

ABSTRACT

“My Country ‘Tis of Thee:”

How the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History Led Baptists to Embrace America

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This thesis traces the development, use, and influence of the “Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History,” particularly among white, southern Baptists in the United States between the Revolutionary War period and the early twentieth century. This narrative, which originated in late-sixteenth century England, portrayed church-state establishment, power, and money as having tarnished the church from the time of Constantine onward. Southern, white Baptist leaders of various sorts often appealed to this narrative of church history as a warning. The narrative consistently influenced how they interpreted intra-denominational and political disputes. Ironically, even though this narrative decried the church and the state becoming intertwined, from the time of the Revolutionary War onward, Baptists influenced by it embraced America. Due to the United States’ republican and disestablished character, Baptists felt that after centuries of true Christianity being oppressed, America was God’s deliverance.

Dynamics of Two Particles Colliding in A One-dimensional Channel

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The United States' unofficial national anthem for most of the nineteenth century was written by a Baptist. In 1831, Samuel Francis Smith, a twenty-four-year-old Baptist seminary student studying at Andover Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, penned the lyrics to "My Country 'Tis of Thee," set to the tune of the British national anthem, "God Save the King." In the last verse of the anthem, Smith declares God to be the "author of Liberty." And then, after asking God to "protect [America] by [His] might," the verse declares him to be "[America's] king."¹

This language indicates that Smith saw America as a Christian nation. However, it was a different kind of Christian nation than the ones in Europe, including Great Britain. The second line of the anthem, after "My Country 'Tis of Thee," describes the United States as a "sweet land of liberty." He then continues, emphasizing "freedom," in all four verses, as a core component of the nation, and in the fourth verse, he characterizes God as "the Author of Liberty." A central message of this anthem is that God has given Americans, as their inheritance, a beautiful land of freedom and liberty. Therefore, they should pray to him, asking for him to continue to protect it. It is also important to keep in mind that since this anthem was set to the tune of "God Save the King," the fact that it ends with a declaration that God is America's king is a bold statement. The notion that

¹ "My Country, 'Tis of Thee: A Spotlight on a Primary Source by Samuel F. Smith," Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/my-country-tis-thee>, accessed Apr 30, 2023.

God, alone, might be a nation's king was a sharp departure from what Christian nations had looked like in Europe.

In some ways, it is surprising that a Baptist wrote "My Country 'Tis of Thee." As Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins note, "In America, Baptists were once the ultimate religious outsiders."² Indeed, for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in most of the British American colonies, Baptists had been marginalized. In Puritan New England, paedobaptistic Congregationalist churches enjoyed official state establishment. Baptists were only allowed religious freedom in one small area that Roger Williams, who was banished from the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1636 for being a Baptist, founded: the colony of Rhode Island. Then, in Virginia, and in southern colonies where the Church of England was established, Baptist ministers were often arrested and imprisoned for preaching without a state-issued license. And even before immigrating to America, Baptists had faced state hostility in England, with the one exception of the period in which Oliver Cromwell was in control. Especially after the Act of Uniformity was passed in 1662, Baptists, along with other non-Anglican Protestants, faced state persecution.

Baptists also had a long track record of opposing state church establishments. In a 1612 pamphlet entitled *Mystery of Iniquity*, Thomas Helwys, one of the pastors of the first-ever Baptist church, characterized church-state establishments as "great cruel tyranny" because they constrained men's consciences.³ Likewise, Roger Williams, in a 1644 book titled *The Bloody Tenent*, argued that "uniformity of Religion [that is] inacted

² Thomas S. Kidd and Barry G. Hankins, *Baptists in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), x.

³ Thomas Helwys, *Mystery of Iniquity* (1612), in C. Douglas Weaver and Rady Roldán, eds., *Exploring Christian Heritage: A Reader in History & Theology*, 2nd ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 138-9.

and enforced in any civill state ... is the greatest occasion of civill warre, ravishing of conscience, persecution of Christ Jesus in his servants, and of the hypocrisie and destruction of millions of souls.”⁴ Baptists like Isaac Backus and John Leland continued to make arguments like this in eighteenth-century colonial America. However, these stances made Baptists outsiders—not only in Britain or the American colonies but compared to the entire Western Christian tradition. Baptists, therefore, with the small exceptions of Commonwealth-era England and the colony of Rhode Island, had little experience feeling like insiders in any nation or polity that they inhabited.

The new republic of the United States of America was a different experience for Baptists, however. First, in 1786, Baptists partnered with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to secure the passage of the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom, ending their legal persecution there. Then, in 1791, the First Amendment was passed, nationwide, as part of the Bill of Rights, securing freedom of religious expression for all Baptists, and preventing the federal government from establishing any church. Individual states were allowed to keep their church establishments, but during the early Republic period, even those states which kept church establishments gradually removed them. Massachusetts was the last to do so in 1833. All of this was a boon for Baptists. Between roughly the 1780s and the 1810s, American Baptist church attendance increased tenfold, and the number of Baptist churches increased from five hundred to twenty-five hundred, an explosion of growth that far outpaced the growth of the general population.⁵ It is safe to

⁴ Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* (1644), Samuel L. Caldwell, ed. (Providence, RI: Providence Press Co., Printers, 1867), 3-4, Google Books.

⁵ Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 1.

say that by 1831, Samuel Francis Smith, the Baptist author of “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” did not feel like an outsider in his own country.

Historiography

The question of American evangelicals’ relationship to the past has been a persistent one among historians in recent decades. In Nathan Hatch’s landmark 1989 book, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, he argues that American evangelicals in the nineteenth century engaged in a “revolt against history.” Rather than appealing to history as authoritative, they simply appealed to the Bible. Protestant Reformers like Luther and Calvin argued for *sola scriptura*, which holds the Bible to be the ultimate authority for faith and practice. Nevertheless, they still appealed to the lesser authority of tradition and grounded their appeals in church history. Hatch argues that in contrast, nineteenth-century American evangelicals *only* relied on the Bible. They had moved from the traditional Protestant belief in *sola scriptura* to a stance of *solo scriptura*.⁶ This narrative, as Paul Gutacker notes, dates to at least the 1880s, when historian Philip Schaff argued that “the denominational and sectarian divisions of American Christianity seem to be unfavorable to the study and cultivation of general church history, which requires a large-hearted catholic spirit.”⁷

Nevertheless, Baptists understood their place in the nation, either as outsiders or insiders, through the lens of church history. History continued to play a large role in the consciousnesses of American Baptists from the Revolutionary War into the early

⁶ Hatch, *The Democratization of Christianity*, 179-180.

⁷ Paul J. Gutacker, *The Old Faith in a New Nation: American Protestants and the Christian Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 2.

twentieth century. This can be seen by simply looking at the titles of some pamphlets and books they authored: for example, Isaac Backus' *A History of New-England, With Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists*, which he published several editions of in the Revolutionary War years; David Benedict's *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, and Other Parts of the World*, published in 1813 and then updated in 1848; James Robinson Graves' 1855 republication of English Baptist G.H. Orchard's 1838 work, *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists: Taken from the New Testament, the First Fathers, Early Writers, and Historians of All Ages*; Cushing Biggs Hassell's ambitious 1886 work, *A History of the Church of God, from the Creation to A.D. 1885; Including Especially the History of the Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association*; Albert Henry Newman's *A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States*, published in 1894; and most famously (or infamously), James Milton Carroll's 1931 short book, "*The Trail of Blood . . .*": *Following the Christians Down Through the Centuries . . . or the History of Baptist Churches from the Time of Christ, Their Founder, to the Present Day*.⁸

⁸ Isaac Backus, *A History of New-England, With Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists. Containing the First Principles and Settlements of the Country; the Rise and Increase of the Baptist Churches Therein; the Intrusion of Arbitrary Power Under the Cloak of Religion; the Christian Testimonies of the Baptists and Others Against the Same, With Their Sufferings Under It, From the Beginning [sic] to the Present Time. Collected From Most Authentic Records and Writings, Both Ancient and Modern*. Vol. 1. (Boston, MA: Printed by Edward Draper, at His Printing-Office in Newbury-Street, and Sold by Phillip Freeman, in Union-Street, 1777), Early American Imprints; David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, and Other Parts of the World*, 2nd ed., (New York: Lewis Colby and Company, 1848), Google Books; G.H. Orchard, *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists: Taken From the New Testament, the First Fathers, Early Writers, and Historians of All Ages; Chronologically Arranged: Exhibiting Their Distinct Communities, With Their Orders in Various Kingdoms, Under Several Discriminative Appellations from the Establishment of Christianity to the Present Age: With Correlative Information, Supporting the Early and Only Practice of Believers' Immersion: Also Observations and Notes on the Abuse of the Ordinance, And the Rise of Minor and Infant Baptism: With an Introductory Essay*, by J.R. Graves (Nashville, TN: Graves, Marks & Co, 1855); Cushing Biggs Hassell, *A History of the Church of God, from the Creation to A.D. 1885; Including Especially the History of the Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association*, Sylvester Hassell, ed. and rev. (Middletown, NY:

The centrality of history to American Baptist consciousness can also be seen in the names and identities of schismatic Baptist groups that formed. The 1820s and 1830s saw the rise of the “Primitive” Baptists, who adopted that title because they saw themselves as a faithful remnant holding to historic Baptist beliefs. In the 1850s, another group emerged, centered around the teachings of James Robinson Graves, who called themselves Landmark Baptists. They derived their name from Proverbs 22:28, which declares, in the King James Version, “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.” From this, they argued against moving away from any of the traditional ecclesiological beliefs to which Baptists held. Central to their identity, too, was the narrative that Baptists were the one true church that had existed in perpetuity since the time of Jesus Christ and that they had constantly faced oppression from both Roman Catholics and Protestants.

The thesis that nineteenth-century American evangelicals were mere biblicists who did not appeal to tradition has recently come under fire, however. Paul Gutacker’s *The Old Faith in the New Nation* finds that “Even as they claimed to rely on the Bible alone, nineteenth-century [American] Protestants concerned themselves with the theology and practices of past Christians . . . and worked hard to locate themselves in the broad history of Christianity.”⁹ He especially focuses on the debates surrounding slavery and the Civil War, demonstrating that Protestant Christians on both sides of that conflict

Gilbert Beebe’s Sons, Publishers, 1886); Albert Henry Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1894), Google Books; James Milton Carroll, “*The Trail of Blood . . .*”: *Following the Christians Down Through the Centuries . . . or the History of Baptist Churches from the Time of Christ, Their Founder, to the Present Day* (Lexington, KY: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1931).

⁹ Gutacker, *The Old Faith in a New Nation*, 144.

extensively appealed to history—they just selectively made use of different materials from within Christian history. This contrasts somewhat with the picture that Mark Noll paints of the relationship between American evangelicals, slavery, and the Civil War. Gutacker explains that Noll, in his book *America's God*, largely blames evangelicals' "[biblicist] assumptions about Scripture and antipathy toward tradition" for the fact that debates about slavery failed and resulted in the Civil War.¹⁰ However, Gutacker references "hundreds of print sources," including "sermons, books, speeches, legal arguments, [and] political petitions," which show this to simply not be true.¹¹

History as a Warning

However, rather than appealing to church history as an inspiration and source of authority, Baptists in America most consistently appealed to it as a warning. Many Baptists saw church history, from Constantine up to the Reformation, as a story of declension. When they examined the millennium of church history following Constantine, they found the widespread oppression of freedom of conscience, suppression of true Christianity, love of mammon, and idolatry. The Protestant Reformation was a slight improvement, but the same issues remained. For example, when many Baptists looked at the early centuries of Protestantism, they were horrified by the persecution of Anabaptists. The post-Constantinian history of the church served, therefore, as a warning of what *not* to do, rather than a source of inspiration or authority.

¹⁰ Gutacker, *The Old Faith in a New Nation*, 2.

¹¹ Gutacker, *The Old Faith in a New Nation*, 3.

To some degree, Protestants had always taken a critical posture toward the millennium of church history that preceded the Reformation. They especially criticized the rise of the Pope, practices they perceived as idolatry, the Catholic sacramental system, and corruption. These emphases can be seen, for example, in the Prefatory Address to King Francis I to John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. However, in this same prefatory address, Calvin explicitly appeals to the authority of the Church Fathers—including post-Constantinian Fathers like Augustine, Epiphanius, Ambrose, Cassiodorus, and Pope Gelasius—to argue that the Protestant doctrines he and others were arguing for was nothing new. He asserts, indeed, “If the contest [between Rome and the Protestants] were to be determined by patristic authority, the tide of victory—to put it very modestly—would turn to [the Protestant] side.”¹² Thus, he placed the beginning of the decline of the Church sometime in the late first millennium AD. However, Baptists departed from previous generations of Protestants, and from magisterial Protestant denominations like the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Lutherans, by depicting this corruption as having begun earlier. Only the New Testament church was truly pure. And they identified a specific origin of the corruption that followed: Constantine. Even though he did not establish the church as the state church of the Roman Empire yet (Theodosius would do so, several decades later), he became a stand-in for all the evils of the state church establishment.

For many American Baptists, therefore, Constantine was the beginning of the downfall in Christian history. They regarded the next thousand years of church history as

¹² John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), John T. McNeill, ed., Ford Lewis Battles, trans., Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 69.

a warning. In their view, the corruption, heresy, violence, and oppression of true Christians that marked the history of Christianity following Constantine all had its root in one critical error: the conflation of the spiritual kingdom of Christ with worldly political power. In their minds, the formal establishment of Christianity by the state, and the mixture of political power with the mission of the church, inevitably led to spiritual decay. This is consistent with the Baptists' long track record since their origin in seventeenth-century England of opposing the separation of church and state. And this mindset put Baptists at odds with most Protestant denominations, who advocated a state church. Yet, from many Baptists' points of view, these magisterial Protestants were continuing to commit the primary sin that had corrupted the church historically: the conflation of worldly political power with the kingdom of God.

The Anti-Establishment Narrative of Church History

This use of church history as a warning was rooted in what this thesis will term “the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History.” This narrative of church history first emerged in late-sixteenth-century England among separatist Protestants such as Robert Browne. Already, popular Protestant books like John Foxe’s 1563 work, *Actes and Monuments of the English People* (better known as the *Book of Martyrs*), had enshrined a certain narrative: while the early church was noble, during the “dark ages,” the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy had turned against true Christianity. Foxe tells the stories of many martyrs who had been killed by the Roman Catholic Church, whom he associates with the Beast in Revelation. Finally, the Protestant Reformation turned the tide.

However, Separatists modified this narrative. First Robert Browne, and then, in the seventeenth century, Baptists, Quakers, and Independents like John Milton, placed the initial moment of corruption in church history hundreds of years earlier. Rather than the problem emerging during the “Dark Ages,” these separatists argued that the seed of corruption was planted when Constantine established Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire. The involvement of the state in religious matters, then, was the primary cause behind the decay of the church over the following millennium. Not only did the state establishment of Christianity result in the oppression of freedom of conscience and the suppression of true Christianity, but it also enabled a love of mammon that pervaded the medieval Roman Catholic Church and a lust for power that they saw as contrary to Jesus’ teachings.

This Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History would become the dominant lens through which many Baptists in the first century and a half of American history interpreted their place amid national and ecclesiastical developments. Chapter Two explores how, as the American Revolution unfolded, not only Baptists, but a range of Protestants—even, remarkably, ones that favored church-state establishments—deployed this narrative of church history in support of the Revolutionary War effort. Numerous Protestant pastors raised concerns about the British implementing an Anglican, or even Roman Catholic, establishment in the colonies. They appealed to the history of the suppression of true Christianity by the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the Church of England, to warn their parishioners about what could happen if the colonies did not rebel against the British. Baptist leaders like Isaac Backus and John Leland, who had already been campaigning for disestablishment, gleefully joined these efforts. Ultimately, Baptist

leaders bet well by getting involved with Revolutionary efforts, as some Founding Fathers like Jefferson and Madison helped dissenters to secure religious liberty in Virginia. Following the passage of the Bill of Rights in 1791, free expression of religion became federally protected in the new United States of America.

However, the Anti-establishment Narrative of History proved to have long-term rhetorical power, even after established state churches ended in the United States. There is significantly more work that could be done on how the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History influenced Black Baptists, Baptists in other regions of the United States, Baptists in the United Kingdom, or even influenced other denominations altogether. However, this thesis, from Chapter Three on, focuses on white Baptists in the Southern United States, who, by the twentieth century, represented the largest group of Baptists in the world.

Chapter Three examines how the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History was a potent force in the Baptist anti-mission controversy that erupted in the 1820s–1830s. It was deployed by Primitive Baptist ministers who arose in opposition to new mission societies, Sunday schools, colleges, and other entities of what historians have termed the Benevolent Empire. Based on their understanding of church history, these ministers worried that organizations that asked local churches for donations reeked of Roman Catholicism. They compared these societies to the Jesuits and worried that the autonomy of the local church was being subverted. As they issued these warnings, they also conflated the ideals of the pure Christianity with the ideals of the American Revolution and worried that the rise of the Benevolent Empire would endanger the values that the American Revolution secured. Though these Primitive Baptist ministers were

anti-establishment, they identified the American nation as, ideally, synonymous with their values and the opposite of the oppressive governments that had subverted Christianity throughout history. This ironic use of the Anti-Establishment Narrative of History to equate the American nation with Baptist values would continue.

However, some nineteenth-century Baptists, particularly in the South, would continue to use the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History to argue that the United States was drifting from its values. Chapter Four looks at the defenses James Robinson Graves, the founder of the Landmark Baptist movement, made for Confederate secession from the Union and how they were informed by the Anti-establishment Narrative of History. Graves promoted the narrative that Baptists had existed in perpetuity since the time of Christ and had been oppressed throughout history. This was essentially the same narrative as the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, only with the specification that the true Christians throughout history had been Baptists. In other writings, Graves castigated the groups that the Anti-establishment Narrative portrayed as having enabled this oppression, which included Roman Catholics, of course, but also Anglicans, Presbyterians, and even Methodists. He especially critiqued the Methodists, Baptists' main rival in nineteenth-century America. He appealed to church history to warn that their hierarchical church structure would lead to the suppression of freedom of conscience. It was the opposite, he argued, of everything that the American founders fought for in the Revolution.

Graves used this same logic to argue for Confederate secession. Convinced from the Bible that slavery was a legitimate institution, he worried about the federal government, and northern abolitionists, over-reaching by imposing their convictions on

southern states. Just as he thought it was oppressive to the liberty of local churches' consciences for higher-up ecclesiastical bodies to impose their will on local churches, he thought the federal government was wrongly trying to forcefully impose their radical convictions about slavery on southern states. Thus, ironically, Graves' opposition to hierarchy in the church and to the oppression of liberty of conscience led him to support a political effort to protect slavery—a hierarchical and oppressive institution. Just as he thought the Methodists posed a danger to the liberties that the American Revolution secured, he saw his Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History-informed values as synonymous with American values and viewed the Confederacy as the means to preserve them.

As the twentieth century dawned, Baptists in the South were split regarding whether they felt excluded or included by the mainstream politics of the day. However, these two camps both appealed to the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. Chapter Five looks at a case of the former. In Arkansas, at the turn of the century, a group of largely rural and small-town Baptists, led by pastor and newspaper editor Benjamin Bogard, increasingly felt alienated by the leadership of the Arkansas State Baptist Convention (ABSC). To these ministers' dismay, the ABSC was tightly interwoven with the Arkansas Democratic Party. In 1902, Bogard and his allies rose in opposition to the state convention leaders, which ultimately resulted in a permanent schism. Historians have rightly noted that they were influenced by populism, which had been popular recently due to William Jennings Bryan's presidential campaigns. Chapter Five argues, however, that they were also influenced by the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. Indeed, the Anti-establishment Narrative warns strongly against the connection

between civil power and ecclesiastical power. Cases like James Philip Eagle, who simultaneously served as the governor of Arkansas and the president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, were seen as a betrayal of Baptist and American values according to the narrative. So, in Arkansas, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church history informed feelings of alienation from the mainstream of American politics and led to some Baptists separating themselves from mainstream Baptist life.

On the contrary, some more mainstream Southern Baptist leaders saw themselves as naturally positioned to be the leaders of America's growing global hegemony. Already before World War I, E.Y. Mullins, a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, argued that the early church had been simultaneously Baptist and proto-American. He saw freedom of conscience and democracy as two core New Testament values that had been suppressed throughout history by the Roman Catholic Church and the magisterial Protestants but finally recovered in America, with the help of Baptists. This sentiment escalated after the end of World War I, with Baptist leaders including Mullins and George Washington Truett—who delivered a famous speech on religious liberty—arguing that Baptists naturally should have the primary place in Woodrow Wilson's American-led "new world order." This dovetailed with a rise in domestic anti-Catholic sentiment, and Southern Baptist leaders were eager to emphasize their emphasis on religious liberty as synonymous with American values. Mullins and Truett employed the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, recalling how true Christianity and freedom of conscience had been suppressed in the Old World by Roman Catholicism and

Magisterial Protestantism but had been, now, restored in America, thanks to Baptist efforts. Baptist values and American values were, in their minds, the same.

CHAPTER TWO

The Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History from Elizabethan England to the American Revolution

Introduction

In 1778, two years after British forces had retreated from Massachusetts, Isaac Backus, pastor of the Baptist Church of Christ in Middleborough, delivered a sermon based on Galatians 5:1: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.”¹ One historian has labeled this verse “The American Motto,” as it was among the most cited by American pastors and pamphleteers in defense of the Revolutionary effort.² Since Paul, in Galatians, was not making a statement about *political* liberty, one might dismiss the frequent use of this verse as pragmatic abuse of the Bible. However, when Backus employed this verse, it was infused, for him, with theological and historical meaning. For example, he wrote in a history of New England that Roger Williams had established “the first civil government upon earth, since the rise of Antichrist, which gave equal liberty of conscience.”³ For Isaac Backus, then, *liberty* was a political and spiritual

¹ Isaac Backus, *Government and Liberty Described; and Ecclesiastical Tyranny Exposed* (Boston, MA: Printed by Powars and Willis; sold by Phillip Freeman, 1778), 2, Early American Imprints.

² James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 129–36.

³ Backus, *Government and Liberty Described*, 9; and in this sermon, he is nearly quoting what he wrote in the history he had completed a year earlier: see Isaac Backus, *A History of New-England, With Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists. Containing the First Principles and Settlements of the Country; the Rise and Increase of the Baptist Churches Therein; the Intrusion of Arbitrary Power Under the Cloak of Religion; the Christian Testimonies of the Baptists and Others Against the Same, With Their Sufferings Under It, From the Beginning [sic] to the Present Time. Collected From Most Authentic Records and Writings, Both Ancient and Modern*. Vol. 1. (Boston, MA: Printed by Edward

ideal. It had been suppressed for over a millennium by Antichrist—i.e., the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy—but was recently being recovered.

This rhetoric was not limited to Baptists or New Englanders, however. Similar rhetoric can be found in a 1771 sermon preached by Herman Husband, a Quaker exhorter nearly seven hundred miles to Backus' south, in Cane Creek, North Carolina. When he preached this sermon, the "Regulator Rebellion," was actively occurring in the area. He drew from the obscure Biblical reference of 1 Chronicles 12 to compare his audience of North Carolina Piedmont residents to the sons of Issachar. He argued his audience that they presently "loved rest and present ease more than liberty, —and choosed to be Slaves rather than to exert themselves to maintain their liberties."⁴ He then urged them to change their course of action, reminding them that "a nation of slaves is a kingdom of asses" and that this produces "the ruin of the common weal."⁵

Historians have frequently noted how Protestant leaders in Revolutionary America combined rhetoric about liberty, tyranny, and anti-Catholicism. James P. Byrd notes that, during the Revolutionary era, the "linking [of] republican ideas of civil liberty with anti-Catholicism and a Protestant drive for religious liberty" was done by Protestant revolutionaries and radicals "across theological boundaries."⁶ However, scholars have not noticed that this combination of rhetoric about liberty, and appeal to anti-Catholicism,

Draper, at His Printing-Office in Newbury-Street, and Sold by Phillip Freeman, in Union-Street, 1777), 95, Early American Imprints.

⁴ Herman Husband, "A Sermon," 1770, in William S. Powell, James K. Hutha, and Thomas J. Farnham, eds., *The Regulators in North Carolina: A Documentary History: 1759-1776* (Raleigh, NC: The North Carolina State Department of Archives and History, 1971), 227.

⁵ Husband, "A Sermon," in Powell, et. al., eds., *The Regulators in North Carolina*, 227-8.

⁶ Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 125.

was rooted in a common narrative of church history: the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. This narrative taught that there had been a gradual rise of “Church Power” along with the rise of Antichrist and Romish Popery, and it viewed church-state intermingling as the primary means by which Antichrist had established his power on earth. This narrative can be seen in both Backus’ and Husband’s sermons. According to the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, the constraints, corruption, and oppression wrought by church-state establishments violated essential Christian and Protestant values: liberty of conscience and the sole authority of the Word and Holy Spirit in a Christian’s life.

This Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History can be traced back to rhetoric used in support of the new Protestant state in Elizabethan England. By the late-eighteenth century, this narrative of church history had trickled into the American colonies, and it informed the way that many ministers preached about liberty in the context of its ongoing political upheavals. The Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History provided a common discourse that Christian leaders were able to tap into across denominational and geographical lines.

The Development of the “Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History”

In the decades following the Protestant Reformation, under the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), England emerged as one of the world’s leading Protestant powers. In this context, some English Protestants developed a narrative that characterized history as a

cosmic fight between the forces of Christ and those of Antichrist, i.e. the papacy.⁷ This narrative of history gained widespread cultural currency in the English-speaking world through writings such as John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments of the English Church and People* (1563), popularly known as the *Book of Martyrs*, and became prevalent in late-sixteenth-century English literature. This was consistent with the widely held idea among Protestants at the time that the Papacy was the historical and present embodiment of Antichrist.⁸

The mainstream version of this narrative envisioned England as a chosen people of God who had been tasked with championing godly Protestantism against the forces of Antichrist. Douglas Bradburn notes that “for those who embraced such logic, England was not only the equivalent of Israel, the chosen nation, but was the natural epitome, protector, and hope of the Reformation.”⁹ John Foxe, especially, advanced this notion of England.¹⁰ Foxe was so influential that Edmund Spenser, one of the most prominent playwrights of this era, “[Modeled] much of the plot of Book I of *The Fairie Queen* (1590) [a famous play of his thought to be extolling Elizabeth] after that of Foxe's *Actes*

⁷ Douglas Bradburn, “The Eschatological Origins of the English Empire,” in *Early Modern Virginia: New Essays on the Old Dominion*, Douglas Bradburn and John C. Coombs, eds. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 16.

⁸ See: Article IV of the 1537 Smalcald Articles for the Lutheran stance; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.7.25 and the preface to the 1542 Geneva Catechism for the continental Reformed stance; Chapter XXV, Paragraph 6 of the of the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith for the British Presbyterian stance; Chapter XXVI, Paragraph 4 of the 1658 Savoy Declaration for the Congregationalist stance; and Chapter XXVI, Chapter 4 of the 1677/1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith for the Particular Baptist stance. The 1571 Articles of Religion (the “Thirty-Nine Articles”) of the Church of England, however, did not mention that the Pope was the Antichrist.

⁹ Bradburn, “The Eschatological Origins of the English Empire,” 16.

¹⁰ William Haller, *The Elect Nation; the Meaning and Relevance of Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 225.

and Monuments.” Indeed, this section of the play is thought to be an allegory, in which the enemies of England’s patron saint in the play, the Redcrosse Knight, represented Mary Tudor and Phillip of Spain, the enemies of Elizabeth I’s Anglican regime. The similarity between this part of Spenser’s play and Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* demonstrates the prevalence of the narrative that the forces of Antichrist and Catholicism were in a cosmic battle with the forces of Christ, led by Elizabethan England. Historian William Haller explains how Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* was updated and re-printed repeatedly over the following half-century and was used by the next monarch, James I, for the same purpose. For example, James employed it after a massacre of Protestants in France in 1610. This narrative thus extolled the English monarch and justified his headship over the Church of England.¹¹

However, there were also dissenting Protestants in England who shared the view that history was a cosmic battle between the forces of Antichrist and Christ, but were cynical about the English monarch and the Church of England. Some saw the Church of England itself as being in league with Antichrist. Robert Browne—an early separatist minister who attended Cambridge in the 1570s, became a separatist, and then planted separatist congregations in the Norwich area—had this interpretation.¹² Going further than many Puritan ministers, Browne not only resisted the Elizabethan Act of Uniformity, which required all ministers to use the *Book of Common Prayer*, but also rejected any state involvement with the affairs of the church.

¹¹ Richard A. McCabe, *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010), 39.

¹² Joe Early, Jr., *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 11.

Browne argued that the Church of England was in league with Antichrist because its teaching contained elements of false, “popish,” doctrine. Hence, godly churches needed to separate from it.¹³ In a 1582 polemic entitled *A Treatise of Reformation Without Tarying for Anie*, he castigates the Church of England and the Puritans who were not separating from it for having “given up [the] keys [of the kingdom] to the Magistrates or the Spirituall Courtes.” He argues for the complete separation of church and state, quoting the Gospel of Matthew and reminding the reader that though “[Christ said his kingdom] is not of this world, [the Church of England] would shift in both Bishoppes and Magistrates into his spirituall throne to make it of this worlde.”¹⁴ The representation of Antichrist’s power on earth was anywhere that the church and the state had become intertwined.

Thomas Helwys, one of the pastors of the first English congregation of Baptists, shared this opposition to church-state establishments and placed the same high value on liberty of conscience.¹⁵ This is no surprise, as this group of Baptists, and their leaders, John Smyth and Helwys, were influenced by Robert Browne. Between the 1570s and 1590s, the center of the Brownist movement shifted from Norwich to London.¹⁶ Helwys became a Brownist while attending Gray’s Inn in London between 1592 and 1594, a time

¹³ Michael P. Winship, *Godly Republicanism: Puritans, Pilgrims, and a City on a Hill*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 46.

¹⁴ Robert Browne, *A Treatise of Reformation Without Tarying for Anie* (Printed at Middleburgh, [England], 1582). Edited for the Congregational Historical Society, with a Biographical Introduction by T.G. Crippen (Congregational Union of England and Wales, London: Memorial Hall, E.C., 1903), 20. Google Books.

¹⁵ See for further reading: Stephen Tomkins, *The Journey to the Mayflower: God’s Outlaws and the Invention of Freedom* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2020).

¹⁶ Early, *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, 11.

during which two followers of Browne, John Greenwood and Henry Barrow were publicly executed in London.¹⁷

After the execution of these men, the church which they had pastored, “The Ancient Church,” relocated to Amsterdam. Helwys and Smyth, who had become a Separatist while studying at Cambridge, would follow, leading the church that they pastored there in 1607.¹⁸ In 1609, their congregation became the first English Baptist congregation after Smyth was convicted of believer’s baptism, and the rest of the congregation followed suit. These Baptists were later termed the “General Baptists” due to their Arminian soteriology. Helwys was a prolific writer, and it is evident that he held the same sentiments as Browne did about the role of the state. In his 1612 pamphlet, *Mystery of Iniquity*, he “[beseeched] the king to judge righteous judgment herein, whether there be so unjust a thing and of so great cruel tyranny under the sun as to force men’s consciences in their religion to God.”¹⁹

Another stream of Baptists that emerged in 1640s England had similar anti-establishment sentiments, even if less overtly so. These Baptists were later termed the “Particular Baptists” because of their Calvinistic soteriology. They emerged out of the Brownist “JLJ” congregation (so-called from the initials of its three pastors between 1616 and 1639—Henry Jacob, John Lathrop, and Henry Jessey) in Southwark, London, after some of its members came to view the baptisms they had received from the Church of

¹⁷ Early, *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, 15.

¹⁸ Early, *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, 13, 16-9.

¹⁹ Thomas Helwys, *Mystery of Iniquity* (1612), in C. Douglas Weaver and Rady Roldán, eds., *Exploring Christian Heritage: A Reader in History & Theology*, 2nd ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 138-9.

England as illegitimate. Eventually, they became convicted of believer's baptism.²⁰ The Particular Baptists then rapidly expanded across the British Isles, exploding to 131 congregations by the 1660.²¹ And in the conclusion of their first published public confession of faith that they published in 1644, they emphasized liberty of conscience, vowing that "if any man shall impose upon us anything that we see not to be commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ, we should in His strength rather embrace all reproaches and tortures of men, to be stripped of all outward comforts, and if it were possible, to die a thousand deaths, rather than to do anything against the least tittle of the truth of God or the light of our own consciences."²²

By the mid-seventeenth century, mainstream voices like John Milton began to promote something akin to the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. By the late 1640s, Milton had become a republican who strongly supported Cromwell and the Commonwealth project.²³ Religiously, Milton was an Independent akin to Robert Browne.²⁴ Like the Baptists, Milton believed that each local church congregation should

²⁰ Ian Birch, *To Follow the Lambe Wheresoever He Goeth: The Ecclesial Polity of the English Calvinistic Baptists 1640–1660* (Cambridge, England: James Clarke & Co, 2017), 2-7; Gordon L. Belyea, "Origins of the Particular Baptists," *Themelios: An International Journal for Pastors and Students of Theological and Religious Studies* 32, no. 3 (April 2007): 42-3.

²¹ Birch, *To Follow the Lambe*, 14-5.

²² "The Confession of Faith, of Those Churches Which Are Commonly (Though Falsly) Called Anabaptists ['First London Confession of Faith']" (London, 1644), Conclusion. In Leon H. McBeth, ed., *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990), 2.3.

²³ John Milton, Sonnet XVI, "To the Lord General Cromwell," 1652," in Merritt Yerkes Hughes, ed., *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 160.

²⁴ By the mid-seventeenth century in England, in the context of the English Civil War, the term "Independent" was being used more to refer to ecclesiastical congregationalist, many of whom later ascribed to the Savoy Declaration, rather than the term "Separatist." Independents were a third main party alongside establishment Anglicans (supporters of the current structure of the Church of England) and the Presbyterians (those who supported a church government structure like that of the Church of Scotland). However, Milton could also appropriately be labeled a "Separatist."

be left alone to govern itself. He also argued that true Christianity defended liberty of conscience. He contrasted this with the civil power that had been regularly deployed by Antichrist throughout history. In his pamphlet, *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*, he explains that “[there are] two things which have been ever found working much mischief to the church of God, and the advancement of truth; force on the one side restraining, and hire on the other side corrupting the teachers thereof.”²⁵ Thus, for Milton, church history demonstrates two problematic patterns: the church using “force” to “restrain” people, and the church engaging in “hire” —i.e. the material corruption of clergy. He explains that it is “chiefly for this cause [that] all true protestants account the pope antichrist, for that he assumes to himself this infallibilitie over both the conscience and the scripture.”²⁶

However, Milton did not only hold the papacy to account. He argues in *A Treatise of Civil Power* that any civil magistrate who “use[s] force in matters of religion” is guilty.²⁷ Indeed, he explains that the “state of religion under the gospel” is one of “grace, manhood, freedom, and faith.” He cites, in contrast, Paul’s metaphor of the bondwoman, Hagar, and the free woman, Sarah, in Galatians 4, as well as Paul’s quote in 2 Corinthians 3:17: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”²⁸ Overall, while Milton does not

²⁵ John Milton, *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes: Shewing That It Is Not Lawful for Any Power on Earth to Compel in Matters of Religion* (First Printed in London: 1659; Re-printed for J. Johnson, St. Paul’s Church-Yard, 1790), 1, Google Books.

²⁶ Milton, *A Treatise of Civil Power*, 6.

²⁷ Milton, *A Treatise of Civil Power*, 20.

²⁸ Milton, *A Treatise of Civil Power*, 26-7, 31; Backus centers the metaphor of the Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4 in Isaac Backus, *A Short Description of the Difference between the Bond-woman and the Free; As They Are the Two Covenants, with the Characters and Conditions of Each of Their Children* [1756]. *The Second Edition Now Corrected. To Which is Now Added, an Answer to Mr. Frothingham’s Late Letter Concerning Baptism* (Boston, MA: Printed and Sold by Edes and Gill, in Queen-Street, 1770), a

flesh out as full of a narrative of history as would later appear, the structure and themes are there. While the Christian religion protects liberty of conscience, throughout church history both the antichristian papacy and magisterial Protestants who have used civil power to “use force” or “compel” religion have contradicted the gospel.

Early Quakers also employed this early version of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. George Fox and Elias Hooke, two early Quaker leaders, wrote the fullest exposition of it yet in 1669. Unlike John Milton and the Baptists, their book, *The Arraignment of Popery*, was a full-length history of the Church and the rise of “Popery.” They show how the church was pure in primitive times but was then corrupted by the rise of all the elements of Popery— “apostasy,” “idolatry,” “superstitious practices,” and the “priviledges and stations of Rome”—and argue that Papist “idolatry is still upheld by the Protestant professors in England at this day.”²⁹ And in accordance with the Anti-establishment Narrative, they zero in on the evils of church-state establishments.

In Chapter XXIX, titled “The Doctrines of Christ and Antichrist Distinguished,” Fox and Hookes describe how civil power inherently flows from the “Kingdom of Antichrist” and thus contradicts the “Kingdom of Christ.”³⁰ While Antichrist uses state power to accomplish his ends, Christ’s power is other-worldly and opposed to political or material sources of power. While “Christ fought against Satan with God’s word,”

sermon in which he explains his Covenant Theology. The fact that even his Covenant Theology pivots so strongly around “liberty” is a testament to how central the concept of “liberty” is to him. In a political sermon involving the Revolutionary War, Backus instead chooses to quote Galatians 5:1— “The American Motto,” but this verse is indeed, properly understood in context, the culmination of Paul’s argument in Galatians 4.

²⁹ Fox and Hookes, *The Arraignment of Popery*, 1, 18, 38.

³⁰ Fox and Hookes, 103-5.

“Antichrist fights against his enemies with the temporal sword.” They extend this critique of the use of force to state establishments of religion, writing that while “Antichrist with his suspensions, ex-communications, apprehensions, persecutions, fire, faggot, sword, [and] halter enforces men to receive his devilish decrees and trifling traditions,” Christ “compels no man against his will to believe his gospel.”³¹

Thus, according to Fox and Hookes, using state power to establish a church is the epitome of Antichristian power. For the rest of this section, they explain, in laborious detail, how virtually everything that the Popes have historically done is exactly what Antichrist would do. Thus, considering the great number of ways they think the papacy had acted like Antichrist, it is interesting that what they chose to mention, *first and foremost*, was the abuse of state power by having a state establishment. They refrained, however, from critiquing the Church of England and Charles II. Perhaps they were worried about the persecution they could face. Nevertheless, what they did do was present a narrative of history that demonstrated how the church had increasingly become corrupted by Antichristian Popery and argue that state establishment of religion was the primary ways in which that came about.

By the early eighteenth century, there appeared an anonymous, fully fleshed-out example of the Anti-Establishment of Church History. Unlike Fox and Hookes’ book, this pamphlet, *Priestcraft Distinguish’d from Christianity*, harshly critiques the British government and the Church of England. This may explain why the author of it remained

³¹ Fox and Hookes, 103-5.

anonymous.³² The anonymous author (or authors) may have been a Quaker, as he mentions, at one point, that people all “have the same Force of Understanding ... and are the more adapted and prepared for Instruction and for Happiness by a greater Light of Knowledge.” This sounds like the Quaker doctrine of the Inward Light that exists within everyone.³³ The themes that are discussed in this pamphlet are also like those in Fox and Hookes’ book, *The Arraignment of Popery*.

The introduction of *Priestcraft Distinguish’d from Christianity* mentions that “the author of the following Discourse was born and bred in the Communion of the Church of England.” At this point, however, just as the author “cannot conceive that anyone can be a priest of the Church of Rome, who disowns the papal supremacy, so he cannot believe that any one can be truly a Priest of the Church of England, but he who ... acknowledges King GEORGE alone, for his rightful Head” —and this is a problem for him.³⁴ He, then, throughout the pamphlet, lays out a narrative of history. He explains that “the Christian religion was first established by the Doctrine of Charity, ... which our Saviour and his Apostles gave through the whole course of their Lives.” The “Roman religion,” on the other hand, “is maintain’d by the same Force and same Fraud to which it owe[s] its

³² *Priestcraft Distinguish’d from Christianity. Shewing, I. That Wicked Priests Are the Real Antichrists Mention’d in Scripture. II. That the Corruption of the Laity in All Christian States, Proceeds from the Corruption of the Clergy. III. That There Was More General Vertue in the Grossest Times of Paganism, Than There Has Been Since Our Saviour Entered the World. IV. That There Is a More General Vertue in Other Parts of the Globe, Than in the Christian World, V. That There Was a More General Vertue in Our Own Nation in the Times of Our Ancestors, Than There Is in Our Own Times; and That Priestcraft, and Corruption of Manners, Have Increas’d Together.* Second ed. (London: Printed for J. Roberts, Near the Oxford-Arms in Warwick Lane, 1715). Google Books.

³³ *Priestcraft Distinguish’d from Christianity*, 39.

³⁴ *Priestcraft Distinguish’d from Christianity*, Preface.

origin.”³⁵ Yet, beyond just critiquing the historical Roman Catholic Church, the author castigates the state of religion in England. He goes so far as to argue that there is less virtue in England at the time of his writing the pamphlet than there had been when it was Pagan and that there was less virtue in it than in “other parts of the globe.”³⁶ He lists several reasons for this decrepit state of piety: “Priestcraft and Atheism, Ecclesiastical Hypocrisy and Laical Deism, Right Divine and Socinianism, Non-Resistance and Publick Treason, [and] Passive Obedience and unnatural prodigious Luxury, [which] have [all] grown up and increas’d together.”³⁷

Within this list, “Right Divine” and “Ecclesiastical Hypocrisy” stand out as conspicuous criticisms of the monarchy and the established Church of England. If these critiques are lined up with what the author writes in the preface—that an Anglican priest must acknowledge King George as his head, just as Catholic priests must avow papal supremacy—it becomes evident that this author takes issue with hierarchy. He believes a major part of why the church has degraded over time and continues to exist in that state of degradation in England is due to hierarchal structures where priests submit to a higher authority other than Christ. In England, the establishment of the Church of England was the mechanism by which this was happening.

This pamphlet also demonstrates an evolution in the concept of Antichrist. Rather than the title of Antichrist just being restricted to the papacy or the Roman Catholic Church *writ large*, like the full title of the pamphlet states, “Wicked Priests are the Real

³⁵ *Priestcraft Distinguish’d from Christianity*, 41.

³⁶ *Priestcraft Distinguish’d from Christianity*, 39-40.

³⁷ *Priestcraft Distinguish’d from Christianity*, 38.

Antichrists.” Thus, the author believes the Anglican Church establishment was guilty of the same problems that Roman Catholicism had long been and therefore takes its ministers to be “Antichrists.” These themes, as well as the word “Priestcraft,” would continue to show up in sermons from the American Revolutionary Era and even in the writings of political leaders like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.³⁸

The “Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History” in Colonial and Revolutionary America

This Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History would then, within the next century and a half, travel to places as remote as the backcountry of North Carolina. Herman Husband, a popular Quaker preacher there, made significant use of it. Born in 1724, in an area in northeast Maryland with a sizeable Quaker presence, he was reared in the Church of England.³⁹ However, after George Whitefield visited his area in 1739, he had a “New Birth” conversion experience.⁴⁰ He eventually became a Quaker. Two Quaker doctrines especially appealed to him: the rejection of Anglican hierarchy, and the idea that the Inward Light of Christ inhabits each believer and that this was the primary principle that should guide all Christians, even above the authority of the Bible.⁴¹ These theological emphases dovetailed well with the Anti-Establishment Narrative of Church History,

³⁸Paul J. Gutacker, *The Old Faith in a New Nation: American Protestants and the Christian Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 22-24.

³⁹ Bruce E. Stewart, *Redemption from Tyranny: Herman Husband’s American Revolution* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 14.

⁴⁰ Stewart, *Redemption from Tyranny*, 15-22.

⁴¹ Stewart, *Redemption from Tyranny*, 24-5.

which viewed church hierarchy as having, for many centuries, oppressed individual liberty of conscience.

Husband employed the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History to urge participation in the Regulator Rebellion in North Carolina, which he helped foment. This rebellion occurred between 1766 and 1771, as common farmers in the Piedmont region of the colony, inspired both by religious critiques of materialism and ideas of individual liberty, rose to fight for the ability to independently own land against the backdrop of political corruption and religious oppression. Middling white farmers of English stock from Virginia, along with German and Scottish-descended farmers from Pennsylvania and the Virginia backcountry, had streamed into the North Carolina Piedmont, pursuing promises of cheap land. However, the North Carolina government struggled to issue land grants amid rampant corruption.

Many of the farmers involved in the Regulator Rebellion were Baptists, Quakers, and other evangelicals. Yet the Church of England was officially the established church in North Carolina and enjoyed significant legal privileges, despite its having remarkably little success at attracting settlers in the western parts of the colony.⁴² Husband first moved to North Carolina in 1755, settling in Orange County, arriving there together with a group of Separate Baptists led by the dynamic preacher, Shubal Stearns. Increasingly, during the 1750s, Husband became involved in politics, especially joining in local protests against attempts to further establish the Anglican Church in the region. Bruce Stewart writes that Husband “envisioned [the North Carolina backcountry] as a ‘new

⁴² Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 7, 77, 87-90, 131.

government of liberty’ —a refuge for small, white farmers and religious dissenters.⁴³ As the Regulator Rebellion unfolded, Husband made it clear that his understanding of “liberty” was colored by the Anti-Establishment Narrative of History.

In 1768, amid the Regulator Rebellion, Husband published *The Second Part of the Naked Truth; or, Historical Account of the Actual Transactions of Quakers In Their Meetings of Business*. The main purpose of this pamphlet was to accuse the leading Quakers of the day—presumably, the ones based around Philadelphia—of having betrayed their principles by persecuting those who were not Quakers. Husband mourns that it is “lamentable it is to see Quaker Clergy, like all others heretofore in the World, in pursuit of Power to persecute.”⁴⁴ He then walks through history to explain how evil this was. What the Quaker leaders were now doing was akin to Popery. He asks the rhetorical question, with an obvious answer: “Does Popery, which is the highest Pattern and Improvement of this select Power, at all resemble Christianity?”⁴⁵

Husband explains that the “mind of the Priest” is to “not trust [people] even with the Bible” but to impress whatever he deems to be the truth upon their consciences. This is what “Church Power” looks like.⁴⁶ Husband then jumps to Charles I of England as a later example of a leader who did this, lamenting that his reign was a time “when Church Power was work'd up into absolute Sovereignty, [even though] those persecuted for Non-

⁴³ Stewart, *Redemption from Tyranny*, 36.

⁴⁴ Hermon Husbunds [Herman Husband], *The Second Part of the Naked Truth; or, Historical Account of the Actual Transactions of Quakers In Their Meetings of Business* (New Bern, NC: 1768), 5. Early American Imprints.

⁴⁵ Husband, *The Second Part of the Naked Truth*, 5.

⁴⁶ Husband, *The Second Part of the Naked Truth*, 6.

conformity were the best Men and Christians, or the most exemplary Livers.” What Charles I had done to the nonconformists was no better than what “Mahomatan Princes” had done to “Greek Society.”⁴⁷ He argues that this use of state power—to create an established church and to force men’s consciences to accept it to the detriment of those deemed as “nonconformists” —was Antichristian. Though it is not clear if he had read George Fox’s discourse on *The Arraignment of Popery*, the way he describes how true Christianity compares to Popery and the Church of England establishment is similar: while “Antichristian Power” uses “carnal weapons” and desires an imperial kingdom of this world, Christ’s kingdom is not of this world. Christ teaches “the true Church ... to deny the World and its Pleasures, and the Use of carnal Weapons.”⁴⁸ Thus, Husband employed the Anti-Establishment Narrative of Church History to argue for why it was wrong for any Quakers to be pursuing an establishment of their denomination. This provides insight into why Husband likewise opposed the establishment of the Anglican church in North Carolina, and into one of several reasons that he become a rhetorical leader of the Regulator Rebellion, which was going on at the time of the publication of this pamphlet.⁴⁹

Herman Husband also preached a sermon in 1770, urging his congregation to participate in the Regulator Rebellion. Like in his polemic directed toward other Quakers, he drew heavily on the Anti-Establishment Narrative of Church History. He delves into an obscure Old Testament passage—referencing the “sons of Issachar” in 1 Chronicles

⁴⁷ Husband, *The Second Part of the Naked Truth*, 7.

⁴⁸ Husband, *The Second Part of the Naked Truth*, 8, 27-8.

⁴⁹ Stewart, *Redemption from Tyranny*, 50-73.

12—to demonstrate how ruin comes to those who “[love] rest and present ease more than liberty,—and [choose] to be Slaves rather than to exert themselves to maintain their liberties.”⁵⁰ He then explains how “civil and religious oppression” flows from “the power of princes and the power of priests,” and how, throughout history, in “Popish countries,” people have had their liberty of conscience stolen from them, as they “must believe nothing contrary to the judgment of the church.” The most extreme historical example of this was the Spanish Inquisition.⁵¹ The problem, however, is that this problem was not confined merely to “Popish countries” such as Spain and Italy. Rather, it was even still occurring in “America, a land renowned for all sorts of liberty,” there, in North Carolina.⁵² And the Church of England was to blame.

Husband describes two kinds of oppression that were occurring in North Carolina: civil oppression and religious oppression. He argues that civil oppression happens because the poor are being taxed as highly as the rich were. And then, religious oppression happens due to the existence of the Anglican establishment. Indeed, he explains that “many conscientious good men are debarred from the privilege of serving the publick” and that the clergy are “pretend[ing] [that there is a] right of demanding church dues” that would fund the Anglican church.⁵³ This, he charges, is tantamount to “treating men like asses.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Husband, “A Sermon,” 227.

⁵¹ Husband, “A Sermon,” 229.

⁵² Husband, “A Sermon,” 230-1.

⁵³ Husband, “A Sermon,” 230, 233-4.

⁵⁴ Husband, “A Sermon,” 234.

Husband therefore employed the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History to exhort those listening to his sermon to “[choose neither] to be Slaves” or to keep being “[treated] like asses.” He used history as a moral lesson to convince his audience to stand up for their liberties by participating in the Regulator Rebellion. As a side note, in the *Documentary History* collection on the Regulator Rebellion edited by Powell, Hutha, and Farnham, they note that this sermon of Husband’s was plagiarized, in large part, from a 1768 sermon collection by James Murray titled *Sermons to Asses*. Murray was an independent minister in Scotland, and in these sermons, he complained that the British government was discriminating against Dissenters by having an established church.⁵⁵ However, this plagiarism does not detract from Husband’s choice to use this content. Rather, it demonstrates how, by this time, this narrative was a transatlantic one used by preachers across the English-speaking world who felt that civil liberty and religious liberty, as well as, conversely, civil oppression and religious oppression, were tied together.

As the Revolutionary War unfolded, the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History proved to be a helpful framework for ministers who were looking for a religious reason, as well as a political one, to engage in rebellion against the British government. Some ministers, such as Baptists like Isaac Backus, predictably embraced this narrative as they were already anti-establishment. There were other ministers, though, who, surprisingly, embraced it despite ostensibly being pro-establishment. One of these was Judah Champion, a Congregationalist pastor in Connecticut, who was paid on a state

⁵⁵ William S. Powell, James K. Hutha, and Thomas J. Farnham, eds., *The Regulators in North Carolina: a Documentary History, 1759-1776* (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State Department of Archives and History, 1971), 227.

salary as a minister of the state-established church. Nevertheless, he employed the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History to stoke fear about Catholicism or crypto-Catholicism being forced back into New England. This shows that this narrative was not only useful to those who opposed church-state establishments but also to those who merely wanted to deploy anti-Catholicism to evoke fear about religious and civil liberties being taken away.

In 1776, Judah Champion preached a sermon before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, entitled “Christian and Civil Liberty and Freedom Considered and Recommended.” He based this sermon on a predictable Bible verse, given that he was preaching on civil and religious liberty and employing the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History—Galatians 5:1: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.” In the sermon, he warns the Assembly that “[their] privileges, civil and sacred, are imminently endangered” —so much so that Galatians 5:1 must be interpreted as applicable “admonitory language of divine providence.”⁵⁶ He then explains how liberty is one of God’s greatest gifts to humans who are created in His image. Indeed, liberty is something that all humans had possession of in the “state of nature.” In man’s prelapsarian state of integrity, there existed “freedom and equality.”⁵⁷

Champion then describes how civil and religious liberty have been oppressed in conjunction throughout history. First, regarding civil liberty, he portrays pre-Norman,

⁵⁶ Judah Champion, *Christian and Civil Liberty Considered and Recommended: A Sermon Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, at Hartford, on the Day of Their Anniversary Election, May 9th, 1776. By Judah Champion, A.M. Pastor of the First Church of Christ in Litchfield* (Hartford, CT: Printed by E. Watson, Near the Great Bridge, 1776), 5-6. Early American Imprints.

⁵⁷ Champion, *Christian and Civil Liberty Considered and Recommended*, 6-7.

Anglo-Saxon England as having been a place of great liberty and freedom.⁵⁸ This was ruined, though, when William the Conqueror (a French Catholic monarch) invaded, gained control of England in 1066, and implemented “despotic power.” Despite later wins for liberty, like the Magna Carta, Champion argues that liberty in England devolved further and further up to Charles I. Like both the earlier anonymous author and Herman Husband, Champion portrays Charles I as the epitome of tyranny. Indeed, he bemoans that Charles I “established arbitrary government” which “introduced a civil war.”⁵⁹ However, the worst tyrant of all was James II, who was a Roman Catholic.⁶⁰ With regards to religious liberty, Champion then reminds the Assembly how they had been “happily delivered from Romish superstition, unappointed rites and ceremonies, and that ecclesiastical hierarchy.” Now, being free from the oppressive establishments of both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, the residents of Connecticut enjoy freedom of conscience. Now “every one has God’s word, may read and judge for himself, [and] may worship God in the way he verily believes Heaven will approve.”⁶¹

Champion warns, however, that the General Assembly needs to “stand fast in [this] liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” because the British Parliament was trying to take it away. Regarding their civil liberty, the British had passed the Declaratory Act, “in consequence of which, taxes have been imposed upon us without our consent.”⁶²

⁵⁸ Champion, *Christian and Civil Liberty Considered and Recommended*, 8.

⁵⁹ Champion, *Christian and Civil Liberty Considered and Recommended*, 9.

⁶⁰ Champion, *Christian and Civil Liberty Considered and Recommended*, 9.

⁶¹ Champion, *Christian and Civil Liberty Considered and Recommended*, 10.

⁶² Champion, *Christian and Civil Liberty Considered and Recommended*, 13.

And regarding religious liberty—in this case, their freedom to practice Congregationalism—Champion worries that that, too, was in danger. Indeed, he asks, “Are not our sacred as well as civil privileges greatly threatened?” He portrays the Crown and Parliament as crypto-Catholic, asking, “Is not the King of Great-Britain, by the Quebec Bill [the Quebec Act], set at the head of the Romish Church in Canada?”⁶³

After winning the Seven Years’ War, Britain acquired Quebec, and to the horror of many American Protestant colonists, the British Parliament then passed the Quebec Act, which allowed the free practice of Roman Catholicism there, allowed the officeholders in Quebec to be Catholic, and even allowed the Catholic Church there to impose tithes.⁶⁴ It may seem like a leap to worry that because of the Quebec Act, the British were going to establish Catholicism and take away the Congregationalists’ liberty, as Quebec was a historically Catholic region and the thirteen colonies were not. However, this fear makes sense when thought of in the framework of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. Champion might have asked one to take one look at the history of the British monarchy and how they had suppressed civil and religious liberty. Look, for example, William the Conqueror, Charles I, and James II. Thus, even pastors who preached at established churches, like Judah Champion, employed the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History to pair civil and religious liberty. He argued that religious liberty was hypothetically in danger of being taken away by Popish authorities, even though there was little warrant behind this fear. Therefore, he

⁶³ Champion, *Christian and Civil Liberty Considered and Recommended*, 18.

⁶⁴ Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 131; “Quebec Act.” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc, 2020. Accessed May 8, 2023.

was able to use the Anti-Establishment Narrative of Church History to justify supporting the American Revolution.

Conclusion

Isaac Backus, therefore, used a century-and-a-half-year-old understanding of church history when he preached a sermon on Galatians 5:1— “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” —and when he cited the example of Roger Williams. By appealing to the history of how Antichrist and the Roman Catholic Church had historically restricted civil and religious liberty, he warned that now, in the context of the Revolutionary War, it was in danger of being taken away again. The same was true for Herman Husband. A few years later, he embraced the American Revolution. As one biographer put it, “Husband believed that Britain was allied with Antichrist” but “remained confident that the spirit of liberty would ultimately prevail over Satan’s Kingdom.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Stewart, *Redemption from Tyranny: Herman Husband’s American Revolution*, 3.

CHAPTER THREE

The Primitive Baptist Protest

Introduction

In 1819, a sixty-eight-year-old Baptist pastor from Franklin County, Kentucky named John Taylor published a tract entitled *Thoughts on Missions*. In it, he recounts attending local Baptist association meetings throughout his life and describes two troubling phenomena that he has observed at them in recent years. His first concern is that “a number of the messengers [to these meetings] are members of the Legislature of the state, and filling some of the highest offices in the commonwealth.”¹ He describes this co-mingling of political and ecclesiastical leadership as a “great ... evil.”² In addition to just this “evil,” though, Taylor decries what he sees to be an even “much greater” evil, “which has made a general sweep among Baptist associations:” the growth of “Missionary Boards, Conventions, Societies, and Theological Schools.”³

In 1825, Joshua Lawrence, the pastor of Tarboro Baptist Church in Halifax County, North Carolina, wrote a similar tract, entitled *The American Telescope, by a Clodhopper, of North Carolina*. In line with Taylor’s first point, he warns of a “learned and monied clergy.” He argues that entrusting them “with any kind of power” is a “dangerous” idea and that if they were to “obtain an ascendancy in the government, they

¹ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, (Franklin County, KY: 1819), 3.
<http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/thoughts-on-missions.pdf>.

² Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 3.

³ Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 3.

would ride rough-shod over the consciences and property of the people, like all other tyrants.”⁴ A year later, Lawrence submitted a declaration to the Kehukee Association, the local Baptist association to which his church belonged. This “Kehukee Declaration” was published a year later as an official statement of the Kehukee Association. In line with Taylor’s second point, the Declaration urged local churches to “discountenance ... Missionary Societies, Tract Societies, Bible Societies, and Theological Societies ... and all the practices heretofore resorted to for their support, [such as] begging money from the public to back them, ... [the Kehukee Association] believing these societies, and institutions, to be the inventions of men, not warranted from the Word of God.”⁵

Taylor and Lawrence were two of the earliest advocates of the Primitive Baptist movement. This movement emerged following substantial change within American Baptist life during the ten years between 1810 and 1820. Back in 1792, under the leadership of William Carey, English Baptists formed the Baptist Missionary Society. American Congregationalists in New England then followed their example by forming the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in 1810. By 1812, the Baptists in America had yet to do so. That year, however, two missionaries sent out by the ABCFM, Luther Rice and Adoniram Judson, came to Baptist convictions while sailing to Burma. Following this, they sent back letters to American Baptists, advocating for them to unite, following the model of the ABCFM, so that support-raising

⁴ Joshua Lawrence, *The American Telescope, by a Clodhopper, of North Carolina* (Philadelphia: Published for the Author, 1825), 17. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, 1998.

⁵ “Minutes of the Kehukee Baptist Association, Holden at Kehukee Meeting-house, Halifax County, Commencing Saturday before the first Lord’s-Day in October, 1827” (Halifax, NC: Printed by Abraham Hodge), 4.

for missionaries could be centralized. In 1814, the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions (or “Triennial Convention” for short because it met once every three years) was founded.⁶ Baptists also formed the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in 1814, which served as a fundraising and sending agency, outside of the local church, for foreign missionaries such as Judson and Rice. And finally, in the early nineteenth century, Baptist ministers, especially in New England, began to attend colleges and seminaries much more frequently. This contrasted with the common practice of Baptist ministers in the eighteenth century—especially Separate Baptists ministers, who typically lacked a seminary education and were suspicious of an educated, seminary-trained, ministry. Many of them worried that education might “squench the Spirit.”⁷

The Primitive Baptist movement grew quickly in response to these changes in Baptist life. They were not limited to any one geographic area, though they primarily grew on the western frontier and in the rural South, while they hardly existed in New England. The movement was part of a broader cultural split emerging in early nineteenth-century America between two groups that Sam Haselby has labeled as the “national evangelists” and the “frontier revivalists. The former group was composed of largely Reformed gentry from New England who supported a new “nationalist missions movement,” while the latter was largely composed of clergymen in the Southern and

⁶ Thomas S. Kidd and Barry G. Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 92-7.

⁷ Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 18.

western backcountries who deployed anti-elitist rhetoric in opposition to that movement.⁸ An early example of Primitive Baptist sentiment was expressed by an association of Baptists in southwestern Indiana in 1819. These Baptists, led by Daniel Parker, concluded, in response to a question asked a year earlier, that the new Baptist mission societies were not “agreeable to the Gospel order.”⁹ This was followed by John Taylor’s tract, *Thoughts on Missions*, which was published in 1820. Daniel Parker also published a tract that year in opposition to the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society. The movement then began to gain steam as the Kehukee Baptist Association in eastern North Carolina joined in 1827, followed by Baptists gathered at Abbott’s Creek in central North Carolina, and Black Rock in western Maryland, in 1832.

The Primitive Baptists exploded in number across the Southern and western parts of the country. By the 1840s, they dominated in places like Ohio, Tennessee, and the wiregrass-country area of south Georgia and the Florida panhandle.¹⁰ These Primitive Baptists rejected the new institutions that were being formed in New England as part of what some historians have termed the “Benevolent Empire.”¹¹ These institutions included

⁸ Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-24.

⁹ Joshua Guthman, *Strangers Below: Primitive Baptists and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 4; Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 111.

¹⁰ Guthman, *Strangers Below*, 7.

¹¹ Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 110-4; The term “Benevolent Empire,” applied to Evangelical Protestant organizations emerging in New England in the early nineteenth century, was first used in Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1933); Prominent examples of Evangelical organizations that made up the Benevolent Empire included the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the American Tract Society, the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, and, for Baptists, the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions, colloquially called the “Triennial Convention.”

seminaries like Andover Theological Seminary, founded in 1807, the American Bible Society, founded in 1816, and the American Sunday School Union, founded in 1817. The foundation of new colleges like Furman University in South Carolina, in 1825, was also concerning to them.¹²

When examining the Primitive Baptist movement, historians have typically either emphasized the influence of hyper-Calvinist doctrine or the importance of social class divides and resentments. However, this chapter will contend that for the ministers who led the beginnings of the movement in the 1820s—including John Taylor, Daniel Parker, and Joshua Lawrence—their embrace of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History was just as important of a factor. These ministers each appealed to church history in the polemics they wrote against the various facets of the Benevolent Empire. In this way, Primitive Baptists were intellectually connected back to seventeenth-century anti-establishment English ministers like the Quaker leader George Fox, and Revolutionary-era American Baptist leaders like John Leland and Isaac Backus. As evidence of this, Leland himself lived well into the early nineteenth century and became sympathetic to the Primitive Baptist movement.

Historiography

One of the oldest ways historians have portrayed the Primitive Baptist movement is that it was primarily motivated by hyper-Calvinist doctrine. This is implied by one of the primary names that have been given to the movement itself—the “anti-mission”

¹² For more on Sunday schools, see: K. Elise Leal, “‘All Our Children May Be Taught of God’: Sunday Schools and the Roles of Childhood and Youth in Creating Evangelical Benevolence,” *Church History* 84, no. 4 (December 2018): 1056-1090.

movement. These historians portray the Primitive Baptists as having rejected mission societies and the other endeavors of the Benevolent Empire because they were hyper-Calvinists. This would imply that they believed that God just saves whomever he wants, without any human effort, and that evangelism was thus unnecessary. These historians thus emphasize the Primitive Baptists' discontinuity with the Baptist tradition. For example, although the Second London Baptist Confession (the confessional document most Baptists in America used), the most widely used Baptist confession of faith in the United States at the time, did not account for the existence of missionary societies and attached evangelism to the context of the local church, it still affirms that evangelism is necessary, declaring that the local church has been given "the ministry of the word" to "[call] out of the world unto himself ... those that are given unto [Christ] by his Father."¹³

Nevertheless, historians have widely promoted the view that the Primitive Baptists were hyper-Calvinists. This view was advocated as early as 1848 by Baptist historian, David Benedict, who published an updated version of a comprehensive book on Baptist history he had first composed in 1813. In this update, he addressed the recent formation of the Primitive Baptists, and he labeled them the "anti-mission party." In response, he expressed "[mortification] that any baptists, should assume an opposition

¹³ Chapter XXVI, Paragraph 5, in *A Confession of Faith Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of Many Congregations of Christians (Baptized upon Profession of Their Faith) in London and the Country* [Known as the "Second London Baptist Confession of Faith," the "1689 Confession", or the "Philadelphia Confession of Faith" in its American revision] (written in 1677, published in 1689, first published in Philadelphia in 1742), seventh edition (Philadelphia: Printed by John Dunlap at the Newest Printing Office, in Market-Street, 1773). Internet Archive.

attitude as to missionary operations.”¹⁴ Baptist historian Albert Henry Newman, writing in 1894, described the Primitive Baptists as “influenced by an unevangelical form of Calvinism,” resulting in them having a “pronounced hostility towards missions.”¹⁵ This view has persisted among some historians. John G. Crowley wrote in 1998 that “most historians of religion ... believe Primitive Baptist doctrine originated in the so-called “Hyper-Calvinism” of the English Independents and Particular Baptists.”¹⁶

Historians in the mid-twentieth century, however, often downplayed the theological reasons for the Primitive Baptist movement and focused instead on social and class-related reasons. Kidd and Hankins summarize these historians as having “attributed the rise of these anti-mission ‘Primitive’ Baptists to the anti-elitist mood of the Jacksonian era and the strength of populist opinion in the wiregrass South.”¹⁷ Some of the earliest of these efforts were condescending and dismissive of the Primitive Baptists’ theological substance—including T. Scott Miyakawa, who, in his 1964 book, *Protestants and Pioneers*, described the Primitive Baptists as “poorer and less-educated elements [of society],” whose theological objections were just “compensating rationalizations for their unfavorable status.”¹⁸ Likewise, another 1960s historian, Walter B. Posey, viewed the

¹⁴ David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, and Other Parts of the World*, 2nd ed., (New York: Lewis Colby and Company, 1848), 935. Google Books.

¹⁵ Albert Henry Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1894), 433, 440. Google Books.

¹⁶ John G. Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South 1815 to the Present* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998), 1.

¹⁷ Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 110-1.

¹⁸ T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 145-58.

movement as a manifestation of envy that uneducated pastors had against educated ones.¹⁹

Since 1970, historians have begun to present more nuanced analyses of the Primitive Baptists. For example, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, in a 1970 article, distinguished between a small minority of Primitive Baptists—including Daniel Parker, who were motivated by hyper-Calvinism—and the large majority who were motivated by cultural and class resentment against developments happening in the Northeast.²⁰ He notes that ministers like John Taylor were incensed by the perceived incursion of “Yankee commercial life” through the expansion of mission societies. He also hints at how an anti-Catholic understanding of church history influenced these ministers. For example, Taylor compared the agents of the mission societies to Johann Tetzel, the Roman Catholic indulgence collector whom Martin Luther opposed in the 1510s.²¹

Recent historians have followed Wyatt-Brown’s lead, taking the Primitive Baptists’ theological ideas more seriously and viewing the movement with nuance. One of the few examinations into how Primitive Baptist ministers thought about church history came from Nathan O. Hatch. In his 1989 book, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, he portrays the Primitive Baptist movement as part of an overall trend in American evangelicalism to “[retrieve truth] from academic speculation and the heavy

¹⁹ Walter B. Posey, *Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 12-22.

²⁰ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in a Regional Folk Culture,” *The Journal of Southern History* 36, no. 4 (November 1970): 501–3.

²¹ Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South,” 510-1.

hand of the past.”²² Like Wyatt-Brown, he notes that a popular, anti-Catholic, “idiom” at the time, which influenced the Primitive Baptist retrieval of truth from the past, was the idea that “Christian tradition since the time of the apostles was a tale of sordid corruption in which kingcraft and priestcraft wielded orthodoxy to enslave the minds of people.”²³ He places the Primitive Baptist movement into a larger narrative where the democratic ideology of the American Revolution shaped nineteenth-century American evangelicalism. In this process, rural populists, motivated by the ideals of liberty and individualism, asserted “the right to think for oneself” against the controlling strictures of “Calvinist orthodoxy,” elite clergy, and historically rooted confessions of faith.²⁴

Hatch lumps in the Primitive Baptists with Restorationists like Alexander Campbell. Campbell “believed that stripping away the accretion of theology and tradition would restore peace, harmony, and vitality to the Christian church.”²⁵ Hatch also argues that this way of thinking about history and theology was new and a departure from the Protestant and Baptist traditions.²⁶ This corresponds with one of the main themes of his book, which is that, in the early American republic, “Rather than looking backward and clinging to an older moral economy, insurgent religious leaders espoused convictions that were essentially modern and individualistic.”²⁷

²² Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 162.

²³ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 167.

²⁴ “Chapter Six: The Right to Think for Oneself,” in Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 162-89.

²⁵ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 163, 167-70.

²⁶ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 179-80.

²⁷ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 14.

However, Hatch is wrong to describe the Primitive Baptists as having been “restorationists.” Unlike the Campbellites, the Primitive Baptists did not seek to create a *new* expression of Christianity that they saw as being in better alignment with the early church. Rather, they sought to preserve what they saw as traditional Baptist ecclesiology against the incursions of what they saw as a new, modern innovation. They indeed saw traditional Baptist ecclesiology as the ecclesiology of the early church, but their basic instinct was conservative rather than restorationist. Furthermore, though Hatch correctly describes how they employed ideas consistent with republicanism in their narrative of church history, this was not new, as Hatch argues, but rooted in the Baptist tradition.

Joshua Guthman’s 2015 book *Strangers Below: Primitive Baptists and American Culture* provides a cultural analysis of the Primitive Baptists. Rather than focusing on their alleged hyper-Calvinism or their rural provincialism and class resentments, he employs “scholarship of lived religion and emotion to tell [their] story.”²⁸ First, he argues that the particular version of Calvinistic theology to which they held gave them an “abiding sense of guilt” and a lack of certainty about the state of their souls. Hence, they lived “lives assailed by doubt.” Throughout the book, he draws from a range of sources: diaries, correspondence, and most strikingly, hymns—of which the Primitive Baptists developed a culturally unique form—to prove this. He argues that they felt they were “betwixt and between evangelicals in response to dramatic shifts in Protestant church life, emotional norms, theology, gender roles, and the further intrusion of the capitalist marketplace.” In reaction to this, they called upon a variety of negative emotional idioms,

²⁸ Guthman, *Strangers Below*, 12.

like guilt and anxiety, which stood in sharp contrast to the “certitude of the missionary crusade” and the exuberance of revivalism.²⁹

Guthman also examines how Primitive Baptists were impacted by the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. He notes how both pro-mission society Baptists and the Primitive Baptists shared a common view of the recent past. They both often recalled the persecution Baptists faced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, he then applies his framework of the different emotions and lived experiences felt by the two groups. He demonstrates that while pro-mission society Baptist histories in the early nineteenth century were marked with an unflapping optimism, Primitive Baptist histories saw the rise of the mission societies, convention structures, seminaries, and other “monied” organizations as a “new dark age.”³⁰ These are prescient observations that rightly understand the centrality of historical memory to the Primitive Baptist protest. However, while Guthman focuses on pessimism in the Primitive Baptists’ use of church history, he does not draw out the anti-Catholic and democratic substance of this narrative of church history. This chapter will show that these features of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History are what colored the Primitive Baptists’ pessimism.

John Taylor and Daniel Parker: Midwestern Misgivings

In his 1820 tract, *Thoughts on Missions*, John Taylor responded to a set of institutions and practices in Baptist and American evangelical life that, from his vantage point, were foreign and new. In doing so, he appeals to history in anti-Catholic and

²⁹ Guthman, *Strangers Below*, 12-3.

³⁰ Guthman, *Strangers Below*, 21-45.

democratic themes. He starts with one of the most obvious examples of a missionary society in church history up to that point: the Jesuits. He discusses how he researched the “Papal missions” in Paraguay done by the Jesuits, and he concluded that “these holy Fathers gained such influence, power and wealth in Paraguay, that they at length held the King of Spain at defiance-and a heavy war ensued, and much bloodshed, before they could be driven out of the country.”³¹ Thus, he implies that the Jesuits were not truly seeking evangelism but instead, “influence, power, and wealth” —to be tyrannical leaders in a country of their own.

Taylor then recounts the history of the recent missions movement in New England. He points specifically to Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice, both of whom he compares to conniving Catholic priests. He notes that his information on them had come from a personal visit by “two young men by the names of Mills and Schermorhorn” [sic] —who, like Judson and Rice, graduated from Andover Theological Seminary. According to Mills and Schermerhorn, “Many poor ministers could scarcely get their bread before, but by stirring up the people in the mission cause, and getting them in the habit of giving their money ... ministers who staid at home, were now richly supplied.” Taylor asks, in response to this, “Is this not Priestly art?”³² Thus, he implies, right after he began with a narrative of the Jesuits in Paraguay, that these new mission societies were merely concerned with “power, influence, and wealth,” just like their Roman Catholic counterpart, the Jesuits.

³¹ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 3.

³² John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 4.

Taylor is motivated by class and regional grievances, too, as he writes that he “did begin strongly to smell the *New England Rat*.”³³ Even this, however, was grounded in an anti-Catholic and pro-democratic understanding of history. Indeed, a few pages later, referring to Luther Rice, Taylor concedes that “although I [admire] the art of this well taught Yankee, yet I [consider] him a modern Tetzal, and that the Pope’s old orator of that name was equally innocent with [him] and his motive about the same.” This just explained why Rice was slick and convincing—he was a wealthy, well-educated Northerner. Taylor’s comparison of him to Tetzal is noteworthy, though, as he was one of the archvillains of the Protestant Reformation. Indeed, Taylor writes that “Luther [Rice]’s motive was thro’ sophistry and Yankee art, to get money for the Mission, of which himself was to have a part.” In the sixteenth century, likewise, Tetzal traveled around the German countryside, using slick rhetoric to convince the laity to buy indulgences, which ultimately enriched the Catholic Church. Further, Taylor warns that Rice and Judson’s goals were anti-democratic. He explained, “[T]hese great men are verging close on an aristocracy, with an object to sap the foundation of Baptist republican government.”

These dire warnings that Taylor gave about the new institutions of the Benevolent Empire, including the missions societies, were rooted in the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. In this understanding of church history, the church became corrupted when it began to get money and power. Indeed, as Taylor’s comparison of the missions agents to the Jesuits and Johann Tetzal makes clear, he is worried that the modern missions movement was founded on money and power. He warns that “money and power

³³ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 4.

are two principal members of the old beast—” drawing here from the narrative of the Beast, in the Book of Revelation, who arises to oppose Christians and the Church.³⁴ Thus, Taylor’s understanding of church history informed him that the advent of these mission societies was a danger of apocalyptic significance.

Daniel Parker, a Baptist minister living in the frontier town of Vincennes, Indiana, also published a pamphlet against the Benevolent Empire in 1820. Born in 1781 and living until 1844, Parker had come to faith in 1802 in a Baptist church while living in northeast Georgia, and he eventually became a pastor and moved to Indiana.³⁵ He was unique compared to other Primitive Baptist leaders like John Taylor and Joshua Lawrence, as the “hyper-Calvinist” charge is fair when attached to Parker and those whom he influenced. He promoted a theology called “Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit.” According to this view, “It is evident that there are the two seeds, one of the Serpent, the other of the woman; and they appear plain in Cain and Abel, and in their offerings.” Thus, people were born into either the seed of the Serpent or the seed of the woman, whether they were reprobate or elect.³⁶

However, like Taylor, Daniel Parker also appealed to the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History in his opposition to the Benevolent Empire. In a pamphlet entitled, *A Public Address to the Baptist Society, and Friends of Religion in General on the Principle and Practice of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions for the United States of America*, Parker likewise hits an apocalyptic note, warning that the “mission spirit”

³⁴ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 7.

³⁵ Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 111.

³⁶ Leonard, *Baptists in America*, 23.

looks not like “the Spirit of Christ” but like the abomination of desolation spoken of in Daniel. He identifies the abomination of desolation from Daniel as the historic “rise of the Popish dominion.” And then, he connects this to seminaries—an element of the new Benevolent Empire. He explains that this rise of popery is what wrongly “gave [formal] education a seat in religion, and made it essential to ministry.” He sees this development as part and parcel of the “mission spirit,” which has “now got possession of the hearts of some of our dear baptist brethren.”³⁷ He then also uses church history to characterize the Benevolent Empire as a danger to American democracy. He references the example of the “Popish empire” before warning that, though there is “no danger now, under our republican government, [yet] how soon may this blessed liberty be snatched from us when so much abused.”³⁸

John Leland and Isaac Backus

In their appeal to church history to warn about the newly forming institutions of the Benevolent Empire, Taylor and Parker were in step with Revolutionary War-era Baptist leaders. John Leland, who was still alive, shared their concerns. In an 1830 letter to the now seventy-eight-year-old Taylor, the seventy-six-year-old Leland appealed to church history when he wrote, “I do not wish to be the bigoted old man, who always finds fault with new customs, though ever so great improvements; but when I see the same measures pursued that were in the third century, I am afraid the same effects will

³⁷ Daniel Parker, *A Public Address to the Baptist Society, and Friends of Religion in General on the Principle and Practice of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions for the United States of America* (Vincennes, IN: Printed by Stout & Osborn, 1820), 56.

³⁸ Parker, *A Public Address*, 56-7.

follow.”³⁹ Here, he is comparing the recent formation of mission societies and the other institutions of the Benevolent Empire to the apocryphal idea that Constantine established Christianity in the Roman Empire in the third century, which, according to the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, was the beginning of the corruption of the church. Indeed, he views this development as encouraging corruption, bemoaning that the formation of “Sunday Schools, Tract and Missionary Societies, Anti-masonic Societies, etc.” turned the focus of Baptist ministers away from “travail[ing] in birth for the salvation of [their] hearers” and towards providing “money [for] these institutions, which are to introduce the millennium.”⁴⁰

This was not the first time Leland employed the Anti-establishment Narrative of history. Back in 1791, Leland had published in Connecticut a tract that argued against the state establishment of churches (the Congregationalist Church was the established church in Connecticut until 1818) on the basis that everyone has an inalienable right to the freedom of conscience. He explains how different groups of Christians, historically—including Constantine, the Anabaptists of Germany, and most of all, the popes—have errantly “supposed that none had a right to rule but gracious men,” leading them to “require a religious test to qualify an officer of the state, proscribing all non-conformists from civil and religious liberty.” This error had overtaken even “the British form of government,” in which “no man is eligible to any office . . . without he subscribes to the

³⁹ John Leland to John Taylor, Letter, December 10, 1830, in John Leland and L.F. Greene, *The Writings of the Late John Leland, Including Some Events in His Life, Written by Himself, With Additional Sketches, &c., by Miss L.F. Greene, Lanesboro, Mass.* (New York: Printed by G.W. Wood, 29 Gold-Street, 1845), 602.

⁴⁰ John Leland to John Taylor, 602.

thirty-nine articles and book of common prayer.”⁴¹ He argues that history shows this form of government to have been disastrous for Christianity. He asks, “Did not the Christian religion prevail during the first three centuries [before Constantine established it as the state religion], in a more glorious manner than ever it has since, not only without the aid of law, but in opposition to all the laws of haughty monarchs? And did not religion receive a deadly wound by being fostered in the arms of civil power and regulated by law?”⁴²

Leland especially sees the Roman Catholic Church as having represented, historically, the epitome of the dangers presented by a state establishment. He argues, in language like that of the Book of Hosea, that though “being espoused to Christ, she [the Roman Church] kept her bed pure for her husband for almost three hundred years; ... afterwards, she played the whore with the kings and princes of this world, who, with their gold and wealth, came in unto her, and she became a strumpet.” He goes on to call the Catholic Church “the *mother of harlots*.” His criticism isn’t restricted to Rome, however. He adds that “all Protestant churches, who are regulated by law [i.e., established], and force people to support their preachers, build meeting-houses, and otherwise maintain their worship, are *daughters* of this *holy mother*.”⁴³ Leland thus believed that the state establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, which he traces back to Constantine, was

⁴¹ John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable, and, Therefore, Religious Opinions Not Cognizable by Law; or, the High-flying Churchman, Stripped of His Legal Robe, Appears a Yahoo* (New London, CT: 1791), in *The Writings of the Late John Leland, Including Some Events in His Life, Written by Himself, With Additional Sketches, &c., by Miss L.F. Greene, Lanesboro, Mass.* (New York: Printed by G.W. Wood, 29 Gold-Street, 1845), 179.

⁴² John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable*, 181.

⁴³ Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable*, 190.

one of the primary things that led to it becoming controlled by a love for power and money. He thought that state governments, therefore, needed to pursue disestablishment, lest the same issues continue to be perpetuated.

By appealing to the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History to warn about the new institutions of the Benevolent Empire, Taylor and Parker drew from an already-established tradition of historiography in American Baptist life. Behind Taylor and Parker's objections to mission societies, and the other institutions of the Benevolent Empire, was a worry that Baptists were becoming too entangled with civil power. This reeked of the Roman Catholic Church—which, in their view, was overtaken by the love of money and the love of power. It is no coincidence that John Leland, who had written on many of the same themes, agreed.

It also did not matter that the new institutions of the Benevolent Empire were not actually seeking a state establishment of Christianity. The mere fact that they seemed so concerned with money and that they were employing similar missions strategies to the Jesuits was enough for Taylor and Parker to smell more than just the "*New England Rat*." They smelled the greatest cautionary tales of church history playing themselves out again.

Joshua Lawrence: "A Clodhopper of North Carolina"

In the rural, eastern lowlands of North Carolina, a Baptist pastor named Joshua Lawrence shared many of the same concerns and had the same propensity to be polemical. In 1826 and 1827, he helped prod his Baptist association to issue the Kehukee Declaration, the first statement by a Baptist association anywhere in the country that

condemned mission societies and other institutions of the Benevolent Empire.⁴⁴ However, with this statement he was simply going public with opinions that he had already published pseudonymously. A year earlier, in 1825, he had published a tract in Philadelphia entitled, *The American Telescope, by a Clodhopper, of North Carolina*. “Clodhopper” was a slang term prevalent in the nineteenth century that, according to Oxford English Dictionary, was insultingly used to refer to “one who walked over ploughed land,” i.e., a common farmer.⁴⁵ Thus, Lawrence, here, was intentionally being populist, identifying himself as a lowly plowman, in contrast to what he saw as elite, northeastern, money-seeking mission agents.

Lawrence appeals to the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History throughout *The American Telescope*. He characterizes the mission agents who had appeared in North Carolina over the last fifteen years as “travelling beggars” who were asking for “money to convert the heathen.” And he charges that this is “unlike the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the apostles, a Luther, a George Whitefield, a [John] Wesley, [and] a [Lorenzo] Dow, . . . who [were] ornaments to the free gospel of Christ; all impressed with the worth of souls; and who [went] forth taking up their cross, denying themselves, and devoting themselves to the work of God, for the good of men: dependant on God, without begging or being shamefully backed by monied societies.”⁴⁶ He compares the mission agents, rather, to the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, writing that “as the churches in this country are now going on, they will soon be

⁴⁴ Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 112.

⁴⁵ "Clodhopper, n." Oxford English Dictionary Online. December 2021. Oxford University Press.

⁴⁶ Lawrence, *The American Telescope*, 4-5.

no better than the church of Rome, and the High Church of England; for money and titles have always been the object of Popes and Popish priests, and also of the clergy of the Church of England.”⁴⁷

Lawrence argued that the church stood in danger of becoming corrupted due to pursuing money and civil power. He writes that “[it] has been the manner of the devil, from the day of Cain, down to Constantine the Great; to set up a form of religion ... and maintain it, in the world, by men of this world.”⁴⁸ He concedes that Constantine may have meant well by establishing Christianity and that it provided ministers with salaries, which was a good thing. However, the Devil soon took advantage of establishment, as from it has “follow[ed] persecution of the saints, ... more or less in every country throughout Christendom.”⁴⁹ Indeed, “[T]he Emperor Constantine, and his men of state, with the clergy’s juggling together, produced the devil in the end, though all was fair weather at first.”⁵⁰ The Protestant Reformation, then, failed to solve the church’s issues. The corruption of the Roman Catholic Church continued in England even after “the cruel yoke of Popery” was thrown off—because England continued to fuse religion with civil power.

Lawrence, therefore, warns: “How dangerous then is a form of religion, armed with civil power! And how dangerous to trust a body of learned and monied clergy, with any power!” He notes that even the authors of the original Constitution of the State of

⁴⁷ Lawrence, *The American Telescope*, 10.

⁴⁸ Lawrence, *The American Telescope*, 16.

⁴⁹ Lawrence, *The American Telescope*, 17.

⁵⁰ Lawrence, *The American Telescope*, 23.

North Carolina recognized this, as they forbade Christian ministers from serving in the Legislature.⁵¹ To drive his point home, he continues to point to examples from church history, recalling how “the priests in France, with crucifixes in their hands, encourage[ed] the blood-thirsty Catholics in the murder of sixty thousand Protestants in a night” — ostensibly referring to the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. He also recalls how the Pope “sen[t] his priests to Baptise at the point of the sword” and “slaughtered” thousands of Welsh people who did not comply with this, as well as “the whippings and imprisonings of the Baptists, in Virginia, and other states.”⁵² Finally, he adds the details that Anglican priests in the American colonies were paid “sixteen thousand pounds of tobacco a year,” which enabled them in “idleness, luxury, and pride,” as further proof that corruption flows from state involvement in religion.

In an 1830 sermon, Lawrence again employed the Anti-establishment Narrative of History to warn about the dangerous effects of the new mission societies. In it, he declares that America had been given special success by God, who “hates tyranny.” He then charges that “Civil and religious liberty must live and die together for hand in hand they came to us out of the revolutionary struggle.” He laments that the new institutions of the Benevolent Empire were, in his view, threatening this religious liberty.⁵³ He warns that “designing priests are endeavoring to bind us with the bands of spiritual tyranny, and

⁵¹ Lawrence, *The American Telescope*, 17.

⁵² Lawrence, *The American Telescope*, 23-4.

⁵³ Joshua Lawrence, *A Patriotic Discourse, Delivered by the Rev. Joshua Lawrence, at the Old Church in Tarborough, North-Carolina, on Sunday, the 4th of July, 1830*. 2nd ed. (Tarboro, NC: Free Press, 1830), 1.

rivet the broken chains of British priestcraft on us and our children, and become our conscience keepers and purse plunderers as in days of yore.”⁵⁴

Lawrence repeated this same basic narrative, yet again, in *The American Telescope*. In this pamphlet, he explains that “for three hundred years, the religion of Jesus Christ stood and flourished without the aid of schools, laws, or help of kings or magistrates.”⁵⁵ After Constantine came to power, however, the “Romish church” increasingly became concerned with “titles, purse, and power.”⁵⁶ In regard to titles, purse, and power, he focuses his aim on seminaries. He makes the case that “[i]n all countries where these factories [theological schools] have been set going, priestcraft and oppression are reigning predominant.”⁵⁷ He appeals to church history to justify this claim, writing that “If you will take the spy glass of church history, you can ... see a Bunyan groaning in prison twelve years, ... see the poor quakers banished, whipped, imprisoned and hung, in New-England, [and] see the baptist ministers in Virginia fined, imprinted, and whipped like slaves.”⁵⁸ Thus, in both *The American Telescope* and in his sermon, *A Patriotic Discourse*, Lawrence draws from the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History to paint a pessimistic picture. He warns that mission societies, seminaries, and the other new institutions of the Benevolent Empire will lead to the loss of the religious liberty that was fought for in the American Revolution.

⁵⁴ Lawrence, *A Patriotic Discourse*, 2.

⁵⁵ Lawrence, *A Patriotic Discourse*, 6.

⁵⁶ Lawrence, *A Patriotic Discourse*, 8.

⁵⁷ Lawrence, *A Patriotic Discourse*, 9.

⁵⁸ Lawrence, *A Patriotic Discourse*, 10.

One might wonder, though, how Lawrence determined that mission societies were connected at all to civil power or church-state establishments. Like Taylor and Parker, Lawrence presented no evidence for this idea. In *A Patriotic Discourse*, however, he gives his case. After noting that the Jesuits were the first “moneyed missionary society” in history, he explains that “these missionary craft men soon began to meddle with political affairs” in the countries into which they went, “...and were by the jealous rulers of those countries expelled from their dominions.”⁵⁹ Regardless of whether this historical account of the Jesuits is true, Lawrence reveals that the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History is what influenced him to connected missionary societies and church-state intermingling. Taylor, Parker, and Lawrence’s warnings also fit neatly with the way Mark Noll argues that most Americans, prior to the Civil War, thought about republicanism. He writes, “Virtuous character and action [was] linked with political liberty and the flourishing of society and, on the other side, vice [was] linked with corruption in government, tyrannical politics, and the collapse of the social order.”⁶⁰

Conclusion

The Primitive Baptist rejection of the institutions of the Benevolent Empire in the 1820s was thus rooted in the warnings taught to them by Anti-establishment of Church History, which fit neatly with the logic of antebellum American republicanism. This narrative warned Primitive Baptist leaders that these kinds of institutions were likely too cozy with a love for money and civil power. John Taylor, Daniel Parker, and Joshua

⁵⁹ Lawrence, *A Patriotic Discourse*, 11-2.

⁶⁰ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 23.

Lawrence all sincerely believed that the new “moneyed” missionary societies that were being established, such as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions or the Triennial Convention, were too eerily “Romish” and evocative of historical figures like Johann Tetzl. And this was same historical narrative that Isaac Backus, John Leland, and others had used to justify a revolt against the British state establishment, decades before.

When attempting to explain the emergence of the Primitive Baptists in the 1820s and 1830s, historians have pointed to hyper-Calvinism and social class. These are relevant factors to consider. However, examining the polemical writings of John Taylor, Daniel Parker, and Joshua Lawrence against the institutions of the Benevolent Empire shows that they were influenced by the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. This narrative warned them that the Benevolent Empire was, likely, not so benevolent.

CHAPTER FOUR

J.R. Graves and Christian Republicanism

Introduction

James Robinson (J.R.) Graves (1820-1893) was a Southern Baptist minister and newspaper publisher based in Nashville, Tennessee in the mid-nineteenth century. He has been described by one historian as “the most influential person in Baptist life in the nineteenth-century South,” as he was the progenitor of the Landmark Baptist movement. The Landmark Baptist movement first began after Graves called a meeting in the western Tennessee town of Cotton Grove in 1851 and passed the “Cotton Grove Resolutions.”¹ In these resolutions, they made clear their fierce commitment to congregational ecclesiology, closed communion, and the exclusivity of credobaptism by immersion. In the following years, Graves published many self-authored writings that inveighed against the evils of other denominations. He and other Landmark Baptists also pushed the idea that Baptists had a direct line of succession back to Jesus Christ.

In his writings, Graves also dove into the political controversies of his day. A lesser-known topic that Graves emphasized, but one which he considered just as fundamental to Christianity and just as exclusively practiced by the Baptists, was what he termed “Christian republicanism.” This political ideology was built directly off the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. Indeed, it emphasized that the church, in its

¹ Joe Early, Jr., “The Cotton Grove Resolutions,” *Tennessee Baptist History* 7 (Fall 2005): 50. Article archived here: <https://www.campbellsville.edu/blog/cotton-grove-resolutions/>.

primitive form, had been non-hierarchical and democratic, with liberty of conscience protected. However, from the time of Constantine onward, it was increasingly corrupted through hierarchy and church and state intermingling—and this was best epitomized in Roman Catholicism but also magisterial Protestantism. Graves’ Christian republicanism was rooted in this understanding of church history and ecclesiology. However, though it would seem to contradict these principles—the Confederacy was pro-hierarchy to the extreme by supporting slavery—Graves employed the logic of Christian republicanism to justify slavery and Confederate secession. This chapter will show how he made sense of that.

Historiography

J.R. Graves’ “Christian republicanism,” though little has been written about it, was not particularly unique. In fact, Mark Noll, who has written about evangelical Protestantism and republicanism in multiple works, argues that evangelical Protestantism was as popular as it was in the nineteenth-century United States precisely because it “successfully clothed the Christian faith in the preeminent ideological dress of the new Republic.”² He argues that syncretism of republicanism and Protestantism increased in popularity during the mid-to-late eighteenth century in the British American colonies and then became the dominant American political theology by the mid-nineteenth century.³ He helpfully provides examples of these different republican philosophies that arose, and

² Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 18.

³ See “Christian Republicanism” in Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 72-93.

the one that looks most similar to Graves' Christian republicanism is the Whig-influenced philosophy of Isaac Backus. For Backus, a republican nation is virtuous when it respects liberty of conscience. Noll highlights how Backus was a committed fighter for "liberty of conscience" "against a Massachusetts legislature that was continuing to enforce legal restrictions against the Baptists." In his view, the idea that the state, which was a higher power, would restrict smaller bodies—local churches—from following their consciences was the opposite of liberty; it was tyranny. This mindset drew from the Whig political tradition, which had developed during the eighteenth century in Britain.⁴

Graves maintained the same emphasis on liberty of conscience that Backus had. This emphasis is what led Graves to support southern secession, for example, because he thought the Southern states' consciences were being infringed upon by the overreaching power of the federal government. When attempting to explain why Southern Baptists supported slavery despite their ecclesiastical emphasis on democratic church governance, several historians have argued for what may be termed the "accommodation thesis." This view argues that while American Baptists were relatively egalitarian in the eighteenth century, white Baptists in the South, in the nineteenth century, discarded these beliefs to accommodate elite, planter culture.⁵

However, an examination of Graves' life and political philosophy challenges the accommodation thesis. Graves grew up in New England, in Baptist churches that were

⁴ Noll, *America's God*, 82.

⁵ This description of these authors, including the use of the word "accommodation," can be found in Jewel L. Spangler, "Becoming Baptists: Conversion in Colonial and Early National Virginia." *The Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 2 (2001): 244-245; also see Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 39-80; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1975); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross, The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

heavily influenced by Backus. As an adult, he then became a Baptist leader in Tennessee, and he justified simultaneously holding to republican and pro-slavery views via the same framework of Whig-influenced Christian republicanism that Backus had used. He denounced the hierarchies of the Methodist and Catholic churches as oppressive and anti-American, and he advocated for spiritual egalitarianism. Yet, he also supported the institution of slavery as an “institution of Heaven” and advocated for Southern secession from the Union in 1860. Graves harmonized these positions via Christian republicanism. By his reckoning, spiritual egalitarianism did not imply social equality in a fallen world marred by sin. And his strong support for republicanism only bolstered his support of secession because he saw the Federal Government as oppressive, overreaching, and acting in violation of its original constitutional principles.

Much has been written over the last century regarding the Landmark Baptist movement. Most works have focused on its ecclesiology, its influences, and its influence upon Southern Baptist life and theology. Additionally, most works came from twentieth-century Southern Baptist historians who provided negative assessments of the Landmark Baptist movement.⁶ Though there is some debate as to how dominant Landmarkist ideas

⁶ Livingston T. Mays, "A History of Old Landmarkism," Th.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1900; Thomas Armour Patterson, "The Theology of J.R. Graves and Its Influence on Southern Baptist Life," Th.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1944; David O. Moore, "The Landmark Baptists and Their Attack upon the Southern Baptist Convention Historically Analyzed," Th.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1949; James E Tull, "A Study of Southern Baptist Landmarkism in the Light of Historical Baptist Ecclesiology." Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1960; G. Hugh Wamble, "Landmarkism: Doctrinaire Ecclesiology among Baptists," *Church History* 33, no. 4 (December 1, 1964): 429–447; LeRoy Benjamin Hogue, "A Study of the Antecedents of Landmarkism," Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1966; Harold Stewart Smith, "A Critical Analysis of the Theology of J.R. Graves," Th.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1966; W. Morgan Patterson, "The Influence of Landmarkism Among Baptists," *Baptist History & Heritage* 10 (January 1975): 44-55. Louis Keith Harper, "Old Landmarkism: An Historiographical Appraisal," *Baptist History & Heritage* 25 (April 1990): 31-39; Brad W. Aldridge, "Early Theological and Historical Influences on the Doctrines of James Robinson Graves," Honors College thesis, Baylor University, 2015.

were in Southern Baptist life during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, most historians agree that they were at least very influential, if not dominant, in the western states of the South—like Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas, and the Indian Territory/Oklahoma.⁷ However, Graves' advocacy of "Christian republicanism," and his fierce defenses of the institution of slavery and Southern secession, have received comparatively little attention.

James Patterson is one of the few historians to have dealt at length with these subjects. In a chapter of his biography on Graves, he shows how Graves' political theology was intimately connected to his ecclesiology. For Graves, the hierarchy of the Methodist Church, or even worse, the Roman Catholic Church, represented "tyranny," while the local, self-governed model of the Baptists represented liberty.⁸ Laura Rominger Porter has also demonstrated that Graves was a key figure in making a religious argument for Tennessee to secede from the Union in 1860 and 1861.⁹ She highlights how Graves'

⁷ Thomas S. Kidd and Barry G. Hankins, in *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), for example, portray Landmarkism as having enough influence to force the resignation of a professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1898, but as ultimately failing to win the "battle for the control of the SBC." They argue that Landmarkers in Arkansas then felt increasingly like the Convention was out of touch and, under the leadership of Ben Bogard, separated from the SBC in 1902 and eventually formed the American Baptist Association (ABA) (Kidd and Hankins 169). This agrees with the main interpretation that prevailed in SBC denominational histories through the twentieth century. However, Stephen Martin Stookey, in "The Impact of Landmarkism upon Southern Baptist Western Geographical Expansion," Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994, distinguishes between "Convention Landmarkism" and "Schismatic Landmarkism" and portrays Landmarkism as the dominant theology in the SBC in the late-nineteenth century and as the motivating ideology behind the western expansion of the SBC into New Mexico, Arizona, and California at that time and later. Christopher Bart Barber, in "The Bogard Schism: An Arkansas Baptist Agrarian Revolt," Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006, concurs with Stookey and argues that at the time of the Bogard-led schism in 1902, there was virtually no challenge to Landmarkist principles among any Baptists in Arkansas, and that the schism, instead, was motivated by agrarian populist sentiments that were connected to the national presidential campaign of William Jennings Bryan and the Arkansas state gubernatorial campaign of Jeff Davis (Barber 4).

⁸ James A. Patterson, *James Robinson Graves: Staking the Boundaries of Baptist Identity* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012).

⁹ Laura Rominger Porter. "Church Government and the Body Politic: The Religious Logic of Secession in Tennessee." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 126-141.

emphasis on congregational autonomy was logically connected to his argument for southern secession. Indeed, just as he would consider the Methodist hierarchy telling local churches—smaller, subordinate bodies—what to do to be ecclesiastical tyranny; the idea that the federal government and the North might tell southern states—smaller, subordinate bodies—what to do was political tyranny.

Landmark Baptist View of Church History

J.R. Graves and the Landmark Baptists have mostly been known for their view of church history. They argued that Baptists had existed in perpetuity since the time of Jesus Christ. In 1855, Graves republished, in Nashville, a book that promoted this view—G.H. Orchard's book, *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists*, which had been originally published in England in 1837.¹⁰ The fact that Graves republished it introduced Orchard's ideas to America.¹¹ This Landmark view of church history was exactly like the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, with a few added elements—primarily, the identification of the faithful Christians throughout history as Baptists.

Orchard argues that the early Christians were Baptists, and that Christianity was characterized by anti-establishment dissent from its outset. He describes early Christians' political theology as: "A love of civil liberty in opposition to magisterial dominion; ... a zeal for self-government, in opposition to clerical authority; [and] the requisition of the reasonable service of a profession of Christianity rising out of man's own convictions."¹²

¹⁰ Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 102.

¹¹ Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 102.

¹² G.H. Orchard, *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists: Taken from the New Testament, the First Fathers, Early Writers, and Historians of All Ages; Chronologically Arranged: Exhibiting Their Distinct Communities, with Their Orders in Various Kingdoms, under Several Discriminative Appellations, from the*

In other words: disestablishmentarianism, congregationalism, and liberty of conscience. He argues that these traits were universal during early Christianity and that “*all* Christian communities during the first three centuries were of the Baptist denomination, in constitution and practice.”¹³ Further, “The religion of the New Testament commenced with *Dissent*.” Indeed, “The genuine spirit of religion has been and will be preserved by those *only*, who dissent from all establishments devised by human policy.” This “religion of the New Testament” was one that upheld “liberty of soul” as the “breath, the element, [and] the existence of that religion inculcated in the New Testament.”¹⁴ Thus, Baptists “*were always on the side of liberty*. Under whatever government they could realize this boon, whether Pagan, Saracen, or Christian; domestic or foreign, that dynasty which would guard their freedom, was their government.”¹⁵

However, Orchard argues that the anti-establishment character of Christianity was stamped out following the ascendance of Constantine. Constantine turned Christianity into an established religion, contrary to the principles of the Baptists—the true Christians. The Donatists, then—a sect in fourth-to-sixth-century North Africa who are normally considered a heretical group—represented, in Orchard’s view, true Christians who were fighting against encroaching imperial power. And they began to ask, “*What has the emperor to do with the church? [and] What have Christians to do with kings?*”

Establishment of Christianity to the Present Age: With Correlative Information, Supporting the Early and Only Practice of Believers’ Immersion: Also Observations and Notes on the Abuse of the Ordinance, and the Rise of Minor and Infant Baptism thereon: Intended for Juvenile Branches of Their Churches (London: George Wightman, Paternoster Row, 1838), 342, Google Books.

¹³ Orchard, *A Concise History*, v.

¹⁴ Orchard, *A Concise History*, 51.

¹⁵ Orchard, *A Concise History*, 329.

Constantine, however, “[D]eprived the Donatists of their churches, . . . this persecution [being] the first which realized the support of a Christian emperor.”¹⁶ However, faithful remnants of true Christianity, like the Waldensians in Italy, held on, “[O]wn[ing] the Scriptures as a rule of conduct and [administering] the ordinance of baptism to believers by one immersion. He admires how they “were always found on the side of religious liberty,” while being “persecuted, awed, dispersed, or destroyed.”¹⁷

After this, Orchard explains how the Protestant Reformation ultimately failed to return the church to its original purity. In contrast to the mainstream Protestants, however, the “Anabaptists and Picard Calvinists” —whom he considers to have been Baptists—nobly fought for the three principles of Baptist political theology: disestablishmentarianism, liberty of conscience, and congregationalism.¹⁸ Though they were the “common objects of aversion to Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists, whose united zeal was directed to their destruction,” they “advocated a separation from worldly establishments, and a liberty to choose the way of preferring devotion to the great Head of the church.”¹⁹ Indeed, amid all the Christians in Germany at the time, “the Baptists *best understood the doctrine of religious liberty*, [and] to them, therefore, the peasants turned their eyes for counsel.”²⁰ Their view on religious liberty was “objectionable” to the mainstream Protestant Reformers “since [the Baptists] broke the national tie, and

¹⁶ Orchard, *A Concise History*, 85-6.

¹⁷ Orchard, *A Concise History*, 156.

¹⁸ Orchard, *A Concise History*, 245.

¹⁹ Orchard, *A Concise History*, 237, 341.

²⁰ Orchard, *A Concise History*, 338.

allowed all persons equal liberty to think, choose, and act in the affairs of the soul.”²¹ These Reformers promoted “the doctrine of liberty ... while pointing out the usurped claims of the Pope; but none understood or carried out this liberty into practice but the Baptists.”²² Orchard then places post-seventeenth-century Baptists at the end of their narrative, as the inheritors of pure Christianity. He draws a straight line between the Baptists who emerged in England in the seventeenth century and the Anabaptists of the Reformation era, arguing that the English Baptists originally received the idea of only practicing believer’s baptism from Dutch Anabaptists while in Amsterdam.²³

J.R. Graves then adopted Orchard’s historical narrative. In an introductory essay to Orchard’s history written by Graves for the 1855 edition of the book, Graves extends the arguments that Baptists were the one true church who advocated for disestablishmentarianism, congregationalism, and liberty of conscience into the history of the United States. In doing so, Graves appeals to the authority of a certain Judge Story, quoting him at length. Story explains that Roger Williams established “a code of laws [in Rhode Island] in which, ‘we read, for the first time, since Christianity ascended the throne of the Caesars, the declaration that ‘conscience should be free, and man should not be punished for worshipping God in any way they were persuaded He required.’”²⁴

²¹ Orchard, *A Concise History*, 342.

²² Orchard, *A Concise History*, 343.

²³ Orchard, *A Concise History*, 361-4.

²⁴ J.R. Graves, “Introductory Essay,” in G.H. Orchard, *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists: Taken from the New Testament, the First Fathers, Early Writers, and Historians of All Ages; Chronologically Arranged: Exhibiting Their Distinct Communities, with Their Orders in Various Kingdoms, under Several Discriminative Appellations, from the Establishment of Christianity to the Present Age: With Correlative Information, Supporting the Early and Only Practice of Believers’ Immersion: Also Observations and Notes on the Abuse of the Ordinance, and the Rise of Minor and Infant*

Graves also appeals to the authority of an historian named Gervinus, quoting him as saying that “Roger Williams insisted in Massachusetts upon allowing entire freedom of conscience, and upon entire separation of Church and State.”²⁵ Williams was then forced out of Massachusetts and founded Rhode Island, which a safe haven for the ideals he had been fighting for: disestablishment, congregationalism, and liberty of conscience. Graves concludes that it is “through the influence of [Baptist] religious principles, and the example of [the Baptist] form of church government, [that] republicanism and republican institutions have already been bequeathed to half the world, and are now rocking the other half to its centre.” He then even points to Thomas Jefferson saying that Baptist churches were “the only pure form of democracy that existed in the world” and would be “the best plan of government for the American colonies.”²⁶

Orchard’s book thus imparted the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, just with a larger emphasis on Baptists’ continuous place throughout it as the pure Church, to the Landmark Baptist movement. He presented principles consonant with republicanism—disestablishmentarianism, congregationalism, and liberty of conscience—as essential to true Christianity, which the Baptists, who had existed continuously since the time of Jesus, represented. And it presented the state becoming linked together with Christianity and the oppression of true Christians who disagreed, from the time of Constantine onward, as the main problem with the Church.

Baptism, Second ed. (Nashville, TN: Graves & Marks, Ag’ts of Tenn. Publication Society, 1855), xix, HathiTrust.

²⁵ Graves, “Introductory Essay,” xx.

²⁶ Graves, “Introductory Essay,” xviii-xix.

J.R. Graves' Christian Republicanism

The view of church history that Orchard developed informed the way that J.R. Graves developed his political theology. He was fiercely committed to the principles that Orchard identifies as having been essential to Baptists throughout their history—liberty of conscience, disestablishmentarianism, and congregationalism—and he drew analogies between the Church's past suppression of these and what was happening in the present-day. Whether Graves was writing against the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Episcopalians, or the Roman Catholic Church, his critiques can all be summed as arguing that these churches were tyrannical due to their hierarchical, structured nature.

In the years following the publication of the Cotton Grove Resolutions, Graves began to regularly critique other denominations in print.²⁷ The first of these critiques, published in 1855 as, originally, a series of columns in the *Tennessee Baptist*, was entitled *The Great Iron Wheel*.²⁸ Another one, entitled, *The Tri-lemma; or, Death by Three Horns*, was published right before the beginning of the Civil War, in 1860.²⁹ Finally, a few decades later, in 1880, Graves put out a publication that explained, in simple terms, what the Landmark Baptists believed—*Old Landmarkism: What Is It?*. And in this

²⁷ See Chapter 4, titled “Christian Republicanism and Landmarkist Ecclesiology: The Graves Synthesis, Part I” of Patterson’s book, *James Robinson Graves*, pp. 85-100, for the best biographical and chronological account of Graves’ development and public explication of Christian Republicanism.

²⁸ James Robinson Graves, *The Great Iron Wheel: Or, Republicanism Backwards and Christianity Reversed: In a Series of Letters Addressed to J. Soule, Senior Bishop of the M.E. Church, North* (Nashville, TN: Graves, Marks, and Rutland, 1855).

²⁹ James Robinson Graves, *The Tri-lemma; or, Death by Three Horns. The Presbyterian General Assembly Not Able to Decide This Question: “Is Baptism in the Romish Church Valid?” Affirmatively or Negatively Without Unbaptizing and Unchurching the Whole Protestant World! No Protestant Can Decide It, and Save His Bible and His Baptism* (Nashville, TN: South-Western Publishing House, 1860).

publication, he yet again torched the other Protestant denominations.³⁰ The next section of this chapter will now examine those three publications to explain the characteristics of his “Christian republicanism” and why he thought these denominations stood opposed to it.

A central principle of Graves’ “Christian Republicanism” was antipathy for hierarchy (though as we will see later—not all forms of it). This was rooted in his understanding of church history, in which the hierarchal structures of the Roman Catholic Church and magisterial Protestantism had resulted in the oppression of true Christians. Based on this, he viewed “hierarchism” as an imminent threat to faithful American churches—i.e., Baptist churches—and to the American political system. He warns that “the time is coming... when Papal and Protestant hierarchism conspiring, shall have overthrown our civil and religious liberties.”³¹ He argues that this is because hierarchical church government structures teach people to be in favor of tyrannical and oppressive political systems. Indeed, he asserts that “it is a fixed fact, and easy of *clearest demonstration*, that *hierarchical* and *aristocratic* Church organizations are hostile in their influence to republican institutions; that they insensibly prepare the rising generation to favor, if not seek, a civil government of the *same character*.”³²

Graves presents the history of the Roman Catholic Church oppressing true Christians as the epitomic example of the dangers of hierarchy. He charges that “[p]opery

³⁰ James Robinson Graves, *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?* 2nd ed. (Memphis, TN: Baptist Book House, 1880).

³¹ Graves, *The Great Iron Wheel*, 153.

³² Graves, *The Tri-lemma, or, Death by Three Horns*, 103.

[is] an absolute and tyrannical hierarchy, oppressive to humanity, hostile to its best interests, and, in its influence, opposed to, and destructive of, all free institutions, as of civil and religious liberty.”³³ He accuses Roman Catholicism of being guilty of no less than “sweeping away the great fundamental vital doctrine of individualism, upon which all true Christianity rests, because she forbids by pains and penalties personal religious liberty, and freedom of the conscience, and forces upon her infantile, unconscious subjects, onerous rites, Church ordinances, and religious obligations, and even salvation, without either faith or voluntariness on their part.” Graves shows, there, that another aspect of his Christian Republican political philosophy is his identification of individualism as a core doctrine of Christianity, which he thinks the Roman Catholic Church, historically, had disastrously rejected.

Magisterial Protestant denominations have not been far behind, according to Graves, though, in being oppressive. Regarding Lutheranism, He writes that “*Lutheranism* in the hands of Luther was opposed to civil and religious liberty,” presumably referring to the Peasant Rebellion that Luther helped oppose. Indeed, “as [Luther] united his “Church” to the State in adulterous union . . . it has been from then until now a persecuting power.”³⁴ Then, with Presbyterianism, he draws on an old trope: the burning at the stake, in Geneva of a heretic named Servetus.³⁵ Jumping on this,

³³ Graves, *The Tri-lemma, or, Death by Three Horns*, 102.

³⁴ Graves, *The Tri-lemma, or, Death by Three Horns*, 103.

³⁵ Michael Servetus, or Miguel Serveto, was a Spanish theologian and Renaissance humanist who, after being condemned to execution by Catholic authorities in France for trinitarian heresy, then fled to Geneva, which was currently led by a government implemented by John Calvin. However, once there, he was arrested by the Genevan authorities and subsequently tried and burned at the stake. For an example of how this incident came to be used as an anti-Calvinist polemical trope, see: *An Impartial History of*

Graves explains that “Presbyterianism in the hands of Calvin burned Servetus in a slow fire of green wood, and drove, by fines, imprisonments, and tortures, the Baptists from the Canton of Geneva.”³⁶ He thus portrays the Presbyterians as brutal and opposed to religious liberty and due process. He connects the Anabaptists of sixteenth-century Switzerland with the Baptists of nineteenth-century America and portrays modern-day Presbyterians as a group that still wants to persecute Baptist churches. And finally, he denounces Episcopalians, the most hierarchical Protestant denomination, as “black and bloody with the murders of the martyrs of Jesus.”³⁷ Graves then reminds his audience that just a century earlier, both the Reformed and the Episcopalians had been culpable in the oppression of Baptists in the American colonies. He explains that “Puritanism and Presbyterianism in New England, and the Episcopacy in Virginia and Georgia made their manifest opposition to religious freedom, in the bloody acts they committed in their mad attempts to crush it out, and prevent its gaining a foothold on these shores.”³⁸

Graves argued that Baptists, by being constituted in a republican manner, were the most *American* denomination. In contrast, other denominations, such as the Methodists, were anti-American. He explains that the “peculiar characteristics of Baptists, which they have maintained in every age” are “the absolute liberty of conscience and belief and the freest expression of them.”³⁹ In contrast to this, he quotes a “Mr. Hanline,” who argues

Michael Servetus, Burnt Alive at Geneva for Heresie. London: printed for Aaron Ward, at the King's-Arms in Little-Britain, 1724.

³⁶ Graves, *The Tri-Lema, or, Death by Three Horns*, 103-4.

³⁷ Graves, *The Tri-Lema, or, Death by Three Horns*, 104.

³⁸ Graves, *The Tri-Lema, Or, Death by Three Horns*, 104.

³⁹ Graves, *The Old Landmark*, 135.

that “the Methodist system is death to all the institutions for which Washington fought and freemen died!” Worse, “the Methodist system is Antichrist,—for it is the very identical priestly power which has crushed and trodden under foot the liberty wherewith Christ doth make free.”⁴⁰ In labeling the “Methodist system” as “Antichrist” and identifying it as “priestly power,” Hanline impugns Methodism with the stench of historical Roman Catholicism. It is the opposite of all that “for which Washington fought” and thus anti-American. Graves agrees, lamenting that American Methodists are deprived of the religious liberty for which Jesus died on the cross and for which their ancestors fought in the American Revolution.⁴¹ He declares, in summary, that the Methodist form of government is “REPUBLICANISM BACKWARDS” [original text is in all caps] and is “such a government as anti-American as it is despotic.”⁴² He even compares their form of government to the “Russian, Turkish and Chinese despotisms.”⁴³

The consistent feature throughout Graves’ critiques of other denominations is his appeal to the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. He warns about the Roman Catholics since he believes they oppressed true Christianity and individualism throughout history. He warns that the Lutherans are dangerous because Luther maintained a combination of church and state. He warns that the Presbyterians are dangerous because of the authoritarianism of Geneva and the Puritans. And he reminds his audience that the magisterial Protestant denominations had been suppressing Baptists just a century earlier

⁴⁰ Graves, *The Great Iron Wheel*, 162.

⁴¹ Graves, *The Great Iron Wheel*, 167.

⁴² Graves, *The Great Iron Wheel*, 167.

⁴³ Graves, *The Great Iron Wheel*, 164.

in several of the American colonies. Church history as a warning formed the basis of Graves' political theology.

J.R. Graves' Support of Slavery and Confederate Secession

Despite J.R. Graves' passionate arguments against hierarchy in ecclesiastical settings, he also defended the institution of slavery and Southern secession from the Union. In short, he believed Southern states' consciences were being trampled upon by abolitionists, the federal government, and the North. Seceding from the Union was thus the only hope to preserve the republicanism that the Revolutionary War and the Founding Fathers had secured. These views might seem strange given that Graves saw any sort of church structure that was hierarchical as "anti-American," and slavery is very much hierarchical. However, this spin on Christian republicanism in the South at the time. For example, Noll quotes a Louisianan newspaper editor who, in 1865, proclaimed, "In its simplest form, the war with us [is] for ... freedom to interpret the Bible and worship God according to the dictates of our own consciences."⁴⁴ Indeed, Eugene Genovese explains how southern pro-slavery apologists saw the North as "a materialistic, marketplace society that promoted competitive individualism and worshipped Mammon," a vice. Considering Noll's point about antebellum American republicanism that was referenced in the previous chapter—that virtue was linked with liberty and tyranny with vice—one can see how the North imposing their values on the South was a frightful idea to many

⁴⁴ Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 79.

white southerners.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this contradictory element of Graves' republicanism was also a contradiction that most American Baptists, except for a few like John Leland, had held during the Revolutionary War era. This was a racially blind and limited view of "liberty," "freedom," and "hierarchy" that only applied these concepts to beliefs and the conscience rather than to material and social relations.

It seems that J.R. Graves may have realized some of the inherent contradictions between slavery and Christian republicanism. He makes sure to qualify that slavery only exists because of sin, and that people are equal spiritually—if even if not naturally. He argues that God instituted slavery "as a *punishment* upon the descendants of Ham," who—a common trope among pro-slavery apologists in the nineteenth century, though he gives no evidence for this assertion—are Africans.⁴⁶ Slavery is an unfortunate reality that sin has brought into the world, as indeed, "[S]in brought *servitude* as well as *death into our world*, and *all our woes*—every evil that afflicts the human race."⁴⁷ He asserts that people may not just enslave whomever they want, as "no one has a right to command but God alone [and] slavery ... is not an original condition."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See the quote from Mark Noll on page 62; Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 102.

⁴⁶ Graves, *The Great Iron Wheel*, 183; for more on the curse of Ham, see David M. Whitford. *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery* (Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009). Whitford argues that the idea of the Curse of Ham is exegetically unfounded as an interpretation from Genesis, which assigns the curse to Canaan, Ham's son. Whitford also shows how medieval Europeans did not attach race to the idea of the curse. However, in the early modern period, it came to be used as a justification for the enslavement of Africans.

⁴⁷ Graves, *The Little Iron Wheel*, 8-9.

⁴⁸ Graves, *The Great Iron Wheel*, 182-3.

For Graves, God had commanded the existence of slavery, and since God himself instituted it, it could not possibly be a sin. He charges that “if any man asserts that the slavery of the family of Canaan be a sin, *per se*, then God is the author of it, which would be blasphemous to affirm.” However, he does seem to be aware of how the hierarchical logic of slavery rubs against the principle of Baptist congregational government, where everyone who is a born-again believer should have authority in the governing of the church. He was also, presumably, also aware of verses like Galatians 3:28, in which Paul argues that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus,” He explains this away by writing that “in the kingdom of grace there is no slavery allowed. No race, no class of men have a curse of servitude passed upon them. All are made free and equal in Christ Jesus.”⁴⁹

Even though he seems to have recognized the inherent contradictions, Graves synthesized his anti-hierarchical ecclesiastical views with his support for slavery. One way he does this is by construing abolitionism as anti-republican and anti-American. He expresses outrage that Northern abolitionists would bind people’s consciences on the matter of slavery, declaring them to be promoting “a false philanthropy, and a manifestation of a questionable character of piety, that arrays itself in the most virulent opposition to an institution of Heaven—seeking by every possible means, political and religious ... the rending of the Churches of Christ, and the ruin of the most highly favored and prosperous nation the sun ever shone upon.”⁵⁰ He points out that even the Declaration of Independence only “clearly recognize[d] the inalienable rights of all men

⁴⁹ Graves, *The Great Iron Wheel*, 183.

⁵⁰ Graves, *The Little Iron Wheel*, 10.

whom the Creator has not disinherited [and] nothing more.” Thus, abolitionists were adding to not only Scripture but to the principles of American republicanism. They were anti-republican and anti-liberty of conscience since they tried to bind the consciences of the southern states.⁵¹

It is no surprise, then, that Graves deployed the logic of republicanism to support the secession of the Confederate states in 1860 and 1861. Indeed, Laura Rominger Porter has demonstrated that the ecclesiological logic of the Landmark Baptist movement was foundational to evangelical Tennesseans’ justifications for secession.⁵² Editorials that Graves wrote in his newspaper show this. For example, in a January 12, 1861 editorial, Graves compared the southern states’ rights within the United States to the rights of a member in a church with congregational polity, writing that “whether in an *ecclesiastical or civil compact*, any one member, or State, may rightfully *withdraw*, or secede from that *compact ... whenever that member is oppressed and unrighteously dealt with by a dominant party in that compact.*”⁵³ Porter notices that Graves’ notions about what justified a church schism and what justified political secession were essentially the same. Both were informed by the importance of liberty of conscience and by the necessity that smaller governing units, like the local church congregation or an individual state, have the freedom to make decisions without compulsion from a hierarchy above it—like an episcopacy or the federal government. Therefore, Christian republicanism provided a

⁵¹ Graves, *The Little Iron Wheel*, 17-8.

⁵² Porter, “Church Government and the Body Politic: The Religious Logic of Secession in Tennessee,” 138.

⁵³ Porter, “Church Government and the Body Politic,” 137-8.

framework for Graves to justify both the institution of slavery and Confederate secession from the Union.

Graves' logic in support of slavery and Southern secession was ultimately rooted in the Anti-establishment Narrative of History. At the root of his Christian Republican political theology were emphases on the importance of liberty of conscience and the danger of hierarchies where larger ecclesiastical or political bodies compelled the consciences of smaller, and more local, ones. This caused Graves to interpret the conflict over slavery in the United States as a situation where the more powerful United States Federal Government, and the Northern states, were imposing abolitionist beliefs on the Southern states and thus taking away the liberty of their consciences. This fear was rooted in the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History—which blamed the historical oppression of true Christians on the power-hungry nature of Roman Catholicism and magisterial Protestantism. The Landmark Baptist narrative of church history, which Graves promoted by re-publishing G.H. Orchard, just added to the Anti-establishment Narrative by identifying Baptists as the true Christians who had been oppressed throughout history. However, the core emphases on liberty of conscience, disestablishmentarianism, and congregationalism in the Landmark Baptist narrative were little different than what Isaac Backus or Herman Husband promoted.

J.R. Graves primarily identified himself, and his Christian republicanism, with the legacy of the American Revolution rather than first and foremost embracing Southern nationalism. Patterson highlights how Graves, in his autobiographical writing, notes that he grew up steeped in ardent New England republican patriotism, taking great pride in his grandfather's participation in the Revolutionary War. Graves recalled "his uncontrollable

hatred of monarchy, despotism, hierarchy, and oppression,” which he ascribes to his Huguenot ancestry, the Reformers, and the patriots of the American Revolution. Related to this, Michael F. Conlin has noted that even though three groups in the United States—pro-slavery Southerners, moderates, and abolitionists—increasingly diverged before the Civil War in their memory of how the Founding Fathers treated the issue of slavery, for the most part, there did not emerge two separate nationalisms, one northern and one southern. Instead, antebellum Americans united around a shared memory of certain civic ideals that they believed the Revolution had represented—the foremost among these being liberty.⁵⁴ J.R. Graves shared these memories of how the American Revolution was fought to inaugurate a country of republican liberty. More specifically, he viewed this through the lens of his Backus-esque, Whig-inspired version of Christian republicanism that particularly emphasized liberty of conscience and the freedom he thought that local churches and polities should have from overbearing hierarchy.

Conclusion

Therefore, J.R. Graves employed similar logic to defend slavery and secession as Revolutionary War-era Baptists did to defend the American Revolution. Like Isaac Backus and the eighteenth-century Virginian Baptists, Graves was strongly committed to what he termed Christian republicanism, both in the government of the local church and in politics. This Christian republicanism was rooted in the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, which emphasized that church hierarchy and embrace of power had led only to tyranny and the oppression of liberty of conscience. However, like Backus

⁵⁴ Michael F. Conlin, *One Nation Divided by Slavery: Remembering the American Revolution While Marching Toward the Civil War* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2015).

and the Virginian Baptists, Graves' opposition to hierarchy was limited to the spiritual and ecclesiastical realms. He asserted that all people were spiritually equal before God and thus should be equal within church government but that because of sin that had occurred in the book of Genesis, people of African descent had been subjected, by God's institution, to slavery. And the idea that abolitionists were allegedly trying to force Southern states to get rid of slavery was tantamount to them violating the liberty of their consciences, like Roman Catholics and magisterial Protestants had done throughout history, since the time of Constantine. This history served as a warning for Graves, who wanted to preserve what he saw as the liberty that the Founding Fathers, and his Baptist forefathers, had finally secured. He became convinced that the only way to do so was to secede from the United States completely.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Bogard Schism

Introduction

In 1901, a group of Baptists in Arkansas who called themselves “Landmark Baptists,” led by pastor Benjamin Bogard and newspaper editor W.A. Clark, separated from the Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC). In the rhetorical flare-ups that occurred around this split, Bogard and his allies promoted the same Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History that had been promoted by Baptists like Isaac Backus in the Revolutionary Era, the Primitive Baptists in the 1820s and 1830s, and then by G.H. Orchard, J.R. Graves, and the Landmark Baptists movement in the 1850s–1860s. Most scholars, throughout the twentieth century, assumed that this rift, which has been termed the “Bogard Schism,” occurred because Bogard and his allies’ were convicted Landmark Baptists and the members of the ABSC establishment were not.¹

However, in a 2006 thesis, Bart Barber argued that functionally speaking, nearly all Southern Baptists in Arkansas were Landmarkers in 1901. Landmark Baptist ecclesiological and historical beliefs were widely shared by most of the ABSC leadership. Stephen Stookey has argued along similar lines, suggesting that it makes more sense to define Bogard and his allies as “Schismatic” Landmarkers and the ABSC

¹ J. Sterling Rogers, *History of Arkansas Baptists* (Little Rock: Executive Board of Arkansas Baptist State Convention, 1948), 588-605; David O. Moore, “The Landmark Baptists and Their Attack upon the Southern Baptist Convention Historically Analyzed” (Th.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1949), 64-65; Louis Keith Harper, “Landmarkism: A Historiographical Appraisal,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 25 (April 1990); J.K. Pratt, “A Landmark Baptist’s Ecclesiology: Ben M. Bogard and Local Church Protectionism (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2005).

leadership as “Convention” Landmarkers.² Instead of Landmarkism being the cause of the Bogard Schism, then, Barber argues that it was the outgrowth of “a conflict between New South centralizers and agrarian populists within the ABSC.”³

Barber argues that Bogard and his allies were influenced by William Jennings Bryan-style populist politics. There is significant evidence for this. In Arkansas, Bryan-style populism was represented by Jeff Davis, who served as governor between 1901 and 1907.⁴ The conflict within the ABSC was, to some degree, a proxy for political conflict surrounding Jeff Davis. Davis, who also served as the vice president of the ABSC, had drawn the ire of James Philip Eagle—the former governor of Arkansas and current president of the ABSC—after he had described the candidate Eagle supported in the primary for the 1902 U.S. Senate election, James K. Jones, as “a greedy New South capitalist in cahoots with New Jersey trusts.”⁵ Thus, the conflict between Bogard and the leaders of the ABSC came to a head at the 1901 state convention of the ABSC, while personal conflict between Eagle and Davis was also coming to a head. Following this meeting, Bogard and his allies started publishing broadsides aimed at the ABSC. For example, J.P. Copeland, writing in W.A. Clark’s newspaper, the *Arkansas Baptist*, labeled the ABSC “a church trust” and attacked it as “a combination of greater powers to

² James A. Patterson, *James Robinson Graves: Staking the Boundaries of Baptist Identity* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 194-5.

³ Christopher Bart Barber, “The Bogard Schism: An Arkansas Baptist Agrarian Revolt” (PhD diss. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), vi.

⁴ Barber, “The Bogard Schism,” 4.

⁵ Barber, “The Bogard Schism,” 89.

oppress weaker powers.”⁶ Oliver S. Jones complained that it was a “cult of the city and town churches.”⁷

However, the traditional interpretation of the 1901 ABSC Split, and Barber’s revision, do not need to be set in opposition to each other. Bogard was influenced by both populism and the Landmark Baptist tradition. Like with J.R. Graves before him, the fact that Bogard held to the anti-establishment, Landmarkist Narrative of Church History informed his political theology—and for him, happened to do so in a populist way.

Benjamin Bogard’s Background

Benjamin Bogard’s writings show that he was influenced by the Landmarkist version of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. In 1900, Bogard published an edited collection of essays on Landmark Baptist doctrine, history, and apologetics entitled *Pillars of Orthodoxy; or, Defenders of the Faith*. In this collection, one essay in particular, “Baptists in History” by W.P. Harvey, presented this narrative of church history.

Harvey describes Christian saints, throughout history, as having been “the apostles of civil and religious liberty.”⁸ Harvey then provides clearer detail on how the primitive church, at first pure, was sullied by Constantine’s establishment of Christianity. He explains how, after Constantine converted to Christianity, “Christians suddenly

⁶ J. P. Copeland, “Church Trusts,” *Arkansas Baptist* (Little Rock, AR: W.A. Clark, 11 November 1901), 11, in Barber, “The Bogard Schism,” 205.

⁷ Oliver S. Jones, “The Latest Cult,” *Arkansas Baptist* (Little Rock, AR: W.A. Clark, 8 January 1902), 9, in Barber, “The Bogard Schism,” 205.

⁸ W.P. Harvey, “Baptists in History,” in *Pillars of Orthodoxy, or Defenders of the Faith*, ed. Ben M. Bogard (Louisville, KY: Baptist Book Concern, 1900), 406, Internet Archive.

emancipated from legal disabilities and social ostracism ... were tempted beyond their power to resist ... [and] suffered themselves to be betrayed into a compromise with Judaism and Paganism, which in the course of time crystallized into Romanism.”⁹ The defining feature of this “Romanism,” according to Harvey, was “the consummation of the unhallowed union of church and State.” This evil intermixing of the sacred and profane spheres—of church and State—led to a “spiritual eclipse that lasted one thousand years, known as ‘the dark ages.’”¹⁰ He explains that “to enforce conformity of worship, for twelve hundred years the sword, the stake and all forms of torture were employed to exterminate those who bravely withstood Popish innovations, ... heard the voice of God above Cesar, ... [and] obeyed God rather than men.”¹¹ When the “glorious Reformation” finally occurred in the sixteenth century, “Baptists emerged from their hiding places.” However, this did not solve the issue. “They were doomed to disappointment,” as mainstream Protestants continued with established churches. Indeed, he writes that Baptists, “on account of their opposition to church and State,” were seen as “worse than traitors,” and the Protestants and Catholics “united to exterminate [them].”¹²

Another essay in this edited collection also promoted the Landmarkist version of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. In “An Old Landmark Reset: Ought Baptists to Invite Pedobaptists to Preach in Their Pulpits?”, James Madison Pendleton

⁹ Harvey, “Baptists in History,” 423-4.

¹⁰ Harvey, “Baptists in History,” 423-4.

¹¹ Harvey, “Baptists in History,” 424-5.

¹² Harvey, “Baptists in History,” 425.

describes how Baptists had been a persecuted group throughout church history. Then, when “the light of Luther’s Reformation began to dawn on Europe ... Baptists ... began to flatter themselves that the days of their persecution were ended.”¹³ However, the Reformers—like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin—all “thought them worthy of death” and “were in several respects more nearly allied to Romanists than to the Baptists.”¹⁴ The Baptists then continued to suffer at the hands of the Anglican and Congregationalist establishments in colonial America. Pendleton remarks, “Who has not read the story of Baptist suffering in the Colony of Virginia before the Revolution?” He notes that “the sterile soil of Massachusetts has been enriched with Baptist blood.”¹⁵

Bogard also shared some of the same concerns that the Primitive Baptists had raised, seventy years earlier. He understood the Landmark Baptist movement, like the Primitive Baptist movement before it, to be opposed to mission societies and other organizations that had been formed as a part of the Benevolent Empire. He explains that when the Baptist Missionary Society was formed in England in 1792, it “was resisted by most Baptists.” However, “this resistance was kept up in a passive sort of way until [the idea of mission societies] and Conventions began to dominate the churches.”¹⁶ In contrast to this, Bogard argued that it should be taught that the local church is God’s mission strategy. He asserted that the story of Paul and Barnabas in the Book of Acts, in which

¹³ J.M. Pendleton, “An Old Landmark Reset: Ought Baptists to Invite Pedobaptists to Preach in Their Pulpits?” in *Pillars of Orthodoxy, or Defenders of the Faith*, ed. Ben M. Bogard (Louisville, KY: Baptist Book Concern, 1900), 281-2. Internet Archive.

¹⁴ Pendleton, “An Old Landmark Reset,” 281-2.

¹⁵ Pendleton, “An Old Landmark Reset,” 282.

¹⁶ Pratt, “A Landmark Baptist’s Ecclesiology,” 252-3.

they were sent out on their mission trip by the church at Antioch, was prescriptive and binding.¹⁷ This was consistent with Landmark Baptist ecclesiology, which argued that pure local church congregationalism was the only valid form of churches of Christ.

Bogard perceived that the mission societies supported by the ABSC were money-grubbing institutions. This, again, was reminiscent of the Primitive Baptists' critiques. He angrily charged that "MORE THAN HALF OF THE MONEY [churches] contribute to pay the 'POOR MISSIONARIES' is used for other purposes."¹⁸ Like Orchard, Harvey, and Pendleton, he also affirmed that Baptists were the true, primitive Church founded by Jesus Christ and had been persecuted and in hiding throughout the centuries, writing in the *Orthodox Baptist Spotlight* in 1946 that the original Baptist church "has continued to exist all through the ages from Christ until this day."¹⁹ Pratt explains that "Bogard believed that in the fourth century the true (i.e., Baptist) church began to be persecuted by the newly formed Roman Catholic Church," and "the rise of the Roman Catholic Church forced the true churches of Christ into hiding in order to survive," and that these true churches of Christ were located among "those groups seen as heretical by the Catholic Church."²⁰

Bogard argued that, historically, the developing Roman Catholic Church violated the three core principles of Baptist political theology: disestablishmentarianism, congregationalism, and liberty of conscience. True Christians had the liberty of their

¹⁷ Pratt, "A Landmark Baptist's Ecclesiology," 263.

¹⁸ Pratt, "A Landmark Baptist's Ecclesiology," 268.

¹⁹ Pratt, "A Landmark Baptist's Ecclesiology," 191-2.

²⁰ Pratt, "A Landmark Baptist's Ecclesiology," 191-2.

consciences violated as they were not free to practice their faith openly.

Congregationalism was flagrantly violated. Indeed, he argued, as Pratt recounts, that “the Roman Catholic Church came into existence by Baptist churches entering into combines and then still stronger combinations until the organization became more and more powerful [and] the spiritual power of the churches became less and less.”²¹ Then, “by the year 251 [AD], a party within the true church had begun to centralize authority in a church hierarchy, ... [which] resulted in the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church becoming much more widespread.”²² And while these errors were enabled, “Baptists” were pushed out and suppressed. This was all due to Constantine formally recognizing and establishing the Christian religion and the growing Roman Catholic Church being aligned with the power of the state.

Landmarkist History and the 1901 ABSC Split

In 1901, most Baptists in Arkansas held to these Landmark Baptist beliefs, including the Landmark version of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. This is shown by how Arkansas Baptists responded to what became known as the “Whitsitt Controversy,” which erupted in 1896 after William H. Whitsitt, a church history professor, became the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) in Louisville, Kentucky. Whitsitt grew up with Landmark Baptist beliefs and held to their understanding of church history, but then, after studying at the University of Virginia and the University of Berlin, came to believe that baptism by immersion had not

²¹ Pratt, “A Landmark Baptist’s Ecclesiology,” 283.

²² Pratt, “A Landmark Baptist’s Ecclesiology,” 207.

been practiced by the group of people who would become “Baptists” until 1641 in England.²³ This put him at odds with Landmark Baptists and provided fodder for controversy to erupt when he was selected to be the president of SBTS.

Following Whitsitt’s appointment, several state conventions and local associations within the Southern Baptist Convention passed resolutions demanding that he resign. Eventually, by 1898, he resigned.²⁴ During this controversy, the Arkansas Baptist State Convention showed that their loyalties lay with the Landmarkist camp. The Arkansas Baptists put forth a resolution in 1896, stating that “whereas, Dr. W.H. Whitsitt ... has recently published ... teachings contrary to sound Baptist views, ... we not only deplore, but repudiate such teaching and method, and we appeal to the Board of Trustees ... to remove the existing difficulties or secure Dr. Whitsitt’s resignation or removal.” This resolution was adopted with no opposition.²⁵

There are several other pieces of evidence that Landmarkism was dominant within the ABSC. For example, since there were doubts that A.J. Barton, who had recently been appointed as Corresponding Secretary of the ABSC, was truly a Landmarker, “[t]he ABSC inaugurated a campaign in 1901 to reassure Arkansas Baptists that [he] was a solid Landmark Baptist, a Baptist of the J.R. Graves type.”²⁶ Also, John William (J.W.) Conger, the president of Ouachita Baptist College (OBC), the official

²³ Thomas S. Kidd and Barry G. Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 168.

²⁴ Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 169.

²⁵ *Proceedings of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention Forty-Eighth Annual Session Held at Hot Springs November, 1896* (Little Rock, AR: Gazette Publishing Company, 1896), 14. <https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=absannuals>.

²⁶ Barber, “The Bogard Schism,” 199.

undergraduate school of the ABSC, contrasted the faculty of OBC against Whitsitt in an essay published in the *Arkansas Baptist* in 1903.²⁷ Even as late as 1948, the ABSC distributed pamphlets to members that still promoted the Landmark Baptist view of history. A page in these pamphlets chronologically listed the “Origins of the Denominations,” with “Baptists” being founded in A.D. 32 by Jesus Christ, “Roman Catholics [separating] from the Baptists in the third century A.D. and [then] gradually drift[ing] into the papacy, and then the various Protestant denominations (of whom the Baptists were not a part) being founded from 1529-onward.”²⁸

Therefore, it was natural for Benjamin Bogard to employ rhetoric derived from the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History to justify the schism he led. It appealed to a broad, sympathetic audience. In various ways, Bogard and his allies argued that the ABSC was impeding congregationalism and disestablishmentarianism, especially the former. This is somewhat strange, as Baptists in Arkansas had not actually pursued any sort of formal establishment. Official state-church establishments had not existed in the United States since Massachusetts abolished its establishment of the Congregationalist church in 1833.

However, one could say that a *de facto* establishment of the ABSC existed. At the very least, there was a high degree of overlap between ABSC leadership and state political leadership. For example, the man who was president of the ABSC from 1880 to 1904, James Philip Eagle, was a wealthy planter who had also, concurrently, served as

²⁷ J. W. Conger, “What Colleges?” *Arkansas Baptist* (Little Rock, AR: W.A. Clark, 3 September 1903), 7, in Barber, “The Bogard Schism,” 199.

²⁸ Barber, “The Bogard Schism,” 209.

the Governor of Arkansas between 1889 and 1893. In the aftermath of Reconstruction in Arkansas, the state had become increasingly controlled by “Redeemer” Democrats pushing a “New South” agenda of economic diversification. The elites in this new political system lived in cities like Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and Jonesboro. And in addition to installing segregationist Jim Crow policies, which is what they were best known for, they made a concerted attempt to diversify the state economy. This included courting railroad industry, promoting greater urbanization, and establishing formal education and reform programs. This all was a push beyond the Jeffersonian republican ideal of encouraging small, common farmers.²⁹ In opposition to this, several rural, agrarian populist groups, such as the Agricultural Wheel, formed. The Agriculture Wheel a secret society of all-white male farmers who declared that the country’s founding principles were being hindered “by combinations of capital ... who propose not only to live on the labors of others, but to speedily amass fortunes at their expense.” These groups became so strong that by the election of 1888, they were able to put forth a candidate, C.M. Norwood, under the banner of the “Union Labor Party.” Norwood then only lost after an election in which there were widespread allegations of corruption, violence, and ballot rigging.³⁰ The Democratic candidate who won the election amid this was none other than the president of the ABSC, James Philip Eagle.

Additionally, during the 1880s and 1890s, the ABSC itself pursued policies that aligned with the ideals of the New South. For example, the ABSC expanded education by

²⁹ Carl Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South, 1874-1929* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 23-40, 64-8.

³⁰ Matthew Hild, "Labor, Third-Party Politics, and New South Democracy in Arkansas, 1884-1896." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2004): 34-5.

founding Ouachita Baptist College in Arkadelphia in 1886. It also engaged in social reform programs such as beginning to advocate against alcohol in 1885 and launching women's missionary associations.³¹ Meanwhile, a number of the most important leaders in the Arkansas Democratic Party, including James Philip Eagle and Jeff Davis, who served as governor between 1901 and 1907, attended the same church in downtown Little Rock, Second Baptist Church, which also happened to be the largest financial contributor to the ABSC.³² At the 1901 annual convention of the ABSC, held in Jonesboro, Eagle presided over the meeting, and Davis, who was currently the governor of Arkansas, served as the vice president.³³ Thus, two of the most politically powerful men in the state—a former governor and the current governor— were also the two most powerful men in the room at the 1901 ABSC Convention. This shows how much overlap there was in Arkansas between civil and ecclesiastical power. The Landmark Baptist narrative warned of the immense danger of this, highlighting it as the primary faults of the Roman Catholic church, and magisterial Protestants, historically, and as leading to oppression. So, despite there being no official establishment in Arkansas, the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History primed Bogard and his allies to be worried.

Even worse, though, in the view of Bogard and his allies, was the fact that the ABSC was allegedly impeding on congregationalism. According to the Landmark Baptist version of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, congregationalism was another one of the key marks of the early church that had been subverted, early on, after

³¹ Rogers, *History of Arkansas Baptists*, 562-4.

³² Barber, "The Bogard Schism," 91.

³³ Barber, "The Bogard Schism," 91.

Constantine established Christianity. The major point of contention with the ABSC became that they were setting up centralized, structured missions organizations, such as the women's missionary societies. As mentioned earlier, Bogard, on the other hand, saw the local church as God's sole mission strategy, and like the Primitive Baptists, he believed that voluntary mission societies were a corrupt, mammon-loving innovation that had only begun in 1792. He warned that, in embracing these missions organizations, the ABSC was embracing "the spirit of Romanism."³⁴ Bogard argued that churches embracing any sort of more structured organization above the local church would cause churches to "break down." He explains, drawing from his understanding of church history, how, "The Roman Catholic Church came into existence by Baptist churches entering into combines and then still stronger combinations until the organization became more and more powerful. ... This went on until all the spiritual power was gone and the organization, the strongest in the world, was found to be without God." He warns that in his present age, "History [was] repeating itself in the modern tendency to centralization."³⁵

The 1901 split in the Arkansas Baptist State Convention ultimately resulted in the permanent separation of the churches that aligned with Bogard from the mainstream Southern Baptist Convention. In 1902, they formed the General Association of Baptist Churches in Arkansas.³⁶ And then, in 1905, these Baptists met in Texarkana, with a group of like-minded, schismatic-Landmarker, Texas Baptists, and formed the Baptist

³⁴ Pratt, "A Landmark Baptist's Ecclesiology, 283.

³⁵ Pratt, "A Landmark Baptist's Ecclesiology, 283.

³⁶ Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 193.

General Association. This would then reorganize into the Texarkana-based American Baptist Association (ABA), which exists to this day. The ABA would become the flagship denomination of a whole new stream of Baptists who call themselves “Missionary Baptists,” and they largely operate in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.³⁷ A split within the ABA in 1950 would result in the formation of a second, smaller, denomination, the Conway, Arkansas-based Baptist Missionary Association of America (BMAA). Together, as of 2012, the ABA and BMAA contained about 460,000 members, a much smaller number than that of the Southern Baptist Convention but a not insignificant one.

However, the Landmark Baptist narrative of church history did not just influence schismatic Baptists like Benjamin Bogard and his followers. Rather, in the first few decades of the twentieth century, after William Whitsitt had been forced to resign from his role as a professor of church history at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for teaching church history that contradicted the Landmark Baptist narrative, professors there, and nationwide leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention, continued to promote the Landmark Baptist understanding of history. Southern Baptists also exploded in number during the early twentieth century—growing from 650,000 members in 1860, when J.R. Graves was publishing his tracts, to 1.9 million members in 1905, a few years after the Bogard schism occurred, and then to 3.15 million members in 1920. And at the same time, the United States’ influence in the world was growing, particularly in the years following World War I. Amid this, Southern Baptist leaders like E.Y. Mullins and

³⁷ NOTE: These “missionary Baptists” are not to be confused with the “Missionary Baptists” that the “Primitive Baptists” of the 1830s were opposed to, or with many Black Baptists in the South who also label themselves as Missionary Baptists.

George W. Truett drew from the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History in its Landmark Baptist form in their thinking about what Southern Baptists' place in the world now was to be.

CHAPTER SIX

Baptists and a “New World Order”

Introduction

On April 2, 1917, when U.S. President Woodrow Wilson spoke before the U.S. Congress, asking for it to approve a declaration of war against Germany and enter World War I, he declared that “[t]he world must be made safe for democracy.” He described the oncoming fight as a “battle with [a] natural foe to liberty.”¹ And then, in the years following the war, Wilson sought to continue “[making the world] safe for democracy” by establishing the League of Nations and creating a “new world order.” Wilson thought that the United States should be a beacon of democracy and “a champion of the rights of mankind.”²

In the decade following World War I, Southern Baptist leaders in the United States eagerly embraced Woodrow Wilson’s understanding of America’s purpose in the world. They heartily affirmed its alignment with Baptist history, theology, and principles. In their view, Baptists had been the first people in American history to advance the ideals of religious liberty and democracy. Then, the Founding Fathers, following the Baptists’ lead, embraced these principles and enshrined them into the American republican system. Southern Baptist leaders thus portrayed America as a society that had restored pure, uncorrupted Christianity. America thus stood in contrast to the old-world European

¹ Woodrow Wilson, “Wilson’s War Message to Congress,” 1917, The World War I Document Archive, last modified 2009, https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson's_War_Message_to_Congress.

² Wilson, “Wilson’s War Message to Congress.”

model of autocracy, which had been epitomized in Roman Catholicism but also was represented by magisterial Protestantism. Edgar Young (E.Y.) Mullins, a professor of theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and the president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1921 to 1924, spoke for many of this period's Southern Baptist leaders when he argued that in contrast to "the defects of the culture and civilization which brought on the world war," "the Baptist conception of the Christian religion contains elements which in the highest degree are adapted to meet the needs of the modern world."³ Southern Baptists felt that *they—their* history, *their* theology, and *their* principles—epitomized everything virtuous about America and were now being, rightly, cast abroad by Wilson in this "new world order." Rather than feeling alienated from the national political *zeitgeist*, as they had during and after the Civil War, Southern Baptists felt now that they had ownership of it.

Central to this set of Baptist principles that both America's national identity and Baptists' identity were tied to was religious liberty. On May 16, 1920, on the east steps of the U.S. Congress building, George W. Truett, the senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, delivered "the most famous sermon in Southern Baptist history" on the topic of Baptists and religious liberty to an audience of ten to fifteen thousand people at the annual session of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).⁴ In this speech, he reminds the delegates attending the convention that religious liberty was one of the defining principles of what it meant to be a Baptist. He reminds them that this religious liberty did

³ Edgar Young Mullins, "Baptist Theology in the New World Order," *Review & Expositor* 17, no. 4 (1920): 405, 7.

⁴ Thomas S. Kidd and Barry G. Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 178-9.

not just mean “mere toleration” but instead, “absolute liberty,” which is a “right” and a “gift from God.”⁵ Baptists, he declares, stand for “unrestricted religious liberty for all men,” including “for his Catholic neighbor, and for his Jewish neighbor, and for everybody else.”⁶ This belief includes that “[r]eligion must be forever voluntary and uncoerced, and that it is not the prerogative [sic] of any power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to compel men to conform to any religious creed or form of worship, or to pay taxes for the support of a religious organization to which they do not believe.”⁷

Truett then asserts that this view of religious liberty is what America, due to the past efforts of the Baptists, now offered to the world in Wilson’s “new world order.” Indeed, the enshrining of religious liberty into the American republican system represented “the supreme contribution of the new world to the old.” It was “pre-eminently a Baptist achievement.”⁸ He explains how, in contrast, in Roman Catholicism—the chief example of “old world” religion— “The church [thrusts] all its complex and cumbrous machinery between the soul and God, ... lording it over the consciences of men, [which is] a ghastly tyranny in the realm of the soul ... [that] destroy[s] freedom of conscience.”⁹ America, however, had taken a stand for freedom. The Founding Fathers— “Washington and Madison and Jefferson and Patrick Henry and many others,” inscribed the “full establishment of civil and religious liberty” into the

⁵ George Washington Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” reprinted in *Baptist History & Heritage* 33, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 67, Internet Archive.

⁶ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 70.

⁷ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 67.

⁸ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 67.

⁹ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 69.

founding documents of the United States.¹⁰ Before the Founding Fathers secured religious liberty, though, it had been the Baptists—men such as Roger Williams, or the Baptists who were arrested and punished in the eighteenth century for violating the church establishments in New England and Virginia—who had led the way.

Five years later, in 1925, one year after leaving office as the president of the SBC, E.Y. Mullins published an article entitled “Baptist Theology in the New World Order.” In this article, like Truett, he describes religious freedom as one of the six main principles of what it means to be a Baptist. He contrasts this with the religion of the Old World, which has a religion that is “sacerdotal,” in which “priests ... [wield] authority over the hearts and consciences of saints ... [having] excessive power and influence [with] the laity [having] become subservient.” This was epitomized in “the union between church and the state” and coincided with “the autocratic as opposed to the democratic view of the state.”¹¹

This embrace of the national political *zeitgeist* by Southern Baptist leaders was a departure from their previous posture. In the Civil War, and the years after it, Southern Baptists felt alienated from the direction in which the country was heading. However, around the turn of the twentieth century, southerners increasingly identified with the United States, writ large. Historians like George B. Tindall and Andrew Michael Manis have described how American militarism in the Spanish-American War of 1898, and then, even more so, World War I, played a huge role in this. Gradually, regional identity

¹⁰ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 77.

¹¹ Mullins, “Baptist Theology in the New World Order,” 406.

and sectionalism among Southerners gave way to nationalism and patriotism.¹² By 1920, Kidd and Hankins note that “white Southerners were not just reintegrated into the nation; they were becoming its most prominent exponents of American exceptionalism. And Baptists were at the forefront of this movement.”¹³ It is in this context that Southern Baptist leaders embraced President Woodrow Wilson’s mission for the United States in the world, during and after World War I, as their own.

Historians have often pointed to more cynical reasons to explain why Southern Baptists embraced Woodrow Wilson’s mission of America “[making] the world safe for democracy.” For example, they have pointed to the fact that Wilson was a white Southerner and a segregationist himself, like Southern Baptists at the time.¹⁴ They have also noted that when Southern Baptists spoke about “unrestricted religious liberty,” this was almost always packaged alongside resisting Roman Catholicism.¹⁵ For example, at the same convention at which Truett delivered his speech, the SBC adopted a “Resolution on Religious Liberty,” in which they affirmed that “it is contrary to the true spirit of Americanism and to the traditions of the American people to foster or favor any union of Church and State,” and they thus “express[ed] the hope that Congress and the Executive

¹² George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 53-64; Andrew Michael Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Civil Rights and the Culture Wars* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 42-49.

¹³ Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 178.

¹⁴ Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict*, 44.

¹⁵ Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 15. Hamburger shows the phrase “separation of church and state,” originating in a letter from Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptists in 1803, was popularized in the mid-to-late nineteenth century amid individualistic Protestants’ nativist fears about Catholics; J. David Holcomb, “A Millstone Hanged about His Neck?: George W. Truett, Anti-Catholicism, and Baptist Conceptions of Religious Liberty,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 43, No. 3 (2008): 68-81.

Department will lend no ear to the suggestion to have [the United States] government represented in any official way at the Roman Vatican.”¹⁶

There are a few reasons why Southern Baptist leaders were particularly fearful of the specter of Roman Catholicism during this period. One was that in the previous few decades, the United States had seen a dramatic incursion of Roman Catholic immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, especially to the large cities, which was changing the demographics of the country. Southern Baptist leaders, like many other Anglo-American Protestants, worried that these immigrants were bringing with them increasing amounts of vice.¹⁷ Southern Baptist leaders were also fearful of the political threat that they thought Roman Catholics might pose to American republicanism and religious liberty. This fear was validated by the fact that in 1864, Pope Pius IX had issued a *Syllabus of Errors*, which listed liberalism and the separation of church and state as among the pre-eminent dangers of modern society.¹⁸ Finally, this period—the late 1910s into the 1920s—was the apogee of the power of the Second Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and one of their main emphases was opposition to Catholic immigration.

Considering these factors, historians have noted how this moment, for Baptists, represented “the intersection of Baptist theology and American democracy.”¹⁹

Christopher Canipe has argued that “[i]n the process of arguing for the necessity of a

¹⁶ “Resolution on Religious Liberty,” Southern Baptist Convention, 1920, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-religious-liberty-11/>.

¹⁷ Holcomb, “A millstone hanged about his neck?”, 72.

¹⁸ Holcomb, “A millstone hanged about his neck?”, 70.

¹⁹ Christopher L. Canipe, “A Captive Church in the Land of the Free: E. Y. Mullins, Walter Rauschenbusch, George Truett, and the Rise of Baptist Democracy, 1900–1925.” Ph.D. diss. (Baylor University, 2004), 217.

strict separation of church and state, Truett [and] Mullins seamlessly wove Baptist theology and American democracy together to the point that they were indistinguishable,” and that “...[his view] was generally consistent with those of his fellow [American] Baptists in the first quarter of the twentieth century.”²⁰ Kidd and Hankins concur, noting that Truett and Mullins, whom they describe as “the two leading Baptist statesmen of the first half of the twentieth century,” “came to identify American democracy with Baptist democracy.”²¹

In addition, however, the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History influenced these Southern Baptist leaders’ understanding of their place in Woodrow Wilson’s post-World War I “new world order.” This thesis, so far, has demonstrated that this “intersection of Baptist theology and American democracy” was not new but was a consistent pattern of white Baptists in the South since the Revolutionary War, whether they thought America was living up to its founding ideals or not. This was consistent with the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, rather than a repudiation of it, because Baptists who were influenced by it, from at least the Primitive Baptists onward, identified America’s founding as one which aligned with Baptist values and made progress against everything the Anti-establishment Narrative warned about.

America, in a sense, was *the* “anti-establishment” country. It was a nation, finally, which promised full liberty of conscience and allowed true Christianity to flourish. Baptist leaders had consistently characterized the previous millennium-and-a-half of Christendom as one of oppression of liberty of conscience, the suppression of true

²⁰ Canipe, “A Captive Church in the Land of the Free,” 219.

²¹ Kidd and Hankins, *Baptists in America*, 178.

Christianity, violence, and love of mammon. After this millennium-and-a-half of corruption, then, they saw the founding of America as the long-awaited deliverance from this. Even Baptist groups during the nineteenth century who were critical of America—like the Primitive Baptists, and then J.R. Graves and other white Southern Baptists during the Civil War—held to this ideal of what America was *supposed to be*. They simply thought America was straying from those ideals. E.Y. Mullins and George W. Truett, though, at the beginning of the twentieth century, had the opposite assessment: America was faithfully reflecting Baptist ideals, promoting liberty of conscience, and allowing true Christianity to flourish. Thus, they argued that Baptists should embrace America projecting its influence across the world.

The juxtaposition of Roman Catholics against liberty and American republicanism was also not new within the framework of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church history. The narrative itself portrayed magisterial Protestants, too, but primarily consisted of looking at the millennium before the Protestant Reformation, during which Rome was increasingly dominant in the Western church, as a warning. Pastors and politicians who employed the narrative during the Revolutionary War worried of “Priestcraft” and warned that the British wanted to establish some kind of crypto-Catholic establishment. Primitive Baptist leaders compared mission societies to the Jesuits. Additionally, the fact that Southern Baptists painted Catholic immigrants as a dangerous source of vice was a continuation of the Christian republicanism that Mark Noll described as dominant in the nineteenth-century, and which factored into the Primitive Baptists view of mission societies and J.R. Graves view of the North: virtue led

to liberty and vice to tyranny.²² Thus, by juxtaposing a darkly shaded history of Roman Catholicism with American republicanism, Truett and Mullins drew on the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. They argued that for the sake of its preservation, America should embrace promote its, as they argued, distinctly Baptist version of republicanism into the world.

E.Y. Mullins

In 1908, about fifteen years before this discussion about Baptists' place in Woodrow Wilson's "New World Order," E.Y. Mullins published *The Axioms of Religion*, a systematic treatment of Baptist belief. Mullins, a native of Texas, became the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1899 and remained so until he died in 1928. Importantly, he was first hired at SBTS following a fight over Landmarkism. After William Whitsitt was fired as the president in 1899 for having non-Landmarkist views, Mullins was hired to replace him. Thus, it is not surprising he was inclined toward the Landmarkist view of church history.

In *The Axioms of Religion*, Mullins summarized not just Baptist theology, but in his view, correct religion (which he equated with proper Baptist theology). And he reduced correct religion down to six axioms. Axioms two through five all argue directly against religion that is spiritually hierarchical or civically established where liberty of conscience might be infringed upon. Indeed, he argues in axioms two and three that "all souls should have equal access to God," and that "all believers have a right to equal privileges in the

²² See the quote from Mark Noll on page 62, and then the second reference to it on page 80.

church,” which disallows any spiritual hierarchy.²³ Then, he argues, in axioms four and five, that “to be responsible, a man must be free.” He asserts that this entails “a free Church in a free State.”²⁴ Thus, congregationalism, liberty of conscience, and a lack of a religious establishment by the state represented, in Mullins’ view, true, uncorrupted Christianity.

Further, Mullins believed that the New Testament church was both Baptist and constituted with similar principles to that of the United States of America. This placed him both in line with Landmark Baptist historiography, which portrays Baptists as existing in a line of succession back to the New Testament church, and in line with the old Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History that emphasizes the democratic character of the primitive church. Indeed, he describes the New Testament church as having been composed of “little Baptist democracies” and opines that the American government was but “the projection of the shadow of” the New Testament church, such that “the primary election that determined whether or not there should be an American government happened two thousand years ago on the shores of the Mediterranean.”²⁵

Mullins then devotes an entire chapter of his *Axioms* to “The Historical Significance of the Baptists.” In this chapter, he roots Baptist identity in many elements of the Landmarkist version of the anti-establishment narrative of Baptist history, though describing it with, in some ways, a distinctively new flair. He begins this section by reminding the reader that “Baptists certainly have a consistent record [in] their advocacy

²³ Edgar Young Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1908), 73, Internet Archive.

²⁴ Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 74.

²⁵ Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 273.

of soul freedom in its completest form, and of the principle of the separation of Church and State, [and] in their insistence upon believer's baptism and a regenerate-church membership."²⁶ This, in itself, does not represent the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History as, although these principles are especially emphasized in those narratives, they are merely distinctive Baptist principles. However, after describing the struggles that early American Baptists faced with religious liberty and being persecuted in Virginia and New England, Mullins then traces this struggle back to Constantine. He explains, "After Constantine until Pope Gregory VII [r. 1073-1085] there had been a struggle for supremacy between Church and State, [and then], in Gregory, the spirit of the Roman church became incarnate and conquered. ... [After that], for many generations the figure of Gregory filled the imaginations of Europe, and even to-day he is a potent force there."²⁷ This resulted in the Church becoming corrupted and obsessed with power. After the Reformation happened, then, the situation did not get much better, as "[n]either Luther nor Calvin hesitated to resort to the arm of civil power when they deemed it necessary to enforce religion."²⁸ It was the Anabaptists, rather, who represented the spirit of true, uncorrupted Christianity during this time, "but they were hounded to death, and in Europe almost seemed to disappear from the face of the earth."²⁹

Finally, Mullins then explains then that each of the religious axioms he describes as the elements of true Christianity is epitomized in the American political system. He

²⁶ Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 44,

²⁷ Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 47.

²⁸ Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 47-8.

²⁹ Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 48.

writes, “The religious axiom, ‘All souls have an equal right to direct access to God’ finds its political counterpart in the American axiom, ‘All men are created free and equal.’”³⁰ Additionally, “The ecclesiastical axiom that ‘All believers are entitled to equal privileges in the church,’ finds its political counterpart in the American axiom that ours is a government ‘Of the people, for the people, and by the people.’” He continues through each of the axioms, showing how America’s legal system corresponds with Christian freedom, how “a free church in a free state” is a reality in America, and how America’s system of “equal rights to all and special privileges to none” epitomizes the Golden Rule.³¹ He concludes by saying that “In short, the Baptist axioms of religion are like a stalactite descending from heaven to earth ... while our American political society is the stalagmite with its base upon the earth rising to meet the stalactite, ... [and] [w]hen the two shall meet, then heaven and earth shall be joined together and the Kingdom of God will have come among men.”³² This is a stunning juxtaposition of Baptist beliefs with the American republic. His view, though, that the American political system was the perfect counterpart of Baptist beliefs was rooted in the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, which portrayed the republican principles of liberty of conscience, lack of spiritual or ecclesiastical hierarchy, and lack of an establishment as pure, uncorrupted Christian principles that were present in the “Baptist” New Testament church.

For Mullins, the Baptists’ history had much to say about their role in the “New World Order.” In his 1925 essay, “Baptist Theology in the New World Order,” he reminds the

³⁰ Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 273-4.

³¹ Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 274

³² Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, 274.

reader that “Baptists throughout history have occupied a unique place in the Christian world, and Baptists as a people feel themselves called of God to render a distinctive service to mankind.”³³ He then lists six distinctive principles that Baptists have always held to. One of these is “religious freedom.”³⁴ He describes how, in America, through the efforts of Baptists in Rhode Island and Virginia, “this principle has become universal.” So, the political system of America reflects Baptist principles.

Mullins then describes seven “needs of the new world,” and in this section, appeals to history to show what has been wrong with the “old world.” According to him, “the cardinal fault of the civilization of Europe” was its lack of respect for “the freedom of the individual and personal responsibility,” which includes liberty of conscience.³⁵ In a similar way to how Graves criticized churches like the Methodist church, Mullins argues that the individual lacked freedom in the old world because of “centralized church organization.” In “centralized churches,” he argues—which he links with “state churches” — “authority takes the place of freedom.” In their sacramental system, “priests wield control over the hearts of men.”³⁶ This is all enabled by “the union of church and state.” Regarding that, he notes, “I do not even need to dwell on this,” as the fact that this has meant that “the church has partaken in the autocracy of the state, and [that] a thousand evils have arisen as a result,” “is familiar to all readers of history.”³⁷

³³ Mullins, “Baptist Theology in the New World Order,” 402.

³⁴ Mullins, “Baptist Theology in the New World Order,” 404-5.

³⁵ Mullins, “Baptist Theology in the New World Order,” 405.

³⁶ Mullins, “Baptist Theology in the New World Order,” 406.

³⁷ Mullins, “Baptist Theology in the New World Order,” 406-7.

George W. Truett

George Washington Truett was also influenced by the Landmark Baptist narrative of church history. Truett, who served as the pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas in Dallas, Texas from 1897 until his death, became one of the most influential leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention for most of the first half of the twentieth century. Other than serving as pastor at one of the more influential churches in the SBC, he is probably best known for his 1920 address to religious liberty given to the assembled Southern Baptist Convention in Washington, D.C. As already described, in this address, he drew on the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. He invoked the Baptists' historical record as champions of religious liberty—particularly freedom of conscience for all people and a lack of a religious establishment—and set this against the foil of oppressive old-world religion, epitomized in Roman Catholicism but also including Magisterial Protestantism.

This understanding of church history, which informed how Truett thought about religious liberty, did not come out of a vacuum. Born in 1867, Truett grew up in Whitewright, Texas, a small town, north of Dallas, near the Texas-Oklahoma border. And as he was growing up, Southern Baptists were trying to find their identity following the Southern loss in the Civil War.³⁸ Many Southern Baptists, particularly in more western states like Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas were finding it in the teachings and historical doctrines of J.R. Graves and Landmarkism.³⁹ By 1897, when Truett assumed

³⁸ O.S. Hawkins, "The Legacy of George W. Truett," *The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 2021, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/the-legacy-of-george-w-truett/>.

³⁹ Barber, "The Bogard Schism," 134.

the pastorate at First Baptist Dallas at the age of thirty, just like in neighboring Arkansas, both establishment and anti-establishment forces in the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) held to Landmarkist principles. As James Patterson explains, a division, like what would emerge in Arkansas in 1902, emerged in Texas in 1897, with some, following the lead of the editor of *Texas Baptist*, Samuel Hayden, “openly assail[ing] leaders of what [they] considered the Texas Baptist establishment, men like Benajah Harvey (B.H.) Carroll, J.B. Gambrell, and J.B. Cranfill.”⁴⁰

However, like in Arkansas, even the Texas Baptist establishment held to Landmark Baptist theology. B.H. Carroll, the senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas, and a professor at Baylor University, was, as Kelly Pigott puts it, “an adamant defender of Baptist successionism,” i.e., the Landmark Baptist narrative of church history—the idea that Baptists had existed continuously since the time of Christ.⁴¹ He put these views on the line by being one of the main, outspoken leaders in the campaign to remove Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) professor William Whitsitt for teaching Baptist history that opposed the Landmark narrative.⁴² He then leveraged this controversy to portray SBTS as too modernist and to then advocate for a new seminary in Texas, which came to fruition in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS). SWBTS opened in 1908, in Waco, with Carroll as its first president.⁴³ B.H. Carroll’s

⁴⁰ James A. Patterson, *James Robinson Graves: Staking the Boundaries of Baptist Identity* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012),

⁴¹ Kelly Pigott, “West of Eden with B. H. Carroll, George W. Truett, and J. Frank Norris: The Lifelong Feud Between the First Baptist Pastors of Dallas and Fort Worth.” *Review and Expositor* 116, no. 2 (2019): 176.

⁴² Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 191; Piggot, “West of Eden,” 176.

⁴³ Piggot, “West of Eden,” 176.

brother, James Milton (J.M.) Carroll would also later, in 1931, write *The Trail of Blood*, the most famous (or infamous) defense of the Landmark Baptist narrative of church history ever written. This context demonstrates the problem with delineating Hayden as a “Landmark Baptist” and the men in the BGCT establishment as not.⁴⁴ Thus, like the split in Arkansas, the Texas division fits better into Stookey’s distinction between “Convention” Landmarkers and “schismatic Landmarkers,” as the overwhelming consensus of Baptists in Texas was toward Landmarker theology.⁴⁵

George W. Truett, therefore, grew up in a context inundated by Landmarker assumptions—even if not the more radical, schismatic elements of Landmark theology. Furthermore, during the time that Truett attended Baylor University, in the 1890s, B.H. Carroll, who was a professor there, served as one of his primary mentors.⁴⁶ So, then, it is not surprising that in the speech he gave at his graduation from Baylor in 1897—which was not about church history but does reference church history in some examples— influence from the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History is evident. While describing the seventeenth-century English Civil War, he labels “[t]he divine right of kings” as “that citadel of iniquity,” against which Oliver Cromwell nobly stood for “the ideal of personal rights in church and state.”⁴⁷ In contrast, though, “The great ideal of the worth and freedom of the individual has made the United States an asylum for the earth,

⁴⁴ Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 191.

⁴⁵ Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 194-5.

⁴⁶ Pigott, “West of Eden,” 175.

⁴⁷ George Washington Truett, “The Inspiration of Ideals” (1897), compiled and edited by Powhatan Wright James (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1950), 16.

and put her flag foremost among all that float in the galaxy of nations.”⁴⁸ He also later characterized the main problem with the medieval Catholic church as having been its restriction of religious liberty and liberty of conscience, writing that “John Huss, . . . from behind prison bars, . . . calmly endure[d] his trials, by the foresight of that day when the arms then wielded for repression of liberty should flash for flash for its emancipation.”⁴⁹

Truett’s Landmarker-influenced background thus gives context to his speech before the Southern Baptist Convention in 1920. He proposed that Southern Baptists, in the post-World War I order, should promote this distinctive view of religious liberty that was rooted in their understanding of church history. Indeed, he appeals to the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History’s understanding of the early church—that it was completely unentangled with civil and political power and uninterested in pursuing it, seeing spiritual purity as involving separation from it. He declares, “Those early disciples of Jesus, without prestige and worldly power, yet aflame with the love of God and the passion of Christ, went out and shook the pagan Roman Empire from center to circumference.” This demonstrates that “Christ’s religion needs no prop of any kind from any worldly source, and to the degree that it is thus supported is a millstone hanged about its neck.”⁵⁰ However, beginning with Constantine, there was “an incomparable apostasy in the realm of religion,” with Constantine “uniting religion to the state” and “the church, [now], robed in purple.” Truett declares, dramatically, that “thus and there was begun the

⁴⁸ Truett, “The Inspiration of Ideals,” 17.

⁴⁹ Truett, “The Inspiration of Ideals,” 18.

⁵⁰ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 72.

most baneful misalliance that ever fettered and cursed a suffering world.”⁵¹ He then explains that, as the Pope’s power both over spiritual and civil affairs increased over time, how the Catholic Church engaged in “astounding” presumptions and lording over the consciences of men.⁵²

Truett then echoes the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History in explaining how the Protestant Reformation did not fix these issues. He laments, “Although the battle cry [of the Reformation was] justification by faith alone, yet they retained the doctrine of infant baptism and a state church,” and “[t]hey shank from the logical conclusions of their own theses.”⁵³ The biggest problem remained: true Christians who were faithful to the spirit of the early church in promoting liberty of conscience were persecuted. He recalls how “Luther unloosed the dogs of persecution against the struggling and faithful Anabaptists,” how “Germany put to death that mighty Baptist leader, Balthaser Hubmaier,” and “[i]n England, John Bunyan was kept in jail for twelve long, weary years because of his religion.”⁵⁴ Then, he describes how in the British American colonies, whether it was a president of Harvard being removed, a Baptist pastor being whipped in the Boston Commons, or Baptist pastors being fined in Virginia, the establishment of church and state was the primary issue that was being worked out in church history, and

⁵¹ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 74.

⁵² Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 74.

⁵³ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 75.

⁵⁴ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 75-6.

Baptists—the Christians being faithful to the uncorrupted spirit of Christianity—were the ones bearing the cost.⁵⁵

However, Truett argues that America was now a beacon of religious liberty, which gave it its place of prominence in the “new world order.” And he insists that this was chiefly the Baptists’ doing. He recalls, in his speech, how, “On and on was the struggle waged by our Baptist fathers for religious liberty in Virginia, in the Carolinas, in Georgia, in Rhode Island and Massachusetts and Connecticut, and elsewhere, with one unyielding contention for religious liberty for all men.”⁵⁶ They put themselves at risk to the point of facing great personal suffering until at last, “mighty statesmen” such as “Washington and Jefferson and Madison and Patrick Henry, and many others,” “were won to their contention.” Finally, “it was written into [the United States’] Constitution that church and state must in this land be forever separate and free.”⁵⁷

Conclusion

Therefore, as the twentieth century dawned, the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History remained just as important as it ever had been in Southern Baptist life. Ironically, Southern Baptist leaders deployed it to justify their place at the political center of American politics. The Anti-establishment Narrative warned, above all, of a fusion of church and state and of the church becoming interested in worldly, political power. Nevertheless, Southern Baptist leaders, like E.Y. Mullins and George W. Truett, eagerly

⁵⁵ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 76-7.

⁵⁶ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 77.

⁵⁷ Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” 77.

cast their lots in with Woodrow Wilson's "New World Order" and argued that Baptists were the natural leaders of it. This would seem to be a repudiation of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History.

However, Truett and Mullins' bullish attitude toward Wilson's "New World Order" was, nevertheless, inspired by this the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History. In their minds, America was the embodiment of Baptist values. It had been, since its start, in a sense, *the* "anti-establishment" country, and thus the one country since the time of Constantine that had allowed true Christianity to flourish. The Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, thus, ironically led them to a conflation of the American mission with the Baptist mission and to cozy up with the American political establishment.

According to the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, democracy, freedom of conscience, and a lack of state establishment were the characteristic marks of true Christianity. From the time of Constantine onward, however, true Christianity had been suppressed, and for the next 1,500 years, it was replaced with oppression, corruption, heresy, and the love of mammon. This was due to the conflation of the civil and the ecclesiastical realms. Indeed, according to the Anti-establishment Narrative, co-mingling political power with the spiritual realm had been inherently ruinous to true Christianity. The narrative then argues that while Protestant Reformation made progress in reversing some of the decay the church had experienced, with state establishments still in place, even the first few centuries after it were marked by oppression of liberty of conscience. However, the church was finally free to practice true Christianity due to the existence of America. At the beginning of the twentieth century, viewing America's

newfound hegemony through the lens of this historical narrative, Southern Baptist leaders saw an opportunity to restore global Christendom to its pure, pre-Constantinian form.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Epilogue

In 1931, J.M. Carroll, a Baptist pastor in Texas, published “*The Trail of Blood . . .*”: *Following the Christians Down Through the Centuries . . . or the History of Baptist Churches from the Time of Christ, Their Founder, to the Present Day.*”¹ It remains infamous to this day as the best-known account of how Baptists had existed in perpetuity since the time of Jesus Christ. Carroll shows how they faced gruesome oppression—indeed, a “trail of blood” —from the time of Constantine, up until they received freedom in America. However, though *The Trail of Blood* is often seen today as a fringe, quirky pseudohistory, at the time of its release, it was not fringe at all. Rather, it was merely a short distillation of the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, which, as this thesis has shown, had consistently been an influence that American Baptists had appealed to since the founding of the country.

Carroll pointed to church-state establishment as the primary historical corruption of Christendom. He declares, “There can be no real and absolute Religious liberty in any nation where the Government gives its support to one special religious denomination.”² He argues that this occurred soon after Constantine officially established Christianity. After this began the “Dark Ages,” in which heresies like “baptismal salvation” were

¹ James Milton Carroll, “*The Trail of Blood . . .*”: *Following the Christians Down Through the Centuries . . . or the History of Baptist Churches from the Time of Christ, Their Founder, to the Present Day* (Lexington, KY: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1931), Google Books.

² Carroll, *The Trail of Blood*, 57.

introduced, the church ceased to be a democracy, “the sword and torch rather than the gospel [became] the power of God unto salvation,” and “all semblance of ‘Religious liberty’ [died].”³ This is little different, in substance, than the narrative that English Separatists like Robert Browne began to lay out in the late-sixteenth century, which was then picked up by Quaker leader George Fox, then John Milton, and then, eventually, Revolutionary War-era Baptist leaders like Isaac Backus and John Leland.

Like Baptists had done since the Revolutionary War, J.M. Carroll used the Anti-establishment Narrative of History to extol America as, finally, a beacon of true Christianity. Baptists during the Revolutionary War, like Backus and Leland, and mainstream Southern Baptists in post-World War I era, like Mullins and Truett, did this obviously and overtly. However, even Baptist groups between 1776 and 1920 who were more pessimistic toward the way things were going in the United States—like J.R. Graves, who advocated secession from it—were motivated by the ideal that the United States of America was *supposed to be* the opposite of the oppressive previous 1,500 years of Christendom. They appealed to the Anti-establishment Narrative to warn their audience that what the American Revolution had secured might be lost. Carroll, in *The Trail of Blood*, proudly notes that while “Church and State, elsewhere at least, had for 1,500 years (since 313) been living in unholy wedlock, ... Religious Liberty was, at least here in the United States, resurrected to die no more, and now gradually but in many places slowly, it is spreading throughout the world.”⁴ America was the means by which God was restoring true Christianity.

³ Carroll, *The Trail of Blood*, 22.

⁴ Carroll, *The Trail of Blood*, 57.

Today, J.M. Carroll's *Trail of Blood*, along with the narrative of Baptist history that it taught, is widely ridiculed. However, Baptist churches still often make the news as sites of a controversial syncretism of American patriotism with evangelical Christianity. For example, First Baptist Church, Dallas, TX—the church at which George W. Truett served as the senior pastor in the early twentieth century—routinely generates controversy by holding “Freedom Sundays” on and around the Independence Day holiday. At their “Freedom Sunday” on July 4, 2020, as the audience waved handheld American flags, Vice President Mike Pence delivered a speech. Like Isaac Backus had done in his Revolutionary War sermon 222 years earlier, Pence referenced Galatians 5:1, declaring, “The Bible tells us it was for freedom that Christ set us free.” His warned that this freedom, which was America’s prized possession, was at risk of being taken away. However, he charged that “if we will but hold fast to Him, we’ll see our way through these challenging times, we will restore our nation’s health, [and] we will renew our freedom.”⁵ First Baptist Dallas’ Freedom Sunday services are particularly ostentatious, but similar occasions are widespread practice among Baptists. Indeed, a 2016 LifeWay survey found that seventy-eight percent of Baptist pastors report doing some sort of July Fourth celebration at their churches.⁶

It might be surprising that American Baptists, who have long been so strongly committed to freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state, would also so

⁵ Michael Grybowski, “First Baptist Dallas megachurch holds ‘Freedom Sunday’ to celebrate America’s ‘Christian foundation,’” *The Christian Post*, accessed Apr 10, 2023, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/robert-jeffress-megachurch-holds-freedom-sunday-to-honor-usa.html>.

⁶ Carol Pipes, “Pastors Favor Patriotism for July Fourth Services,” *Baptist Press*, accessed Apr 10, 2023, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/pastors-favor-patriotism-for-july-fourth-services/>.

strongly embrace symbols of the nation and that they would court political power. Bill Leonard notes this apparent contradiction in the introduction to his book, *Baptists in America*. He writes that while “Baptists are among the most outspoken advocates of religious liberty in modern Protestant history ... [they] have struggled with the way in which religious liberty affected issues of patriotism, citizenship, and the unending debate over America as ‘Christian nation.’”⁷ However, this thesis has shown that these things are not in tension at all. Rather, it is precisely *because* of Baptists’ commitment to anti-establishment sentiments that many Baptists have so strongly embraced American patriotism. They looked at the long record of church history, informed by the Anti-establishment Narrative of Church History, and saw oppression, violence, greed, and apostasy. They looked at the Protestant Reformation and saw some improvement in terms of doctrine but, for the most part, oppression that continued.

Finally, though, Christianity was now being restored to its early purity because of God’s gift of America. Baptists, who had long been marginalized by Christian regimes, and who identified themselves with splinter Christians groups from the time of Constantine-onward, were now free in America. This enabled them, too, as J.M. Carroll noted, to spread explosively around the world. It makes sense, then, why many American Baptists have felt, and still feel, that it is entirely right to sing “Protect us by thy might, great God, our King” —declaring God to be America’s king.

⁷ Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 157.

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