and deep-rooted angry feeling in the State of South Carolina." He urged Bachman to use his influence and talents to convince his fellow Carolinians of the folly of secession: "You are in a position to influence many—you have a clear view of the unutterable horrors that would result from a dissolution of our Union—and I think that your talents and the name you have acquired, alike demand of you to do all you can to avert so great a calamity." Audubon prophesied that war against the Union, successful or not, would "convert the South into a desert waste."⁸⁵

Enthusiasm for secession in South Carolina cooled temporarily after 1852, when it became evident that other slave states were unwilling to support a southern confederacy. But the emergence of the Republican Party, "Bleeding Kansas," and the fugitive slave issue in the mid 1850s reignited the movement. At the time of the presidential election of 1856, Bachman regaled Ruffin with the youthful misdeeds of the Republican candidate, John C. Fremont, who had attended the College of Charleston, where Bachman served as a trustee and professor of natural history. According to Bachman, Fremont was a swindler who engaged in various "rascally acts." Fremont certainly had a reputation of being a ladies' man while at the college, and he often skipped classes. He was expelled from the college for insubordination, but nevertheless was awarded his degree by the Board of Trustees a few years later. Bachman welcomed Fremont's defeat, but was deeply upset by how close he came to winning: "What a character does it

⁸⁴ John Bachman to Victor Audubon, Sept. 11, 1851, typescript in Shuler Collection; Stephens, *Science*, 214; *Happoldt Journal*, 48.

⁸⁵ Victor Audubon to John Bachman, Sept. 18, 1851, typescript in Shuler Collection.

give his supporters, that notwithstanding the exposure of all these acts, this man barely missed being elected President of the United States!"⁸⁶ In January 1857, Bachman informed Victor Audubon: "I think the days of [the] Union are nearly numbered. The black republicans are rising into power—when they do, the South will walk out of the Union . . . [and] I shall sink or swim in the Southern ship."⁸⁷ A few weeks later, he wrote that the operators of the underground railroads were thieves and cowards, "stealing our property is considered an act of heroism—in spite of the constitution and the laws of the land." In a subsequent letter, he wrote of those involved in the railroad: "Glorious patriots—keep the dogs—we do not want them."⁸⁸

In 1858 Bachman publicly announced what amounted to his personal secession from the North. In a sermon, he told his congregation that he identified completely with the South, and no longer recognized any "other home but this. The house of my youth has become the house of the stranger."⁸⁹ After John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859, Bachman decided that secession of the whole South was inevitable—not only to preserve slavery, but to prevent an imminent slave insurrection. He predicted that the Republicans would win the upcoming election. They would then abolish slavery, and the result would be the tyranny of the black majority. After Brown's raid, Bachman began to goad the arch-secessionist Ruffin into doing more to prod Virginia into secession: "We look with longing and hopeful eyes toward our sister Virginia. . . . You have a fair specimen of northern sentiments in the tender mercies of Old Brown. Are you waiting for something more of the same sort? You will have it before long." He warned Ruffin that the abolitionists would shortly have their "feet upon our necks and their daggers in our throats."⁹⁰

When the Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln instead of the expected William Seward in 1860, Bachman wrote Ruffin that Lincoln was the more "dangerous of the two."⁹¹ A few days before, Bachman had warned Ruffin that the Republicans might try "to lull us to sleep a little while longer by putting an ass into the presidential chair," where Seward could "lead him or drive him." Either way, Bachman was sure there would be a Republican in the White House in 1861. Again he prodded Ruffin to take

⁸⁶ Ruffin, *Diary*, 1: 66.

⁸⁷ Bachman to Victor Audubon, Jan. 30, 1857, Bachman Papers, Charleston Museum, typescript in Shuler Collection; Bachman to Victor Audubon, March 9, 1857, Bachman Papers, typescript in Shuler Collection. Also in *Happoldt Journal*, 99.

⁸⁸ Bachman to Victor Audubon, Jan. 30 and March 9, 1857, typescripts in Shuler Collection.

⁸⁹ Bachman, *Discourse*, 12-13.

⁹⁰ Bachman to Edmund Ruffin, Jan. 18, 1860, quoted in Stephen Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1974), 121.

⁹¹ Bachman to Edmund Ruffin, May 28, 1860, quoted in Channing, *Crisis of Fear*, 231.

action: "Will Old Virginia nestle under the wing of that black buzzard? Will it swallow black republicanism, tariff, nigger and all?"⁹²

A few days after Lincoln's victory, Bachman preached a sermon in support of secession: "If our rights had been protected in the Union, we would not desire a political change. . . . Our fore-fathers in Convention entered into a solemn compact for mutual defence and protection. On the part of the majority, these pledges have been violated, and a higher law than the Constitution substituted. . . . our cause is just and righteous."⁹³ Bachman's wife, Maria, recorded that by a "singular coincidence" the cadets from The Citadel appeared in the gallery to hear the sermon, which she thought "quite appropriate to them *particularly*." Later that day, Bachman told a friend, "I have done the saddest act of my life. I have preached a sermon against the Union, and upholding the secession movement of our people. . . . I love the union, but I must go with my people."⁹⁴ A few days later, Bachman stood with Edmund Ruffin at the ceremony where the state's new Palmetto Flag was raised.⁹⁵ A month later, South Carolina formally seceded from the Union, and Bachman delivered his prayer for the success of the new nation. Ruffin was pleased that this task had been given to "my old friend Dr. Bachman, who is a great man, as well as one of the best of all the good men whom I have known." The following Sunday, Ruffin attended the service at St. John's and noted that Bachman omitted "the heretofore regular and formal prayer for the president . . . and Congress."⁹⁶

In 1851 Bachman had predicted that a civil war would end in disaster for South Carolina: "Should South Carolina secede she will entail on herself long years of poverty & misery."⁹⁷ But in 1861, he was supremely confident of a southern triumph: "I have not the slightest apprehension of Lincoln's hordes attacking Charleston," he told Henry Summer. "They cannot come into our harbour with large vessels and the small ones would fare badly if the attempt was made. They will not attempt it." A land assault would be equally futile. "They cannot stand before our boys. . . . If they come to James or Johns Island we are ready to meet them. They cannot conquer us."⁹⁸ Bachman was correct in one thing: Union forces never "conquered" Charles-

⁹² Bachman to Edmund Ruffin, May 23, 1860, quoted in Betty L. Mitchell, *Edmund Ruffin: A Biography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 156.

⁹³ Bachman, *John Bachman*, 361-62; *The Courier* (Charleston, S.C.), Feb. 25, 1874; *Happoldt Journal*, 101-02.

⁹⁴ *The Courier*, Feb. 25, 1874, obituary of John Bachman; Bachman, *John Bachman*, 358.

⁹⁵ Ruffin, *Diary*, 497.

⁹⁶ Ruffin, *Diary*, 512, 514.

⁹⁷ Bachman to Victor Audubon, Sept. 11, 1851, typescript in Shuler Collection.

⁹⁸ Bachman to Major Henry Summer, Nov. 12, 1861, Bachman Papers, South Caroliniana Library, cited in *Happoldt Journal*, 105.

ton. The Confederates evacuated it. But his 1851 prediction had been more prescient about the ultimate results of secession for South Carolina.

The Civil War greatly increased Bachman's hostility towards his former homeland and his northern Lutheran colleagues. His message and rhetoric became increasingly harsh and hyperbolic. In a sermon of 1861, he compared northerners to the Edomites in the Bible, who robbed the Israelites of slaves they held "by the authority of God." He called the Union a "ruthless, godless foe," a "vindictive" enemy whose "cruelty and abominations" rivaled Roman tyrants.⁹⁹ The *Southern Lutheran*, which Bachman edited, referred to northerners as "nasal twanging abolition-bred rats."¹⁰⁰ During the war, he routinely called Yankees "barbarians," a tremendous irony considering his origins.¹⁰¹ In 1862, at his suggestion, southern Lutherans broke with their northern brethren and formed the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Confederate States of America.¹⁰²

The bitterness of the division is indicated by an article one of his northern colleagues wrote just after the war. In July 1865, an article in a northern Lutheran periodical accused Bachman of denying communion to a dying Union soldier, who received it from a Catholic priest instead, and openly gloating over "the barbarities inflicted on our prisoners." The author of the article claimed that his source was "one of the most eminent citizens of Charleston." Bachman replied indignantly that the charges were false and malicious. He predicted that the "eminent citizen" would turn out to be "an unprincipled, time-serving demagogue—a spy, a political turncoat, a defamer of the reputation of others, to obtain notoriety, power, and money—not many degrees removed from a drunkard—a man without credit or character, and who never had either."¹⁰³ He went on to detail the sufferings of his friends, family, and himself at the hands of Union soldiers when Sherman's army marched through South Carolina in February 1865, which included theft, arson, and the beating and torture of both whites and blacks to reveal the location of valuables. Bachman himself was badly beaten. He described the soldiers involved as "libidinous, beastly, barbarians," whose deeds "scarcely had an equal in the ages of heathen barbarity."¹⁰⁴

How did the Yankee John Bachman come to this point? Was he forced to choose secession and the train of horrors and hatreds it produced? Or did

⁹⁹ *Charleston Daily Courier*, June 13, 1861, March 25 and 27, 1862.

¹⁰⁰ Stange, "Our Duty to Preach," 180.

¹⁰¹ Bachman to Edmund Ruffin, Nov. 15, 1864, SJLC, typescript in Shuler Collection.

¹⁰² Stange, "Our Duty to Preach," 181.

¹⁰³ John Bachman, *Vindication of Rev. Dr. John Bachman in Answer to Rev. E. W. Hutter* (Published by a Personal Friend, 1868), 3-9, 15, quotations are from pp. 3 and 15.

¹⁰⁴ Bachman, *Vindication*, 8-14.

he choose secession because he had become so assimilated to southern institutions and attitudes that he could not perceive their shortcomings? He once wrote, "I believe I am too good-natured, —doing what my friends wish, though not always sure that I am doing right."¹⁰⁵ Did he reluctantly follow his friends—"his people"—into disaster in 1860? Or did he help lead them, convinced as he declared, that secession was just and that it was the only way to preserve their rights to property in slaves? Perhaps it was a bit of both—that he was both leader and led. In an article on the "Carolina Ideal World," William H. Longton argues that "slavery dictated the requirements for Southern world views and even those who dissented from specific theoretical suggestions rarely questioned the essential, ideological structure within which their dissent was contained, because slavery was its irreducible first principle."¹⁰⁶ Bachman fits this description. Once he became assimilated to the South Carolina world, it was almost inevitable that he would choose to support secession.

¹⁰⁵ Bachman, *Designs and Duties*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ William Henry Longton, "The Carolina Ideal World: Natural Science and Social Thought in Ante Bellum South Carolina," *Civil War History* 20 (1974): 118.

**"A FAITHFUL AMBASSADOR":
THE DIARY OF REV. WILLIAM HUTSON,
PASTOR OF THE INDEPENDENT MEETING IN
CHARLESTON, 1757-1761**

EDITED BY DANIEL J. TORTORA

(Continued from October)

1758

January 1st
1758

A memorable Day. The first Day of the week, the first Sabbath, & the first Day of a new year. Found myself when I awoke in the morning, I hope, desirous to spend it well. Rose; found my Heart aspiring towards God. Endeavoured, & I humbly hope, was enabled in Sincerity this new years Morning, to make a solemn surrender of my self to God, Father, Son & Spirit, whose I am, & whom I desire to serve every day I live & whilst I have any thing. O my God I dare not promise for my self—I know if thou leavest me I am nothing, can do nothing. But surely, if I know my own Heart, the desire of my Soul is to spend this year, better than I have done the last to be lively & active & zealous & to do more for thy Glory. Brother Edmonds preached this morning a good Sermon from Ephesians 5:16—"see then that ye would see"—it was a good Discourse.¹⁵⁵ Oh! That I might be enabled to improve it as a word in Lesson, especially unto me. In the Afternoon preached myself from Revelation 10:4-6.¹⁵⁶ But had not so much Freedom as I really expected, considering the Importance & affecting not of my Subject. O my God, may I ever remember that without thee I can do nothing—& yet through Christ strengthening me I can do all things.¹⁵⁷ I found this true, by happy & very comfortable Experience this very Evening. Was unexpectedly called to preach, Brother Edmonds being out of order—& Oh! How graciously did

¹⁵⁵ Ephesians 5:16: "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

¹⁵⁶ Revelation 10:4-6: "And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer."

¹⁵⁷ Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."