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## THE BAPTIST AND METHODIST CLERGY IN SOUTH CAROLINA AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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In the two decades preceding the American Revolution, numerous Baptist congregations were organized in South Carolina and between 25 and 35 clergymen of this persuasion were ministering to the colonists. About half of this number were fully ordained men of the cloth, while the remainder served as assistant ministers. Most of the Baptist churches were composed of Particular Baptists, although Stono was a General Baptist church, Broadriver was organized by the Seventh Day Baptists, and both Beaver creek and Clouds creek were Tunker churches. All of the divisions of Baptist theology were represented by the clergy of that denomination in the area prior to the Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

There was no national Baptist organization to which any of these churches belonged, but in 1751 the Charleston Baptist Association was formed, and in 1771, the Congaree Association was organized and became, "first in the South Carolina back country."<sup>2</sup> Neither of these unions issued comments or instructions regarding political matters, and they were not even successful in uniting the adherents to the various Baptist schools of thought in any religious harmony. Leah Townsend attributed the dissolution of the Congaree Association in 1776 to, "the dissension and general decrease of religious activity due to the Revolution."<sup>3</sup> Morgan Edwards decided that this Association exerted an unwarranted interference with the expression of the personal prejudices of the members, but whether or not this extended into political affairs cannot be determined.<sup>4</sup> Yet, on March 30, 1776, Oliver Hart, of the Baptist Church in Charleston, and Elhanan Winchester, of Welch Neck, wrote to

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<sup>1</sup> Morgan Edwards, *Materials Towards A History of the Baptists in the Province of South Carolina*, Original manuscript in the Alester G. Furman Collection, Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina. Hereinafter cited as Edwards, *Materials of South Carolina*.

<sup>2</sup> Joe M. King, *A History of the South Carolina Baptists* (Columbia, South Carolina: The General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964), xix.

<sup>3</sup> Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists 1670-1805* (Florence, South Carolina: The Florence Printing Company, 1935), 175. Hereinafter cited as Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists*.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, *Materials of South Carolina*.

Henry Laurens, Vice-President of the Province of South Carolina, "in behalf of the Baptist Congregations in General," and stated:

We hope yet to see hunted liberty sit regent on the Throne, and flourish more than ever under the administration of such worthy patriots; may we not hope that the time is come, in which our rulers may be men fearing God, and hating coveteousness, a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well! We bless God that he hath begun our deliverance; and that he will complete it shall be our constant prayer.<sup>5</sup>

The prompt reply of Laurens expressed his gratitude that the Baptists were pleased with the political events of the day.

Other than this statement, little evidence has been found to indicate the opinions of the Baptists as a united group, and the revolutionary sentiments of the denomination can be most distinctly discerned in the activities of the individual clergymen.

Oliver Hart, born a Pennsylvanian, was the self educated pastor of a Charleston congregation, and one of the leading Baptist divines in the colony which Morgan Edwards described as, "the polite and wealthy province of South-Carolina; a province whose planters are Nabobs, whose merchants are Princes."<sup>6</sup> Dr. Richard Furman, in the funeral sermon he preached on the occasion of Hart's death, called attention to the degree conferred upon the minister by the College of Rhode Island in 1769,<sup>7</sup> and Dr. Rogers, of Philadelphia, also delivered a similar tribute to the memory of the Carolina Baptist when he died.<sup>8</sup>

John Gano, the New Jersey-born Baptist missionary, who made an arduous journey to Carolina on behalf of this Church, was also self-educated, but "well qualified for the office" according to Charles S. Todd.<sup>9</sup> Gano preached in Hart's Charleston pulpit on an occasion when

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Gregg, *History of the Old Cheraaws* (New York: Richardson and Company, 1867, reprinted Columbia, South Carolina: The State Company, 1905), 260-263. Hereinafter cited as Gregg, *Old Cheraaws*.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, *Materials of South Carolina*.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Furman, *Rewards of Grace on Christ's Faithful People, A Sermon Occasioned by The Decease of the Rev. Oliver Hart, A.M., Preached at the Baptist Church in Charleston, South Carolina, February 7, 1796*, (The Alester G. Furman Collection, Furman University, contains among the papers of Richard Furman, a printed copy of this sermon, which has been defaced. The name of the printer and the date of publication are therefore missing. Reference to the Alester G. Furman Collection is hereinafter cited as Furman, *Papers*).

<sup>8</sup> William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 8 Volumes, 1858), VI, 48. Hereinafter cited as Sprague, *Annals*.

<sup>9</sup> Sprague, *Annals*, VI, 62.

George Whitefield was present, and his discourse was considered creditable from both a religious and scholastic point of view.<sup>10</sup>

Morgan Edwards, the visiting historian, was quite proud of his Master's degree from the College of Philadelphia, and Richard Furman, just in the early stages of his ministry when the Revolution began, added the degrees of both Master of Arts and Doctor of Divinity from Brown University to his name after independence was won.<sup>11</sup> Evan Pugh, of Mount Pleasant, was a graduate of Brown University, and, according to the discriminating Edwards, both Nicholas Bedgegood, of Ashley River, and Henry Haywood, of Stono, were scholars above the ordinary level. Edwards described a number of other ministers, including Philip Mulkey, as pious and effective preachers, even though they were not classical scholars in the ordinary sense of the term.<sup>12</sup> Most of the remaining Baptist divines were like Daniel Marshall, who, "Without any extraordinary talents, or much intellectual culture . . . made himself felt as an element of life and power in every community in which he mingled."<sup>13</sup>

It cannot be truthfully said that the Baptist clergymen attached no importance to higher learning, or even basic education, for they obtained all that was possible for themselves, and they were apparently quite proud of the fact. Even Pugh, who had been a teacher before his clerical ordination, was a charter member of a Society to found a school in St. David's Parish, but the institution was not opened until after the Revolution.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the divines were too fully occupied with organizing new churches, discussing differences in theological doctrine, and conducting evangelistic services to devote much time to classical education for their parishioners. Learning was a secondary matter when compared with religion, and their influence for or against the Revolution was expressed through means other than as school teachers.

Baptist preachers of the Revolutionary period have left a number of sermons for examination, although they appear to be in no way intended to promote political thinking. Some of these discourses may have been intended to criticize the royalists in a subtle manner, although this is a matter of opinion. Oliver Hart, who preached to the most fashionable Baptist congregation in the province, composed a treatise on, "Dancing Exploded," and remarked, "Our merry gentry, who delight so

<sup>10</sup> Sprague, *Annals*, VI, 63.

<sup>11</sup> Sprague, *Annals*, VI, 82, 162.

<sup>12</sup> Edwards, *Materials of South Carolina*; also, Gregg, *Old Cheraws*, 96.

<sup>13</sup> Sprague, *Annals*, VI, 61.

<sup>14</sup> Gregg, *Old Cheraws*, 280.

much in frolicking and dancing, would do well to consider how they will answer for all their filthiness, foolish talking, jesting and suchlike things when they come to stand at the bar of God.”<sup>15</sup> In view of the patriotic fervor of the cleric, this sermon may have had a deeper meaning than simply a criticism of moral practices of the day. Hart often referred to “wicked and sinful Charleston,” in his diary, but after the approach of the British army forced him to leave the city, he lamented “Often—often did I wrestle with God with fervent Prayers and Tears, that poor Charleston might be spared, and not suffered to fall into the Enemy’s Hands—never could I give it up, until I heard of its Surrender.”<sup>16</sup> So it seems that Hart was both a confirmed Christian moralist and a devoted patriot. Upon receiving the news of the battle of Sullivan’s Island, he wrote, “God appeared for us, and defeated our Enemies,” then when South Carolina became an independent state in 1776, he exclaimed, “May we never again be enslav’d!”<sup>17</sup> When the constitution of the new state was published, Hart rejoiced that, “We now have a hopeful Prospect that we shall obtain religious Liberty, in its full Extent, in this State.”<sup>18</sup> The views of such an enthusiastic revolutionary could hardly have failed to be imparted to his congregation in his messages from his pulpit.

Further testimony to the popularity of the Reverend Mr. Hart with the revolutionists in Charleston is evident in his correspondence with Richard Furman.<sup>19</sup> Urged to return to his church, the exile had grown too feeble to accept the invitation, although there was a “Dearth of Ministers”<sup>20</sup> in South Carolina, and Furman eventually became the pastor of the Charleston church.

In 1772, according to Edwards, the Reverend Henry Haywood had published a catechism and a number of other treatises. A sermon delivered by Nicholas Bedgegood, “before a society of Planters,” had been printed by request, but none of these discourses apparently had any effect on the coming Revolution.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Frank Moore, (ed.), *The Patriot Preachers of the American Revolution* (New York: Printed for the Subscribers, 1860), 246.

<sup>16</sup> *Year-Book—1896, City of Charleston, South Carolina*, Containing Extracts From the Diary of Rev. Oliver Hart from A.D. 1740 to A.D. 1780, with Introductory Letter from William C. Williams (Charleston: Walker, Evans and Cogswell Company, 1896), 393, 399. Hereinafter cited as *Diary of Oliver Hart*.

<sup>17</sup> *Diary of Oliver Hart*, 392.

<sup>18</sup> Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, February 12, 1777, *Furman Papers*.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Furman to Oliver Hart, August 27, 1790, *Furman Papers*.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Furman to Oliver Hart, January 26, 1785, *Furman Papers*.

<sup>21</sup> Edwards, *Materials of South Carolina*, 96.

Evan Pugh became quite concerned over the fate of Charleston when hostilities commenced, and delivered a sermon of thanksgiving on July 14, 1779, because of the slow progress of the British, although "the joyous respite was of short duration."<sup>22</sup> Pugh represented St. David's Parish in the Constitutional Convention of 1790, and a large crowd gathered at Darlington in 1799, to hear him preach a memorial sermon to George Washington.<sup>23</sup> Thus was his championship of the Revolution rewarded.

Richard Furman, born in 1755, had only begun his ministry when the War took place, but his contemporaries said, "he took an early and decided stand in favor of liberty and the measures of Congress."<sup>24</sup> A number of his sermons have been preserved, all composed after the Revolution, but several on patriotic themes. Two were preached before the Society of the Cincinnati, and in the first one, Furman said, "there is great reason to believe, the American revolution was effected by the special agency of God."<sup>25</sup> In the second, eulogizing Alexander Hamilton, the minister praised the supporters of the principles of the Revolution.<sup>26</sup> It seems unlikely that Furman would have been selected as the guest speaker before patriotic organizations had his sermons only become revolutionary after the struggle for independence had been won.

Although Leah Townsend regretted "the paucity of materials on the history of the Baptist churches of South Carolina during the Revolution,"<sup>27</sup> sufficient facts are known about the Baptist divines to stamp them all as supporters of the revolt. Oliver Hart was selected by the Council of Safety in 1775 to accompany William Tennent and William Henry Drayton on their mission of spreading propaganda in the South Carolina backcountry.<sup>28</sup> Hart was too ill to withstand the rough treatment he expected from the conquering British and left Charleston as did other

<sup>22</sup> Gregg, *Old Cheraws*, 296.

<sup>23</sup> Gregg, *Old Cheraws*, 451, 466.

<sup>24</sup> Harvey T. Cook (ed.), *A Biography of Richard Furman* (Greenville, South Carolina: Baptist Courier Job Rooms, 1913), 10. Hereinafter cited as Cook, *Biography of Furman*.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Furman, *A Sermon Preached at the Baptist Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on the Fourth Day of July, 1802, before the State Society of the Cincinnati, the American Revolution Society, and the Congregation Which Usually Attends Divine Service in the Said Church* (Charleston: Printed by W. P. Young (1st ed.), 1802), 7, 20. Thomas Jefferson had a copy of this work in his library.

<sup>26</sup> Cook, *Biography of Furman*, 143.

<sup>27</sup> Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists*, 176.

<sup>28</sup> J. H. Easterby (ed.), *The Colonial Records of South Carolina: The Journals of the Commons House of Assembly* (Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 6 Volumes, 1951-1956), *Journal for 1775*, 167.

Baptist clergymen, who were described by David Benedict as, "ministers, who had been active friends of the revolution."<sup>29</sup> Among these was Richard Furman, who had joined a company recruited by his brother, Captain Josiah Furman, at the beginning of the War. In addition, the minister served as a chaplain, but was requested by Governor Rutledge to return home where his influence would serve the Cause with more value than in the Army. Furman acted upon this advice, and only left the State when the approaching Cornwallis declared his intention of severely punishing "so notorious a rebel," if he could capture him.<sup>30</sup>

Joseph Reese was forced to flee to escape the British wrath, and Joseph Cook saved nothing but his life when the soldiers destroyed his home after he had fled. Edmund Botsford served as a chaplain with the South Carolina troops, while his Georgia home was burned.<sup>31</sup> Oliver Hart's son, John, "Entered the Army August 20, 1776," and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant under Colonel Moultrie.<sup>32</sup> Drury Pace and young Henry Holcombe both served as captains of militia. Other Baptist clergymen with military records included John Greer, Benjamin Moseley, William Murphy, Jeremiah Rhame, James Smart, Alexander Scott, Benjamin Neighbors, Benjamin Nix, James Crowder, Samuel Newman, Jonathan Wise, John Webb, Thacker Vivian, and William Woodward.<sup>33</sup> This impressive list is one of the testimonies to the loyalty and patriotism of the leaders of the Baptist clergy in the Revolution.

Of the more than one hundred Baptist clergymen known to have ministered in South Carolina during the colonial period, not more than ten are known to have been born in Europe, and at least twelve definitely in the American colonies. The birthplaces of the remainder are unknown, although biographical data indicate that they lived in the mainland provinces as children, and grew to manhood in America, not in Great Britain.<sup>34</sup> This fact contributed to their eager acceptance of the popular resentment against the oppression of the Crown authorities, and caused them to be more sympathetic with the Revolution than would otherwise have been the case.

<sup>29</sup> David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination, in America* (Boston: Lincoln and Edmands, 2 Volumes, 1813), II, 139.

<sup>30</sup> Cook, *Biography of Furman*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists*, 177.

<sup>32</sup> *Diary of Oliver Hart*, 392.

<sup>33</sup> Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists*, 177-178.

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Lewis Weis, *The Colonial Clergy of Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina* (Boston: Published by the Society of the Descendants of the Colonial Clergy, 1955), 71-95.



All religious organizations paid a heavy price for their loyalty to the American Cause and the Baptists were no exception. The brutality and wanton destruction of the British Army was so unnecessary that Governor John Rutledge was moved to a passionate outburst before the South Carolina Assembly in 1782:

Neither the tears of mothers, nor the cries of infants, could excite on their breasts pity or compassion. Not only the peaceful habitations of the widow, the aged and infirm, but the holy temples of the Most High were consumed in flames kindled by their sacrilegious hands.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of the formidable task of rebuilding, many of the Baptist clergy returned to the state and were welcomed by their congregations. Richard Furman was elected to the convention which drafted a new constitution for the state, while Edmund Botsford moved to Georgetown, and became a prime factor in the religious development of that area of South Carolina.<sup>36</sup> John Gano, who had served with distinction as a chaplain in the Continental Army in the North, made another missionary journey to the state and encouraged the rebuilding of many of the burned houses of worship.<sup>37</sup> They had given their blessing to the Revolution, and they generously gave their energies to cherish the independence which had been won.

Quite in contrast to the activities of the Baptists were the attitude and record of the Methodist clergymen in South Carolina. Neither as strong numerically in membership nor in clerical leadership, the Society of Methodists was introduced into South Carolina by individuals, and not by groups of settlers. Organized to reform the Church of England, and not to abolish it, Methodism grew slowly in Carolina. Its founders, John and Charles Wesley, had visited the province as early as 1736, and George Whitefield followed these clerics in 1738. The latter was forbidden by Commissary Garden to preach in South Carolina, and little more was heard of this phase of the Anglican Church until Joseph Pilmoor made an exploratory tour through the colony in 1772. This pious itinerant arrived in Charleston January 22, 1773, after a strenuous journey, and preached his first sermon in the city. As a result, Oliver Hart allowed

<sup>35</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of South Carolina from its First Settlement in 1607, to the Year 1808* (Charleston: Privately Printed, 1808, Reprinted Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, 2 Volumes, 1959. The latter edition is used for reference here), II, 234, contains the text of Rutledge's address.

<sup>36</sup> Sprague, *Annals*, VI, 62.

<sup>37</sup> Sprague, *Annals*, VI, 140.

him to use the pulpit of his church,<sup>38</sup> and the traveler also conducted services in several other churches in South Carolina.<sup>39</sup>

Accordingly, and in response to the missionary effort, slight though it was, converts to Methodism were made in the province, but they were still members of the Church of England, of which the Methodist movement was a part. In 1773, South Carolina was considered a part of the Annual Methodist Conference held in England, although no more than nine ministers who were members of the Conference came to South Carolina as residents before the Revolution.<sup>40</sup> These divines and their followers subscribed to the following Methodist ruling, recorded in question and answer form:

Q. Ought not the authority of Mr. Wesley and that conference, to extend to the preachers and people in America, as well as in Great Britain and Ireland?

A. Yes.

Q. Ought not the doctrines and discipline of the Methodists, as contained in the Minutes, to be the sole rule of our conduct who labour in the connection with Mr. Wesley, in America?

A. Yes.<sup>41</sup>

This particular ruling revealed the authority of the Conference and the strong influence of the leadership of John Wesley, which was not relinquished until 1784, when he consented for Francis Asbury to found the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, when the Revolution became imminent, the members of the Society looked to their clergy for guidance, and the clergy depended upon Wesley to formulate their policy. In great alarm over the prospect of an armed re-

<sup>38</sup> *The Journal of Joseph Pilmoor*, as reprinted in part in Albert M. Shipp, *The History of Methodism in South Carolina* (Nashville, Tennessee: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884), 128. Hereinafter cited as Shipp, *History of Methodism*. (The original manuscript of Pilmoor's *Journal* is in the Historical Center Library, Old St. George's, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.)

<sup>39</sup> Shipp, *History of Methodism*, 133-134.

<sup>40</sup> *Minutes of the Methodist Conference Annually Held in America, from 1773 to 1813* (New York: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813), 2. Hereinafter cited as *Minutes of the Methodist Conference*.

<sup>41</sup> *Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1773-1828* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 36.

<sup>42</sup> The famous Christmas Conference of the American Methodists convened in December, 1784, and did not complete its deliberations until January, 1785. Therefore, either date is sometimes used as correct for the year of the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. However, most historians apparently use the earlier date, 1784.

bellion against the Crown, Wesley wrote his missionaries in 1775, and gave them the following instructions:

You were never in your lives in so critical a situation as you are at this time. It is your part to be peace-makers: to be loving and tender to all; but to addict yourselves to no party. In spite of all solicitations, or rough or smooth words, say not one word against one or the other side.<sup>43</sup>

The Methodists accepted this ruling with misgivings, for Jesse Lee, an active clergyman of the Society at the time, remarked, "in many places the people were in great confusion."<sup>44</sup> Lee further commented, "our preachers were all from Europe, and some of them were imprudent in speaking too freely against the proceedings of the Americans."<sup>45</sup>

That some of the Methodists were torn between their duty to obey Wesley's mandate, and their sympathy for the American effort to obtain independence was evident in the discussions at the Conference held in 1777. A query was introduced to that body, phrased as follows:

Q. As the present distress is such, are the Preachers resolved to take no steps to detach themselves from the work of God for the ensuing year?

A. We purpose, by the grace of God, not to take any step that may separate us from the brethren, or from the blessed work in which we are engaged.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of this admirable expression of fortitude on the part of the Methodist clergy, Jesse Lee observed, "It might be well said during this year, that *without were fighting, and within were fears,*" because, "in many places the people were in great confusion."<sup>47</sup>

However, regardless of any indecision or inclinations, the ruling of the revered Wesley was obeyed, and there was no pre-Revolutionary activity, or any participation in the conflict by the few Methodist clergymen in South Carolina at the time. Actually, they attempted to be neutral non-participants, but this stamped them as Loyalists in the eyes of many of the zealous Patriots, and the Methodist attitude was not popular at all. The activities of the laity of the Society cannot be determined, as no churches had been formally organized, and without rolls of

<sup>43</sup> Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 4 Volumes, 1839), I, 115.

<sup>44</sup> Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America* (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), 62. Hereinafter cited as Lee, *Short History*.

<sup>45</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 60.

<sup>46</sup> *Minutes of the Methodist Conference*, 14-15.

<sup>47</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 62.

membership, there is almost no way to ascertain who the members of the Methodist body were. In all probability, the followers of Wesley imitated their clergymen to some extent, for it was apparent that they did not discredit their religious leaders. The minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodists in 1784 listed 3,271 members of the Society in South Carolina, which was an increase of 992 members over the previous year. The number was doubtless much smaller prior to the Revolution, and this increase in membership would hardly have been the result of disension with the clerical leadership.<sup>48</sup>

Jesse Lee had vigorously protested the attempt to draft him into military service by the American authorities during the War, yet had voluntarily acted as a chaplain to the soldiers. He was the only member of the Society apparently with any known connection with the Revolution, and that had not been an impressive one. In 1785, Lee accompanied Francis Asbury, Henry Willis, and Woolman Hickson to South Carolina to organize the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States in the state.<sup>49</sup> Lee recorded, "On Sunday, the 27th of february [1785], I preached the first sermon in Charleston, which may be considered the first Methodist sermon that was ever preached in that city, with a view to continuing preaching in that place."<sup>50</sup> The mission was not marked with conspicuous success, for Asbury noted in his diary, "There is a great dearth of religion here; some say, never more so than at this time."<sup>51</sup> The memory of the loyalty of Wesley to the crown had not been forgotten, and the result was the natural development of resentment against his followers, and this seems the most plausible explanation for the unpopularity of the Methodist visitors. At any rate, the missionaries persisted in spite of obstacles and the Methodist Episcopal Church gradually became a permanent religious denomination in South Carolina.<sup>52</sup> Few of those who founded it had been involved to any great extent in the American Revolution. Their clergy had not advocated it, but had taken an official stand in opposition to it. While they accepted the emergence of the United States placidly, and those who did not return to England became loyal citizens of the new government, the Methodists, as directed by Wesley, were opposed to the Revolution.

<sup>48</sup> *Minutes of the Methodist Conference*, 14-15.

<sup>49</sup> Shipp, *History of Methodism*, 142; also, Lee, *Short History*, 112.

<sup>50</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 112.

<sup>51</sup> Elmer T. Clark, I. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton (eds.), *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury* (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 3 volumes, 1958), I, 484.

<sup>52</sup> Abel M. Chreitzberg, *Early Methodism in the Carolinas* (Nashville, Tennessee: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1897), 40-41.