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978-0-521-43122-4 - Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South
Mitchell Snay

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The centrality of religion in the life of the Old South, the strongly religious nature of the sectional controversy over slavery, and the close affinity between religion and antebellum American nationalism all point toward the need to explore the role of religion in the development of Southern sectionalism. This book examines the various ways in which religion adapted to and influenced the development of a distinctive Southern culture and politics before the Civil War, adding depth and form to the movement that culminated in secession.

From the abolitionist crisis of 1835 through the formation of the Confederacy in 1861, this book shows how religion worked as an active agent in translating the sectional conflict into a struggle of the highest moral significance. At the same time, the slavery controversy sectionalized Southern religion, creating separate institutions and driving theology further toward orthodoxy. Through establishing a biblical sanction for slavery, developing a slaveholding ethic for Christian masters, and demonstrating the viability of separation from the North through the denominational schisms of the 1830s and 1840s, religion reinforced central elements in Southern political culture and contributed to a moral consensus that made secession possible.

This book will foster a better understanding of the intellectual origins of Southern nationalism, the coming of the Civil War, and the dynamic relationship between religion and politics in American history.

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Religion and separatism
in the antebellum South

MITCHELL SNAY

Denison University



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To my parents

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Acknowledgments

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