

The Quality of Mercy: Southern Baptists and Social Christianity, 1890-1920

Dr. Keith Harper

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Contrary to popular perception, turn-of-the-century Southern Baptists had an identifiable social ethic that compelled them to minister to society's dispossessed. Although Southern Baptists never deviated from their primary goal of saving souls, they believed biblical stewardship had broader implications than wealth management. Baptists eagerly engaged in social ministries for which they found scriptural mandates, especially orphanages. The key to enlisting support for such expanded social ministries was missions. Baptist leaders synthesized evangelical concern with social compassion and convinced church members that the Bible sanctioned social ministries and that such endeavors were worthy of support. The effect was twofold: Baptists built institutions to relieve the needy, and they also used these institutions to propagate the Gospel and teach Baptist doctrine.



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