

GALVANIZED BY THE GOSPEL:
NINETEENTH-CENTURY BAPTIST MISSIONS
AND THE ANTI-MISSION RESPONSE

by

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ABSTRACT

The Second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century brought significant changes to the American religious landscape. In addition to inspiring the creation of new denominations, the Awakening's emphasis on religious democracy and the era's prevalent postmillennial ideology motivated Protestants to establish numerous mission societies and other "benevolent" organizations to aid in the spreading of the Christian gospel. Baptists, too, were launched to a level of evangelistic fervor in the early 1800s that the denomination had never before witnessed. While many Baptists embraced the nineteenth-century mission movement, a significant number of "anti-mission" Baptists rejected it as antithetical to "pure" Baptist doctrine. Anti-missionists' opposition to missions was ideologically motivated and stemmed from their understanding of Baptist history and theology. They felt that mission organizations imposed hierarchy upon a faith that was democratic in nature and thereby threatened religious liberty—a cause to which American Baptists had devoted themselves since the colonial era. In addition, anti-missionists perceived in missions a fundamental contradiction of the basic Calvinist doctrines that they held dear, because evangelism implied that human effort—not God's grace alone—was necessary to spread the message of salvation to all.

By the 1820s, Baptists had become bitterly divided over the issue of missions. Individual churches and regional associations split ideologically and physically during the controversy. As the mission spirit became more prevalent among Baptists, the denomination's doctrinal and structural priorities shifted to emphasize collective

cooperation in evangelistic efforts over predestination and the authority of local churches. Proponents of missions and anti-missionists assailed each other in sermons and periodicals that now bear witness to the intensity of the debate—and to the deep-seated ideological motives of the anti-missionists, who refused to accept the theological foundations supporting the mission movement. By the mid-nineteenth century, anti-missionists declined significantly in number. On the other hand, those Baptists who embraced missions eventually grew into the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. This episode sheds light on the origins of modern-day Protestantism's evangelistic focus and reveals the effects that this focus has had on religious denominations in America—namely, an ever increasing bureaucratic structure.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“War in all cases is distressing,” heralded an 1831 editorial in the Baptist periodical the *Church Advocate*.¹ The war that the editorial referred to was not a physical war, but rather a theological battle that was taking place amid the changing religious landscape of early nineteenth-century America. A general spirit of religious revival that came to be known as the Second Great Awakening swept the country during the first few decades of the 1800s, and caused American Protestants to become increasingly preoccupied with evangelism. The widespread acceptance of Christianity, they believed, would hasten Christ’s return to earth, where he would reign during a “millennium” of peace. In response to this popular millennial ideology, Protestants formed a variety of foreign and domestic mission societies with the goal of spreading the Christian gospel throughout the world. Other religious innovations accompanied the growth of missionary organizations, such as the establishment of theological schools and societies that distributed Bibles and tracts. In a matter of decades, the number of religious organizations in the new American republic soared.²

Baptists, who gained popularity in the late eighteenth century after being persecuted during the colonial era for their dissenting religious beliefs, were one group of Protestants that participated in missions. Baptists are notoriously difficult to define, due

¹ Daniel Parker, ed., “Remarks on Religious Controversy,” *Church Advocate*, Vol. 2 No. 4 (January 1831) (Vincennes, Indiana: Elihu Stout, Printer).

² Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2007), 166.

to the lack of overarching denominational authority that results from their commitment to individual freedom of conscience and the autonomy of local churches. These beliefs, along with that of adult baptism by immersion, commonly unite Baptists.³ In regard to other doctrines, however, Baptists are perhaps the most diverse of all Protestant denominations. As American religious historian Mark Noll points out, such diversity creates a pervasive “problem of Baptist identity.”⁴ Conflicting reactions by nineteenth-century Baptists to the birth of the mission movement highlight this problem. While the majority of Baptists came to embrace the mission movement, others disputed its legitimacy and found it to be incompatible with Baptist doctrine and history. These anti-mission Baptists, as they came to be known, felt that the actions of missionary societies made salvation into a commodity rather than a religious experience, and thought that placing individual believers and churches under any semblance of hierarchy undermined the foundations of the American Baptist tradition.⁵ To anti-missionists, fighting the religious innovations of the nineteenth century became a practice of “spiritual warfare.”⁶

Anti-mission Baptists primarily based their arguments against nineteenth-century religious innovations on their understanding of Baptist history and on their perception of “pure” Baptist doctrine. Baptists—both pro-mission and anti-mission—believed that Christ himself had introduced their doctrine and practices on earth, and that they alone

³ Jon Butler, Randall Balmer, and Grant Wacker, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 180.

⁴ Mark Noll, “So You’re a Baptist—What Might That Mean?” *Books & Culture: A Christian Review* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Christianity Today, 2011), <http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2011/julaug/youbaptist.html> (accessed April 1, 2012).

⁵ Although the “American Baptists” are now a distinct denomination, the term “American Baptist” as used in this thesis refers more generally to Baptists in the United States.

⁶ Parker, ed., “Remarks on Religious Controversy,” *Church Advocate*.

continued to adhere to this ancient faith while other denominations departed from it.⁷

Anti-missionists appealed to this understood version of Baptist history as they argued that the missionary societies of the early nineteenth century resembled more closely the religion of corrupted denominations than the “original” Christianity practiced by Christ’s apostles. The doctrines of predestination and the authority of the Bible were central to their arguments.

Anti-mission Baptists maintained that God predestined only certain people to salvation, and that missionaries attempted to convert the non-“elect,” contrary to God’s will. In addition, anti-missionists believed unwaveringly that the Bible was the only religious authority needed on earth, and that individuals could interpret scripture themselves. This belief eliminated the need for theological schools.⁸ Moreover, anti-missionists feared that religious organizations imposed hierarchy and bureaucracy on their members. This in turn threatened religious liberty and undermined the independence of individual churches, which Baptists believed to be the highest ecclesiastical organizations on earth. Although Baptist churches were often members of regional “associations,” these associations existed merely as means of communication among various congregations, and each church possessed the autonomy to make its own

⁷ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a well-known British Baptist preacher of the nineteenth century, expressed this idea well. “We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians,” he proclaimed in a sermon in 1861. “We have an unbroken line up to the Apostles themselves! We have always existed from the very days of Christ, and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten like a river which may travel underground for a little season, have always had honest and holy adherents.” C.H. Spurgeon, *C.H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife, and His Private Secretary*, Vol. III: 1856-1878 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1899), 6.

⁸ As will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter three, American Baptists descended from the Puritans, whose theology was Calvinist in nature. While many Baptists and members of other Calvinist denominations such as Presbyterianism did not believe that a belief in predestination precluded support for evangelism or theological schooling, anti-mission Baptists did view their predestinarian doctrine as a primary reason to oppose such practices.

decisions and define its own beliefs. To support their allegations that mission organizations threatened religious liberty, Calvinist theology, and the authority of the Bible and individual churches, anti-missionists pointed to the history of Baptists in eighteenth-century America, who had been the victims of persecution in colonies that had established religions.

By the 1820s, American Baptists had become bitterly divided over the issue of missions. Proponents of missions championed their cause through a growing network of organizations, while anti-missionists' aversion to organization required them to rely on individual leaders and churches to build up support for their efforts. The controversy tore apart Baptist communities, and congregations of anti-mission Baptists began to separate formally from their pro-mission brethren beginning around 1830. Many of these took on the name of "Primitive Baptist," and were referred to as "Hard-Shells" and "Old School Baptists." Meanwhile, the rest of the Baptist denomination became increasingly pro-mission. When northern and southern Baptists split in 1845 primarily over the issue of slavery, Baptists of both regions widely accepted a pro-mission ideology. In fact, one of the primary reasons cited for the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions' refusal to appoint slaveholders as missionaries.⁹

The anti-mission controversy resulted in much more than physical splits within churches and associations. Ideologically, the pro-mission and anti-mission sides edged further apart as each sought to define itself distinctly from the other. Constitutions of early Primitive Baptist churches emphasized predestinarian principles, while missionary-

⁹ Butler, Balmer, and Wacker, *Religion in American Life*, 180-181.

minded Baptist churches made missions an explicit goal. (The original constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention, for example, stated that its primary purpose was to “[direct] the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort, for the propagation of the Gospel.”¹⁰) As the popularity of mission societies increased, the function of associational meetings as vehicles for communication among individual churches became less important. Finally, hostility within Baptist communities grew, and some remained entangled in the debate over missions even into the twentieth century. Anti-missionists advocated breaking ties with their pro-mission opponents, while missionaries persisted in their endeavors to evangelize even among anti-mission congregations. In the end, Baptists with pro-mission tendencies prevailed statistically over anti-missionists. Today fewer than one thousand Primitive Baptist churches exist in the United States, which together have no more than 70,000 members.¹¹ On the other hand, Baptists of the “evangelical tradition”—those who support missions and evangelism in general—make up the largest sector of evangelical Protestants, who are the largest religious affiliation in America today. The majority of these Baptists are members of the Southern Baptist Convention.¹²

Predictably, pro-mission Baptists in the nineteenth century attributed anti-missionists’ numerical decline to their lack of evangelistic efforts. The larger reason

¹⁰ Nathan A. Finn, “Southern Baptist History: A Great Commission Reading,” in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God’s Mandate in Our Time*, eds. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 109.

¹¹ Jeffrey Wayne Taylor, *The Formation of the Primitive Baptist Movement* (Ontario: Pandora Press, 2004), 142.

¹² Pew Research Center, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey” (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008), 12. According to the Pew Forum’s survey, Evangelical Protestants make up 26.3% of churchgoers in the United States, with Catholics a close second at 23.9%. Within Evangelical Protestantism, Baptists number 10.8% of the population, with Southern Baptists accounting for 6.7% of these.

behind the deterioration of anti-mission Baptist congregations, however, was their inability—or unwillingness—to adapt ideologically to the significant cultural and religious changes brought about by the Second Great Awakening. Ultimately, anti-missionists who held strongly to their historical roots and defended tradition failed to grow in number, while pro-mission Baptists, who embraced and adapted to change, flourished.

In this thesis, I argue that the reason for anti-missionists' opposition to nineteenth-century religious innovations lay in their interpretation of Baptist history and in their commitment to what they perceived as “pure” religious doctrine. Although previous scholars have asserted that the anti-mission response was primarily a socio-economic conflict, the literature of anti-missionists makes clear that they viewed the controversy as a theological battle. Furthermore, associational records reveal that anti-missionism produced a structural divide in the ecclesiastical organization of Baptist churches. The nineteenth-century emphasis on evangelism necessitated the creation of religious organizations as well as a more bureaucratic structure within denominations that made missions a priority. American Protestantism has since become increasingly reliant upon this type of structure, and the most successful denominations today are those that employ bureaucratic elements—such as internal committees and action organizations—in their ecclesiastical structure. The decline of anti-missionists was not due simply to their failure to evangelize, but resulted more fundamentally from their refusal to institute the structural changes that pro-mission denominations embraced to sustain evangelistic efforts.

“Should the Lord’s army draw back and surrender, would not the enemy gain the

victory?” continued the *Church Advocate*’s condemnation of missions in 1831. “Oh! let each soldier of the cross of Christ say, let me be the last one that sheathes my sword, grounds my arms, or proves a traitor to my King and Saviour, for the battle will soon be over; the victory is sure.”¹³ By their own standards, anti-missionists may have triumphed theologically by adhering to what they saw as sound, traditional doctrine rather than accommodating “modern” religious views. They did not, however, achieve the cultural victory that they hoped for by persuading others to cling to this tradition as well. Evangelism constituted a central theological doctrine to pro-mission Baptists, to whom “earthly” victory also meant heavenly victory. Since the nineteenth century, this focus on evangelism has come to define the ideology of most Protestants in the United States.

¹³ Parker, ed., “Remarks on Religious Controversy,” *Church Advocate*.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

In 1823, itinerant frontier preacher John Taylor urged Baptists to begin writing their own history, which, he lamented, had “hitherto...been much neglected.”¹⁴ Taylor recognized correctly that the history of Baptists in America—particularly the histories of individual congregations and associations—remained largely unwritten by the 1820s. Moreover, Taylor’s supplication of Baptists to compose their own histories proved to be a foresight into the historiography to come. For over a century, Baptist insiders and denominational historians dominated this historiography. As a result, the history of American Baptists—like that of most American religious denominations—has been told primarily from the perspective of those within the denomination. The result of this denominational slant is a biased historiography, which for the most part casts the anti-mission movement in a negative light. Those who have studied Baptist anti-missionism can generally be divided into three groups: contemporaries of the movement, later Baptist denominational historians, and non-denominational historians.¹⁵

While the histories written by the first group are useful in providing cultural context for the controversy, they are significantly prejudiced since their authors experienced first-hand the elevated emotions surrounding the peak of the anti-mission movement. Depending upon which side they took, these authors tended either to glorify

¹⁴ John Taylor, *Baptists on the American Frontier: A History of Ten Baptist Churches of Which the Author Has Been Alternately a Member*, ed. Chester Raymond Young (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1995), vii.

¹⁵ The term “non-denominational” is used throughout this chapter to refer to historians who have not written explicitly on behalf of, or in support of, a particular religious denomination.

or to ridicule anti-missionists. Baptist denominational historians, though knowledgeable insiders, also produced highly biased works. Writing after the mid-1800s, these historians aimed to support a Baptist denomination that had become primarily pro-mission by that time. Thus, they most often depicted anti-missionism as injurious to the Baptist cause and even to Christianity as a whole. Finally, although religious history within the last fifty years has begun to lose its denominational slant, the discipline tends to over-emphasize the assumptions of social and new social history, which aim to interpret historical events in terms of race, class, and gender. As a result, historians often attribute counter-cultural religious beliefs, like those of the anti-mission Baptists, to mere economic conflicts or power struggles. In doing so, they neglect to acknowledge the significance of ideological commitments in shaping behavior.

Contemporaries of the Movement¹⁶

Two notable works, written by Baptists who lived through the anti-mission controversy, exhibit the opposing positions that early Baptist historians took in the dispute. In 1860, David Benedict published *Fifty Years among the Baptists*, which dismissed the still-extant anti-missionists on behalf of the pro-mission Baptist majority as “opposing members, whose mistakes we all deplore.”¹⁷ These individuals, Benedict wrote, worked to propagate their “paralyzing principles far and wide” and impede the “progress” of mission societies and other benevolent organizations.¹⁸ Benedict, an

¹⁶ Historians of individual churches and associations also tended to mention the anti-mission movement in their local or regional studies. See, for example, Anthony Howard Dunlevy, *History of the Miami Baptist Association; from its Organization in 1797 to a Division in That Body on Missions, etc. in the Year 1836* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Geo. S. Blanchard & Co., 1869).

¹⁷ David Benedict, *Fifty Years among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1860), 126-127.

¹⁸ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 181.

obvious supporter of missionary societies, marveled “that so much should have been done by [Baptists] in the home and foreign mission departments” to expand “the means of intelligence and benevolence” within the denomination.¹⁹

On the side of the dispute opposite Benedict were father-son historians Cushing Biggs Hassell and Sylvester Hassell, who, at the request of a Primitive Baptist congregation, published *History of the Church of God from the Creation to A.D. 1885* (1886). The Hassells’ ambitious book essentially attempted to provide a religious history of the Christian world with the view that God, upon his creation of the earth, intended for all people to follow Baptist doctrine. The authors argued, moreover, that God’s definition of Christianity was not only Baptist, but specifically Primitive Baptist. They noted characteristics of the early church, as described in the Bible, which complied with nineteenth-century Primitive Baptist beliefs and practices. These included baptism by immersion, disestablishment, and a view of the “local church [as] the highest and last ecclesiastical authority on earth.”²⁰ The Hassells made no attempt to exhibit impartiality in their thoroughly anti-mission analysis, which denounced the religious innovations of the nineteenth century as ungodly and unbiblical. They went so far as to compare missionaries to a biblical plague, stating, “from their mills [missionaries] are grinding out young preachers yearly by scores, who are to spread over the land, like the locusts of

¹⁹ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 27. Ironically, a ca. 1974 Primitive Baptist-sponsored compilation of anti-mission texts quoted excerpts from Benedict’s history as evidence that missionary societies and benevolent organizations strayed from original Baptist belief and practice, and that the Primitive Baptist faith was the more historically authentic one. Benedict did point out that a paid ministry, mission societies, Sunday schools, etc. were dramatic changes that occurred in the denomination over his fifty years as a Baptist. See W.J. Berry, ed., *The Kehukee Declaration and Black Rock Address with Other Writings Relative to the Baptist Separation between 1825-1840* (Elon College, North Carolina: Primitive Publications, [1974?]), 50.

²⁰ Cushing Biggs Hassell and Sylvester Hassell, *History of the Church of God from the Creation to A.D. 1885; Including Especially the History of the Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association* (Middletown, Orange County, New York: Gilbert Beebe’s Sons, Publishers, 1886), 292.

Egypt.”²¹ The Hassells even maintained “as historical truth, not successfully to be denied, that wherever Missionary Societies...[and various other societies] prevail...There the mark of the Beast and there persecution prevail.” By supporting extra-biblical innovations like missions, claimed the Hassells, “New School” Baptists broke away from the original Baptist faith, which followed “the faith and practice of the Apostles of the Lamb.”²²

Denominational Historians²³

The Hassells’ depiction of the anti-mission movement differed considerably from arguments presented by later denominational historians. B.H. Carroll’s *The Genesis of American Anti-Missionism* (1902) provides an example of how most twentieth-century Baptist historians assessed the anti-mission movement. Carroll offered a chronological account of anti-missionism, as well as an impassioned defense of the Baptist foreign mission movement, as he argued “that under God the Foreign Mission movement among American Baptists has been the greatest factor in our denominational development.”²⁴ Throughout his book, Carroll clearly maintained that the anti-missionists of the nineteenth century did not follow sound Baptist doctrine; on the contrary, they had been deceived by their leaders, who Carroll described as “men of small mental calibre but with

²¹ Hassell and Hassell, *History*, 757.

²² Hassell and Hassell, *History*, 747-748.

²³ For further examples of anti-missionism examined by Baptist-affiliated authors, see Benilton Carlos Bezeera, “Sources and Early History of the Anti-Mission Controversy in the United States: 1814-1840” (master’s thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1956), and Larry Douglas Smith, “The Historiography of the Origins of Anti-Missionism Examined in Light of Kentucky Baptist History” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982).

²⁴ B.H. Carroll, *The Genesis of American Anti-Missionism* (Louisville, Kentucky: Baptist Book Concern, 1902), 7.

sharp, acute and suspicious minds.”²⁵ Carroll labeled “the *antis*” as the “*attack[ers]*”; it was they who “forced the fighting and necessitated the division,” he claimed, while the missionaries and their supporters should simply have broken earlier with these false representatives of the Baptist faith.²⁶

The arguments that other Baptist denominational historians made during the first half of the twentieth century closely resembled those of Carroll. Writing in 1939, Harry L. Poe asserted that Baptists had always possessed a missionary spirit.²⁷ The cause of the anti-mission movement, according to Poe, was not at its core a disagreement over doctrine. Rather, it was the influence of dynamic leaders who convinced their followers to disregard the inherent mission spirit of the denomination. Ira Durwood Hudgins echoed the sentiments of Poe in a 1951 article about the anti-mission controversy, in which he attributed the causes of anti-mission sentiment to cultural and economic anxieties. Anti-mission Baptists reacted the way that they did, according to Hudgins, because they “feared the loss of...prestige” to wealthier or more educated ministers who seemed to threaten the authority of local churches and their individual ministers.²⁸ Like Poe, Hudgins cited anti-missionism as an anomaly in Baptist history, since he believed that Baptists had always supported missions. “Few indeed among [the] early Baptists

²⁵ Carroll, *Genesis*, 185.

²⁶ Carroll, *Genesis*, 188.

²⁷ Harry L. Poe, “The History of the Anti-Missionary Baptists,” *The Chronicle*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (April 1939): 51-64, 51.

²⁸ Ira Durwood Hudgins, “The Anti-Missionary Controversy Among Baptists,” *The Chronicle*, Vol. XIV, No. 4 (October 1951): 147-163, 161.

could be found who did not think of missions as their imperative duty,” he declared.²⁹

Non-Denominational Historians³⁰

Church historian William Warren Sweet published his *Religion on the American Frontier* series in the 1930s, in which he briefly mentioned the anti-mission controversy. Despite his lack of affiliation with the Baptist denomination, however, Sweet did not offer an analysis of anti-missionism that differed significantly from that of previous historians. In fact, he, too, clearly assessed it as a negative event in Baptist history. “The total effect of the anti-mission movement in the west was undoubtedly harmful to religion generally and to the progress of the Baptists in particular,” Sweet wrote. Specifically, he claimed that “The unevangelical type of Calvinism which it fostered led to bigotry and intolerance, and its absurdities brought the churches and ministers into disrepute among those who most needed their ministrations and their restraints.”³¹ Historian Nathan O. Hatch has acknowledged that although Sweet did “more than any other single scholar in the twentieth century to promote the serious study of Methodists and Baptists on the frontier,” his “vision of these groups as bearers of civilization to the uncouth, unrestrained society of the frontier” revealed overt bias.³²

²⁹ Hudgins, “The Anti-Missionary Controversy,” 153.

³⁰ Several works not treated in this section have mentioned anti-missionism briefly in the more general context of religion on the frontier. See, for example, Walter Brownlow Posey, *Frontier Mission: A History of Religion West of the Southern Appalachians to 1861* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), and T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964).

³¹ William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists 1783-1830, A Collection of Source Material* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1964), 76.

³² Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 223.

Byron Cecil Lambert attempted to correct such bias with his 1980 publication of *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists: Sources and Leaders, 1800-1840*, which was the first work dedicated exclusively to analyzing the anti-mission movement. As its title implied, Lambert's study focused primarily on individual leaders of the anti-mission movement. Lambert refuted the view that anti-missionism was merely a frontier movement supported by "yokels," and gave due acknowledgment to the ideological causes of the controversy.³³ Despite this emphasis on ideology, however, Lambert neglected to portray the anti-mission movement as ideologically unified, since he categorized its adherents by regional identity and thus accentuated their differences.

Several religious historians of the 1960s and 1970s discussed the anti-mission movement in studies that focused more broadly on frontier religion or general Baptist history. Most of these historians considered anti-mission Baptists to be hyper-Calvinists who were reacting to the social and economic disparities visible between easterners and early frontiersmen during the nineteenth century. Walter Brownlow Posey and Bertram Wyatt-Brown both drew this conclusion, and in the process reinforced prior negative interpretations of the anti-mission movement. Posey stated that "Ignorance and prejudice closed the minds" of anti-missionists and caused them to react against the religious innovations of the nineteenth century.³⁴ He classified anti-missionists' motivations as attitudinal rather than ideological, claiming that their "opposition arose largely from a fear of centralized authority and the notion that missions were money-getting schemes."

³³ Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists: Sources and Leaders, 1800-1840* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), iv.

³⁴ Walter Brownlow Posey, *Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 18.

Posey further cited “Jealousy” as an underlying motivation of anti-missionists, who were uneducated and often unpaid, unlike society-supported missionaries.³⁵ Wyatt-Brown employed similar reasoning in his assessment of the causes and effects of anti-mission sentiment among Baptists. While he acknowledged that the anti-mission movement was rooted in “ecclesiastical, [as well as] sectional, and social grounds,” he claimed that it was primarily driven by socio-economic discrepancies. Anti-missionism, wrote Wyatt-Brown, “was one expression of a confused internal cleavage between the folkways of the poor and their social betters.”³⁶ Most anti-mission Baptists, he continued, believed that “sectional and social factors were more pressing issues than doctrinal complaints.”³⁷

Two works that came out in 1998 dealt with the anti-mission movement as a regional phenomenon. John G. Crowley’s *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South* provided historical background regarding anti-missionists’ evolution into today’s Primitive Baptists, but primarily studied Primitive Baptist congregations in Georgia and Florida from the era of the Civil War to the present.³⁸ Randy K. Mills, who analyzed anti-missionism in Indiana, blamed the movement for “[contributing] to the development of American sectionalism” due to Baptists’ distrust of theological education, which Mills

³⁵ Posey, *Religious Strife*, 24.

³⁶ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (November 1970): 501-529, 503, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2206302> (accessed February 19, 2012).

³⁷ Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement,” 514.

³⁸ John Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South: 1815 to the Present* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

labeled “anti intellectualism.”³⁹ To Mills, the anti-mission movement was a “political, economic, regional, and cultural” issue rather than a doctrinal one.⁴⁰ Mills clearly concluded in favor of missionary Baptists, stating that the work of the Union Association in Indiana (a missionary society) “helped carry the flame of Baptist evangelism to future generations.”⁴¹

Several works on the anti-mission movement that have appeared within the last decade have shed light on how Baptist doctrine influenced the anti-mission movement. James R. Mathis’ *The Making of the Primitive Baptists* (2004) and Jeffrey Wayne Taylor’s *The Formation of the Primitive Baptist Movement* (2004) analyzed the doctrinal foundations of the anti-mission movement. These studies both departed from previous works significantly, in that they focused on theological motivations for anti-mission sentiment rather than on economic or social causes. Mathis expressed regret that “historians treat religion and religious belief as mere epiphenomena...ignor[ing] the simple, obvious answer: that individuals joined churches and participated in religious life because they believed in what those churches taught.”⁴² Anti-missionism “and the rise of the Primitive Baptists,” Mathis wrote, “were a theologically based cultural response to the religious, doctrinal, and structural changes” that occurred in nineteenth-century

³⁹ Randy K. Mills, “The Struggle for the Soul of Frontier Baptists: The Anti-Mission Controversy in the Lower Wabash Valley,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 94, No. 4 (December 1998): 303-322, 322, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27792120> (accessed February 19, 2012).

⁴⁰ Mills, “The Struggle,” 303.

⁴¹ Mills, “The Struggle,” 322.

⁴² James R. Mathis, *The Making of the Primitive Baptists: A Cultural and Intellectual History of the Antimission Movement, 1800-1840* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

America.⁴³ Taylor supported this argument as well, and cited anti-missionists' unwillingness to adapt to these changes as the reason for their decline. Both Mathis' and Taylor's works maintained that while missionary Baptists succeeded as a result of their evangelistic fervor and participation in the era's "market culture," anti-missionists were at a disadvantage due to their adherence to a theology that prohibited such participation.⁴⁴ Both of these historians, however, underestimated the connection between American Baptists' understanding of their own history and their commitment to traditional doctrine. In addition, both examined nineteenth-century anti-missionists by comparing them to modern-day Primitive Baptists, and thus neglected to assess the effects of the anti-mission movement aside from the formation of the Primitive Baptist sect.⁴⁵

In his 2007 dissertation, John Ayabe also insisted that anti-mission Baptists were motivated primarily by doctrine. Ayabe argued that the missionary movement threatened Baptists' view of local churches as autonomous bodies. Missionaries, he asserted, "undermined local church authority and encouraged the adoption of new practices that, for western Baptists, would redefine the purpose and identity of the local church."⁴⁶ Brian Russell Franklin's thesis, also from 2007, analyzed the anti-mission movement as a reflection of a changing economic, social, and political culture in the antebellum south

⁴³ Mathis, *Making*, 2.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey Wayne Taylor, *Formation*, 20.

⁴⁵ Historian Jan Shipps differentiates a "sect" from a "denomination" by defining a sect as "a group that coalesces around a leader or leaders who find themselves in disagreement with ecclesiastical authorities over matters that manifest themselves as concern about ritual and liturgy, institutional structure, the pattern of relationships within and without the community, or the nature of authentic spiritual experience." Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 48.

⁴⁶ John Ayabe, "Evangelicals and the Antimission Crisis: A Study of Religious Identity in the Central Mississippi Valley, 1820-1840" (PhD diss., Saint Louis University, 2007), 1-2.

and west, but emphasized that it was predominantly a religious movement. Anti-missionists, Franklin claimed, “perceived every realm of life religiously. Thus, they opposed the labor, market, and monetary practices of missionaries not for economic reasons alone, but because of their religious beliefs regarding economics.”⁴⁷ Finally, Joshua Aaron Guthman’s 2008 dissertation examined the collective identity of Primitive Baptists in order to illustrate a “group portrait” revealing how they interacted with the culture and society of their time—first as followers of the anti-mission movement, and later as members of a distinct sect.⁴⁸

Historiographical Goals for This Thesis

With this thesis, I aim to add to the existing historiography of the anti-mission movement in several respects. First, I argue that primarily religious doctrine—not economics or some other peripheral issue—drove the anti-mission controversy, and that anti-mission sentiment was directly related to Baptists’ understanding of their own history. Despite recent historians’ attempts to interpret anti-missionism as an ideological conflict, no work so far has sufficiently explained why anti-mission Baptists remained immovable in their dedication to tradition in a period of dynamic religious and cultural change.

Additionally, I do not focus on the anti-mission movement as a local or regional issue, as other studies have done. Although much of the controversy took place in Baptist communities along the early Appalachian and Mississippi Valley frontiers, these are not

⁴⁷ Brian Russell Franklin, “The Antimission Movement in the Antebellum South and West” (master’s thesis, Texas A&M University, 2007), iv.

⁴⁸ Joshua Aaron Guthman, “‘What I Am ‘Tis Hard to Know’: Primitive Baptists, the Protestant Self, and the American Religious Imagination” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008), 9.

the only regions where Baptists became embroiled in the struggle over missions. Frontier Baptists were more involved in the controversy because they resided where the majority of domestic mission activities were taking place. Anti-mission sentiment, however, was prevalent on the east coast as well as on the frontier, and in large cities as well as in small towns. Because the controversy was fundamentally about doctrine, it is important to note that the anti-mission reaction among Baptists was more widespread than a mere frontier response.

In this thesis, I also examine the effects that anti-missionism had on nineteenth-century Baptist communities on both structural and ideological levels. Previous works have acknowledged the formation of distinctly anti-mission sects like the Primitive Baptists, but few have analyzed how the functions and structures of individual congregations and associations changed as a result. Finally, many studies of anti-missionism have tended to take the form of a cultural study of today's Primitive Baptists, relating how they evolved from anti-missionists. I do not seek to explain what today's Primitive Baptists have in common with their anti-missionist predecessors, but am instead concerned with examining how and why the Baptists of colonial America evolved into divergent anti-mission and pro-mission bodies.

CHAPTER THREE: FOUNDATIONS OF ANTI-MISSIONISM

Historically, Baptists in the United States have been eager to emphasize their denomination's dedication to religious liberty. Today's Southern Baptist Convention lists the separation of church and state as one of its "basic beliefs."⁴⁹ Nineteenth-century American Baptists also defended the ideal of religious liberty, and even claimed that their religious principles embodied—and had even inspired—the nation's foundational ideals of independence and individual liberty. David Benedict's denominational history, for example, cited a Baptist tradition that held that Thomas Jefferson modeled the "Constitution" on the example of a Baptist church that he had visited.⁵⁰ "Some of the primordial principles of the great document which [Jefferson] afterwards penned," Benedict related, "were conceived from observing the successful movements of a little self-operating body which acknowledged no allegiance to any other power."⁵¹ In addition to their confidence in the Baptist faith's accordance with American governmental principles, nineteenth-century American Baptists believed that their doctrine adhered to that of the apostolic church—the church ordained by Christ and established on earth by

⁴⁹ Southern Baptist Convention, "Basic Beliefs," <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp> (accessed March 29, 2012).

⁵⁰ The use of "Constitution" presumably refers to the First Amendment, which Jefferson influenced, though did not author.

⁵¹ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 78-79. The Hassells also included this anecdote in their *History*.

his apostles.⁵² The idea that their theology exemplified most clearly the principles of democratic government, and the conviction that their faith resembled most closely that of the apostolic church, gave Baptists compelling fodder to support the perception that they professed both political and theological truth. These commitments to their historical roots later provided the basis for anti-mission Baptists' arguments against a more market-driven and bureaucratic form of religion that emerged in the nineteenth century.

Early Baptist Doctrine and Ecclesiastical Structure

Nineteenth-century American Baptists, both pro-mission and anti-mission, believed that their theological principles derived directly from the apostolic church. To anti-missionists, this belief became an important point of proof that they were on the correct side of the controversy against modern innovations within the Baptist denomination. In *History of the Church of God*, C.B. and Sylvester Hassell explained why a claim to consistency with the apostolic church mattered to Baptists. “The church of the first century forms the standard and example for the church of all future ages,” they wrote. “Should there exist now on earth a body of professed Christians who occupy the same ground in faith and practice as that of the church of the first century, they are RIGHT; and if any should be found occupying a different position, they are WRONG.”⁵³

The Hassells asserted that several characteristics of the (Primitive) Baptist denomination revealed its loyalty to the first-century church. Among these “marks” were baptism by immersion, democratic church government, an unpaid and uneducated ministry, the “complete separation of church and state,” and “the independent or

⁵² See Hassell and Hassell, *History*, 269-326, and David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, and Other Parts of the World* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1813), 92-99.

⁵³ Hassell and Hassell, *History*, 269-270.

congregational polity or government of each local church, subject only to the Headship of Christ.” According to this last point, “Hierarchies and synods [were] unscriptural, tyrannous usurpations.”⁵⁴ Anti-mission Baptists connected the religious innovations of nineteenth-century American Protestantism to a form of “tyrannous” hierarchy, and therefore argued that Baptists who supported the mission movement rejected the denomination’s dedication to religious freedom.

Baptists’ background in Calvinism was another aspect of their history that helped to fuel the anti-mission controversy. Baptist theology drew significantly from its roots in the Calvinism of the Puritans, and Baptists at the turn of the nineteenth century retained strong ties to Calvinist doctrines such as predestination. David Benedict wrote that in the early 1800s, “the Associated Baptists were all professedly Calvinistic in their doctrinal sentiments.”⁵⁵ Historian E. Brooks Holifield observed that in the mid-eighteenth century, American Baptists “gravitated...toward the Calvinism of the Westminster and Philadelphia confessions,” which established “criteria for membership follow[ing] the pattern set by the seventeenth-century Puritans.”⁵⁶ James Mathis also provided a brief history of Baptists’ Calvinist views in *The Making of the Primitive Baptists*. In 1742, Mathis explained, the Philadelphia Baptist Association (which formed in 1702 and “acted as a national body” of Baptists) devised for its statement of faith “a modified form of the Calvinistic *London Confession of Faith* of 1689, modeled on the Presbyterian *Westminster Confession of Faith* of 1649.” The *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* dictated

⁵⁴ Hassell and Hassell, *History*, 291-294.

⁵⁵ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 138.

⁵⁶ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 276-278.

American Baptist doctrine until the mid-nineteenth century. The churches that adhered to this statement of faith believed that church membership should consist only of members of “God’s elect,” or those that God had predestined to salvation. In order to become church members, individuals were required to present “evidence” of their personal conversion experiences, although according to Calvinist belief salvation could never be confirmed for certain.⁵⁷

The personal conversion experience became a point of contention among Baptists when the mission movements of the nineteenth century arose. From a Calvinist point of view, those who claimed to be converted by missionaries were not necessarily saved even if they did “repent and accept,” since they probably were not members of God’s elect. Calvinist Baptists believed that a conversion experience was a mark of God’s election and gave one the ability to accept the gospel. The missionaries of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, argued that exposure to the gospel resulted in the opportunity for conversion.⁵⁸ When Baptist mission organizations first started, their members retained a Calvinist belief in predestination, but also maintained that the “elect” who had never heard the gospel should be exposed to it in order to understand God and salvation more fully.

Baptists in early America also adhered to a strict belief in the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, or the concept that the Bible was “the sole authority for Christian faith and life.” Baptists, as descendants of the Protestant Reformation, firmly believed that individuals with no religious education could read and interpret the Bible themselves.

⁵⁷ Mathis, *Making*, 22-23.

⁵⁸ Jeffrey Wayne Taylor, *Formation*, 127.

This doctrine was a primary way that Protestants after the Reformation differentiated themselves from Catholics, who upheld the belief that biblical interpretation should come primarily from the church hierarchy.⁵⁹ Many Protestant denominations accepted the utility of an educated clergy, and even demanded theological education for their ministers. Early Baptists, however, exhibited more skepticism toward theological education than other denominations. As E. Brooks Holifield pointed out, since the “early Baptist movement took hold mainly among the uneducated...many [Baptists] saw little need for educated theologians to guide them.” In the opinion of the prominent New England Baptist minister Isaac Backus, for example, “divine enlightenment” trumped “human learning.”⁶⁰

This mentality typified Baptists in colonial America, who mostly viewed the Bible as divinely inspired and the only spiritual authority necessary on earth. Thus, no other authority—such as a bishop or a pope—was needed to interpret scripture or impose doctrinal uniformity, and Baptists decried both the hierarchical structures and the emphasis on clerical education that characterized Catholicism and other Protestant denominations.⁶¹ Preachers in Baptist churches were first “called” by God and then elected by laity, if a congregation believed the divine calling to be genuine. This was the democratic allure of the Baptist denomination: congregations had the power to accept and hire—or reject and fire—preachers. Thus, according to Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, “the interests of the clergy could not be imposed upon the laity [but] the will of the laity

⁵⁹ Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 88-89.

⁶⁰ Holifield, *Theology*, 273.

⁶¹ Holifield, *Theology*, 275.

could, to a very considerable extent, be imposed on the clergy.” This ecclesiastical principle persisted in Southern Baptist churches when the Southern Baptist Convention formed, and continues to define Baptist churches today.⁶²

In accordance with their belief in *sola scriptura*, Baptists in colonial America reacted vehemently against established religion. They feared that if government possessed the power to regulate religion, it could impose outside authority on what should be a personal matter. Historians contend that “Baptists have vigorously defended the separation of church and state” since the efforts of Roger Williams to attain freedom of conscience in New England.⁶³ The anti-missionists fervently believed in this interpretation of history. As the Hassells noted with pride, “Baptists have always advocated, not simply religious toleration, but religious freedom.” In fact, they claimed, seventeenth-century English Baptists published the first confession of faith that proclaimed the “right” of religious freedom for all.⁶⁴ Baptists’ concept of democracy was evident in their doctrine and in the unique structure—or lack thereof—of their denomination, which emphasized individual liberty of conscience and local church autonomy while rejecting any semblance of hierarchical authority.

The way that the Baptist denomination functioned as a religious body was tied explicitly to this commitment to individual conscience. Unlike other Protestant

⁶² Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (Piscataway, New Jersey: 2005), 186.

⁶³ Butler, Balmer, and Wacker, *Religion in American Life*, 425.

⁶⁴ Hassell and Hassell, *History*, 296. The confession of faith to which the Hassells referred was probably the 1611 “Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland,” written by Thomas Helwys and accepted by scholars to be the first published Baptist confession of faith. Helwys stated that Jesus Christ was the only “King” or “Law-giver...[whose laws] no Prince, nor any whosoever, may add to, or diminish from,” according to scriptural authority. See Joe Early, Jr., *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press: 2009), 64-70.

denominations such as Methodism, which operated as a hierarchical episcopacy, the Baptist denomination had no hierarchy. Instead, individual Baptist churches possessed full autonomy in spiritual matters, and the congregation as a whole existed as the highest spiritual authority on earth. A church formed by baptized members of the elect, wrote Baptist historian William Fristoe in 1808, “has certain rights granted her by the great Lawgiver and Head of the church, which no power civil [or] ecclesiastic has a right to deprive her of. . . she is the ground and pillar of truth. . . and all ministers of the Gospel and other officers in the church, are nothing more than her servants.”⁶⁵ These “servants,” however, had duties to the church body as well as to Christ. In the tradition of Puritanism, it was the responsibility of Baptist pastors and congregations “to watch over each other. . . see that each fellow member maintains family worship, and suppresses sin and vice.”⁶⁶ “In our well regulated communities,” David Benedict wrote of early nineteenth-century Baptist churches, “all the members of all grades, and of both sexes, felt bound to watch over each other, and become helpers in all matters of discipline; and all were held to a strict account in their moral conduct generally.”⁶⁷

In addition to individual churches, Baptists also formed associations, or unions among several churches in the same region. These associations did not impose a hierarchical structure on individual churches, but rather provided for social and religious communion among individual churches. In his history of the Kettocton Association in Virginia, William Fristoe explained what occurred at an annual associational meeting:

⁶⁵ William Fristoe, *The History of the Kettocton Baptist Association, 1766-1808* (1808; Reprint, Stephens City, Virginia: Commercial Press, 1978), 12.

⁶⁶ Fristoe, *History of the Kettocton Baptist Association*, 57.

⁶⁷ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 78.

Information is obtained respecting desolate churches, or congregations who are destitute of the ministry of the word of God and administration of the ordinances thereof, which gives an opportunity of devising ways for relieving such churches in their widowed state, by nominating individuals, and encouraging preachers to visit and preach to them, to forward their growth in grace and improvement in the knowledge of spiritual things... [The association also served] as an advisory council, when application is made by any of the churches by way of enquiry in matters or questions intricate or mysterious, the association gives her opinion and advice, but never attempts to enforce her measures so as to infringe on the independence of church government; for it is a doctrine held sacred in this community, that a congregational church of Christ is the highest court God hath established on earth.⁶⁸

Baptist associational formation, then, functioned to provide an information-sharing network among member churches that sought to promote denominational union and a democratic approach to church government. Although associations provided structure, churches were voluntarily members, and thus no one church or member had authority over any other. Baptists prided themselves in this democratic form of church governance. Among Baptists in colonial America, common experiences of religious intolerance and persecution reinforced the need for, and strengthened their commitment to, democratic religious organization.

Experience of Baptists in Early America

In colonial America, members of Baptist churches tended to be those who had left other denominations, especially Congregationalism.⁶⁹ This made them religious dissenters, and subjected them to various forms of persecution. Puritan New England—particularly Massachusetts—was renowned for religious intolerance; in seventeenth-

⁶⁸ Fristoe, *History of the Ketocton Baptist Association*, 7-8.

⁶⁹ William Warren Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1942), 120.

century Massachusetts, Baptists “were whipped, imprisoned, and banished.”⁷⁰ Since the Puritans established the colony for the purpose of reforming the Church of England by being a paradigm of a pious society, Puritan leaders viewed democracy as “dangerous” to their cause.⁷¹ The colony’s authorities reserved the right to expel those who disagreed with the doctrines promulgated by religious leaders.⁷² As a result, dissenters were ousted from Massachusetts under the guise of being punished for political sedition.⁷³

One such dissenter, Roger Williams, became the progenitor of American Baptists. In the late 1630s, Williams attracted a following of similarly discontented Puritans and established the colony of Rhode Island (and the first Baptist church in America) as a refuge for those seeking freedom of conscience.⁷⁴ Williams denounced the establishment of a state religion, arguing that the two spheres were inherently separate: “The source of civil power is not religious,” he claimed, “but natural and flows from society.” As the government, then, had no power over religion, religion should have no influence in government. Williams had witnessed first-hand the repercussions of governmental interference in the spiritual realm—and vice versa—in Massachusetts, and believed that both politics and religion would benefit most from being exercised in separate domains.⁷⁵

The religious intolerance that Roger Williams faced and fought against was not confined to the New England colonies. It also existed prevalently in the middle and

⁷⁰ William H. Brackney, ed., *Baptist Life and Thought: 1600-1980, A Source Book* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1983), 95.

⁷¹ Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 85.

⁷² Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 90.

⁷³ Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 94.

⁷⁴ Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 123.

⁷⁵ Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 125-126.

southern colonies, and Baptists encountered a large part of the persecution that occurred there. Virginia's established Anglican Church particularly oppressed Baptists. Non-Anglican preachers were required to obtain a license to preach. If found preaching without this license, they could be arrested.⁷⁶ Obtaining such a license was no easy task, however; applicants had to take an examination and apply to an Anglican minister for approval, which was granted only to preachers who were willing to agree with a majority of the Church of England's tenets. Additionally, Virginia Baptists could not build or utilize a church building without navigating a tedious bureaucratic process. William Fristoe explained that each request required a petition signed by "twenty free persons, with the addition of two acting justices of the peace, certifying that the above signers were inhabitants of the place." Such petitions were difficult to put together, and "it was both discouraging and mortifying; [for] the attempt to offer a petition, when it was known, if granted at all... would be with great reluctance."⁷⁷ In addition to these methods of discrimination, beatings and other forms of physical violence, as well as the deliberate impeding of baptisms, commonly were inflicted upon Baptist preachers in Virginia to keep them from carrying out their pastoral duties.⁷⁸

Although there was no official law in Virginia providing for persecution of dissenters, Baptists were punished under the label of "disturbers of the peace" for upsetting the social order.⁷⁹ Historian Rhys Isaac has described the reactions of the (largely Anglican) gentry toward the (primarily lower-class) Virginia Baptists in the mid-

⁷⁶ Fristoe, *History of the Ketocton Baptist Association*, 35.

⁷⁷ Fristoe, *History of the Ketocton Baptist Association*, 37.

⁷⁸ Fristoe, *History of the Ketocton Baptist Association*, 39-40.

⁷⁹ Fristoe, *History of the Ketocton Baptist Association*, 36.

1700s. With Baptists' condemnation of the established church, they "introduced more popular focuses of authority and sought to impose a radically different and more inclusive model for the maintenance of order in society." This philosophy upset the social hierarchy of Virginia in which lower, uneducated, non-landholding classes—from which Baptists drew most of their numbers—owed deference to the Anglican-dominated planter class. By flouting the social hierarchy through their religious beliefs and practices, Baptists reaped the contempt of their social superiors who "accused them of 'carrying on a mutiny against the authority of the land.'"⁸⁰

Due to their experiences of persecution, Baptists appeared at the forefront of the fight for religious liberty during the creation of the new United States of America. While it is doubtful that Thomas Jefferson gleaned his philosophy of democratic government from interacting with Baptist congregations, he and other politicians empathized with the Baptists' cause of freedom of conscience. Jefferson drafted a bill providing for religious freedom in Virginia, where persecution of religious minorities (especially Baptists) prevailed. John Leland, a Baptist minister who would later become one of the first opponents of the mission movement, was an enthusiastic supporter of religious liberty and of Jefferson's Statute for Religious Freedom in Virginia, which the state adopted in 1786. When Jefferson became president in 1801, Leland was serving as a minister in Cheshire, Massachusetts. For Jefferson's continued support of religious freedom and "as a token of esteem" from Baptists, Leland and his fellow Cheshire citizens bestowed upon him a 1,235-pound block of cheese carrying the inscription "Rebellion to tyrants is

⁸⁰ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (1982; Reprint, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 173-175.

obedience to God.”⁸¹ President Jefferson gained further support among Baptists when he famously expressed his approval of religious freedom to the Baptist minority in Connecticut, who feared that rights of conscience might be too easily taken away from them and other religious minorities in their state. In a letter to Connecticut’s Danbury Baptist Association in 1802, Jefferson astutely drew a phrase from Roger Williams to allay their fears, writing that he believed the “wall of separation between church and state” provided for in the First Amendment to be “the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience.”⁸²

Influence of the First Great Awakening on Baptists

The laws and governmental provisions for freedom of conscience established in the early republic certainly accorded with Baptists’ desire to secure religious liberty in the legal and political arenas. The precursor to this success, however, and the most significant factor in the eventual acceptance of Baptists within the broader culture, was the pervasive religious revival of the First Great Awakening, which allowed the Baptist denomination to grow rapidly. Much debate exists among scholars regarding the dates of the First Great Awakening, but there has, according to Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, “been near unanimity across the theological spectrum that something extraordinary happened during the period approximately from 1739 through 1742 that is worthy of the name Great Awakening.”⁸³ Religious historian Thomas S. Kidd asserts that the “First Great Awakening started before Jonathan Edwards’s 1734-1735 Northampton revival and

⁸¹ Hatch, *Democratization*, 95-96.

⁸² Thomas Jefferson to Messrs. Nehemiah Dodge and Others, a Committee of the Danbury Baptist Association, in the State of Connecticut (January 1, 1802), in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984), 510.

⁸³ Finke and Stark, *Churching*, 87-88.

lasted roughly through the end of the American Revolution, when disestablishment, theological change, and a new round of growth started the (even more imprecise) ‘Second’ Great Awakening.”⁸⁴ While the exact dates of the great revival are nebulous, historians generally agree that the peak of the revival occurred around 1740, and the waves of religious excitement generated by the First Great Awakening reverberated for decades thereafter.

This series of revivals that struck the American colonies during the eighteenth century triggered a greater emphasis on religion as a personal experience rather than as an institutional affiliation. “What is striking about the period after the Revolution in America,” Nathan O. Hatch has observed, “is not disestablishment per se but the impotence of Congregational, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian churches in the face of dissent. At the turn of the century, their own houses lay in such disarray that movements such as the Methodists, Baptists, and Christians were given free rein to experiment.”⁸⁵ The former dissenters became the new mainstream in American Christianity, and their numbers continued to multiply into the nineteenth century.⁸⁶ Their growing popularity also gave them greater leverage in the quest for religious liberty. As William Warren Sweet asserted, “The great increase in the number of dissenters as a result of the great colonial Awakenings was still another factor in creating an environment favorable to the growth of religious freedom.” During the late eighteenth century, Baptists comprised the

⁸⁴ Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xix.

⁸⁵ Hatch, *Democratization*, 59.

⁸⁶ This is not to say that Baptists did not face continuing intolerance for their perceived threat to the social order. For a description of the Anglican gentry’s reaction to the new religious expressions born out of the First Great Awakening in Virginia, see chapter 15 in Kidd’s *The Great Awakening*.

largest religious denomination—indeed the “largest single body”—striving for religious freedom in the colonies.⁸⁷

Both religious practice and doctrine in American Protestantism underwent dramatic changes as a result of the First Great Awakening’s influence. “New Lights,” as the often charismatic followers of the Awakening were called, threatened the standing social order by promoting religious populism and rejecting the need for an educated clergy. Additionally, New Light churches often required converts to give accounts of their intense conversion experiences for evidence of salvation, which was “validated” further if churchgoers noted a change in the convert’s behavior.⁸⁸ An Anglican minister in Virginia described these conversion experiences and the preachers who elicited them. New Light ministers, he wrote, caused their revival audiences to be “scar’d, cry out, fall down & work like people in convulsion fits.” They “Screw[ed] up the People to the greatest heights of religious Phrenzy, and then [left] them in that state.”⁸⁹

Baptist theology already possessed many of the features of First Great Awakening religion. Baptists’ commitment to *sola scriptura* precluded any need for an educated clergy, and their involvement in the struggle for religious liberty made them veterans of upsetting social order and established churches. Moreover, the powerful displays of conversion exhibited by New Lights were consistent with Baptists’ Calvinist doctrine, which required visible indication of membership in the elect. Because Baptist beliefs resembled closely the religious principles promoted by the revivals, the First Great

⁸⁷ Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, 333.

⁸⁸ Isaac, *Transformation*, 169.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 236.

Awakening gave a tremendous boost to the denomination's popularity and fostered its subsequent growth. By 1800, Baptists were the fastest growing religious denomination in the United States.⁹⁰ The mission movement that permeated American Protestantism during the early nineteenth century further fostered this growth.

⁹⁰ Brackney, ed., *Baptist Life*, 96.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE EMERGENCE OF MISSIONS

Today, Baptists execute one of the most significant missionary programs in the world, thanks to the Southern Baptist Convention's support of over ten thousand foreign and domestic missionaries.⁹¹ This current emphasis on missions, however, did not develop among Baptists or other Protestants until the turn of the nineteenth century. During the first few decades of the 1800s, another series of populist religious revivals known as the Second Great Awakening brought dynamic change to American Protestantism and incited the beginning of missionary efforts that are now so popular among Protestant denominations in the United States.

Historical Context of the Second Great Awakening

Like the First Great Awakening before it, the Second Great Awakening has rather ambiguous points of beginning and ending. Most historians agree with Roger Finke and Rodney Stark that it occurred generally "From the early 1800s through the early 1830s" in the form of "a series of local revival meetings" throughout the United States.⁹² The revivals of the Second Great Awakening took place over a vast spread of the country. The famous 1801 camp meeting in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, launched hundreds of similar small revival meetings throughout the south, while churches in the north—particularly in the

⁹¹ See the report of the North American Mission Board in the Southern Baptist Convention's "Annual of the 2010 Southern Baptist Convention" (Nashville, Tennessee: Prepared by the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2010), 208. See also the International Mission Board's "2010 Fiscal Resources Strategy Plan" (Richmond, Virginia: 2010), 24-25.

⁹² Finke and Stark, *Churching*, 88-89.

“Burned-Over” district of New York—experienced equally fervent revivals.⁹³ Historian Daniel Walker Howe has determined that, “In terms of duration, numbers of people involved, or any other measure, the Second Great Awakening dwarfed the First.”⁹⁴

Whereas the First Great Awakening had promoted the elimination of social hierarchies in the religious sphere, the ideology characteristic of the Second Great Awakening placed an even greater emphasis on religious populism. The Protestantism typical of the Second Great Awakening era continued to do away with hierarchy and “high culture” in religious life, as Baptists and other marginalized religious groups of the colonial period had begun to do.⁹⁵ In addition, the Second Great Awakening promoted greater individual choice in spiritual matters to early nineteenth-century Americans, who embraced an increasing variety of religious options. Since the United States had been newly established as a politically egalitarian nation, proponents of populist religion wondered why people should not be able to choose their own religious beliefs as well.⁹⁶ As a result, “new forms of organization and belief” and a multitude of new denominations cropped up in the religious field after 1800.⁹⁷ Although Baptists were not a new denomination, the Second Great Awakening helped even more to foster their growth due to its emphasis on democratic religion, which Baptists ardently endorsed.

Several aspects of the political and cultural environment of the early republic aided in the transformation of American religion during the first few decades of the

⁹³ Butler, Balmer, and Wacker, *Religion in American Life*, 172-174.

⁹⁴ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 186.

⁹⁵ Hatch, *Democratization*, 5.

⁹⁶ Hatch, *Democratization*, 24.

⁹⁷ Hatch, *Democratization*, 7.

1800s. The early nineteenth-century United States witnessed a conversion to a market economy, increased land availability, and rapid population growth. These factors provided an ideal environment for religious competition to flourish, and, combined with the new country's commitment to freedom of religion, they allowed a "marketplace" of religion to develop. According to Daniel Walker Howe, the disestablishment of religion after the American Revolution actually "facilitated" the growth of religion in the new United States, and denominations and organizations were able to "[multiply] beyond number."⁹⁸ "If America was becoming a democratic marketplace of equally competing individuals with interests to promote, it is not difficult to understand the appeal of insurgent religious movements who claimed to take a place at the center of culture by virtue of their popular following," agrees Nathan O. Hatch.⁹⁹

The widespread belief in the right to choose one's own religious affiliation was the fundamental spirit of Second Great Awakening religion. The competitive religious environment of the early 1800s inspired ministers to become "salesmen" of their faith, and the innovation of missionary movements became a primary means for them to gain new followers. During the first half of the nineteenth century, missions proved to be an effective method of evangelism that stimulated church growth. By 1845, the number of Christian clergy in the United States had grown to 40,000—more than twenty times the number it had been in 1775.¹⁰⁰ From 1776 to 1850, the number of religious adherents in

⁹⁸ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 165-166.

⁹⁹ Hatch, *Democratization*, 61-62.

¹⁰⁰ Hatch, *Democratization*, 4.

America rose from 17 percent of the country's population to 37 percent.¹⁰¹

The Birth of Missions

Although many local and denominational missionary societies formed during the early nineteenth century, the more collective efforts that arose later had a greater impact on the mission movement in the United States. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), established in 1812, was comprised mainly of Congregational and Presbyterian members and supported mission endeavors by those denominations. A focus on home missions followed the formation of foreign mission organizations. The American Home Missionary Society, also formed by Congregationalists and Presbyterians in 1826, sent missionaries from New England to what was then the western frontier.¹⁰² Mission organizations as well as other types of voluntary societies became common features of American religion during the era of the Second Great Awakening. The American Sunday School Union, for example, formed in 1824, with the American Tract Society following in 1825.¹⁰³ Neither of these societies had a denominational affiliation, but members of various denominations joined these efforts as well as denomination-specific organizations that were formed for the purpose of spreading the gospel.

Baptists in the United States began to form local missionary societies as early as 1800.¹⁰⁴ The first effort of Baptists to establish a collective missionary program occurred

¹⁰¹ Finke and Stark, *Churching*, 22.

¹⁰² Colin Brummitt Goodykoontz, *Home Missions on the American Frontier: With Particular Reference to the American Home Missionary Society* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1939), 7.

¹⁰³ Posey, *Religious Strife*, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Goodykoontz, *Home Missions*, 152-153.

on May 18, 1814, when the “General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions” (often referred to more simply as the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions) formed in Philadelphia.¹⁰⁵ An organization for home missions, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, followed in 1832. Before 1814, according to David Benedict, American Baptists’ involvement in organized missions had consisted of “a few small societies for domestic missions,” which dispatched missionaries to “destitute regions”—those areas that had no permanent or regular preachers.¹⁰⁶

With the establishment of mission organizations, “two streams” of missionaries that affected Baptists came to the western frontier throughout the 1820s: those from Baptist-affiliated societies, and those from other New England voluntary societies.¹⁰⁷ Leaders of these mission societies tended to be northerners, a fact that caused contention between frontiersmen and eastern missionaries who often, as Bertram Wyatt-Brown observed, “could not hide their contempt for the ignorance, provincialism, backwardness, and presumed irreligion of the native whites.”¹⁰⁸ The opposition that they encountered, however, did not discourage missionaries or their sponsoring organizations to cease mission efforts either abroad or at home. Instead, the popularity of mission societies in the United States boomed during the 1820s and 1830s.

¹⁰⁵ Mathis, *Making*, 55.

¹⁰⁶ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁷ Mathis, *Making*, 65.

¹⁰⁸ Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement,” 517.

Religious Changes Resulting from the Second Great Awakening

Millennial ideology was a significant factor that stimulated the growth of the mission movement. Many evangelical Protestants in the early 1800s desired to hasten Christ's return to earth. Two different millennial interpretations were common during this period. Postmillennialists, who believed that Christ would return at the end of a thousand years of peace, viewed the millennium "as the climax and goal of human progress, with human effort contributing to the realization of God's providential design."

Premillennialists, on the other hand, believed that Christ's return would initiate the millennium, and depended on "divine intervention for deliverance." While anti-missionists tended to be premillennialists like their Puritan forebears, it was postmillennialism that particularly thrived in the early 1800s. According to Howe, this view was strengthened by the nineteenth century's "material improvements, political democratization, and moral reform [which] all provided encouraging signs that history was moving in the right direction, as did the spread of Christianity to the four corners of the globe."¹⁰⁹

Since most Protestants adopted the ideology of postmillennialism, they believed in the necessity of a widespread missionary movement. Anti-mission Baptists viewed this idea as antithetical to the tenets of Calvinism. The millennialism that emphasized missions as a way to win converts and hasten Christ's return, James Mathis argued, "replaced an older Calvinist orthodoxy with...[a] theology which emphasized human instrumentality over divine power in salvation."¹¹⁰ Whereas Calvinists believed that

¹⁰⁹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 285-286.

¹¹⁰ Mathis, *Making*, 39.

God's grace alone granted salvation, proponents of missions proclaimed that human effort was necessary to spread salvation throughout the world by disseminating the message of Christianity.

Anti-mission Baptists saw additional threats in the means of evangelism that accompanied the spread of postmillennialism. The emphasis on missions encouraged ministerial education and Sunday schools as ways to advance evangelism, which, in the eyes of anti-missionists, seemed to go against the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Baptists believed that individuals could read and understand the Bible without clerical interpretation, and most initially rejected the idea of theological education, although such education has since become the standard among most present-day Baptists. Since anti-missionists were particularly anti-institution, they saw no need for ministers to be educated at specialized institutions, or for children to be instructed in religious matters by teachers other than their own parents. Moreover, the mission system required vast financial resources to keep it afloat. Mission societies often requested money from individual churches in order to sustain their mission efforts and the missionaries that they supported. To anti-mission Baptists, mission societies were not only unnecessary innovations, but also represented an imposition of power over individuals' religious beliefs and the autonomy of local churches. National societies' entreating of money from individuals and churches, as well as their encouragement of theological education, seemed to reveal their underlying aspirations toward hierarchy and bureaucracy.

Effects of Nineteenth-Century Missions

In measuring the effects of the Second Great Awakening, William Warren Sweet noted that the frontier states particularly were affected by the new acceptance of formerly

dissenting denominations. Two such denominations, Methodists and Baptists, competed for the greatest numbers of adherents in the early west. From 1800 to 1803 in Kentucky, for example, Baptists and Methodists both gained over ten thousand members. By 1820, “the Methodists and Baptists had about 21,000 members each in the state of Kentucky...while all other religious organizations combined had less than 1,000 members.” Sweet surmised that “These proportions [held]...for most of the frontier communities at this period.”¹¹¹ The mission effort provided the most significant contribution to the growth of the Methodist and Baptist denominations.

Preoccupied by their fervor for missions, Hatch argued in *The Democratization of American Christianity*, many “Americans found it difficult to realize...that a commitment to private judgment could drive people apart, even as it raised beyond measure their hopes for unity.”¹¹² Baptists were indeed driven apart over the issue of evangelism. As a whole, Baptists welcomed missions as a beneficial means for promoting the spread of the gospel and, consequently, the growth of their denomination. Many of the religious innovations brought about by the Second Great Awakening, however, challenged Baptists’ core beliefs and practices. While most Baptists found themselves able to reconcile missions with their commitment to the fundamental doctrines of religious liberty, egalitarianism, and even predestination, a significant number of Baptists reacted negatively to such religious change.

The Baptists who objected to nineteenth-century religious innovations viewed the formation of mission organizations as religious bureaucratization, which threatened to

¹¹¹ William Warren Sweet, “The Churches as Moral Courts of the Frontier,” *Church History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (March 1933): 3-21, 10-11, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/3691954> (accessed February 19, 2012).

¹¹² Hatch, *Democratization*, 81.

undermine the autonomy of local churches, impose a religious hierarchy, and lead Baptists astray from their Calvinist foundations. As Charles Grandison Finney, one of the best-known evangelists of the Second Great Awakening, claimed, “A revival of religion is not a miracle...[but] a result of the right use of the constituted means.”¹¹³ This mentality was a direct threat to the belief in predestination, which anti-missionists held as sacred truth. While anti-mission Baptists were not opposed to preaching the gospel in order to provide spiritual sustenance to the elect, they fought vehemently against organizations and societies that promoted evangelism and elicited conversions that they believed to be false. As they made clear in their own expressions of opposition, anti-missionists’ resistance to the modern mission movement stemmed from their understanding of Baptist history, and from their staunch commitment to what they believed was “pure” Baptist doctrine.

¹¹³ Quoted in Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 171.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ANTI-MISSION RESPONSE

Anti-mission Baptists certainly disagreed with the formation of the ABCFM and other denominational mission organizations started at the turn of the nineteenth century. Their opposition became more fervent, however, as other Baptists began to join such societies and even create their own. In particular, the formation of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions in 1814 triggered intense antagonism among Baptists. By 1820, anti-missionists had begun to unite behind impassioned figures like John Taylor, Daniel Parker, and other individual ministers who preached fiery sermons, published rancorous essays, and printed numerous periodicals condemning the religious innovations of the nineteenth century. Three chief arguments against missions pervade anti-missionist literature. First, anti-mission Baptists resisted the creation of organizations because they were “worldly” and threatened religious liberty. Second, many Baptists disagreed with the emphasis on theological education—both seminaries and Sunday schools—that accompanied the growth of the mission movement. They believed that such education was not only unnecessary, but also that it was not designed by God. Third, anti-missionists opposed the basic religious doctrine of the missionaries, who they believed distorted scripture and preoccupied themselves with the things of the world. All of the anti-missionists’ opposing arguments can be traced to their doctrinal commitments and their perception of Baptist history.

Opposition to Mission Organizations

One of anti-missionists' greatest objections to the modern mission movement stemmed from missionaries' insistence that the spreading of the gospel required the formation of societies and other voluntary or benevolent organizations. Anti-missionists did not necessarily oppose the preaching of the gospel, as long as it occurred in line with their views of Baptist doctrine. Rather, they disagreed with the structure of mission organizations and the means that these organizations employed in order to evangelize. The itinerant minister and fierce anti-missionist John Taylor, for example, actually believed that "preaching the gospel to the unsaved was necessary and useful." Despite his support for preaching, however, he did not approve of the "structure" that Baptists employed in their missionary organizations.¹¹⁴ As the number and membership of mission societies boomed during the early 1800s, opposing Baptists quickly pointed out that no warrant for such organizations existed in the Bible. Therefore, claimed anti-missionists, they were secular institutions and should not be supported by faithful Christians. This perceived "worldliness" of missionary societies, and their reliance upon money to sustain them, was a chief reason behind anti-missionists' opposition. Anti-mission Baptists, like many other Christians, believed that it was God's will for Christians to be "in the world...[while] not being of the world."¹¹⁵

Much of the earliest anti-mission literature was intended to argue that mission boards and societies were unbiblical and therefore harmful. As far as anti-missionists

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Chester Raymond Young, ed., *Baptists on the American Frontier: A History of Ten Baptist Churches of Which the Author Has Been Alternately a Member* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1995), 61.

¹¹⁵ Daniel Parker, et al., *The Authors' Defence by Explanations and Matters of Fact: Remarks on Church Discipline and Reflections on the Church of Christ, with the Utility and Benefits of Associations* (Vincennes, Indiana: E. Stout, 1824), 19.

were concerned, “the gospel ha[d] been conducted, directed and supported for nearly eighteen hundred years without such a plan as the [Baptist] Board ha[d] prescribed.”¹¹⁶ In his 1819 treatise *Thoughts on Missions*, John Taylor labeled “*Missionary Boards, Conventions, Societies, and Theological Schools*” as “deadly evil[s].” These innovations threatened Baptists, according to Taylor, because they originated not from a biblical example, but rather from acts of men. In Taylor’s view, missionaries cared only about “self aggrandizement, and getting money.” This made their efforts contrary to God’s plan—and, therefore, correct Baptist doctrine.¹¹⁷ To anti-missionists, it was “mortifying” that those who called themselves Baptists would deign to “mingle with the Methodist—the world, or anything that [was] calculated to make them conspicuous, and popular.”¹¹⁸

Like Taylor, anti-mission leader Daniel Parker also argued that evangelization and religious education should occur without “mingl[ing] matters of religion with the things of this world.”¹¹⁹ In 1820, echoing Taylor’s *Thoughts on Missions*, Parker condemned the “mission system” as a “moral evil” contrary to Baptist doctrine.¹²⁰ He claimed that the arguments supporting missions were “drawn [more] from the wisdom of the world, than the authority of the bible,” and that the biblical references cited by missionaries gave “more to answer the plan of man’s invention, than give the true

¹¹⁶ 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, Indiana: Stout & Osborn, 1820), 32-33.

¹¹⁷ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions* (Frankfort, Kentucky: 1819). Publisher unknown. No pagination.

¹¹⁸ Gilbert Beebe, ed., *Signs of the Times*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (March 13, 1833) (New Vernon, New York).

¹¹⁹ Parker, *A Public Address*, 9.

¹²⁰ Parker, *A Public Address*, 37.

meaning of God’s word.”¹²¹ Joshua Lawrence, an anti-mission Baptist minister, also maintained that missionaries themselves—not God—were the “inventors” of Bible and tract societies, as well as Sunday schools.¹²² Lawrence repeatedly referred to missionaries as “priests” and “craftsmen,” and associated the modern missionary movement with the efforts of Catholics, who established a “Congregation for Propagation of the Faith” in the seventeenth century.¹²³ When Baptists started to organize mission activity in England, Lawrence claimed, they began to “hatch this missionary egg, which has since filled the States with a peace-disturbing brood of crafts, without thus saith the Lord for their proceeding.”¹²⁴

The consequences of following a worldly approach to religion as opposed to God’s plan, asserted anti-missionists, were greed and corruption. To anti-mission Baptists, missionaries appeared to believe that “It [was] more blessed to receive than to give,” rather than the opposite proverb found in the Bible.¹²⁵ John Taylor worried that the money and power that missionaries accumulated through organizational support would ultimately become corrupting influences. As support for this argument, Taylor claimed that medieval Catholic priests had been corrupted by the money and power given to them

¹²¹ Parker, *A Public Address*, 3.

¹²² Joshua Lawrence, *A Patriotic Discourse Delivered by the Late Elder Joshua Lawrence at the Old Church in Tarborough, North Carolina, on Sunday the 4th of July, 1830* (Reprint, Carthage, Illinois: The Primitive Baptist Library, [196-?]), 33.

¹²³ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 24.

¹²⁴ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 27.

¹²⁵ Alexander Campbell, ed., *The Christian Baptist, Published Monthly*, Vol. I (1827), Buffalo Brooke County, VA: Printed and Published by A. Campbell at the Buffalo Printing-Office (Reprint, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1955), 221.

by the church hierarchy.¹²⁶ Other Baptists eagerly agreed with Taylor. Rudolph Rorer, a reader of *The Primitive Baptist*, wrote to the periodical in 1836 to express his concern that missions had “their foundation on money” and therefore were evil, since, according to the Bible, “money is the root of all evil.”¹²⁷ In order to obtain money, missionaries employed “artful measures...disgustful to common modesty,” such as forming bureaucratic organizations with ever-increasing levels of hierarchy. John Taylor complained:

They begin with missionary societies; then they create a great board of different officers, and then select the most vigorous and artful agent they can find, to create more societies of different grades, as Female Societies, Cent Societies, Mite Societies, Children Societies, and even Negro Societies, both free and bond; besides the sale of books of various kinds, and in some instances the sale of images.¹²⁸

Missionaries’ tactic of selling items to make money frequently made them targets of criticism. Baptist minister James Osbourn criticized their “*gipsey-like* mode of dragging a few dollars, or a few cents, or a finger ring, or a necklace, or pen knives, bodkins, thimbles, &c. from simple-hearted men, women, boys and girls.”¹²⁹ Joshua Lawrence objected that, rather than merely giving Bibles to the heathen, missionaries sold the Bibles “at any price they [could] get.”¹³⁰ In *Thoughts on Missions*, John Taylor related an anecdote told by a well-known Baptist missionary, Luther Rice, in which a poor widow,

¹²⁶ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, n.p.

¹²⁷ Mark Bennett, ed., “Missionary Spirit,” *The Primitive Baptist*, Vol. 1 No. 20 (October 22, 1836).

¹²⁸ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, n.p.

¹²⁹ James Osbourn, *The Voice of Truth from the Far West; or Serious Reflections on the Present Corrupt Missionary Doings in the Great Valley of Mississippi* (Indiana: Ezekiel Saunders, Jeremiah Cash and Others, 1838), 55.

¹³⁰ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 33.

after hearing missionaries' pleas for help, desired to help "the poor Hindoos" by praying for their salvation. According to Taylor, Rice told the widow "that she must not do it, till she first paid some money." Though she was unable to give more than twenty-five cents, she gave up the sum cheerfully, and was subsequently delighted that she now had "the liberty to pray for the poor heathen."¹³¹ Telling people that they were unworthy to pray until they had given money to missions disgusted the anti-missionists, for it "[made] merchandise of the gospel, by offering their services in the market to the highest bidder."¹³² This tactic, complained anti-missionists, allowed "poor, starving children" to be "swindled out of their last half-penny" for a cause that God himself did not support.¹³³

Mission organizations' need for money to operate offended anti-mission Baptists because it differed from the example given in the Bible of how preachers of the gospel should make their living. "How very different are the characters of those men from the ancient Missionaries of the cross of Christ...who preached without pay," John Taylor lamented. He noted that, upon becoming a frontier minister, he expected to live in a difficult financial situation. He graciously took what little church members could afford to give him, which tended to be food and other provisions rather than money. Taylor's total payment, he claimed, "never amounted to fifty dollars per year, exclusive of the food myself and horse lived one [*sic*], and my own food scarcely safe from putrefaction

¹³¹ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, n.p.

¹³² Gilbert Beebe, ed., *A Compilation of Editorial Articles, Copied from the "Signs of the Times," Embracing a Period of Forty-Two Years; in which is Reflected the Doctrine and Order of the Old School, or Primitive Baptists*, Vol. II (Middletown, Orange County, New York: Re-Published by Benton L. Beebe, 1874), 630.

¹³³ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. II, 273.

from want of salt.”¹³⁴ Daniel Parker, too, claimed that he thought payment in food and other goods was more useful than money, as one’s “family cannot eat money.”¹³⁵ The preachers lauded in the Bible “had rather die” than be paid for preaching, Taylor observed, while nineteenth-century missionaries were metaphorical parasites. He compared contemporary missionaries to “horse-leech[es], ever crying, *Give, Give!!!*” in their entreaties for money to support missions. This worldly quest, however, would not endure because it was not favored by God: “It is said of the horse-leech,” Taylor continued, “that it is so thirsty for blood, that when it sticks on the horse’s legs, unless prevented, it will suck on till it bursts, and of course falls off and dies.”¹³⁶ Taylor’s prediction of the inevitable demise of missions, of course, never came to pass.

Despite the monetary gains that missionary societies made with their campaigns, missionaries still grieved that the money did not go far enough, which further angered anti-missionists. Gilbert Beebe criticized Benjamin Hill, corresponding secretary of the Baptist Home Mission Society, who reportedly “wept while he wrote the lamentable tale that [the Society’s] treasury was overdrawn.” “These crocodile tears of Mr. Hill,” Beebe wrote, “are full of deception and hypocrisy; they are only intended to work upon the weak minds of those who have money.”¹³⁷ What was more, the “Lord’s treasury never was exhausted,” for “it is inexhaustible.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, n.p.

¹³⁵ Parker, *A Public Address*, 30.

¹³⁶ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, n.p.

¹³⁷ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. II, 120.

¹³⁸ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. II, 563.

To anti-mission Baptists, the missionaries' infatuation with the things of the world was evident in their church buildings and in the fact that their pastors were paid. In 1838, James Osbourn observed that "most of the Baptist chapels in the cities and large towns at the north and east, cost from ten to fifty thousand dollars each; and the preachers' wages for their services, standing at, from seven hundred to two thousand dollars per annum." He accused foreign missionaries of living in luxury, while still proclaiming that the mission endeavor lacked resources. If missionaries truly served God and cared about "the souls of heathen men and women," Osbourn wrote, "they would never suffer those Indians, Birmans, Hindoos, and others, to perish in their sins just for the want of pecuniary aid, when they themselves are indulging in sinful luxuries, parade, and gallantry."¹³⁹ Daniel Parker argued that if God had intended for missionaries to do his work, "no doubt but he would provide for their support where he sent them, as he has done for his other preachers he has sent." The "kingdom of God is like a grain of Mustard seed," Parker went on, in that "if God has planted it there, it is the Lord's work to make it grow."¹⁴⁰

These departures of missionaries from scriptural examples seemed proof to anti-missionists that the mission movement was not part of God's plan for the world. In particular, the hiring and designation of missionaries by societies was an affront to anti-mission Baptists' belief that ministers must be "called" by God in order to preach the gospel. "We stand opposed to the mission plan," Daniel Parker wrote,

¹³⁹ Osbourn, *Voice of Truth*, 56. Osbourn's statistics regarding clergy salaries and building costs seem inflated, based on the fact that the average salary for a Baptist clergyman was only \$536 in 1906. See Finke and Stark, *Churching*, 184. Nevertheless, this exaggerated style was typical of anti-mission Baptists' expression of disdain for a paid clergy.

¹⁴⁰ Parker, *A Public Address*, 34.

in every point and part where it interferes or is connected with the ministry, either in depending on the church to give them a call, or seminaries of learning to qualify them to preach, or an established fund for the preacher to look back upon for a support, and when the board assumes authority to appoint the fields of their labor, we believe they sin in attempting a work that alone belongs to the Divine Being.¹⁴¹

John Taylor also argued that modern missionaries had not received God's calling to the ministry, and in his opinion they had "very moderate preaching abilities." Despite this, "the approbation of the Great Board [of Foreign Missions]" inflated their egos until they possessed the arrogance to become preachers.¹⁴² Daniel Parker also argued with the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions, whose "sole purpose," he claimed, was to "give pious young men education to qualify them to preach," and thus make them servants of the Board, which aimed to "hold the government of the ministry in their own hands" rather than to do God's will.¹⁴³ In an 1830 editorial in the *Church Advocate*, Parker suggested that anti-mission churches create their own "articles of faith" taken from the example of the Wabash Association in Indiana. This association's statement of faith outlined its belief in the duty only of called ministers, as opposed to representatives of missionary societies, to preach the gospel. "We believe that none have a right to administer the gospel ordinances," members agreed, "but such ministers of the gospel who have received the legal authority from the laws of Zion...under and by the authority of the gospel church."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Parker, *A Public Address*, 8.

¹⁴² John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, n.p.

¹⁴³ Parker, *A Public Address*, 13.

¹⁴⁴ Parker, ed., "The Views of the Editor upon the Constitution of Churches," *Church Advocate*, Vol. 1 No. 11 (August 1830).

Alexander Campbell (who began the anti-mission fight as a Baptist and later departed to form the Disciples of Christ sect that rejected all denominational markers) explained how preachers of the gospel should be called. The apostles in biblical times, he wrote, “were sent to all the world; but were prohibited, in the accompanying instructions, from commencing their operations, until they should be endued with a power from on high. Thus all the missionaries, sent from heaven, were authorized and empowered to confirm their doctrine with signs and wonders.”¹⁴⁵ Modern missionaries, Campbell and other anti-missionists believed, lacked proof of their divine callings through appropriate “signs and wonders,” and were unlike truly called ministers who found it essential to their own well-being to preach. Joshua Lawrence, writing to *The Primitive Baptist* in 1832, described missionaries with the following metaphor:

They preach like a woman who has a young child and full breast, she is under the necessity of suckling it for her own ease and not for pay. Would you not think that woman a brute, who would charge the son of her womb for sucking her breast, that the God of nature has freely bestowed and filled for the nourishment of her children? Yes, sir, such a woman is worse than the brutes—so is such a minister of God. God has filled his heart with the sincere milk of the word for his children, and I say he is worse than a brute if he don’t freely give it them.

Minister and congregation alike, the author went on to say, benefitted from the minister’s duty “to suckle the children of God.”¹⁴⁶

In addition to pointing out the failure of missionary societies to adhere to scriptural advice when assigning preachers, anti-missionists stated that mission organizations undermined the Baptist view of the independence of local churches. A

¹⁴⁵ Campbell, ed., *The Christian Baptist*, 41.

¹⁴⁶ Joshua Lawrence, Letter to the Editor, *The Primitive Baptist*, ed. Mark Bennett, Vol. 1 No. 2 (January 23, 1836).

Baptist church, many anti-missionists repeatedly wrote, represented “the highest ecclesiastical authority upon earth.”¹⁴⁷ Daniel Parker believed that Baptist church government was “infringed on” by the power given to organizations like mission societies.¹⁴⁸ Anti-missionists “view[ed] the church [as] an assembly met together for one purpose...of worshiping God in spirit and truth.” They claimed that Christ established this purpose for the church, which was outlined in the Bible “and ha[d] been kept and preserved by the power of God” ever since.¹⁴⁹ The church, which was metaphorically the “body of Christ” and “not an incorporated body by human laws,” must remain “separate and distinct from the world,” despite being part of it.”¹⁵⁰

Those who adhered to these doctrines, claimed anti-mission Baptists, were part of Christ’s church. Members of the “body” maintained unity through fellowship with others by forming regional associations of individual churches. The associational structure was beneficial and biblically approved, but such an “association should never be a head over the churches as a law giver, nor even an advisory counsel.” The purpose of an association was “only a medium of correspondence” among individual churches.¹⁵¹ Therefore, to anti-missionists, Baptist mission societies and other benevolent organizations overstepped their biblical bounds.

¹⁴⁷ Parker, ed., “A Short Sketch to Mr. J.M. Peck, for the Purpose of Proving to Him that He is Not a Baptist (of the Old Stamp,) and to Prevent His Imposition on the Public,” *Church Advocate*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (October 1830).

¹⁴⁸ Parker, et al., *The Authors’ Defence*, 16.

¹⁴⁹ Parker, et al., *The Authors’ Defence*, 19-20.

¹⁵⁰ Parker, ed., *Church Advocate*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (November 1829).

¹⁵¹ Parker, et al., *The Authors’ Defence*, 22-23.

Anti-missionists also opposed religious organizations because they saw them as threats to religious liberty, since American Baptists had prided themselves on being anti-hierarchical since colonial times. Both the authority of local churches and the idea of republican government were foundational to American Baptist doctrine, and the bureaucracy that anti-missionists perceived in mission societies undermined these beliefs. Anti-mission Baptists who argued against the mission system on the basis of its potential to infringe upon religious liberty tended to use historical arguments to draw connections between nineteenth-century religious innovations and the threats they posed to the religious freedom that colonial Baptists sought.

John Leland, writing for the *Signs of the Times* in 1835, reminded Baptists that “the banished *Roger Williams* began the reformation from Hierarchy: he established the first form of government ever known, in Rhode Island, which excluded religious opinions from the civil code.”¹⁵² John Taylor thought that modern missionary societies proved detrimental to this freedom and “verg[ed] close on an aristocracy, with an object to sap the foundation of Baptist republican government” by undermining the authority of local churches.¹⁵³ The various organizations and campaigns employed by the mission system, such as Sunday schools and even the religious crusade against Sunday mail delivery, represented “a deep-laid plan to take from us our civil and religious liberties.”¹⁵⁴ Could Baptists believe, wondered Gilbert Beebe, that when organizations “have united together, and called to their aid the mob, who have already lit up the fires of persecution in our

¹⁵² Beebe, ed., *Signs of the Times*, Vol. 3. No. 20 (September 30, 1835).

¹⁵³ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, n.p.

¹⁵⁴ Parker, ed., “A Few Remarks on the Mission Subject,” *Church Advocate*, Vol. 2 No. 11 (September 1831).

land of boasted civil and religious liberty, shall have exterminated the Catholics, and butchered the residue of the Mormons, that they will spare the Old School Baptists?”¹⁵⁵

Joshua Lawrence delivered a sermon on Independence Day in 1830 in which he emphasized the importance of religious liberty to Baptists, and claimed that “civil and religious liberty must live and die together; for hand in hand they came to us out of the revolutionary struggle.” Lawrence challenged Baptists to stand up in defense of religious liberty against the “spiritual tyranny” of modern religious innovations.¹⁵⁶ He blamed Constantine for turning Christianity into a “craft” by establishing it by law, and thus beginning “schools, laws,” and a paid ministry.¹⁵⁷ Lawrence assailed contemporary organizations and theological schools for following this path by “mak[ing] craftsmen to tyrannize, oppress, and suck the purses and the blood of men.” He feared that, with the power that mission organizations were gaining, they would establish their form of religion with the “law on their side, [and they would] load the cart with tithes, to the galling of your hearts, and you must go, or pop goes the whip.” Like other anti-missionists, Lawrence worried that a marriage of church and state would undo the efforts of colonial Baptists who fought for religious liberty on behalf of “the poor quakers [who were] banished, whipped, imprisoned and hung, in New England” and “the baptist ministers in Virginia [who were] fined, imprisoned, and whipped like slaves.”¹⁵⁸

Lawrence believed that mission organizations would impose an undemocratic form of government in the societies themselves and in the United States as a whole. He

¹⁵⁵ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. II, 483-484.

¹⁵⁶ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 2-3.

¹⁵⁷ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 13.

¹⁵⁸ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 19-20.

worried that Sunday schools and tract societies would “force out of schools all books but those approved by” them. Societies and their proponents, Lawrence argued, wanted to increase their membership “because [people] are much easier governed” as members of an organization.¹⁵⁹ “Our civil and religious liberty is in danger,” he warned, “and the magnificence of our republic in great danger of being destroyed by these designing men.” Thus, Lawrence urged his audience not to give any money to societies, but rather to “give to the poor and needy” in accordance with the Bible’s commands. To “save your country,” he preached,

you should not support any man for public office in the States, that is a member of, or that is in favor of the societies of the day, lest any bill supporting priestcraft should come before the State or National Legislature, and there meet with priest-made friends to rivet the yoke on your necks...for of all the men in the world I dread the tyranny of the unconverted, men-made, money-coveting priest.¹⁶⁰

Anti-missionist literature, particularly in the late 1830s and 1840s, commonly featured such comparisons of missionaries to Catholic priests. In 1838, James Osbourn worried that if the “power” missionary societies had gained among Baptists in the previous twenty years continued, “it [would] not be very long before their once truly republican form of church government [would] be metamorphosed into one that is despotic” like that of “the Papistical power.”¹⁶¹

Anti-missionists reconciled their own restrictive doctrine with their belief in religious liberty by claiming that supporters of missions actually harmed morality.

¹⁵⁹ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 36.

¹⁶⁰ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 38-39.

¹⁶¹ Osbourn, *Voice of Truth*, 74.

As an 1844 editorial in *The Primitive Baptist* stated, “A Baptist has a right, as a citizen and a man, to bet his money on a horse race, or a hand at cards: yet as a Christian, he has no such right, though the money is his; because it would be applying it to vicious purposes. So with missions. Contributions to them are offerings to avarice.”¹⁶² Moreover, some anti-mission leaders like Daniel Parker offered to aid in pro-mission Baptists’ attempts to spread the gospel, if the latter would cooperate with the whole of the Baptist church.¹⁶³ Anti-missionists were unopposed to “giving the heathen the Bible,” they conceded, but missionaries went far beyond this simple act.¹⁶⁴

Opposition to Theological Education

A second reason that anti-mission Baptists opposed the nineteenth-century mission movement was because, in addition to requiring societies and financial support, proponents of missions emphasized the need for theological education for both ministers and the laity. This innovation, according to anti-missionists, contradicted the Baptist belief in the Bible as the only necessary source of religious authority. Since they had no hierarchical structure and thus no one in a position of power to interpret scripture, Baptists placed complete faith in the authority of the Bible alone. “No people,” wrote Daniel Parker, “have so great use for the Bible in maintaining and defending their religion as the Baptists have.”¹⁶⁵ According to a circular letter distributed among the

¹⁶² Bennett, ed., *The Primitive Baptist*, Vol. 9 No. 2 (January 27, 1844).

¹⁶³ Parker, et al., *The Authors’ Defence*, 6-7.

¹⁶⁴ Parker, *A Public Address*, 34-35.

¹⁶⁵ Parker, ed., *Church Advocate*, Vol. 2 No. 10 (July 1831).

churches of the Delaware Baptist Association in 1832, anti-missionists found no “pattern or direction for licensing preachers” in scripture.¹⁶⁶

Anti-mission Baptists, who esteemed the Bible as the sole religious authority on earth, found it difficult to understand why it was necessary for teachers and theologians to instruct others how to interpret the Bible. After all, they pointed out, Jesus himself had “commenced his ministry...without education.”¹⁶⁷ Daniel Parker boasted, as did many other anti-missionists, that he was uneducated. He wrote that he had “no knowledge of the English grammar, only as my bible has taught me.” Parker further noted that the doctrinal “errors” that marked the beliefs of pro-mission Baptists “nearly all originated amongst the wise and learned.”¹⁶⁸ Catholicism, he claimed, first gave education “a seat in religion,” and he warned Baptists against assuming characteristics of the “Popish dominion” for themselves.¹⁶⁹

Anti-mission Baptists also attacked theological education in the form of Sunday schools as a way “to bend the youthful mind to answer the mission purposes” and “a plan to release parents from their obligations to govern their families on the Lord’s day, when they have no right to transfer that duty to another person” according to scriptural guidelines.¹⁷⁰ While the Bible “enjoin[ed] upon parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” the same scriptures “forb[ade] the idea of parents intrusting [*sic*] the religious education of their children to giddy, unregenerated young

¹⁶⁶ Beebe, ed., *Signs of the Times*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (December 18, 1832).

¹⁶⁷ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 43.

¹⁶⁸ Parker, *A Public Address*, 2-3.

¹⁶⁹ Parker, *A Public Address*, 48.

¹⁷⁰ Parker, ed., “A Few Remarks on the Mission Subject,” *Church Advocate*.

persons.”¹⁷¹ Those who sent their children to Sunday schools defied biblical standards for parenting, and were deceived by the incorrect doctrine of the missionaries. As Sunday schools were “the product of the mission principle” and “composed of auxiliary societies”—and, therefore, “without authority in the word of God”—faithful Baptists should reject them, Parker argued.¹⁷²

Additionally, anti-missionists found it objectionable that mission organizations hired and appointed preachers, rather than deferring to God’s divine calling of ministers. Mission societies “[did] not require a call to the work” as Christ had done; “when he was about to send out preachers, [he] called them, whether they had learning or not,” Daniel Parker asserted.¹⁷³ The message from God in the Bible, anti-missionists noted, was “*Go ye—not send others.*”¹⁷⁴ In a letter to the missionary periodical the *Columbian Star* that he reprinted in his own periodical the *Church Advocate*, Daniel Parker regretted “that the call of the spirit to the work of the ministry [was] not to be known” in the “prevailing arguments” of his day. Such an approach to the ministry, he argued, was “under the influence of the spirit of this world, and not the spirit of Christ and his apostles.”¹⁷⁵ The Bible never stated that God “intended that his work should be carried on in the

¹⁷¹ Berry, ed., *The Kehukee Declaration*, 27.

¹⁷² Parker, ed., “A Few Remarks on the Mission Subject,” *Church Advocate*.

¹⁷³ Parker, *A Public Address*, 26.

¹⁷⁴ Gilbert Beebe, ed., *A Compilation of Editorial Articles, Copied from the “Signs of the Times,” Embracing a Period of Thirty-Five Years; in which is Reflected the Doctrine and Order of the Old School, or Primitive Baptists*, Vol. I (Middletown, Orange County, New York: Re-Published by Benton L. Beebe, 1868), 246. The injunction to which Beebe referred most probably came from Mark 16:15, which states, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (KJV).

¹⁷⁵ Parker, ed., “For the Columbian Star,” *Church Advocate*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 1829).

world...by education, assisting the divine spirit, and therefore has made it the duty of his children to erect seminaries of learning for that purpose,” Parker claimed.¹⁷⁶

Parker urged his fellow Baptists to pray for missionaries to be “taught by the divine spirit, that it is God, not man, that calls, qualifies, and sends out ministers of the gospel” so that they would “cease to depend on man for their qualifications and support.”¹⁷⁷ In this endeavor, they would be adhering to the example of the apostolic church. Joshua Lawrence cited John the Baptist, with his plain clothing and meager diet, as a biblical example of the opposite of the modern-day missionary. There was nothing “like craft in this first gospel minister,” Lawrence declared. Moreover, no “societies, begging, funding, and dividing thereby” existed in the early church.¹⁷⁸ Supporters of missions seemingly did not respect the Bible’s mandates or the tradition of the early church, and were “aiming to make addition to God’s word,” as though Christ “was imperfect and did not know the best plan for qualifying, supporting and sending out preachers.”¹⁷⁹

Opposition to Missionary Doctrine

Anti-missionists opposed the strategies employed by missionaries and mission organizations to spread the gospel. More fundamentally, however, they disagreed with the basic theological doctrine of missionaries, including their understanding of church history and their approach to millennial ideology. Anti-missionists frequently attacked

¹⁷⁶ Parker, ed., “For the Columbian Star,” *Church Advocate*.

¹⁷⁷ Parker, et al., *The Authors’ Defence*, 13.

¹⁷⁸ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 46-47.

¹⁷⁹ Parker, *A Public Address*, 47-48.

missionaries' ideology as having deviated from true doctrine, and even labeled missionaries as the “*bastard* Baptists or *mungrel* [*sic*] breed.”¹⁸⁰

John Taylor claimed that missionaries were “deluded” in their own doctrine and in their labeling of “Jesus Christ himself... a *Missionary*.”¹⁸¹ Since anti-mission Baptists believed that they alone were members of “the living church of Jesus Christ,” they found it necessary to “expose [the] error” in the doctrine of pro-mission Baptists.¹⁸² The “pure, primitive gospel of Jesus Christ and his ordinances,” according to *Church Advocate* reader Richard M. Newport in 1830, “ha[d] been legally and correctly administered (by and through his church) to thousands of the saint in every age of the gospel dispensation,” long before the nineteenth century.¹⁸³ “If the Bible has not directed and authorized the mission plans and ways,” Daniel Parker and others argued, missionaries “are a set of wicked rebels against the government of heaven...[and] cannot show in God’s word by what authority they are doing these things.”¹⁸⁴

Daniel Parker believed that Baptists who organized and supported the modern missionary system were “acting in the place of God” rather than submitting to God’s sovereignty.¹⁸⁵ Members of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions, Parker claimed, “rebelled against” Christ, since they “assumed an authority that Christ has reserved alone to himself.” Likewise, they “violated the right or government of the Church of Christ in

¹⁸⁰ Parker, ed., “The Views of the Editor upon the Constitution of Churches,” *Church Advocate*.

¹⁸¹ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, n.p.

¹⁸² Parker, *A Public Address*, 2.

¹⁸³ Richard M. Newport, Letter to the Editor, *Church Advocate*, ed. Daniel Parker, Vol. 1 No. 7 (April 1830).

¹⁸⁴ Parker, ed., “The Views of the Editor upon the Constitution of Churches,” *Church Advocate*.

¹⁸⁵ Parker, *A Public Address*, 19.

forming themselves into a body and acting without authority of the [greater Baptist] union.”¹⁸⁶ An 1835 editorial in *The Primitive Baptist* stated that the missionary “schemes of the day” were “ostensibly intended to promote Christianity, but evidently tending to destroy the great and fundamental principles upon which it is based, by making a gain of godliness.” Societies and the modern mission movement were therefore “unscriptural.”¹⁸⁷

The gospel that missionaries preached was in fact “*another gospel*” altogether, claimed anti-mission Baptists who lamented that “the preaching of the day” effectively changed the gospel preached by Christ from one of “native simplicity” to one of “pomp and gallantry.”¹⁸⁸ They accused the missionaries’ version of the gospel of “rendering the path-way to Heaven more plain and easy than what it anciently was.” Missionaries’ postmillennialism “required [money] to convert the whole world of sinners” in order to “bring on what is called the millennium.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, anti-missionists like James Osbourn claimed, missionaries’ doctrine more closely resembled that of the Roman Catholic Church than “the doctrines taught and the courses pursued by Christ and his apostles, or even by those servants whom the Lord sends forth to preach his word.”¹⁹⁰ In their enthusiasm to spread the gospel to the unsaved as quickly as possible, millennium-minded missionaries became “busy-bodies, and fond of bustle and parade, and every

¹⁸⁶ Parker, *A Public Address*, 39.

¹⁸⁷ Bennett, ed., *The Primitive Baptist*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 3, 1835).

¹⁸⁸ Osbourn, *Voice of Truth*, 12-13.

¹⁸⁹ Osbourn, *Voice of Truth*, 30.

¹⁹⁰ Osbourn, *Voice of Truth*, 50.

thing of a showy appearance.”¹⁹¹ To anti-missionists, missionaries’ efforts represented “the works of man and the devil.”¹⁹²

In addition to criticizing missionaries for their attachment to worldliness, anti-missionists decried missionary doctrine for flouting the Calvinist principles that they saw as the foundation of Baptist belief. “The New School Baptists,” an 1842 editorial in the *Signs of the Times* reported, “represent[ed] God as having as little to do with the salvation of sinners, as he has in the tilling of the earth, ploughing, sowing, &c.”¹⁹³ In addition to making additions to the gospel, missionaries preached altogether false doctrine, some Baptists railed. Daniel Parker protested:

the mission spirit has drawn too many of our preachers too far into the Armenian [*sic*] principle or method of preaching, and they have laid down the weapons of war against the prevailing errors of false systems, and unite truth and error together, and give false principles and practices more credit than the bible authorizes them to do.¹⁹⁴

Joshua Lawrence rhetorically asked his audience to consider, “as some of you are Bible readers, whether such forming societies, begging, funding and dividing the spoil, is a craft or not; and whether the first Christians practiced any craft like this; or whether such conduct is found among Christ and his apostles.”¹⁹⁵ Lawrence and other anti-mission Baptists concluded that the model of nineteenth-century missions was not found in scripture, and therefore missionaries departed from the gospel imparted in the Bible.

¹⁹¹ Osbourn, *Voice of Truth*, 15-16.

¹⁹² Parker, ed., *Church Advocate*, Vol. 2 No. 7 (April 1831).

¹⁹³ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. I, 754.

¹⁹⁴ Parker, *A Public Address*, 50.

¹⁹⁵ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 29.

Daniel Parker laid out his own doctrine in an 1829 editorial in the *Church Advocate*. His beliefs, which he claimed to have gleaned directly “from the authority of the Bible,” strongly resembled Calvinist tenets. They included belief in the “total depraved state of man”; God’s predestination of “his people...before the world was made”; salvation through God’s grace alone; and the assertion that “the true faith of the gospel, is the work of the Divine Spirit in the hearts of the subjects of grace.”¹⁹⁶ The doctrine of missionaries, Parker and other anti-missionists believed, conflicted with the core of Calvinism. Parker noted that two concepts of salvation existed among Baptists; the Arminian view differed from the predestinarian view in its emphasis on men’s ability to “seek” their own salvation. The conflict between these views, Parker claimed, was the reason “why there is such contentions, wars and divisions, among the Baptist.” Anti-mission Baptists, however, saw clearly that “one of these spirits or principles [was] from the Lord [the predestinarian], and the other from the Devil [the Arminian].”¹⁹⁷ To these opponents of missions, God clearly taught predestination “in his word and by his spirit.”¹⁹⁸

The widespread mission effort of the nineteenth century was unnecessary in the opinion of the staunchly Calvinist anti-missionists, who believed that “the word is always made powerful and effectual to the soul grace has prepared.”¹⁹⁹ S. Trott, a subscriber to Gilbert Beebe’s *Signs of the Times*, wrote to the periodical in September of 1833 “to

¹⁹⁶ Parker, ed., “For the Columbian Star,” *Church Advocate*.

¹⁹⁷ Parker, ed., *Church Advocate*, Vol. 1 No. 3 (December 1829).

¹⁹⁸ Parker, ed., “A Short Account of Some Few Associations,” *Church Advocate*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (October 1830).

¹⁹⁹ Parker, ed., “For the Columbian Star,” *Church Advocate*.

confess,” sarcastically, “the ignorance of us, poor Anti-mission Baptists...[who] never learned in our *Old School* that the church possessed energies to accomplish the conversion of a single individual, excepting what reside alone in her head, Christ, and which are applied only by the Holy Spirit.”²⁰⁰ Anti-missionists also questioned the validity of the conversions that missionaries elicited, and argued that converts were made so quickly that they were not properly taught Christian doctrine; they were instead taught rote prayers that they did not understand. Missionaries, wrote “A Young Pilgrim” to the *Signs of the Times*, “profane[d] the name of the Lord, by using it to cover their deception, and they would, (if it were possible) deceive the very Elect.”²⁰¹ James Osbourn employed racially charged language to describe these converts in a poem, in which he likened the intellect and spiritual state of missionary converts to “a black man whitewash’d o’er”:

Or should they teach him how to pray,
As do the Romans in their way;
We’d view him in no other light,
Than just a praying Ishmaelite
For he who merely prays by rote,
Or as he in some school was taught;
We very justly may at once,
Say, ‘he is but a praying dunce.’...
And though he for his golden grains,
From men of pride great credit gains:
Without the Spirit’s work within,
He’s black all o’er, and dead in sin.²⁰²

In an 1834 editorial in the *Signs of the Times*, Gilbert Beebe also worried about invalid baptisms performed upon those not genuinely saved by God. It was “an inundation of corruption,” he howled, that opened “the flood-gates to let in upon us whole villages and

²⁰⁰ S. Trott, Letter to the Editor, *Signs of the Times*, ed. Gilbert Beebe, Vol. 1 No. 21 (September 11, 1833).

²⁰¹ A Young Pilgrim, Letter to the Editor, *Signs of the Times*, ed. Gilbert Beebe, Vol. 2 No. 19 (September 10, 1834).

²⁰² Osbourn, *Voice of Truth*, 71-72.

cities of baptized Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Universalists, Quakers, Roman Catholics, Mormons, &c.”²⁰³ Despite the “Thousands of conversions” chronicled by Baptist missionaries, anti-missionists took comfort in quoting Christ’s words from the Bible that “Every plant that my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.”²⁰⁴

Some anti-missionists went so far as to call into question the status of missionaries’ own salvation, since their doctrine appeared to deviate so much from the Calvinist belief in divine election. John Taylor claimed, regarding the baptisms of two well-known missionaries, that there was “no evidence of [the missionaries’] religious or political principles being changed, only in the use of much water.”²⁰⁵ In a palpably Calvinistic attack on how mission societies operated, Daniel Parker alleged that it was:

simple and wicked to pray for the Lord to revive his work—to raise up and send forth labours into the vineyard—to attend and bless the administration of his word—to convict and convert sinners, or even visit our own soul with a sense of his love; for God works no other way in such cases, but by his spirit through whatever means he pleases.²⁰⁶

It is important to note that, at least at the commencement of the mission movement, pro-mission Baptists still held to Calvinist doctrine despite anti-missionists’ arguments otherwise. To missionaries and their supporters, evangelism did not necessarily conflict with beliefs in predestination and God’s sovereignty. Since Baptists agreed with Calvin that no one—including preachers and missionaries—could ever be certain of his own salvation, they saw those involved in missions as vehicles to spread knowledge of the gospel and salvation. It was ultimately God who saved a person, though members of the

²⁰³ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. I, 180.

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. II, 96.

²⁰⁵ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, n.p.

²⁰⁶ Parker, ed., “For the Columbian Star,” *Church Advocate*.

elect could come more fully to experience and understand God through hearing the gospel. A sermon preached at the 1814 convention that formed the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions reveals that Calvinism still remained central to the theology of pro-mission Baptists. The “promise” of salvation, the sermon proclaimed, “appl[ied] to those who, having the gospel sent to them...[were] disposed...to receive it.” Members of the elect, or “regenerate souls,” could still doubt their own salvation; therefore, they must always recognize that they were powerless, apart from the grace of God, “to effect the conversion of sinners.” Missionaries still required converts to provide indication of a conversion experience before they could be baptized.²⁰⁷

Despite these affirmations of Calvinist belief, anti-missionists doubted the motives of missionaries, and contended that they deviated from the true intent of Calvinism. Accordingly, they put forward their best efforts to point out the doctrinal errors that they perceived in the modern mission movement. Much to their dismay, however, missionaries continued “multiplying like locusts” in the 1820s and 1830s.²⁰⁸ As more Baptists embraced the mission spirit as a central theological tenet, Baptist communities experienced pervasive division.

²⁰⁷ *Proceedings of the Baptist Convention for Missionary Purposes; Held in Philadelphia, in May, 1814* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Convention, by Ann Coles, 1814), 17-23.

²⁰⁸ Osbourn, *Voice of Truth*, 69.

CHAPTER SIX: EFFECTS OF ANTI-MISSIONISM

Over the course of the anti-mission controversy, anti-missionists expressed their views through the channels of sermons, periodicals, and tracts. Their loyalty to individual church autonomy and lack of overarching structure, however, made it impossible for them to form a unified movement against the prevailing changes in nineteenth-century American religion and culture. While mission societies gained more members and grew stronger and more cohesive, anti-missionists could not, due to their own ideological constraints, form dedicated anti-mission organizations. Steadily declining numbers of anti-missionists continued to rail against modern missions even into the twentieth century. In the end, their opposition proved inadequate to combat a larger societal shift toward religion that was more organized and focused on evangelism. The growing success of missions did not, however, prevent anti-missionists from continuing to express their disagreement with this modernized religion, and Baptist congregations throughout the United States experienced both ideological and physical repercussions of the anti-mission controversy.

Physical and Structural Division

In addition to individual leaders' endeavors to gather support for anti-missionism through sermons and the printed word, anti-missionists also made attempts at formal separation from pro-mission Baptists. In 1827, the Kehukee Association in North Carolina declared itself to be officially opposed to "the modern missionary movement and other institutions of men." In the midst of the theological disputes and chaos that the

mission movement caused in the Baptist flock, members of the Kehukee Association deemed it “necessary to take a decided stand against [modern religious innovations], and thereby no longer tolerate these innovations on the ancient usages of the church of Christ by fellowshipping them.”²⁰⁹ In 1832, churches from the Baltimore Association joined with the anti-mission Black Rock church in Maryland to condemn missions.²¹⁰ Baptist churches in both the northern and southern United States followed suit throughout the 1830s.

The committee that drafted the Black Rock Address asserted that, if “New School” Baptists continued to “compel us either to sanction the traditions and inventions of men, as of religious obligation, or to separate from” them, separation was indeed necessary. Those who held two opposing views regarding fundamental doctrine, they claimed, could not possibly “walk in union.”²¹¹ In an attempt to distinguish themselves further from religious innovation and the more hierarchical structure of mission organizations, supporters of the Black Rock Address threw off structural constraints so far as to “disclaim being an Association of churches or an organized body of any kind.” Instead, they “simply [met] as Brethren of one faith, one order and one heart.”²¹²

The majority of Baptists who separated with official declarations from pro-mission churches came to designate themselves as Primitive Baptists. The name originated in the Kehukee Association, which in 1835 began publishing a periodical

²⁰⁹ Berry, ed., *The Kehukee Declaration*, 13.

²¹⁰ Berry, ed., *The Kehukee Declaration*, 15-16. Gilbert Beebe, of *Signs of the Times* fame, was one of these members.

²¹¹ Berry, ed., *The Kehukee Declaration*, 40.

²¹² Berry, ed., *The Kehukee Declaration*, 45.

called the *Primitive Baptist* “as an organ for the southern Antimissionaries.”²¹³ A defining characteristic of Primitive Baptists was anti-institutionalism; they scorned missionary societies, theological schools, Sunday Schools, and any other forms of modern organization that they deemed hierarchical and anti-scriptural.²¹⁴ Today’s Primitive Baptists adhere principally to these same doctrines and practices. They refused to engage in nineteenth- and twentieth-century religious “debates”—for example, the controversy over slavery—and still do not engage in disputes over modern-day religious issues.²¹⁵ John Crowley, who studied contemporary Primitive Baptists, found that they “wish not to change the world but to escape from it... They often refer to their churches as ‘little heavenly places,’ where they escape out of time and mundane concerns.”²¹⁶

Ideological Division

In the Black Rock Address of 1832, Baptists who decided to split from churches that supported missions and other modern religious innovations reiterated the doctrinal commitments that led them to their decision. “It constitute[d] a new era in the history of the Baptists,” they proclaimed, when Baptists were “charged with antinomianism, inertness, stupidity, &c., for refusing to go beyond the word of God.” Their belief in using the Bible alone as a religious authority joined their commitment to remaining faithful to church history. Black Rock supporters saw in the missionary movement “departures from the order established by the great Head of the church, through the

²¹³ Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South*, 75.

²¹⁴ Berry, ed., *The Kehukee Declaration*, 47.

²¹⁵ Mathis, *Making*, 149.

²¹⁶ Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South*, 189.

ministry of his apostles.”²¹⁷ “In ancient times,” the Black Rock Address claimed, “preachers of the gospel [were called] by the Holy Ghost,” not appointed by organizations.²¹⁸ Furthermore, those who drew up the Black Rock Address beseeched fellow Baptists to “profit from the history of past ages, and guard against...the corruptions observed in the modern church.”²¹⁹ There was a fundamental ideological conflict between those Baptists who believed that their interpretation of biblical doctrine precluded adaptation to new religious practices, and those who were able to reconcile tradition with modernity.

The constitutions and statements of faith of Primitive Baptist churches established during this split reflect their dedication to the doctrinal points upon which opposition to the missionary movement was based. In Hickman County, Tennessee, Center Primitive Baptist Church provided an “Abstract of principles” when it formed in 1825. These principles included beliefs that “the scripture of the old and new testament are the word of god and the only rule of faith and practice,” that “god chose his people in christ before the foundation of the world,” and that only those who were “called” could become ministers. The church body also consented to a form of democratic church governance when they agreed “to be governed thereby solisiting The father of sperits that unity may Abound Among us and that all will Cordially submit to eachother” [*sic*].²²⁰

²¹⁷ Berry, ed., *The Kehukee Declaration*, 24.

²¹⁸ Berry, ed., *The Kehukee Declaration*, 31.

²¹⁹ Berry, ed., *The Kehukee Declaration*, 45.

²²⁰ “Abstract of principles,” Records of Center Primitive Baptist Church, Swan Creek, Hickman County, Tennessee, 1825-1912.

Effects on Baptist Communities

Beginning in the 1820s, anti-mission Baptists lamented the changes that had come to their denomination in recent decades. The Second Great Awakening had begun to change the physical makeup of the Baptist denomination, which had primarily consisted of members from the lower social class during the First Great Awakening. By the mid-nineteenth century, Baptists drew more of their membership from the upper ranks of society, and as they gained “respectability” by employing modern innovations, they continued to gain members. An editorial by Gilbert Beebe in the *Signs of the Times* proclaimed these changes, which those against such innovations viewed unfavorably:

Now the Baptists have their Doctors of Divinity, their Colleges, their National and State Conventions; their churches occupy stately mansions with sounding bells and towering domes...No longer are they willing to wait for the Lord to build them up, to convert sinners, or to give them ministers...They have acquired the art of getting up revivals, of preparing men for the ministry, of making converts to their faith and accessions to their number.²²¹

Baptists continued to gain popularity in American religion, and their numbers grew accordingly, particularly during the mid-1800s. In 1800, Baptists claimed approximately 160,000 members in the United States; this number grew steadily to 250,000 by 1820. In 1840, 580,000 Baptists were recorded in membership registers, and by 1860 the denomination boasted one million members, which were increasingly middle and upper class.²²² For anti-mission Baptists who cherished their denomination’s origin as a faith of the downtrodden, this increasing wealth made them uncomfortable, and they blamed it on the mission system’s emphasis on money, which in their view was anti-biblical.

²²¹ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. I, 589-591.

²²² Jeffrey Wayne Taylor, *Formation*, 24.

As anti-missionists continued refusing to compromise their doctrine and adapt to innovations, and as missionary societies became more popular, anti-missionists' numbers began to decline as pro-mission Baptists grew in strength. The membership of the Ketocton Association, for example—"one of the oldest associations in Virginia, and formerly one of the most flourishing"—decreased from 2,000 to 615 between 1833 and 1841, according to the missionary periodical the *Cross and Journal*. This decline, the periodical claimed, started when the association "began its opposition to the benevolent institutions."²²³ Gilbert Beebe disputed the validity of these numbers, but did acknowledge a decline. However, he pointed out that even though the anti-mission churches appeared to be "*withered*" and "*lifeless*" to their opponents, they possessed "the promise and oath of God" that he would reward them for their steadfastness in his own timing.²²⁴ To the missionary societies that noted the decline in numbers among anti-mission churches and members, anti-missionists replied, "Mock on." They readily admitted their decline, but bore it as a mark of pride that they had not fallen prey to the "institutions of anti-christ" like those "whose hearts are not stayed on God."²²⁵

Within associations, intense discord arose as a result of the anti-mission movement. As churches withdrew from associations with opposing tendencies, and as members left individual churches with whom they disagreed about religious innovations, both sides lamented the declension of the Baptist denomination as a whole. The pro-mission Baptist historian David Benedict observed that prior to the development of

²²³ Quoted in Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. I, 676-677.

²²⁴ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. I, 678.

²²⁵ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. I, 645-646.

missions, associations were less bureaucratic and congregations settled disputes internally, with “no standing committees.” Furthermore, members of congregations held themselves and others accountable to standards of “moral conduct.”²²⁶ The increasing bureaucracy that came about in associations as a result of a changing structure within the Baptist denomination, Benedict implied, led to less of an emphasis on personal accountability. In addition, members of associations and those who attended annual gatherings became less “enthusiastic and numerous” after 1810, whereas before they had been filled with a “revival spirit” and journeyed great lengths to attend. Benedict suggested that the increase in (missionary) periodicals to relay news partially eliminated the need for individual church members to attend associational meetings.²²⁷

Though he supported and sympathized with the missionary cause, Benedict saw inherent disadvantages in the religious innovations of the early nineteenth century, and blamed the detrimental effects on the increasing bureaucratization of religion. “Thus far,” he wrote, “the old manner of conducting associations seems to have been better than that of later years, so far as the free flow of religious feeling and the ardor of piety were concerned.”²²⁸ Because of “the rise of modern benevolent institutions,” associations became “burdened” with all of the requests and needs of the societies. Previously, “associations were at full liberty to attend to their own proper work without any interference from any quarter.”²²⁹

²²⁶ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 78.

²²⁷ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 87-88.

²²⁸ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 90.

²²⁹ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 225.

Records of associational meetings reveal the conflict wrought within Baptist communities by the anti-mission controversy. When the Columbia Baptist Association gathered in 1835, members sent a corresponding letter to its fellow associations lamenting the “day of division and strife among those who assume the name of Christ.” Although their own associational meeting had been harmonious, they feared becoming embroiled in the “discords and divisions” evident in the denomination and even within their own association.²³⁰ By the next meeting in 1836, the association found “much cause for deep humiliation and godly sorrow” as there had been little growth in numbers, and several individual churches had been beset by “Strifes and divisions...[that had] torn asunder brethren who once appeared to be united in Christian harmony.” Six churches professing anti-mission sentiments withdrew that year from the association, which overall supported “the benevolent institutions of the day.”²³¹ At the annual meeting in 1842, the Columbia Association established its own missionary society, which was composed of representatives from member churches who could contribute at least one dollar per year.²³² The association employed its first missionary in 1844.²³³

Baptist missionaries faced the effects of the anti-mission controversy perhaps even more than members of anti-mission congregations. The churches and associations that supported missionaries did not always do so for the propagation of the gospel to non-

²³⁰ *Minutes of the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Columbia Baptist Association, Held, by Appointment, at the Baptist Meeting House, in the Town of Alexandria, D.C., August 1835*, 12.

²³¹ *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Columbia Baptist Association, Held, by Appointment, at the Grove Meeting House, Fauquier County, VA, August 1836*, 15-16.

²³² *Minutes of the Twenty-Third Annual Meeting of the Columbia Baptist Association, Held, by Appointment, with the Church in the Town of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania County, VA, August 1842*, 14.

²³³ *Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Columbia Baptist Association, Held, by Appointment, at the Broad Run Meeting House, Fauquier County, Virginia, August 1844*, 16.

believers; rural churches “scarce of ministerial aid” often relied on missionaries to preach on occasion, or to establish churches where none existed. The reputation that missionaries gained among anti-missionists made some churches hostile to this system. The hired missionary from Kentucky’s Little Bethel Association, T.L. Garrett, referred to several churches that he visited from 1837 to 1838 as “situated in the hotbed of opposition and...yet dependent upon our missionary system for the preaching of the Gospel.”²³⁴ He remarked that he had “labored more or less at every church” in the “Associational District,” and worked particularly in a region where there was “a greater destitution of preachers of our faith and order, there being but one in our county and he very far advanced down the declivity of old age.”²³⁵

The missionary’s job, according to the reports of the Little Bethel Association, was to increase church membership through preaching and baptisms, thus building up the strength of the churches. Garrett noted that many of the churches at which he served “[gave] freely...to the cause of domestic missions” and thereby “defray[ed] the necessary expenses” associated with missionary efforts.²³⁶ He lamented when churches did not support these efforts, exclaiming: “O, that the Lord may open the hearts of all His people to feel as well as theirs eyes to see their duty in this great work [domestic missions], for indeed the harvest is great but the laborers are few.” Garrett wondered why members in such churches “talk[ed] much of the scarcity [*sic*] of ministers” while not supporting

²³⁴ *Minutes of the Little Bethel Association, 1836-1866*, 31-32.

²³⁵ *Minutes of the Little Bethel Association, 1836-1866*, 30.

²³⁶ *Minutes of the Little Bethel Association, 1836-1866*, 35.

missionaries.²³⁷ Many churches simply wanted to know that their preachers were called by God, and may not have felt that supporting missionaries financially—even those who preached to them—agreed with biblical doctrine. By 1838, T.L. Garrett recounted that the “discord and confusion...heresies and scisms” that had “alienated [church members] in their feelings each toward the other” began to lessen as more came to support the mission system, ideologically and financially.²³⁸ In Little Bethel’s missionary report of 1839, all of the association’s churches “appear[ed] to be in peace and ha[d] all received an addition during the year.”²³⁹

As anti-mission Baptists separated further ideologically and physically from their pro-mission brethren, they encouraged non-fellowship with those of opposing beliefs. Anti-missionists (or “Seceders”) from the Contineinea Association, for example, drew up a statement of faith claiming that they would “not fellowship any member or members of Bible, Missionary, Tract, or Sunday School Union Societies, nor advocates of Theological schools, nor any person who does fellowship with them.”²⁴⁰ In a circular letter to the churches that comprised the Kettocton Baptist Association, Thomas Buck, moderator of the August 1830 associational meeting, described the situation within the Baptist denomination as “a time of great darkness...when false and conditional systems [benevolent societies] will be exalted.” Buck urged Kettocton Baptists to hold fast to their Calvinist principles, and to remember that “Nothing but overpowering grace ever induced any of us to be his disciples.” He also encouraged them to “declare the glory of God...by

²³⁷ *Minutes of the Little Bethel Association, 1836-1866*, 36.

²³⁸ *Minutes of the Little Bethel Association, 1836-1866*, 37-38.

²³⁹ *Minutes of the Little Bethel Association, 1836-1866*, 43.

²⁴⁰ Bennett, ed., “The Seceders,” *The Primitive Baptist*, Vol. 1 No. 22 (November 26, 1836).

[exhibiting] a holy life and godly conversation...put[ting] to silence the ignorance of foolish men by practically maintaining the principles of the gospel of Christ.”²⁴¹

Members of the Licking Association of Baptists (who later changed their name to the Licking Association of Particular Baptists) wrote a circular letter against modern missionary innovations during an associational meeting in September of 1818. “The day in which we live is dark and gloomy, and many are engaged in propagating doctrines, by corrupting the scriptures, to seduce the people from the truths of the gospel,” they wrote. They warned the churches with whom they corresponded against “the pretender, who tells you that Christ died for the sin of all the world, and that he has Christ, life and salvation to offer you, upon the condition of your obedience, faith and repentance.” Such preachers were “blind guide[s]” who perverted the Bible, they warned, and it was “the duty of every Christian to guard the sacred volume of divine inspiration, and have no fellowship with those who misrepresent Christ and the method He has devised for the salvation of sinners.” This method, of course, was “*grace*” alone.²⁴²

In addition to noting the theological “dangers” of missions, some anti-mission Baptists linked the advance of missions and religious innovations to social ills such as increased crime and suicides. Missionaries lamented a decline in the revival spirit, which seemed to result in an escalation of suicides. Anti-missionists declared that it was no wonder, since the church was becoming more worldly, that its members fell prey to worldly problems. They blamed the source of the problem on missionary societies’

²⁴¹ *Minutes of the Kectocon Baptist Association, Held by Appointment at Upperville, Fauquier County, Va., August 12, 13 & 14, 1830, 4-5.*

²⁴² *Minutes of the Licking Association of Baptists, Held at Mill Creek, the 2d Saturday in September, 1818, 3.*

“attempting to wrest the work of salvation from the hand of him that sitteth upon the eternal throne” and emphasizing “the zeal and co-operation of the world.”²⁴³ At the beginning of 1843, the Philadelphia *Gazette* noted an increase in crimes such as arson and murder. Gilbert Beebe reprinted these statistics in the *Signs of the Times* and asserted that the growth in crime corresponded with the growth of “anti-scriptural institutions for the evangelization of the world.”²⁴⁴

Joshua Lawrence, too, attributed social problems to changes in religion. “Society is worse in its morals than when I could first remember,” he wrote, with “more pride, more dress, less confidence between men, more failures, suicides, and murders, than there were thirty-five years ago” before missionary societies began to operate and distribute Bibles. The distribution of Bibles and the preaching of the gospel, Lawrence argued from a Calvinist standpoint, could not save the non-elect, which was why these efforts ultimately did not improve society. “How many thousands have been hopefully converted to God, that never owned a bible, nor read a word in one?” he wondered, implying that God’s plan of predestination remained a more powerful force for salvation than the mission movement.²⁴⁵

As more Baptist communities embraced the religious innovations that anti-missionists decried, those that resisted change became ever more reactionary. In an 1830 letter to Daniel Parker’s *Church Advocate*, Elder E. Roberts from Illinois wrote that the churches in his area were increasingly “becoming hardshells,” and applauded young

²⁴³ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. II, 42-43.

²⁴⁴ Beebe, ed., *Editorial Articles*, Vol. II, 331.

²⁴⁵ Lawrence, *Patriotic Discourse*, 34.

preachers for holding to the tenets of predestination against the shifting tide toward free will. Roberts personified “free will” as an “old man...[who] walks very fast, (not towards Christ) and at almost every breath, or at least in every sentence, he says, if you dont be faithful in good works, you cant be saved.” Roberts gave thanks, however, that this old man was “shot at by our young shooters with such precision.”²⁴⁶ J. Floyd of Illinois also wrote to the *Church Advocate* to tell of a “revival” that appeared to be “progressing amongst the Regular or Predestinarian baptists” in his area, despite the attempts of those who preached the appeal of free will and missions.²⁴⁷ David Benedict also pointed to a growing divide between congregations and clergy in Baptist churches by the mid-1800s, in addition to friction among church members. “Baptist people, and those who sympathized with them, in olden times were very gregarious and loved to flock together,” often in the home of their minister, Benedict wrote. Then, “hospitality was the order of the day, and the good old pastors kept open doors for guests of all descriptions.” This practice appeared to be declining in 1860 when Benedict was writing his history, *Fifty Years among the Baptists*.²⁴⁸

Determining a precise account of anti-missionists’ decline and pro-mission Baptists’ growth is problematic. Since Baptists did not have a unified, overarching structure, and therefore lacked a consistent way to track the membership of the whole denomination, it is difficult to establish the exact number of anti-missionists that existed nationwide at the controversy’s peak. Most statistics come from regional or state

²⁴⁶ Elder E. Roberts, Letter to the Editor, *Church Advocate*, ed. Daniel Parker, Vol. 1 No. 10 (July 1830).

²⁴⁷ Quoted in Parker, ed., *Church Advocate*, Vol. 2 No. 3 (December 1830).

²⁴⁸ Benedict, *Fifty Years*, 86.

associations. In Indiana, for example, over half of the Baptist associations became anti-mission after 1833.²⁴⁹ By the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, anti-missionists had become a clear, and continually decreasing, minority. In 1880, it is estimated that the Primitive Baptist sect had around 100,000 members.²⁵⁰ In the south, “Hard-Shells numbered only 45,000 [in 1890]...while the southern missionary Baptists boasted an enrollment of 1,125,892.”²⁵¹ Even if anti-mission Baptists never were a majority within the denomination, it is clear that the mission movement resonated with a greater portion of the Baptist population in the United States as the nineteenth century progressed.

²⁴⁹ Mills, “The Struggle,” 320-321.

²⁵⁰ Jeffrey Wayne Taylor, *Formation*, 9.

²⁵¹ Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement,” 527.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

American religious historian Paul Harvey observes that “Baptist history almost perfectly represents the perpetual American evangelical struggle to balance liberty and autonomy, on the one hand, with organization and control on the other.”²⁵² The anti-mission controversy illustrates this struggle excellently. Anti-missionists rejected the increasing organization of religion in the nineteenth century as theologically unsound and threatening to religious liberty. Ironically, this same objection weakened their own cause.

The evangelistic emphasis brought about in American Protestantism by the Second Great Awakening prompted conscious efforts by religious denominations to increase their membership. It was not merely evangelism that allowed denominations to expand, however. More fundamentally, the variety of organized religious societies that Protestants formed in response to this increasing focus on evangelism facilitated the growth of the denominations that embraced them. In general, mission societies and other religious action organizations provide a unified means of outreach, which helps to expand the size and influence of denominations. Without these advantages, anti-mission Baptists could not compete successfully in the nineteenth-century religious marketplace without a similarly cohesive platform from which to conduct their campaign.

Because of their Calvinist theology, anti-missionists did not aim to grow in the same sense as evangelically focused denominations did. Rather than trying to reach

²⁵² Paul Harvey, “Baptists,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion in America*, Philip Goff, ed. (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2010), 429-430.

everyone with the gospel, they targeted only those who might be members of God's elect. Anti-mission leaders' fervent pleas for Baptists to point out the errors in the mission system, and the vast amount of literature that they produced to this purpose, reveal the importance that they placed on maintaining doctrinal purity—to them, adherence to Calvinist beliefs—within a unified Baptist denomination. Without the structure and resources that mission societies and other religious organizations provided, however, their efforts to maintain ideological dominance within the denomination were ineffective. The majority of Protestants influenced by the Second Great Awakening's encouragement of widespread evangelism realized that such a goal required extensive organization. As the anti-missionists feared, organized mission efforts naturally assumed bureaucratic structures, and, consequently, increased bureaucratization within religious denominations. Anti-mission Baptists foresaw negative consequences in mixing religion with bureaucracy, such as the “corporatization” and commodification of religious belief.

Since the nineteenth century, the emphasis on evangelism within American Protestantism has only increased, and therefore so has the bureaucratic structure of mission efforts and religious denominations more generally. The modern-day Southern Baptist Convention is one example of this increasing bureaucratization and its success. The SBC supported missionary organizations at its inception in 1845, and created various other organizations over the latter half of the nineteenth century, including a Sunday School Board, theological schools and seminaries, and publishing services. The amount of organizational oversight in the SBC increased further after 1925, when the Convention established a centralized “Executive Committee.” In the 1950s, in an effort to increase its structural and operational efficiency, the SBC hired a consulting firm and ended up

adopting a “corporate management theory” in its structure. As a result, the Convention established an official headquarters for the Executive Committee, and provided for more guided interaction of individual churches with the Convention through the creation of “program assignments.” According to the prominent SBC leader Albert Mohler, Jr., these changes attempted “to bring the denomination into the cultural mainstream in terms of [the] managerial revolution” of the mid-1900s.²⁵³ Today, the SBC is the second largest church in the United States (after the Catholic Church), with over 16 million members.²⁵⁴

One of the fastest growing religious affiliations in the United States presently, “nondenominational” Christianity, also makes use of a type of bureaucratic organization, despite its lack of centralized authority or denominational affiliation. Those who label themselves nondenominational Christians currently make up 3.4% of churchgoers in the United States—just three percentage points behind Southern Baptists—and are tied with Pentecostals as the second largest group of Evangelical Protestant churches.²⁵⁵

Nondenominational churches are typically comprised of numerous internal “ministries” run by laypeople, similar to the volunteer societies of the nineteenth century. Pastors of these churches generally exercise little hierarchical authority, but, according to religion scholar Donald E. Miller, they “create a ‘corporate’ culture...[while giving] relative autonomy to their staff and members in implementing the vision they so skillfully

²⁵³ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention,” in *The Great Commission Resurgence*, 153-158.

²⁵⁴ Eileen W. Linder, ed., *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches 2011, Prepared and edited for the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 12.

²⁵⁵ Pew Research Center, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” 12.

articulate.”²⁵⁶ At first glance, nondenominationalism seems to eschew bureaucracy, but in actuality it would not be able to function as it does without the vast array of societies and ministries that comprise it.

The adoption of bureaucratic organization by nineteenth-century pro-mission Baptists, and by both the Southern Baptist Convention and nondenominational Christianity more recently, has proven highly successful. The more tightly an institution is organized, the more unified it can be in its efforts at outreach and expansion, and the more cohesively it functions. This pertains to areas other than religion as well. In American politics, for example, a governmental structure that allowed for the independence of individual states, with little federal power, ultimately failed under the Articles of Confederation. The United States Constitution, on the other hand—which established branches of government and requires states to observe federally instituted laws—has functioned much more successfully due to its provision for a stronger central government. Mission-minded Protestants of the nineteenth century recognized such benefits in establishing bureaucratically structured societies.

One byproduct of the increasing size and structure of religious denominations seems to be a growing commodification of religion. In order to expand, a denomination must successfully “sell” itself. In many evangelical churches today, commodification takes the form of church-run bookstores that sell religious or church-specific products such as clothing, bumper stickers, and recorded sermons. Pastors are able to create huge followings through the establishment of “megachurches,” and by marketing their ideas

²⁵⁶ Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 140.

and theological views in books, videos, and other forms of media.²⁵⁷ This view of religion as something that can be marketed was precisely the threat that anti-mission Baptists perceived in the rise of missions and religious organizations during the nineteenth century. Their commitment to the history of their denomination, as well as to their estimation of doctrinal purity, made them unable to accept the changes that they witnessed in nineteenth-century American Protestantism.

The denominations that became involved in the mission movement, on the other hand, valued evangelism as their top theological priority. Since mission societies and benevolent organizations aided in this goal, evangelical Protestants saw the resulting religious bureaucratization and commodification as a small price to pay. Evangelicals who employ these strategies today also believe that they comply with God's will for widespread evangelism. Despite the corporate structure that it has gradually adopted, for example, the Southern Baptist Convention remains more deeply committed to evangelism than ever. In February of 2012, a panel designated by the SBC suggested that Southern Baptists begin using the name "Great Commission Baptists" to describe themselves. This moniker would further emphasize the Convention's commitment to missions.²⁵⁸ Southern Baptists' predecessors in the early nineteenth century also believed strongly in the theological doctrines supporting missions. The dispute between pro-mission and anti-mission Baptists, then, was fundamentally ideological. Those who supported missions

²⁵⁷ Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 145; 159.

²⁵⁸ The "Great Commission" is a biblical reference to Jesus Christ's order to "go and make disciples of all nations," which evangelical Christians see as a command to support mission efforts. See the Associated Press, "Southern Baptist Panel Recommends Add-On Name, Not Full Change: 'Great Commission Baptists,'" February 20, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/southern-baptist-leaders-to-hear-recommendation-on-changing-name-for-wider-appeal/2012/02/20/gIQAzLjPR_story.html (accessed February 21, 2012).

saw the greatest spiritual value in evangelism and denominational growth. Anti-mission Baptists, on the other hand, believed that accommodating new—albeit highly successful—methods of evangelism and ecclesiastical structure came at too high a theological price.

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