

Baptists and the Bible, Slavery and the Lost Cause: Inseparable Hermeneutics of Racism  
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Had the holding of slaves been a moral evil, it cannot be supposed, that the inspired Apostles, who feared not the faces of men, and were ready to lay down their lives in the cause of their God, would have tolerated it, for a moment, in the Christian Church. If they had done so on a principle of accommodation, in cases where the masters remained heathen, to avoid offences and civil commotion; yet, surely, where both master and servant were Christian, as in the case before us, they would have enforced the law of Christ, and required, that the master should liberate his slave in the first instance. But, instead of this, they let the relationship remain untouched, as being lawful and right, and insist on the relative duties. In proving this subject justifiable by **Scriptural authority**, its morality is also proved; for the Divine Law never sanctions immoral actions.<sup>1</sup>

The Reverend Richard Furman, pastor of First Baptist Church, Charleston, wrote those words in 1822, at the end of a year that sent shock waves through South Carolina and the rest of the South with the discovery of Denmark Vesey's plans for a slave revolt. Vesey, a freed slave of Caribbean origins, worked to arm a group of slaves organized through Charleston's African Methodist Episcopal Church, lead their revolt, and ultimately find sanctuary in Haiti. The plot

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Furman, "EXPOSITION of the Views of the Baptists, Relative to the Coloured Population in the United States in a Communication to the Governor of South-Carolina," in Bill J. Leonard, *Early American Christianity* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1983, 382-383.

was discovered and some 131 blacks arrested, sixty-seven found guilty, thirty-five hanged, and the rest exiled from the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Furman, representing white South Carolina Baptists, implored the governor to call a Day of Devotion and Gratitude, thanking God the plot was foiled and the masters saved. He wrote:

But with the knowledge of the conspiracy is united the knowledge of its frustration; and of that, which Devotion and Gratitude should set in a strong light, *the merciful interposition of Providence*, which produced that frustration. The more rational among that class of men, as well as others, know also, that our preservation from the evil intended by the conspirators, is a subject, which should induce us to render thanksgivings to the Almighty. . .<sup>3</sup>

Furman added that such a day of gratitude would communicate to other would-be rebels that “their destitution in respect to arms and the knowledge of using them,” would doom them in the face of a weaponized white community that was standing strong.<sup>4</sup>

Furman suggested that slave rebellions were inspired, at least in part, by the dueling biblical hermeneutics—methods of reading and interpreting scripture—within American Christianity. He warned that “certain writers,” many “highly respected,” promoted positions “very unfriendly to the principle and practice of holding slaves,” opinions advanced “*directly* to disturb the domestic peace” of South Carolina. Their anti-slavery views produced

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<sup>22</sup> H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But . . . Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 54.

<sup>3</sup> Furman, “EXPOSITION,” 379.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 380.

“insubordination and rebellion among the slaves,” particularly their insistence that opposition to slavery was born of “the Holy Scriptures,” and “the genius of Christianity.” By contrast, Furman and the Baptist Convention he represented did not think anti-slavery to be “just, or well founded: for the right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example.”<sup>5</sup>

Ante-bellum pro-slavery, its institutional and religious implications, remains a historical, indeed, continuing blight on Christian communions, particularly white Baptists, in the American South and beyond. Among other ethical miscarriages, the use of scripture to defend chattel slavery illustrates the way in which pro-slavery advocates used biblical texts to undergird a particular political and cultural practice, all the while claiming a public role as moral arbiters against a culture of worldliness and sin. Likewise, their support for slavery reflects the way in which a literalistic hermeneutic aided faith communities in linking biblical authority to a practice that contradicted the Christian gospel.

In other words, pro-slavery religionists made support for slavery synonymous with Christian orthodoxy. Implicitly and explicitly, they suggested that if the Bible was wrong in sanctioning slavery, it might be untrustworthy on the nature of salvation itself. At the same time, many of the same Baptist college founders—Richard Furman (Furman University), Samuel Wait (Wake Forest), Thomas Meredith (Meredith College), and the 4 founding faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (originating on the Furman campus), were slaveholders.

This brief lecture explores the relationship between scripture and racism, not simply in slavery time, but in the legacy of racist hermeneutics from slavery through Lost Cause

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 381.

mythology and Jim Crow segregation, all with implications for present controversies. Richard Furman's 1822 address is a case study in the hermeneutical principles that became the basis for a large corpus of work presenting "biblical defenses of slavery." We begin by exegeting that address. With his pro-slavery hermeneutic, Furman wove together both testaments, insisting that:

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were directed to purchase their bond-men and bond-maids of the Heathen nations; except they were of the Canaanites, for these were to be destroyed. And it is declared, that the persons purchased were to be their "bond-men forever;" and an "inheritance for them and their children."<sup>6</sup>

He cited Leviticus 25: 44ff to prove that for the Hebrews, "the children born of slaves are here considered slaves as well as their parents. And to this well-known state of things, as to its reason and order, as well as to special privileges, St. Paul appears to refer, when he says, 'But I was free born.'"<sup>7</sup> Concerning the New Testament, Furman asserted that,

Many of these [slaves] with their masters, were converted to the Christian Faith, and received, together with them into the Christian Church, while it was yet under the ministry of the inspired Apostles. In things purely spiritual, they appear to have enjoyed equal privileges; but their relationship, as masters and slaves, was not dissolved. Their respective duties are strictly enjoined. The masters are not required to emancipate their slaves; but to give them the things that are just and equal, forbearing threatening; and to remember, they also have a master in Heaven. The "servants under the yoke" \*[*upo zugon Douloi*: bond-servants, or slaves. *Doulos*, is the proper term for slaves; it is here in

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 381.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

the plural and rendered more expressive by being connected with yoke---UNDER THE YOKE.] (bond-servants or slaves) mentioned by Paul to Timothy, as having "believing masters," are not authorized by him to demand of them emancipation, or to employ violent means to obtain it; but are directed to "account their masters worthy of all honour," and "not to despise them, because they were brethren" in religion; "but the rather to do them service, because they were faithful and beloved partakers of the Christian benefit."<sup>8</sup>

Slavery had its cruelties, Furman admitted, noting,

That Christian nations have not done all they might, or should have done, on a principle of Christian benevolence, for the civilization and conversion of the Africans: that much cruelty has been practised in the slave trade, as the benevolent Wilberforce, and others have shown; that much tyranny has been exercised by individuals, as masters over their slaves, and that the religious interests of the latter have been too much neglected by many cannot, will not be denied. But the fullest proof of these facts, will not also prove, that the holding men in subjection, as slaves, is a moral evil, and inconsistent with Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

Thus the Bible set forth a "Christian" treatment of slaves that was not always adhered to by slave owners. That fact, however, did not negate the scriptural and moral validity of slavery as viable social practice. So Furman concludes that, "In proving this subject justifiable by Scriptural authority, its morality is also proved; for the Divine Law never sanctions immoral actions."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 382.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 385.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 383.

Thus, Furman asserts that the anti-slavery Christians, however well intended, should be particularly careful, however benevolent their intentions may be, that they do not by a perversion of the Scriptural doctrine, through their wrong views of it, not only invade the domestic and religious peace and rights of our Citizens, on this subject; but, also by an intemperate zeal, prevent indirectly, the religious improvement of the people they design, professedly, to benefit; and, perhaps, become, evidently, the means of producing in our country, scenes of anarchy and blood . . . <sup>11</sup>

Christian opposition to slavery reflected the “perversion” of scripture, interfered with the proper Christian instruction for civilizing of slaves, and may have exacerbated their desire to revolt, bringing chaos and death to themselves and their masters.

Furman even goes so far as to suggest that the participants in the “insurrection among us” had no Christian connections. He commented that, “It is true that a considerable number of those who were found guilty and executed, laid claim to a religious character.” Most were “grossly immoral” and “were members of an irregular body, which called itself the *African Church*, and had intimate connection and intercourse with a similar body of men in a Northern City, among whom the supposed right to emancipation is strenuously advocated.”<sup>12</sup> Here I think Furman betrayed the depth of his religio-racism, both dismissive and cynical about the existence of one of the earliest African American denominations in the U.S. The call for emancipation was the sign of “an irregular body” of Christians.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 386.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 389.

Furman's letter concludes with a reassertion that "the holding of slaves is justifiable by the doctrine and example contained in Holy writ," hence it was thoroughly orthodox. He ends by insisting with clarity and directness: "That slavery, when tempered with humanity and justice, is a state of tolerable happiness; equal, if not superior, to that which many poor enjoy in countries reputed free." He even declares: "that a master has a scriptural right to govern his slaves so as to keep them in subjection; to demand and receive from them a reasonable service; and to correct them for the neglect of duty, for their vices and transgressions." But, he asserts, slave-owners have neither scriptural nor "moral right" to "inflict on them cruel punishment."<sup>13</sup> Thus "the interest and security of the State would be promoted, by allowing, under proper regulations, considerable religious privileges, to such of this class, as know how to estimate them aright...by attaching them, from principles of gratitude and love, to the interests of their masters and the State; and thus rendering their fidelity firm and constant."<sup>14</sup> So Furman sought the conversion and Christian instruction of slaves both to make them fit for heaven and for biblically mandated servitude in this present world.

Richard Furman's "EXPOSITON" was among the earliest of what became a broad collection of ante-bellum "Bible defenses of slavery," works that conjured up marks on Cain and curses on Ham as evidence from Genesis that the darker races had been set aside by divine act as an inferior race, punished for their moral failures from the beginnings of humanity, laying biblical foundations for white supremacy. Other Southern religionists who took up the cause continued to use scripture as central to the case for pro-slavery. Presbyterian Robert L. Dabney argued that pro-slavery clergy could ultimately bring northern Christians to their views if they

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 390.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 391.

stressed the biblical support for enslavement. In 1851 he wrote to his brother: “Here is our policy, then, to push the Bible argument continually, drive abolitionism to the wall, to compel it to assume an anti-Christian position. By doing so we compel the whole Christianity of the North to array itself on our side.”<sup>15</sup> Thus Dabney proposed a strategy for casting anti-slavery Christians as outside biblical orthodoxy.

An 1852 publication entitled *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution* contained the extensive correspondence between South Carolina pastor Richard Fuller and Brown University president Francis Wayland on the slavery question. Fuller reasserted Richard Furman’s arguments and in greater detail, insisting that “both testaments constitute one entire canon, and that they furnish a complete rule of faith and practice.” Thus, he declares that, “WHAT GOD SANCTIONED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, AND PERMITTED IN THE NEW, CANNOT BE A SIN.”<sup>16</sup>

Francis Wayland was no abolitionist, rather he supported gradual emancipation, fearing that slaves were not ready for freedom. He opposed the militancy of the abolitionists but supported their contention that the overarching command of the Golden Rule negated slavery as a viable practice, especially for Christians.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But . . .*, 136, citing Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney* (Richmond, 1903), 129.

<sup>16</sup> *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution: In a Correspondence Between the Rev. Richard Fuller, of Beaufort, S.C., and the Rev. Francis Wayland, of Providence, R.I.*, (New York, 1845), 170. Capital letters used in the original text.

<sup>17</sup> Doug Weaver, “Review: Domestic Slavery Considered As a Scriptural Institution,” *Journal of Southern Religion* 15 (2013): <http://jsr.fsu.edu/issues/vol15/weaver.html>.



The Civil War came and went; the South lost; and the biblical hermeneutic for slavery created a theological crisis for Baptists and others. Certain Baptists continued to defend those beliefs, suggesting that the South was defeated, not because their views on slavery were incorrect, but because southerners had neglected the biblical treatment of slaves as laid out in scripture. After Appomattox, Southern Baptists repudiated neither the Civil War nor slavery. One 1866 contributor to the *Virginia Religious Herald* wrote:

Can it be that it was the *design* of God in the late terrible civil war to overthrow an institution which he himself ordained, established and sanctioned, and which he ‘designed’ should exist forever? . . . [God would not have caused all this suffering] that an inferior race might be released from a *nominal* bondage and endowed with a freedom which, to them, is but another name for licentiousness, and which must end in complete extermination, so far as human foresight can judge. . . .<sup>18</sup>

Very quickly Southerners turned to the Lost Cause, a term first used by Edward Pollard in his 1867 book of the same name, a way of re-mythologizing the post-Appomattox Confederacy.<sup>19</sup> The Lost Cause originated “as a byword for the perpetuation of the Confederate ideal,” that became a mindset for “justifying the southern experience.”<sup>20</sup> Introduced to explain the South’s defeat and memorialize its honored dead (hence the statues), it morphed into a broader

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<sup>18</sup> *Religious Herald* (Richmond), February 22, 1866, 1, cited in Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961), 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> Edward A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* Facsimile of the original 1867 edition (New York: Bonanza Books, 749).

<sup>20</sup> Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows, *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 2-3.

method for undergirding the collective racism of segregation, denial of blacks' voting rights, and culturally entrenched white supremacy, mindsets that still plague American society.

In our 21<sup>st</sup> culture Lost Cause mythology continues to reveal itself in a variety of expressions in the public square. I anchor the topic's significance on one word: Charlottesville, a 2017 event that illustrates the sad perpetuation of racism and militancy yet remaining in American culture. The rise in religion-related hate crimes, white supremacy rhetoric, KKK rallies, and race-based deviations in voting laws, suggest that some of the worst Lost Cause-oriented ideologies are not LOST in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

These racial, ethnic, and immigrant issues are remnants of the Lost Cause, a metaphor, Carolyn Janney suggests, by which the defeated southerners reshaped a collective memory that cast "the war and its outcome in the best possible terms," "often factually and chronologically distorting the way in which the past would be remembered." These "alternative facts" minimized or dismissed the role of slavery as a reason for a war fought in response to "'Yankee aggression,' and black 'betrayal.'"<sup>21</sup>

Alan Nolan calls the Lost Cause "a rationalization, a cover-up," that created a "**sense of advocacy**" to preserve the South's "defensive posture" that Civil War was NOT about slavery, but the autonomy of state's rights and "sectionalism."<sup>22</sup> Lost Cause ideologues theorized that "if the Confederacy could not have won [the war], it somehow did not lose."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Carolyn E. Janney, *Burying the 'Dead but Not the Past': Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Alan T. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," in Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, editors, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

Southern white Protestantism was a major force in shaping Lost Cause theology and mythology. As Connelly and Bellows write: “The rising tide of evangelical faith, witnessed in the phenomenal growth of the Southern Baptist Church and other fundamentalist churches, gave solace and structure to the defeated Confederate generation.”<sup>24</sup> In *Baptized in Blood, the Religion of the Lost Cause*, Charles Reagan Wilson writes that “as guardians of the region’s spiritual and moral heritage,” southern ministers “used the Lost Cause to buttress this heritage.” Thus “Christian clergymen were the prime celebrants of the religion of the Lost Cause.”<sup>25</sup> Thus Wilson concluded that these ministers,

used the Lost Cause to warn Southerners of their decline from past virtue, to promote moral reform, to encourage conversion to Christianity, and to educate the young in Southern traditions; [and] in the fullness of time, they related it to American values.<sup>26</sup>

While Lost Cause mythologists attempted to rewrite the South back into national identity, it also portrayed the South as the prime preserver of the original myth of America as God’s Redeemer Nation. For these Protestants, the Lost Cause meant that the people who lost the war, retained the vision. The defeated people, even in defeat, would be more moral, more “Christian,” and more “American” than their northern counterparts had been or ever could be.<sup>27</sup>

Yet underneath the rhetoric of moralism, sectionalism, and theological orthodoxy was the abiding scourge of racism. Lost Cause myths facilitated the formation of the Ku Klux Klan, a group

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows, *God and General Longstreet*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Bill J. Leonard, *God’s Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing, 1990),

whose racism was romanticized in books like *The Clansman*, written in 1905 by Baptist preacher, and Wake Forest University graduate, Thomas Dixon. In his introduction to the novel, Dixon set forth the plight of the Reconstructionist-devastated South and the deliverance offered by the Ku Klux Klan in two idealized paragraphs:

In the darkest hour of the life of the South, when her wounded people lay helpless amid rags and ashes under the beak and talon of the Vulture, suddenly from the mists of the mountains appeared a white cloud the size of a man's hand. It grew until its mantle of mystery enfolded the stricken earth and sky. An "Invisible Empire" had risen from the field of Death and challenged the Visible to mortal combat. How the young South, led by the reincarnated souls of the Clansmen of Old Scotland, went forth under this cover and against overwhelming odds, daring exile, imprisonment, and a felon's death, and saved the life of a people, forms one of the most dramatic chapters in the history of the Aryan race."<sup>28</sup>

In many ways, Dixon's novels mark a second stage of Lost Cause mythology, glorifying the Klan as an agent of southern deliverance, and the war as a states' rights issue, not a battle over slavery.

Likewise, the Lost Cause became a vehicle for reasserting white supremacy as the divinely ordained division between the superior Aryan race and the lesser, darker races around the world and in the United States. Again, Dixon's novels link the Lost Cause irrevocably with white supremacy. In *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), a central character, Baptist politician Charles Gaston is crystal clear in his analysis of the South's postwar challenge:

*"My boy, the future American must be an Anglo-Saxon or a Mulatto. We are now deciding which it shall be. The future of the world depends on the future of this Republic. This Republic*

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1970, 1905), 2. *The Clansman* was a source for the silent film *Birth of a Nation*, a cinematic attempt to romanticize the South and the Klan.

*can have no future if racial lines are broken and its proud citizenship sinks to the level of a mongrel breed of Mulattoes. The South must fight this battle to a finish. Two thousand years look down upon the struggle, and two thousand years of the future bend low to catch the message of life or death.*"<sup>29</sup>

For Reverend Dixon and other Lost Cause advocates, Reconstructionist attempts to bring the races together politically, regionally, and biologically would ultimately destroy the Republic. The result of their futile attempts was "the complete alienation of the white and black and white races as compared with the old familiar trust of [slavery-based] domestic life."<sup>30</sup> Thus the racist hermeneutic in the assertion that scripture forbade the "mixing of the races."

Dixon's novels redefine the nature of the Civil War from slavery to sectionalism as the primary cause. They glorify the work of the Ku Klux Klan as the protectors of the South in general and southern womanhood in particular. They "stand for one thing at least, the supremacy of Anglo-Saxon civilization."<sup>31</sup>

Other Baptists picked up such supremacist and sectionalist elements perpetuating and in some ways institutionalizing the Lost Cause in various Southern religious institutions. Mercer University professor Robert Nash illustrates Baldwin's point in an essay entitled, "Peculiarly Chosen: Anglo-Saxon Supremacy and Baptist Missions in the South," documenting that ecclesiastical collusion with the case of James Franklin Love, corresponding secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1915-1928. Nash shows that during Love's tenure at the Baptist mission board, "the basic premises of Anglo-Saxon supremacy were adopted with considerable intentionality as mission strategy. In an effort to encourage Baptist

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Leopard's Spots* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1902), 200. Italics are Dixon's.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 202.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 312.

expansion into Europe, Love argued that world evangelization, could be accomplished more quickly if the aggressive white races were evangelized first.”<sup>32</sup> In laying out his strategy for that kind of white-dominated evangelism, he wrote:

Let us not forget that to the white man God gave the instinct and talent to disseminate His ideals among other people and that he did not, to the same degree, give this instinct and talent to the yellow, brown or black race. The white race only has the genius to introduce Christianity into all lands and among all people.<sup>33</sup>

Love went so far as to link white supremacy with Divine chosenness, insisting that the Spirit’s call to St. Paul redirected him from Asia to evangelization in Europe, noting that before that time “the Jews were the chosen race; since then the Anglo-Saxon race has been God’s favored people.” Love concluded: “There is not a colored race in the world which could evangelize the white race . . . All of Africa could not evangelize one county of American white people.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus, for a time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Southern Baptist mission strategy was formulated by a leader who had drunk deeply at the wells of the Lost Cause, undergirding white supremacy with a form of racial election that he believed to be the will and work of the God of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

In August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, another Baptist preacher, Martin Luther King, Jr. assessed the inadequacies of Redeemer Nation and Lost Cause mythologies, challenging the nation to make America Great Again **for the First Time**. Said King:

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<sup>32</sup> Robert N. Nash, Jr, “Peculiarly Chosen: Anglo-Saxon Supremacy and Baptist Missions in the South,” in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* (Volume 38, Number 2, Summer, 2011), 164-165.

<sup>33</sup>Robert N. Nash, Jr, “Peculiarly Chosen: Anglo-Saxon Supremacy and Baptist Missions in the South,” 165, citing James Franklin Love, *The Appeal of the Baptist Program for Europe* (Richmond, VA: Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1920), 14-15.

<sup>34</sup>Robert N. Nash, Jr, “Peculiarly Chosen: Anglo-Saxon Supremacy and Baptist Missions in the South,” citing Love, *The Mission of our Nation* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1912), 18, 21, 64-65.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. [One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.]

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. . . . It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."<sup>35</sup>

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his assassination in Memphis, Dr. King's words prompt conclusions to today's address, commentary aimed primarily at the students and faculty, but the rest of you are welcome to listen in.

First, such engagement requires learning to read contemporary culture in the United States with a sense of history. The line from Baptists' biblical defenses of slavery, segregation,

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<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream," <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm>.

Jim Crow, and religio-cultural racism runs directly to our two Universities, Furman integrated in 1965 and Wake Forest, integrated in 1962. Your recent commemoration of that event highlights, in Brian Neumann's fine study, the battle with Baptist institutional racism to make campus integration happen.

It necessitates locating contemporary rhetoric of American exceptionalism and chosen nation, a renewed Lost Cause ideology, or racism masquerading a voter reform within the historical context that birthed them. It mandates informed analysis and comprehension of the roots of white supremacy, internet racism, and ongoing anti-Semitism, and, perhaps most importantly, distinguishing "alternative facts" from 'alternative interpretations.'

Second, for a new generation of students it means learning to distinguish between Christian conviction and cultural prejudice, especially when both are articulated in biblical rhetoric that has acquired increased imperative. Many elements of slave-based culture and Lost Cause mythology were rooted in distorted biblical hermeneutics, interpretative methods that gave proof texts for supporting Manifest Destiny, exploitation of Indians, chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and white supremacy. Such malformed Biblicism was evident in 2017 when Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, touted Romans chapter 13 as divine sanction for a U.S. President to "take out" the South Korean leader, using assassination, and other dark arts, as necessary.<sup>36</sup>

Third, churches and schools must cultivate dissent anew, contesting the ways in which religious communities cut deals with the larger culture. Edwin Gaustad wrote: "This reform of

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<sup>36</sup> Pastor Robert Jeffress, 'God has Given Trump Authority to Take out Kim Jong-Un,' August 8, 2017, [www.firstdallas.org](http://www.firstdallas.org).



religion in the name of religion, this growing edge, this refusal to let well enough alone, is the role of dissent.” It “may also be a manifestation of the unfettered human spirit.”<sup>37</sup> And sometimes essential dissent becomes irrevocably prophetic. Cathleen Kaveny writes that prophets provide a “kind of *moral chemotherapy* . . . a brutal but necessary response to aggressive forms of moral malignancy,”<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Roger Williams and Ann Hutchinson, Frederick Douglas and Harriet Tubman, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King, and oh yes, Jesus, offer instruction in re-mythologizing America, not as Redeemer Nation, but as **Beloved Community**. In segregated America of 1963, Dr. King reminded the nation that the existence of slavery meant that the mythic covenant of a Redeemer Nation was broken from the start, a promissory note of “insufficient funds.” But King did not lose hope: “I have a dream,” he said, “that **one day** this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all . . . are created equal.” More than a half century later, that creed remains unfulfilled for so many. Fulfilling that promise requires mirroring Dr. King’s courage by confronting a renewed Lost Cause ideology spewed out Charlottesville, Virginia, in white supremacy-KKK-Nazi bigotry made tangible in torch light parades, “blood and soil” mantras, and the murder of a 32-year-old dissenter. If the hope of a Beloved Community means anything at all, then Heather Heyer must not have died in vain.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Edwin S. Gaustad, *Religious Dissent in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 4-5.

<sup>38</sup> Cathleen Kaveny, *Prophecy Without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 312.

<sup>39</sup> Heather Heyer was slain in Charlottesville when a self-described white supremacist drove his automobile into a crowd of counter-protesters, killing Heyer and injuring numerous others.

Resisting that kind of perpetual racism requires our commitment as instruments of justice, reconciliation, and compassion. That's the language of a Beloved Community, language and action that can never be a Lost Cause.