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# ‘Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power?’: Politics of the Antebellum Baptist Schism in Kentucky

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**"Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power?"[1]**
**Politics of the Antebellum Baptist Schism in Kentucky**

The Baptist denomination in the United States has been a reliable litmus test for the social and political atmosphere throughout American history and continues to be today. According to Pew Research Center's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, one in five American adults identify themselves as a Baptist.[2] The U.S. is home to over 70% of the Baptists in the world. [3] With its purely congregational and autonomous ecclesiastical polity, its emphasis on personal experience, its advocacy of freedom of conscience and a secular state, and its notion of baptism of believers unto equal membership with all others, the Baptist church has been the religious manifestation of American ideas of democracy, self-government, individualism, personal liberty, and egalitarianism respectively. However, just as the Baptist denomination is beneficiary of American beatitudes, it is also heir to American ideological pluralism which is often the catalyst for faction and schism. Before Baptists even came to America during the mid-seventeenth century, they were already subject to schismatic factions, divided between the General (Arminian) and Particular (Calvinist) Baptists. With the birth of the new American republic, however, the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening and the antebellum zeal for social reform would incite another schism in the Baptist Church. This schism is known as the Missionary Controversy.

The Anti-Mission Movement occurred between 1820 and 1840 and affected several American Protestant denominations, but specifically the Baptists. It was during this time that certain Baptist churches and Baptist associations began to express their disapproval of mission boards, Sunday

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1 See Romans 13:1-7 King James Version

2 The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "Statistics on Religion in America". Accessed at http://religions.pewforum.org/reports.

3 "The Largest Baptist Communities". Accessed at http://www.adherents.com/largecom/com_bap.html.

schools, temperance societies and other church extensions which had grown out of the evangelical fervor of the Second Great Awakening. The very reactionary churches, which rebuked and repudiated those churches which had the aforementioned institutions, called themselves the Primitive Baptists. This faction was ardently Hyper-Calvinist, embracing a soteriology wherein the Gospel played no part in the regeneration of the elect, where efforts to reform society and evangelize non-believers were not only futile but even un-Christian, and where any church function that was not explicitly based in scripture was considered extra-biblical and evil. The churches which embraced these institutions called themselves Missionary Baptists. Emphasizing the command of Matthew 28:19, they sponsored both foreign and domestic missions, established temperance societies advocating teetotalism, endeavored to attain higher religious education through Bible societies, Sunday schools, and theological seminaries, and even went so far as to drift from the tradition of rigid Calvinism as they reconciled the once contradictory doctrines of free atonement and sovereign grace.

Another schism which proceeded concurrently with that of the Baptists was that of Thomas Jefferson's political brainchild, the Democratic-Republican Party. With the decline of the rival Federalists after the War of 1812, American politics had enjoyed an "Era of Good Feelings". However, as nothing gold can stay, this Belle Époque of the American state began to fade away in 1820 when the Missouri Compromise implicated sectional conflict and polarized American politics. The election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 prompted the reorganization of American politics into two camps, the National Republicans or Whigs, and the Jacksonian Democrats. The former constructed their platform around Henry Clay's American System. They favored high protective tariffs and a robust Federal government with the ability to improve the nation's infrastructure, reform national morals, and foster economic and industrial growth through a national bank. The latter vehemently opposed the efforts of the former. The Democrats were staunch libertarians, calling for a dramatic abbreviation of government. They championed free trade, an agrarian rather than industrial society, a laissez-faire

approach to moral reform, and the dismantling of the Second National Bank, internal improvement projects, and other institutions which they saw as unconstitutional extensions of Federal power.

This project seeks to find a correlation between the schism of Baptist church resulting in the Missionary Baptist and Primitive Baptist factions, and the schism of the Democratic-Republican Party resulting in the Jacksonian Democrat and Whig parties. The scope of this undertaking is Kentucky from 1828 to 1840. Kentucky is a very appropriate scope for the project for several reasons. 1) Sources of examinable information are in convenient proximity. 2) Kentucky, from its earliest beginnings, has always been predominantly Baptist in religion, therefore making Baptist churches reliable indicators of popular opinion in this era. 3) Kentucky in this period leaned politically toward the Whigs, an anomaly for any slave state, but also had a substantial Democratic presence. Thus it was a state wherein the rival parties stood on rather equal ground in relation to the states of South or New England, where the electorate was nearly homogenously one or the other. This paper analyzes both primary sources to identify ideological similarities between religious and political factions and numerical data to substantiation to a correlation between the two statistically. What the project seeks to argue is that Kentucky counties where Missionary Baptist churches outnumbered Primitive Baptist churches tended to swing toward the Whigs rather than the Democrats in elections, and vice-versa. Specifically, if this can be proven, it can easily be concluded that the mutual catalyst of both schisms was attitude toward the role of institutions in society. Some Kentuckians believed institutions, either ecclesiastical or of the state, should work actively for the improvement of society. Others saw them as unwarranted and inappropriate extensions of regulatory agency that, although established out of benevolent sentiments, could have only malicious consequences insofar as they had no sanction in a strict construction of either the New Testament or the U.S. Constitution.

## Historical Context of the Schism

In order to understand the dynamics of both the religious and political divisions which

Kentucky in the 1830s, it is important to comprehend the atmosphere in which both schisms occurred and the events and factors which produced the controversies. With the end of the War of 1812, the Federalist Party had declined and allowed a political "Era of Good Feelings" in which the Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans reigned in national politics. This political Golden Age was short lived, as sectional conflict brought forth dissonance between a faction of Americans who saw the federal government as a means to foster national prosperity and reinforce national morality and those who were cautious to allow any expansion of Federal power. The Monroe and Adams administrations had overseen the rechartering of the Bank of the United States and the implementation of public improvement and infrastructure projects such as roads and canals. Reactionaries in the Democratic-Republican party, especially those from the South, became wary of these institutions and formed a conservative, libertarian bloc. The conflict climaxed with the election of Andrew Jackson to the Presidency in 1828 and the reformation of American politics into the National Republicans, or Whigs, and the Jacksonian Democrats. The former advocated a national financial infrastructure, internal improvements, and a protective tariff while the latter vehemently opposed these measures as intrusive and unconstitutional augmentations of Federal power. Whigs were more apt to support reform movements such as Sabbatarianism and Temperance while Democrats tended to be circumspect with respect to these.

This political transition transpired concurrently with a religious movement in the U.S. known as the Second Great Awakening. This surge of evangelical revivalism swept the nation and religious sentiments were a catalyst for numerous reform movements. "Connections between revivalism and reform," historian Ronald Walters claims, "were obvious at the time and have been much emphasized by historians ever since….The Second Great Awakening raised expectations that the Kingdom of God

on Earth was imminent."[4] Evangelical Christians, including the Baptists, employed themselves to improving their society and engendered a form of Protestantism more proselytic and more systematically active in society than had before existed in America. The effects of the Second Great Awakening had one of its strongest manifestations in Kentucky. Perhaps one of the largest protracted revivals of the Second Great Awakening was the one which occurred at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801. One attendant, who was converted at the Cane Ridge meeting, gave an account of the effect that the ongoing revival had on those present:

> "It was supposed that there were in attendance at times during the meeting from twelve to twenty-five thousand people. Hundreds fell prostrate under the mighty power of God, as men slain in battle. Stands were erected in the woods from which preachers of different Churches proclaimed repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and it was supposed, by eye and ear witnesses, that between one and two thousand souls were happily and powerfully converted to God during the meeting. It was not unusual for one, two, three, and four to seven preachers to be addressing the listening thousands at the same time from the different stands erected for the purpose. The heavenly fire spread in almost every direction. It was said, by truthful witnesses, that at times more than one thousand persons broke into loud shouting all at once, and that the shouts could be heard for miles around"[5]

The Cane Ridge revival was a collaborative, interdenominational effort in which Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists cooperated in a joint evangelical effort. Church members took their new-found evangelical fervor for saving souls back with them to their home congregations in the years after Cane Ridge, which had a very profound effect on American churches. In the Baptist denomination, congregations and associations began to form mission boards to spread the Gospel at home and abroad, tract societies to disseminate Christian pamphlets and literature, Sunday schools to advocate religious education of the laity, theological seminaries to professionally train ministers, and temperance societies to combat the influence of alcohol on society. Missionary zeal amongst the Baptists produced, along with the aforementioned ecclesiastical institutions, protracted meetings and large, charismatic revivals

4 Walters, Ronald G. *American Reformers: 1815-1860*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).Pg. 23-24

5 "A Religious Flame That Spread All Over Kentucky: Peter Cartwright Brings Evangelical Christianity to the West, 1801–04" Accessed at http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6370/.

at which hundreds upon hundreds were converted. However, in spite of the prevalence of these benevolent sentiments, a significant number of Baptists were in vehement opposition to these efforts.

**The Primitive Baptists and the Democrats**

In October of 1827, representatives from the thirty-five churches of the Kehukee Baptist Association convened to discuss the proliferation of missionary institutions. At that meeting they set forth what would become a Declaration of Independence for Antimissionary Baptists or Primitive Baptists, as they referred to themselves. Their declaration read:

> "[I]t was agreed that we discard all Missionary Societies, Bible Societies, and Seminaries, and the practices heretofore resorted to for their support, in begging money from the public; and if any persons should be among us, as agents of any of said societies, we hereafter discountenance them in those practices; and if under a character of a minister of the gospel, we will not invite them into our pulpits; believing these societies and institutions to be the inventions of men, and not warranted from the word of God. We further do unanimously agree that should any of the members of our churches join the fraternity of Masons, or, being members, continue to visit the lodges and parades, we will not invite them to preach in our pulpits, believing them to be guilty of such practices; and we declare non-fellowship with them and such practices altogether."[6]

This repudiation of the "societies and institutions" in Baptist churches marked the beginning of the schism which divided the denomination between churches which identified themselves with their participation in such institutions (Missionary Baptists) and churches who identified themselves by their disassociation with the former (Primitive Baptists). Rhetoric like this is very similar to that of the Democratic voice in American politics.

In spite of the efforts of churches and associations to reconcile differences and maintain unity, the dissonance was exacerbated by the ongoing fervor of reform and with the prevalence of Jacksonian Democracy. The same controversies regarding missionary institutions and revivals divided the

6 Hassel, Cushing B. History of the Church of God: From the Creation to A. D. 1885; Including Especially the History of the Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association. (Middleton, NY: Gilbert Beebe's Sons Publishers, 1886). Pg 741-742

Methodists and Presbyterian denominations during this era.[7] Five years after the Kehoukee Declaration, several antimission Baptist delegates convened in Blackrock, Maryland, to convey their grievances toward the "inventions of men", as they called them. If the brethren at Kehukee had issued a Declaration of Independence for their reformation, the delegates at Blackrock were framing a manifesto for Antimissionism. The Blackrock Address, as it came to be called, was a systematic, point by point, explanatory denunciation of Missionary churches, much like the orderly, methodical admonitions of Luther and Calvin centuries earlier. Interestingly, some of the tenets in the document are strikingly similar in rational and in ideology with Democratic arguments against what they saw as unconstitutional augmentations of federal power. The address begins by criticizing tract societies, then shifts attention to Sunday schools, which are deemed controversial "because such schools were never established by the apostles, nor commanded by Christ…We therefore believe that if these schools were of God, we should find some account of them in the New Testament." Next the brethren rebuke the American Bible Society, which they claim is "an institution as foreign from anything which the gospel of Christ calls for." A four point criticism is expounded against Bible societies in the church:

> **"lst,** That such a monstrous combination, concentrating so much power in the hands of a few individuals, could never be necessary for supplying the destitute with Bibles….
> **2nd**, That the humble followers of Jesus could accomplish their benevolent wishes for supplying the needy with Bibles, with more effect, and more to their satisfaction, by managing the purchase and distribution of them for themselves…..
> **3rd**, That the Bible Society, whether we consider it in its monied foundation for membership and directorship, in its hoarding up of funds, in its blending together all distinctions between the church and the world, or in its concentration of power, is an institution never contemplated by the Lord Jesus as connected with his kingdom…...
> **4th**, That its vast combination of worldly power and influence lodged in the hands of a few renders it a dangerous engine against the liberties, both civil and religious, of our country, should it come under control of those disposed so to employ it. The above remarks apply with equal force to the other great

7 Walters, pg. 22

> national institutions, as the American Tract Society, and Sunday School Union, &c., &c."[8]

The next target of reproach is the most essential, that of missions. The brethren at Blackrock express their belief that the church is to be an establishment wherein "the poor is placed on equal footing with the rich, and money is of no consideration." They convey their conception of de facto missions as trangressive of this egalitarian principle:

> "Not so with Mission Societies; they are so organized that the unregenerate, the enemies of the Cross of Christ, have equal privileges as to membership, &c., with the people of God, and money is the principal consideration; a certain sum entitles to membership, a larger sum to life membership, a still larger to directorship, &c., so that their constitutions, contrary to the direction of James, are partial, saying to the rich man, sit thou here, and to the poor, stand thou there…..there is formed a general amalgamation, and a concentration of power in the hands of a dozen dignitaries, who with some exceptions have the control of all the funds designed for supporting ministers[.]"[9]

In his book Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900, Christianity historian Gregory A. Wills comments on the apprehension of Antimissionaries toward "benevolent institutions…[which]…entailed improper interference with the rights of the churches, threatened the freedom of congregational discipline, jeopardized the pure democracy of the New Testament, and imposed appearances of splendid national forms of government."[10] The anti-institutional, egalitarian sentiments against ecclesiastical institutions expressed by the brethren at Blackrock in 1832 are very similar to the political sentiments against public institutions made around the same time by Jacksonian Democrats. Just as the Kehoukee and Blackrock brethren emphasized the lack of scriptural basis for church institutions, anti-Bank Democrats expressed disapproval of what they saw as extra-constitutional national institutions. In his message to the Senate concerning his veto of the Second National Bank renewal, President Jackson wrote:

> "A bank of the United States is in many respects convenient for the Government and useful to the

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8 "The Blackrock Address", 1832. Text accessed at http://www.pb.org/pbdocs/blakrock.html.
9 Ibid.
10 Wills, Gregory. *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900.* Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg. 32-33.

> people. Entertaining this opinion, and deeply impressed with the belief that some of the powers and privileges possessed by the existing bank are unauthorized by the Constitution, subversive of the rights of the States, and dangerous to the liberties of the people, I felt it my duty at an early period of my Administration to call the attention of Congress to the practicability of organizing an institution combining all its advantages and obviating these objections. I sincerely regret that in the act before me I can perceive none of those modifications of the bank charter which are necessary, in my opinion, to make it compatible with justice, with sound policy, or with the Constitution of our country." [11]

Antimissionist sentiments against religious institutions and for strict interpretation of the New Testament were akin to Democratic sentiments against banks and federal power and for a strict construction of the Constitution. Historian John Ashworth notes that the Democrats were vehement about equality and despised any system which promoted advantages to the wealthy over the less affluent.[12] It is true, Primitive Baptists and Democrats had several demographic and ideological similarities. "Jacksonian Democrats", historian Ronald G. Walters claims, "rallied against the repressive goals of evangelicals and warned darkly about an alliance of church and state[.]"[13] and were "disdainful of moral crusades such as temperance."[14] In his study on Southern Antimissionism, historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown explained that hardcore democrats and Antimissionists often shared the condition of being "a rural, economically insecure people….not belong[ing] to the ruling elite whose attitudes have shaded modern perspective."[15] Wyatt-Brown discusses how the Missionary movement created a "sense of direction and a national framework" which would intrude upon local the sovereignty of communities, something that to both Democrats and Antimissionists was objectionable.[16]

Baptists in general had always been resistant to any relationship between religion and the

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11 Jackson, Andrew. *Bank Veto Message*, July 10, 1832. Miller Center of the University of Virginia Website. Accessed at http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3636.
12 Ashcroft, John. "The Jacksonian as Leveller" *Journal of American Studies* , Vol. 14, No. 3 (Dec., 1980), pp. 407-421
13 Walters, pg. 34
14 Ibid, pg. 177
15 Wyatt-Brown. "The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South". Pg 502
16 Ibid. pg 507.

government. Their persecution in England, Virginia, and Connecticut as non-conformists had conditioned their outlook on the state to be one of suspicion and apprehension. The persecution under the latter had prompted President Thomas Jefferson to write a letter to an association of Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut in 1802 which emphasized "a wall of separation between Church & State", an ideal which was immediately canonized into Baptist orthodoxy as well as enshrined in American jurisprudence.[17] Antimission Baptists were willing to build the "wall" very tall indeed. In his publication called The Primitive Baptist, Elder Joshua Lawrence of North Carolina expressed his disdain for a benevolent state, claiming that he "had rather  be under the government of a deist, and atheist, or a Turk" than the "tyranny of an unconverted…money-making…factoried" political establishment with religious pretensions.[18] Elder Lawrence conveyed the preference which Antimissionary Baptists shared for unregenerate leaders like Jefferson, whom they revered as a Cyrus the Great sort of liberator, rather than the "do-gooders" whom they feared to be wolves in sheep's clothing.

**The Missionary Baptists and the Whigs**

The growing ranks of Missionary Baptists, however, were willing to compromise somewhat with the secular-state dogma. In 1833, the New Hampshire Baptist Convention, a Missionary body, met to set forth a refined Confession of Faith which articulated the Missionary precepts in distinction to the obstinacy of Primitive churches. Authored by theologian John Newton Brown, these articles were surprisingly endorsing of government:

> "We believe that civil government is of divine appointment, for the interests and good order of human society; and that magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously honored, and obeyed; except only in things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Lord of the conscience, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."[19]

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17 Dawson, Joseph M. *Baptists and the American Republic*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1956). pg. 31.
18 Wyatt-Brown, pg. 508
19 Brown, John N. Church Manual. American Baptist Board of Education and Publication, 1858. Pg 12

Another interesting characteristic of the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, as it was called, was its toning down of Calvinist soteriology, which had long been a hallmark of Baptist theology. In contrast to the staunch predestination views of the Antimissionists, the Missionary outlook emphasized the freedom of salvation to all in order to justify missions:

> "We believe that the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the gospel; that it is the immediate duty of all to accept them by a cordial penitent and obedient faith; and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth, but his own inherent depravity and voluntary rejection of the gospel; which rejection involves him in an aggravated condemnation.
> We believe that election is the eternal purpose of God, according to which he graciously regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners; that being perfectly consistent with the free agency of man, it comprehends all the means in connection with the end[.]"[20]

The New Hampshire Confession of Faith became a template statement of faith for Missionary Baptist churches across the country, including Kentucky, and continues to be used ubiquitously in such churches today. Years later, John Newton Brown would author The Baptist Church Manual, a guide for Missionary Baptist churches to follow which included the New Hampshire Confession and also included a template Church Covenant, or mission statement, to be framed on the wall of the church for all to see. This statement affirmed the church's endeavors:

> "…to contribute cheerfully and regularly to support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations…..We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances……to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drink as a beverage, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior."[21]

Though it is subtly stated, the language of the covenant is loaded with sentiment for foreign and domestic missions, a paid ministry, Sunday schools, temperance, and even accommodates Masonic membership ("secret devotions"), all of which had been repudiated by Antimissionists. Like the New Hampshire Confession, John Newton Brown's covenant became commonplace in Missionary churches

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid, pg 32.

across the nation and remains so today.

The Missionary Baptists, with a reverence for the state and a zeal for reform, were closely ideologically aligned with the mainstream Whig Party. Prominent Whigs like President John Quincy Adams favored "a national bank to hold the local banks in check, ….protecting infant industries in America from foreign *competition*…[and] believed that the federal government not only had the power, but the duty, to stimulate the internal improvements of the nation."[22] Kentucky's own Great Compromiser Henry Clay was renowned across the nation for his "American System," which advocated "an active, rather than passive, federal government, one that assumed responsibility for economic development by means of a protective tariff, a national bank, and internal improvements."[23] Clay was exemplary of his fellow Whigs in Kentucky. In May of 1832 the Lexington Observer and Reporter, a Whig paper, remarked that the Second National Bank was 'the very foundation upon which our commercial and agricultural prosperity is built, and if taken away, the whole superstructure must inevitably crumble into ruin."[24] Kentucky's Whigs were among the most progressive in the nation. Their general ideology advocated increased revenues from taxes, tariffs, and the sale of public lands "for the purpose of promoting improvements, education, colonization, and similar projects."[25] Kentuckians were "uniquely interested" in the Maysville Road project. As one paper in the state said, "[n]ot only would it be a great convenience to the traveling public and expedite the transportation of the mail, but it would also increase by fifty percent the property values along the road."[26] Another Whig brainchild, the Tariff of 1828, was also very popular in Kentucky because it levied a heavy tax against imported spirits and liquors, a policy adored by Kentucky's distillers, grain farmers, and

22 Parsons, Lynn. *John Quincy Adams*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998). Pg 159
23 Ibid, pg 173
24 Lexington Obeserver and Reporter, May 24th 1832
25 Coffin, John. "The Whig Party in Kentucky 1822-1850".(PhD. Diss, Indiana University, 1933). Pg 54
26 Ibid, pg 15

especially temperance-minded Baptists.[27] In the national political theatre, the Whig platform "had so many features for the benefit of Kentucky that congressmen began to speak of every measure as 'the Kentucky Policy'."[28] The Jackson administration, which had vetoed the Maysville Road project and been an impediment to Whig legislation, was highly criticized in Kentucky. In one Whig pamphlet circulating the state, the Democrats were denounced as "anti-tariff, anti-internal improvements, anti-Western, anti-Northern, and a real Southern administration."[29]

Kentucky voters had not always been so committedly Whig. The data in Appendix 5 shows that Adams did not muster a winning support from Kentuckians in 1828, as most counties swung for Jackson. Yet the data also reveals that between 1828 and 1840, Whigs were becoming progressively more popular with each election, culminating in an overwhelming victory for William Harrison in the state in 1840. Just as Kentucky politics had completely transformed over the course of a decade, her Baptist churches were concurrently undergoing realignment. In his "Condition of the Baptist Cause in 1837", the Reverend James M. Pendleton lamented that Kentucky's Baptists were very much in the clutches of Antimissionism: "There were few churches that gave any regularity to the cause of missions, whether foreign or domestic. They had but few Sunday schools…There was no appreciation for ministerial education among the brethren."[30] That same year, the General Association of Kentucky Baptists, a Missionary Baptist body, was organized. At its first meeting, it was reported that there were 28,142 Baptists in the state, the vast majority of which, if Pendleton's account is true, were opposed to missionary institutions.[31] According to statistics shown in Appendix 6, however, by 1843 the number of Baptists in the state had grown to 67,179, of which 59,302 (88%) were members of Missionary churches. 94% of the 7, 747 converts from previous year in 1842 were baptized as Missionary church

27 Ibid, pg 7
28 Ibid, pg 8
29 Ibid, pg 20
30 Pendelton, James. "The Condition of the Baptist Cause in 1837", pg. 8
31 Nowlin, William D. Kentucky Baptist History. (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1922). pg 126

members. Therefore, it can be inferred that the Missionary movement with its remarkably rapid growth had successfully transformed the Baptist denomination in the six years between 1837 and 1843.[32] This extraordinary growth of Missionary churches in Kentucky can be attributed to the efforts of the General Association itself, whose zealous endeavors for missions and reform. In 1840, a report given at the meeting of the General Association opened: "The Christian Religion is a system of benevolence."[33] Like the Whig platform calling for a system of public improvement, the 1840 report given to the General Association claimed that "[e]very church should have some regular system for sustaining the Gospel."[34] This report remarked very positively on the success of the General Association and the proliferation of Missionary churches:

> "During the few years since our organization…great and important changes for the better have been effected; a revolution has been in motion, calling into action hitherto dormant energies of our denomination and promising speedily to renovate the moral condition of our beloved state."[35]

Nevertheless, the General Association emphasized a need for further improvements. "Our churches, for want of meeting houses had to assemble in the wilderness….We cannot, without criminality, be idle and indifferent spectators of the moral waste that surrounds us."[36] Missionary Baptists, like Whigs, were concerned with infrastructural development and moral reform. Just as Kentucky Whigs had criticized Democrats for being "anti-improvement", the minutes of the General Association labeled Antimissionists as "the anti-effort party".[37]

**Analyzing Data**

Analysis of sources reveals similarities between the ecclesiastical anti-institutional apprehensions of the Primitive Baptists and the libertarian sentiments of Jacksonian Democrats as well as those between the reforming zeal of Missionary Baptists and the improvement politics of the Whig

32 See Appendix 2
33 Report to the General Association of Kentucky Baptists, 1840.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid
37 Ibid

party in Kentucky. It is undeniable that the marriage of Christianity and politics was consummated in antebellum Kentucky. In the 1832 gubernatorial election, in spite of the Whig victories of Henry Clay for the presidency and James T. Morehead as lieutenant governor, Whig candidate Richard A. Buckner was defeated due to his being in favor of transportation of the mail on Sunday, a heresy which perhaps cost him over 1500 votes in a single district. His opponent, John Breathitt, a devout Presbyterian, won the election and became the first Democratic governor of the state.[38] Yet, can a substantial correlation between the Baptist schism and partisan politics in Kentucky be inferred? To answer this question, an examination of Appendix 1 is warranted. When election results of Kentucky counties are compared alongside data on the distribution of Missionary and Antimissionary Baptist churches, it is clear that a strong correlation is discernible. Analysis of the data reveals that in the fourteen counties which had voted consistently Democratic in presidential elections from 1828 to 1840, Antimissionary churches accounted for nearly half of the Baptist congregations in those counties. In Allen, Anderson, and Calloway counties, the most strongly Democratic electorates in the state throughout this period, Antimissionary churches were dominant. Conversely, in the most solidly Whig counties such as Knox, Garrard, and Logan, Baptist congregations were unanimously Missionary. In synopsis, there is a strong correlation between partisan politics and the prevalence of Baptist sub-denominations in several Kentucky counties. It is evident from Appendix 1 that by 1840 Kentuckians were overwhelmingly supportive of the Whig party. Most counties which went Democratic in 1840 did so narrowly.

Furthermore, when these statistics of Kentucky's Baptist churches were recorded, Antimissionism had been in continual decline in the state, accounting for only 25% of the states Baptist churches and only 12% of the state's Baptists. With an average congregation size a little more than a third of that of Missionary Churches, not only were Primitive Baptist churches few and far between,

38 Coffin, pg 62

but they were small and without much influence.[39] What is clear in that data is that counties where voters still held out against Whig improvement and reform, Baptists still paddled upstream against the proliferation of missionary institutions. The remnants of these two dying factions persisted in the same counties in Kentucky, perhaps because many they consisted of the same diminishing population of adherents.

Insofar as the data only allows for the inference that Whig politics and Missionary churches tended to thrive together in certain counties as did Democratic politics and Antimissionism in others, to conclude that political opinion influenced religious affiliation among Kentucky's Baptists or vice-versa would be conjectural. Instead, what may be implied by both the data and examination of primary sources is that both correlations owe their existence to an overarching apprehension toward the power of institutions, be they political or ecclesiastical, in one group of people and a belief in the benevolent potential of these institutions in the church and in society in another group of people.

## Epilogue

Today there is but a remnant of Antimissionism in America. The formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 represented the resounding victory of missionary zeal as it began to make seminary education commonplace, send thousands of missionaries all over the world, and print literature for religious education. With over 16 million members and over 45,000 participating churches, the SBC is now second largest religious body in the United States after the Roman Catholic Church.[40] It appears that the strict ideology of the Primitive Baptists is all but extinct, and that the bond of radical libertarianism and religious conservatism is severed. Or is it?

In his book *The Tea Party: A Brief History,* University of Kentucky Professor of History Ronald Formisano devotes a whole chapter towards the relationship of the American far-right to American

39 See Appendix 2

40 "About us: Meet the Southern Baptists". Accessed at http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/default.asp.

Christianity. In analyzing what he calls “Constitutional and Biblical Fundamentalism”, Formisano notes:

> “The Religious-Right's strong biblical fundamentalism, meaning belief in literal interpretation of the Bible, finds a parallel in Tea Partiers' constitutional originalism. They maintain that for much of the twentieth century and especially during the New Deal, Congress exceeded its powers and violated the Constitution. The federal government...must be held to a strict interpretation of the Constitution...God meant for secular government to possess only limited authority”[41]

The Neo-Conservative movement of the late 1970s through the present was able to sweep up the sentiments of American Baptists like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell who arranged a marriage of libertarianism and Baptist faith with their ministries. In 1979, Pat Robertson claimed that, along with homosexuality and abortion, the sins which plagued America were “a powerful central government...and the belief in the economic policy...to the end that government spending and government fine tuning would guarantee perpetual prosperity.”. Robertson called on Christians to vote for candidates who “pledged to reduce the size of government.”[42]

Perhaps the Antimissionary spirit has returned from the grave. It is important, however, to emphasize a crucial difference between libertarian Baptists of the early nineteenth century and those of today. During the Missionary controversy, the Baptists were vehemently opposed to the fusion of church and state, so much so that they were careful to compartmentalize their rhetoric so as not to explicitly bring political stances into their religious orthodoxy. Prompted by the social revolution of the twentieth century culture war, Baptists and other Christians today are dismantling the once impregnable ideological “wall of separation” and are hurling the bricks in protest of liberalism and federal power.

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41 Formisano, Ronald. The Tea Party: A Brief History. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).*Pg 52-53.*

42 Phillips-Fein, Kim. Invisible Hands: The Businessman's Crusade Against the New Deal. (New York W.W. Norton, 2009) Pg 225.

**Appendix 1: Statistical Data Tables: Counties, Population, Churches, and Election Trends.**

-County populations found in 1840 census records

-Populations are color-coded by the following scale:

0-6,000

6,000-12,000

12,000+

-Geographical distribution of churches found in an 1843 statistics report to the General Association of Kentucky Baptists entitled "Statistics of the Baptist Associations of Kentucky 1843". Compiled and presented to the General Association by Thomas A. Malcom. Accessed via microfilm Minutes of the General Association of Kentucky Baptists 1832-1850 at Boyce Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville Kentucky.

*There are approximately 50 churches in the state whose location was not listed in the General Association's statistics and could not be found in other sources examined by the author of this project. Thus, the sum of churches added on this table will not be equal to the recorded number of churches in state as shown in Appendix 6.

-Election results refer to U.S. Presidential elections. Statistics accessed in Presidential politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948: A Compilation of Election Statistics and an Analysis of Political Behavior (1950) by Jasper B. Shannon and Ruth McQuown.

Election results are color-coded by the following scales:

Democratic victory 51%-65%

Democratic victory 65%-100%

Natl. Rep./Whig victory 51%-65%

Natl. Rep./Whig victory 65%-100%

| County | 1840 Population | # of Anti-Mission Churches | # of Missionary/ United Churches | 1828 Election | | 1832 Election | | 1836 Election | | 1840 Election | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Dem | N.R. | Dem | N.R. | Dem | W | Dem | W |
| Adair | 8,466 | 1 | 12 | 63.2 | 36.8 | 61.1 | 38.9 | 64.3 | 35.7 | 42.1 | 57.9 |
| Allen | 7,329 | 6 | 5 | 70.8 | 29.2 | 61.1 | 38.9 | 65.0 | 35.0 | 47.9 | 52.1 |
| Anderson | 5,452 | 8 | 3 | 80.6 | 19.4 | 73.7 | 26.3 | 67.4 | 32.6 | 53.0 | 47.0 |
| Barren | 17,282 | 19 | 20 | 53.7 | 46.3 | 47.1 | 52.9 | 51.2 | 48.8 | 37.6 | 62.4 |
| Bath | 9,763 | 1 | 1 | 61.5 | 38.5 | 43.2 | 56.8 | 49.2 | 50.8 | 44.0 | 56.0 |
| Boone | 10,034 | 4 | 5 | 52.3 | 47.7 | 39.8 | 60.2 | 45.7 | 54.3 | 35.9 | 64.1 |
| Bourbon | 14,473 | 2 | 11 | 43.6 | 56.4 | 31.8 | 68.2 | 29.5 | 70.5 | 26.0 | 74.0 |
| Bracken | 7,053 | 0 | 3 | 48.6 | 51.4 | 36.9 | 63.1 | 36.1 | 63.9 | 28.2 | 71.8 |
| Breathitt | 2,195 | 0 | 0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 22.1 | 77.9 |
| Breckinridge | 8,944 | 1 | 8 | 42.4 | 57.6 | 28.9 | 71.1 | 18.9 | 81.1 | 17.8 | 82.2 |
| Bullitt | 6,334 | 1 | 4 | 66.7 | 33.3 | 62.6 | 37.4 | 60.4 | 39.6 | 35.2 | 64.8 |
| Butler | 3,898 | 1 | 6 | 63.2 | 36.8 | 62.9 | 37.1 | 59.0 | 41.0 | 42.3 | 57.7 |
| Caldwell | 10,365 | 6 | 2 | 73.3 | 26.7 | 56.5 | 43.5 | 62.2 | 37.8 | 49.4 | 50.6 |
| Calloway | 9,794 | 9 | 7 | 90.5 | 9.5 | 85.8 | 14.2 | 87.9 | 12.1 | 84.0 | 16.0 |
| Campbell | 5,214 | 7 | 8 | 75.1 | 24.9 | 61.4 | 38.6 | 67.9 | 32.1 | 56.8 | 43.2 |
| Carroll | 3,966 | 1 | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 38.0 | 62.0 |
| Carter | 2,905 | 0 | 0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 58.3 | 41.7 |
| Casey | 4,939 | 0 | 6 | 59.3 | 40.7 | 50.6 | 49.4 | 56.0 | 44.0 | 15.5 | 84.5 |
| Christian | 15,587 | 3 | 11 | 44.7 | 55.3 | 37.7 | 62.3 | 41.2 | 58.8 | 35.4 | 64.6 |
| Clark | 10,802 | 2 | 9 | 40.7 | 59.3 | 29.8 | 70.2 | 21.2 | 78.8 | 16.6 | 83.4 |
| Clay | 4,607 | 0 | 1 | 14.3 | 85.7 | 25.1 | 74.9 | 42.5 | 57.5 | 17.2 | 82.8 |
| Clinton | 3,068 | 4 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 28.0 | 72.0 |
| Cumberland | 6,090 | 1 | 1 | 57.1 | 42.9 | 50.9 | 49.1 | 32.1 | 67.9 | 12.2 | 87.8 |
| Daviess | 8,831 | 0 | 9 | 63.8 | 36.2 | 46.1 | 53.9 | 43.6 | 56.4 | 38.8 | 61.7 |
| Edmonson | 2,914 | 4 | 4 | 61.6 | 38.4 | 56.0 | 44.0 | 55.0 | 45.0 | 39.1 | 60.9 |
| Estill | 5,535 | 0 | 0 | 52.6 | 47.4 | 42.2 | 57.8 | 54.2 | 45.8 | 25.2 | 74.8 |
| Fayette | 22,194 | 3 | 7 | 43.2 | 56.8 | 34.7 | 65.3 | 35.2 | 64.8 | 29.3 | 70.7 |
| Fleming | 13,268 | 1 | 3 | 49.4 | 67.6 | 35.3 | 64.7 | 34.1 | 65.9 | 29.2 | 70.8 |
| Floyd | 6,302 | 3 | 4 | 80.5 | 19.5 | 72.9 | 27.1 | 87.3 | 12.7 | 63.4 | 36.6 |
| Franklin | 9,420 | 2 | 10 | 62.2 | 37.8 | 47.5 | 52.5 | 52.4 | 47.6 | 39.8 | 60.2 |
| Gallatin | 4,003 | 0 | 3 | 57.0 | 43.0 | 45.8 | 54.2 | 52.1 | 47.9 | 44.6 | 55.4 |
| Garrard | 10,480 | 0 | 6 | 20.5 | 79.5 | 17.6 | 82.4 | 21.1 | 78.9 | 11.9 | 88.1 |
| Grant | 4,192 | 1 | 4 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 42.9 | 57.1 | 47.7 | 52.3 | 47.5 | 52.5 |
| Graves | 7,465 | 4 | 4 | 85.5 | 14.5 | 79.8 | 20.2 | 69.7 | 30.3 | 66.6 | 33.4 |
| Grayson | 4,461 | 2 | 3 | 51.6 | 48.4 | 35.2 | 64.8 | 36.3 | 63.7 | 31.6 | 68.4 |
| Green | 14,212 | 0 | 20 | 65.5 | 34.5 | 72.1 | 27.9 | 76.5 | 23.5 | 46.5 | 53.5 |
| Greenup | 6,297 | 0 | 0 | 50.7 | 49.3 | 40.0 | 60.0 | 42.6 | 57.4 | 30.9 | 69.1 |
| Hancock | 2,581 | 3 | 5 | - | - | 45.0 | 55.0 | 32.1 | 67.9 | 24.4 | 75.6 |
| Hardin | 16,357 | 4 | 17 | 64.3 | 35.7 | 46.8 | 53.2 | 43.0 | 57.0 | 28.1 | 71.9 |
| Harlan | 3,015 | 0 | 0 | 36.3 | 63.7 | 29.5 | 53.2 | 23.3 | 76.7 | 2.2 | 97.8 |
| Harrison | 12,472 | 1 | 3 | 70.6 | 29.4 | 62.3 | 37.7 | 61.6 | 38.4 | 48.8 | 51.6 |
| Hart | 7,031 | 2 | 8 | 70.8 | 29.2 | 53.3 | 46.7 | 64.2 | 35.8 | 37.8 | 62.2 |
| Henderson | 9,548 | 0 | 4 | 41.2 | 58.8 | 42.6 | 57.4 | 49.7 | 50.3 | 42.3 | 57.7 |
| Henry | 10,015 | 8 | 9 | 66.5 | 33.5 | 51.3 | 48.7 | 56.0 | 44.0 | 51.2 | 48.8 |
| Hickman | 8,968 | 4 | 5 | 89.0 | 11.0 | 79.7 | 20.3 | 72.5 | 27.5 | 63.5 | 36.5 |
| Hopkins | 9,171 | 0 | 7 | 56.9 | 43.1 | 46.3 | 53.7 | 48.6 | 51.4 | 42.4 | 57.6 |
| Jefferson | 36,346 | 0 | 9 | 58.8 | 41.2 | 43.6 | 56.4 | 48.9 | 51.1 | 35.4 | 64.6 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jessamine | 9,396 | 0 | 4 | 52.4 | 47.6 | - | - | 39.8 | 60.2 | 29.5 | 70.5 |
| Kenton | 7,816 | 2 | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 54.4 | 45.6 |
| Knox | 5,722 | 0 | 3 | 32.0 | 68.8 | 27.3 | 72.7 | 23.5 | 76.5 | 12.5 | 87.5 |
| Laurel | 3,079 | 0 | 3 | 35.3 | 64.7 | 32.5 | 67.5 | 36.9 | 63.1 | 19.1 | 80.9 |
| Lawrence | 4,730 | 0 | 1 | 72.6 | 27.4 | 52.6 | 47.4 | 75.3 | 24.7 | 26.9 | 73.1 |
| Lewis | 6,306 | 0 | 1 | 57.1 | 42.9 | 53.8 | 46.2 | 46.7 | 53.3 | 38.0 | 62.0 |
| Lincoln | 10,187 | 0 | 6 | 51.0 | 49.0 | 30.7 | 69.3 | 34.1 | 65.9 | 16.5 | 83.5 |
| Livingston | 9,025 | 0 | 5 | 63.7 | 36.3 | 63.8 | 36.2 | 61.6 | 38.4 | 43.1 | 56.9 |
| Logan | 13,1615 | 0 | 10 | 27.9 | 72.1 | 25.8 | 74.2 | 24.3 | 75.7 | 14.8 | 85.2 |
| Madison | 16,355 | 3 | 10 | 43.0 | 57.0 | 32.8 | 67.2 | 30.2 | 69.8 | 22.9 | 77.1 |
| Marion | 11,032 | 0 | 4 | - | - | - | - | 66.2 | 33.8 | 28.4 | 71.6 |
| Mason | 15,719 | 0 | 5 | 44.1 | 55.9 | 33.3 | 66.7 | 29.2 | 70.8 | 26.6 | 73.4 |
| McCracken | 4,745 | 0 | 5 | 74.0 | 26.0 | 61.2 | 38.8 | 41.6 | 58.4 | 40.5 | 59.5 |
| Meade | 5,780 | 1 | 4 | 42.7 | 57.3 | 31.9 | 68.1 | 27.4 | 72.6 | 18.9 | 81.1 |
| Mercer | 18,720 | 0 | 8 | 70.6 | 29.4 | 53.0 | 47.0 | 55.9 | 44.1 | 45.5 | 54.5 |
| Monroe | 6,526 | 3 | 1 | 77.2 | 22.8 | 69.2 | 30.8 | 55.1 | 44.9 | 28.1 | 71.9 |
| Montgomery | 9,332 | 1 | 2 | 50.6 | 49.4 | 37.2 | 62.8 | 39.5 | 60.5 | 38.4 | 61.6 |
| Morgan | 4,603 | 4 | 2 | 81.9 | 18.1 | 68.9 | 31.1 | 85.5 | 14.5 | 55.0 | 45.0 |
| Muhlenberg | 6,964 | 0 | 7 | 42.6 | 57.4 | 36.3 | 63.7 | 39.8 | 60.2 | 25.1 | 74.9 |
| Nelson | 13,637 | 1 | 9 | 48.4 | 51.6 | 31.0 | 69.0 | 35.7 | 64.3 | 21.1 | 78.8 |
| Nicholas | 8,745 | 0 | 2 | 62.0 | 38.0 | 47.7 | 52.3 | 50.6 | 49.4 | 43.9 | 56.1 |
| Ohio | 6,592 | 0 | 9 | 62.7 | 37.3 | 44.7 | 55.3 | 44.1 | 55.9 | 31.3 | 68.7 |
| Oldham | 7,380 | 6 | 6 | 65.7 | 34.3 | 60.9 | 39.1 | 62.5 | 37.5 | 50.8 | 49.2 |
| Owen | 8,232 | 9 | 12 | 81.1 | 18.9 | 67.0 | 33.0 | 78.9 | 21.1 | 54.4 | 45.6 |
| Pendleton | 4,455 | 4 | 3 | 63.7 | 36.3 | 57.4 | 42.6 | 72.0 | 28.0 | 60.3 | 39.7 |
| Perry | 3,089 | 0 | 0 | 37.1 | 62.9 | 35.7 | 64.3 | 67.5 | 32.5 | 19.6 | 80.4 |
| Pike | 3,507 | 0 | 1 | 98.5 | 1.5 | 85.7 | 14.3 | 89.9 | 10.1 | 41.8 | 58.2 |
| Pulaski | 9,620 | 0 | 9 | 54.3 | 45.7 | 43.0 | 57.0 | 46.3 | 53.7 | 32.4 | 67.6 |
| Rockcastle | 3,409 | 0 | 3 | 35.0 | 65.0 | 16.1 | 83.9 | 12.7 | 87.3 | 4.5 | 95.5 |
| Russell | 4,238 | 1 | 6 | 57.4 | 42.6 | 49.5 | 50.5 | 36.0 | 64.0 | 13.3 | 86.7 |
| Scott | 13,668 | 6 | 6 | 64.1 | 35.9 | 53.7 | 46.3 | 64.6 | 35.4 | 52.2 | 47.8 |
| Shelby | 17,768 | 0 | 14 | 46.3 | 53.7 | 35.2 | 64.8 | 30.6 | 69.4 | 26.6 | 73.4 |
| Simpson | 6,539 | 3 | 5 | 51.5 | 48.5 | 51.3 | 48.7 | 44.0 | 56.0 | 28.2 | 71.8 |
| Spencer | 6,581 | 3 | 6 | 66.7 | 33.3 | 50.6 | 49.4 | 54.3 | 45.7 | 38.9 | 61.1 |
| Todd | 9,991 | 0 | 7 | 37.9 | 62.1 | 30.6 | 69.4 | 27.8 | 72.2 | 21.9 | 78.1 |
| Trigg | 7,716 | 6 | 5 | 60.3 | 39.7 | 54.0 | 46.0 | 57.0 | 43.0 | 50.1 | 49.9 |
| Trimble | 4,480 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 58.7 | 41.3 |
| Union | 6,673 | 1 | 4 | 55.6 | 44.4 | 51.1 | 48.9 | 56.5 | 43.5 | 46.4 | 53.6 |
| Warren | 15,446 | 3 | 7 | 41.5 | 58.5 | 36.4 | 63.6 | 36.6 | 63.4 | 30.5 | 69.5 |
| Washington | 10,596 | 1 | 6 | 75.2 | 24.8 | 50.9 | 49.1 | 71.6 | 28.4 | 32.7 | 67.3 |
| Wayne | 7,399 | 1 | 10 | 68.1 | 31.9 | 48.9 | 51.1 | 47.7 | 52.3 | 22.6 | 77.4 |
| Whitley | 4,673 | 0 | 7 | 52.4 | 47.6 | 46.1 | 53.9 | 22.9 | 77.1 | 10.6 | 89.4 |
| Woodford | 11,740 | 0 | 7 | 44.2 | 55.8 | 37.3 | 62.7 | 34.6 | 65.4 | 28.9 | 71.1 |

| Appendix 2: Data of Kentucky's Baptists, 1843<br><br>*This data was collected from an 1843 statistics report to the General Association of Kentucky Baptists entitled "Statistics of the Baptist Associations of Kentucky 1843". Compiled and presented to the General Association by Thomas A. Malcom. Accessed via microfilm Minutes of the General Association of Kentucky Baptists 1832-1850 at Boyce Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville Kentucky. | **Primitive Baptists** | **Missionary Baptists** | **Totals** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Associations | 17 (30%) | 39 (70%) | 56 |
| Churches | 204 (25%) | 625 (75%) | 829 |
| Ordained Ministers | 82 (24%) | 262 (76%) | 344 |
| Church Members | 7,877 (12%) | 59,302 (88%) | 67,179 |
| Baptisms the previous year | 476 (6%) | 7,271 (94%) | 7, 747 |
| Average Church membership size | 38.61 | 94.88 | 81.04 |

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