Between Religion and Honor: Charles Colcock Jones and a Discussion of Antebellum Southern Values

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Abstract
The ethic of honor among Southern white men encouraged violence, excess, and public displays of manhood. Conversely, evangelical religion compelled Christians toward abstinence and self-control, ideas usually incompatible with the expectations of honor. An elite plantation owner and a prominent Presbyterian minister, Charles Colcock Jones, acted on both these opposite ideals during the Secession Crisis and Civil War. An examination and analysis of his and other Jones family letters and correspondence will demonstrate how Jones incorporated the ethic of honor as the threat of disunion materialized, only to turn back toward evangelical Christianity following the outbreak of war.

On August 26th, 1861 Charles Colcock Jones, a prominent Presbyterian and an elite Georgia plantation owner, wrote an irate letter to a former employee and fellow minister. After citing his credentials as a Christian gentleman, Jones accused the man of “debauch[ing] a young Negro girl...,” who happened to be a slave belonging to Jones, and fathering her child. Jones angrily told his former assistant he had violated the principles of Christian benevolence and betrayed Jones’s trust. Jones declared that, “You, [sir], are the only man who ever dared to offer...so vile and so infamous an insult to me personally and to my family!” Disgusted, Jones finished, “How you have wounded the Saviour [sic], and brought disgrace upon religion.”

As Jones made clear, he believed that the offense was a crime against both himself and his slave. In making his claim, Jones drew upon two distinct ethical belief systems that dominated the antebellum South to justify his position—honor and evangelical Christianity. Jones based his personal umbrage on the Southern ethic of honor and took it as an insult that a former employee would enter his household under the pretense of Christian service only to commit such an ungodly act. In addition, Jones believed that his former guest had compromised the principles of Christian duty towards others. By using the two together, Jones created an amalgamation that might seem unexpected or, at the very least, unorthodox. Yet Jones accomplished this task with relative effortlessness. Upon closer examination, however, in moments of personal crisis, Jones seems to have used his evangelical beliefs more so than the ethic of honor.

At first glance, Jones’s simultaneous use of the ethic of honor and the precepts of evangelical Christianity might appear to be antithetical. Indeed, scholars of honor and evangelical Christianity have often been inclined

to note the differences between the

two rather than the potential for

cooperation. Historian Bertram Wyatt-

Brown suggests that because the church

population of the antebellum South

was only a small portion of the entire

population, “Churchmen either were

temselves involved or stood quietly

aside, recognizing the superior moral

force of the circle of honor itself.”

In an examination of post-bellum

Southern culture, historian Ted Ownby

argues that Southern men vacillated

between the worlds of manly honor

and pious evangelicalism in a binge

and purge cycle of excess and denial.

Even when the two did converge,

historian Christine Leigh Heyrman

suggests that evangelicals bent to the

will of honor, coming to “accept the

most basic assumption of the code

of honor...behavior in the company

of other masters.” Jones, however,

provides an excellent example of one

person bound to both standards of

Southern ethics and time and again, he

relied on both to inform his actions as

a Southerner. As Jones dealt with issues

relating to parenthood, secession, and

slavery, he was guided by both honor

and evangelical Christianity. Yet while

he acted on the influences of each,

particularly during moments of crisis,

Jones seems to have been influenced

more by his evangelical beliefs than his

status as a man of honor.

As a prominent white Southerner,

Jones lived within the Southern

culture of honor. Several key factors

distinguished the Southern ethic of

honor. First, when Southerners spoke

of and acted upon honor, they believed

only white men could possess it.

Women, minors, and blacks of both sexes,

regardless of their status as free

or enslaved, were excluded from

the world of honor. Second, Southerners

defined honor in terms of a man’s

relationship with the community.

Society’s opinion determined his worth

and standing, and this public assessment

was the most important aspect of a

man’s character. Third, the very nature

of the community’s expectations

required men to act independently.

This translated into aggressive behavior

in an attempt for self-assertion. By

acting in such a manner, Southern

white men hoped to prove their

masculinity and gain community esteem

and public acceptance. Elites often

expressed their honor through seeking

political office, oratory, gambling,

and dueling. Members of the lower

classes resorted to more crude methods

including brawling, profanity, acts

of miscegenation, and other boorish

activities. Nevertheless, each was

an attempt to earn credibility and

acceptance in the eyes of others. Thus,

when Southern white men acted out,

they were submitting to the community’s

expectations. To do otherwise signified

a complete lack of honor. Although

Jones was not one to indulge in worldly

pleasures or excesses like most other

men of honor, he was concerned about

his status within the community, the

most important aspect of honor.

Just as the ethic of honor displayed

several distinct characteristics,

evangelical Christianity possessed certain

distinctive attributes. One prerequisite

upon which all evangelicals insisted was

conversion. Conversion symbolized the

rejection of one’s own will and ceded

control to God. In addition, evangelicals

stressed the personal relationship with

God. They hoped that this could prevent

worldly influences from corrupting

the individual and thereby maintain

the personal piety essential to the

evangelical view of Christianity. Another

view to which evangelicals subscribed

was a missionary ethos, which required

all Christians to convert others. By

doing this, Jones fulfilled the mandate
to all Christians first given by Christ.

Finally, although much dissimilarity
existed between evangelicalism and

honor, evangelicals like Jones believed

in submission before God, just as those

of an honor–bound society bent to the

will of the community. Wyatt–Brown

notes that the graceful element of

Christianity, in which God conveyed

mercy upon humanity, lent itself well to

a hierarchy in which honor was central.

Evangelical submission, however, was

unique in that, at least theoretically,

all were equal before God. This belief

could potentially lend itself toward

an egalitarian view of society, and it
did to some degree in the Northern

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4 Christine Leigh Heyrman, Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 252. Heyrman suggests that a key feature of early 19th century evangelicals was to demonstrate “self-mastery” and that doing so was a means for demonstrating their worth in Southern culture.
7 A number of historians have provided descriptions of evangelical Christianity. For those I have found particularly helpful, see: Heyrman, 4-5; Anne C. Loveland, Evangelicals and the Social Order: 1800-1860, (Baton Rouge, 1980), 1-90; Donald G. Mathews, Religion in the Old South, (Chicago, 1977), xvi-xvi; also Steven Elliot Tripp, Yankee Town Southern City, (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 50.
states. However, as historian Eugene Genovese notes with his usual expertise, the egalitarian aspects of evangelical Christianity were not so powerful by themselves as to threaten the status quo within the antebellum South.8

A closer analysis of the case of the debauched slave reveals an example of how Jones used honor and evangelical Christianity simultaneously. As it developed, the incident began to take on several important aspects of an affair of honor. Central to such development was the correspondence between Jones, the accused, and officials from another Presbyterian church who became involved at the behest of the accused. When confronted with the charges, the accused denied Jones’s claim in an enclosure to a letter from the aforementioned officials to Jones, stating,

Charges have been made against me by Rev. C.C. Jones embracing adultery and therewith un-Christian conduct. I hereby deny…such charges and pronounce them to be false and unfounded.9

Clearly, the accused attempted to defend his reputation. Yet, he was careful to avoid questioning Jones’s honor as a man of a higher social standing, particularly in the presence of church officials who would have regarded Jones as a social equal. Calling Jones a liar would have indeed been a serious affront. As historian Kenneth Greenberg argues,

calling a fellow man a liar often escalated trivial disputes into duels.10 While Jones would likely not have been inclined to engage in a duel, the accused clearly selected his words carefully when dealing with so prominent a man as Jones.

Hon. John Johnson and A.G. Redd, the officials from the Presbyterian Church of Columbus, Georgia, also used the language of honor when coming to the defense of the accused. They based their position on their belief in a lack of credibility on the part of the female slave especially when compared with the accused, a white male with considerable standing in the community. They snidely remarked that, “the fact is apparent that your woman…has departed from the rules of chastity.” They further asserted,

[He] is a member of the church…it is…our duty to protect and defend innocent members…[His] character is in great jeopardy, and with his character goes his prospects for success even in his secular vocation.11

Clearly, the defenders of the accused perceived a threat to white male honor; namely, that a woman, a slave, no less, could challenge a white’s status in society. As Wyatt–Brown points out, the south was a true patriarchal society in that it placed white men at the top of the hierarchy and institutionally assaulted female identity.12 As such, these officials felt compelled to defend the honor of the accused, an embattled white man of standing. Yet just as they did, they began an affair of honor between themselves and Jones. In subsequent letters, Jones lamented the fact that sometimes the guilty are exonerated and that the product of the infidelity, the child of the slave, unmistakably resembled the accused. In addition, he reaffirmed his support of the female slave and pointed out that the argument against her had likely been informed by racist tendencies. He argued, “If my servant were a white woman…she would carry a prosecution for bastardy against him in any common court.”13 In so doing, Jones clearly deviated from the norms of the antebellum South. Moreover, Jones hoped to encourage his colleagues to put aside their prejudices and consider the charges against the accused before defending him.

The advocates of the accused pointed out that in a world based on male honor, taking the word of a debased slave was a violation of the social hierarchy. Even though they recognized Jones’s status as an elite, they remained committed to defending the accused. Still, Jones staunchly pursued the case. Thus, while this incident exemplifies many characteristics of an affair of honor, it also demonstrates that Jones believed in the primacy of evangelical Christianity within the Southern culture. While Jones did not see the slave as an equal with whites, the fact that he

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9 Hon. John Johnson to Rev. C.C. Jones, Nov. 18th, 1861 enclosure of Mr. _______, Myers, 800.
12 Wyatt–Brown, 226, 246; Also see: Wilber J. Cash, The Mind of the South, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991; reprint), 29-58. In his dated but still valuable examination of Southern history, The Mind of the South, Cash argues that the central character of antebellum Southern society was the white male, and it was his word and action which stood paramount above all others.
13 C.C. Jones to Hon. John Johnson and Mr. A.G. Redd, Oct. 16, 1861; Myers, 774-776.
reduced the word of a white to that of a slave suggests, in terms of the sinful nature of man, Jones believed all were equally susceptible to temptation. Although the dynamics of master and slave relations often permitted similar cases of miscegenation among white men as that of the alleged debauchery mentioned by Jones, he believed the accused had committed a greater offense than violation of Jones' honor. Rather, he had committed a morally indefensible act to which any evangelically conscious master would object. As an evangelical and a member of the master class, Jones felt compelled to address the issue.

In making his argument, Jones did more than take the word of a female slave over a white man. Historian Steven Stowe argues that in affairs of honor, men of elite status “invoked...a moral force” to justify their claims.\textsuperscript{14} While this no doubt influenced Jones’s thinking, he took this event a step further than most others among his social strata. Jones reduced the word of a man of considerable esteem to that of a slave. As Greenberg points out, Southerners associated slavery with a lack of personal autonomy. While white of elite standing were free to do as they chose to assert themselves among their peers, a slave was limited to submitting to the will of others.\textsuperscript{15} Misuse or mistreatment of another man’s property was a considerable offense in an honor-bound society; however, in most cases an infringement of this nature would not be so severe as to entirely remove a white man’s honor. Yet Jones’s rejection of white solidarity is significant in that it reflects a sense of moral equality for the slave. While white men could and did get away with such treatment toward black women on countless occasions, Jones would have no part of it as a patriarchal master who felt responsible for the moral condition of a slave. It is on this point that Jones revealed his evangelical foundations.

This was not the first time Jones ran afoul of the South’s racial orthodoxy because of his evangelical beliefs. As a young theology student at Princeton Theological Seminary, he dabbled with antislavery sentiments. As historian Donald Mathews argues, the minister-in-training harbored misgivings about slavery because he was, “saddened and embarrassed by the contrast between southern society and the northern society he had come to admire.”\textsuperscript{16} Yet as historian Erskine Clarke suggests, Jones’s contempt for slavery was not the deep antipathy of abolitionism which regarded it as sin. Rather, Jones viewed it as an evil which could be purged through gradual emancipation. While such a distinction might seem confusing at first, it was significant in that Jones would not have believed that slaveholders were sinning per se. Instead, they were simply actors in a system beyond their control. Thus for Jones during his youth, it could be argued that he believed in slavery as a “necessary evil,” a socially undesirable aspect of the South about which little could be done to fully eradicate, at least in the short term.\textsuperscript{17}

Upon returning to the South, however, Jones became more conservative in his views toward slavery. As he became more firmly established in the ministry, Jones contributed to what Mathews calls a “slaveholding ethic” which “emphasized the moral responsibility of both master and slave and was concerned with securing the benefits of both.” Moreover, Jones argued that to leave the system of slavery as it was would have been in negligence of Christian duty, but with Christianity, it could be vastly improved.\textsuperscript{18} Clearly, by 1842, when Jones wrote a treatise on Christianity and slavery, he had no intentions of eliminating slavery. In The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States, Jones urged masters to convert their slaves to Christianity as means for providing earthly benefits as well as heavenly rewards for those bound in servitude. At the same time, he emphasized that conversion would be beneficial to the master class. He argued that by bringing Christianity to the unconverted slave population, “There would be a better relation of master and servant: and of their reciprocal duties.” (italics by Jones) Thus, just as masters fulfilled their responsibilities by offering the benefits of Christianity, slaves in turn, at least in theory, would be better equipped to accept their station in life if they became Christians.\textsuperscript{19} Such sentiments deviated from those of his youth in that instead of bemoaning slavery, he attempted to both purify and support it. Yet as he wrote of the acceptable treatment of masters toward slaves, Jones never strayed from his central purpose of ensuring that the relationship be Christian in nature. Moreover, Jones implied that if slavery were to continue, slaveholders should be required to recognize and accommodate for the evangelical needs of the enslaved. In making such an implication, Jones clearly places evangelical objectives at the center of his agenda.

\textsuperscript{14} Stowe, 33.
\textsuperscript{15} Greenberg, \textit{Honor and Slavery}, 103-104.
\textsuperscript{17} Erskine Clarke, \textit{Wrestlin’ Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in Antebellum Georgia and the South Carolina Low Country}, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 12.
\textsuperscript{18} Mathews, \textit{Religion in the Old South}, 173, 141.
Just as Jones applied both the ethics of honor and evangelical Christianity to his stance on issues of race and slavery, he acted on these models to guide his approach in the realm of parenting. And here again, while acting on the principles of honor, Jones acted more closely in line with his evangelical beliefs. While Jones had three children, two sons and a daughter, we know the most about his relationship with his oldest son, Charles Colcock Jones, Jr., because of their extensive correspondence with one another. A graduate of Harvard Law School, Charles C. Jones Jr. ran a law practice in Savannah, Georgia. In 1860, Jones Jr. took up an active interest in politics. In October of that year, he notified his father of his election as mayor of the city:20 “It is a high honor, coming unsolicited, and the expression of the confidence of the majority of your fellow citizens,” his father responded, “[w]e are gratified that your conduct and character have been such to attract you their suffrages and place you in the highest office in their gift.” Jones even compared his son with Socrates, but noted that he had an even greater likelihood of success than “that great and excellent heathen.” Yet he also warned his son to be wary of popular demands and implied that he could only be assured of honor by holding a steadfast position.21 As Greenberg suggests, by resisting such demands, Southern politicians demonstrated their ability to act independently from outside influence, proving that they deserved honor.22 In encouraging Charles C. Jones Jr. to exercise the proper conduct of a Southern political elite. He furthermore urged him to read his Bible and pray constantly as he exercised the mayoralty of Savannah. Such language suggests Jones believed that honor and evangelical Christianity could not only coexist but cooperate as well. Just as Jones expected his son to behave in an honorable fashion regarding politics, he also emphasized the religious elements involved.

In addition to advising Charles C. Jones Jr. on his political ascendance, Jones also considered his son’s other public achievements, a distinguishing characteristic of a man bound to the Southern ethic of honor among elites. Following a speech given at a secession meeting, Jones praised his son’s performance in a letter written to his daughter, Mary S. Mallard. Happily acknowledging the community’s approval he wrote, “Your brother presided with ease and dignity, and delivered an admirable opening address…rapturously applauded.”23 While any proud father might have noted the “ease and dignity” with which a son spoke to an audience, a man of honor took special occasion to draw attention to the way an audience “rapturously applauded” a speaker. In so doing, Jones noted the community’s role in assessing his son’s achievements, essential to the world of honor.

Jones also praised his children for their military service, another element often associated with the world of honor. While Jones was too old and frail to serve, he repeatedly expressed satisfaction toward both his sons for their contributions to the Southern cause. “Our only sons—and both in the army! …There is true nobility in their action,” he wrote to his daughter Mary. Clearly he believed public opinion would recognize their contributions. Jones also believed his sons would serve honorably because “the current cause exceeds in character that of our first revolution.” Is so doing, Jones attempted to associate the actions of his son with the ethic of honor.24 Just as heroes like George Washington, a fellow Southerner, had manfully resisted the British, Southerners in 1861 must do the same against a Northern contingent they viewed as bent on a policy of subjugation. Surely, he believed, his sons would act appropriately for men of their social standing during such times.

Despite his satisfaction with Charles C. Jones Jr.’s services as mayor of Savannah and later as a Confederate Army officer, Jones expressed displeasure with his son on certain occasions. While the two undoubtedly had a healthy relationship, they apparently disagreed, at least periodically, over the question of salvation. Although Jones figured to be one of the South’s most prominent evangelicals, his son resisted conversion until 1861. Jones expressed these concerns to his son numerous times. On many occasions, Jones exhorted his son to accept Christ and save himself from eternal darkness. Interestingly, however, Charles C. Jones Jr. did not respond to these demands. While he often spoke of God’s aid and the dealings of Providence, when his father pressed him about becoming a Christian, he remained silent on the issue. Not until the illness and death of both his wife and young daughter in the summer of

20 Charles C. Jones Jr. to Rev. and Mrs. C.C. Jones, Oct. 9th, 1860; Myers, 613.
23 Rev. C.C. Jones to Mrs. Mary S. Mallard, Dec. 13th, 1860; Myers, 634.
1861 did Charles C. Jones Jr. heed his father's demands for conversion.

While some might see Jones's attempts to convert his son as a patriarchal dispute of honor between father and son, closer analysis reveals Jones's true motivations. He urged his son to convert because his evangelical beliefs required it. Moreover, Jones went so far as to tell his son to reject worldly attractions. Of the temptations the world had to offer, Jones wrote that there is nothing to draw you back, but much to draw you on, in them. You have but very few friends who have your present and eternal interests at heart.25

When using such language, Jones emphasized the eternal implications, a keystone of evangelical rhetoric.

By the time Charles C. Jones Jr. decided to convert, Jones, in light of the deaths of his daughter-in-law and granddaughter, told his son that salvation was even more essential at this moment of loss. Reminding his son that he would not be reunited with his departed wife and child if he remained unconverted, Jones wrote:

There is such a thing as substituting imaginations for realities; and unless you have a real interest in the merits and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ…you will never meet her in heaven…your immortal soul will be eternally lost! Nothing short [of conversion] will satisfy me…the emptiness of pleasure and honor and of wealth and all else earthly…perhaps you would never have so fully realized as by the affliction.26

After such a poignant plea, Charles C. Jones Jr. finally chose to address his eternal affairs. He wrote,

I would not have you believe that I am trifling with God's dealings with me…Those realities are too sacred, too awful, too heartening, to admit…vain imaginations…my wish is…to embrace that salvation…and peace made with God. All else is valueless."27

From the sources that exist, it seems clear that Jones believed his son's uncertain eternal affairs presented a greater threat than any political or military adversary he would ever have to face. While he could be a man of honor, wealth, or worldly esteem, all would be for naught if he did not secure his eternal future. Thus, while Jones complemented his son on his honorable achievements, he viewed worldly acclaim as superficial in comparison to religious security.

While Jones used both the ethic of honor and evangelical Christianity extensively in the spheres of race and fatherhood, he took a unique position during the Secession Crisis and Civil War. Instead of relying on the standards of the honor code, Jones based the defense of the South on his evangelical beliefs. Although Jones had distinguished himself by combining the precepts of evangelicalism and honor on other occasions, his actions during the Sectional Conflict demonstrated Jones's commitment to Christian convictions. Instead of using the ethic of honor to defend the South like most fellow Southerners, Jones relied heavily on his evangelical beliefs when defending the Confederacy. Even when he called on the ethic of honor during this time, such usage was sparse and framed within a larger context as a defense of evangelical precepts.

Even when Jones used honor to defend the South, he combined it with a defense of Christianity. On one occasion, Jones wrote to fellow minister David H. Porter regarding the split of the Presbyterian Church. Of the eminent divide he wrote his colleague,

The inauguration of war upon the South by the Black Republican government, backed by the entire North, is sufficient reason [for the separation].

Jones leveled this charge because he wanted to call attention to what he believed was a North devoid of Christianity. If Southern Christians were true to their beliefs, they would defend themselves against a Northern contingent they saw as imposing and oppressive. Furthermore he argued, “Ecclesiastical connections conform to civil and political…our being citizens of separate confederacies will but tend to bring up the question.”28 While such language contains elements of honorable Southern assertion, notably self-defense when faced with an assault, Jones relegated the ethic of honor to a supporting rather than primary role. If honor were dominant, Jones would have spoken of being personally violated. Instead, he believed that Northern Republicanism threatened the South's Christianity.

Although Jones believed the South's actions were an honorable defense of Christianity, he justified the war as a matter of divine purpose. He reminded son Charles C. Jones Jr., who by November 1861 was lieutenant in a Confederate artillery division, that

If it should please God to enable us to repel the invading fleet, it will greatly strengthen our cause...we must hope and believe that God will not suffer before their boasted power.29

Moreover, when criticizing the North, Jones suggested that its leaders behaved in a reckless manner, describing the Republican Party as destitute of justice and mercy, without the fear of God, supremely selfish and arrogant...The conduct of the old United States...is an outrage upon Christianity...No man can even conjecture where this strife is to end. Yet it is under the control of God...we can but cast his care upon him and humbly await his interposition.30

A close analysis of Jones's language reveals a twofold purpose. When criticizing the North, Jones questioned the attributes of haughtiness and assertion, aspects which would be viewed favorably in the South. As Greenberg and Wyatt–Brown demonstrate, manly pride and aggressiveness were essential characteristics in the Southern culture of honor. If Jones were an ordinary Southerner, he might have relished the opportunity for the South to compete with the North and assert its honor. Greenberg points out, some Southerners even admired the assertive and dangerous John Brown despite his attempted slave insurrection.31 Instead, Jones offered a harsh rebuke for a North he viewed as threatening to true Christianity. In so doing, Jones associated the South with Christianity and transformed the conflict into an issue that invoked the Almighty's aid. As his sons served the Confederate cause, he justified the war not in terms of honor, but rather as an event which would demonstrate the South's Christian virtues.

Jones also repeatedly expressed his belief that God, not human agency would determine the outcome of the war. As such, he refused to place much faith in European intervention. Early in the war Jones declared, "We must let England and France go...and depend on ourselves, trusting in God."32 Such language was a clear indication that Jones believed the Southern cause was in God's hands. If the South was indeed worthy of honor, God would deal justly with the North. Even when things were going badly, Jones maintained a higher power was at work. Jones wrote to his son on December 25, 1861,

With the shadow of God's judgment...and no ray of absolute light...I do not know that we can greet each other with a 'Merry Christmas.' But...His judgments are right...and so rest upon him to keep and to sustain and bless us.33

Clearly, Jones received true consolation in believing that God controlled all things when he could not rely on the ethics of his elite standing to affirm his beliefs.

From the fervor of the Secession Crisis through some of the darkest moments in the Confederacy's existence, Jones associated the South with evangelicalism, only using honor to defend Christianity. In November of 1860, he admitted some concern about the prospect of war with the North. In such an event, Jones declared, "Certainly we do need 'the prayers of the pious.'" Still, Jones confidently asserted, "I do not fear it (war) if the Southern states are united." After a Confederate victory at Fort Sumter, Jones supported the Palmetto State's valor and hoped Georgia could emulate such behavior. Yet following a particularly disastrous Confederate showing at the Battle of Antietam, Jones woefully wrote his son,

What a judgment is falling upon our country!...it is enough to sober the most inconsiderate and soften the obdurate and bring our whole people to humiliation before God.34

While we may find such language to be contradictory, the Reverend Jones saw no conflict between the defiant words he used before the war to the humble tone he took during its darkest hours. Rather, Jones believed the South to be truly Christian in nature. Thus, when the South came under assault by an entity he saw as lacking in Christian virtues, Jones felt bound to defend it. Only then did honor come into play and in a distinctively supportive role.

31 Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 104-107.
34 C.C. Jones to Hon. Charles C. Jones, Jr., Nov. 15th, 1860; C.C. Jones to C.C. Jones, Jr., Apr. 20th, 1861; C.C. Jones to C.C. Jones, Jr., Oct. 2nd, 1862; Ibid, 629, 666, 971.
With the lone exception of urging his son to convert, no other event seems to have spurred Jones toward invoking the aid of the Almighty more than the tension with the North. While Jones undoubtedly believed in and acted upon the ethic of honor, by associating the South with Christianity, he placed evangelical Christianity at the center of his worldview. When the Southern system in which he experienced evangelical success became embattled, Jones wielded the ethic of honor to defend his evangelical foundation. Following the war, one observer described Liberty County, Georgia, Jones’s home, as socially and morally destitute. Had Jones lived to witness the South’s defeat, such conditions would not have surprised him. Jones might have expected that with the demise of the Southern social system, the Christianity, which Jones had created, was also bound to suffer. Thus, it seems clear that when Jones married the South to Christianity, he placed all other beliefs in a supporting role to his primary evangelical ethics.

Jones, like many other Southern Christians, clearly valued both the ethics of honor and social hierarchy alongside evangelical Christianity. As such, he acted on the precepts of each throughout his changing circumstances and experiences combining various each to varying degrees. As war and poor health threatened his worldly security, however, he turned increasingly toward evangelical Christianity. Yet he spoke in a distinctly Southern tone, and believed to his death that the ethic of honor was fully compatible with evangelical expectations. Still, there were occasions where honor took a back seat to evangelicalism. With this in mind, it may be possible to view Jones as a forerunner for a South on the verge of transformation. While he embraced both the traditions of honor and evangelicalism, traditions that historians have seen as increasingly compatible, evangelical Christianity was clearly ascendant. Southerners resisted change in many ways before the Civil War, but initial resistance to evangelicals faded into acceptance. The emergence of the biblical defense of the Confederacy and the Lost Cause following the war further suggests an increasing tendency among Southerners to identify with evangelicalism. Still, the vestiges of honor remained strong in Southern society and postwar Southerners used such language to support often distorted views of evangelical purity.

As theological historian Samuel S. Hill Jr. argues, Southern evangelicals believed in an ethic of “social responsibility.” Yet instead of taking a progressive form as it did within Northern churches, it became, “the preservation of orthodoxy, primarily religious, but with social orthodoxy in a supporting role.” For Jones, this portrait, though accurate in some regards, does not fully explain his behavior. While Jones did become a Southern conservative by the late antebellum period, he did not view his relationship with Southern society as a one way street. Instead a mutual reciprocity existed between the worlds of honor and evangelicalism. When Southern Christians became conservative, and therefore non-threatening, they gained greater religious liberties within Southern society. Conversely, when the culture of honor conceded these freedoms to Southern evangelicals, it allowed men of honor to point out that they could be both religiously pious and honorable at the same time. When attacked by Northern reformers on social issues, Southerners of both honorable and evangelical persuasions had a means for defense on which they could rely. For example, when Northern critics attacked slavery for its ungodliness, Southerners called on men like Jones to refute this claim. In turn, after being attacked as hypocritical, Southern Christians defended themselves and the Southern system with the language of honor. Jones, it seems, offered an example of this process of reciprocity and how each side benefited from the other.

Yet the two were not always perfectly harmonious either. Just as Jones used the two seamlessly, he also bent the rules of honor to conform to his Christian beliefs. While in some ways, Christianity was, by the time of the Civil War, adapting and conforming to the rules of an honor-bound society, Jones offers an interesting example of an evangelical who adapted the rules of honor to conform to a different set of ethical standards. And while Jones did not speak for all Southern evangelicals of his day, he was one of the group’s most eloquent voices. Moreover, Jones’s apparent tendency to reshape the rules of honor to conform to evangelical Christianity seems to suggest a far more complex relationship between the two than has heretofore been previously understood. By studying Jones and looking for similar examples it might be possible to better understand how Southern evangelicals dealt with the culture of honor and how Christianity has since emerged as such a dominant factor in Southern society.

36 Heyrman, 27.
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Published Primary Sources


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