

RICE UNIVERSITY

**From Border South to Solid South:
Religion, Race, and the Making of Confederate Kentucky
1830-1880**

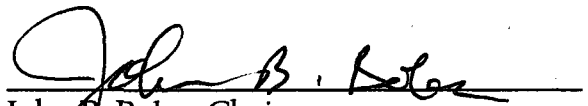
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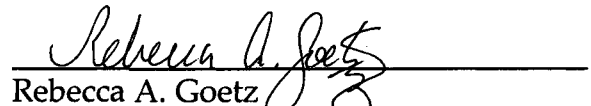
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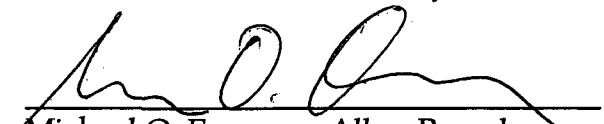
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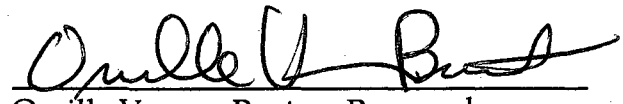
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ABSTRACT

From Border South to Solid South:

Religion Race and the Making of Confederate Kentucky, 1830–1880

by

Luke Edward Harlow

This dissertation demonstrates the central role of proslavery theology in the politics and collective identity of white American southerners—not just before, but also during and after the Civil War. It examines, more generally, the way that nineteenth-century Americans used evangelical religion to legitimate, defend, and debate political and social arrangements. Through an analysis of sermons, evangelical newspapers, and ministers' correspondence in Kentucky, this study contends that proslavery theological arguments formulated before the war were recast in the post-slavery era as justifications for Jim Crow and as sources of neo-Confederate identity.

Recent studies of the interface between religion, politics, and culture in the postbellum South acknowledge that proslavery ideology continued to exert enormous influence on the shaping of the late nineteenth-century South's segregationist order. Yet most histories, by positing the Civil War as a period divide, overlook important continuities that spanned the era. If historians are aware that proslavery ideology remained vital after the Civil War, scholars have yet to explain precisely how that thought evolved and survived, especially after

the death of legal slavery. The key to the persistence of proslavery ideology, this project argues, lies in the persistent power of proslavery theology.

Kentucky, the geographic focus of this dissertation, offers an ideal opportunity to explore the long life of proslavery religious thought. As a border slave state, it remained with the Union during the Civil War. However, after the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery in 1865—eight months after Confederate surrender—white Kentuckians embraced a decidedly pro-Confederate stance. White religious understandings of slavery and racial difference were key to the forging of Confederate identity in the postbellum Bluegrass State. Kentucky's postbellum white population, led by clergy and laity who rejected civil rights for African Americans, came to a broad embrace of Confederate ideas and paved the way for the emergence of a dominant white Democratic political bloc in the state.

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Portions of this dissertation, albeit in different form, were presented to the University of Alabama's Conference on Race and Place, the Society of Civil War Historians, and the Houston Area Southern Historians. Parts have appeared in print in *Slavery and Abolition*, *Ohio Valley History*, and a 2007 volume of essays I co-edited with Mark Noll, *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*. I thank the many editors, reviewers, commentators, and audiences who have helped shape the ideas that appear in the pages that follow.

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Lodging and meals often put a significant dent into research and conference budgets, but I was able to save considerable sums—often extending trips—thanks to the generous provision of several friends and family members, including Adam and Bonnie Garbinski, Gary and Bette Harlow, Tommy and Ruby Kidd, Mike and Betty Miller, Keith and Christen Morgan, Ethan Schrum, and Larry and Sheila Witten.

In September 2008, early on in my final academic year at Rice, Hurricane Ike smashed the Texas Gulf Coast and left my wife, Amber, and me without electricity for 22 days. Without a hint of discontent, Brian and Lee Ann Payne graciously allowed us to stay in a spare bedroom for two weeks. Then, Bruce and Sara Williams gave us their home for our final week without power. These acts of generosity provided a necessary source of stability in an overwhelming and demanding season; I cannot overstate my gratitude to such friends.

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I thank also the members of my dissertation committee. Vernon Burton has, in general, been an unflagging cheerleader. He saw long before I did the significance of Kentucky to nineteenth-century American history and gently pushed me to seek answers to the questions that led to this dissertation. Rebecca Goetz was a perceptive, superlative critic of my work and knew precisely when to offer words of encouragement. Michael Emerson has taught me as much as any scholar about American religion and the problem of race and has influenced many of the ideas in this study. Additionally, I also acknowledge and thank Mark Noll, who guided this project in its very earliest stages, read and critiqued much of my work at Rice, and has provided a sustaining confidence in my research pursuits. Randal Hall has proved an indispensable advisor and friend. From the start of my time at Rice, his editorial office at the *Journal of Southern History* has been a site of countless rewarding exchanges.

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Rice graduate students know well the tremendous additional scholarly resources provided by the *Journal of Southern History's* presence and I am grateful to a group of editors who allowed me to quite frequently drop by the office for help. Pat Burgess was always a warm and welcoming presence. Bethany Johnson arrived late in my graduate career, but her editorial care and ongoing willingness to read my work spared me from many problematic formulations.

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For some time, I contemplated opening these acknowledgments by first thanking the person most important in my life—and to this dissertation—since that is really where she ranks, but custom dictates that I recognize her last. Words cannot do much justice to the role my wife, Amber, has played in my graduate school career. She has lived with this dissertation in ways that I surely cannot begin to comprehend. Her ongoing curiosity, encouragement, faith, hope, and love are inspiring. I love her deeply.

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INTRODUCTION

THE LONG LIFE OF PROSLAVERY RELIGION

This dissertation demonstrates the central role of proslavery theology in the politics and collective identity of white American southerners—not just before, but also during and after the Civil War. It examines, more generally, the ways that nineteenth-century white Americans used evangelical religion to legitimate, defend, and debate political and social arrangements. Through an analysis of pamphlets, sermons, evangelical newspapers, and ministers' correspondence in Kentucky, this study contends that proslavery theological arguments formulated before the war were recast in the post-slavery era as justifications for Jim Crow and as sources of neo-Confederate identity.

Recent studies of the interface between religion, politics, and culture in the postbellum South acknowledge that proslavery ideology continued to exert enormous influence on the shaping of the late-nineteenth-century South's segregationist order. And, to be sure, historians have overwhelmingly and persuasively demonstrated the role of proslavery religion in the forging of antebellum white southern sectionalism.¹ However, scholars have yet to explain precisely how that thought evolved and survived, especially after the death of legal slavery. Most histories, by positing the Civil War as a period divide,

¹ See Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); and Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (1993; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

overlook important continuities that spanned the era.² White southerners believed deeply that God had ordained slavery—along with the supremacy of the white race that attended the evil institution. The legal fact of emancipation did not change that belief. The key to the persistence of proslavery ideology, this dissertation argues, lies in the persistent power of proslavery theology.

Kentucky, the geographic focus of this study, offers an ideal opportunity to explore the long life of proslavery religious thought. The Commonwealth was a slave state, but it was a border slave state. Six hundred sixty-four miles of the Ohio River touched the free soil of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois—the longest of any slave state/free state border. In the antebellum period, Kentucky and other Upper South states did not follow precisely the religious patterns of the Deep South. Regional location played a role in shaping religious attitudes toward

² On religion, race, and slavery in the nineteenth-century South, most histories treat the Civil War as period divide. For only a few representative studies on the antebellum era, see Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980); Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*; John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002); and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For a sampling of postwar scholarship, see Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865–1925* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1865–1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865–1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005). Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), is something of an exception. Noll does not probe far beyond the war, but he does show why the Civil War failed to resolve the antebellum theological slavery debate.

slavery. Located on the borderlands between slavery and freedom, antebellum Kentucky was in key respects shaped as much by its proximity to the North as by its affinities with the South. Consequently, it fostered a religio-political environment on the slavery question that allowed for a considerable degree of nuance in the antebellum era. Although proslavery whites comprised the preponderant political and religious majority, some white Kentuckians, for example, rejected American slavery as practiced, even as they overwhelmingly accepted the idea of slavery in the abstract as a God-given mode of social organization. Some went further and advocated gradual emancipationism but always of a very qualified sort, meaning they frequently invoked the language of white supremacy and unapologetically rejected the ideas of “radical” abolitionists who sought slavery’s immediate end. In their minds, arguments against slavery were not arguments against white racism.

Kentucky, in other words, fostered a fuzzy middle-ground stance toward slavery before the Civil War. Indeed, it was that middle-ground stance—which meant that when white Kentuckians had to choose sides, for or against slavery, they often chose neither—that fostered Unionism in the state. To remain on the middle ground toward slavery was a conservative stance. In 1860 and 1861, when no threat to slavery appeared imminent, there was no reason to leave the Union. Kentucky was a southern slave state prior to the Civil War, but, as historians have long argued, there were many Souths.³ To be southern in

³ For one representative account, see William W. Freehling, *The Road To Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17–19.

Kentucky in the era of the Civil War did not initially require Confederate allegiance.

Emancipation changed such opinions. After the Thirteenth Amendment finally sealed American slavery's fate in 1865—eight months after Confederate surrender—white Kentuckians embraced a decidedly pro-Confederate stance. The presence of slavery had created a context that enabled a middle ground attitude toward slavery among Kentucky whites. But when slavery was removed as a religious and political issue, racist antislavery conservatives made common cause with racists who had exhibited a more stridently proslavery stance before the war. In other words, when slavery disappeared, so too did the middle ground: a racist unity emerged. White religious understandings of slavery and racial difference were key to white Kentucky's postbellum transformation. The Bluegrass State's postbellum white population, led by clergy and laity who rejected civil rights for African Americans and who fiercely opposed abolitionism and its implications, came to a broad embrace of Confederate ideas and paved the way for the emergence of a dominant white Democratic political bloc in the state.

Thus the nineteenth-century case of Kentucky demonstrates the strength and vitality of proslavery religion as well as the more general tendency of ideologies to outlive the institutions they were first intended to justify. Though proslavery religion would not have existed without slavery, it eventually became an independent intellectual system that was more than merely ideological.⁴ As an

⁴ Historians have long known that many of the ideas associated with proslavery arguments persisted well beyond the immediate years surrounding emancipation and Confederate defeat. See John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the*

unquestioned truth in much of nineteenth-century America—in not only the South, but also the North—theological proslavery remained after emancipation. In the absence of legal slavery, however, old arguments came to be deployed in new ways.

Given Kentucky's antebellum and wartime record, interpreting the reasons for the state's postwar ideological shift has proved an enduring problem, but one that has not been diligently pursued by historians. Undoubtedly, to assert that the Commonwealth joined the Confederacy after the fact is to repeat a historical truism. As historians Hambleton Tapp and James Klotter have cogently explained, "Perhaps the most significant fact associated with the political history of Kentucky during the readjustment period immediately following the Civil War was that ex-Confederates gained control of the Democratic party and promoted it to a position of complete political domination in the state."⁵ That seemingly straightforward political realignment drew from deep social, cultural, and intellectual roots, and several recent dissertations have gone a long way toward interpreting the ascendancy of Confederate identity in Kentucky. Yet the literature on the topic remains underdeveloped, and historians have not fully appreciated the ways in which religion significantly contributed to the forging of

New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865–1918 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985).

⁵ Hambleton Tapp and James C. Klotter, *Kentucky: Decades of Discord, 1865–1900* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1977), 2–5, 28.

Confederate identity in the Bluegrass State.⁶

Overwhelmingly, the dominant religious tradition in nineteenth-century Kentucky, as in the United States as a whole, was evangelical Protestantism. Indeed, so significant was the evangelical presence for antebellum American political matters that historian Richard Carwardine has called evangelicalism the “largest, and most formidable, subculture” in the period, estimating that roughly 40 percent of the national population held some sort of evangelical affiliation by

⁶ Scholarship on postbellum Kentucky remains scant, but recent dissertations have probed much farther than previous studies into the relationship between white ideas about race and the creation of Confederate identity in the postwar Bluegrass: Anne E. Marshall, “‘A Strange Conclusion to a Triumphant War’: Memory, Identity, and the Creation of a Confederate Kentucky, 1865–1930” (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 2004), offers a suggestive exploration of Kentucky’s postbellum cultural history; Aaron Astor, “Belated Confederates: Black Politics, Guerrilla Violence, and the Collapse of Conservative Unionism in Kentucky and Missouri, 1860–1872” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2006), provides a comparative study of political attitudes and ideologies in central Kentucky and central Missouri, the areas in each state most populated with slaveholders; James Michael Rhyne, “Rehearsal for Redemption: The Politics of Post-Emancipation Violence in Kentucky’s Bluegrass Region,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 2006), as his title suggests, explicates the role of violence in the Bluegrass region after emancipation.

E. Merton Coulter’s pro-Confederate *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926) remains one of the few full-length monographs on the topic. Coulter explains Kentucky’s move toward Confederate identity by blaming Union military officials for harsh policies toward the state, discrediting the “meddling work of the [Freedmen’s] Bureau,” and placing the failure of civil rights upon the shoulders of “innocent and benighted” African Americans “unprepared” for emancipation, who brought racial violence upon themselves. Quotes, 340, 341, 347. Ross A. Webb’s brief *Kentucky in the Reconstruction Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979) retains some aspects of Coulter’s thesis, especially the significance of Union interventionism in turning white Kentuckians politically and ideologically southward, but Webb rejects the racism of Coulter’s analysis.

the mid 1850s.⁷ Connected by networks of faith and facilitated by their ability to harness a burgeoning print culture, nineteenth-century evangelicalism became a powerful national presence. Moreover, if evangelicalism's nineteenth-century national hegemony has not been lost on historians, south of the Mason-Dixon line the evangelical presence was even more pronounced, visible, and culturally powerful. In mid-nineteenth-century Kentucky, as the table on the following page enumerates, evangelicals accounted for nearly 60 percent of the state's total population but over 70 percent of its white population.

Ascertaining the actual number of Christian adherents in nineteenth-century America, evangelical or otherwise, is highly imprecise. For the estimated percentages in Kentucky for the purposes of this dissertation, Christian Churches, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians counted as evangelical, but by no means did these four ecclesiastical traditions represent all—or the only—evangelicals in nineteenth-century America. Congregationalists, Reformed Christians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians exhibited evangelical traits. Due to relatively restrictive membership standards, most churches saw many more regular church attendees—perhaps double or triple the number—than actual members. As a result, most careful historians of American religion tend to rely on U.S. Census tallies of church accommodations, but nonetheless lack effective

⁷ Richard Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 44. See also C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: The Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985), 55–56.

TABLE: KENTUCKY CHURCH ACCOMMODATIONS, 1850–1870⁸

	1850	1860	1870
Christian Churches	46,340	104,980	141,585
Baptist	291,855	267,860	288,936
Cumberland Presbyterian*	n/a	31,335	n/a
United Presbyterian*	n/a	400	n/a
Methodist	169,060	228,100	244,918
Presbyterian	99,106	67,440	100,750
Total Evangelical Accommodations	606,361	700,115	776,189
Total Church Accommodations	671,053	778,025	876,439
Total Slave Population	210,981	225,483	n/a
Total Free Colored Population	10,011	10,684	n/a
Total African American Population†	220,992	236,167	222,210
Total White Population	761,413	919,484	1,098,692
Total Free Population	771,424	930,201	n/a
Total Population	982,405	1,155,684	1,321,011
Total Church Accommodations as Percentage of Total Population	68.3	67.3	66.3
Total Evangelical Church Accommodations as Percentage of Total Population	61.7	60.6	58.8
Total Church Accommodations as Percentage of White Population	88.1	84.6	79.8
Total Evangelical Church Accommodations as Percentage of White Population	79.6	76.1	70.6

*Cumberland and United Presbyterians only appear in the 1860 U.S. Census.

They were included in the general "Presbyterian" category in 1850 and 1870.

†Total African American population for 1850 and 1860 represents the sum of the "slave" and "free colored" populations given by the U.S. Census.

⁸ Population and church accommodation (termed "sittings" in the 1870 census) figures taken from the 1850, 1860, and 1870 U. S. Census reports. These are the only decades in the period considered by this study—1830 to 1880—when U.S. Census recorded data on religious adherence. See *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*; *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*; *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*; all accessed at Historical Census Browser, University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center:

<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

ways of determining just how many people considered themselves active faith practitioners in the period.⁹

American evangelicals—used interchangeably with “conservative Protestants” in this dissertation—drew their historic roots from the mid-eighteenth-century series of transatlantic Anglo-American Protestant revivals. Yet there was no single, monolithic “evangelical” group. Due to evangelicalism’s lack of authority structure and the wide array of theologies and denominations it embraced, historians have labored to cogently summarize the core tenets of evangelicalism. Perhaps the most influential historical definition has come from David Bebbington, who presents evangelicals as those Protestant Christians who subscribed to all four of the following tenets: conversionism (the need for a religious transformation in one’s life); activism (particularly the dedication of the believer to the service of the Christian God); the centrality of “doctrine of the cross” (the idea that the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth provided the means of reconciling sinful humanity to the Christian God); and the authority of the Bible for matters of faith and practice. To be sure, Bebbington construes each of these beliefs fairly broadly, which—especially over time and in different contexts—has allowed for the great degree of doctrinal flexibility that has marked evangelicalism.¹⁰

⁹ For an extremely useful elucidation of this problem, as it applies to antebellum Virginia, see Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 3–10. See also Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation*, 55–56.

¹⁰ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 4–17. See also Mark A. Noll,

In the context of the American nineteenth century, evangelical notions of orthodoxy fundamentally dictated a shared method of biblical interpretation. This approach, called a “Reformed, literal hermeneutic” by historian Mark Noll, deemed the Bible an eminently readable book that contained Holy Spirit-inspired teachings, which any individual Christian could plainly apprehend. Drawn from the legacies of the Scottish Enlightenment and American political philosophy as much as Christian tradition, this democratized, common sense methodology led to a literalistic form of biblical interpretation. Ubiquitous among evangelicals in the period, the hermeneutic stressed the immediate relevance and applicability of scriptural teaching to practical affairs of everyday nineteenth-century life.¹¹

When forced to deal with the morality of American slavery, that literalist method of biblical interpretation led to a theological crisis. As this dissertation elucidates at length, key passages in both the Old and New Testaments suggested the Holy Writ sanctioned slavery. Southern proslavery divines made much of the biblical warrant for slavery, but many ostensibly antislavery ministers in the North—like Presbyterian Charles Hodge (1797–1878), Baptist Francis Wayland (1796–1865), and Congregationalist Moses Stuart (1780–1852)—also conceded the biblical imprimatur for slavery. Such concessions did not mean

Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004).

¹¹ On the “Reformed, literal hermeneutic” and its significance for religious debates over slavery in antebellum America, see Mark A. Noll, *America’s God, From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 367–401.

that antislavery clergy rejected the narrow proslavery biblical argument but rather distinguished between ancient and American slavery. While some antislavery activists, like Boston's William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879), argued from a radical perspective that a higher human law demanded the Bible be rejected for its endorsement of slavery, more moderate antislavery religious voices held to biblical authority yet attempted to show how the slavery in scripture differed greatly from American slavery. Not only did the American system refuse to recognize such biblical concepts as the Jubilee Year—in Mosaic Law, when all slaves were set free every seven years—or allow for marriage between slaves, but, most significantly, biblical slavery also was not based on racial difference. American slavery clearly was. Thus, antebellum American evangelicals grew deeply divided over the slavery question. By 1861, two factions had emerged, more or less divided sectionally, both claiming to read the Bible the same way, both denouncing the other as sinful. On the one side were southern proslavery divines who insisted on following the letter of the biblical text and who saw a direct divine sanction of American slavery. On the other side were antislavery clergy who maintained that a deeper understanding of the Gospel's broad intent, revealed through the Bible, denounced American slavery because it was different from the slavery of biblical times.¹²

Thus, principally because of the slavery question, a distinctive form of evangelicalism emerged in the white South by the middle decades of the

¹² Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 31–50; and Noll, *America's God*, 386–401. See also J. Albert Harrill, "The Use of the New Testament in the American Slave Controversy: A Case History in the Hermeneutical Tension Between Biblical Criticism and Christian Moral Debate," *Religion and American Culture* 10 (Summer 2000): 149–86; and Holifield, *Theology in America*, 494–504.

nineteenth century. The theologically conservative beliefs of southern whites were conditioned by what historian Stephen Haynes has called “intuitive racism.” They maintained, in other words, a common sense understanding of their own racial superiority. When applied to a common sense reading of Holy Scripture, the Bible affirmed what southern white Christians already wanted to believe it said about American, race-based, slavery.¹³

But was there actually a distinctively southern variety of evangelicalism? Because of the looseness of the term “evangelical,” some scholars have questioned its usefulness as an explanatory category. Perhaps the most cogent critic is historian Beth Schweiger, who has advocated abandoning the term and relying more rigorously on the denominational appellations employed by historical actors themselves. In Schweiger’s own study of nineteenth-century Virginia Methodists and Baptists, she writes that these believers “were united only in the advocacy of Protestant Christianity and their firm opposition to sin, and they often disagreed on how to define both of these.” Methodists and Baptists, Schweiger contends, did not “think of themselves as representatives of something that historians have labeled ‘Southern evangelicalism,’ a phrase that they have so often invoked in such varied contexts that it has lost any meaning.

¹³ Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 126. On the creation of a distinctive southern evangelicalism centered around slavery, see Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1977), 136–84; John B. Boles, “Evangelical Protestantism in the Old South: From Religious Dissent to Cultural Dominance,” in Charles Reagan Wilson, ed., *Religion in the South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 13–34; and Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 3–36.

'Southern evangelical' refers to an imaginary, homogenous group that would have been a mystery" to nineteenth-century Protestant believers.¹⁴

Schweiger's point is a serious and important one. For questions of ecclesiological identity and authority, the theological particulars of denominationalism always counted for much more in Kentucky than broader evangelical allegiances. Baptists, for example, devoted much more space in their denominational press to debates about, and defenses of, the proper mode of baptism (for the willful believer, by full bodily immersion in water) than issues of race, slavery, or national loyalty. Methodists spoke more overtly on the broad religio-political questions of slavery and sectionalism, especially after the Civil War in the context of denominational reunification debates. But Methodists too devoted much intellectual energy to the particulars of denominational belief. As just one example, in 1873 the *Central Methodist*, the official newspaper of the Kentucky Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, published a debate on the most appropriate, biblical form of baptism (they approved of baptizing children), which included ten "arguments" and "replies" and spanned more than twenty issues—over half of the year's catalog.¹⁵

Kentucky's Christian Churches, moreover, are an even clearer example of the robust nature of denominational commitment over purely political alignments. Birthed by the early nineteenth-century Restorationist movement led

¹⁴ Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8–9.

¹⁵ See "A Discussion on the Mode of Baptism: Gospel Baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Trinity. The *Record* affirms; the *Methodist* denies," *Central Methodist*, 11 January–5 July 1873.

by Alexander Campbell (1788–1866) and Barton W. Stone (1772–1844), by 1860 Christian Churches constituted the third-largest denomination in the Commonwealth and the fourth-largest overall in the United States. In 1849, in the midst of a political drive to amend Kentucky's state constitution with an emancipationist clause, Alexander Campbell did publish an essay in his theological journal, *Millennial Harbinger*, which advocated gradually ending slavery in Kentucky. While that article drew ire from proslavery Restorationists, it also represented something of an aberration among Kentucky Christian Church members. By and large, they steered a moderate course, which—as was the case among other conservative white believers in the state—meant they rejected radical abolitionism and maintained mild proslavery convictions. But it also meant that Restorationists tacitly agreed to relegate the slavery question and other political matters secondary to those of denominational theology and polity.¹⁶

Indeed, the notable Civil War-era Restorationist journal, *Lard's Quarterly*, published in Georgetown, Kentucky, from 1863 to 1868 by Campbell associate Moses Lard (1818–80), had little to say about contemporaneous political debates. As Lard explained in his inaugural issue, the journal existed to promote “the claims of *Primitive Christianity*.” The publication “aspire[d],” in short, “to contain a clear, true statement, and just defense of Christianity as taught in God's holy

¹⁶ Alexander Campbell, “Tracts for the People—No. XXXIII. A Tract for the People of Kentucky,” *Millennial Harbinger*, 3rd Ser., 6 (May 1849), 241–52. On the slavery question among Restorationists, see David Edwin Harrell Jr., *Quest for a Christian America: The Disciples of Christ and American Society to 1866* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966), 91–138. According to Harrell, p. 121, Campbell's 1849 essay to Kentuckians, “marked the last real conflict between Campbell and Southern slavery apologists.”

word." Over its five-year run, the journal did contain religious reflections on the "Union of Church and State" and Christian views of warfare, but those essays avoided making extreme partisan statements and represented only a small fraction of quarterly's printed output. In fact, Lard warned readers in 1863 that taking too extreme a position on the sectional crisis represented nothing less than a "deep strategy of Satan" to undermine the work of the true faith.

Acknowledging that individual believers could hold differing political opinions, Lard wanted Restorationists to remain committed to one of their core doctrinal principles: Christian unity.¹⁷

To be sure, in analyzing the institutional machinations of nineteenth-century denominations, it is appropriate to downplay the significance of a more expansive, more ecumenical notion of evangelicalism. As historian John Boles once wrote in a foundational essay on the topic, "The [southern] evangelical hegemony . . . was less a sense of religious community than a religious culture."¹⁸ In that sense, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Restorationists maintained strident and robust denominational differences. This dissertation, however, analyzes evangelicalism's interaction with the broader white southern culture. As a result, the technical particulars of denominational identification—though recognized as central to the lives of historical actors and analyzed significantly throughout this study—are stressed to a lesser degree than generic affinities

¹⁷ Quotes from Moses Lard, "Preface," *Lard's Quarterly* 1 (September 1863), 1; and Lard, "The Cause and the Work it Needs," *Lard's Quarterly* 1 (December 1863), 223. Emphasis in original. See also L. B. Wilkes, "Union of Church and State," *Lard's Quarterly* 4 (April 1867), 125–28; and G. W. Able, "War," *Lard's Quarterly* 4 (April 1867), 139–48.

¹⁸ Boles, "Evangelical Protestantism in the Old South," 27.

between evangelical belief and social, cultural, and political opinion. For that reason, this dissertation does not probe the activities of Restorationists or explore debates between pedobaptists and adult immersionists.

In assessing white evangelical answers to the broadly political questions of race, slavery, and the status of the American nation, this study primarily relies upon printed records from the period. As many historians who have worked on religion and the long era of the Civil War have thoroughly demonstrated, evangelical print culture was a core ingredient to the making of white Protestantism's nineteenth-century notion of "Christian America."¹⁹ Largely—though by no means exclusively—pamphlets and religious tracts constituted the main sources for this dissertation's first two chapters, while the final four chapters rely on religious serials. In antebellum Kentucky, several denominational newspapers achieved wide readership, but many denominational presses attempted to bracket political discussion from their pages and religious debates over slavery largely took place in widely circulated pamphlets.²⁰ By 1860, as the sectional crisis grew more intense and as newly formed Presbyterian and Methodist serials emerged devoted in large part to the

¹⁹ On the rise and significance of nineteenth-century evangelical print culture, particularly newspapers, to the making of "Christian America," see Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation*, 36–38. See also Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 108–113, for the importance of the rebuilding of the religious press for the task of reconstructing white southern cultural authority after the Civil War.

²⁰ Kentucky's most active, longest lasting—and perhaps most influential—was the Baptist *Western Recorder*. (Indeed, the *Recorder*—published as the *Baptist Banner* from 1829 to 1851—remains one of the oldest successive religious newspapers in the United States.) The *Recorder* did not ignore antebellum politics or debates about race and slavery, but these discussions only constituted a small fraction of its printed output.

key religio-political questions at stake in the conflict, the religious arena of political debate shifted subtly from pamphlets to newspapers and theological journals.

Undeniably, all of these political debates occurred within the context of the denomination. Yet if denominationalism trumped evangelicalism, white southern evangelicals nonetheless shared much in the way of bedrock theological principles, especially in their common approach to biblical interpretation. And when it came to questions about slavery and abolition, race, and the formation of sectionalism, that broader white southern evangelical religious culture provided an important, formative source of affiliation and identity.

Nowhere was that more true than in nineteenth-century Kentucky. Whites in the Commonwealth drew on long-standing theological proslavery arguments—theologically conservative, explicitly racist, and fiercely anti-abolitionist—to create a sense of religious solidarity with the rest of the white South after the Civil War. In so doing, they cleared a path for the emergence of the Commonwealth's postwar political order, which was built upon a white conservative Democratic bloc, opposed to civil rights for African Americans, and averse to overtures from northern religious and political agents. In short, the political reality of emancipation and its religious implications moved Kentucky's religiously conservative whites from their avowedly neutral antebellum ideological position as a border South state to a postwar affinity with an emerging solid South, comprising the former Confederacy and starkly racist.

CHAPTER ONE

NEITHER SLAVERY NOR ABOLITIONISM
THE DILEMMA OF CHRISTIAN CONSERVATIVE ANTISLAVERY
1830–1845

I was charged with being an 'Abolitionist.' . . . [My critics] made no distinction between an 'Abolitionist' and an 'Emancipationist.' The latter was in favor of doing away with slavery *gradually*, according to State Constitution and law; the former believed slavery to be a sin *in itself*, calling for immediate abolition without regard to consequences. I was an Emancipationist . . . but I was never for a moment an Abolitionist.

–Baptist minister James M. Pendleton (1811–91),
Reminiscences of a Long Life (1891)¹

On March 1, 1836, Kentucky's state legislature passed a resolution condemning the work of "abolition societies." Members of such organizations were motivated by a "wild and fanatical spirit" that called immediately for "an entire abolition of slavery in the United States." The profile of these northern antislavery immediatists had increased drastically in recent years, thanks to a widespread campaign of printed "tracts, pamphlets, almanacks, and pictorial representations." Although Kentucky's white officials claimed no quarrel with the freedom of the press—"secured to the citizen by the constitution of the country"—they did have a problem with those who would "prostitut[e]" that freedom "to such unhallowed purposes" as the total abolition of slavery. Abolitionists strove, as the Kentucky legislature saw it, "to produce a spirit of discontent, insubordination, and perhaps insurrection with the slave population

¹ James M. Pendleton, *Reminiscences of a Long Life* (Louisville: Press Baptist Book Concern, 1891), 112–113. Emphasis in original.

of the country." No one could claim a right "to excite a portion of the population of a sister [slave] state to rapine and murder." As a result, the legislature resolutely denounced "the effort of the abolitionists to stir up a portion of the population of eleven states of this Union to rebellion and bloodshed." The point was made: abolitionists were "fanatics." They would resort to the "radical" program of achieving their aims through violence—particularly by inciting slave insurrection. For Kentucky whites, such an agenda was unconscionable.²

The possibility of slave violence and race war, however, was not the only reason Kentucky lawmakers rejected abolitionism. In their view, northern antislavery immediatists also worked actively to undermine the laws of racial order the Christian God had clearly given to human society. As the legislature put it, "the people of Kentucky hold themselves responsible to no earthly tribunal, but will refer their cause to Him alone, through the mysterious dispensations of whose Providence, dominion has been given to the white man over the black." It was God "alone" who would "judge of [slavery's] compatibility with his will," and Kentucky's white political leaders believed they were upholding a divine institution, mandated for the racial ordering of American society.³

² *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Forty-Fourth General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky* (Frankfort, Ky.: J. H. Holeman, 1836), 683–86. For further elucidation of this particular legislative decision, see William Elsey Connelly and E. M. Coulter, *History of Kentucky*, ed. Charles Kerr (Chicago: American Historical Society), 2:802–804.

³ *Acts of the Kentucky General Assembly, 1836*, 683–84.

Just a year earlier, however, a group of Kentucky Presbyterians seemed to offer a rival interpretation of the divine will for American slavery. In 1835, ten leading Bluegrass Presbyterians offered a “plan for the instruction and emancipation” of the state’s enslaved population. Led by minister John C. Young (1803–57), later the president of Danville’s Centre College and moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. in 1853, these white religious Kentuckians argued “that the system of slavery, which exists among us, is not right.” Employing biblical language, they implored their audience: “May He ‘who hears the cry of the poor and needy,’ and who has commanded to let the ‘oppressed go free,’ give to each one of us wisdom to know our duty and strength to fulfill it.” Against the common proslavery claim that “the Bible sanctioned slavery,” these Kentuckians contended that the biblical imprimatur did not extend to American slavery, but only ancient “*Greek and Roman slavery*”—in other words, “the kind of slavery” common to “the countries where the apostles preached and wrote their epistles.” American slavery was “a system which exhibits power without responsibility, toil without recompense, life without liberty, law without justice, wrongs without redress, punishment without guilt, and families without marriage.” These blatantly sinful features of the southern system compelled Young and his cohort to argue that “THE NEW TESTAMENT DOES CONDEMN SLAVERY, AS PRACTICED AMONG US, IN THE MOST EXPLICIT TERMS, FURNISHED BY THE LANGUAGE IN WHICH THE INSPIRED PENMAN WROTE.” In short, the Bible did give warrant to a form of slaveholding, but the time for that type of slavery—the slavery of biblical antiquity—had long since passed. As these white Kentucky Presbyterians asserted in 1835, their fellow

southern believers needed to move toward ending the institution in the present day.⁴

The Presbyterian proposal gained little traction within the Kentucky Synod—the state-level denominational ruling body—but it was not as stark an antislavery platform as its authors suggested. The proposal was, in fact, rather conservative, advocating a plan of gradual emancipation. As the authors viewed the matter, African Americans were not yet ready to participate in free white society: “At present, an emancipated black among us is placed in peculiarly unpropitious circumstances.” Furthermore, although the Presbyterians devoted most of their space to concern for the enslaved, they also wanted their white readers to understand their own particular racial stake in the matter, contending that slavery “*demoralizes the whites as well as the blacks.*” In short, while condemning American slavery as it existed, these ministers offered no radical abolitionist program to their white coreligionists in Kentucky.⁵ Indeed, elsewhere Young and his colleagues connected their gradual emancipation plan with colonization schemes—the removal, in other words, of the African American population to the colony of Liberia in west Africa—and distanced themselves from abolitionist activism.⁶

⁴ John Brown and John C. Young, *An Address to the Presbyterians of Kentucky, Proposing a Plan for the Instruction and Emancipation of their Slaves* (1835; Newburyport, Mass.: Charles Whipple, 1836), 3, 20, 21, 23. Emphasis in original.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17, 30. Emphasis in original.

⁶ Charles C. Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes* (Savannah, Ga.: Thomas Purse, 1842), 78–79, documents John C. Young’s leadership in the gradualist “Kentucky Union, for the moral and religious improvement of the colored race,” comprised of a “union of the several denominations of christians, in the State.” In point of fact, Young leaned much closer to a more radical antislavery platform

The statements of the Kentucky legislature and the state's Presbyterians were manifestly different: the former endorsed slavery whereas the latter rejected it. But both the Kentucky legislature's 1836 denunciation of abolitionism and the 1835 statement of John C. Young and the gradualist antislavery clergy affirmed a three-fold, profoundly religious, conservative argument on slavery that remained a fixture in the thought of white Kentuckians through the antebellum era and, indeed, persisted throughout the Civil War and Reconstruction. First, the Commonwealth's religious whites, overwhelmingly evangelical in affiliation, affirmed slavery as a divinely mandated institution for the ordering of society, at least in some place and time. Second, Kentucky's religiously conservative whites drew on the broad cultural belief in white supremacy, which they also saw as ordained by the Christian God. Third, they collectively rejected abolitionism for its ostensible radicalism, which Kentucky whites believed challenged divine dictums and threatened the racial order.

By and large, Kentucky whites shared these three beliefs about slavery in common, but such views obviously did not lead to a univocal proslavery consensus in the antebellum Bluegrass State. Rather, white Kentucky's religious mind, like its political mind, always remained conflicted about slavery. As a middle ground slave state, the Commonwealth allowed the intellectual space for a moderate antislavery ideology, evangelical in theological shape and embracing

and was fairly realistic about the practicality of colonization schemes, believing black expatriation all but impossible to implement on a wide scale and acknowledging the widespread lack of support for such efforts, especially within the African American community. See Harold D. Tallant, *Evil Necessity: Slavery and Political Culture in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 38–39, 60–61.

neither slavery nor abolitionism. Despite slavery's existence in Kentucky since its earliest days, the state sat too far north to grow cotton, sugar, or other crops that required a large chattel labor force. Even the state's largest hemp and tobacco farms were not comparable in size to the giant plantations farther south.⁷

Although these factors did not serve to make slavery more "mild" in Kentucky than the rest of the South, as historians once thought, they did make the Commonwealth both a more volatile and receptive arena for antislavery thought.⁸ By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, however, public

⁷ On the nature of the Kentucky slave economy and agriculture, see Ivan E. McDougale, *Slavery in Kentucky, 1792–1865* (1918; New York: Arno Press, 1970), 26–29; J. Winston Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 41–47; James C. Klotter, *The Breckinridges of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 63–65; Lowell H. Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 133–38, 168–69; Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, vol. 1, *From Slavery to Segregation* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society).

⁸ Ivan McDougale wrote in 1918 that most Kentucky slaves "seem to have been content in their condition" and that "personal interest in a slave and his welfare took precedence over merely his economic value to the owner." McDougale did acknowledge that "life among the slaves of Kentucky was not by any means a path of roses." See McDougale, *Slavery in Kentucky*, 73, 77, 78. J. Winston Coleman claimed in his 1940 account, *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, vii, that Kentucky had the "mildest form" of slavery, "better than in any other state, with the possible exception of Maryland or Virginia," and certainly a more mitigated form than the Deep South's "proverbially harder" chattel version. Lowell Harrison and James Klotter accept a qualified version of Coleman's view. They highlight the racial dimension of slavery but state nonetheless: "Relative mildness was no excuse for the existence of slavery, but a slave in Kentucky probably received somewhat better treatment than a slave in Mississippi or Alabama." See Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 174. For a challenge to this line of reasoning, see Marion B. Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 1:42–50. More recently, Harold Tallant has argued contrary to Coleman that Kentucky slavery was in fact harsher than slavery farther south. See Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 62–65. For a reappraisal of Coleman that remains critical of the "mildness" thesis but that also emphasizes the historiographical importance of *Slavery Times in Kentucky* for its description of the "darker side" of slavery, see John David Smith, "'To hue the line and let the chips fall where they may': J. Winston Coleman's *Slavery Times in*

support for slavery was on the rise, and the political power of the slaveholding class was increasing. The signal event came, as the next chapter explicates, in 1849 and 1850 when a new state constitution, overwhelmingly approved by popular vote, strengthened the rights of slaveholders and guaranteed slavery's survival well into the future. Still, even though the influence of antislavery advocates waned in the state after 1850, a small minority continued to agitate against slavery through the years until the beginning of the Civil War.⁹

This complex approach to the slavery question did not necessarily make the Bluegrass State unusual in the antebellum United States. One of the more vexing problems in American history has been explicating the nineteenth-century relationship between slavery and Christianity. While the literature on this problem is vast, it is really only in the last several decades that the most important advances have been made toward understanding the role of religion before the Civil War in shaping ideas about slavery. Most recently, scholars such as Mitchell Snay, John McKivigan, Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Mark Noll, and John Daly have demonstrated the centrality of theological considerations in political and economic debates about slavery. Much of the public argument over the nature of slavery that occurred from 1830 to 1860 stemmed from a debate over the authority and role of the Bible. Proslavery Protestants in the antebellum South, the literature suggests, affirmed a literalist biblical sanction for slaveholding, which approved, in their language, "slavery in

Kentucky Reconsidered," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 103 (Autumn 2005), 691–726.

⁹ On Kentucky's constitutional debates of 1849–50, see Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 117–119; and Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 151–60.

the abstract." Abolitionists, by contrast, adopted a broader interpretive scheme—anathema to the literalists—and concluded that the "spirit" of Scripture denounced slavery, in spite of its literal word. Slavery, in other words, presented a theological impasse by the late antebellum period.¹⁰ Certainly James Henley Thornwell, the South's leading proslavery cleric prior to the Civil War, spoke for many religious southerners—and even many in the North—when he described the debate as a fight between "Christianity and Atheism," with "the progress of humanity the stake."¹¹

The opinions of leading proslavery clergy notwithstanding, however, the relationship between slavery and Christianity was always complicated in the

¹⁰ William Sumner Jenkins' foundational chapter, "Moral Philosophy of Slavery" in *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 200–41, in many ways set the agenda for future scholars looking at the debate over slavery as a debate about the nature of Christianity and the role Christian doctrine should play in shaping society. More recent historians have extended Jenkins' work much further. Some of the most significant examples include, but are certainly not limited to: Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (1993; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); the collected essays in John R. McKivigan and Snay, eds., *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Mark A. Noll, *America's God, From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 367–401; Eugene D. Genovese, "Slavery Ordained of God": *The Southern Slaveholders' View of Biblical History and Modern Politics* (Gettysburg, Pa.: Gettysburg College, 1985); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Genovese, "The Divine Sanction of Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders' World View," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (Summer 1987), 211–33; Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 505–65; E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 494–504; and John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002).

¹¹ James Henley Thornwell, "The Christian Doctrine of Slavery," in John B. Adger and John L. Girardeau, eds. *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, (1873; Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1974), 4:406.

antebellum South. Certainly the southern religious proslavery elite did their part to defend the peculiar institution, but their support was not uncritical. Even in the years after 1830, where historians have traditionally pointed to a shift in southern attitudes from ambivalence about slaveholding to decisive support for the practice, southern theologians wrote that slavery as it was practiced in America needed reformation. They did not doubt that God had established the master-slave relationship as foundational for Christian society. But holy sanction of “slavery in the abstract” did not suggest to southern divines that slavery as practiced below the Mason and Dixon line was necessarily beyond reproach. The proslavery clergy frequently lamented what they saw as slavery’s abuses and excesses—though never its racist foundation. If they were opposed to antislavery measures, if they were unwilling to say that slavery itself was sinful, the proslavery clergy remained hopeful that American slavery could become more equitable and more just—more Christian. Southern divines saw American slavery as a flawed system that needed to be brought into conformity with an identifiably Christian standard.¹²

That southern ministers recognized weaknesses in the American slave system suggests that the historiographic emphasis on a hardened, rigid religious proslavery ideology has been exaggerated. Among much of the southern evangelical population, there was no clean shift from a “necessary evil” to a

¹² See Kenneth Moore Startup, *The Root of All Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 67–77; and Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 3–33. For a classic statement that posits 1830 as a stark period divide on southern attitudes toward slavery, see Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).

"positive good" view of the peculiar institution.¹³ To be sure, regional location played a role in shaping clergy attitudes toward slavery. Especially outside the Lower South, public sentiment never completely crystallized in favor of slavery. The Middle South—including states like Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina—retained pockets of antislavery dissent up to the Civil War. And in the Border South, where geography dictated forms of agriculture that did not require large chattel labor forces and where long state borders touched free soil, the discomfort with slavery was magnified. In Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri, a degree of antislavery sentiment persisted throughout the antebellum period.¹⁴

Thus, Kentucky harbored a persistent antislavery presence into the 1860s. For public figures of all sorts, from politicians to publishers to clergy, slavery was a questionable institution and its supposed merits demanded analysis. Kentucky's antislavery populace never gained a majority in the commonwealth,

¹³ As Charles Irons has put it in his study on Virginia evangelicals, "Post-Revolutionary evangelical leaders did not arrest any religious momentum for abolition because no real momentum ever existed." See Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 57. For a detailed description of how evangelical proslavery was neither situated in language of "necessary evil" nor "positive good," see Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, 30–56.

¹⁴ For a cogent description of the differences between these "Souths" and regional attitudes toward slavery, see William W. Freehling, *The Road To Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17–19. For a dated, but incredibly valuable study of the persistence of antislavery views in Virginia churches, see Patricia Hickin, "'Situation Ethics' and Antislavery Attitudes in the Virginia Churches," in John B. Boles, ed., *America: The Middle Period: Essays in Honor of Bernard Mayo* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973), 188–215.

but they did generate enough support to make political waves. As such, the long life of antislavery agitation in nineteenth-century Kentucky has been a subject of much historiographic consideration.¹⁵ Not only have historians been interested in the persistence of southern dissent against slavery in the decades immediately preceding the Civil War, they have also highlighted the varieties of opinion among antislavery advocates. While the Commonwealth did feature abolitionists on its religious and political margins—like the pacifist evangelical John G. Fee (1816–1901) and the exiled James G. Birney (1792–1857)—who hoped for the immediate eradication of slavery, Kentucky’s late antebellum antislavery movement remained dominated by emancipationists who sought to end the institution gradually, with compensation given to the owners of freed slaves. In fact, the vast majority of antislavery Kentuckians rejected outright the aims of “radical” abolitionists.¹⁶ Broadly considered, this collection of gradual

¹⁵ In addition to a great number of journal articles, several important monographs have surveyed late antebellum Kentucky antislavery activism. See Asa Earl Martin, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky prior to 1850* (Louisville: Standard Printing, 1918); McDougale, *Slavery in Kentucky*, 93–118; Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, 290–325; Lowell H. Harrison, *The Antislavery Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978); and Tallant, *Evil Necessity*. Kentucky antislavery has also been of some interest in more general histories of antebellum America. See, for example, Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (1940; New York: Peter Smith, 1951), 247–79; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 462–74.

¹⁶ Cassius M. Clay (1810–1903) complicates historians’ understanding of Kentucky’s antislavery advocates. Clay was not an abolitionist—the bowie-knife wielding politico fought duels over lesser charges—and he advocated gradual emancipation, often connected to colonization. Yet Clay entertained the support of northern abolitionists and he worked closely for a time with John G. Fee. Clay also appeared less strongly committed to white supremacy than other gradualists, and he thought blacks and whites could live together in one society. Moreover, unlike many other slaveholding Kentuckians who denounced slavery,

emancipationists—like John C. Young and his likeminded Presbyterian colleagues—believed sending Kentucky's black population to the Liberia colony was the best way to end slavery. To be sure, colonizationists came from a variety of ideological casts; they were not a monolithic group. But the primary impulse behind colonization was racist: supporters held a paternalistic view of African Americans and believed that free blacks could not live among the commonwealth's white population. Black freedom would be best experienced apart from whites. Slavery may have been wrong, but so too was an interracial society.¹⁷

Clay actually manumitted his slaves. On Fee and Cassius Clay and the differences in their racial thought and antislavery agendas, see Richard Sears, *The Kentucky Abolitionists in the Midst of Slavery, 1854–1864: Exiles for Freedom* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), and also the work of Stanley Harrold: "Violence and Nonviolence in Kentucky Abolitionism," *Journal of Southern History* 57 (February 1991), 15–38; "Cassius Clay on Slavery and Race: A Reinterpretation," *Slavery & Abolition* 9 (May 1988), 42–56; "The Intersectional Relationship between Cassius Clay and the Garrisonian Abolitionists," *Civil War History* 35 (June 1989), 101–119; and *Abolitionists & the South, 1831–1859* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995). Harrold's nuanced interpretation of Cassius Clay's racial thought and his relationship to William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist disciples has largely replaced the otherwise significant work of David Smiley, *Lion of White Hall: The Life of Cassius M. Clay* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962); and "Cassius M. Clay and John G. Fee: A Study in Southern Anti-Slavery Thought," *Journal of Negro History* 42 (July 1957), 201–213. James G. Birney had a minimal presence in Kentucky after 1835. He saw his attempts to set up an antislavery press in Danville thwarted by local citizens. Birney received support from northern abolitionists Gerrit Smith and Theodore Dwight Weld and rather than stay in Kentucky, he opted to advocate immediate abolition in the North, among a more receptive audience. Harrison, *Antislavery Movement in Kentucky*, 39–45. On the mainstream of Kentucky antislavery and its denunciation of abolitionism, see Jennifer Cole, "'For the Sake of the Songs of the Men Made Free': James Speed and the Emancipationists' Dilemma in Nineteenth-Century Kentucky," *Ohio Valley History* 4 (Winter 2004), 27–48; and Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, passim.

¹⁷ When the Kentucky Colonization Society began in 1829 as an extension of the American Colonization Society, it became the primary forum in which to express

Many of the state's chief gradual colonizationists were also some of Kentucky's most prominent slaveholders. Their ranks included such noted politicians as Henry Clay (1777–1852) and Joseph R. Underwood (1791–1876), the longtime U.S. congressman from Bowling Green. Among white Kentucky's religious adherents, no one embodied this antebellum gradualist emancipationist position more clearly than Robert J. Breckinridge (1800–71), a politician from a prominent Kentucky family who, by 1832, accepted a call to Presbyterian ministry and became one of the state's most vocal religio-political activists into the 1860s. Breckinridge rose to prominence within national Presbyterian circles—he was elected moderator of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.'s General Assembly in 1845—and maintained an active and domineering presence within the Bluegrass State, helping to found Danville Theological Seminary, affiliated with Centre College, in 1853. Like much of white Kentucky's antislavery elite,

antislavery sentiment in the commonwealth. Yet, it never achieved much success, partly because of the conflicting values the KCS represented. Indeed, the contradictory impulses of colonizationists are at least one of the many factors for the failure of the movement. As Harold Tallant and others have argued, colonization was invoked for proslavery, antislavery, and "separationist" (not dealing with slavery per se, but seeking a means of removing blacks from the presence of whites) ends. On the varieties of Kentucky colonizationism and racist motivations, see Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 27–57; see also Harrison, *Antislavery Movement in Kentucky*, 29–31. On colonization as a legitimate form of antislavery expression, see Jeffrey Brooke Allen, "Did Southern Colonizationists Oppose Slavery? Kentucky 1816–1850 as a Test Case," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 75 (April 1977), 92–111; and Carl N. Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 22–25. In her important article on the activity of Rufus W. Bailey, the leading agent of the American Colonization Society in Virginia, Ellen Eslinger concludes that colonizationists may have held sincere antislavery views, but the ACS nonetheless also affirmed the "basic premise that the United States was a society for white people." See Eslinger, "The Brief Career of Rufus W. Bailey, American Colonization Society Agent in Virginia," *Journal of Southern History* 71 (February 2005), 74.

Breckinridge was a slaveholder himself, owning nine slaves in 1825, seventeen in 1830, and thirty-seven in 1860. If this fact suggests a contradiction between values and action to modern observers, no such conflict existed in Breckinridge's mind. As historian James C. Klotter has argued, slavery in nineteenth-century Kentucky was "ingrained and convenient." The inertia perpetuating slavery trumped the forces opposed to the institution.¹⁸

Breckinridge published his first important antislavery work, *Hints on Slavery*, in 1830, as a series of seven weekly articles in Lexington's *Kentucky Reporter*. At the time, Breckinridge—not yet an ordained minister—was serving in the Kentucky legislature. The essays were part of his contribution to an emancipationist movement to amend the state's constitution to ban the importation of slaves into the state. According to Breckinridge, state governments needed to handle the slavery question because "the national government has not the smallest power over the subject of slavery within the limits of any state." Breckinridge's emphasis on the sovereignty of states to regulate institutions within their borders would mark many of his arguments in the years that followed.¹⁹

As he affirmed state sovereignty, Breckinridge also made clear his belief that slavery undermined moral law and needed to be ended in Kentucky. Slavery, he claimed, was a scourge on the land. "[O]ne unborn cannot be a slave," he argued. "You may take a man at his birth, and by an adequate system

¹⁸ Klotter, *Breckinridges of Kentucky*, 63.

¹⁹ The original articles were later republished as a pamphlet in 1843. Robert J. Breckinridge, *Hints on Slavery* (1830; Lexington, Ky.: n. p., 1843), 9.

make him a slave—a brute—a demon. This is man's work." Appealing to his readership's religiosity and common sense, he continued: "The light of reason, history and philosophy—the voice of nature and religion—the spirit of God himself proclaims that the being he created in his own image he must have created free." Consequently, Breckinridge proposed a system of gradual emancipation whereby slaves born after a certain date would become free at a certain age. The young politician proposed that those born to slave women in Kentucky after 1835 be freed at age twenty-one; if born after 1840, free at sixteen; after 1856, free at birth. Thus, he wrote, hereditary slavery would cease to exist.²⁰

Once free, he argued, slaves ought to be sent to the American Colonization Society's Liberia colony in West Africa. In his support of colonization, Breckinridge demonstrated his commitment to the racial ideology of the ACS, arguing that the races ought to govern their own kind. If this principle were followed, he asserted, free blacks would have much better opportunities. Ignoring Liberia's ongoing difficulties both with finances and native discontent toward the colonial presence—along with a brutally fatal disease environment—Breckinridge saw the colony as "a model of good order" as a result of its racially homogenous populace. In America, "[f]ree negroes are very seldom good citizens," he continued, because "they are not citizens at all. The law views them with constant jealousy, and barely tolerates their existence in the country. . . . The end proposed should be to get rid of both classes, or if that is not practicable, then of the worst." Like many of his fellow advocates of colonization, Breckinridge saw the movement as a Christian endeavor.

²⁰ Ibid., 16, 23.

According to the future Presbyterian minister, in a twist of providential irony God had allowed the African to be enslaved yet “now demands his restoration that [the former slave] may Christianise his brethren.”²¹

Lest anyone think that Breckinridge primarily cared for the welfare of blacks, he was sure to let the readers of *Hints on Slavery* know where he stood. Breckinridge did not advocate immediate abolition. “Slavery itself was preferable to the general residence among us of manumitted slaves,” he wrote. But a gradual emancipation that sent the African American population abroad would greatly benefit Kentucky’s working class. What would be “better,” he asked, a slave population with “no motive for toil but the rod” or a “hardy, happy, and laborious yeomanry,” the future white population of the state? For Breckinridge, in the question lay the answer.²²

Breckinridge was neither the first nor only Kentuckian to place white concerns at the center of his antislavery argumentation, and the strategy proved a successful one in *Hints on Slavery*. The state’s immediately contentious Nonimportation Act passed in February 1833, due in large part to the activities of antislavery conservatives like Breckinridge. The “Law of 1833” legally blocked Kentuckians from bringing more slaves into the commonwealth and placed restrictions on slave trading. Disdained by proslavery Kentuckians almost from

²¹ Ibid., 6, 11. Breckinridge’s arguments about colonization as a Christianizing endeavor follow closely those made by some of colonization’s earliest advocates. For an example, see the writings of Robert Finley, a Presbyterian minister from Baskingridge, New Jersey, and early member of the American Colonization Society, in Isaac V. Brown, *Biography of the Rev. Robert Finley*, 2nd ed. (1857; New York: Arno Press, 1969), 99.

²² Breckinridge, *Hints on Slavery*, 5–8.

the moment it passed, opponents of the 1833 nonimportation law spent the greater part of the next two decades seeking its repeal.²³

In the time between *Hints on Slavery* and the passage of the Nonimportation Act, Breckinridge left professional politics for a career in the Presbyterian ministry. Though sparked by a religious conversion, Breckinridge's career move did not mean that he gave up political activity. No longer in Kentucky to relish firsthand the success of the Law of 1833—he accepted the pastorate of Baltimore's Second Presbyterian Church in 1832—Breckinridge continued to write publicly against slavery and in support of conservative emancipation. In June 1833, just a few months after Kentucky codified nonimportation, he published "Hints on Colonization and Abolition," an article

²³ The argument that slavery was wrong because it ultimately undermined the interests of Kentucky's white population featured prominently in writings and speeches by Henry Clay, Joseph Underwood, and Cassius Clay, among others. Stanley Harrold has argued persuasively that Cassius Clay's motivations were less stridently racist than those of more conservative opponents of slavery, suggesting that the whites-first antislavery argument could be marshaled for more radical, if not integrationist, ends. (Indeed, Cassius Clay was often labeled "the 'fanatic' among Kentucky's opponents of slavery.") However, if the white supremacist antislavery argument could be deployed for less conservative ends, Breckinridge was not the person to make such a move. To quote Lowell Harrison at length: "In whatever lowly economic status a poor white found himself, he had the psychological assurance that he was superior to all blacks, no matter how much better off they might be in material terms. This racial distinction helped forge a bond between poor whites and wealthy planters that often baffled and infuriated opponents of slavery." On the white-over-black antislavery arguments, see Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 11–14, 80–82; Harrison, *Antislavery Movement in Kentucky*, 48–49 (quote); Cole, "James Speed and the Emancipationists' Dilemma," 31–34; Harrold, "Cassius Clay on Slavery and Race," 44 (quote); Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 94–96; and Harrison, *Antislavery Movement in Kentucky*, 46–48.

designed to answer charges brought by Boston's most noted radical abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison, against the colonization movement.²⁴

In his influential and hard-hitting *Thoughts on African Colonization* (1832), Garrison had decried colonization as a ploy that merely served the goals of slaveholders. Lending support to colonization offered the populace a means of easing its conscience about slavery without, as Garrison put it, "giving offence to those slaveholders with whom they associate . . . nor denounc[ing] the crime of holding human beings in bondage." He allowed that many colonizationists thought they were serving antislavery ends and were unaware of these consequences. But such individuals, he asserted, "are laboring under the same delusion as that which swayed Saul of Tarsus—persecuting the blacks even unto a strange country, and verily believing that they are doing God service." Garrison's interpretation of colonization represented a watershed in the American antislavery movement, becoming the foremost articulation of the radical antislavery critique of colonization.²⁵

In response, Breckinridge maintained that colonization was rooted in the desire both to end slavery and to spread the gospel to the African continent. His essay elaborated the argument he first raised in 1830. "We hazard nothing in asserting," he wrote, that the relationship between black and white "cannot remain as it" is. Moreover, the health and stability of the United States did not

²⁴ Vivien Sandlund, "Robert Breckinridge, Presbyterian Antislavery Conservative," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 78 (Summer 2000), 148–150.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 150; William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization* (1832; New York: Arno Press, 1968), 3, 2, 19. On colonization and abolitionists, see Harrold, *Abolitionists & the South*, 18–19; Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 38–39, and Degler, *The Other South*, 22–25.

permit "a nation of idle, profligate, and ignorant persons." Like other ACS members, Breckinridge claimed that white Americans had a responsibility to ameliorate the condition of the nation's black population. "They are victims to our fathers and now us," he wrote. "[H]ow, we pause not to ask. But they are victims: and every sentiment of religion impels us to regard their case with an eye of pity."²⁶

According to Breckinridge, there were two possible solutions to the race problem. Free blacks could be "admit[ted] all the privileges of whites," or Americans could "divide the two races totally, by colonizing the free blacks." The Presbyterian minister favored the latter. Outright egalitarianism, he argued, could never be achieved without racial "amalgamation," and he could not "see what good was to be effected, by reducing all races of men to one homogenous mass; mixing the white, the red, the tawny, the brown, the black, all together and thus reproducing throughout the world, or in any single State, a race different in some physical appearance from all that now exist." To maintain racial autonomy, he wrote, free blacks should be sent to a climate "perfectly fitted to [them], and to nobody else on earth." "[I]n Liberia," he wrote, "the moral and intellectual condition" of American blacks would be "immediately and greatly improved," and they would "retain in an equal or higher degree" any "advantage" they possessed in the U.S.²⁷

²⁶ Breckinridge, "Hints on Colonization and Abolition; with Reference to the Black Race," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 5 (July 1833), 283–84.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 284–85, 287–89.

In "Hints on Colonization and Abolition," Breckinridge also denounced the slave system as a whole. "Slavery," he wrote, "cannot be made perpetual," because it was "ruinous to the community that tolerates it" and "most cruel and unjust to its victims." He decried "instant abolition," but asserted that God, "will, in his own good time and way, break the rod of the oppressor, and let all the oppressed go free." Unlike his Presbyterian counterparts farther south, who a few years later found biblical sanction for slavery, Breckinridge saw an inherent conflict between slavery as described in the Bible and as it existed in the U.S. Masters in the scriptures, he noted, were commanded to "give unto their servants that which is just and equal." "[T]o what feature of [American] slavery may that description apply! Just and equal!" he exclaimed. Such a system did not exist in the United States where slaves could not marry or raise families unmolested. Anyone who tried to deny this fact, he argued, "has simply no moral sense." Furthermore, "[H]e who presumes that God will approve, and reward habitual injustice and wrong, is ignorant alike of God, and of his own heart." Shaped by Kentucky's conservative antislavery heritage and evangelical Protestantism's emphasis on biblical authority, Breckinridge in 1833 concluded that U.S. slavery was "undeniably . . . contrary to the revealed will of God."²⁸

As Breckinridge hoped, "Hints on Colonization" succeeded in attracting Garrison's attention. The Boston abolitionist quickly denounced Breckinridge as an enemy of American black equality, accused him of "fostering 'a spirit of Negro hatred,'" and even suggested that Breckinridge was, in fact, proslavery. Breckinridge condemned Garrison in kind, calling the abolitionist's tactics "false,

²⁸ Breckinridge, "Hints on Colonization and Abolition," 294-97.

pernicious, and immoral." With the paths of colonization and abolition diverging at the national level, Breckinridge became a bitter enemy of abolitionism. The rise of militant antislavery thought pushed Breckinridge, like colonizationists around the nation, to assert more forcefully a conservative position on race. He came to despise abolitionists, and later in his career often turned to proslavery circles for support rather than look for aid among the Garrisonians.²⁹

Race was not the only point of contention between Breckinridge and more radical abolitionists. Breckinridge also did not approve of what he saw as their more cavalier approach to orthodox Christian principles. "We do not pretend to justify slavery," Breckinridge argued, but "abolitionists err in principle." "Instant abolition," he concluded, "is not more sound in morals, than it is hurtful if impossible in practice." In short, Breckinridge believed that gradualism and colonization rested on firmer Christian footing than immediate abolitionism. In making this contention, Breckinridge signaled how closely his religious understanding of gradualist emancipationism aligned with proslavery ideas.³⁰

²⁹ Sandlund, "Breckinridge, Antislavery Conservative," 150–51; Garrison and Breckinridge quoted 151.

³⁰ Breckinridge, "Hints on Colonization and Abolition," 300, 302 (quotes). The connection between abolitionism and theological heterodoxy would become clearer for theological conservatives in the coming years. In 1840, former Kentucky resident and abolitionist James G. Birney published his well-known treatise, *The American Churches, The Bulwarks of American Slavery* (1840; Boston: Oliver Johnson, 1843). As early as 1836 Birney received correspondence from the noted moderate abolitionist Unitarian William Ellery Channing—a particular target of James Henley Thornwell and other proslavery divines—supporting Birney's efforts. See, *Letter of Dr. William E. Channing to James G. Birney* (Cincinnati: A. Pugh, 1836). The more conservative Kentucky emancipationist Cassius Clay, who shared many of Breckinridge's fears of interracialism, only occasionally squabbled with Garrisonian abolitionists and, according to Stanley Harrold, more often enjoyed their respect. In part, the affinity between the

As was the case everywhere else in the antebellum United States, slavery in Kentucky was a topic of the utmost religious importance. Virtually all nineteenth-century American believers asserted that the political question of slavery was one with serious religious implications. In fact, Kentucky clerics who reached opposite conclusions about the nature of slavery agreed that it was the Christian's duty to either attack or defend the institution. William C. Buck (1790–1872), a moderately proslavery Louisville Baptist pastor and editor of the official statewide denominational newspaper, the *Baptist Banner*, wrote plainly in the late 1840s that the “abstract question of slavery” had both “religious and civil” significance. Even though Buck had hoped to leave the matter a “purely political one” reserved for “the political press,” agitation of the slavery question in churches compelled Buck to write.³¹ On the other side, the abolitionist John G. Fee felt the need to make “chiefly a Bible argument” against slavery. In so doing, Fee posited what most of his nineteenth-century readers already believed: “The Bible, in our country, is the standard of right. Its decisions are final. And there is not a judge upon the bench, nor a jury in the land, who will decide in opposition to what are the generally received teachings of the Bible.”³²

Garrisonians and Clay had to do with Clay's religious beliefs, which Harrold suggests were influential but heterodox. See Harrold, “Cassius M. Clay on Slavery and Race,” 44–45; and Harrold, “Cassius Clay and the Garrisonian Abolitionists.”

³¹ William C. Buck, *The Slavery Question* (Louisville: Harney, Hughes and Hughes, 1849), 3–4.

³² John G. Fee, *An Anti-Slavery Manual or, The wrongs of American Slavery exposed by the Light of the Bible and of Facts, with a Remedy for the Evil*, 2nd ed. (New York: William Harned, 1851), 7–8.

In such an intellectual climate, where the tie between religion and slavery was not questioned but rather assumed, victory in public battles often depended on who claimed the religious high ground. Both proslavery and antislavery divines believed they had God on their side, and both sides followed the same evangelical biblical interpretive tradition that took the Bible to be the divinely inspired Word of God that they could interpret—easily, and many believed matter-of-factly—for themselves.³³

Such an interpretive method worked well for southern defenders of slavery. Deploying the common sense literalist hermeneutic, white southerners came to believe that the slavery in their time and region—stated forthrightly, a race-based, caste-oriented slavery system and the hierarchy led by the white elites that attended it—had been ordained by God as a proper mode of social relations. The noted Baptist preacher from Virginia, Thornton Stringfellow, provides the clearest example of the southern proslavery commitment to this form of biblical literalism. Following just a few years after Breckinridge's arguments with Garrison, Stringfellow, in a famous treatise initially published in 1841—and then widely circulated and published in a variety of forms during the late antebellum period—painstakingly mined the biblical text to show the divine imprimatur behind slavery. Canvassing the Old and New Testaments, Stringfellow hoped southerners would “be seen cleaving to the Bible and taking all our decisions about this [slavery] matter from its inspired pages.” Undeniably, thinking like Stringfellow's was widespread among southern clergy

³³ Noll, *America's God*, 367–85.

in the mid-nineteenth century. Passage upon passage, throughout the Old and New Testaments, referred to and endorsed slavery.³⁴

Proslavery southerners had all the evidence they believed was required to establish the righteousness of slaveholding. Because the literal letter of the Holy Writ offered no succinct denunciation of slavery, proslavery lights looked upon abolitionist argumentation with derision.³⁵ Proslavery divines argued that new conceptions about what constituted moral behavior, independent of the aegis of the church, led abolitionists to read too much of their own agenda into the biblical text. South Carolina Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell was dumbfounded by “what may be called *the Christian argument* against slavery.” Abolitionists, Thornwell wrote in 1851, created their agenda from “the abstrusest of all speculations upon the vexed question of ‘human rights,’ and not the obvious teachings of the Scriptures.” The only way a biblical case could be made against slavery, Thornwell wrote, was by “strained application of passages, or forced inferences of doctrines, in open violation of the law that Scripture is its own interpreter.” By Thornwell’s reading, anyone claiming to have a biblical case against slavery violated traditional forms of biblical interpretation and imposed

³⁴ Thornton Stringfellow, “A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony on the Institution of Slavery,” in Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 138–67, quote 139.

³⁵ Eugene D. Genovese has cogently summarized the debate: “The God-fearing southern people turned to the Bible to justify slavery, and the Bible did not disappoint them. Their theologians rent the abolitionists, at least on the essentials, in their war of biblical exegesis.” Genovese, *The Southern Front: History and Politics in the Culture War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 34.

detrimental, novel opinions upon the text.³⁶ The results of such misreadings of Scripture, he argued in an 1850 sermon, was that Yankee abolitionists claimed to be motivated by philanthropic interests, but their “spurious charity” was “dictating the subversion of the cherished institutions of our fathers, and the hopes of the human race.” The stakes were high, according to Thornwell. “It is not the narrow question of Abolitionism or Slavery,” the minister argued. The matter was “not simply whether we shall emancipate our negroes or not; the real question is the relations of man to society, of States to the individual, and of the individual to the States—a question as broad as the interests of the human race.”³⁷ According to Thornwell and other proslavery southerners, the slavery debate was not simply a struggle over the best way to socially and economically order American society. Rather, abolitionist and proslavery forces engaged in a fight for the soul of the nation, if not all humanity.

In this key respect, Kentucky’s colonizationists-emancipationists followed much of the proslavery logic. Baptist minister James M. Pendleton, a gradual emancipationist who spent most of his antebellum ministry laboring in south central Kentucky, provides a clear demonstration of how theological commitment often trumped particular views on slavery among Kentucky’s white evangelicals, collectively unifying the populace against abolitionists. Pendleton’s posthumous memoirs, *Reminiscences of a Long Life* (1891), provide several critical insights regarding why the Baptist minister rejected abolitionism and slavery at

³⁶ Thornwell, “Relation of the Church to Slavery,” in *Collected Writings Thornwell*, 4:388. Emphasis in original.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4:401, 405.

the same time. Published just months after his death, Pendleton had written his memoirs over the course of a few months in the winter of 1890–1891. At seventy-nine years of age and in declining health, Pendleton wanted to tell his life's story in his own words. For the most part *Reminiscences* dealt with the minister's ecclesiastical affairs, but the book also provided many interesting anecdotes pertinent to his role as an antislavery activist. Even as Pendleton's *Reminiscences* catalogued his view that the eventual "overthrow of slavery" at the end of the Civil War "was God's work," the Baptist minister did not mean to suggest that he considered all antislavery activity worthwhile.³⁸ Pendleton wanted his readers to understand clearly that even though he sought slavery's end, he "was never for a moment an Abolitionist." If Pendleton's contemporary or future readers did not inherently understand the problem with abolitionism, he made it plain: There was a "distinction between an 'Abolitionist' and an 'Emancipationist.' The latter was in favor of doing away with slavery *gradually*, according to State Constitution and law; the former believed slavery to be a sin *in itself*, calling for immediate abolition, without regard to consequences." There is no simple way to conclude what Pendleton might have meant when he said he was "never an abolitionist," but in the context of Kentucky emancipationism, it is not difficult to infer. Pendleton, who saw "consequences" for his actions, placed himself on the same ideological plane as most of Kentucky's evangelical

³⁸ Pendleton, *Reminiscences*, 124.

antislavery activists. They were theological and racial conservatives, not radicals.³⁹

Pendleton from the start of his ministry must have known of all the religious problems slavery posed. Perhaps that is why he worked so hard in the early stages of his career to avoid the question as much as possible. As a young minister of growing renown, Pendleton accepted the pastorate of Bowling Green's First Baptist Church in 1836.⁴⁰ From the start of his tenure there, Pendleton worked to ensure that locally enslaved African Americans would have access to the gospel. His church voted in 1838 to admit slaves into the congregation, and the next year they voted to create a separate "Negro congregation" that would be allowed to gather for worship at the First Baptist Church. Other than these measures, however, Pendleton relegated the slavery matter to a secondary status. Several members of his church held slaves, and it was not a concern in determining who could become church members. The issue rarely made its way into sermons except to affirm that Christian slaveholders had the moral obligation to treat their slaves charitably.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., 112–113. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁰ Pendleton was baptized in April 1829 at age seventeen and joined the local Baptist congregation in Christian County, Bethel Church. Despite a lack of formal education, Pendleton worked for a short time as a teacher, and his church called him to preach in 1830. By 1833, Pendleton was ordained and leading both the Bethel Church and a congregation in Hopkinsville. Then, in 1836, the First Baptist Church of Bowling Green offered Pendleton its pastorate at the rate of four hundred dollars per year. The offer was a significant one: according to Pendleton, he was the first Baptist pastor "in all of Southern Kentucky" to take a salary sizable enough to ensure a pastorate as his primary and only vocation. See Pendleton, *Reminiscences*, 23–29, 48–49; and Bob Compton, "J. M. Pendleton: A Nineteenth-Century Baptist Statesman (1811–1891)," *Baptist History and Heritage* 10 (1975), 28–30.

By the mid-1840s, however, Pendleton had no choice but to confront the slavery issue head on. In 1844 he personally witnessed the events that led to the creation of the Southern Baptist Convention. It was in that moment that Pendleton witnessed abolitionist radicalism firsthand. Though all indications suggest that Pendleton never intended to get drawn into religious debates about slavery, he unwittingly found himself unable to avoid the controversy.

Pendleton's own antislavery position was still undeveloped in 1844, but his displeasure with abolitionism was already beginning to formulate. That April he traveled to Philadelphia as a delegate to the triennial convention of the Baptist Home Mission Society. Slavery had become a contentious religious issue for the nation's Baptists. The meeting's attendees might have agreed in principle with Pendleton's view that "discussion of the [slavery] question in the Home Missionary Society is out of order," but that did little to keep the issue from dominating much of the tenor of the conference.⁴² Pendleton's experience in Philadelphia shaped his religious opinion of abolitionists and contributed to his antislavery conservatism.

Leading up to 1844, northern abolitionist Baptists had been pushing for the denomination to articulate a denunciation of slaveholding, and they argued that slaveholders should not be missionaries. Ever since the 1840 American Baptist Anti-Slavery Convention, a meeting of northern abolitionists in New York City, sectional tensions had been building. The 1840 Convention produced

⁴¹ Victor B. Howard, "James Madison Pendleton: A Southern Crusader Against Slavery," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 74 (July 1976), 193–94.

⁴² Journal of James Madison Pendleton, 26 April 1844, Department of Library Special Collections, Manuscripts, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky.

a treatise entitled "An Address to Southern Baptists" that denied the biblical sanction of slavery and called on Baptists in the South to repent for perpetuating the institution. Moreover, the abolitionists demanded that southerners immediately move toward emancipation or face being cut off from fellowship. Expectantly, the ultimatum did little to motivate slaveholding Baptists to free their slaves and only increased sectional friction. In between the northern and southern factions, the Home Mission Society attempted to hold a middle ground. At the 1841 meeting of the Society, its executive committee passed a resolution that implored both sides to avoid bringing extra-religious affairs to the center of Baptist life. Whatever political differences might separate Baptists, the committee urged, they ought to be bound together by a sense of unity shaped by adherence to the same Christian tradition.⁴³

This spirit of tension marked the 1844 meeting Pendleton attended. As did the leaders of the convention three years prior, Pendleton tried to maintain a neutral stance on the slavery question. Nevertheless, Pendleton's journal reflected a noticeably negative tone toward the abolitionists at the convention. Pendleton's record of the event tells of the slavery question being introduced at the convention on April 26 and recounts some of the argumentation. South Carolinian Richard Fuller, according to Pendleton, "remarked impressively that there must be a new Bible before it could be proved that slavery is a sin—for where there is no law there is no transgression." Moreover, by Pendleton's

⁴³ C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985), 92–93.

estimation, the chief abolitionist spokesman, Nathaniel Colver (1794–1870), pastor of Boston's Tremont Street Baptist Church, was "exceedingly rough & uncourteous" and failed to argue "with fairness and magnanimity." Despite these opinions, Pendleton refrained from taking sides. Because the Society had not been organized to deal with such "extra-constitutional" questions, there was no reason to debate them. Although Pendleton briefly mentioned another debate over slavery on April 29 and the vote on April 30 that continued to allow ministers from slave states to become missionaries, he provided no further analysis of the matter.⁴⁴

Clearly Pendleton thought the issue had been tabled, but that fall a group of Alabama Baptists decided to test the resolution. They appealed to the General Convention, asking what it would do if a slaveholder attempted to become a missionary. Though stated cautiously, the executive committee effectively ended its neutral stance when it replied that it would not appoint a slaveholder to such a post. The committee, based in Boston, felt more of a connection to northern concerns and also believed that the future of the denomination rested in the North. By taking a definitive stance against slavery in late 1844, the members of the General Committee decisively rent the fabric of Baptist America that had, in the years leading up to their decision, somehow managed to hold together.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Journal of James Madison Pendleton, 26, 29, 30 April 1844. In only a few years, Nathaniel Colver would achieve even greater acclaim as an abolitionist spokesperson with the publication of his sermon, *The Fugitive Slave Bill: Or, God's Laws Paramount to the Laws of Men. A Sermon, Preached on Sunday, October 20, 1850* (Boston: J. M. Hewes, 1850).

⁴⁵ Goen, *Broken Churches*, 95–96.

In May 1845 southerners held a meeting in Augusta, Georgia, to discuss splitting from the national convention and forming a new body comprised of Baptists from the slave states. The Upper South was vastly under represented—only one representative from Kentucky attended and no one came from Tennessee—although according to historian C. C. Goen, most Baptists in these states agreed in principle with the convention's purpose but lacked the time to send delegates. Confident of southern solidarity on the issue, the meeting went forward and formed the Southern Baptist Convention.⁴⁶

Pendleton followed his fellow southerners into the Southern Baptist Convention, though he had little to say about it in his autobiographical *Reminiscences*. Here too, Pendleton's lack of commentary requires interpretation. His 1891 account of the meeting of the 1844 Home Mission Society, for example, followed almost word-for-word that of his 1844 journal. The reason for this latter silence also has much to do with Pendleton's dismissal of abolitionist activity and his assessment that they commenced their activities "without regard to consequences."⁴⁷

More than any other American denomination, Baptists maintained a rigid commitment to the autonomy of local congregations. Unlike Protestant counterparts in the Episcopal, Methodist, or Presbyterian traditions, Baptists had no authoritative body that exercised congregational oversight. For Baptists, "congregational autonomy" was neither mere lip service nor a simple catchphrase. Baptists like Pendleton believed, as a matter central to the way they

⁴⁶ Ibid., 96–97.

⁴⁷ Pendleton, *Reminiscences*, 75–77.

practiced their faith, that Christian identity was an individual matter expressed through the local congregation. Naturally, different practices and interpretations grew from different churches. Historian Philip Mulder has eloquently explained the nature of Baptist church relations: "The host of people and congregations claiming to be Baptist included a tremendous variety of ideas and rituals, and Baptists managed somewhat to coexist with each other under the guiding principle of church autonomy."⁴⁸ This view of congregational polity is precisely what made the abolitionists' raising of the slavery question so offensive to Pendleton. Slavery—and other such questions of moral and political import—was a matter to be sorted out in local churches, not aired in the context of denominational debate. The Home Mission Society existed to support and discuss missionary endeavor, not affairs properly relegated to the congregational level.

Pendleton's disdain for northern abolitionist Baptists would not have been limited to their cavalier attitude toward congregational autonomy. Such abolitionists, he believed, also came dangerously close to heterodox views of the Christian religion as a whole. Historian John R. McKivigan has written that northern Baptists tended to treat the slavery question like their abolitionist counterparts in New School Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Unitarian circles, who were all well known for employing—in differing degrees—what

⁴⁸ Philip N. Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53. While Mulder's account is mainly devoted to eighteenth-century developments, he nonetheless provides an apt description of Baptist congregational principles. See also Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26–36.

Pendleton would construe as a loose view of Scripture.⁴⁹ Pendleton would have agreed with the position of proslavery Christians, as historian Anne Loveland documented it: where southerners once might have looked at abolitionists as being motivated by genuine religious conviction, by the 1830s southern evangelicals' "perception of the abolitionists changed. They contended that abolitionists had repudiated the church, the Bible, and Christianity, and were motivated by a 'political radicalism.'"⁵⁰ In general, to southern evangelicals, abolitionists during the nineteenth century slowly—but steadily—downplayed the importance of Scriptural authority and moved instead toward faith in the individual's ability to decide religious issues.⁵¹ Statements that placed Scripture above reason, the Bible over an individual's intuition, and orthodoxy versus liberalism (heresy), therefore, became part and parcel of the slavery debate.

The southern view of abolitionist heresy relied in many ways on caricature. Many of the evangelical abolitionists—individuals like Lewis Tappan (1788–1873), Jonathan Blanchard (1811–92), and Kentucky's John G. Fee, to name just a few—would have also been hesitant to identify with the theological liberalism of more radical abolitionists. Certainly they blended Bible arguments against slavery with more secular ideas about natural law, but as historian Mitchell Snay has shown, divines on both sides of the slavery argument drew

⁴⁹ John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830–1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 91.

⁵⁰ Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 258–59.

⁵¹ Fox-Genovese and Genovese, "The Divine Sanction of Social Order," 215.

from Scripture and natural law.⁵² To be sure, however, beyond such evangelical abolitionists, there were those abolitionists who fit the proslavery description. The famous target of theological conservatives on the slavery matter, William Lloyd Garrison, is one such example. Garrison in fact agreed with the proslavery movement and its view that the Bible did sanction slavery. By 1845, however, he concluded that biblical sanction meant not that slavery was right, but that the Bible was wrong. Garrison employed the critique of Enlightenment rationalism to Scripture, arguing, "The God, who in America, is declared to sanction the impious system of slavery . . . is my ideal of the Devil." Rather than the authoritative source of truth most Americans saw in the Bible, Garrison read the book to be "a lie and a curse on mankind." He went further in other essays, claiming that "To say everything contained within the lids of the Bible is divinely inspired," such as the notion, for example, that slavery was a necessary part of God's ordained social order, "is to give utterance to a bold fiction, and to require the suspension of the reasoning faculties." Although he succeeded in rallying some support within abolitionist circles—Wendell Phillips (1811–84), Theodore Parker (1810–60), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) all voiced agreement—the lingering effect of Garrison's scandalous anti-biblicism was to alienate from the abolitionist movement many who affirmed the high place of Scripture.⁵³ For

⁵² Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 54. For an example of the free blending of the Bible and natural law in the cause of abolitionism, see John G. Fee, *The Sinfulness of Slaveholding Shown by Appeals to Reason and Scripture* (New York: John A. Gray, 1851), with comments about natural law *passim*.

⁵³ See J. Albert Harrill, "The Use of the New Testament in the American Slave Controversy: A Case History in the Hermeneutical Tension Between Biblical Criticism and Christian Moral Debate," *Religion and American Culture* 10 (2000):

James M. Pendleton and other white emancipationists in Kentucky who shared the widespread evangelical conviction in the Bible's authority and its common sense applicability to the believer's daily life, the religious heterodoxy of the Garrisonian wing made abolitionism on the whole unacceptable.

Among gradual emancipationists, Pendleton was not alone in his assessment of abolitionism. Indeed, Robert J. Breckinridge had a significant opportunity to defend gradualism and colonization against abolitionism publicly in 1836. George Thompson (1804–78), an English friend of Garrison, gained renown in the British Isles by advocating the abolition of slavery and the immediate emancipation of slaves. An agent of the British and Foreign Society for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the World, Thompson set sail for America in 1833 after Parliament ended the institution in all the British colonies but India and embarked on an antislavery tour with Garrison.⁵⁴ Upon his return to Britain, Thompson issued a challenge in the British press to any American minister interested in debating the nature of slavery in the U.S. Thompson indicted American clergy as willing supporters of the institution and hoped to bring the issue before a public audience. Agitated and emboldened by his earlier disputes with Garrison, Breckinridge agreed to discuss the matter in early June 1836, proposing that they debate for "three or four hours a-day, for as many days as consecutively may be necessary." The arrangement suited Thompson, and the

149–86. Quotes from Harrill, 159–60, and William Lloyd Garrison, "William Lloyd Garrison," in Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll, eds., *A Documentary History of Religion in America to 1877*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 525.

⁵⁴ Sandlund, "Breckinridge, Antislavery Conservative," 145; and Klotter, *Breckinridges of Kentucky*, 69. At one point on the American tour the two immediatists were nearly lynched by an anti-abolitionist mob.

two argued their positions on the slave question in Glasgow, Scotland, from June 13 through 17.⁵⁵

In his letter accepting Thompson's challenge, Breckinridge claimed slavery was "contrary to the spirit of the gospel, and the natural rights of men." An anonymous third-person narrator documented the debate, and the account was circulated throughout Britain and the U.S. Yet because Breckinridge denounced abolitionism as the harbinger of social chaos throughout the debate, he never convinced his audience that his antislavery beliefs were sincere. In fact, one version published by New England abolitionists included a critical summary of the event that called Breckinridge an "apologist for slavery."⁵⁶

Opening the discussion in Glasgow, Breckinridge argued that it was fallacious to call slavery "an American question." Repeating an argument he had first made in *Thoughts on Slavery*, he called the United States a nation consisting of "twenty-four separate republics"; as such, each state possessed the ability to determine the course of slavery within its borders. Half the American states had abolished slavery, and therefore the institution affected only a "small portion of the nation." According to Breckinridge, calling all Americans complicit in slavery

⁵⁵ *Discussion on American Slavery, In Dr. Wardlaw's Chapel, Between Mr. George Thompson and the Rev. R. J. Breckinridge of Baltimore, United States, on the Evenings of the 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th June, 1836* (2nd ed., Glasgow: George Gallie, 1836), 1-2; and Klotter, *Breckinridges of Kentucky*, 69.

⁵⁶ *Discussion on American Slavery*, iii. Sandlund, "Breckinridge, Antislavery Conservative," 153n7, discusses the edition of the debate published by abolitionists.

was akin to saying that all "British were idolaters" since there were "millions of idolaters in India, who were British subjects."⁵⁷

Later in the debate, Breckinridge argued for the transportation of manumitted slaves to Africa. He claimed that "God had kept several races of men distinct" and His design dictated that the separate races ought to rule themselves. Referring specifically to the offspring of Noah, Breckinridge noted that "[W]herever the descendents of Shem had colonized a country, occupied by the descendants of Japhet or Ham, they had extirpated those who were before them," as did Noah's other children when they took lands occupied by a different people. This biblical evidence led Breckinridge to conclude that "[T]he only means in our power to prevent the ultimate colonization of central Africa by some strange race, and the consequent extirpation of its race of blacks, is to colonize it with blacks."⁵⁸

In his arguments, Breckinridge asserted his belief that race determined a group's ability to achieve "civilization." Despite his initial affirmation that blacks were entitled to "natural rights" as human beings, he clearly believed them to be less capable than white people. No one, he argued, ever thought of stealing an Englishman or a German because they had established ordered societies. In contrast, Breckinridge saw Africans as a people "sitting in darkness and drinking blood," and colonization was the only realistic way such a people might be

⁵⁷ *Discussion on American Slavery*, 9–10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

Christianized and civilized. Once Africans were colonized and westernized, however, no one would ever again consider enslaving them.⁵⁹

Aside from what appeared to his British listeners as an apology for American slavery, Breckinridge's arguments in Glasgow also revealed his views regarding the nature of the American national project. In arguing for colonization, he claimed that Europe became Christianized via colonization, as did North America. Of course, while Breckinridge advocated that African Americans be sent to Africa because the continent was filled with the same race, white Europeans colonized a continent filled with Native Americans and took control of the land by force. Moreover, the Europeans who traveled to America were already Christians and did relatively little to convert indigenous peoples. Still, Breckinridge's comments reflected the dominant American sense of the nation's "manifest" destiny: "Two new States had recently been added to the Union; and God speed the day when others would be added, till the whole continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific was included in the union." For Breckinridge, naturally, this vision applied only for the United States's white population. African Americans would have to experience their own providential destiny in another location.⁶⁰

Breckinridge was not the only contemporary commentator to connect ideas about American expansion and black racial inferiority. If he differed from his fellow southerners in his evaluation of slavery, he shared their thinking about the place of whites in the North American continent. As historian Reginald

⁵⁹ Ibid., 55–56.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 55, 9.

Horsman has convincingly shown, between 1815 and the mid-1850s white Americans frequently invoked the primacy of their Anglo-Saxon heritage to justify expansion. The philosophy justified the expulsion of Native Americans from the eastern half of the United States and fed support for the Mexican-American War (1846–48). For many whites, the perceived inferiority of African Americans relegated them to chattel status, and the future growth of the American republic depended on white leadership. While Breckinridge publicly sought to have African Americans removed from the U.S., ostensibly for their own good and the good of Africa, his emancipationist language always reflected his concern for white interests. Breckinridge may have believed blacks possessed certain natural rights, but that did not preclude him from seeing them as inferior beings.⁶¹

Yet, as conservative as such an emancipationist agenda in fact was, it often proved too radical for contemporaries of a more decidedly proslavery conviction. Just a few years after Breckinridge's debate with George Thompson, he found himself embroiled in another conflict, this time with Robert Wickliffe, an affluent Lexington attorney who, by the early 1850s was the state's largest slaveholder, owned nearly two hundred slaves. A one-time supporter of emancipation and colonization, the former state senator Wickliffe ultimately rejected all antislavery initiatives. The hot-tempered slaveholder also held a longstanding grudge against Breckinridge. In the late 1820s the two had squared off in the state

⁶¹ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). See especially the sections, "American Destiny" and "An Anglo-Saxon Political Identity," 81–297.

legislature over the slavery question, and Breckinridge's 1830 *Thoughts on Slavery* included a number of personal references to Wickliffe. In 1840 Wickliffe gave a public speech in Lexington in which he attacked the Law of 1833 banning slave imports into Kentucky. More important, he lambasted the antislavery sentiments that had been developing in the state for years.⁶²

According to Wickliffe, emancipationists promised to lead Kentucky into a tumultuous future. "Suppose," Wickliffe asked, "that gentlemen gain their point and set our negroes free, do they benefit the slave or the condition of society?" Knowing that antislavery folk would answer in the affirmative, Wickliffe asserted, "I beg leave to differ from them." Manumitted blacks would, he continued, "become masses of vagrants," and Kentucky the scene of "a war of extermination [to] settle which race shall possess" it. Wickliffe then launched an attack on local opponents of slavery, in the process drawing Breckinridge into the debate. Defining "abolitionist" as "One who intends to abolish negro slavery, by an immediate or a slow process—by a direct attack upon the tenure of slavery, or by an indirect mode," Wickliffe smeared Breckinridge with a word the Presbyterian despised—abolition. Wickliffe, however, went still further. If the conservative minister insisted that he was not an abolitionist, then he aimed to delude the public. In fact, Wickliffe contended, Breckinridge was an abolitionist "in disguise."⁶³

⁶² Klotter, *Breckinridges of Kentucky*, 70–71; Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 168–69.

⁶³ Robert Wickliffe, *Speech of Robert Wickliffe Delivered in the Court House, in Lexington, On Monday, the 10th day of August, 1840, Upon Resigning His Seat as Senator from the County of Fayette, More Especially in Reference to the "Negro Law"*

Within a few months, Breckinridge appeared at Lexington's courthouse to offer a rebuttal. He opened with a pro forma introduction in which he noted his "surprise" at being caught up in "political agitations." Thereafter, he preserved few niceties. In the 1820s, the Breckinridge family had employed Wickliffe to help handle the management of the family estate, but by the early 1830s the family was questioning Wickliffe's ethics and the arrangement ended bitterly. Breckinridge wanted to tell the "complete" story of his history with Wickliffe, but doing so personalized and embittered the tone of the debate.⁶⁴

Breckinridge called Wickliffe's definition of abolitionist "as insidious as it is absurd." Abolitionists, he argued, promoted "*immediate* emancipation" and rejected on principle "gradual and remote results." To Breckinridge they were "public enemies," individuals who should be "treated as conspirators against the peace and safety of your families; hunted down as the instigators of arson, rape, and murder." Abolitionists advocated "a heresy," of which the chief "doctrine" was racial "*amalgamation*." "Against this horrid doctrine," Breckinridge argued defiantly, "I have fought without intermission." Resorting to hyperbole, Breckinridge mocked the idea that he might also be considered a "conspirator": "Now we understand," he said, "that whoever *intends* that a day shall ever come in the distant future, when true, real, and general freedom shall dwell amongst

(Lexington, Ky.: Observer and Reporter, 1840), 16–19.

⁶⁴ Robert J. Breckinridge, *Speech of Robert J. Breckinridge, Delivered on the Courthouse Yard at Lexington, KY. On the 12th day of October, 1840, In Reply to the Speech of Robert Wickliffe . . .* (Lexington, Ky.: N. L. and J. W. Finnel, 1840), 5–6.

the children of men and cover the earth with peace and blessedness—that man is a traitor.”⁶⁵

A month later, Wickliffe went back to the Lexington courthouse to “reply to the billingsgate and filth with which the reverend slanderer has bespattered me.” Wickliffe mocked Breckinridge’s professed spirit of piety, saying, “He came here . . . with uplifted hands and eyes, declares, by the Providence of God, to defend himself against the gross slanders on his pure and immaculate character and *his beloved Church*. And how does this saint commence? Why, by bringing up my private and individual affairs before you.” The personal attack did not end there. Wickliffe derided Breckinridge’s emancipation and colonization plans throughout the speech, but he also besmirched Breckinridge’s conduct and character before he entered the ministry. To Wickliffe, Breckinridge “resembles another great man—an excellent hypocrite, in more respects than one. I mean Oliver Cromwell. Oliver was a great gambler before he joined the church,” he said, but at least Cromwell returned all that he had won after coming to faith. In contrast, Breckinridge “gambled off several of” his family’s slaves. Driving home the point, Wickliffe noted that one of these slaves, “the *namesake* of the gentleman, was a listener to him on yesterday, when he quoted from [Cassius] Clay his sentiment on slavery, and proclaimed himself the universal champion of universal emancipation.” Wickliffe finished by warning Breckinridge that he should put his own affairs in order before bringing up the “sins of other people.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid., 20, 23–24. Emphasis in original.

Despite counsel from family and friends, Breckinridge published a pamphlet against Wickliffe. Wickliffe responded with his own leaflet, and it was clear that by this point the debate had degenerated into a vitriolic stalemate. Breckinridge fired back his *Third Defence* (1842), wherein he warned of God's judgment on slanderers, but Wickliffe would have the last word. In many ways, the title of his final pamphlet captures the disdain he held for the Presbyterian minister: *A Further Reply of Robert Wickliffe to the Billingsgate Abuse of Robert Judas Breckinridge, Otherwise Called Robert Jefferson Breckinridge* (1843). In it, Wickliffe likened Breckinridge's attacks on slavery to the behavior of Judas, Jesus of Nazareth's betrayer. Judas, Wickliffe noted, was often "represented with a downcast, sly, doggish countenance, with a pair of huge whiskers, treating with the Jews for the thirty pieces of silver to betray the Saviour." "I have no drawing of" Breckinridge "when he was negotiating with the universal emancipating society," Wickliffe added, but the deceptive facial expression adopted by Judas when "kissing the Saviour, and slyly handing him over to a Roman soldier" was the same face Breckinridge "assumes when he salutes a former companion at farro and poker."⁶⁷

Wickliffe's character assassination did not stop here. He intimated that Breckinridge had carried on an interracial sexual relationship with some of his

⁶⁶ Robert Wickliffe, *Speech of Robert Wickliffe, In Reply to the Rev. R. J. Breckinridge, Delivered in the Court House, in Lexington, on Monday, the 9th November, 1840* (Lexington, Ky.: Observer and Reporter, 1840), 3–4, 49–50. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁷ Robert J. Breckinridge, *The Third Defence of Robert J. Breckinridge Against the Calumnies of Robert Wickliffe*. . . . (n. p., 1842), 90; Robert Wickliffe, *A Further Reply of Robert Wickliffe to the Billingsgate Abuse of Robert Judas Breckinridge, Otherwise Called Robert Jefferson Breckinridge* (Lexington, Ky.: Kentucky Gazette, 1843), 7. Emphasis in original.

slaves. The first was a house servant, "Miss Milly," owned by Breckinridge's father, with whom "Judas" had a dalliance during his teenage years. No child resulted from this relationship, but Wickliffe strongly "suggested" that the minister had "sired" two "almost white" children with a mulatto slave, Louisa. She never admitted who the father of her children was, but that did not hide Breckinridge's "fame as a *Bocanegra*." With these charges, Wickliffe decided "to nauseate the reader" no farther. Breckinridge never responded.⁶⁸

As the debate between Breckinridge and Wickliffe reveals, the distinction between Kentucky's defenders of slavery and the state's gradualist emancipationists was often quite profound. Antebellum Kentucky's white conservatives made the Commonwealth a remarkably volatile ideological environment when it came to the slavery question. As a border slave state, Kentucky's context enabled gradual emancipationists to develop an alternative to the white southern Protestant reading of the Bible that drew divine sanction for American slavery as it existed. Geographically located in the middle ground, these conservatives found a way to carve out a middling antislavery position that, if unpersuasive to more committed proslavery coreligionists, did not sacrifice the evangelical Protestant orthodoxy of the day.

Nevertheless, even as Kentucky's border location afforded emancipationists the freedom to maintain antislavery political and theological convictions, that freedom was not without its limits. Although their gradualist antislavery offered a way to uphold nineteenth-century standards of evangelical orthodoxy while still dismissing abolitionism out of hand, the era's prevailing

⁶⁸ Ibid., 55–57. Emphasis in original.

racial orthodoxy offered no such flexibility. Kentucky's emancipation-colonization movement shared with its proslavery opposition an all-encompassing faith in white superiority. Kentucky's white emancipationists would remain a vocal presence in the late 1840s and 1850s, and their gradualist stance marked them as distinct from more decidedly proslavery religious adherents. Still, the foundation of evangelicalism, white supremacism, and anti-abolitionism allowed for a greater degree of unity with other conservative whites—proslavery whites—than the antebellum context of debate over slavery itself revealed. In the years to come, Kentucky's white population would assess politically the merits of gradual emancipation—in particular, by vote in 1849. Overwhelmingly, the state's whites found the program wanting, and in the coming years conservative Christian antislavery would reach its political and theological limits. Nonetheless, emancipationism remained a fixture in the pre-Civil War Commonwealth.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN CONSERVATIVE ANTISLAVERY
 THE FAILURE OF EMANCIPATIONISM
 1845–1860

The abolitionist and the pro-slavery man, agree in nothing but the final result of their principles. . . . They both contend that the black man and white ought to abide together forever; whereas if reason or experience teaches us any lesson, it is that they ought not. God has been pleased to distinguish the races of men inhabiting this earth. . . . For Kentucky, there is no condition of her high and lasting progress more obvious to me, than the removal from her bosom of the black race.

—Presbyterian minister Robert J. Breckinridge,
The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky (1849)¹

For Kentucky's antebellum history of slavery, 1849 was a signal year. During the session of 1846–1847, the Commonwealth's legislature called for a public referendum to vote on whether or not the state should revise its constitution, which had been in place unmodified since 1799. Overwhelmingly, the state's electorate endorsed the idea of revision, with more than 67 percent voting for change. To proceed with the creation of a new constitution, Kentucky law required a follow-up referendum and, in 1848, the number supporting revision grew to more than 72 percent of the voting populace. Thus, as per the mandate of the people, a constitutional convention was called to meet in August 1849.²

¹ Robert J. Breckinridge, *The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky* (n.p., 1849), 14.

² Harold D. Tallant, *Evil Necessity: Slavery and Political Culture in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 133–36; Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 176–78.

Although a range of political issues prompted Kentucky officials to propose revising the state's dated constitution, slavery overshadowed them all as the major point of debate in the late 1840s campaign. For proslavery Kentuckians, it was an opportunity to expand the political reach of the slaveholding class. They succeeded in February 1849 in repealing the 1833 slave Nonimportation Act; and constitutional revision, it seemed, offered a way to secure slave owners' interests for the longterm.³

By contrast, the repeal of the Law of 1833 served to further galvanize the state's already-active emancipationist movement. The ending of the ban on slave importation constituted, in the words of the Commonwealth's visible and committed minority of white antislavery activists, "part of a system designed to terrify and crush the emancipation party of this State." With such a dire assessment of their political standing, emancipationists thought the time ripe to insert a gradual emancipation clause into the constitution, thereby resisting what they saw as a proslavery conspiracy. As a result, from 1847 to 1849, the commonwealth's opponents of slavery conducted a public campaign they hoped would shape the constitutional convention. On April 25, 1849, the state's most influential politician, Henry Clay, led a statewide emancipationist convention in Frankfort. Numerous leading "friends of Emancipation" from religious and political ranks attended the meeting, including Presbyterians Robert J. Breckinridge, John C. Young, and Stuart Robinson (1814–81), Baptist James M. Pendleton, the nonsectarian abolitionist John G. Fee, abolition-minded political

³ Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 134–42.

activist Cassius M. Clay (1810–1903)—Henry Clay’s cousin—and former Whig representative to U.S. Congress, William P. Thomasson (1797–1882) of Louisville. Henry Clay later declined to represent the newly formed emancipationist party at the state’s constitutional convention because he believed it would compromise his standing as a U.S. senator. As a result, Robert J. Breckinridge, then pastor of Lexington’s First Presbyterian Church, accepted an offer to take charge of the party. At the same time, local emancipationist meetings convened around the state, and they succeeded in nominating antislavery candidates in twenty-nine counties.⁴

In fact, the emancipation canvass of 1849 proved the apogee of Kentucky’s antislavery movement. Showing just how unwilling most white Kentuckians were to embrace even the most conservative and modest of antislavery proposals, the 1849 emancipationist effort fell far short of its supporters’ expectations. The Commonwealth’s generally proslavery populace voted unambiguously against emancipation throughout the state. Historian Harold Tallant’s admittedly high estimates suggest that emancipationists garnered just 14,801 votes—or 9.7 percent of the total ballots cast—and succeeded in getting only two delegates elected to the constitutional convention. Moreover, the

⁴ Lowell H. Harrison, *The Antislavery Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978), 53–60; Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 136–45. The phrase “friends of Emancipation” is from James M. Pendleton, *Reminiscences of a Long Life* (Louisville: Press Baptist Book Concern, 1891), 92; and “Convention of the Friends of Emancipation in Kentucky,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 21 June 1849; Breckinridge, *The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky*, quote 3. See also Victor B. Howard, “The Kentucky Presbyterians in 1849: Slavery and the Kentucky Constitution,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 73 (July 1975): 217–240.

constitution that the state did approve strengthened the rights of slaveholders, essentially barred free blacks from the state, and guaranteed slavery's survival in Kentucky well into the future.⁵

The emancipationist constitutional campaign of the late 1840s—and its legacy into the 1850s and 1860s—demonstrates the limits of Christian conservative antislavery in antebellum Kentucky. Religious actors took a primary role in shaping the public debate over the nature of slavery in the Commonwealth. Because of the overwhelmingly conservative nature of Kentucky's white Christian majority, emancipationists in the 1840s continued to draw on arguments crafted in prior years that emphasized fidelity to evangelical standards, the superiority of the white race, and the detrimental nature of abolitionist schemes. As was the case in earlier years, these antislavery canons did not allow for a radical paradigm, but they did permit the ideological leeway to politically pursue an emancipationist program. Particularly, in the drive of the late 1840s, evangelical emancipationists used these conservative ideas to advocate free labor as a form of economic and social organization superior to slave labor. Still, if gradualists did not violate robust orthodoxies on religion and race, their program remained untenable to most white Kentuckians.

To advocate for constitutional emancipation in the Bluegrass State, the functional leader of Kentucky's emancipationist movement, Robert J. Breckinridge, penned a series of articles outlining the antislavery platform that

⁵ Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 117–119; Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 145–60, with voting statistics 149 and 251n30. James Klotter, *The Breckinridges of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 76, offers the more common conservative estimate of roughly ten thousand voting for emancipation.

he and other gradualists had been developing for nearly two decades. Just before the mid-1849 formation of the emancipationist party, the minister wrote an article for the *Lexington Observer and Reporter* under the pen name "Fayette." The essay followed many of his earlier colonization arguments and stated as baldly as ever Breckinridge's version of the whites-first emancipationist agenda.

"Emancipation is not the main thing," he contended. In fact, ending slavery was, "not even *a* main thing except as it may aid an object more important than itself." The "object" instead was the "*Unity of race, and that the white race for Kentucky.*"⁶

Yet, in spite of his emphasis on white concerns, Breckinridge did argue in a subsequent pamphlet, *The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky* (1849), for the basic religious rights of African Americans. Proslavery believers, he noted, have "invoked" "our divine religion . . . against us. God, the creator of man, and his infinite benefactor, it is constantly alleged, is the great author of the institution by which man has the most effectually defaced God's image in man." Such suggestions, Breckinridge argued, were wrong. Every black slave, he suggested, "was, like us, created in the image of God; has, like us, an immortal soul; is, like us, capable of joy and sorrow." Slaves may be "property; but they still are our fellow-men, our fellow-sinners, many of them our fellow-christians." Breckinridge succinctly rejected the religious proslavery argument when he wrote, "The master may serve God—so may the slave. Both it may be, might serve him better if the relation did not exist." The biblical mandate for

⁶ Quoted in Victor B. Howard, "Robert J. Breckinridge and the Slavery Controversy in Kentucky in 1849," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 53 (October 1979), 333. Emphasis in original.

slavery, as gradualists had argued for years, did not apply to the institution's American form.⁷

Without a doubt, Breckinridge's form of antislavery rested on a conservative, racially paternalistic foundation, but it still proved too extreme a position for much of the minister's southern audience. Not only did the idea of gradual emancipation prove unconvincing to Kentucky voters, Breckinridge himself ran afoul of dedicated proslavery Presbyterians. Just after the defeat of emancipation in Kentucky in the fall of 1849, the *Princeton Review*—nineteenth-century American Presbyterianism's flagship theological journal, edited by one of the nation's most influential antebellum evangelical divines, Charles Hodge—published an editorial essay favorable toward Breckinridge's *The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky*. Lauding gradualism and the emancipationists' goals in the constitutional revision process, the *Princeton Review* celebrated that Kentucky "Presbyterians have taken the lead in this [emancipationist] struggle." The editorial did acknowledge that "the cause of emancipation in Kentucky has failed for the present," but it held out hope for future gains for the emancipationist cause in the Bluegrass State.⁸

Such praise from the North, however, preceded an anonymous 1850 proslavery pamphlet written by "A Presbyterian in the Far South." The unnamed author assaulted Breckinridge's emancipationist agenda and the *Princeton Review*

⁷ Breckinridge, *The Question of Negro Slavery*, 13–15.

⁸ Charles Hodge, "Emancipation: Art. VI.—*The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky*. By Robert J. Breckinridge, D.D.," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 21 (October 1849), 581–606, quotes 585.

for supporting it: "In sober truth, it is melancholy as well as surprising, that a man of the grasp of mind of Robt. J. Breckinridge, in urging the adoption of a favorite theory, should blindly rush into difficulties that are palpable to the plainest subject." Breckinridge, the pamphleteer charged, had proposed a plan that might hold merit in Kentucky but that lacked any support in the rest of the South. Breckinridge and the *Princeton Review* should realize that they were faced with the "WHOLE SOUTH WANTING SLAVE LABOR," and that the institution looked very different in the Deep South than in Kentucky. The author conceded that Breckinridge was more than likely aware of the difference—even if the *Princeton Review's* Yankee editor Charles Hodge was not—and he was even willing to grant that Breckinridge's scheme only pertained to Kentucky. But any attempt to extend privileges or rights to blacks was necessarily destined for failure: "God has doomed the African race to slavery, for ages past, and so far as we can see, for ages to come." By pushing for Christians to recognize the need for African American emancipation—even as he presumed African American inferiority and advocated black expatriation—Breckinridge distanced himself and the gradualist position from the view held by more staunchly proslavery clergy.⁹

As chapter one elucidated, the southern proslavery clergy made a forceful biblical argument in defense of the institution. The Holy Bible, proslavery advocates contended, established the righteousness of slaveholding. The South's leading expositor of proslavery Christianity, James Henley Thornwell, made this

⁹ A Presbyterian in the South, *A System of Prospective Emancipation, Advocated in Kentucky, By Robert J. Breckinridge, D.D., and Urged and Supported in the Princeton Review, in Article VI. — October, 1849* (Charleston: Walker & James, 1850), quotes 15, 16, 22. Emphasis in original.

point clear in an 1851 report to the Presbyterian Synod of South Carolina. Entitled "Relation of the Church to Slavery," Thornwell expressed lucidly what most proslavery clerics already believed: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is [the church's] rule of faith and practice. . . . Beyond the Bible, [the church] can never go, and apart from the Bible she can never speak." And what did the Bible say about slavery, Thornwell asked? "Certain it is that no direct condemnation of Slavery can anywhere be found in the Sacred Volume. . . . it is truly amazing that the Bible, which professes to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work, nowhere gives the slightest caution against this [supposedly] tremendous evil." Jesus never condemned slavery and the prophets never condemned slavery; in the case of the laws of Moses and the New Testament works of Paul, slavery often appeared to earn direct approval. The only way a person could demonstrate that slavery, inherently, was a sin would require that individual to rely on the "spirit of speculation," not on the hard evidence that the revealed Word of God offered.¹⁰

For Kentucky's religious white emancipationists, such logic proved convincing. However, as gradualists affirmed the proslavery approach to reading the biblical text, they tended to disagree that the conclusions proslavery divines reached about contemporary slavery arrangements were in fact the scriptural message. Where proslavery clergy found biblical sanction through a

¹⁰ James Henley Thornwell, "Relation of the Church to Slavery," in John B. Adger and John L. Girardeau, eds. *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, (1873; Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1974), 4:383–85. The Synod of South Carolina unanimously approved Thornwell's paper.

literalist reading of the text, gradualist believers saw reason for slavery's end. Like their opponents, like Thornwell, theological conservatives such as Robert J. Breckinridge would have resisted the temptation to move toward a "spirit of speculation" on the Holy Writ's meaning to achieve near-term political gains. Yet arguments about the nature of Scripture and how it might be applied to public affairs notwithstanding, evangelical antislavery conservatives in the Commonwealth saw American slavery as a deeply flawed system that needed to end. The proslavery religious argument was never absolutely ironclad, but it was difficult, in other words, for white theological conservatives to sidestep the proslavery implications of an interpretative method that they themselves employed. Yet that was precisely what evangelical emancipationists attempted in refuting American slavery.

It was just this subtle interpretive maneuver that the Baptist cleric James M. Pendleton brought to bear in his most compelling piece of antislavery writing, *Letters to the Rev. W. C. Buck* (1849), a pamphlet that appeared in response to a series of proslavery newspaper articles published by his friend and colleague in the Baptist pulpit, William C. Buck, pastor of Louisville's First Baptist Church. Pendleton spelled out explicitly his primary reason for seeking slavery's end: American slavery was not the same as biblical slavery, and no amount of hermeneutical gymnastics could convince him that the institution should be preserved in the United States. The righteousness of "slavery in the abstract," as the proslavery mantra went, ignored the injustice of slavery as it was practiced.

For Pendleton, "a great deal of sin" marked American slavery, and that was enough to justify ending the evil practice altogether.¹¹

In April 1849 Buck was serving as editor of the *Baptist Banner*, the chief organ of Kentucky Baptists. Hoping to prompt thoughtful Christian reflection about the political issue of slavery, the Louisville minister wrote a series of articles that, months later, he republished in pamphlet form as *The Slavery Question* (1849). He circulated five thousand copies of the pamphlet with the intent of discouraging support for the Commonwealth's emerging emancipation party.¹²

For his part, Buck saw no reason to reject slavery as a means of social organization. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, was full of descriptions of master-slave relationships. That relationship, Buck wrote, was designed for a specific purpose: "*benevolence to the poor and defenceless, and religious instruction to Idoliters.*" God had instituted slavery for reasons of moral uplift, for those with means to take care of those without. "Slavery was never intended by God to minister to the cupidity and luxury of the master without an adequate, and even more than an adequate return of good to the slave." Yet, this "perverted and abused" form was exactly what much of American slavery looked like. Buck did not want to defend slavery as an "apologist" for the system as it existed at the

¹¹ Pendleton, *Letters to Rev. W. C. Buck, In Review of His Articles on Slavery* (n.p., 1849), 10. Pendleton and his wife were regular guests of Buck's at his First Baptist Church in Louisville, and the two worked together in state-level Baptist efforts. See Pendleton, *Reminiscences*, 59–60; W. P. Harvey, *History of Bloomfield Baptist Church, 1920. Two Hundredth Anniversary* (n.p., Bloomfield, Ky., 1991), Nelson County Public Library, Bardstown, Ky., 15.

¹² Victor B. Howard, "James Madison Pendleton: A Southern Crusader Against Slavery," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 74 (July 1976), 200–201.

time, for he freely admitted that slavery “has been the occasion of enormous and crying sins.”¹³

Such admissions, however, did not compel Buck to reject slavery out of hand. One did not have license to proclaim that “slavery is a sin in itself” just because “wicked men have sinned.” As was the case with biblical slavery, American slavery could be rescued from sinful implementation. The biblical slave was “*the gainer* by his enslavement; so that the master is guilty of no moral wrong” because “the condition of his slave is better than it otherwise would have been.” Indeed, Buck wrote, this was true of much of American slavery. Was not America a better place than Africa? That continent “from time immemorial, has been inhabited by a population of the most degraded, ignorant, barbarous, and cruel of any other quarter of the world.” Africans were “pagan idolaters, enveloped in the thickest moral darkness” who needed to be brought into the light—that is, introduced to Christianity. Whatever its abuses, had not slavery done that for blacks? Truly, Buck wrote, “American slavery assimilates with what we have seen to be an important constituent of the slavery recognized in the scriptures—*effecting the good of the enslaved*.” Despite such feelings, Buck did not unequivocally endorse American slavery as it existed. Seemingly similar to Pendleton, Buck wrote that the “Slavery in this country” was not the same as “the slavery of the Bible.”¹⁴

¹³ William C. Buck, *The Slavery Question* (Louisville: Harney, Hughes and Hughes, 1849), 10, 12. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12, 15, 16, 22. Emphasis in original.

Buck, however, regardless of his opinion that American slavery was sinful in practice, did not agree with the emancipationists that universal manumission was the best solution to the problem. Buck had long been a defender of a colonization scheme, writing: "Compared with the natives of Africa, the Africans in this country are a civilised and christianised people; and are rapidly approaching that state of intellectual improvement and moral refinement which will fit them for *self-government and national independence*." These opinions very closely lined up with the colonization-emancipation agenda of Kentucky's emancipationists, yet Buck rejected the Kentucky emancipationists' 1849 program. There were three primary reasons Buck withheld his support. First, each slaveholder had to be compensated "for the loss of the estate which he holds in his slave property." Second, even though many colonizationists supported the emancipationist party, the party platform itself contained no plan to colonize formerly enslaved African Americans once manumitted. Colonization had to be part of the plan or "the country is to be infested with multitudes of lawless and irresponsible hirelings for a half century to come." Third, Buck wrote, no one had considered how to ensure the continuing moral and civil development of blacks once free, so that once colonized they could properly "exercise the right of self-government." Thus, in the end, though not an uncritical supporter of slavery, Buck refused to see how emancipation would improve upon the current social system of relations.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ibid., 22, 27-9. Emphasis in original.

Buck's rejection of emancipation aroused James M. Pendleton's antislavery sensibilities. Pendleton responded to Buck's writing with a series of letters he intended for publication in Buck's *Baptist Banner*. When he was denied a forum there, they ended up appearing in an emancipationist newspaper, the Louisville *Examiner*, founded in 1847 by John C. Vaughan and a leading voice of Kentucky's emancipationist movement.¹⁶

Pendleton's *Letters to the Rev. W. C. Buck* (1849) were aimed right at the heart of the Louisville Baptist's argument. Buck had written that "*God approves of that system of things which, under the circumstances, is best calculated to promote the holiness and happiness of men.*"¹⁷ The idea that slavery, as it existed in Kentucky, "promote[d] the 'holiness and happiness' of slaves" was ludicrous to Pendleton. To demonstrate that slavery had a pernicious influence, Pendleton wrote, "would be like showing that the sun is not the source of cold and darkness." That idea was "an insult to the good sense of [Buck's] readers," as was the idea that American slavery had a positive value.¹⁸

Buck and many of those advancing the proslavery argument claimed that the institution of slavery was sanctioned in the Bible and, as evidence, pointed to the fact that Abraham had servants.¹⁹ That explanation did not satisfy Pendleton. "If the term 'servant,' as used in the Scriptures, is synonymous with the term

¹⁶ Howard, "Pendleton: Southern Crusader Against Slavery," 200–201.

¹⁷ Buck, *The Slavery Question*, 4. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸ Pendleton, *Letters to Rev. W. C. Buck*, 2–3. Emphasis in original.

¹⁹ Buck, *The Slavery Question*, 9–10.

'slave' as used among us," he queried, "is it not remarkable that the Hebrew and Greek words translated servant are in no instance rendered slave?" Besides the issue of translation, Pendleton argued, "it does not follow necessarily that Abraham's servants were slaves in the American acceptance of the word." For example, he wrote, in Genesis 14, Abraham armed his servants for battle, whereas in mid-nineteenth-century America "many of our states make it a penal offence for a slave to carry a weapon." Moreover, "Abraham held his slaves for *their* benefit." In what instance, he asked, have "American slaveholders [been] influenced by considerations of benefit to their slaves to hold them in bondage?"²⁰

Content with his arguments regarding Abraham, Pendleton moved on to Moses, who "says, 'He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hands, shall surely be put to death.'" In Pendleton's view, if Americans were truly following a biblical model in their slave practice, they would sentence slave traders to death. "How were Africans first introduced into this country? They were stolen from their native land and brought here in chains." Continuing, Pendleton asked where in American slavery the concept of the Jubilee year might be found. In ancient Israel, under Mosaic Law, every seventh year all slaves were to be set free. "How would American slaveholders fancy a periodical manumission of slaves?" he inquired. They would "resist," naturally. Compared to the American system, "servitude under the Mosaic law was indeed benevolent."²¹

²⁰ Pendleton, *Letters to Rev. W. C. Buck*, 1–4. Emphasis in original.

The rest of Pendleton's *Letters* attacked the proslavery argument in a more general sense. The Bowling Green pastor noted that many people, Buck included, argued that slavery was not wrong "in the abstract." What, he asked, did that mean? He supposed it referred to "slavery separated from its abuses." But this kind of slavery, he argued, did not exist in reality. "[P]ro-slavery men most ridiculously transfer their idea of the innocence of slavery in the abstract to slavery in the concrete," he wrote. According to Pendleton, defenders of slavery frequently said, "The slavery which sacredly regards the marriage union, cherishes the relation between parents and children, and provides for the instruction of the slave, is not sinful." But the proslavery argument from Scripture was at base fallacious when applied to the local situation, Pendleton wrote. The "system of slavery in Kentucky . . . *does none of these things*." Slave masters made no "provision" for the "improvement and moral training of the slave," and no law compelled masters to do so. Furthermore, marriages between slaves were completely "disregarded." Whatever case proslavery champions might make for their cause Pendleton believed was confounded by the immorality of the system as it operated in practice.²²

On these latter points about the nature of slavery in practice, Pendleton would have earned Buck's agreement. But the two would have differed greatly about what constituted the most Christian way to order a society. Before his confrontation with Buck, in a series of anonymous articles in the *Examiner*, Pendleton had tipped his hand in that regard. The Bowling Green pastor

²¹ Ibid., 4–5.

²² Ibid., 9–10. Emphasis in original.

signaled his support for a free labor society. Because of Adam's biblical fall, detailed in Genesis' third chapter, and the subsequent curse placed on future humanity as a result, all people were required to labor. Yet slavery kept some people from contributing their rightful amount of work. Slavery, Pendleton, wrote, upset the providential design and as such, free labor was a matter of religious importance.²³ Moreover, the presence of slavery in southern states explained why they failed to progress at the rate of northern states, Pendleton wrote. Considered in terms of political economy, Georgia did not lag behind Massachusetts because of "the inequality of the action of tariff laws." No, Pendleton said, the reason was that "one is a free state, the other is cursed with slavery. In one labor is considered honorable; in the other disgraceful—the business of slaves."²⁴

Lethargy in economic development was only a part of the problem, Pendleton wrote. The even greater tragedy was that the southern states, because of slavery, had become dependent on the North for their very survival. The lack of any sort of manufacturing industry had made Kentucky wholly "dependent" on northern industry. "Is not Kentucky compelled to admit, humiliating as the admission is, that she is tributary to the free states? She depends, in a great degree, on the fabrics of the free states to clothe her population—even her slaves." That Kentucky could not provide its own economic sustainability was a scandal

²³ A Southern Kentuckian (Pendleton), "Thoughts on Emancipation—No.7," *The Examiner*, 6 November 1847.

²⁴ A Southern Kentuckian (Pendleton), "Thoughts on Emancipation—No. 9," *The Examiner*, 4 December 1847.

in Pendleton's mind. Slavery had so enfeebled Kentucky that the commonwealth was forced to give up its "independence and self-subsistence."²⁵ In truth, Pendleton wrote, Kentucky was stuck in a "colonial condition." Citing a speech given by the U.S. Senator from Bowling Green, Joseph Underwood, Pendleton wrote that Kentuckians were "looking to the mother country for supplies."²⁶

Such bold arguments for free labor would have aroused the suspicions of proslavery Christians. Obviously, the idea of eliminating slavery was a threat to southern order, but the issue was not that simple. While proslavery clerics rested their defense of slavery in large part on biblical injunction, they also did so because they saw free labor as at base a pernicious, destructive, and unambiguously anti-Christian way to organize a society. Pendleton might have seen "a great deal of sin" in master-slave relations, but most southerners did not share his appraisal of its implications.²⁷ They saw no reason to believe that modern capitalist economies were inherently more righteous than slave systems. Capitalism destroyed familial and communal ties, slaveholders wrote; it preyed upon the weak. "Free labor" was a phantasmal concept. It replaced one form of subjugation with another. The difference was that in a bourgeois system laborers thought they were free, but no moral impetus compelled capitalists to treat their workers with magnanimity. Southerners wanted to find an alternative to this

²⁵ A Southern Kentuckian (Pendleton), "Thoughts on Emancipation—No. 13," *The Examiner*, 1 January 1848. Emphasis in original.

²⁶ A Southern Kentuckian (Pendleton), "Thoughts on Emancipation—No. 14," *The Examiner*, 8 January 1848.

²⁷ Pendleton, *Letters to Rev. W. C. Buck*, 10.

social design, and they had one in their slave society. They could ostensibly preserve paternalism and benevolence, and furthermore, antebellum southerners could claim the biblical high ground.²⁸

William C. Buck said as much in *The Slavery Question*. Free labor was a tragedy concept because there was always an inequitable power relationship: "the rich have the control, not only of the amount of labor to be performed, but of the wages to be paid for it." Employers could keep wages low while prices for staples like food rose to exorbitant levels. Workers would "labor sixteen hours out of the twenty-four" and then not be "able to supply themselves with bread." The immorality of this arrangement appalled Buck, especially when there was a more Christian alternative. People may be "fallen" sinners, incapable of true moral behavior, but God, in spite of human nature, had provided all the resources necessary to create a just society. It was a truism that "in all ages and countries, those who are in affluence and power have oppressed the helpless and poor." The only way that such oppression could be overturned, Buck wrote, was if "*by some benevolent arrangement, the interests of the poor and helpless are identified with the interests of the powerful and wealthy.*" Biblical slavery was "such an institution." There was no master in the South who would let his slave go hungry, according to Buck. The same, the Louisville pastor contended, could not be said of industrial Europe or of "the populous cities of the [American] East." Slavery may have had its sinful excess, Buck admitted. But those shortcomings

²⁸ See Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 3-8.

were nothing compared to the sort of social upheaval brought on by modern capitalism.²⁹

The type of argument Buck made against free labor has not been lost on historians. With regard to British abolitionism, for example, David Brion Davis's landmark *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (1975) placed the rise of industrial capitalism at the center of abolitionist efforts to end the slave trade. Davis rejected the prevailing logic that placed Christian altruism at the center of abolitionist motivation. Not that Christian impulse was marginal, but rather, Davis saw that the cause of abolitionism was advanced in Britain simultaneously with the rise of a newly formed class of industrial capitalists. Antislavery activists like the Quakers may have abhorred slavery's oppressive features, Davis wrote, but by his reading, the religious dissent that pushed Britain to end the slave trade in 1807 tacitly affirmed a newly emerging industrial capitalist mode of social relations: "Liberation from slavery did not mean freedom to live as one chose, but rather freedom to become a diligent, sober, dependable worker who gratefully accepted his position in society." While Davis carefully avoided a simplistic interpretation of British abolitionism, the overwhelming conclusion of *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* was that abolitionists, far from achieving the egalitarian aims they claimed to seek, served basically to replace one form of oppressive social relations—slavery—with another: industrial wage labor.³⁰

²⁹ Buck, *The Slavery Question*, 13. Emphasis in original.

³⁰ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), quote 254, and 450–68.

It is not necessary to accept Davis's argument,³¹ but his work is useful in understanding precisely why proslavery clergy were so allergic to antislavery measures in the mid-nineteenth century. Like Davis, proslavery divines saw the North's emerging capitalism as a threat to their slave-driven social order. Part of the reason for this proslavery rejection of free labor had to do with what historian Kenneth Startup has described as a consistent, profound, southern Christian disdain for "mammonism": southerners believed "that the economic enthusiasm of the day was leading to a deadly indifference toward higher, spiritual things." No serious proslavery clergyman doubted that the slave system as it existed was in need of reform, but demands for the generation of more capital stymied any attempts to make slavery more just. By Startup's assessment, the proslavery rejection of capitalism was only part of a larger proslavery attempt to create a just society rooted in biblical values.³²

³¹ Thomas Haskell has been the foremost critic of the argument Davis presents in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. According to Haskell, Davis's insistence on abolitionism linked to a burgeoning industrial class is misplaced. Haskell too sets capitalism at the center of abolitionist logic, but for Haskell "what links the capitalist market to a new sensibility is not class interest so much as the power of market discipline to inculcate altered perceptions of causation in human affairs." Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," *American Historical Review* 90 (April 1985), 342. The debate between Davis and Haskell, which also included John Ashworth, spanned many years and issues of the *American Historical Review*, but the principle material has been included in Thomas Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

³² Kenneth Startup, "'A Mere Calculation of Profits and Loss': The Southern Clergy and the Economic Culture of the Antebellum North," in Mark A. Noll, ed., *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 217–35, quote 218.

Pendleton, a Christian supporter of free labor, did not agree with proslavery views that asserted the advantages of slave labor over free labor. Moreover, he did not think, as proslavery advocates did, that God had sanctioned the sort of slavery that existed in the United States. Dissent against slavery on these grounds, however, did not lead Pendleton to take what he and other evangelical gradualists would have seen as a radical step and join the ranks of immediate abolitionists. For Pendleton, slavery was always a complex matter, laden with complicated factors. He may have opposed slavery, but he even more strongly opposed the work of abolitionists.

In point of fact, in the Kentucky context, free labor ideology quite comfortably complemented the whites-first antislavery argument of the state's religious conservatives. Fellow gradualist Robert J. Breckinridge's 1849 pamphlet, *The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky*, reasserted the racist rationale for opposing American slavery by suggesting exactly how and why emancipation would benefit Kentucky whites. It was important, the divine contended, for "*the great non-slaveholding interest*"—Kentucky whites who comprised "seven-eighths of the whole population, the overwhelming majority of the voters of the State"—to understand the personal losses they faced due to the labor problem created by slavery. Breckinridge and other gradualists wanted to see the end of slave importation into Kentucky and slowly kill off the institution because, as the Presbyterian viewed the matter, slavery considerably harmed the free white population. If slavery kept African Americans in a "degraded state," it also hurt whites by taking away probable sources of gainful employment. "The white laborer," Breckinridge claimed, had the right "to make his living by the sweat of his brow." Some Kentuckians might

wonder what would happen in the labor “vacuum” created by the absence of slavery, but Breckinridge did not worry: jobs would be taken “by our own children” and the practice of “preferring our neighbor’s slaves to our own flesh and blood” would cease. The end of slavery, in short, would open a labor market for Kentucky’s economically disadvantaged whites. “For my part,” he wrote, “I so greatly desire to see this noble State made the exclusive abode of the free white man” that “one of the leading motives of all my conduct connected with [emancipation] has been the hope of substituting the race of negro slaves with the race of free whites.” According to the minister, the slaveholding class that would “plead for protection in the enjoyment of [its] slave property” aimed to “cut short at every step, the hopes, the rewards, and the privileges of the free.” Indeed, the preservation of slavery would come “at the expense of the white people of the State.” If slaveholders did not see an economic reason to emancipate their slaves, perhaps they would be motivated by a notion of racial solidarity.³³

Baptist minister Pendleton never pushed as far as Breckinridge with this sort of racial theorizing, but it can be assumed that the Presbyterian clergyman represented Kentucky’s antislavery, anti-abolitionist, anti-black populace with such white supremacism, Pendleton included.³⁴ While less overt on racial

³³ Breckinridge, *The Question of Negro Slavery*, 2–5, 9, 10.

³⁴ See Harold Tallant’s treatment of the racism of Kentucky emancipationists in Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 59–90. Perhaps the lone exception to the stricter racism of Kentucky’s bulk of antislavery advocates was the abolitionist John G. Fee. Not only did he develop a singular anti-caste platform, but Fee was decidedly in favor of amalgamationist schemes, though not during the late 1840s emancipationist canvass. See Tallant, *Evil Necessity*, 178–80. In his anti-

matters, many of Breckinridge's themes informed Pendleton's antislavery writings. From September 1847 to June 1848, Pendleton published a series of pro-emancipationist articles under the pen name "A Southern Kentuckian" in the Louisville *Examiner*. In those essays, the Baptist opposed the extension of slavery into the West and called for a program of emancipation, but he also made sure to distance himself from the agenda of more radical abolitionists to the north.³⁵

Pendleton generally avoided overtly racist statements, and even appealed to the Declaration of Independence's line that "all men are created equal" to undermine the white supremacist assumption of black inferiority. "Africans are not excepted," Pendleton wrote. "There is no allusion to their inferiority."³⁶ Still, in

colonizationist book, *Colonization. The Present Scheme of Colonization Wrong, Delusive, and Retards Emancipation* (Cincinnati: American Reform Tract and Book Society, 1857), 27, Fee blasted away at the perpetuation of a race-based "caste system" in America. Interracial mixing was desirable for Fee: "Better that we have black faces than bad hearts, and reap eventually the torments of hell. We may have pure hearts if our faces should, after the lapse of a century or two, be a little tawny."

In 1866, Fee founded Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, as an interracial, egalitarian institution. Within a few years of its establishment, Berea's black student population reached sixty percent. See Marion B. Lucas, "John G. Fee, The Berea Exiles, and the 1862 Confederate Invasion of Kentucky," *The Filson History Quarterly* 75 (2001), 180. At Berea, Fee specifically hoped to encourage racial amalgamation through interracial marriage among his students. Fee's more radical position, however, was not supported by all members of Berea College's trustees. In 1872, the board adopted a resolution that, while approving of interracial marriage, said that it was not "desirable in general for those of either race to cultivate the most intimate social relations with those of the other sex and a different race, especially when the difference in race is quite marked." Board of Trustee Minutes, Vol. I, 1858-1899, 81, Box 8, RG 2, Berea College Archives, Berea, Ky.

³⁵ Howard, "Pendleton: Southern Crusader Against Slavery," 195; Pendleton, *Reminiscences*, 93.

³⁶ A Southern Kentuckian (Pendleton), "Thoughts on Emancipation—No.15," *The Examiner*, 22 January 1848.

the midst of such broad-minded opinions, Pendleton also followed Breckinridge in placing white concerns at the center of the issue. One essay lamented that slavery perpetuated idleness among Kentucky's free population and asked: "Who" could "not deplore slavery as a great calamity, the effect of which is decidedly unfavorable to the interests of our white population?"³⁷ Questions like these, which implicitly asserted the whites-first antislavery position, aligned Pendleton closely with the racist ideology of the bulk of Kentucky's emancipationists.

In addition to such white supremacist argumentation about labor and slavery, Pendleton also supported other conservative antislavery measures. Along with attending Henry Clay's April 1849 state emancipation meeting in Frankfort, in May he helped lead a meeting of Warren County emancipationists that included Joseph Underwood, the U.S. Senator from Bowling Green. There Pendleton joined the others in resolving not to "disturb, or to aid others in disturbing the right of masters to their slaves now in being in Kentucky." At the same time, they advocated entering a clause into the Commonwealth's constitution opposing "any increase of slaves in this state," agreeing that to do so would be "highly detrimental" to Kentucky's free black population. Furthermore, they agreed to a platform of gradual emancipation connected to the colonization effort.³⁸ As these activities and writings indicate, Pendleton's

³⁷ A Southern Kentuckian (Pendleton), "Thoughts on Emancipation—No. 7," *The Examiner*, 6 November 1847.

³⁸ Clement Eaton, ed., "Minutes and Resolutions of an Emancipation Meeting in Kentucky in 1849," *Journal of Southern History* 14 (November 1948), 543–44.

rejection of abolitionism and acceptance of conservative antislavery ideas placed him on an intellectual trajectory that followed the bulk of Kentucky's conservative emancipationists. The tacit message of his *Examiner* articles, stated more openly by the Warren County emancipationists, was that Pendleton promoted gradual emancipation connected to colonization, a position laden with a belief in black inferiority. Perhaps Pendleton muted the racist implications of his gradualist position more than most of his fellow antislavery conservatives, but that did not mean he escaped racism altogether.³⁹

The racism of gradualism carried forward into the next decade. An 1850 proslavery report characterized Kentucky's 1849 defeat of emancipation as "very decisive," showed definitively that the "agitation of the matter was uncalled for," and offered "small encouragement" to those emancipationists who might ever hope for a "renewal" of political debate on the question. However, despite the political setbacks, many gradualists attempted to carry on the cause in Kentucky.

³⁹ Pendleton's affinity for the colonizationist aspect of gradual emancipationism scheme always remained tacit in his antislavery writings and an oblique part of his public activism. As anecdotal evidence that directly demonstrates Pendleton's support for colonization, it is possible that Pendleton intended to colonize the one slave he owned. According to historian Victor B. Howard, the Baptist divine inherited a slave boy from his father in the late 1840s and sought to free him for passage to Liberia. Before the boy could go, however, he died. See Howard, "Pendleton: Southern Crusader Against Slavery," 194. Howard's record differs with Pendleton's own narrative about his slave. According to Pendleton himself, the slave he acquired was a young female, whom he did not obtain until 1863, when the minister's mother died. By law, he could not emancipate the slave girl so the "best [he] could do was to hire her out" and add ten percent to whatever she earned. Pendleton wrote that he was "not a slave-holder *morally*, but *legally*," and when the institution "was abolished I rejoiced in the severance of the relation I had sustained to her." See Pendleton, *Reminiscences*, 127–28. Pendleton left the South in 1862, so there is some reason to believe Howard's account over that recorded in Pendleton's memoirs.

For his part, Robert J. Breckinridge remained committed to theologically and racially conservative antislavery. In 1851 he spoke before the Kentucky Colonization Society and argued that “the life and doctrine of Jesus Christ” taught right-minded believers that all humanity shared a “universal brotherhood.” The idea, “which nature teaches—and all knowledge fortifies,” the minister contended, was in fact, “a precious, living truth.” Nevertheless, a seeming contrast was also apparent: “The reality of immense diversities in the condition, development, character, and destiny of different portions of our race, must be accepted as a truth, even more obvious than its unity.” Breckinridge claimed that African Americans represented “part of an immense race, embracing an eighth part of the human family,” but still they remained “a race doomed,” as history recorded, “to general degradation and personal servitude; long outcast from the family of man and from the great common brotherhood.” Yet, after more than two centuries of the slave trade and American slavery in practice, a “grand era in the world” had finally arrived. The future of the African American population had become completely entwined with that of the U.S.’s whites, and that racial reality was an immense blessing to the inferior population. Or, as Breckinridge zealously and paternalistically explained the providential benevolence that now extended to enslaved and free blacks:

The parasite has clung to the wall of adamant—the African is bound to the car of the Anglo-American! He must bear him through in triumph—he must perish with him by the way—or he must destroy him outright. That car cannot pause to re-adjust this doomed connection, any more than the adamantine spheres can cease to wheel unshaken in the hand of God, that

the planets may adjust their casual perturbations. Bear him through in triumph—perish with him by the way—or destroy him outright!

To prevent the impending disaster of a racial—if not a total human—holocaust, Breckinridge proposed, as he had for twenty years, that African Americans should “be restored to their father land.” The colonization imperative, in the minister’s eyes, was in fact a divine calling for American whites. “Can the Anglo-American,” Breckinridge asked of his audience, “bear through in triumph, not his own destiny only, but that of the black race also?” The “notable conjunction of many acts of God and man” had forced the question on American whites. To ignore the emancipation-colonization program was to ignore the will of the Christian God for the human race.⁴⁰

Despite such impassioned pleas, however, gradual emancipationism was in fact becoming the marginal presence in Kentucky that proslavery critics saw it as. Manifestly, Breckinridge’s 1850s career followed the trajectory of the Bluegrass State’s larger emancipationist movement. He was a limited voice for the emancipationist cause in the decade. Extraneous duties account for part of this change, including serving as Kentucky’s secretary of public education from 1847 to 1853, followed by the founding of Danville Theological Seminary in 1853 with the ambition of building it into the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.’s premier center for ministerial education in the American west. He also published two major theological tomes, *The Knowledge of God, Objectively Considered* (1858) and

⁴⁰ Robert J. Breckinridge, *The Black Race: Some Reflections on its Position and Destiny, as Connected with Our American Dispensation* (Frankfort, Ky.: A. G. Hodges, 1851), 5, 7, 12.

The Knowledge of God, Subjectively Considered (1860). In spite of these pressing duties, however, it was also true that the Presbyterian's antislavery views in general calloused in the 1850s. Following an increasingly conservative trajectory, he continued to rebuke publicly his old enemies, the immediate abolitionists, and even wrote that slavery was improving in the South through the "power of the Gospel." Breckinridge never officially renounced his early antislavery positions, but by the start of the Civil War, as the following chapters show, he was willing to mute his opposition to slavery in the interest of preserving the Union.⁴¹

Other conservative emancipationists also found themselves marginalized in the wake of the 1849 defeat, even if they followed a different path than Breckinridge. In his memoirs, James M. Pendleton recorded that his "spirit sank" with the failure of the emancipation movement. The Baptist lamented that he "saw no hope for the African race in Kentucky, or anywhere else without the interposition of some Providential judgment."⁴² Knowing how visible he had been in the emancipation drive, Pendleton counted the many slaveholders in his Bowling Green congregation and came very close to accepting a pastorate in Springfield, Illinois, in order to take his family away from the slavery agitation

⁴¹ Klotter, *Breckinridges of Kentucky*, 58–60, 76; Breckinridge, *The Knowledge of God, Objectively Considered: Being the First Part of Theology Considered as a Science of Positive Truth, Both Inductive and Deductive* (New York: Robert Carter, 1858); Breckinridge, *The Knowledge of God, Subjectively Considered: Being the Second Part of Theology Considered as a Science of Positive Truth, Both Inductive and Deductive* (New York: Robert Carter, 1860). On Breckinridge's 1850s involvement in theological debates, many of which took on a sectional cast, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 542–56.

⁴² Pendleton, *Reminiscences*, 93–94.

and to raise his children in a free state. His church in Kentucky, however, refused to accept its pastor's resignation and Pendleton remained at the post for several more years.⁴³

The 1850s were no less contentious times for Pendleton. His renown grew in Southern Baptist circles due his ecclesiological tract, *An Old Landmark Re-set* (1854). The treatise became a foundational text for the Landmark Baptist movement, which was highly influential in the Middle and Upper South and claimed a pure and unbroken line of succession from Jesus Christ to particular contemporary Landmark churches, thereby rejecting non-Landmark churches as valid arbiters of the gospel.⁴⁴ As a result of his rising prowess and prominence in

⁴³ Howard, "Pendleton: Southern Crusader Against Slavery," 201–202; Pendleton, *Reminiscences*, 94, 102–103. In 1850, Pendleton did leave his Bowling Green congregation for a pastorate in Russellville, Kentucky. From all indications, this move had nothing to do with Pendleton's antislavery stance. He helped start Bethel College in Russellville, and then returned to Bowling Green's First Baptist Church in 1851.

⁴⁴ Landmarkism made several sweeping claims about the nature of Baptist Christianity. Chief among them were the rejection of the historic concept of an invisible and universal church; a view that a truly spiritual church could only be found within local, autonomous congregations; the rejection of any forms of baptism other than those performed by immersion; and the assertion that Landmarkism stood in a historic line of "succession" that extended from Jesus Christ through the "true church" through time to the contemporary Landmark Baptist churches. This final point, and the collective weight of the Landmark movement, drove home the notion that only Landmarkists—and no other Christian adherents, even some Baptists—were actually Christians. Landmarkism was a tremendously controversial movement with ramifications for all sorts of Baptist practices through the latter half the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth.

Pendleton remains associated with Landmarkism because his *An Old Landmark Re-set* (Nashville: Graves & Marks, 1854) gave the movement its name. Pendleton was one of the three pillars in the early Landmark triumvirate; James R. Graves, longtime editor of the *Tennessee Baptist*, and A. C. Dayton were the other early leaders of the movement. Keith Eitel, "James Madison Pendleton," in

Southern Baptist life, Pendleton received an appointment in 1857 as a theology professor at Union University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. His continuing antislavery principles, however, drew routine public criticism, especially as sectional tensions between South and North intensified during the late 1850s. When the Civil War broke out, Pendleton feared for his life and fled to the North, accepting a pastorate in Hamilton, Ohio.⁴⁵

By the late 1850s, Kentucky's religiously conservative antislavery movement had shown its limits. Unable to make a compelling religious case for free labor designs and failing in 1849 to achieve a decisive political victory for their agenda, emancipationists could not influence more committed proslavery theological minds to abandon the idea of the righteousness of slaveholding. Kentucky continued in the late 1850s to experience public dissent against slavery,

Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), argues that Pendleton was not as thoroughgoing in his Landmarkism and suggests that Pendleton disagreed with Graves and Dayton on several key points, especially the existence of a universal church. For more on the foundations and platforms of Landmarkism, as well as the three leaders, see the series of articles published in *Baptist History and Heritage* 10 (1975): James E. Tull, "The Landmark Movement: An Historical and Theological Appraisal," *Baptist History and Heritage* 10 (1975), 3–18; Harold S. Smith, "The Life and Work of J. R. Graves (1820–1893)," *Baptist History and Heritage* 10 (1975), 19–27, 55–6; Bob Compton, "J. M. Pendleton: A Nineteenth-Century Baptist Statesman (1811–1891)," *Baptist History and Heritage* 10 (1975), 28–35, 56; and James E. Taulman, "The Life and Writings of Amos Cooper Dayton (1813–1865)," *Baptist History and Heritage* 10 (1975), 36–43.

⁴⁵ Pendleton, *Reminiscences*, 112–114. John E. Dawson, an editor of the Alabama newspaper the *South Western Baptist*, charged Pendleton as an "abolitionist" and argued that no person with antislavery views ought to hold a post in a southern university. Howard, "Pendleton: Southern Crusader Against Slavery," 206–210, discusses the great number of papers that came out against Pendleton. Interestingly, one of his main defenders was William C. Buck. Despite the public debate, the two remained friends, and Buck charged Pendleton's detractors with wrongly connecting Pendleton to abolitionist John Brown.

but it required the Civil War to force slavery's end—an end that would come immediately, not in the gradualist-colonizationist mode preferred by conservative white Kentuckians. Those white believers in antebellum Kentucky who opposed slavery held commitments to evangelicalism, white supremacy, and anti-abolitionism in common with their proslavery opponents. Yet that common ideological ground would not become apparent until after the death of American slavery. And then, it was proslavery evangelicals who convinced the gradualists to join their side. In Kentucky, the future of conservative Christian antislavery resided with the proslavery movement.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ABOLITIONIST THREAT
RELIGIOUS ORTHODOXY AND POLITICAL NEUTRALITY AMONG WHITE
KENTUCKIANS ON THE EVE OF CIVIL WAR
1860–1861

The great heresy of the North is abolitionism. The creed founded on it discards many of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. As a morbid sentiment, it naturally tends to socialism, rationalism, and infidelity. Elevating its own lawless impulses and dictates above the Biblical standard of truth, it necessarily rejects the Word of God as a guide. Prescribing its own passion as a condition of religious fellowship and church membership it repudiates the charity of the Gospel, rejects the doctrines of Christ, and excludes the people of God from its communion. This explains all. . . . Abolitionism is the cancer at the very heart of America.

–“Northern Apostacy,”
Western Recorder, May 26, 1860¹

On May 6, 1861, just a few weeks after Confederate artillery fired on Fort Sumter and initiated the American Civil War, Kentucky’s annual statewide meeting of Baptists, the General Association, petitioned the state legislature to “preserve the peace of the state.” A report in the *Western Recorder*, formerly named the *Baptist Banner* and the chief organ of the denomination in the Commonwealth, took great pride in noting that the document lacked partisan animus. Demonstrating that Baptists were not “attempt[ing] to make political capital” in that moment of sectional strife, the petition had been affirmed by coreligionists from all variety of perspectives, “Secessionists and Unionists, women and children.” The appeal itself called upon Kentucky’s politicians to “rise above the excitement and

¹ “Northern Apostacy,” *Western Recorder*, 26 May 1860. This article was reprinted from the Richmond, Virginia, *Christian Advocate*, the official newspaper of the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

confusion of party, and of the times, and deliberately, in the fear of God, seek only, first, the good, the very best possible good, of our Commonwealth, and, then, of other portions of our country." The logic of this argument was straightforward: Kentucky Baptists hoped "to avert from our soil, our homes, our women, and our children, the dreadful scourge of civil war." In the coming conflict, they wanted to remain neutral.²

That opinion was common among Kentucky's religious whites, and among white Kentuckians as a whole. Located just south of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, 664 miles of the Ohio River were all that separated the slave state of Kentucky from free soil. Thus "truly a border state" in both geography and politics, Kentucky whites labored to remain detached from the divisive sectional controversy.³ Their sentiment of neutrality stood out vividly in the notably complicated and controversial presidential election of November 1860. A majority of the Commonwealth's electorate (45.2 percent) sided with the conservative Constitutional Union Party candidate, slaveholder John Bell of Tennessee, over the Southern Democratic Party nominee, native Kentuckian John C. Breckinridge (36.3 percent). The other two candidates, Democrat Stephen A. Douglas and Republican Abraham Lincoln—the eventual winner—both from Illinois, received 17.5 and .9 percent respectively. Almost everywhere else in the United States, Constitutional Unionists were unpopular; Kentucky joined only Tennessee and Virginia in giving a majority vote to Bell. The party itself was an

² "The Lexington Memorial," *Western Recorder*, 25 May 1861.

³ See Lowell H. Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), quote ix.

amalgam of former Whigs and Know Nothings and famously ran on a platform that “recognize[d] no political principle other than *the Constitution . . . the Union . . . and the Enforcement of the Laws*.” Most significantly, Constitutional Unionists took no stance on the most pressing issue of the day—slavery.⁴

Such reluctance to speak on the slavery question, if unappealing most everywhere else in the United States, singularly suited a border slave state unwilling to push for secession but also unwilling to tamper with the institution within its boundaries. Slavery, in fact, had much to do with white Kentucky’s variety of political conservatism. If the Union was to be preserved, it was the Union without modification: that is, the Union as it existed in 1860. Neutral Kentuckians defended, in other words, a slaveholding nation they refused to leave and opposed changing.⁵

White Kentucky’s political neutrality drew considerable justification from religious sources. For the state’s substantial constituency of evangelical whites, God had ordained slavery as a properly Christian institution. To be sure, debate persisted in Kentucky throughout the antebellum era over the relative merits of

⁴ Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 183–86; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); quote 221. 1860 Presidential election figures taken from the American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1860>. For further analysis of Kentucky voting patterns in the 1860 election, see Harrison, *Civil War in Kentucky*, 4–5.

⁵ Historians Lowell Harrison and James Klotter cogently capture the irony of Kentucky’s attempt to remain disengaged from the sectional crisis: “neutrality was attractive to many Kentuckians who were uncertain of the path their state should take, although a state had no more right to declare neutrality than it did to secede.” See Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 187.

slavery in the Commonwealth. A minority of conservative voices, in fact, advocated gradual emancipation, contending that southern slavery fell far short of biblical guidelines for the institution. But no religiously conservative white Kentuckian disavowed the biblical mandate for the institution in the abstract. Moreover, none from that group dared question the racist foundation upon which antebellum white American society was based. Biblically considered and divorced from practical reality, white evangelical Kentuckians contended that slaveholding represented the supreme application of divine political economy. Since, on the eve of the Civil War, the United States remained a nation that protected the rights of slaveholders, when most religious whites in Kentucky spoke of loyalty to the Union, they spoke of a nation they believed served as the civil protector of conservative Christian values, including slavery. It was this belief that drove their commitment to political neutrality in the sectional conflict.

From such a perspective, threats to neutrality constituted threats to their faith or, at the very least, threats against the nation that secured their conservative Christian faith. As the Kentucky Baptist press contended in early 1860, "God has chosen these United States as the theater" of divine beneficence. The American nation stood "elevat[ed] among the kingdoms of the earth," "a monument of the power of Christianity and civilization," "reserved for some grand and holy purpose" by "our great Creator." To rend the national fabric would prove disastrous, especially if that rending came through violent and bloody means.⁶

⁶ "Prayer for the Preservation of the Union," *Western Recorder*, 9 January 1860; "Thoughts Upon the Present Condition of our Country," *Western Recorder*, 18 August 1860.

From the view of religiously and politically neutral Kentucky, two major factions poised to fight. On one side were southern proslavery secessionists. On the other were northern abolitionists. Both were evil because both sought to destroy the Union as it presently existed. But secession, however undesirable and extreme it might have seemed to many white evangelical Kentuckians in 1860 and 1861, served to preserve Christian slavery and the white supremacy that attended the institution. If disunion was wrong, Kentucky's religiously conservative whites at least identified with and understood the position of their coreligionists in the South.

They offered no such empathy for the hostiles from the North. To Kentucky's conservatives, secession remained far less of an evil than that foisted upon the American public by a radical antislavery faction hell-bent on tearing down the most basic foundations of Christian America: its faith, its unity, and its racial stratification, all of which the slavery system secured. As chapters one and two have argued, abolitionists committed, according to most whites in the Bluegrass, a two-fold form of heresy. The first was theological: abolitionists contravened nineteenth-century standards of American evangelical orthodoxy. The second was racial: by demanding an immediate end to slavery, abolitionists threatened the secure social fabric of America, which required the dominance of a pure-race class of white elite leadership. Abolitionism thus constituted the primary threat to Christian America and, by extension, Kentucky's political neutrality.

In early January 1860 the *Western Recorder* published an article by venerable Baltimore Baptist divine Richard Fuller (1804–76) that quickly set the terms of debate on the sectional crisis for religious conservatives in white

Kentucky. The essay initially appeared in the *Boston Courier* as a defense of the Christian slaveholding South against the assaults of northern abolitionists. Fuller's pen had been quickened by the late workings of John Brown, the infamous abolitionist who, in October 1859, led twenty-one followers to raid a federal armory in Harper's Ferry, Virginia. This "insane outbreak of fanaticism," as Fuller called it, had been interpreted throughout the North as an act of heroism. From Fuller's viewpoint in Baltimore, that sort of "sympathy" for a man who had a long record of excessively violent reaction against proslavery opponents and who had recently been hanged for committing a treasonous "deed of violence and blood" had no place in the United States. Rather, the North's positive response to Brown was cause for "amazement and alarm." For generations, Yankee abolitionists had "inflame[d] the imagination of women and children" and "misled multitudes of men—most excellent and pious—but utterly ignorant as to the condition of things at the South." In Fuller's own purple prose, quoted here at length, the northern position on the slavery-abolition controversy, as exemplified by what he saw as enthusiasm for John Brown-style antislavery, could be encapsulated as follows:

The South is denounced for not at once immolating four thousand millions of property guaranteed to them by the Constitution; for not at once abandoning to weeds and brambles millions of fertile acres; for not breaking up their entire social system, and either driving their servants from their comfortable homes, to become vagabonds in other States, which will again drive them out of their borders—or else harboring in their midst hordes of discontented, indolent vagrants, utterly unfit for freedom, who would certainly be exterminated unless in mercy they were again reduced to servitude. Because they will not do all this—will not

inflict this suicidal wrong upon themselves, and try this fatal experiment upon the servants they love; because they will not thus ruin their families, and desolate their hearths and homes, and all this in violation of their best convictions of duty, they are to be the objects of incessant calumny, to be pillaged and murdered in cold blood by their own fellow citizens, who are heroes and martyrs for doing this butchery.⁷

The basic flaw in this argument, as Fuller saw it, was that abolitionists cared little for African American souls. If his northern antagonists did, they would push for less extreme ends to slavery and work to ensure that the South's racial dependents were actually prepared for freedom. The northern populace, Fuller wrote, "wasted large sums for Abolition books and lectures," but they never spent that money where it really mattered, nor even so much as inquired of a white southerner—those who knew from their day-to-day existence—"what could be done to promote the happiness and welfare of these slaves." And what needed to be done, Fuller argued, was to provide gospel-based education for slaves. In a show of fairness to certain abolitionist claims, Fuller admitted that there were immoral laws on southern books that had impinged on the right of slaves to freely assemble. Yet, as a right-minded minister who placed his higher calling ahead of temporal decrees, Fuller reported that he willingly broke those laws, "meeting thousands from different plantations and preaching to them" while also teaching many other slaves to read. Fuller's own example, he argued, ought to prove to his abolitionist readers that the white southerner was the "true friend" of "the African." As he saw it, "the guardianship of a kind master"

⁷ Richard Fuller, "Letter of Dr. Fuller on Union," *Western Recorder*, 21 January 1860.

represented the best hope—"a great blessing"—for the future of the black race. Freedom would come, but only through the civilization that white Christianity would bring. Moreover, "If the gospel is to emancipate slaves," Fuller contended, "it would be, not by insurrection and massacre, but by a love which will melt off their bonds." Those who assailed slavery, Fuller believed, misunderstood its Christianizing and civilizing import.⁸

This 1860 vindication of the slaveholding South contra John Brown and radical abolitionism resonated with a widely accepted Christian proslavery position that Fuller, along with many of his colleagues in southern pulpits, had maintained for years. Indeed, Fuller was commonly regarded—certainly in the South, but also in the North—as one of the finest, most careful, and judicious interpreters of the biblical record's application to American slavery. The signal moment in Fuller's securing of this reputation came in 1845, when he engaged Brown University president Francis Wayland (1796–1865) in a debate over the Christian merits of the American slave system.⁹ In Baptist circles, the moment was rife with contention, as the denomination careened toward sectional cleavage over the slavery question. In response to antislavery critics in northern circles, Fuller—at that time pastor in Beaufort, South Carolina—gave as much ground to his opponents as he believed the Bible would allow on the issue.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ For the broader significance of this debate for antebellum America, see Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 36–38. Noll considers the Fuller-Wayland dispute one of the last public religious discussions of slavery where opponents exercised "reasonable restraint" and avoided devolving into heated polemic.

Fuller did not deny that injustice infected American slavery. But, like his fellow southern proslavery clerics, he could not avoid the fact that the Bible “condemn[ed] the abuses of slavery, but permit[ed] the system itself.” The burden of proof, Fuller contended in 1845, rested on opponents of slavery. Antislavery activists could not escape the clear message of both Old and New Testaments: slavery was a properly Christian institution. As a human reality, it was true that slavery could not avoid the taint of original sin. Because human beings could not avoid imperfection—sin—all human endeavors were necessarily flawed. The inevitable sinfulness of human actors, however, did not mean that believers gave up attempts to work for good in the world. As such, the reality of a slavery system compromised by sin did not impugn the idea of Christian slavery itself. Making the point, Fuller asked his readers, “will it not be laboring in the vocation of the infidel, to assert that the Bible does not condemn slavery, especially when we know that in the times of the Apostles, masters were allowed to torture their slaves, and starve them, and kill them as food for their fish?” Admitting the moral gravity of this question, the southern divine answered, “the enormities often resulting from slavery, and which excite our abhorrence, are not inseparable from it—they are not elements in the system, but abuses of it.” American slavery had flaws, but so too did all human institutions. To dismiss slavery out of hand meant dismissing the biblical record as well.¹⁰

¹⁰ Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution: In a Correspondence Between the Rev. Richard Fuller of Beaufort, S. C., and the Rev. Francis Wayland, of Providence, R. I.* (New York: Lewis Colby, 1845), quotes 4, 7.

Francis Wayland, Fuller's Rhode Island opponent, found himself compelled by the force of the southerner's argument. "Never before," Wayland wrote, "has the defence of slavery on Christian principles been so ably conducted." An evangelical emancipationist, like many Kentuckians, Wayland held a conservative, white supremacist antislavery position and rejected immediatist abolitionism.¹¹ Thus, it is not surprising that he found aspects of Fuller's argument, especially his strict biblicism, convincing. Yet Wayland refused to concede to Fuller that all forms of slavery were implicitly righteous, simply due to biblical warrant for an abstracted version of the institution. Taken to its logical conclusion, Wayland contended, Fuller's argument meant that blacks could enslave whites as much as whites had enslaved blacks in American society. Making his own use of biblical chapter-and-verse to show the error of Fuller's logic, Wayland explicated his meaning about non-racial slavery, citing 1 Peter 2:18: "[I]f the slaves of any state or plantation should rise and enslave their masters, this precept would justify them; and yet more, the other precepts, according to your interpretation, would oblige the masters as Christians to obey them, 'doing service from the heart, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.'" In point of fact, Wayland admitted that such a racially revolutionary notion of American slavery "goes very far beyond any thing that I ever before heard claimed for the slaves." And the Brown president did not

¹¹ For an extended treatment of Wayland's conservative antislavery views, see Deborah Bingham Van Broekhaven, "Suffering with Slaveholders: The Limits of Francis Wayland's Antislavery Witness," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery*, ed. John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 196–220.

actually believe “slaves had a right to rise and emancipate themselves by force,” as “it would be a great calamity were [slavery] to terminate by violence, or without previous moral and social preparation.” In other words, as was the case with most American whites, the prospect of slave insurrection alarmed Francis Wayland. The Brown University president may have disagreed with Fuller over the nature of American slavery, but they reached common ground on the duties of Christian masters to bonded souls.¹²

Indeed, in Wayland’s closing correspondence, he repeatedly remarked how closely his view aligned with Fuller’s, especially their agreement on the extent of corruption in American slavery. Slaveholders, Wayland asserted, were compelled by the words of Holy Scripture to treat their slaves as Christian equals. Stated baldly, such a view required what were then extra-legal matters: slave marriages had to be honored, family structures could not be compromised by separating children from parents, slaves should receive full educational access, their testimony should stand in secular as well as church courts, and slaves should be given the ability to freely assemble for worship. “[I]n a word,” Wayland wrote, a robustly Christian conception of slavery, which he believed Fuller was advancing, understood that slaves deserved “the full benefit of equal law in all cases whatsoever, save only that he is under obligation to render reasonable and cheerful service to his master.” Insofar as Fuller worked toward these aims, Wayland could scarcely complain about the southerner’s version of proslavery doctrine.¹³

¹² Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered*, quotes 226, 237, 238, 252.

Wayland did not concede the righteousness of slavery and—while endorsing aspects of Fuller’s argument—he did not compromise his antislavery principles out of deference to the slavocracy. Instead, as historian Deborah Bingham van Broekhoven has contended, Wayland’s attitude toward Fuller can be explained along religious and political lines. First, though the Rhode Island divine believed in the evil of American slavery—in his words, “I believe that I should sin willfully against God, if I ever promulgated a slaveholding Christianity.”—Wayland believed more fervently in the importance of preserving religious unity. Thus, in condemning slavery, Wayland avoided using invective against Fuller and sought to mollify differences between pro- and antislavery religious factions. Second, Wayland was a committed evangelical and a conservative emancipationist. As remained the case with coreligionists in Kentucky, that amalgam made him unwilling to support abolitionist schemes that would have radically called for the immediate end of slavery or a cavalier attitude toward the biblical record on slavery. As Wayland saw it, abolitionists had so “commonly indulged in exaggerated statement, in violent denunciation, and in coarse and lacerating invective,” that they had poisoned the nation’s religious discourse on the issue and threatened the peace of society.¹⁴

Fifteen years after Wayland and Fuller squared off, the issues at stake in their 1845 debate were still very much alive, especially from the perspective of white religious Kentuckians. And, much like Fuller and Wayland more than a

¹³ Ibid., 226–54, quote 234.

¹⁴ Van Broekhoven, “Suffering with Slaveholders,” 207–208; Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered*, quotes 13, 123.

decade prior, Kentucky's religious conservatives agreed about the primary agitators in the sectional crisis. When contrasted with abolitionists, the differences proslavery and emancipationist Kentuckians saw between themselves became inconsequential. From the perspective of those white evangelicals who considered themselves true believers in 1860, there was right and wrong on the slavery question. Abolitionism was wrong. Thanks to that "alarming" fiction, as one *Western Recorder* article contended, "Orthodox churches have been affected" by the "corrupt current of mingled errors." The essay—republished from the *Richmond Christian Advocate*, chief organ of the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South—saw the "evangelical ministry" now warped by "widespread heresies." Classic doctrines of Christianity, including "a particular providence, the special agency of the Spirit in regeneration, the inspiration of the Scriptures," to say nothing of "depravity, regeneration, and the atonement," had all been subverted by abolitionism's wayward theology. It was a theological problem freighted with tremendous social and political baggage. "Heresy in religion is a portentous omen," the article's Methodist author argued. Assuming the orthodox Christian foundation for nineteenth-century American society, "A corrupt public conscience is a throne on which Satan sways a terrible dominion." Thus, "Religion in America has more to fear from the abolition speculations of the North than from any other source in the whole world." True Christians needed to band together to defeat such threats, white religious conservatives maintained.

Such unified orthodoxy might not simply preserve the faith. It might also protect the life of the American nation.¹⁵

It was precisely this sort of religious solidarity against abolitionism that prompted the Baptist *Western Recorder* to publish, in early January 1861, a sermon by Henry J. Van Dyke (1822–91), noted minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn, New York. Just under a month prior, Van Dyke labored to show “The Character and Influence of Abolitionism.” The New York Presbyterian’s religiously conservative message registered a clear ecumenical appeal, apparent in the strong approbation given by the *Western Recorder*’s editors. Van Dyke, they wrote, delivered a “discourse characterized by the loftiest Christian patriotism, and by its fearless advocacy of God’s truth.” Indeed, they had “seldom seen a more faithful revelation of the true character of abolitionism.” Though a Presbyterian in the heart of Yankeedom, Van Dyke’s commitment to foundational principles of conservative Protestantism offered a guiding light to Kentucky Baptists.¹⁶

In the redacted form of Van Dyke’s discourse that followed this introduction, the Presbyterian pastor plainly defined his sermon’s target. An abolitionist “believes that slaveholding is sin, and ought therefore to be abolished.” That was quite a different position than the one occupied by emancipationists, who, for example, might “believe on political or commercial grounds that slavery is an undesirable system” or find the U. S. Constitution unduly disposed toward “the rights of slaveholders.” That antislavery impulse

¹⁵ “Northern Apostacy,” *Western Recorder*, 26 May 1860.

¹⁶ “Character and Influence of Abolitionism,” *Western Recorder*, 5 January 1861.

could be tolerated, according to Van Dyke. One was not an abolitionist “unless he believes that slave holding is morally wrong.” Advocates for that extreme view, he argued, had no Christian basis for such a claim.¹⁷

Van Dyke’s argument unfolded directly. Abolitionism failed as a properly Christian ideology because it had “no foundation in Scriptures.” It was “a historic truth,” he contended, that “at the advent of Jesus Christ slavery existed all over the civilized world, and was intimately interwoven with its social and civil institutions.” On such a purportedly evil institution, the New Testament record remained silent. “Drunkedness and adultery, theft and murder—all the moral wrong which have ever been known to afflict society, are forbidden by name.” Somehow, however, slavery, “according to abolitionism, this greatest of all sins—this sum of all villainies—is never spoken of except in respectful terms. How,” Van Dyke asked his sermon’s auditors, “can this be accounted for?”¹⁸

The answer was obvious. Abolitionism led “to utter infidelity.” Those under its spell operated from the “assumption, that men are capable of judging beforehand what is to be expected in a Divine revelation.” Abolitionists “did not try slavery by the Bible” but rather “tried the Bible by the principles of freedom.” Theoretically those “principles of freedom” drew from the laws of “nature.” But really, Van Dyke surmised, natural law was merely code language for “preconceived notions.” Abolitionists, in other words, committed the classic first

¹⁷ Ibid. Quotes from longer printed version of the sermon, published as, Henry Jackson Van Dyke, *The Character and Influence of Abolitionism!: A Sermon Preached in the First Presbyterian Church, of Brooklyn, on Sunday Evening, December 9th, 1860*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Henry Taylor, 1860), 5.

¹⁸ “Character and Influence of Abolitionism,” *Western Recorder*, 5 January 1861.

error on the path to heterodoxy: a human believing they understood the mind of God was “the cockatrice’s egg, from which in all ages heresies have been hatched. This is the spider’s web,” the Brooklyn divine argued, “which men have spun out of their own brains, and clinging to which, they have attempted to swing over the yawning abyss of infidelity.” Van Dyke admitted that not all “abolitionism is infidelity,” but the “tendencies” within the system were too much to ignore: “Wherever the seed of abolitionism has been sown . . . a plentiful crop of infidelity has sprung up.” True believers needed to avoid the bitter “fruit of such principles.” Orthodox faith, Van Dyke asserted, demanded no less.¹⁹

The Brooklyn pastor gained little traction for his perspective among his northern coreligionists, but in white evangelical Kentucky, it achieved extensive appeal. Moreover, Van Dyke’s was not the only opinion about abolitionism from above the Mason-Dixon line that white religious Kentuckians found laudable.²⁰ Van Dyke’s sermon only briefly alluded to the white supremacist foundation of American slavery, but for the many white Americans—South and North—who agreed with him, it was impossible to extract racism from their critique of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ As a result of his open denunciation of abolitionism, many in the North argued that Van Dyke was a proslavery southern sympathizer. Van Dyke’s Unionist credentials, however, had long been established and his opinion on abolitionism does not seem to have affected his Brooklyn congregation’s opinion of his pastoral abilities, where he served until his death in 1891. See Lewis G. Vander Velde, *The Presbyterian Churches and the Federal Union, 1861–1869* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932), 285; Peter J. Parish, “From Necessary Evil to National Blessing: The Northern Protestant Clergy Interpret the Civil War,” in *An Uncommon Time: The Civil War and the Northern Home Front*, ed. Paul A. Cimballa and Randall M. Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 78–79; and “Tablet to the Rev. Dr. Van Dyke: Formally Unveiled in the Second Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn,” *New York Times*, 2 October 1894.

abolitionism.²¹ Indeed, just a few months after publishing Van Dyke's sermon, the *Western Recorder* published a defense of slavery that originally ran in the *Christian Observer*, a Philadelphia-based New School Presbyterian paper that earned a reputation as the only publication in that mostly northern denomination to overtly endorse secession.²² Written anonymously by "A Christian" from the City of Brotherly Love, the article contended, like a slew of other anti-abolitionists, that "The advocates of the 'higher law' in regard to slavery" rejected the Holy Writ and were only able to "contend against the institution on conscientious grounds." The truth of the biblical record on slavery, however, became apparent, the author argued, when rational minds looked at the very practical racial need for slavery. Despite possessing "every opportunity," "the African has no where risen, to any extent in civilization." Freedom was no blessing to American blacks and the writer knew as much, living as he did on the free soil of Philadelphia. "There is a homely adage that 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating,' and when we in Philadelphia see around us a population of at least ten thousand persons of color, the mass of them born in our own State, and enjoying every advantage of civilization," it was impossible for the white mind to countenance that "we find them, with a few avocations, [living] in poverty." If

²¹ It is no reach to assume Van Dyke's own sense of racial superiority pervaded his analysis. In briefly saying that he would bracket questions of race in his sermon, he alluded to a classic racist defense of slavery: its utility as a Christian instrument for the improvement of benighted Africans: "I shall not attempt to show what will be the condition of the African race in this country when the Gospel shall have brought all classes under its complete dominion." Van Dyke, *Character and Influence of Abolitionism*, 11–12.

²² On the record of the *Christian Observer* in the sectional crisis, see Vander Velde, *Presbyterian Churches and Federal Union*, 370–71.

the “degenerate” state of “the free black man, with the great advantage he has in Philadelphia,” proved any indication, the writer asked, “how can it be expected that the liberated slave could succeed?” As the northern author contended, and his white Kentucky readers understood, African Americans constituted an unavoidably degraded race. Those Abolitionists who argued otherwise rejected “common sense” and “God’s law” only to uphold “their pride of opinion.” As “A Christian” put it, God, “for his wise purposes, permitted the African for centuries to be a barbarian in his own country, and a slave when he left it. Why,” he asked, would anyone “rebel and cavil with the great decree?” American slavery served a fundamentally Christian purpose as “it is now bringing thousands” of African Americans “to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.” It made little sense that immediatist antislavery activists, “calling themselves Christians’ and ministers of Christ interfere to prevent this glorious cause.” Abolitionism, asserted the writer, ludicrously pursued the wrongheaded ideal “of giving freedom to the contented and happy slaves.” God had chosen one superior race to work for the elevation of one far more inferior. To act against that divine imprimatur represented nothing less than an affront to the will of God.²³

Much historiographic debate has concerned the extent to which racism pervaded proslavery Christianity, particularly as it concerned readings of Genesis 9:18–27, where the biblical patriarch Noah pronounces the so-called “Curse of Canaan” or “Curse of Ham” upon his son. While no allusion to race, in any modern sense of the term, exists in the passage—and although there existed

²³ A Christian, “The Bible and Slavery,” *Western Recorder*, 9 March 1861.

little historical precedent for a racialized reading of the text—white nineteenth-century American interpretations ubiquitously read African American inferiority into the curse, finding therein a foundation for black enslavement.²⁴ As a pseudonymous “Nannie Grey” contended in a February 1860 *Western Recorder* essay (reprinted from the Richmond, Virginia, *Whig*), God’s providential racial design for humanity, set forward in Genesis 9:27, had only recently been fulfilled. The text—“God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.”—contained a direct, prophetic application to American race relations. The North American continent’s first peoples, American Indians, “are, undoubtedly, the descendents of Shem.” Likewise, Japheth was progenitor of “the Europeans” who had conquered the North American continent and “now dwell in the homes of the Indians.” Finally,

²⁴ Stacy Davis, *This Strange Story: Jewish and Christian Interpretation of the Curse of Canaan from Antiquity to 1865* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2008), provides a thoroughgoing analysis of the origins of the nineteenth-century racist, proslavery reading of the Curse of Canaan. Davis contends that, while prior Christian exegetes read social stratification into the text, there existed few precedents for a racialized interpretation.

The full text of Genesis 9:18–27 reads: “And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan. These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread. And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their fathers nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.”

Canaan's "sons" constituted the population of black slaves. Once, according to Grey, they "lived in the degraded wilds of Africa," but now they had received the "blessing" of becoming the "servant" of Japheth's white offspring—"to be civilized by the enlarged brain of Japheth, for God enlarged him mentally as well as physically." Africa's "miserable inhabitants," Grey argued, had been offered divine provision. Sparing no shortage of abhorrently imaginative racist language, Grey portrayed indigenous Africans to the *Western Recorder's* white readers as "the thick-lipped, black skinned and wooly headed negro, in a state of barbarism, more degrading than of the brute creation; for he has neither the ingenuity of the beaver, nor the industry of the bee; for he provides neither food nor shelter for himself; but [is] guided by brute instinct alone." The Genesis curse, Grey explicated, had so "literally" and obviously "been fulfilled" that no one could doubt the "truth" the Christian God revealed in "the Bible." Racial distinctions, biblically considered by white religious conservatives in nineteenth-century America, were a providential gift.²⁵

Some proslavery divines, as historian Eugene Genovese has maintained, found such a strained application of the text for racist ends "feeble." But most contemporary southern whites did not. Drawing from the deep religious well of what Stephen Haynes has called "intuitive racism," proslavery believers read

²⁵ Nannie Grey, "The Origin of Slavery," *Western Recorder*, 25 February 1860. Versions of this article circulated through a number of southern newspapers in the period. In addition to its interpretation of African American inferiority, the article's exegesis of the Curse of Canaan was also applied broadly to justify Indian subjugation and, hence, manifest destiny. See William G. McLoughlin and Walter H. Conser Jr., "The First Man was Red"—Cherokee Responses to the Debate Over Indian Origins, 1760–1860," *American Quarterly* 41 (June 1989), 252.

white supremacy directly into the biblical texts they charged their abolitionist enemies with perverting. Relying on their own common sense understanding of black inferiority, most whites required no fancy hermeneutical scaffolding to build a racialized theological structure. Simply put, white American theology was, by and large, racist theology.²⁶

A late March 1861 *Western Recorder* article, also reprinted from the New School Presbyterian, Philadelphia-based, *Christian Observer*, demonstrated this point succinctly. "The descendants of Ham are yet in slavery as God willed it, and they will be so until he changes their condition." The divine division of the races led to a "natural dislike or antipathy in the white race to the black, which prevents the amalgamation of the races." While racial hostility would not remain permanent, it would persist until the end of human time as the writer knew it, invoking the historic Christian notion of millennial global peace at the end of time, "when the Lion and the Lamb lie down together." Until then, however, American slavery, "which is now in a very ameliorated form," served as a socially stabilizing force of Christian benevolence. In this writer's telling, African

²⁶ For the first quote, see Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 4. On "intuitive racism," see Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 126. Part and parcel to the Christian proslavery exegesis of the Curse of Canaan as connoting racial difference was a defense of monogenetic accounts of human origins, as explained in the biblical record. Reaching for an explanation of a white-dominated racial hierarchy that also upheld the Genesis record on common human ancestry, the racialized interpretation of the curse proved a convincing narrative. See Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Modern World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 137–51; and David N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 180–86.

Americans were an uncontrollable people when left to their own, baser passions. The enslaved were “happy where they are,” “restrained by their owners from the vices so common with the free black man in our cities.” Those “vices” included a host of the most critical problems facing American urban populations: “details of murders, poisonings, arsons” filled the “daily papers.” “Our streets at night swarm with prostitutes, swindling in high and low places, dram-drinking, gambling, and every vice that can be enumerated.” Comparatively considered, slavery could not be so bad—the Bible approved of it. The Christian God had offered slavery as a means by which whites could socially control an inferior race unfit, as the example of northern free blacks confirmed, for the responsibility of freedom. Slavery may have been evil, the author opined, but it was certainly “the least of evils.”²⁷

The proponents of abolitionism, however, did not see the matter that way. “This self-righteous and Pharisaic spirit impedes the cause of the church,” a sympathetic northern voice contended. By pushing a racially and theologically heterodox agenda, as a like-minded Presbyterian put it, abolitionists ventured to “plunge our happy nation into a fraternal war.” Abolitionism “would let loose the passions and prejudices of men and all the evils which [include] civil war, the slaughter of men and of innocent women and little children.” White Kentuckians, long assured of the rationality and importance of neutrality—and equally convinced of abolitionism’s syllabus of errors—did not need persuading on this point.²⁸

²⁷ A Christian Father, “Christian Charity,” *Western Recorder*, 23 March 1861.

Three days before South Carolina's secession, December 17, 1860, Duncan Robertson Campbell (1814–65) penned a letter to the *Western Recorder* addressed to a readership broadly defined as the "Christian public, North and South." Campbell, well known to his audience as president of Georgetown College—located in central Kentucky, roughly ten miles north of Lexington, and the state's flagship institution of Baptist undergraduate education—did not achieve such a prominent position through extremist measures.²⁹ His opinion on the sectional crisis was, like that in much of white religious Kentucky, characteristically moderate. A civil war need not occur, Campbell assured his readership, but it would only be avoided if extreme partisans on both sides of the divide would give up their grievances. Those grievances were manifold, but it was clear from the tone of Campbell's letter that one section had been injured far more than the other. Campbell's prose took up more than three lengthy newspaper columns and offered words of opprobrium for the South's secessionists, who he saw as inaugurating nothing less than "revolution." That rebuke of disunionists, however, accounted for only a small fraction of the space devoted to condemning the North's "crusade of abuse" of southern patriots.³⁰

Southerners charged that "the present troubles originated with the North." By and large, Campbell wrote, they were right. Because they lived on free soil, northerners "have ungenerously and offensively assumed to themselves

²⁸ Ibid.; A Christian, "The Bible and Slavery."

²⁹ For biographical information on Campbell, see J. H. Spencer, *A History of Kentucky Baptists: From 1769 to 1885* (Cincinnati: J. R. Baumes, 1885), 1:603–604.

³⁰ D. R. Campbell, "To the Christian Public, North and South. *Must the Union be broken up?*" *Western Recorder*, 22 December 1860.

a higher grade of moral Christian character." There had been no shortage in the "torrents of abuse and insult" from Yankee "pulpits," "platforms," and "presses" in the "last fifteen or twenty years." It was not only the South's "peculiar institution" that came under attack, but "our character also." However, those same northern Christians, the college president argued, needed to consult the Bibles they believed carried so much authoritative value. After a close reading of the text, Yankee believers would have to ask themselves "if the supercilious and proscriptive course" toward abolition, which included much invective "towards Christians at the South, is warranted by the spirit and conduct of Christ and his apostles towards the slaveholders of their day?" On this matter, the slaveholding South could remain assured: the answer was no. Abolitionism drew no "warrant from Scripture." As Hopkinsville educator J. W. Rust claimed, "The pulpit at the North" labored under the "pressure of the 'higher law power.'" It had thus become corrupted: "The great *animus* of the Northern pulpit has been hostile, and in constant activity against the institution of slavery in the South." Abolitionism, a heretical virus, had infected northern churches and twisted traditional Christian messages of love into harangues of hate.³¹

Northerners thus bore the responsibility for "driv[ing] the South to revolution." With the rise of the abolition-minded Republican Party to political dominance in the North, a "section" was now "wholly controlling" national

³¹ Ibid; J. W. Rust, "'My Kingdom is not of this World.' *The Irrepressible Conflict*," *Western Recorder*, 5 January 1861, emphasis in original. Rust was one of the most prominent non-ordained Baptists in Kentucky. In 1864, he assumed the presidency of Hopkinsville's Bethel Female College, a boarding school sponsored by the local Bethel Association of Baptist churches and, in 1869, he became co-owner of the *Western Recorder*. See Spencer, *History of Kentucky Baptists*, 1:727.

politics with the “single sentiment of antislavery.” Thus, as Duncan Campbell explicated, the South had no recourse, no way to protect its own interests—slavery—but war. The dominant section, the North, held the salve that would heal the nation’s deep wounds: they had to “retrace their steps of aggression” and recognize the rights of masters in the South—secured both by the Bible and the U. S. Constitution. Since the abolitionist North had provoked the animosity between the sections, according to Campbell, it was the North that needed to repent. After that—and after “a reasonable time” passed—sectional hostility would cease.³²

Presbyterian Samuel R. Wilson (1818–86) presented a similar argument in a November 1860 sermon on the sectional crisis: “I believe that in this whole affair Northern men have been really the aggressors, and impartial history will so attest.” Wilson, pastor of Cincinnati’s First Presbyterian Church, claimed his “life-blood” came through “Southern veins,” despite being born in the Queen City, having received his education in northern schools, and only holding pastorates to date on free soil. To be sure, Wilson claimed a sizable audience in Kentucky, so much so that he assumed the pulpit of Shelby County’s Mulberry Presbyterian Church in 1863 before moving to Louisville’s First Presbyterian Church for a thirteen-year pastorate beginning in 1865. Like religiously conservative Kentuckians, Wilson, just north of the slave line, espoused a conservative Unionist viewpoint. The Presbyterian contended the election of Lincoln, while the “*immediate occasion*” of the “present threatening movements in

³² Campbell, “To the Christian Public.”

the country," was "not the *cause*." Sectional strife came from a deeper source, rooted in the rampant tripartite American sins of "Pride," "Oppression," and "Lawlessness." No region claimed a monopoly on these wrongs, according to Wilson.³³

Still, the Ohio minister's message of sectional conciliation tended, like his Kentucky coreligionists, to highlight the record of northern wrongs. On southern plantations, there persisted "the degradation and oppression" of the enslaved, of which most Americans had been well informed. But "In New England, with the paeans of liberty sounding in his ears, the emancipated slave freezes and starves and sinks into imbecility; and the philanthropy of his boasted Northern friends, having exhausted itself in denunciation of his master, leaves him to the tender mercies of time and chance." In truth, Wilson allowed, "the black man in our midst is subjected to many unjust disabilities." That acknowledgment, however, did not mean that the Cincinnati pastor advocated, like apostate abolitionists, "either social or civil equality" of the races. Simply, Wilson wanted to point out the hypocrisy of northern immediatist antislavery voices. "The taunting finger," as he put it, "may point to the slave-mart, the whipping-post, and the loose marriage-tie of the slave; and the taunt may be hurled back by an appeal to the pauperism, prostitution, homicides, and divorces of those who, in the philanthropic zeal, have forgotten the admonition of Jesus: 'Judge not, that ye not

³³ Samuel R. Wilson, *Causes and Remedies of Impending National Calamities* (Cincinnati: J. B. Elliot, 1860), 7–11, 16. Emphasis in original. For biographical information on Wilson, see William Elsey Connelley and E. M. Coulter, *History of Kentucky*, ed. Charles Kerr, vol. 3 (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1922), 364–65.

be judged.” Southern secessionists, according to Wilson, were guilty of trying to “break up the national Covenant” and could not be lauded for launching a “rebellion” that, if failed, “is treason.” In Wilson’s telling, however, the South had been provoked by “A pulpit teaching the infidel doctrine of a Higher law than God’s word residing in the instincts and rational consciousness of man’s own soul.” If bloodshed were to come from the impending crisis, in the mind of Kentucky’s white evangelicals, it would be on abolitionist hands.³⁴

It was an attempt to avoid the mass spilling of American blood that led John J. Crittenden (1786–1863)—one of the Bluegrass State’s U.S. Senators and, like much of his constituency, a Constitutional Unionist—to propose to Congress a famously flawed eleventh-hour compromise on slavery in December 1860. The slave-free line would be set at 36°30’: Deep South states could keep slavery, the Fugitive Slave Act would be more strictly enforced, and future states entering the nation could determine for themselves whether or not they wanted slavery. Crittenden’s Compromise, which smacked overtly of other failed attempts to mollify sections of the country on the slavery question and looked patently similar to the Missouri Compromise of 1820, was rejected outright by Republicans in both houses of Congress and never came up for a vote. Moreover, it did nothing to stave off the secessionist impulse. Two days after Crittenden submitted his proposal for consideration, South Carolina left the Union.³⁵

³⁴ Wilson, *Causes and Remedies*, 4, 10, 11, 15.

³⁵ Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 185–86.

Still, if the Crittenden Compromise proved offensive beyond Kentucky's borders, within the state it seemed the only hope for saving the nation. Particularly among Kentucky's leading religious bodies, neutrality remained the watchword of the day. As right-minded conservatives, Kentucky's religious whites would not lead the path to bloodshed or national destruction. But it was also clear from their perspective that there were zealots in both North and South who would. Robert J. Breckinridge, at that date Kentucky's most prominent Presbyterian cleric—and also the state's most cantankerous—argued in a widely published sermon following South Carolina's secession that warfare would be all but unavoidable “if, the Cotton States, [follow] the example of South Carolina—or the Northern States adher[e] to extreme purposes in the opposite direction.” Such insanity was to be avoided at all costs. As was the case with Crittenden, Breckinridge held the “unalterable conviction” that “the slave line is the only permanent and secure basis of a confederacy for the slave States” and “that the union of free and slave States, in the same confederacy, is the indispensable condition of the peaceful and secure existence of slavery.” Similarly, in a late 1861 article in the *Danville Quarterly Review*, the theological journal associated with the Old School Presbyterian Danville Theological Seminary and known for its politically Unionist tone, Breckinridge contended that the only sure security for American slavery came through a collectively unified nation. As the first two chapters of this dissertation demonstrated, Breckinridge's antebellum conservative emancipationism led him to affirm, on the one hand, a commitment both to the maintenance of white supremacy in Kentucky through the colonization of African Americans in Liberia and, on the other, a version of states rights doctrine that did not interfere with the interests of slave states further

south. The U. S. Consitution, the minister argued in 1861, had guaranteed the rights of southern slaveholders from its inception. The Union, moreover, which enforced those constitutional assurances, had provided Americans with "more than seventy years of unparalleled prosperity." Given these historical and contemporary political realities, according to the Presbyterian divine, the "madness of the whole secession conspiracy" made little sense. Southerners would leave the Union to protect their right to hold slaves, a right they already enjoyed.³⁶

As a letter by one of the state's emerging Baptist orators, Henry McDonald (1832–1904), asked in the *Western Recorder*, "Are Christian men prepared for secession and its bitter fruits? What evil will disunion remedy? As men, as patriots, as Christians, let us weigh well what we do. Are any so blind as to suppose that our rights, civil and religious, can live in the engulfing maelstrom of disunion?" No, the state's white religious conservatives maintained, Kentucky would have no part in the endeavor to wreck the Union. In the sectional crisis, moderation was key.³⁷

³⁶ Robert J. Breckinridge, *Discourse of Dr. Breckinridge Delivered on the Day of National Humiliation, January 4, 1861, at Lexington, KY* (Baltimore: John W. Woods, 1861), 15; Breckinridge, "The Civil War:—Its Nature and End," *Danville Quarterly Review* 1:4 (December 1861), 645.

³⁷ Henry McDonald, "The Resolution of the State Convention of Alabama Baptists," *Western Recorder*, 8 December 1860. At the time, McDonald was serving as pastor of Greenburg Baptist Church in south central Kentucky. His star would rise considerably in coming years, when, beginning in 1870, he served (at times contemporaneously) as pastor of Georgetown Baptist Church, professor of theology at Western Baptist Theological Institute, and professor of moral philosophy at Kentucky's Georgetown College. By 1880, he had accepted the pastorate of the Second Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, and held a position at Richmond College. From 1882 to 1900 he led the Second Baptist

For religious Kentuckians, these matters were never purely political, nor were they only responding to secular developments. Indeed, much of the context for white Kentucky's religious statements on disunion came from coreligionists elsewhere in the nation. With regard to secession, Baptists in particular were acutely aware of developments in Alabama, where the state's Baptist convention endorsed a secessionist resolution at their November 1860 meeting. The Alabama Baptist statement came out almost immediately in response to the election of Abraham Lincoln, widely believed in the South to be an open assault on the southern way of life enshrined in slavery and, thus, cause to break with the North.³⁸ Writing to a broad audience of Kentucky Baptists, Henry McDonald found such argumentation tenuous at best. Nothing had happened yet, he contended. "The rights of the people are represented as not merely endangered, but destroyed." Yet Lincoln "has not yet assumed the position to which he has been constitutionally elected," nor had he "done one official act, good or bad." The opinions emanating from Baptists farther South could be characterized unambiguously: "Rhetoric, not reason, war, not peace, angry agitation, not

Church of Atlanta, Georgia, and also served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board. See Spencer, *History of Kentucky Baptists*, 2:211; and George Braxton Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 5th ser., 1902–1914 (Lynchburg, Va.: J. P. Bell, 1915), 99–102.

³⁸ For the broader context on the Alabama Baptist resolution, see Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 109–113. On broadly southern attitudes toward the election of Lincoln as a rationale for secession, see Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001). One representative opinion, among the many presented by Dew, is that of John Archer Elmore, secession commissioner from Alabama to South Carolina, who on December 17, 1860, argued, "The election of Lincoln [is] 'an avowed declaration of war upon the institutions, the rights and the interests of the South.'" (p. 27)

conservatism, rule the day." Disunion—and certain warfare to follow—needed to be considered far more carefully by Baptists in the United States, McDonald argued.³⁹

Unlike any other nation in world history, McDonald reminded his readers, the U.S. had afforded Baptists incredible religious liberties. By contrast, "Pagan, papal, and too often Protestant nations have united to exterminate Baptists." As the historical record showed, "There is hardly a country in Europe but what has drunk the blood of Baptists, and kindled the fires of persecution against us." In the divinely favored United States, however, "True soul freedom, the yearning of every Baptist heart, and for which we have so nobly suffered, is now realized." "In no other land," McDonald maintained, "is there such fullness of religious freedom." The work of nation-making had been a distinctively Baptist enterprise, as "Baptist blood was shed on every revolutionary battle field." Why, he asked, would American Baptists now choose to "desecrate the land where [our forebears] sleep by destroying what their lives help to purchase?" It was unimaginable to McDonald that his coreligionists elsewhere in the South could forget the labors of such a significant generation from less than a century prior. Moreover, considered theologically from a Baptist perspective, the Union stood guardian of an essential doctrinal principle—the liberty of believers to practice their variety of faith as they pleased. By dismissing the Union so cavalierly, as Alabama Baptists did in their resolution against the Union, secessionists risked key aspects of their religious lives.⁴⁰

³⁹ McDonald, "Resolution of the State Convention of Alabama Baptists."

The *Western Recorder's* editors enthusiastically endorsed Henry McDonald's conservative Unionist article. Indeed, the paper argued like McDonald that Abraham Lincoln's election, however unpopular, provided no just provocation for secession. Even as late as March 9, 1861, the Baptist newspaper remained positive in support of the Union. That date came only days after Lincoln took the oath of office on March 4. In addition to publishing the full text of the new president's inaugural address, the paper asserted its viewpoint on the matter: even "though in the estimation of many" civil war was irrepressible, the editors chose "to look on the bright side" and refused to "give up the hope but that all may be well with our whole country." At the time these words appeared in print, however, seven southern states had exited the Union and it appeared increasingly less plausible that such longing for peace would be realized in the near term.⁴¹

Moreover, if the *Western Recorder* was the primary dispenser of Baptist opinion in the Commonwealth, its editors certainly did not speak for all Kentucky Baptists. Just a week after McDonald's December 1860 article appeared in print, the newspaper published an altogether different perspective on "The Crisis" by A. D. Sears (1804–91), a well-known pastor in the western Kentucky town of Hopkinsville. As Sears interpreted the troubles of the day, the nation had been on a collision course since 1845—when Baptists agreed to split along the Mason-Dixon line over the slavery question. Baptists in the South, who affirmed

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Apologies," *Western Recorder*, 9 March 1861.

the biblically sanctioned Christian right of masters to hold slaves, had been pushed far enough throughout the course of the antebellum era. Given “the aggressions upon the institution of slavery, so constantly and violently made by the people of the North,” it was no surprise to Sears that “we would reach the present crisis.” Rather, he contended, “The wonder to me is that the people of the South have kept quiet so long.” Sears found no “fault” in the action of the Alabama Baptists. “They are not traitors,” he asserted, “[W]e should remember that the men of Alabama and South Carolina are but men, and that as men they have been goaded on by the wrongs of the Northern States to a determination to resist aggression, and to defend their rights at all hazards.” Any talk of patriotism, Sears argued, ignored the role of “a mad and infuriated sectional party”—apparent to any reader as abolitionist-influenced Republicans—who had forced the hand of southern secessionists.⁴²

The question now before citizens of the Bluegrass State, according to the Hopkinsville pastor, was whether or not it would follow the lead of slaveholding states to the South. Kentuckians had a choice. They could “remain silent, and thus lead both the people of the North as well as the South astray.” Or, by contrast, Kentucky could take a stand and show that it “would not countenance any attempt to invade the soil of any of the States of the South by Federal troops and that in no event will Kentuckians endorse or sustain measures calculated to

⁴² A. D. Sears, “The Crisis,” *Western Recorder*, 15 December 1860. Sears ranked as one of the more prominent Baptist ministers in Kentucky and Tennessee, carrying on an active ministry in the region for more than forty years. See Spencer, *History of Kentucky Baptists*, 1: 267–68.

involve any of the states in the calamities and horrors of civil war." From Sears' point of view, the choice was plain: "[I]f we are not blind to the spirit of the religion of our Saviour, as well as utterly destitute of all regard to the interests of mankind, we will adopt the latter answer." White Kentucky had not yet made such a decision but, according to Sears, protecting the interests of the white Christian South could not be wrong. Sears did not advocate that Kentucky secede, but he did insist that the state oppose actions to militarily resist the secession of its sister states to the south.⁴³

Kentucky never came to officially endorse the southern cause, but Sears otherwise reflected clearly the political opinion of the state's whites. On April 15, 1861, Kentucky Governor Beriah Magoffin famously rebuffed Lincoln's call for 75,000 troops to the support the war effort, four militias of which would come from the Bluegrass State. Magoffin minced no words in replying to the president: "I say emphatically, Kentucky will furnish no troops for the wicked purpose of subduing her sister Southern states." Then, a month later, the governor followed with a broadcast declaration of the state's neutrality, opposing the use of any of the "State Guard" for any purpose other than to "prevent encroachments upon [Kentucky's] soil, her rights, and her sovereignty by either of the belligerent parties." The commonwealth's militia, he asserted, existed only to "preserve the peace, safety, prosperity, and happiness and strict neutrality of her people." As a matter of official state policy, Kentucky neither supported southern secession nor

⁴³ Ibid.

northern military efforts to reunite the nation.⁴⁴

For the state's conservative whites, Magoffin's declarations represented the political application of the religious values they steadfastly held. Interpreting the war, which had only just begun, Joseph Otis, editor of the *Western Recorder*, wrote that the paper had "but one mission and that mission is peace." Otis fervently declared himself "loyal to the Union" but refused to take sides in the fight. Explaining his position, Otis asked his readers, "Shall the cause of Christianity be set back a hundred years to appease fanaticism on one hand or build up a sectional administration on the other? Shall the benign influence of Christian America be forever destroyed throughout the world" simply to achieve "political ends?" "Shame," Otis wrote, "on the Christianity which requires the sword to uphold it; and thrice cursed is that nationality which can live only at the cost of their own citizens, immolated upon the altar of sectional bigotry." As a Methodist essayist put it, evangelical northerners and southerners were bound together by a bond that transcended sectional allegiance: their faith. As "the cry for blood, blood, blood, comes from one section and is sent back with terrible defiance by the other, shall we lift up our voice to augment the wrath and swell the fury? By the grace of God, *never*." Neutrality in the warfare, thus understood, was an important religious value because it meant refusing to take arms against fellow members of a broader Christian fellowship.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ "President Lincoln to Gov. Magoffin," *Western Recorder*, 20 April 1861; "Proclamation of Gov. Magoffin," *Western Recorder*, 25 May 1861. For the broader political context, see Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 186–89.

⁴⁵ Joseph Otis, "WHO WILL WRITE THE CHAPTER?," *Western Recorder*, 1 June 1861; "Our Brethren," *Western Recorder*, 1 June 1861. Emphasis in original.

At the same time, however, it remained clear whom white religious Kentuckians blamed for stoking the embers of sectional conflagration. Abolitionists, by their heretical views of Christian truth, could never stake claim to a broader fellowship of the orthodox. Right thinking believers understood that Christian America had been a divine gift. "[W]e were unwilling," Joseph Otis wrote, summing up the late antebellum political attitude of white religious Kentuckians, "to give our sanction to building up a sectional Christianity, based upon an unrelenting hostility to [the] wise and beneficent institution" of slavery. That is, he could not sanction abolitionism or the political consequences of its principles. After all, slaveholding had been "protected by the Constitution, and blessed and owned of God in the enlightenment and regeneration of many of Africa's sons, who are now heralds of the cross in their benighted fatherland." As religious conservatives in white Kentucky had consistently contended, slavery was a Christianizing force, a quintessential institution for a nation shaped by faith.⁴⁶

The Civil War, brought on by abolitionist agitation, thus threatened the core of Christian America. There was only one solution to the late strife, according to Otis. "Christianity, pure and undefiled," was all that could "save our country and once again unite every section in sweet communion." Unfortunately, it seemed to the editor that the moment of Christian influence

⁴⁶ Otis, "WHO WILL WRITE THE CHAPTER?"; Otis, "OUR NATION'S GROUND OF HOPE," *Western Recorder*, 8 June 1860.

had passed. In allowing the slavery question—which true believers did not agitate—to fuel sectional antagonism, the properly orthodox had compromised their formidable antebellum base of cultural unity and power. Now, however, “a heterogenous mass, composed of natives and foreigners, and sects of every shade and color, abolitionists, proslavery demagogues, rip-raps, zouaves and infidels” had “assumed a guardianship over the nation.” Christian America had been compromised. Otis worried “that the nation’s ground of hope, the only palladium of a free people”—white evangelical Christianity—“is forever buried.” For the godly in the Commonwealth, the open fighting between sections represented the worst of American life. Because of the war, the nation that had served as the guarantor of Christian values could no longer make such assurances.⁴⁷

For this reason, in June 1861 the *Western Recorder* announced in its pages, “SINK OR SWIM, LIVE OR DIE, SURVIVE OR PERISH, WE ARE OPPOSED TO THIS WAR.” That sentiment prevailed more broadly in the state throughout the course of the conflict, but Kentucky’s political neutrality came to an end in September 1861. At that date, following contentious debate between a Union-minded legislature and southern-sympathizing but neutral governor, the state’s House and Senate passed resolutions against the wishes of Magoffin demanding the removal of Confederate forces that had entered the southwest part of the state. Formalized support for the Union soon followed, and Kentucky remained

⁴⁷ Otis, “OUR NATION’S GROUND OF HOPE”; Otis, “WHO WILL WRITE THE CHAPTER?” Emphasis in original.

with the Union throughout the course of the war. A sizable group of Confederate sympathizers did, however, organize a provisional government in Bowling Green in October 1861, but it operated ineffectually for the next year and only under the protection of the nearby Confederate Army. When southern forces withdrew from the Bluegrass State the next year, after the battle of Perryville in October 1862, Confederate Kentuckians had to rule from beyond state lines and did so with little effect.⁴⁸

By the summer of 1861, no one in the Commonwealth was certain of the future the Civil War would bring. Yet war had come and, from the perspective of conservative white religionists in the state, it was an unwelcome presence. They were confident that the fighting, which had only just begun, had irreparably sundered Christian America—the only viable basis for North-South unity. But in point of fact, they argued, it was abolitionism that was responsible for the initial breach. Conservative Kentuckians had long held antipathy toward those radicalized northern opponents of slavery who they believed created the tension between the sections. That belief they carried with them in the coming years. As the war progressed and turned from a war to preserve the Union to a war to abolish slavery, white Kentuckians grew increasingly convinced that their antebellum fears of an abolitionist threat were being realized. The religious interpretation of the righteousness of slavery and the inequality of the races, developed and in place before emancipation, thus provided a compelling narrative for white religious Kentuckians to remain politically neutral even as

⁴⁸ Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 190–94.

they sided socially and culturally with the South. Thus white evangelical theology also compelled the developments that were to come in the postbellum years.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPETING VISIONS OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY
KENTUCKY PRESBYTERIANISM'S CIVIL WAR
1861–1862

It is easy to say that [disloyalty to the Union] is *political*—all this difficulty is *personal* . . . On the contrary, it is *sin*. It is heresy and schism in the Church; it is conspiracy and treason in the commonwealth; it is malice, and false witness, and hatred, and envy, against God's children. It is sin—*grievous sin*. And God will require it of his servants, and will exact it both of the Church and State—if the leaders in such sins go uncensored and unpunished.

–*Danville Quarterly Review*,
June 1862¹

In early March 1862, noted Old School Presbyterian polemicist Robert J. Breckinridge published an article in the *Louisville Journal* soliciting subscriptions for the *Danville Quarterly Review*. Conditions were dire for the fledgling theological journal. Founded just more than a year prior by Breckinridge and an “association” of eleven like-minded ministers, the publication was connected to central Kentucky's Danville Theological Seminary and Centre College, both located roughly thirty-five miles southwest of Lexington and aligned with the Old School Presbyterian Church. In early 1862, however, five members of the editorial board—Stuart Robinson, Thomas A. Hoyt, John H. Rice, Robert L. Breck, and J. M. Worrall—had left the *Review* under protest. Now, the publisher, Richard H. Collins—closely connected with the departed editors—refused to continue printing the journal and would not release the mail book that contained

¹ “The Late General Assembly of 1862, of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America,” *Danville Quarterly Review* 2:2 (June 1862), 370.

the names of subscribers. According to Breckinridge, the departure of the editors and publisher could be explained straightforwardly: "they were secessionists" who disapproved of Breckinridge and the *Review*, which, in a number of articles, had overtly and consistently advocated Unionism over the past year.²

Breckinridge's brief article achieved a twofold purpose. For the short term, it secured the *Danville Quarterly Review's* solvency. But much more significantly, it inaugurated a theological war among Kentucky Presbyterians over two competing ideas about the relationship of the church to the state. Indeed, Breckinridge's perspective only represented one side of the story. Within days of the initial article, responses from several of the five former *Review* editors appeared, all of whom disavowed secessionist sympathies. As Covington, Kentucky, minister J. M. Worrall argued, "I have never done, or left undone, anything . . . that ought subject me to the epithet of 'Reverend Secessionist,' or any other kind of Secessionist."³ More vociferously, Stuart Robinson—popular pastor of Louisville's Second Presbyterian Church, a pro-emancipationist in the late 1840s canvass, and a late 1850s colleague of Breckinridge at Danville Theological Seminary—who would soon emerge as Breckinridge's foremost opponent, retorted that "Dr. B.'s charges, and infatuations" were "wholly untrue." Continuing, he pressed further: "As to the unworthy cry of

² Robert J. Breckinridge, "The Danville Review," *Louisville Journal*, 5 March 1862, Stuart Robinson scrapbook, Stuart Robinson papers, Box 1, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Ky. Also published verbatim in Breckinridge, "In Memoriam. A Tribute to the Rev. Stuart Robinson: With Notices of the Rev. J. M. Worrall, the Rev. T. A. Hoyt, the Rev. R. L. Breck, and some others," *Danville Quarterly Review* 2:1 (March 1862), 140–42.

³ J. M. Worrall, "Danville Review," *Cincinnati Gazette*, n.d., Stuart Robinson scrapbook, Stuart Robinson papers, FHS.

'secessionist,' I know of no ground for Dr. B.'s charge, except that I do not concur in Dr. B.'s despotic and intolerant spirit, nor in his Jacobinal contempt for courts' and judges' decisions, nor in his judgment of the ability and importance of his articles, in which I have discovered few important ideas."⁴ Robinson, Worrall, and the former editors may have disagreed with the tone of the *Danville Quarterly Review's* Unionist stance, but that, they argued, did not make them disloyal to the United States.

Rather, they maintained deeper reasons for their dissent. First, they contended that Breckinridge had moved the *Review* away from its initial terms of incorporation. As Thomas A. Hoyt explained, when the *Review* was founded in October 1860 before the November 6 election of Abraham Lincoln to the U.S. presidency, "no one dreamed of a theological review plunging into the arena of party politics." Hoyt, along with the other *Review* expatriates, acknowledged that the journal's founding principles allowed any of the editors "to publish whatever he chose."⁵ But the *Review* also called for a "prohibition of direct controversy . . . between its different contributors."⁶ In the very first issue of the publication, March 1861, Breckinridge had opted to publish a militantly Unionist article and, knowing he advocated a debatable position, asked his fellow editors to

⁴ Stuart Robinson, "Dr. Breckinridge and the Danville Review Again," *Louisville Journal*, n.d., Stuart Robinson scrapbook, FHS. Robinson also reprinted the article in his newspaper, see "Dr. Breckinridge and the Danville Review Again," *True Presbyterian*, 3 April 1862.

⁵ Thomas A. Hoyt, "Rev. Dr. Breckinridge's Card," *Louisville Bulletin*, n.d. (7 March 1862), Stuart Robinson scrapbook, FHS.

⁶ "Explanatory Note," *Danville Quarterly Review* 1:1 (March 1861), ii.

contribute a dissenting essay. Rather than create tension among editors in the pages of the *Review*, Robinson and Hoyt claimed they chose to live up to the original terms of agreement, avoid controversy, and opted to leave the journal.⁷ John H. Rice, J. M. Worrall, and Robert L. Breck soon followed.

The point of division, however, could not so easily be reduced to a fight about the *Review's* original principles. Much more fundamentally, much more critically, the former editors rejected the sort of Unionist political theology advocated by Breckinridge and the journal. J. M. Worrall denied that he ever "tried to dispense the Gospel" of "Jeff. Davis, or the Cincinnati Gazette, or any other so fallible guides." No, Worrall argued, he simply followed his "best understanding of the sacred Word of God."⁸ In Robinson's language, "there is an important difference between Dr. B.'s views and my own, but one with which 'secession' has nothing to do." Robinson had "for years" believed, "taught, and practiced the doctrine that Ministers of the Gospel, Professors of Theology, and teachers of religion generally have no right to use a position given by the church to inculcate political dogmas, either Northern or Southern." The "confounding" of the distinction between the "spiritual and secular" was "the great bane of religion and of the church."⁹ When politics and religion were too closely mingled, the *Review's* former editors argued, the true faith suffered. Breckinridge and the *Danville Quarterly Review* had shown no respect for this principle. As a

⁷ Hoyt, "Breckinridge's Card"; Robinson, "Breckinridge and the Danville Review."

⁸ Worrall, "Danville Review."

⁹ Robinson, "Breckinridge and the Danville Review."

result, the departed editors could no longer endorse or participate in the journal's efforts.

It was the beginning of a division over religion and politics that would only get bigger. On one side were those led by Breckinridge and affiliated with the *Review*, those committed to the northern-based Old School Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, which throughout the course of the Civil War expressed manifestly nationalist statements of loyalty to the U. S. government. Against this stance, Stuart Robinson was by far the most prominent voice of opposition. Along with his fellow *Danville Quarterly Review* expatriates, Robinson deployed a conscientiously theological argument about the relationship between church and state, arguing that the church was a wholly "spiritual" institution that could not speak to matters of politics. For one party the greater sin was rending church and nation. For the other it was mixing politics and religion. Over the course of the Civil War, hostility among Kentucky Presbyterians over these two visions of political theology increased exponentially.

It was no minor internecine squabble. Indeed, during the Civil War, Kentucky became the site of a major debate over the relationship between church and state that had significant implications for future interactions between religion and American politics. Ideas have never been formulated in cultural, political, or social isolation. In the context set by the American Civil War, Kentucky's Presbyterians found answers to questions of loyalty and disunion to the United States—as well as answers to closely related questions about the righteousness of slavery—in the realm of ecclesiological debate. The answers they reached did not simply divide Kentucky Presbyterians into feuding camps.

Unlike the state's Methodists and Baptists, the majority of whom were already affiliated with southern sectional denominations as a result of divisions over slavery in 1844 and 1845, the Old School Presbyterians—the most populous form of American Presbyterianism—remained united across sectional boundaries until late 1861. As Kentucky Presbyterians sorted out their sectional loyalties along theological lines, the intrastate debate spilled into the General Assembly—the highest, nation-wide, ruling body of the Presbyterian Church. As detailed in chapter six, the controversy ultimately fractured the Synod of Kentucky, with the majority of the state's presbyteries leaving the Unionist denomination for the Southern Presbyterian Church by 1869. Thus, for Bluegrass Presbyterians, theological answers to questions about Union or secession proved decisive in setting the tone for the future of American Presbyterianism. However, in a much broader sense, those Civil War debates also paved the way for the future shape of American religious engagement with political matters, and not only for Presbyterians. If Kentucky's Methodists and Baptists did not fight among themselves over political theology, the answers reached by Bluegrass Presbyterians about the relationship between religion and politics nonetheless spoke to opinions widespread among the state's influential white Protestant denominations in the wake of the Civil War. As such, Kentucky Presbyterianism's civil war underscores the broad factors that prompted white Kentucky's ideological move from Border South to solid South after the Civil War.

Robert J. Breckinridge and his cohort of Unionist Presbyterians retained a robustly providential view of the United States' place in world history. Such a conviction resonated broadly with a theological understanding of the church's

relationship to the state that had persisted north of the Mason-Dixon line since the Puritan era. As historian James Moorhead explained in his landmark study on the topic, for many northern Protestants, the Civil War represented the culmination of a millenarian vision, a necessarily violent hurdle to be cleared before inaugurating an age of peace and ultimate divine favor upon the American people. Since the slaveholding South rejected the providentially ordained United States by seceding, the Protestant North, understanding itself as participating in a divine covenant with the Christian God, believed the rebellious elements of society required eradication in an "American Apocalypse." It was this sort of vision that led Robert J. Breckinridge to write in late 1862 that, although he did not initially desire the sectional conflict, it had come with the promise that "our glorious country, baptized indeed in blood," would be afterward "purged, united, and safe." As a result, Breckinridge and his fellow Danville Presbyterians remained loyal to the United States until the end of the war.¹⁰

In the war's early years, that Unionist vision prevailed in white Kentucky. But Kentucky's border state identity and location also meant that it fostered a political-theological understanding of the American nation's place in Christian history that rivaled the post-Puritan ideal. If the Commonwealth claimed adherents to northern-style Protestant theologies of church and state, there were also those in Kentucky who followed political theologies regnant in more southern locales.

¹⁰ See James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978). Breckinridge, "Negro Slavery and the Civil War," *Danville Quarterly Review* 2 (December 1862), 686.

White Protestant theology, as several decades of careful scholarly analysis has established, was foundational to the making of Confederate identity. Drew Gilpin Faust has made the point directly: "The most fundamental source of legitimation for the Confederacy was Christianity." When the Confederate States of America ratified its constitution in March 1861, the southern document—in sharp contrast to the non-sectarian and religiously neutral U.S. Constitution—signaled to all readers that the new nation was "invoking the favor and guidance of Almighty God." Like the North, the people of the South developed the belief that they were a chosen people who participated in a covenant relationship with God. From a southern religious perspective, the Confederate cause—and war in its name—was a Christian one. White southerners entered the Civil War convinced that God was on their side.¹¹

Yet that politicized understanding of white southern religion was a departure from historic patterns. For at least a century, dating to the colonial era, southern evangelicals had refrained from wielding religion in direct political engagement, believing the church a purely spiritual institution that should not meddle with the purely secular affairs of state. That pervasive southern Protestant doctrine, which achieved its fullest articulation as the "spirituality of the church" (or nonsecularity of the church), was implicitly proslavery: it asserted that the church's proper role was to aid in the saving of souls and the

¹¹Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 22. See also Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (1993; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006), 47–52.

cultivating of individual piety, not to work for the Christianization of society at large. In other words, white southerners could be certain of slavery's morality because of the institution's biblical foundation. As a result, they argued, churches ought not haggle over and meddle with the legality of slavery. It was a righteous institution but, as a legal matter, best left to the state.¹²

However, with the rise of more aggressive antislavery activism in the 1830s and the rhetorical attacks on southern society that followed, southern Protestants became increasingly vocal about supposedly secular political affairs. Slavery, the bedrock of antebellum white southern society, was ordained of God. It was not the South that had erred, but the North, which southerners believed ignored the plain, commonsense, literal teaching of the Bible about slavery. Thus, as explicated in the previous chapter, the election of Abraham Lincoln to the U.S. presidency in November 1860 proved decisive in securing southern religious support for the Confederacy. White southerners convinced of the righteousness of slavery came to believe that an abolitionist conspiracy had taken over the American government. In 1861 the evangelical South suddenly laid claim to the same sort of politicized religious identity that had persisted in the Protestant North for more than two centuries.¹³

¹² On the complex series of ecclesiological negotiations that led white southern evangelicals to reach this political stance in the post-Revolutionary era, see Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 55–96, especially p. 66.

¹³ On the transformation of a historically apolitical southern religion to politicization on slavery and the sectional crisis, see John B. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 75–89. Analyzing the emergence of religious Confederate rituals in Richmond, Virginia, Harry Stout and Christopher Grasso compellingly explain the transformation in white southern

In the border state of Kentucky, however, the pattern was slightly different. Without question, evangelical whites denounced abolitionism with ubiquitous vigor. However, because the slaveholding state had not entered the war on the side of the Confederacy, many in the Commonwealth retained the older southern Protestant understanding of the relationship between church and state. Thus, the 1862 *Danville Quarterly Review* controversy exposed a rift between two competing visions of political theology. The years 1861 and 1862 represented only the beginning of hostilities in a fight that would not be resolved until well after the Civil War itself ended.

If the 1862 quarrel over the *Danville Quarterly Review* exposed a rift between rival political theologies, signs of fracture had been visible—as former *Review* editors noted—for more than a year. On January 4, 1861, Breckinridge ascended a pulpit in his native Lexington to preach on the growing sectional crisis. Calling for humility and repentance for national sins, Breckinridge hoped that armed conflict might be avoided. “These are but the beginning of sorrows,” he exhorted. “If we desire to perish, all we have to do is leap into this vortex of disunion. If we have any conception of the solemnity of this day, let us beseech God that our country shall not be torn to pieces.”¹⁴ Elsewhere, the minister

church-state ideas as such: “Where the Puritans had taken two generations to invent a rhetoric of nationhood and war around the ritual convention of the fast and the thanksgiving day, the Confederacy would achieve it in a year, and it would grow thereafter until the very last battles were lost.” Stout and Grasso, “Civil War, Religion, and Communications: The Case of Richmond,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 320.

¹⁴ Robert J. Breckinridge, *Discourse of Dr. Breckinridge, Delivered on the Day of National Humiliation, January 4, 1861, at Lexington, KY* (Baltimore: John W. Woods, 1861), 4. For other sermons on the sectional crisis, see *Fast Day Sermons: Or The*

lashed out at the “spirit of lawlessness and anarchy” running rampant in both North and South. Whether in the form of radical abolitionism and its “systematic and persistent agitation connected with the Black Race” or southern secessionism’s inane pretension to “obstruct the execution of the laws of the United States” and “nullify them absolutely,” both extremes were marked by the same “universal tendency to disintegrate all things.”¹⁵

The message may have been one for a nation careening toward civil war, but Breckinridge fashioned it singularly for his Kentucky audience. He argued that Kentucky and other states along the border of the “slave line” held the key to preserving national unity. He believed it was those states—the free states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, along with the slave states of Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri—that were most politically moderate. The Border States rejected “the passionate violence of the extreme South” and refused to follow “the turbulent fanaticism of the extreme North.” Breckinridge minced no words: it would be “suicidal” to embrace secession and deviate from the moderate course. The minister had one main argument: “the chief aim . . . should be the preservation of the American Union, and therein of the American nation.”¹⁶ It was a goal to be pursued at all costs.

To be sure, there would be costs. Breckinridge recounted the flashpoints in the recent American history of turmoil over slavery and politics: “the unjust,

Pulpit on the State of the Country (New York: Rudd & Carelton, 1861).

¹⁵ Breckinridge, “Our Country,” 74–75.

¹⁶ Breckinridge, *Discourse of January 4, 1861*, 2, 14. Though farther south, Breckinridge also included Tennessee and North Carolina as “moderate” states that he hoped would not join the secession effort.

offensive, and unconstitutional enactments by various [northern] State Legislatures" in refusing to cooperate with the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act; the Supreme Court's decision in the Dred Scott case (1856), which had attempted "to settle" once and for all the status of slavery's legality and, in so doing, led to the "repeal of the Missouri Compromise"; the "conduct of the Federal Government and of the people in Kansas," where through vigilantism they attempted to resolve slavery's fate; "the total overthrow of the Whig and American parties, the division and defeat of the Democratic party, and the triumph of the Republican party"; and, lastly, the "secession of South Carolina." In spite of these travails, Breckinridge contended, there remained "no justification for the secession of any single State of the Union—none for the disruption of the American Union." People needed to bury their "unhallowed passions" and the "fanaticism of the times." The different sections of the country were distinct, and Breckinridge saw no "reason why States with slaves and States without slaves, should not abide together in peace . . . as they have done from the beginning." Such forbearance, however, required personal sacrifice.¹⁷

In the name of Union, indeed, Breckinridge seemed willing to make such sacrifices. Significantly, that included his prior antislavery stance. Though the cleric never repudiated his career of antislavery activity, with the sectional crisis impending he did subtly alter his position. Up until the start of the Civil War, no religious Kentuckian more clearly embodied the complexities and contradictions of white Border South ideology than Robert J. Breckinridge. As previous chapters

¹⁷ Breckinridge, *Discourse of January 4, 1861*, 9.

have shown, the slaveholding Breckinridge spent more than three decades arguing for a program of gradual emancipation. The approach was conservative to the core, focusing primarily on the interests of Kentucky's white population and rejecting all calls by abolitionists for an immediate end to the institution. Yet by early 1861, Breckinridge sought to bracket the discussion of slavery with hopes of allaying sectional strife and thus preserving the Union. It was an approach that, if inconsistent with his antebellum politics, followed a similar ideological trajectory. The minister had long denounced "extreme" approaches to the slavery issue and in that respect his views never changed—to fight a civil war over slavery would be the very definition of extreme.

Still, in January 1861 he admitted that he "[knew] of no way" that "slavery" in the "Cotton States" could "be dealt with at all."¹⁸ Breckinridge had long defended a form of states' rights doctrine, and this statement reflected that position. At the same time, it also spoke to Breckinridge's Reformed theological view of the world, which assumed human individuals and societies were inescapably corrupted by sin and thus forced to employ some form of social stratification. As he wrote in an essay just a few months later, slavery was "utterly incapable of being permanently and universally abolished" so long as humanity "continues in a state of sin and misery." Slavery itself was amoral in the same way that "sickness"—"the product of God's just sentence of death upon our sinful race"—was amoral. "Sorrow and affliction are brought on us in innumerable forms," Breckinridge wrote. Directly put, he offered "the simple, the rational, and the scriptural account of human servitude." The idea that one

¹⁸ Ibid., 12–13.

could escape slavery, or, at the very least, an unequal division of labor and society, was, theologically considered, incomprehensible.¹⁹

Along with political and theological motives for muting his opposition to slavery in 1861, Breckinridge added racist reasons. The Presbyterian's white supremacism had always loomed at the forefront of his antebellum antislavery arguments. On the eve of the Civil War, Breckinridge also invoked white trepidation about blacks in the name of preserving the Union. He put the question to his audience: "Do you want some millions of African cannibals thrown amongst you broadcast throughout the whole slave States?"²⁰ Shortly thereafter, the minister wrote in a Unionist *Danville Quarterly Review* essay that "the only infallible rule of conduct, God's blessed Word," spoke against the kind of radicalism—"upon which the public mind has been lashed into madness"—that had infected the North and South. White Americans should be worried about the "triumph" of an "anarchical spirit," Breckinridge wrote. If "this nation is destroyed," the country's whites would have to deal with "the real problem": a war over slavery would force "the cotton region of this continent" to decide whether "the ultimate dominion of the white race" would prevail or if "a mixed race essentially African" come to rule. "Is the inaugurating of that problem worth the ruin of this great nation?" Civil war over the question of slavery would no doubt prompt a dialogue on race that Breckinridge knew his white

¹⁹ Robert J. Breckinridge, "Our Country—Its Peril—Its Deliverance," *Danville Quarterly Review* 1 (March 1861), 92–93.

²⁰ Breckinridge, *Discourse of January 4, 1861*, 13.

readers, comfortable like him in their racial superiority, were not willing to have.²¹

Breckinridge never moved toward a direct, explicit endorsement of American slavery but, in point of fact, for Unionism's sake he edged closer than ever before toward endorsing some form of a proslavery position. Indeed, as historian Charles B. Dew has rigorously documented and persuasively argued, it was just that kind of white supremacist argument that motivated the southern secessionists to abandon the Union for the Confederacy.²² The development was not lost on critics. Benjamin Morgan Palmer (1818–1902), a prominent New Orleans Presbyterian cleric, one of the South's leading champions of slavery, and a hardened secessionist, responded to Breckinridge's 1861 ideas with surprise and approval. The Kentuckian who had once argued that slavery was "inconsistent with a state of sound morality" now made assertions congruent with the proslavery position "held by Christian men throughout the South for many years." In point of fact, Breckinridge's shifting opinion on slavery reflected less hypocrisy than a realignment of his religio-political priorities. In that moment of sectional crisis, where strife over slavery threatened to destroy the nation that Breckinridge believed was uniquely favored by the Christian God, he privileged the Union over gradual emancipation. Nevertheless, to Palmer, it was "a sign of progress" in Breckinridge's Christian thought. Proslavery believers should "have no strictures to make upon his present exposition of negro

²¹ Breckinridge, "Our Country," 94.

²² See Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

slavery," Palmer maintained. Breckinridge's current view was "condemned neither by the clear teachings of revelation on the one hand, nor by the confused utterances of the law of nature on the other."²³

Breckinridge, however, had not attempted to curry favor from divines like Palmer, rejecting as he had the "fanaticism" of secessionist excitement. Palmer did not miss the point. If the Kentuckian won support from proslavery ranks for his religious and racial orthodoxy, his strident Unionism spoiled whatever goodwill he had acquired. "The cloak of the philosopher," Palmer inveighed, "has been too scant to hide the burly form of the partisan." Breckinridge "pours forth his defamatory charges upon the seceding States with a wealth of expression only at the command of this great mast of the English tongue." Palmer, proving every bit Breckinridge's polemical equal, continued: "Anarchy, disloyalty, revolt, revolution, rebellion, fanaticism, sedition, form the alphabet of an almost exhaustless invective, which, by endless transposition and iteration, make up a description so hideous that its very deformity should prove it a caricature." As he agreed with Breckinridge's theological and racial view of slavery, so Palmer also endorsed the Kentuckian's depiction of abolitionism as the radical harbinger of chaos. But he saw no ground for secession to be "lashed together" with the "Abolitionism of the North." Secessionism, far from the fanatical crusade depicted by Breckinridge, was largely a conservative movement led by southerners committed to a true application of the U.S. Constitution. Writing just before the April 12, 1861, Confederate attack on Fort

²³ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, "A Vindication of Secession and the South," *Southern Presbyterian Review* 14 (April 1861), 142–43.

Sumter that started the Civil War, Palmer contended that any rational person knew what was happening in the Charleston harbor: the federal fortification of the fort "meant" northern "coercion" of the South. To Palmer, the message was clear. The "imbecile and treacherous Government" of the North "could not be trusted." In such a political situation, secession was not rash. It was the only proper course of action.²⁴

The political realities of southern disunion and military confrontation with the United States were not immediately manifest in the Old School Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterians had been the first national denomination to suffer antebellum schism. In 1837 an "Old School" majority of the Presbyterian General Assembly voted to remove four "New School" synods located in New York and Ohio. The New School was accused of deviating from the denomination's stricter Calvinist roots, embracing more liberal revivalist doctrines, and advocating forms of interdenominational cooperation that modified traditional church polity. As historian George Marsden has shown, the slavery question was not the primary issue at stake in the Presbyterian divide. It was, however, a very closely related secondary matter. Much of the abolitionist agitation in Presbyterian circles came from New School ranks. There was little doubt that the South's presbyteries, overwhelmingly populated with conservatives, supported the Old School on theological grounds. However, following the Old School also gave southerners a chance to rid the denomination of abolitionist influence. The following year, in 1838, a newly formed New School General Assembly claimed

²⁴ Ibid., 144–45, 158–59.

roughly 100,000 members, 85 presbyteries, and 1,200 churches. It was just less than half the Old School's approximately 127,000 members, 1,763 churches, and 96 presbyteries.²⁵

The Presbyterian schism of 1837–1838 could not have happened without southern support for the Old School, but the divisions were not clearly sectional. A few southern presbyteries initially joined the New School, but, in the next decade, agitation over slavery proved too much stress for the denomination. In 1857 the New School condemned slaveholding as sinful, prompting 21 southern and border state presbyteries—containing approximately 15,000 members—to leave the denomination, making the New School a wholly northern denomination. At the same time an uneasy peace prevailed in the Old School until the start of the Civil War.²⁶

Thus, even though some Confederate clergy advocated denominational schism, the impact of the war on ecclesiastical relations remained unclear in the first few months of 1861. All that changed after the May meeting of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.'s General Assembly in Philadelphia. Slave state Presbyterians, who accounted for roughly a third of all American Presbyterian communicants, were conspicuously absent at the meeting, with more than half of all southern presbyteries (33 of 64) unrepresented. Still, representation was

²⁵ George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 93–103, 250–51. See also James H. Moorhead, "The 'Restless Spirit of Radicalism': Old School Fears and the Schism of 1837," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 78 (Spring 2000), 19–33.

²⁶ C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985), 68–78.

strong from the Border South states that had remained with the federal Union: the Kentucky and Missouri synods sent representatives from every presbytery (six of six and five of five, respectively), while the Baltimore and Upper Missouri synods each only lacked representation from one presbytery (four of five and three of four, respectively).²⁷

As expected, the General Assembly called for a statement on the sectional crisis. With representation from the Confederate states weak, the General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a starkly nationalist declaration. Known as the "Spring Resolutions," they were named for the minister who proposed the statement, New York City's Gardiner Spring (1785–1873). Like Breckinridge, Spring had long opposed abolitionism, but he also ardently supported the national government. The Spring Resolutions broke into two parts. The first called for a "day of prayer" on the "first day of July next" where Presbyterian clergy and laity should "humbly confess and bewail our national sins; to offer thanks to the Father of light for his abundant and undeserved goodness toward us as a nation; to seek his guidance and blessing upon our rulers and their counsels, as well as on the Congress of the United States." These prayers were to be uttered with the hope that the Christian God might "turn away his anger from us, and speedily restore to us the blessings of an honorable peace."²⁸

²⁷ See Lewis Vander Velde, *The Presbyterian Church and the Federal Union, 1861–1869* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932), 42–45, numbers from p. 43.

²⁸ Joseph M. Wilson, *The Presbyterian Historical Almanac, and Annual Remembrancer of the Church, for 1862* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1862), 73. See Vander Velde, *Presbyterian Church*, 46–87, for extensive discussion of the Spring Resolutions.

The second resolution built upon the nationalism expressed in the first. It noted, "That this General Assembly, in the spirit of that Christian patriotism which the Scriptures enjoin . . . do[es] hereby acknowledge and declare our obligations to promote and perpetuate, so far as in us lies, the integrity of these United States." Moreover, the statement asserted, upstanding Presbyterians were "to strengthen, uphold, and encourage the Federal Government in the exercise of all its functions under our noble Constitution," to which they had to give their "unabated loyalty." To avoid misconceptions, the resolution clarified that the term "Federal Government" meant the "central administration . . . prescribed in the Constitution of the United States," which was "the visible representative of our national existence." American Presbyterians did not have the freedom to pick and choose "particular administration[s]" or "the particular opinions of any particular party." No, the nation always required their loyalty, regardless of controversial governmental policy.²⁹

The Spring Resolutions only passed after days of debate. Even then, prominent denominational leaders registered significant dissent. Principally, that dissent came from Princeton's Charles Hodge, the most distinguished Presbyterian theologian of the nineteenth century. Hodge's protest conceded that "loyalty to the country" was "a moral and religious duty, according to the word of God, which requires us to be subject to the powers that be," but the Spring Resolutions had demanded far more than loyalty to government. Those Presbyterians in seceded states no longer lived under the authority of the United

²⁹ Wilson, 1862 *Presbyterian Historical Almanac*, 73.

States. By forcing them to assent to the Spring Resolutions, the General Assembly was, in effect, coercing Confederate Presbyterians to commit treason against their new government. Confederate Presbyterians would be "forced to choose between allegiance to their States and allegiance to the Church." It was a choice they should not have to make. It "violated the Constitution of the Church, and usurped the prerogative of the Divine Master." As Hodge put it in a counter resolution to Spring's, "The General Assembly is neither a Northern nor Southern body; it comprehends the entire Presbyterian Church, irrespective of geographical lines or political opinion." Now, with the Spring Resolutions, political allegiance became a test of membership. That move represented "a departure" from historic Presbyterianism. "The General Assembly has always acted on the principle," Hodge argued, "that the Church has no right to make anything a condition of Christian or ministerial fellowship, which is not enjoined or required in the Scriptures and the Standards of the Church." In previous years, numerous partisans had pushed for authoritative statements on controversial issues like temperance and slaveholding. The General Assembly, to its credit, always "resist[ed] these unscriptural demands." In so doing, Presbyterians "preserved the integrity and unity of the Church." A political dilemma as fraught as the sectional crisis was "clearly beyond the jurisdiction of the General Assembly." Political stances did not determine the state of souls and should not become a test of church membership. The Spring Resolutions threatened an already weak relationship between sectional Presbyterians. Hodge's dissent received endorsement from 58 commissioners to the General Assembly, a majority of whom hailed from slave states (34 of 58). That number

remained far less than the 156 who affirmed the Spring Resolutions, but the disapproval was worth noting.³⁰

Border State Presbyterians, particularly Kentuckians, met the action of the 1861 General Assembly with stated disapproval. By and large, Kentucky Presbyterians voiced their agreement with the Hodge protest. In September 1861 the Presbytery of West Lexington, in language largely composed by Robert J. Breckinridge, denounced the Spring Resolutions. "It is undoubtedly certain," the presbytery argued, "that the General Assembly had no authority, either from Christ or from the Constitution of the Church, to require, or even advise, the tens of thousands of Presbyterians who are citizens" of the Confederate states "to revolt against the actual governments under which they live." Just a few months later, the Synod of Kentucky issued a similar statement, calling it "incompetent" of the "Assembly, as a spiritual court, to require, or to advise acts of disobedience to actual governments." The Synod registered its "grave disapprobation" of the Spring Resolutions and declared them "to be repugnant to the word of God, as that word is expounded in our Confession of Faith." Like Charles Hodge, Kentucky Presbyterians believed the General Assembly acted in error.³¹

³⁰ Wilson, *1862 Presbyterian Historical Almanac*, 70, 76–77. For the sectional breakdown of signers of the Hodge protest see Vander Velde, *Presbyterian Churches*, 69.

³¹ Reports of the Presbytery of West Lexington and the Synod of Kentucky excerpted in "Jurisprudence, Sacred and Civil.—The published Criticisms on some of the Principles heretofore discussed in the Danville Quarterly Review," *Danville Quarterly Review* 2:1 (March 1862), 170–73. This article in the *Review* appeared as a response to an article in Louisville's *Presbyterian Herald*, which accused the *Review* of coming too close to supporting the Spring Resolutions. The *Review* denounced the *Herald* and endorsed the decisions of the West Lexington Presbytery and Synod of Kentucky. The *Herald*, which was a Unionist, but theologically conservative newspaper—and thus supported the Hodge protest—

Compared to the reaction of Presbyterians in slave states further south, however, the Kentucky response was staid. Almost immediately after the General Assembly, Presbyterians in Confederate states began pushing for denominational schism. On December 4, 1861, the aim was achieved. A number of prominent southern Presbyterians met in Augusta, Georgia, and founded the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America.³²

Though Kentuckians denounced the decisions of the 1861 General Assembly in favor of the Spring Resolutions, denominational schism proved too extreme a solution at that date. Yet Kentucky Presbyterians remained anxious about the action taken by the national governing body. Indeed, it was in response to the 1861 General Assembly that the fault lines in Kentucky Presbyterianism began to appear. But it was not until the meeting of the 1862 General Assembly that the Kentucky Presbyterians began to choose political-theological sides.

The 1862 national meeting came in the immediate wake of the *Danville Quarterly Review* controversy. Robert J. Breckinridge, who had initiated the war of letters with Stuart Robinson and other former editors of the *Review* by calling them secessionists, showed little patience for their denials of national disloyalty. He launched a fiery missive against his former colleagues in the pages of the March 1862 *Review*. Breckinridge reprinted word-for-word his article from the *Louisville Journal*, which had called for support for the failing theological

folded in early 1862. It was purchased by Stuart Robinson, who began publishing the *True Presbyterian* as an outlet for his version of apolitical Christianity.

³² Vander Velde, *Presbyterian Churches*, 88–102.

publication, followed immediately by a verbatim copy of Robinson's reply. In the end, Breckinridge proposed to bring the whole issue before the 1862 General Assembly, so that the divisive issue might be adjudicated. If the church decided in his opponent's favor, he would resign his post at Danville Theological Seminary. Before making that promise, however, Breckinridge delivered an invective so severe that it could have only served to exacerbate tensions among Bluegrass Presbyterians.³³

Breckinridge argued that the former *Review* editors had, because of their secessionist politics, engaged in a conspiracy to destroy the journal and the unity of national Presbyterianism. Disregarding the clerics' words to the contrary, Breckinridge directed most of his ire toward Robinson, whose "series of insolent and calumnious insinuations, turgid in expression, and sprinkled with few pious words," were "like salt on spoiled meat." Breckinridge had made the truth of his opponent's political loyalty plain; and Robinson, when faced with that uncomfortable truth, had "resort[ed] to unworthy subterfuges and evasions." Rather than "honestly owning" his secessionist views, Breckinridge accused Robinson of "interlarding various misstatements of fact" and acting as if the debate between the two divines had something to do with the superiority of Robinson's "high spiritual" theology. In fact, Robinson was a secessionist. Breckinridge had no qualms about admitting he was a "Union man." Why, Breckinridge asked, would Robinson not do the same?³⁴

³³ Breckinridge, "In Memoriam."

³⁴ Breckinridge, "In Memoriam," 149, 151.

To be sure, Breckinridge knew the answer to that question. Robinson claimed he had long advocated a stark separation of church and state. The claim was not disingenuous. In 1855, Robinson and his colleague Thomas Peck initiated *The Presbyterian Critic and Monthly Review*, a short-lived journal that often advocated non-political Christianity.³⁵ Then, in 1858, during a brief stint as Breckinridge's colleague at Danville Theological Seminary, Robinson published a widely circulated volume on ecclesiology, *The Church of God*. In that book, Robinson offered a sweeping statement on the theological foundations of the church and argued that the church's "power" was "wholly spiritual," consistent with Jesus Christ's "idea of a kingdom not of this world." The church and state had "nothing in common except that both powers are of divine authority" and "both were instituted for the glory of God." Other than that, Robinson wrote, "they differ fundamentally." The church existed to save souls and dealt with "things unseen and spiritual." The "scope and aim" of "civil power," by contrast, pertained only to "things seen and temporal."³⁶ Moreover, in a well-known 1859 lecture, Robinson praised "the American theory of Church and State," which, enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, kept the institutions separated. Robinson saw himself as a true disciple of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, which rescued true Christianity from "the pagan Rome idea of religion as part of the State." There was a difference between the action of individual believers and

³⁵ See "Our Idea," *The Presbyterian Critic and Monthly Review* 1:1 (January 1855), in Preston D. Graham, Jr., *A Kingdom Not of This World: Stuart Robinson's Struggle to Distinguish the Sacred from the Secular During the Civil War* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2002), 193–99.

³⁶ Robinson, *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel, and the Idea, Structure, and Functions Thereof* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1858), 84–85.

those of ecclesiastical bodies. As free citizens in a democratic society, individuals could believe and advocate for whatever causes they wished. However, Robinson argued, "The Church has no right to decree touching civil affairs, nor to teach politics." A mixing of the two only perverted the true church.³⁷

The *Danville Quarterly Review* and Breckinridge flatly rejected Robinson's political theology. The church, a *Review* essay argued responding to the Spring Resolutions, is "bound to recognize the state as an ordinance of God; to render to it a true allegiance and obedience." Where Robinson saw the church and state divided under particular offices of the Trinity—the church under Jesus Christ, the redeemer of a "peculiar people"; the state under God, "the author of nature," as a way of ordering of societies "for the preservation of the race"—the *Review* made the categories far less clearly separated.³⁸ It found Robinson's "distinctions" lacked "the least foundation in the word of God."³⁹ The "church and state," according to the *Review*, "are coordinate jurisdictions under the same divine charter—analogous to the executive, legislative, and judicial departments of government, under the Constitution of the United States." The church had an obligation to act "[w]hen a political question enters the sphere of morals and religion." As such, the contentious 1861 General Assembly erred "not in *speaking*, but in speaking unwisely. The Assembly had a right to make a [political] deliverance; the misfortune is, it made an erroneous one." Like the Synod of

³⁷ Stuart Robinson, *The Relations of the Secular and Spiritual Power* (Louisville: Bradley & Gilbert, 1859), 6, 20; Robinson, "Breckinridge and the Danville Review."

³⁸ Robinson, *Relations of Secular and Spiritual Power*, 20.

³⁹ "Politics and the Church," *Danville Quarterly Review* 2:4 (December 1862), 629.

Kentucky and leading denominational light Charles Hodge, the *Review* rebuked the Spring Resolutions for encouraging rebellion against established governments. The *Review* article, however, refuted the idea that the church existed as a solely spiritual institution, unqualified to pronounce on secular, political measures.⁴⁰

Agreeing with his journal, Breckinridge believed Robinson's non-secular theory of the church was a grave mistake. But he set the stakes much lower in the 1862 *Danville Quarterly Review* controversy. Robert J. Breckinridge simply did not believe Robinson practiced what he preached. He saw Robinson's "endeavor to develop and enforce a higher spiritual life" as nothing more than "a thin varnish of piety over a turbulent spirit," a patina of theological posturing to mask "his schismatical and disloyal schemes."⁴¹ Truth told, Breckinridge asserted, Robinson had sent him a letter dated January 24, 1861, which offered "three reasons" why Robinson could no longer serve on the *Danville Quarterly Review's* editorial board. The first two listed practical concerns: Robinson saw little hope for the future success of the journal and they had not secured the number of subscribers they had hoped. The third reason, however, revealed Robinson's secret political motives. Robinson stated that, although he held "no special sympathy with South Carolina"—which had seceded a month prior—he could not endorse Breckinridge's Unionism. Robinson believed that Kentucky's future, "or rather the least of evils," lay with "a Southern Confederacy." While Robinson

⁴⁰ E. E., "The Late General Assembly.—Church and State," *Danville Quarterly Review* 1:3 (September 1861), 501, 505, 511.

⁴¹ Breckinridge, "In Memoriam," 157, 159.

maintained that, "as a minister of the Gospel," he had "studiously avoided becoming partisan on the subject," he simply did "not accept" Breckinridge's "views, in so far as they look hostile to the South." Grandstanding aside, this private letter exposed Robinson's deepest political and theological loyalties. As Breckinridge interpreted for his readers, even if Robinson denied his secessionism, "his best possible defense is, that he did nothing" to help preserve the Union. That was enough. In Breckinridge's dualistic world, there was no defense for removing oneself from politics in the face of a "bleeding country" that "needed" any and all help to ensure its preservation. Robinson's so-called "doctrine" of a non-secular church really meant nothing more than "the treason of his comrades." The issue was black and white. Refusal to aid the Union was an endorsement of secession.⁴²

It is impossible to know if Robinson actually sent Breckinridge such a letter. Certainly Robinson kept company with some of southern Presbyterianism's most prominent and enthusiastic secessionists, clergy like Benjamin Morgan Palmer and the venerable James Henley Thornwell of South Carolina. Perhaps, as Breckinridge charged, Robinson meddled in schismatic church politics behind closed doors. Robinson, for his part, flatly denied the charge.⁴³ But whether or not Robinson ever actually endorsed the Confederacy was not altogether important. Rhetorically Breckinridge had lumped secessionists, pacifists, and neutrals—in general anyone not solidly committed to

⁴² Breckinridge, "In Memoriam," 154–59.

⁴³ For Robinson's denial, see Robinson, *An Appeal to the Christian Public, and all with whom Loyalty is not Madness* (Louisville: Hanna & Co., 1862), 9–10.

the future of the national unity of the United States—into one undifferentiated anti-American mass. Those who questioned the Union—or the *Review*, or Breckinridge, or the Presbyterian General Assembly—became enemies. Breckinridge's conduct toward the other *Danville Quarterly Review* editorial expatriates reveals as much. Presumably, he did not hold the same sort of damning private correspondence from Thomas A. Hoyt, Robert L. Breck, J. M. Worrall, or Richard H. Collins. Yet that did not prevent Breckinridge from going after them with the same sort of aggressive linguistic hostility he displayed toward Robinson.

The case of Breck is particularly telling. A founding member of the *Review's* editorial board, the Maysville, Kentucky, pastor served the journal throughout 1861. He tendered his resignation when, in late 1861, the rest of the editors rejected unseen an article he wrote attacking President Abraham Lincoln's famously unpopular April 1861 suspension of habeas corpus, followed in May by the imposition of martial law in order to quell dissent in Union areas—decisions notably unpopular to Kentuckians because Maryland, as a border state, shared many social and political characteristics with the Bluegrass. Concerned that Breck's thesis "might appear unfriendly to the action of the General Government," the editors asked Breck to "withhold" the essay until a future date less burdened with "political stress." Breck replied to the *Review* board that, although he did not know what everyone else thought politically, he was no radical and did not suppose his views were "materially different" than those of the other editors. Still, Breck assured his colleagues that he did not seek to disturb the peace among editors. Rather than force the issue, he withdrew his article and left the board. The *Review's* editors responded that they hoped Breck

would stay, but the Maysville minister declined, saying that he wanted to remain on good terms.⁴⁴

Richard H. Collins, the *Review*'s publisher in 1861, did not like the way Breck had been treated. Not only did he decide to stop publishing the *Review*, but he also opted to publish Breck's article in pamphlet form as *The Habeas Corpus, and Martial Law* (1862). In his preface, Collins wrote that Breck was "a loyal citizen" of Kentucky and the United States, but that loyalty and patriotism did not demand approval of all government actions. Breck made a straightforward point: it was important to save the Union, but more than the Union itself, there were certain "inalienable rights" that mattered more than national unity. What Breck asked, was the Union worth if it did not protect "the great underlying principles of our liberty"? Surveying recent legal writings on the issues, Breck concluded that habeas corpus was the constitutionally guaranteed security against despotism. Revoking it, combined with the declaration of martial law, meant "the enforcement of the arbitrary will" of a "dictator" and signaled the abrogation of fundamental American freedoms.⁴⁵

Breck's pamphlet largely avoided taking sides in the Civil War. But his opinions still raised Breckinridge's antipathy. Throughout the course of the Civil War in Kentucky, there remained a significant number of Confederate sympathizers who opposed any sort of federal intervention in the Bluegrass. At the same time, Kentucky also claimed a significant number of Unionists who, as

⁴⁴ See correspondence between Robert L. Breck and Jacob Cooper, 29 October 1861, 4 November 1861, 8 November 1861, in Robert L. Breck, *The Habeas Corpus, and Martial Law* (Cincinnati: Richard H. Collins, 1862), 5–8.

⁴⁵ Breck, *Habeas Corpus*, 4, 10, 32.

loyal citizens of the nation, opposed the governmental suppression of civil rights.⁴⁶ It is hard to determine where Breck's loyalties resided in 1861. Breck ended his essay on a cautious note, arguing that the Union was better lost if it meant abandoning the Constitution's guaranteed protection of basic rights. Still, he carefully avoided endorsing the Confederacy. In fact, he turned the words of strident Unionists like Robert J. Breckinridge around. According to Breck, those who would reject the "supremacy" of the Constitution by suspending habeas corpus were the real traitors.⁴⁷

Breckinridge had no time for such an opinion. By his dualistic rubric, Breck had all but joined the Confederacy. No "loyal man" could "even appear to endorse" Breck's drawing of "the faintest possible line, between loyalty and treason." Breck did not mention Breckinridge by name, but according to the senior cleric, Breck's "attack" was intended to "harm" Breckinridge and the *Danville Quarterly Review*. That was a particularly regrettable development because Breckinridge felt a strong bond of friendship to Breck's family, and Breck himself never received "anything but proofs of respect and affection" from Breckinridge. Still, the doyen of Danville felt the need to issue a warning: Breck was "co-operating" with "men" in "business" that was "[un]worthy of his race, or his former self." Anyone who would attempt to take on the *Danville Quarterly Review* served "directly" the ends of "the detestable secession conspiracy." For Breckinridge, the Union, the *Review*, and the General Assembly of the

⁴⁶ For more on Kentucky attitudes toward the suspension of habeas corpus and martial law in the Civil War, see Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 205–207.

⁴⁷ Breck, *Habeas Corpus*, 38–39.

Presbyterian Church were all constituent parts of the same organism. Battling one meant battling all. And Breckinridge ensured a fight would happen at the 1862 General Assembly.⁴⁸

Stuart Robinson proved more than eager to engage Breckinridge. In early May, a week before the 1862 General Assembly met in Columbus, Ohio, Robinson published a thoroughgoing rebuke of Breckinridge in his newly launched newspaper, the *True Presbyterian*. The newspaper's title spoke to its platform: Robinson wanted a paper that would advocate doctrines on church and state consistent with what he saw as "true" Presbyterianism. The article, republished in pamphlet form in advance of the General Assembly, continued to make Robinson's case against Breckinridge.⁴⁹

The essay added little of theological substance to Kentucky Presbyterianism's fight over political theology. It did, however, offer insights into Robinson's political sentiments, delivered in the form of polemical fireworks. Breckinridge had dishonestly misled the public with a "meretricious array of bedazzled billingsgate and gilded defamation." Centrally, Breckinridge had completely misrepresented Robinson's political allegiances, which Robinson had never attempted to hide. According to the Louisville pastor, he was a "Border State man against Abolitionism" and "the atheistic tendencies of that fanaticism." He stood "*against* the Black Republican platform" but also "*against* the theory of secession." Robinson believed in the "Union on the basis of the

⁴⁸ Breckinridge, "In Memoriam," 141, 146, 163–65.

⁴⁹ Stuart Robinson, "To the Christian Public—and all with whom loyalty is not Madness," *True Presbyterian*, 8 May 1862. For the pamphlet form, see Robinson, *Appeal to the Christian Public*.

Crittenden Compromise," the 1860 proposal offered to Congress—and rejected by both the House and Senate—by Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden, which would secure and preserve slavery for the Deep South and, in so doing—according to proponents—stave off secession.⁵⁰

In bringing up the Crittenden Compromise, Robinson hinted at how closely the contours of his fight with Breckinridge followed the ebb and flow of Kentucky politics. "[U]p to six months ago," Robinson wrote, no one in Kentucky would have considered his politics the least bit suspicious. It was not much of a reach to think that as many as "nine-tenths of the people of Kentucky" might have agreed with Robinson's opinions. Without getting into specific details, Robinson spoke to the Unionist change that occurred in Kentucky's government in the latter months of 1861. Up until the summer of that year, many of Kentucky's main political leaders, including Governor Beriah Magoffin, were members of the State Rights party. Though Magoffin and his fellow party members often spoke in terms of stark neutrality—so much so that in May 1861 Magoffin and the state legislature refused to raise troops to fight for the United States—many believed it only a matter of time before Kentucky followed the rest of the slaveholding South and joined the Confederacy. Starting in July, however, when representatives to the U.S. House were elected, and through the August state legislature elections, Kentuckians overwhelmingly chose Unionist candidates. Part of the reason for Kentucky's strong endorsement came from very low voter turnouts; most State Righters, arguing for strict neutrality, did not participate in the elections. The result was a landslide for Unionism. For his part,

⁵⁰ Robinson, *Appeal to the Christian Public*, 4–5.

Robinson may have disagreed with the “wisdom” of the Kentucky electorate, but he “abided by, respected and obeyed the laws” in the state he called home.⁵¹

In the same way, when it came to the church, Robinson continued to spell out his Border State convictions. Though he “opposed, and very earnestly,” the Spring Resolutions, Robinson planned to continue within the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. “unless” the General Assembly would make it “impossible for the Kentucky Slave-holding Churches to continue their connection with it.” Robinson was no earnest secessionist, nor did he desire to fracture the church, despite the claims of his antagonist in Danville.⁵²

At the 1862 General Assembly, the Breckinridge-Robinson dispute often took center stage. As promised, Breckinridge brought the *Danville Quarterly Review* controversy before the Assembly. Told from his perspective, Breckinridge had been unfairly maligned by Stuart Robinson and Thomas A. Hoyt “without any provocation on my part”—a claim that flatly ignored his March article in the *Louisville Journal* that started the fight. His opponents had charged Breckinridge with abusing his position as a professor of theology at Danville Theological Seminary and using the post “to the advancement of improper public objects, and unworthy personal aims.” Breckinridge, however, maintained—as he had all along—that his political activities fell well within the bounds of his office. As such, Breckinridge tendered his resignation from the seminary, effective September 1, 1862. Robinson and Hoyt both issued rebuttals, arguing that it was

⁵¹ Robinson, *Appeal to the Christian Public*, 4; Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 185–90.

⁵² Robinson, *Appeal to the Christian Public*, 5.

they who had been attacked and denying that they did anything other than respond in "self-defence." Robinson maintained that this "personal controversy" should not even have entered the General Assembly—the matter was not one for such a high court. It dealt with "charges of moral delinquency" among pastors. Such charges, according to the constitution of the church, had to be sorted out at the local, presbytery level.⁵³

The entire controversy went before a committee of seven ministers and elders for arbitration. The committee agreed with some of Robinson and Hoyt's concerns, particularly that the General Assembly was not the forum for dealing with personal squabbles. Yet, in the main, Breckinridge emerged victorious. The Assembly ruled that "no facts" had come to light that "impair[ed] their confidence in Dr. Breckinridge as a Professor in the Danville Seminary." As such, the church refused to accept his resignation. Moreover, with Breckinridge, they agreed that theology professors did not have to sit silent on political "matters of great national concernment." Indeed, Breckinridge deserved "the gratitude of the Church and the country" for his "bold and patriotic stand" over the past year of Civil War and church schism.⁵⁴

Breckinridge and Robinson collided once more at the 1862 General Assembly. The second time, the issue cut straight to their differences over political theology. On the fourth day of the meetings, Breckinridge issued a paper on the "State of the Country and the Church" for the Assembly to

⁵³ Joseph M. Wilson, *Presbyterian Historical Almanac and Annual Remembrancer of the Church, for 1863* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1863), 118–22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

consider. As historian Lewis Vander Velde assessed it, the Breckinridge document was overtly Unionist and not markedly different than the previous year's Spring Resolutions, which Breckinridge had denounced. Breckinridge's paper contained no sentiments that would encourage revolution—the feature of the Spring Resolutions he had most stridently objected to—but much of the rest was the same. And, indeed, in what was a significantly longer document, Breckinridge's tone was equally, if not much more, harsh than Spring's. "This whole treason, rebellion, anarchy, fraud, and violence, is utterly contrary to the dictates of natural religion and morality and is plainly condemned by the revealed will of God," the professor argued. "If, in any case, treason, rebellion, anarchy can possibly be sinful, they are so in the case now desolating large portions of this nation, and laying waste great numbers of Christian congregations." Then, in a statement that can only be read in light of Breckinridge's past year of theological-political disputation, he brought down a rhetorical hammer: "Disturbers of the Church ought not to be allowed—especially disturbers of the Church in states that never revolted." No ministers were mentioned by name, but Breckinridge's argument sounded quite similar to the ones he had deployed in Kentucky against Robinson and his cohort. Those "disturbers who, under many false pretexts, may promote discontent, disloyalty, and general alienation, tending to the unsettling of ministers, to local schisms, and to manifold trouble" could not be tolerated in the Presbyterian Church.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid., 123–24. For more on the discussion of the Breckinridge paper, see Vander Velde, *Presbyterian Churches*, 110–114.

Such words were not lost on Stuart Robinson. The Louisville pastor argued that the language “concerning ‘disturbers of the Church,’ acting ‘under false pretexts’” would no doubt “be taken by the public as practically a judgment against some one.” Yet because “not a single fact in the paper itself” explained what was meant by these statements, it would be left “to the prejudices and passions of the public, to any Synod, Presbytery, or person” to decide how to rule against such violators of the church’s peace. Continuing his argument about the church’s spiritual character, the Louisville pastor protested an Assembly that “declare[d] ‘loyalty’ to be in common with orthodoxy and piety.” The Breckinridge paper took the “authority given to the Spiritual Courts” and turned it on its head. It “render[ed] to Caesar the *things that are God’s*” and also presumed that the church had the God-given “authority” to lead affairs of state, rather than remain “subject to the powers that be.” Both were “contrary to Scripture” and, thus, errant decisions.⁵⁶

Despite Robinson’s protest, the Breckinridge paper easily passed. Since most slave-state Presbyterians had left the General Assembly for the Presbyterian Church C.S.A., little sympathy remained for opinions that appeared less than fully committed to the United States. By an overwhelming vote of 206 to 20, Breckinridge’s political theology proved victorious at the 1862 General Assembly. Robinson’s dissent was recorded but left unanswered and received no formal discussion.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., 126–28.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 126, 129.

Endorsed by the General Assembly in May, the *Danville Quarterly Review* followed in June with a celebratory, triumphalist account of the controversy with the “diabolical” Robinson and his “secret helpers.” The “coarse and vulgar element in Mr. Robinson’s nature” had been exposed. The “assumed grandeur and spirituality” of his theology was a ruse for his anti-Unionism. Robinson had been proven a “sham spiritual hero.” The article claimed it could not be certain how many of Robinson’s fellow “secessionists” remained willing to help the Louisvillian destroy Breckinridge and Danville, but the *Review* believed that number was shrinking. Writing as if their conduct stemmed from the purest of motives, the *Review* suggested that they would not pursue “vengeance” against Robinson and his associates. “God has said it is his.” The true Christian God would judge “those who abuse his name and outrage his laws.” Robinson and his compatriots would receive their due. Justice would come and God would honor those who lived for right.⁵⁸

Just a month later it appeared that some form of justice had come: Robinson left Kentucky in July 1862. On a trip to Ohio to visit the home of his ailing brother, the minister received word from friends in Kentucky that it would be best for him not to return. Local Union troops had deemed his writings in the *True Presbyterian* inflammatory and they had seized copies of the paper. Robinson’s comrades feared that the minister would be jailed on charges of sedition if he returned to the Falls City. Although he maintained his connections

⁵⁸ “The Late General Assembly of 1862, of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America,” *Danville Quarterly Review* 2:2 (June 1862), 363–69.

to the Bluegrass State and continued to edit the *True Presbyterian*, Robinson exiled himself to Toronto for the duration of the war.⁵⁹

With Robinson out of the way, by mid 1862 Breckinridge appeared destined to win the Kentucky fight over political theology. Indeed, with Unionism ascendant in Kentucky politics, guaranteed by a mandate of the electorate in the fall of 1861, Breckinridge's nationalist political theology seemed perfectly suited to carry the day. All that, however, would change within a few short months. Breckinridge's political theology was tied to the fortunes of the United States. That made it an imperfect fit for a border slave state like Kentucky. So long as the Union made decisions that comported with the will of white Kentucky, Unionism succeeded.

On September 22, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued the first part of the Emancipation Proclamation, which guaranteed freedom to all slaves who were in Confederate lands as of January 1, 1863. It did not alter slavery's status in states like Kentucky that remained with the Union. Nevertheless, white Kentucky perceived quickly the significance of the Proclamation. Where the Civil War was once intended to preserve the Union alone, it now became a war about slavery. And that was unacceptable to Kentucky whites. Suddenly, the idea of Union became less and less appealing. With slavery's end impending, racist white Kentuckians no longer found a political theology resolutely committed to Union as compelling as it had once appeared.

⁵⁹ See Vander Velde, *Presbyterian Churches*, 168; Louis B. Weeks, *Kentucky Presbyterians* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 86–87; and Preston D. Graham Jr., *A Kingdom Not of This World: Stuart Robinson's Struggle to Distinguish the Sacred from the Secular During the Civil War* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2002), 53–59.

Breckinridge himself never gave up his Unionism, but he also neither expressed any desire to see emancipation. In fact, he vocally opposed it until the end of the war. By the end of 1862, Kentucky Presbyterians had declared no winner in the battle over political theology. But as emancipation loomed closer on the horizon, the less certain it seemed that Breckinridge's vision would prevail.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE END OF NEUTRALITY
 EMANCIPATION, POLITICAL RELIGION, AND THE TRIUMPH OF
 ABOLITIONIST HETERODOXY IN WHITE KENTUCKY
 1862–1865

[I]n times to come scholars and historians shall be treating abolition as the great fanaticism of the nineteenth century . . . As a politics, history will write it down as below the intellect and contrivance of a bedlamite. As a religion, it will go down to posterity as a mongral exhibition of all the mongral infidelisms of the times—infidelism which cheated the churches and ruined them.

—“Abolition and the Future,”
True Presbyterian, March 3, 1864¹

In mid October 1862 white minister William Thomas McElroy (1829–1910), pastor of Louisville’s Walnut Street Presbyterian Church, lamented the course of the “dreadful war” presently tearing apart “our country + state.” At that date, McElroy and his wife Eliza were residing in the home of her father, prominent Louisville merchant and philanthropist Samuel Casseday. McElroy’s brother-in-law Alex had already joined the “Rebel” war effort as an officer in Kentucky general Simon Bolivar Buckner’s brigade, and it distressed McElroy that “every member of [Samuel Casseday’s] family”—all of the seven Casseday children, except the oldest brother “Ben + my wife,” as McElroy wrote in his journal—“is strong for the rebellion.” Against the family’s prevailing opinion, the minister argued, “I cannot, + will not countenance any measure subversive of the good government under which we have lived.” McElroy remained loyal to the United

¹ Philo, “Abolition and the Future,” *True Presbyterian*, 3 March 1864.

States, and stood “for ‘The Union, The Constitution, + The enforcement of the laws.’” Convincingly, he wrote, “I am as I have been from the start, + ever expect to be.” Many Kentuckians—including his own family members—had questioned their state’s official commitment to the Union, but McElroy was not one of them.²

His opinion soon changed, however. Just a few months later, in December 1862, upon reading “with great care” the text of President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation for the first time, McElroy found himself appalled. The document “looks far too much like abolition for me to endorse,” he explained. Where the minister might have supported Lincoln’s efforts to preserve the Union, McElroy now worried that the president’s “whole cabbinet is so [abolitionist] that I fear the war will degenerate from a lofty + noble struggle for the nations life, to a brutal war over the negroes.” He continued, “if the war be simply for the Union the constitution + the enforcement of the laws—they will be maintained, if on the other hand it becomes a war for abolition it will be long, fatal to the country, + fail of its object.” McElroy’s language reflected how closely he, like many white religious Kentuckians, followed the conservative line of the Constitutional Union Party—the amalgam of former Whigs and Know Nothings

² William Thomas McElroy Journal, 17 October 1862, William Thomas McElroy Papers, Folder 10, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Ky. On Samuel Casseday and his family, see Lucien V. Rule, Review of Fannie Casseday Duncan, *When Kentucky Was Young* (Louisville: John P. Morton, 1928), *Filson Club History Quarterly* 2 (July 1928), 184–85. Alex Casseday began the war, like Simon Bolivar Buckner’s unit more broadly, as a member of the Kentucky State Guard and thus neutral in the sectional conflict. Buckner opposed Kentucky’s late 1861 end of political neutrality, rejected a Union commission, and accepted a Confederate generalship—and took most of his unit with him, including Alex Casseday. See Arndt M. Stickles, *Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 51–91, esp. p. 67 on Alex Casseday’s defense of neutrality.

that attained popularity in the border South but remained almost irrelevant everywhere else—and contended slavery had nothing to do with the issues at stake in the war. In other words, he could not accept that the Civil War was a conflict about anything other than the preservation of national unity.³

McElroy argued that he was for the Union “but not for the [abolitionist] policy advocated by some of the cabinet.” Before the war, the minister had endorsed some conservative, gradual emancipationist measures. But when, in 1856, he was accused of preaching “an abolition sermon,” McElroy took great care to show that his views were actually “the reverse” of any radical scheme to immediately free slaves into white American society.⁴ As was the case for the overwhelming majority of Kentucky’s religious whites, the divine had no vision for the future political equality of the nation’s enslaved African American population—indeed, he could not imagine such a possibility.

In fact, so strong was McElroy’s antipathy for what he perceived as the consequences of immediate emancipation that, by the end of 1862, the idea of an abolitionist governmental takeover doomed the Unionist cause for the Kentucky minister. Within a short time, he began preaching pro-Confederate sermons from his Louisville pulpit. By the end of the war, his thinking about race and politics proved cause for religious disunity along sectional and racial lines. McElroy led the majority of his congregation to join the bulk of Bluegrass Presbyterians, who between 1865 and 1869 voted overwhelmingly to reject their ties to the northern Presbyterian Church U.S.A.—a connection all the state’s presbyteries had

³ McElroy Journal, December 1862.

⁴ Ibid., 7 July 1856; 17 October 1856.

maintained through the war—and align with the southern sectional branch of the denomination, known during the war as the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America.⁵

The case of William Thomas McElroy is illustrative of a broad-scale cultural and political transformation that occurred among Kentucky whites in the Civil War era. For more than thirty years prior to the firing on Fort Sumter, as the first part of this dissertation elucidates, white Kentuckians joined with religious conservatives in the South—and also in the North—in condemning abolitionists. These immediatist antislavery activists committed, according to most whites in the Bluegrass State, a two-fold form of heresy. The first was theological: abolitionists contravened nineteenth-century standards of American

⁵ On McElroy and the move of Kentucky's Presbyterians to the Presbyterian Church in the United States (or Southern Presbyterian Church), see the brief account in Louis B. Weeks, *Kentucky Presbyterians* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 79–107.

McElroy's role was a great deal more significant and complicated than this brief description suggests. In 1865 and 1866, McElroy, several lay leaders, and a sizable majority of his parishioners at Walnut Street Presbyterian Church initiated a congregational split over an intricate set of questions pertaining to Presbyterian denominational polity, the most glaring and crucial of which was whether or not the church could tolerate its pastor's southern-sympathizing from the pulpit. Because McElroy and his supporters chose to leave the northern Presbyterian church—the owner of the church's property “in trust”—the split created a knotty legal battle over who could claim control of the physical church property. After much wrangling, both in church and civil courts, the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court in the landmark case, *Watson v. Jones* (1871). The court's ultimate decision—which ruled that because Presbyterianism was a hierarchical form of government, the denomination that originally claimed the church was the rightful owner of its property—set precedent for more than a century of complicated American church-state property law. See Ronald W. Eades, *Watson v. Jones: The Walnut Street Presbyterian Church and the First Amendment* (Lynnville, Tenn.: Archer Editions Press, 1982).

evangelical orthodoxy and poisoned the faith by unnecessarily mixing their political opinions with religion. The second was racial: by demanding an immediate end to slavery, abolitionists threatened the secure social fabric of America, which required the dominance of a racially pure class of white elite leadership. The Emancipation Proclamation, which promised an immediate end to slavery for at least some southern blacks—and surely indicated future freedom for greater numbers of the enslaved—thus signaled to Kentucky's white religious conservatives that abolitionist heterodoxy had triumphed at the highest levels of American public office. The specter of emancipation served to unite the state's white evangelicals around a common cause that they had collectively agreed upon long before the Civil War: their putative racial and theological superiority. Starting in late 1862, white Kentuckians drew on long-standing theological proslavery arguments—aggressively anti-abolitionist and explicitly racist—to distance themselves from Union policy and, more generally, the North. That section, they argued, had become infected with an abolitionist heresy that had perverted its religion and society.

Because it applied to purely political matters, as explained in chapter three, the state's supposed neutrality ended in the autumn of 1861 when Confederate troops entered the western part of the state and refused to leave. While many state leaders, including Governor Beriah Magoffin, hoped to remain neutral or even tacitly approved secession, the state legislature steered Kentucky northward. The Commonwealth remained in the Union for the duration of the conflict. Kentucky did, in spite of its formal Unionism, retain a visible minority of Confederate sympathizers and sent between 25,000 and 40,000 volunteer soldiers to fight for the South. However, more than three times that number fought for

the Union—including, after the landmark early 1864 Union decision to enlist black troops, more than 23,000 once-enslaved African Americans who fought for their own freedom and that of their dependents—and the state was dominated politically by conservative Unionists.⁶

The turning point in white Kentucky's transformation from border South to solid South, this chapter argues, came in the years from 1862 to 1865. As the Commonwealth's white religious conservatives responded to emancipation, abolitionism, and politicized religion, it became increasingly clear that the possibility of maintaining an ostensibly neutral, middle-ground stance on slavery and the nation no longer existed. White religion, in other words, served a primary ideological role in the making of Kentucky's postwar Confederate identity.

September 22, 1862, marked the beginning of the end of white Kentucky's ideological neutrality. On that date, United States president Abraham Lincoln announced that the end of slavery would be coming to some parts of American soil. The Emancipation Proclamation would go into effect on January 1, 1863, and

⁶ Estimates of soldiers serving the Confederacy and Union are from Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 179–80, 195. Federal legislation to enlist black troops passed in February 1864 but, because of the extreme unpopularity of the idea of enlisting African American soldiers among Kentucky whites, Lincoln had promised Kentucky Governor Thomas E. Bramlette that the Bluegrass State would not be called upon to send the Union black soldiers. However, when Kentucky failed to meet its draft quotas using only whites, Bramlette agreed in March 1864 to allow for black enlistment. In March 1865, federal legislation freed any enslaved wives or children of black Union soldiers. See Victor B. Howard, *Black Liberation in Kentucky: Emancipation and Freedom, 1862–1884* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 45–90; and Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: Volume 1: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760–1891* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), 146–77. See also John David Smith, "Self Emancipation in Kentucky," *Reviews in American History* 12 (June 1984), 225–29.

it would free slaves in areas under Confederate control. The statement did not—as contemporary observers and later historians have noted—actually end American slavery. States in rebellion refused to honor the dicta of a president they had rejected, and since the border slave states of Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri had remained loyal to the Union, the enslaved in those locales remained in bondage. Nevertheless, immediate legal ramifications of the document aside, the Emancipation Proclamation registered a decisive impact. Not only did it permanently free those slaves who had fled the evil institution for the protection of Union military camps in the South, but it also offered those still enslaved a promise of approaching liberation—thereby encouraging and hastening southern blacks' escape from enslavement. Finally, after decades of energy spent to eradicate slavery, to many Americans the Emancipation Proclamation seemed the culmination of abolitionist activism. It clearly indicated that the United States' war to preserve the Union was also being fought to destroy slavery.⁷

Among Kentucky's religiously conservative whites, this latter point was not lost. In December 1862 thoroughgoing Unionist Presbyterian Robert J. Breckinridge wrote derisively "that neither *the Constitution as it is*, nor yet *the Union as it was*, is compatible with the state of things" the Emancipation

⁷ The classic, but brief, study of the Emancipation Proclamation is John Hope Franklin, *The Emancipation Proclamation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963). For recent scholarly interpretation, see Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004); and Harold Holzer, Edna Greene Medford, and Frank J. Williams, *The Emancipation Proclamation: Three Views* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

Proclamation set in motion. The war had entered a new era, and, as the white minister put it, "it is perfectly obvious to every sane man . . . who is not an ultra Abolitionist" that the prospects were dire. The war was now being prosecuted to "establish the freedom and supremacy of the black race in the South, and confer on free negroes . . . that perfect equality with ourselves, whether personal, social, civil, or political." Supporting the Union in "a war for the maintenance of a Constitution that allowed and protected slavery" was a noble cause. But fighting "a war against slavery"—the federal placation of "the abolition cry" that had grated on the nation for "a whole generation"—was not an endeavor Breckinridge believed worth defending.⁸

Breckinridge's opinion appeared in the pages of his theological journal, the *Danville Quarterly Review*, which had maintained since its founding in January 1861, as chapter four shows, a strongly Unionist stance and addressed theological and political matters of central significance to the Ohio Valley region. From his editorial position, Breckinridge argued that he was well qualified to speak on behalf of the "loyal slaveholders of the nation, and especially of the Border States," who believed unequivocally that the secessionist "engines of revolutionary fanaticism" and "treason" should be quashed. Unlike their abolition-minded counterparts, however, these more moderate Unionists held the "profound conviction" that ending American slavery "can have no beneficial effect whatever" toward "crushing the rebellion, and preserving the nation." At the moment of secession, the *Danville* divine argued, Confederates responded in

⁸ "Negro Slavery and the Civil War," *Danville Quarterly Review* 2 (December 1862), 673, 676, 708. Emphasis in original.

the most "extreme reaction" imaginable to the ascendancy of the Free Soil-based Republican Party and the election of its candidate, Abraham Lincoln, as president. Now, however, with emancipation announced, loyal Americans were forced to accept a likewise "subverted and abused" understanding of the U.S. Constitution, a view that only an antislavery radical could find tolerable. The *Review* editorial contended that the vast majority of Unionists were conservative in nature, which meant they would "not permit a party at the South to create a new nation," but neither would they "permit a party at the North to destroy the Constitution under the pretext of maintaining the Union." Both secessionists and abolitionists operated from the same extremist impetus, but from "opposite directions," the editor argued: "They both agree that our system is a failure, and must be abandoned or greatly modified." A properly conservative and theologically informed view of the American nation, however, understood that neither course should be followed. "Here we plant ourselves with confiding faith in God," Breckinridge insisted. "His dealings with the American people have been wonderful, from their first settlement on this continent, [and in the] nearly two and half centuries since."⁹

But this was a decidedly whitewashed picture of American history. Fundamentally, conservative religious whites in Kentucky rejected the Emancipation Proclamation because they did not see African Americans as rightful, equal participants in the American political system. Indeed,

⁹ Ibid., 671–73, 676, 678, 684; "The Secession Conspiracy in Kentucky, and its Overthrow: with the Relation of both to the General Revolt," *Danville Quarterly Review* 2 (March 1862), 121.

Breckinridge wrote that “the black race” “for nearly two and a half centuries” had been “hanging upon” the United States’ white population “like a parasite upon a noble oak.” Emancipation had been declared without fully coming to terms with the consequences of “bestowing a qualified freedom upon several millions of an inferior and subject race.” The reality, according to the white minister’s assumption about post-emancipation American society, was that “utter ruin would overwhelm the black race” and “indescribable shock” would overtake “every element of prosperity—nay, even of civilization, throughout every region where the black race approximated the whites.”¹⁰

In other words, as had been argued among white Kentuckians for decades, the abolition of slavery would inaugurate a race war.¹¹ Once the Civil War had a noble purpose—protecting the interests of a white, Christian republic that maintained slavery. That prospect, however, was all but gone. Lincoln’s “proclamation of September” threatened to “sweep this nation, already convulsed, into new convulsions, the depth of which no modern sufferings of nations have fathomed.” No doubt the South had erred in seceding from the Union. And undeniably secessionists deserved just punishment. But the Danville Presbyterian found himself wondering, “if it is *worthy of us*”—loyal whites—“to inflict such a fate” as black liberation “on an immense portion of our own race.”

¹⁰ “Negro Slavery and the Civil War,” 679, 707–708.

¹¹ Ibid., 679, 681, 708. Breckinridge’s argument was not new. The fear that abolitionism would lead to race warfare was ubiquitous throughout the slaveholding South prior to the Civil War and, according to Charles R. Dew, drove the secessionist impulse in the Confederate states. See Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

It was one thing to punish the South and crush an impertinent rebellion against God's chosen nation. But it was quite another to allow "an alien and inferior race" to make war on fellow whites. No one "with Saxon or Norman or American blood in their veins" could, according to Breckinridge, be a party to "the slaughter" of whites at the hands of blacks. No cause, no matter how ostensibly moral—not "the pretext of loyalty and patriotism" to the nation, nor the subduing of "rebels and traitors"—could justify that kind of racial treason. "We are not even able to see" how the war "in any way involves or affects the black race," the cleric contended. "The nation is fully able—irrespective of all questions about the black race—yea, is better able without than with most of these intricate questions—to conquer its rebellious citizens" and "restore peace and public order." The president and the abolitionist North, however, disagreed. With emancipation announced, the fundamental terms of the war changed and the white Unionist Presbyterian minister feared that the country he believed in fighting to preserve no longer existed.¹²

Race war was not the only catastrophe emancipation raised in the minds of Kentucky's white evangelicals. Conservative whites had no doubt that even if an all-out racial holocaust did not occur, their race would be marred forever by the looming prospect of interracial sex. Although many white Americans found themselves, especially after the Civil War, convinced by scientific and theological polygenesis arguments designed to demonstrate the bestial origins of African Americans and other non-Anglo-Saxon peoples, most religious conservatives in

¹² "Negro Slavery and the Civil War," 686, 708

the Civil War era—and especially proslavery theologians—did not accept such logic because it contravened the biblical record on a single source of human ancestry. Indeed, as historian Christopher Luse has demonstrated, southern proslavery divines linked polygenesis to other forms of infidel understandings of the world—including abolitionism—and saw ideas affirming a multiplicity of human progenitors as part of a “worldwide assault on the Christian foundation of Western society.”¹³ Still, as historian Joel Williamson has put it succinctly, just as academics now take for granted that race is a modern social construction, “in the past people often thought that character and culture were carried, quite literally, in the blood.”¹⁴ For evangelical whites it was thus possible to maintain a commitment to a theory of the unity of the human race and yet still believe firmly in a providential design for racial hierarchy, which secured whites’ sense of racial superiority.¹⁵

¹³ Christopher Luse, “Slavery’s Champions Stood at Odds: Polygenesis and the Defense of Slavery,” *Civil War History* 53 (2007), 382. See also Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 147–51; and David N. Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 186–200.

¹⁴ Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (1980; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), xiii.

¹⁵ Indeed, Kentucky’s religiously conservative whites maintained a biblically-informed monogenesis view of human origins. See, for example, “The Unity of the Human Race,” *Danville Quarterly Review* 2 (September 1862), 395–406; and “‘How much is a Man better than a Sheep.’—The sacredness of our common humanity,” *True Presbyterian*, 24 September 1863.

It was this perspective that led Presbyterian Stuart Robinson, Breckinridge's most virulent and long-standing critic, to lash out in April 1864 at abolitionism for advancing the "God-defying depravity" of "intermarriage between the white and the negro races of the country." Robinson "had supposed that no thing could any longer surprise us in the way of demented, depraved and debasing 'ism' from" the North, "the great hot-bed of effete, putrid and fermenting Puritan infidelism"—which, because of its historic linking of religion and politics represented nothing more than an apostate region. Nonetheless, northern heretics had managed such a feat by advocating "*miscegenation*" as the means for the "elevation of the negro" and "a policy for the improvement of the white race." Surely no "American, and especially" no "Christian American," found such "degraded and debasing fooleries of men" attractive. From a certain point of view, the white minister could imagine interracial sex leading to at least some social benefit, but that perspective also imagined African Americans as docile, infantile submissives to the dictates of white orthodox Protestantism. "We can see how the Yankee's selfishness might be supplemented by the negro's generosity," the cleric sarcastically conjured. Or, perhaps the northern abolitionist's "Chinese self-conceit" might be mollified "by the negro's humility; his infamous faithlessness by the negro's fidelity; his niggard meanness by the negro's generosity; his innate coarseness and vulgarity by the negro's passion for the refined and beautiful, his God-defying infidelity by the negro's whole-hearted faith in Christ;—and perhaps a score of other points to contrast."¹⁶

¹⁶ "Rapid Progress of the Northern Infidel Negrophilism to Utter and Shameless Depravity," *True Presbyterian*, 14 April 1864.

Those seemingly positive reasons for integrating the races, however, counted for little in the face of the glaring problems of mixing two populations given to depravity. "What shall be the result," Robinson queried, "of adding the Yankee's natural propensity to thievery to the negro's passion for pilfering; to his cringing cowardice the negro's abject fear; to his inveterate lying, the negro's natural mendacity; to his natural vulgarity the negro's animalism; to his treachery and bloodthirst, the negro's savagery—and so of other points of resemblance?" In answering this question, the minister opined that "true philanthropy" required that a superior people protect a "helpless race" "from contact with influences" that would do little more than "degrade them" further.¹⁷

Race mixing, Robinson argued, was a critical issue that bore on the future of the country. If Kentuckians thought they could remain aloof, they were misguided. The "most radical Abolitionist" conspiracy to "coerce both Church and State into submission" had already been inaugurated. "Kentucky" and "other Border States" needed to remain vigilant. Once the "emancipation scheme is successful," the white minister argued, the division between the races would be the next bastion of American civil society to fall. Abolitionists had already succeeded in destroying slavery. They could not be permitted to assault the rampart of white hegemony as well.¹⁸

In spite of an omnipresent sense of racial superiority among Kentucky's white evangelicals, however, not all white voices were so assured of their race's special, divinely elevated character. According to a February 1864 editorial in the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Western Recorder, the state newspaper of Kentucky Baptists, "The Anglo-Saxon race, indeed, has much to distinguish it from the general mass of mankind." Whites had been so important and influential in world history that they had "played a conspicuous part in the world's progress in intellectual culture, inventions, enterprise, and wealth." The superiority of the white race was so plainly obvious, the *Western Recorder* editors wrote, that many believed "that the perpetuation and spread of our particular ideas and institutions are so linked with the civilization, enfranchisement, and conversion of the world, that we certainly are safe, whatever may transpire." It was a common viewpoint, but such a notion, according to the Baptist newspaper, was "entirely a delusion." "With all the godliness, faith, saintship, missionary fervor, and real nobility which have been developed among the Anglo-Saxons," despite "their superior privileges," the fact remained that "the most wicked, godless, hypocritical, atheistic, and heaven defying-people on earth have been, and to this day are, these self-same Anglo-Saxons." It could not be denied, the article claimed, that "the Anglo-Saxon race is an embodiment of the same depraved humanity found everywhere upon earth." Perhaps whites were "only a little better cloaked with Pharisaism, a little more thoroughly pervaded with Satanic subtlety," or "a little more pietistically sentimental," but they were also "a little in advance in the procession of apostate nations on their way to the judgments of God Almighty." For those readers who doubted this truth, the legacy of the Civil War was proof enough to make the point: "The Anglo-Saxon race professes to be the messenger of peace, yet carries a sword ever warm with blood, and often with the blood of its own immediate kindred." The *Western Recorder* was by no means suggesting that whites should give up their place of privilege, and it certainly did not

suggest that emancipation was a proper policy decision. The essay was, however, a sober and commonsensical reflection on the carnage supposedly enlightened white Americans had brought upon themselves.¹⁹

Moreover, rather than challenging the white supremacism that so defined Kentucky's conservative religion, the *Western Recorder* was actually questioning the foundations of U.S. civil society. American whites were complicit in an "idolatry of self and country." They had chosen the "substitution of human devices, agencies, and arrangements in the place of the proper Saviour." This flawed religious approach—"such mischievous delusion"—had been enshrined, the Baptist paper argued, in the "*entirely atheistic*" U.S. Constitution. "The deepest principles upon which the whole machinery of our Government is built," the article maintained, "is a theological falsehood.—a Pelagian heresy." Invoking the fifth-century theologian who battled with Augustine of Hippo over the nature of grace and salvation—and was deemed a heretic by the ancient church for advancing that human free will remained unstained by original sin—the American constitution "assure[d] that the majority of men are pure, intelligent, right-minded, virtuous, and governed by reason and truth; which is contrary to all Scripture, experience, and fact." In sum, "the framework of our institutions" was "subversive of the divine order, and embraces all the elements of apostasy from God, and ultimate destruction."²⁰

¹⁹ "Our Country: What is to Become of It?," *Western Recorder*, 13 February 1864.

²⁰ Ibid.

The opinion of the *Western Recorder* revealed a burgeoning hostility to the American nation among white Kentucky evangelicals. That acrimony was connected directly to the conservative white impression of abolitionism. If at one time there existed a Christian America, a properly righteous nation, biblical in shape, it had been directly undermined by the “radicalism” of “the abolition effort.” That movement had “for years declared that the accomplishment of its designs could only be achieved *over the ruins of the American church and the American union.*” Abolitionism, as Kentucky’s religiously conservative whites had long maintained, fomented the Civil War by forcing the hand of secession-leaning southerners. It appeared, from the perspective of early 1864, that these radical antislavery activists “have succeeded” in their plan to undermine the foundations of Christian America—its national unity and its churches.²¹ In the wake of emancipation, and as Civil War-era politics tended to lean toward abolitionist-influenced policy, evangelical whites in the Commonwealth increasingly questioned the basis for their loyalty to the national Union. That religious understanding was an important precursor to white Kentucky’s broader identification with the Confederacy after the Civil War.

During the conflict however, as the previous chapter explained, those white evangelicals in Kentucky who retained an affinity for southern forms of belief, expressed their hostility toward Unionism through the language of the “spirituality of the church.” In July 1862, months before the Emancipation Proclamation would animate Kentucky whites, the *True Presbyterian*—the weekly

²¹ “The Church and the War,” *Western Recorder*, 16 January 1864. Emphasis in original.

newspaper edited by Stuart Robinson, founded just a few months prior to directly oppose the Unionist political theology advocated by Robert J. Breckinridge and the *Danville Quarterly Review*—published an anonymous article that made the point directly: arguing, “Christ’s kingdom is not of this world nor of the nature of the governments of this world. Its actions and theirs, its principles and theirs, its governors and theirs are wholly different, and all attempts to work them together, or to identify them, is utter folly and certain injury to each.” The implication could not be more obvious, the author contended: “To weave the web of Church and State . . . together is not patriotism, but phrenzy, and will end as all phrenzy does end.” Mixing politics and religion led to a perversion of both entities and it had extreme, violent implications for society at large.²²

Just a month earlier, in June 1862, the newspaper had published an anonymous essay by a minister concerned that the war effort had impinged upon his apolitical pastoral call. It was no longer enough, the writer asserted, “to preach a pure gospel, to bring men to Christ, and” to teach “obedience to the laws of God and man.” The minister stood incredulous that, in the moment of war fervor, preachers “must define and teach the political creed also, the creed most in favor, *our* political creed, and this even at the risk of driving off your hearers from God’s house.” Noting the New Testament example of the Apostle Paul, the anonymous correspondent wrote, “The great model, ever before held up for all preachers said, ‘For I determined *not* to know *any thing* among you,

²² Junius, “Church and State: Chapter 1,” *True Presbyterian*, 17 July 1862.

save Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Now, the minister believed, “we must know something more; Jesus Christ and him crucified are to be held in abeyance—thrust in the background, in deference to the superior claims of [national] loyalty.”²³

In the reading of these evangelical Kentucky whites, those Unionist believers who overtly mixed politics and religion constituted a “Satanic School.” As one of Robinson’s *True Presbyterian* editorials contended, Christian Unionists were a “class of religionists in all churches, who, under guise of zeal for the government” issued a “war-cry against the South.” Additionally, those “of their fellow-citizens of the North” who held questionable Unionist credentials faced “fierce ‘breathings out of threatenings and slaughter.’” Robinson’s argument drew directly from biblical exegesis. In the New Testament book of John, Jesus of Nazareth had lashed out at his Pharisee opponents for “falsehood and blood-thirst.” Those Jewish officials, famously depicted in the Writ as responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion, were, in Robinson’s interpretation, the biblical parallel to his nineteenth-century pro-Union, abolition-minded, politicized religious opponents. Quoting the text, Robinson showed that Jesus had called the Pharisees for what they clearly were: “ye are of *your father the devil*, and the lusts of your father ye will do. HE WAS A MURDERER from the beginning AND ABODE NOT IN THE TRUTH, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it.” Robinson’s religious

²³ Z., “Preaching Up to the Times --- A Pastor in Trouble,” *True Presbyterian*, 5 June 1862. Emphasis in original. The quoted biblical text is 1 Corinthians 2.2.

enemies, who in his view twisted the truth of the gospel into fodder for a political agenda, thus represented no less of a "Satanic School."²⁴

This understanding of the church's spirituality had direct implications for how white Kentucky evangelicals understood the emancipation issue. The Commonwealth's whites had deeply theological reasons for opposing radical antislavery schemes. Abolitionists, according to the state's religiously conservative whites, drew their conclusions from what they believed "the Bible *ought* to teach." The text, however, offered no succinct denunciation of slaveholding. In fact, the scriptures affirmed the institution. By the 1860s white southerners knew this proslavery biblical litany quite well. It had been rehearsed, sharpened, and invoked countless times over the past four decades. Proslavery divines had, throughout the antebellum era, learned how to make the most of the commonsensical, literalistic biblical hermeneutic that dominated American religious culture. Now, in 1863, the *True Presbyterian* covered well-worn polemical terrain, writing that "to be consistent, [the Abolitionist] must throw away his belief, or throw away the Bible." And that, according to the newspaper, perfectly summarized "the spirit of Abolitionism." Radical antislavery activists preferred to "let the Bible burn" as they drew their arguments from "the misty regions of infidel anthropophilism and negrophilism." Abolitionism represented a "treacherous faithlessness" that drew its mission not from divine revelation but rather "the claims of philanthropy."²⁵

²⁴ "The 'Satanic School' of Religionists," *True Presbyterian*, 24 September 1863. Emphasis in original. The quoted biblical text is John 8.44.

As such, it was obvious to conservative white readers that radicalized opponents of slavery “clearly assail[ed] the actual Providential government of God over human society,” in place “since ever society existed.” Abolitionists, the *True Presbyterian* argued, hoped “to carry on war till God shall re-construct society.” That flawed interpretation of divine work in the world “clearly impeaches the scriptures of truth by denouncing as inherently wicked a form of social organization”—slavery—that was “universal” in the biblical era but never “denounced” by the Writ. Radicals, the newspaper argued, promised to “continue the carnage of civil war in the South” until “all injustice and oppression shall vanish from the earth.” Not only was that vision inherently driven by a sadistic bloodlust—it was impossible, the paper argued, to eradicate evil from the world—but God had clearly ordained slavery and given humanity the Bible to make that point. Divine decrees could not, as a matter of fact, be unjust. As heretics who misconstrued the providential order, abolitionists also misunderstood the nature of justice.²⁶

Radical “heresiarchs,” the *True Presbyterian* argued, clamored that “‘Slavery is the cause of all our troubles, therefore the Church must exert every energy to destroy slavery.’” That opinion, however, overlooked the “fact that the true origin of the [United States’] trouble, is the refusal of faithless Ahabs”—the Old Testament king of Israel who refused to heed the advice of God’s prophet Elijah and brought famine and drought on his nation as a result—“to leave

²⁵ “‘How much is a Man better than a Sheep.’”

²⁶ “Abolitionism Gone to Seed,” *True Presbyterian*, 16 April 1863; “‘How much is a Man better than a Sheep.’”

slavery as our fathers and the Providence of God placed it." Slavery, a public institution properly ordained by God, should not be meddled with in the courts of the church, the essay argued. Biblically considered, the covenant that God had extended to his chosen people—first to Israel, and then the Christian church—did not require compromising divine truths for the sake of being "*patriotic*." So-called Christian opposition to slavery, especially in the name of war and supporting the Union, was an affront to divine order.²⁷

From the perspective of Kentucky's evangelical whites, the most meddlesome and blatantly political features of abolitionist-influenced Protestantism appeared vividly in late 1863 and early 1864 when United States Secretary of War Edwin Stanton authorized several northern denominations to occupy or take control over churches in rebellious states "in which a loyal minister . . . does not now officiate." For denominations that had split over the slavery question—or, in the case of the Presbyterians, split over the Civil War—the orders represented a chance to reclaim a previously lost connection to old memberships. For white southern Christians, the orders were an affront emblematic of how little the North understood about the South's commitment to orthodox, purportedly apolitical, faith.²⁸

²⁷ "The real Disturbers of the Church's Peace," *True Presbyterian*, 26 February 1863. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ The quote comes from the first of the orders, issued on November 30, 1863, and authorizing Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop Edward R. Ames to occupy disloyal Methodist Episcopal Church, South, churches. For the order, see W. H. Daniels, *The Illustrated History of Methodism in Great Britain, America, and Australia, From the Days of the Wesleys to the Present Year* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1890), 639. For the broader impact of these "religious Reconstruction" orders, see Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863–1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30–31. Lincoln eventually had

Stanton's church orders paved the way for the "religious Reconstruction" of the South, and conservative Kentuckians did not interpret them kindly. The *Western Recorder* exploded at the notion: "'Re-Christianizing the South'!!! What a miserable burlesque on Christianity! What a vile profanity! What a stupendous arrogance! What ineffable stupidity!" Stuart Robinson's *True Presbyterian* had no difficulty identifying the development as a "shameless conspiracy" of the "Northern churches" and the "secular military power, for the propagation of their infidel negro evangel by the power of the sword." It was a "scheme as absurdly fanatical and devilish as ever disgraced the annals of Papal or Mohammedan propagandism." In other words, not only did abolitionism and politicized northern Christianity present and assault on right belief, they were in actuality false religions designed to pervert truth. For Kentucky religionists who had never taken arms against the Union, the idea of southern whites—even those secessionists conquered in war—losing their religious freedom proved inflammatory.²⁹

Methodists, the largest religious body in the United States before the Civil War—and second only to Baptists in Kentucky—took the lead in religious reconstruction efforts. Part and parcel to such labors by northern religious whites was the attempt to provide education and general social relief for southern

the orders rescinded. While he saw them as important for silencing treasonous and rebellious speech, he also thought they undermined the separation of church and state. See Richard Carwardine, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (2003; New York: Knopf, 2006), 277–78.

²⁹ "Re-Christianizing the South," *Western Recorder*, 20 February 1864; "The New Military and Ecclesiastical Combination for the Missionary Work in the South," *True Presbyterian*, 3 March 1864.

freedpeople. It was plain to the *Western Recorder*, writing in early 1864 that these Yankee interlopers had come under the sway of "The New Gospel, the cornerstone of which is *Servants Obey NOT Your Masters*." What struck the *Recorder* as odd, however, is that the *New York Methodist*, when reporting these early missionary efforts, wrote that the "members of the Louisville Conference"—along with the Kentucky Conference, one of two overarching Methodist ruling bodies in the Bluegrass State linked to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South—had "avowed their loyalty to the Government of the Union, and by this avowal covered themselves from the rebel part of Southern Methodism." To be sure, Kentucky Methodism, like the state's other leading white religious bodies, contained a sizable proportion of Unionists throughout the Civil War. But was it really true, the Baptist *Western Recorder* asked of fellow Bluegrass believers, that "Kentucky Methodists" believed "that the Methodist Church North is so identified with the Federal political power that adherence to the one implies equal union to the other?" Had the Louisville Conference "transferred to the Church North?" No, the *Recorder* contended. Such wishful thinking on the part of politically minded religious northerners—that Kentuckians would willingly, simply, turn their backs on their southern compatriots because they remained on the wrong side of the war—"is a little too fast." Indeed, the Baptists properly interpreted the opinion of their spiritually kindred Kentuckians. In April 1864 Louisville hosted a convention of Southern Methodist clergy in Union states that protested the political co-opting and loyalist occupation of "rebellious" churches in their denomination.³⁰

³⁰ "Dixie Missions," *Western Recorder*, 30 January 1864; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*,

Although the Baptist *Western Recorder* and the *True Presbyterian* might have come close to approximating the political opinion of much of white religious Kentucky, they did not represent the whole of the state. In December 1864, Presbyterian Jacob Cooper (1830–1904), an Ohio native and professor of Greek at Centre College in Danville, forcefully denounced any who held the “spirituality of the church” doctrine. The “Higher Spirituality” argument, Cooper contended, had been crafted “In order to strengthen the bulwarks of slavery and [to] silence” dissenting “discussion.” The professor acknowledged the strength of biblical “arguments” that showed that “slavery is not a sin *per se*.” Yet those hermeneutical abstractions from the Holy Writ occluded the reality that “slavery never did and never can exist *per se*. It involves an imperfect master clothed with substantially unlimited power over the body and soul of a servant.” As a human institution, slavery had “consequences,” and, as such, it was up to the church to interpret whether it was “good or evil.” Cooper himself maintained that he was “no Abolitionist”—“a name synonymous with all villainy.” He claimed “no sympathy with the fanaticism frequently manifested” by radical antislavery activists and “utterly abhor[red] the infidel and blasphemous doctrines of” notorious abolitionists “[William Lloyd] Garrison, [Theodore] Parker, and their followers.” That said, however, slavery presented real difficulty to American society and constituted a great moral evil. It had been the cause of

31; and Ralph E. Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1956), 32–43.

the secessionist impulse, and, according to Cooper, that movement to fracture the nation was, from a Christian perspective, reprehensible.³¹

Those southern believers who claimed the church had no warrant to preach to the problems of secular society were, in Cooper's telling, hypocrites. "Those men who were the most violent in their political invectives against political preaching in the North," the Presbyterian wrote, "were the foremost in urging the insurgents to revolt." The most famous of proslavery southern divines, James Henley Thornwell of South Carolina and Benjamin Morgan Palmer of New Orleans, had both claimed that the church was a wholly spiritual institution when the slavery question was agitated in the antebellum era. Then, on the eve of secession, in late 1860, both men had preached secessionist sermons designed "to consummate the accursed crime of treason without cause, and bloodshed without provocation." The nineteenth-century proponents of a nonsecular church were ironically "too holy to join with the civil power in denouncing an acknowledged evil"—slavery—"but just holy enough to aid and abet a faction in its work of sedition and blood."³²

In Kentucky, many "spirituality of the church" advocates claimed no explicit affinity for secessionism. To be sure, the Commonwealth's white evangelicals who held that belief often used it as a way of defending the rights of

³¹ Jacob Cooper, "Slavery in the Church Courts," *Danville Quarterly Review* 4 (December 1864), 517–21, 551.

³² Ibid., 516–17, 526. For the secessionist sermons referenced by Cooper, see J. H. Thornwell, "Our National Sins," and B. M. Palmer, "Slavery a Divine Trust," in *Fast Day Sermons; or The Pulpit on the State of the Country* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1861), 9–80.

slaveholders, but it also was deployed as a pretext for neutrality—as much of the state hoped to remain in the early years of the Civil War. Robert L. Stanton, professor of homiletics and pastoral theology at Danville Theological Seminary, railed against at such ideas in his widely published 1864 Unionist tome, *The Church and the Rebellion*. “Neutrality, at such a time, is a sin against God, and a crime against the country.” “[T]here is, in fact,” the professor argued, “no neutrality, regarding this contest, in the breast of any American citizen. It is an impossible thing, and every man knows and feels it.” In Kentucky, proponents of the church’s exclusively spiritual character—particularly Stuart Robinson and the *True Presbyterian*—were “the most powerful auxiliaries for keeping alive the spirit of the rebellion among the [state’s] secessionists.” Some ministers “in the Border States, and elsewhere,” believed that “in this contest between loyalty and treason,” one could “be ‘neutral’” and have “no opinion.” As Stanton saw it, they were gravely misguided. According to his colleague Jacob Cooper, “There are, in truth, only two parties in our country, the Unionists and the Secessionists—there can be no middle ground, and those who are not for us in this struggle are against us.” In white religious Kentucky, the border had disappeared. There could be no place of moderation toward the nation or slavery.³³

That development was significant. With the surrender of Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Courthouse in April 1865, the formal fighting of the Civil War came to an end. In Kentucky, however, the ideological and political battles for the

³³ Robert L. Stanton, *The Church and the Rebellion: A Consideration of the Rebellion against the Government of the United States; and the Agency of the Church, North and South, in Relation Thereto* (New York: Derby & Miller, 1864), 218, 221; Jacob Cooper, “The Loyalty demanded by the present Crisis,” *Danville Quarterly Review* 4 (March 1864), 110.

loyalty of the state's white population were only beginning to escalate.³⁴ The sectional conflict resolved the fate of the national Union and, after emancipation—and ultimately the Thirteenth Amendment (1865)—the legal status of slavery, but in the minds of many Kentucky whites, neither issue had been resolved religiously.

Kentucky's proslavery evangelicals made that much clear. In March 1865 Stuart Robinson published a treatise titled *Slavery, As Recognized in the Mosaic Civil Law, Recognized . . . and Allowed, in the . . . Christian Church*. In the main, Robinson's argument was not a new one. It stood in a decades-long tradition of southern Protestant proslavery theological writing. Published just weeks after President Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, Robinson took extreme umbrage with one of Lincoln's most famous lines. The president had "utter[ed] that blasphemous sentence, 'Yet, if God wills that [the war] continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

Plainly, Robinson wrote, Lincoln's words—which quoted Psalm 19.9—could

³⁴ The physical fighting in Kentucky also remained fierce, particularly in the form of guerilla violence, well after Appomattox. See J. Michael Rhyne, "A 'Murderous Affair in Lincoln County': Politics, Violence, and Memory in a Civil War Era Kentucky Community," *American Nineteenth Century History* 7 (September 2006), 337–59; Rhyne, "Rehearsal for Redemption: The Politics of Post-Emancipation Violence in Kentucky's Bluegrass Region," (Ph.D. diss. University of Cincinnati, 2006); and J. Michael Crane, "'The Rebels Are Bold, Defiant, and Unscrupulous in Their Dementions of All Men': Social Violence in Daviess County, Kentucky, 1861–1868," *Ohio Valley History*, 2.1 (Spring 2002), 18–19.

“hardly be characterized as less than impiously presumptuous perversions of the Word and Providence of God.” According to Robinson, Lincoln’s chief offense was that his Second Inaugural twisted the Bible—which offered obvious support for American slavery—into an abolitionist instrument.³⁵

In Robinson’s opinion, such religiously based political denunciations of Lincoln did not violate the spirituality of the church doctrine. Indeed, he argued that there was a difference between the actions of individual believers and those of ecclesiastical bodies. As free citizens in a democratic society, individual believers could advocate for whatever causes they wished. When he had delivered the content of his *Slavery* volume first as a series of sermons, Robinson claimed he made no mention of the “great secular issues now pending between the slave-holding and non-slave-holding states.” In book form, however, away from a formal church pulpit, the minister “felt at liberty to suggest the applications of the argument.”³⁶

Robinson’s distinction between political opinions offered within church contexts (unacceptable) and by religious actors independent of the aegis of an organized church (acceptable) may have been too subtle. The minister might not have intended to be disingenuous in his argumentation but, if not, he was certainly naïve about the extent to which nineteenth-century American religion was politicized. Nevertheless, Robinson’s ideas about the spirituality of the

³⁵ Stuart Robinson, *Slavery, As Recognized in the Mosaic Civil Law, Recognized also, and Allowed, in the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Christian Church* (Toronto: Rollo & Adam, 1865), v, 20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

church and the biblical sanction for slavery proved key to the shaping of white Kentucky's postwar embrace of Confederate identity.

Bluegrass Baptists revealed their own developing sense of sectional solidarity when, in early 1864, a report in the *Christian Witness*, a Chicago-based Illinois Baptist newspaper, castigated the condition of religiosity in Louisville. The *Western Recorder* saw fit to respond to the main charge of the *Witness*, namely that the practice widespread in the Falls City "of ignoring politics in the pulpit" was an "erroneous policy" that had created a "coldness" and "spiritless worship" the city's churches. Nothing could have been further from the truth, the *Western Recorder* contended. The fact was that "the orthodox churches in this city have never experienced a better feeling than in the last few months." The apolitical message preached "in their pulpits and their churches" led to a recent wave of "revivals" that claimed "scores and hundreds" of participants. As practitioners of true gospel Christianity, Kentucky whites knew well what they were witnessing and its properly Christian source.³⁷

The same could not be said for their fellow Baptists from Illinois. "[S]uppose," the Kentucky paper posited, "instead of preaching the gospel," the Louisville clergy "had given themselves to Sabbath harangues upon the duty of Kentuckians to give up their slaves, to discountenance the institution and join Freedmen's societies." This approach to sermonizing, no doubt commonplace in the North's abolition-minded congregations, would have "driven from church" no fewer than "Nine-tenths" of Louisville parishioners. Nothing would be left of

³⁷ "'Louisville Correspondence' of the *Christian Times*," *Western Recorder*, 16 January 1864.

historic houses of worship but “desolated monuments of folly and madness.” Here was the reality, according to the *Western Recorder*: “Abolitionism, Materialism, and Politics may suit the pulpits and church-goers of Boston and Chicago, but . . . they will not do in Louisville.” In those northern locales, “The house of God has been metamorphosed into an amphitheatre, and the silent devotion of religion changed into the loud plaudits of a mob.” Honestly, the Kentucky Baptist press asked, what was the discernible “difference” between Brooklyn’s Congregationalist “Plymouth Church”—the home of nineteenth-century America’s most famous public preacher, Henry Ward Beecher, brother of abolitionist *littératrice* Harriet Beecher Stowe—and New York City’s notoriously corrupt political machine at “Tammany Hall”? As the Kentuckians saw it, the author of the *Christian Witness*’s report on Louisville religion “is manifestly a vagrant, desperately afflicted with the epidemic of nigger-on-the-brain, and has not sense or honesty enough to see and state things as they are here.” If Louisville lacked “clerical demagogues,” so be it. Abolitionism—and also the line that demarcated slave soil from free—proved too divisive an obstacle for any sense of common Christian unity.³⁸

By 1865, the point could not have been any clearer among Kentucky’s white evangelicals. Presbyterian Stuart Robinson’s March 1865 defense of slavery had argued that “the whole orthodox biblical learning of the Church expounds the Scriptures on this subject in one way—and that in the way it is understood in the Southern Church.” By contrast, abolitionism was a “perversion” of the

³⁸ Ibid.; “Politics and the Pulpit,” *Western Recorder*, 23 January 1864. This latter article was a reprint of the *Louisville Journal*’s response to the Chicago *Christian Times* article attacking Louisville religion.

Christian gospel, which ignored the plain teaching of the Bible. With emancipation all but secured at the date of publication, Robinson lambasted the “dogmas of the noisy, canting, infidel philanthropism whose prophets have seduced” the American public “to follow the pretended revelations of natural reason, ‘spiritual insight,’ and ‘universal love,’ instead of Jehovah’s prophets whom their fathers followed.” It was Robinson’s hope that, after reading his book, true believers would give abolitionist ideas a “sober second thought,” recognize how they contravened scriptural mandates, and understand the “relation of master and slave” as divinely sanctioned.³⁹

Especially in his own state, Robinson got his wish. Though slavery itself was dead by the end of 1865, old religious ideas about the righteousness of the institution continued to live on—and indeed, gained new life. Those ideas spanned the Civil War era and proved crucial to the forging of sectional identity in postbellum Kentucky, and not just among Robinson’s own Presbyterians. With the ending of neutrality, Kentucky Baptists overwhelmingly affirmed a southern vision for their faith—a vision ultimately manifest in 1877 with the establishment of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Kentucky Methodists, already belonging to the southern sectional branch Methodist Episcopal Church, South, followed a similar pattern. Both the Louisville and Kentucky Conferences retained vocal minorities of Unionists, but like white believers throughout Kentucky after the Civil War, Methodists in the

³⁹ Robinson, *Slavery*, quotes v, 11.

Commonwealth found effective ways to keep northern-sympathizers from positions of leadership and power. In so doing, Kentucky Methodism followed the path commonplace throughout white Kentucky religion, moving from border South to solid South in the wake of the sectional conflict.⁴⁰

White Kentuckians did not overwhelmingly embrace the Confederate cause during the Civil War. But after the war, as the next chapter explains, they embraced Confederate religion. Rooted in antipathy for abolitionism, African-American political and social equality, and politicized religion, white religious Kentuckians had, in significant ways, been preparing for the shift from border South to solid South long before the sectional crisis began. The end of religious neutrality would shape the landscape of white Kentucky's politics and culture for decades to come.

⁴⁰ See Roy Hunter Short, *Methodism in Kentucky* (Rutland, Vt.: Academy Books, 1979), 25–26.

CHAPTER SIX

SOUTHERN SECTIONALISM, RACIAL SEPARATISM
SLAVERY'S RELIGIOUS LEGACY AMONG KENTUCKY WHITES
1865–1875

Immediately after the war our brethren in the M. E. Church, North, announced our death; they published our Obituary; they preached our funeral in many of *their* pulpits . . . and many of their ministers have made it their especial business to declare that from and after the abolition of slavery the Southern Church had ceased to exist . . . [The northern church offered sectional reunion] Upon the very mild and gracious terms of forsaking our sins, and “accepting the condition of things,” such . . . as military rule, Freedman’s Bureaus, universal suffrage, negro supremacy, [and] the freedom and equality of negroes with ourselves, that is, to cease to be what we are.

–“The M. E. Church, North,”
Christian Observer, July 25, 1868¹

In July 1874 the *Central Methodist*, the weekly newspaper of the Kentucky Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, published a forceful article on antebellum slavery. Titled “Was Our Position on the Slavery Question Scriptural?” the article answered the question it posed forthrightly and in the affirmative. For the last several years, the *Central Methodist*, like Methodist papers throughout the country, had offered opinion on whether or not the northern and southern branches of national Methodism should engage in “fraternal relations.” The Methodist Episcopal Church, the United States’ largest religious group prior to the Civil War, fractured in 1844 along sectional lines after long-standing conflict over the slavery question. Now, in 1874, nearly a decade beyond the Civil War and Thirteenth Amendment—and thirty years

¹ “The M. E. Church, North,” *Christian Observer*, 25 July 1868. Emphasis in original.

beyond the denominational schism—some Methodists in both the North and South sought to put differences aside and reunite the denomination. The *Central Methodist*, however, could countenance no such reunion. “We don’t ask our Northern brethren to come to our opinion. We cannot go to theirs,” the essay contended. Speaking for their white Methodist readers in Bluegrass State, the paper’s editors argued, “If [northern Methodists] enter into fraternal relations with us, they must do so with the distinct understanding that we occupy the same ground on this question that we have always occupied.” The point was plain, and the decidedly unreconstructed *Central Methodist* wanted its readers to understand: “What we were in 1844 . . . we still are.”²

Just a few months prior, the paper blamed the split of 1844 on “the unscriptural and radical abolition policy” that some northern Methodists had pursued. The *Central Methodist*’s editors would not pretend that their former enemies were now their allies. Although they had admitted elsewhere that the idea of “free and full” sectional rapprochement was attractive, they refused to endorse it “at the expense of principle.” At the most basic level, that principle required the acknowledgment that the antebellum Southern Methodist defense of slavery was biblically correct. By attempting to circumvent the slavery question, supporters of fraternal relations ignored the key issues that led to

² M., “Was Our Position on the Slavery Question Scriptural?,” *Central Methodist*, 18 July 1874. On the antebellum Methodist schism over slavery and its implications, see C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985), 78–90; and Richard Carwardine, “Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War,” in Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow, eds., *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 185–93.

denominational fracture in the first place. Leaders of “modern abolitionism” had agitated the question and spoken out against the plain teaching of the Bible in favor of slavery. Thus, by insisting on slavery’s scriptural sanction nearly a decade after the death of legal slavery, the *Central Methodist* asserted that slavery remained a divinely approved institution, regardless of legal realities.³

Such an opinion had significant political implications, especially when it came to matters of race. The *Central Methodist*, like white religious newspapers throughout the South, was a vociferous critic of civil rights for African Americans. Indeed, in the months leading up to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, the *Central Methodist* openly opposed the bill. In its view, the same “abolition partisans of the Northern and N. western states” who had co-opted national Methodism in the 1840s also brought the agitation that led to the Civil War. Those crimes were part of a long trajectory that had, in the wake of Confederate defeat, allowed for “the elevation of the lowest and worst citizens to offices of trust and power, and to bear rule in the allotment of our privileges and civil rights.” Indeed, Northern Methodism was complicit in enabling the “worst features affecting society,” for they had sent hundreds of “carpet-bag preachers” south. These, along with other representatives of “Northern Methodism,” “[w]hile in the South . . . prate lustily, are the champions of many of the most oppressive political measures, [and] are fierce and bitter politicians.” One such example was Gilbert Haven (1821–80) who, in 1872, became the Northern

³ “Was Our Position on the Slavery Question Scriptural?”; S. C. Shaw, “Western VA. Conference. Historical Sketches. Extra,” *Central Methodist*, 25 April 1874; “Fraternity,” *Central Methodist*, 16 May 1874.

Methodist Church's bishop in Atlanta. Haven cooperated extensively with the Freedmen's Bureau and secured funding for what would become the historically black Clark College. After reprinting part of an article by Haven that championed the virtues of integrationism for the post-slavery order, the *Central Methodist's* editors did not bother to interpret Haven's writing. They instead asked a question their readers presumably already knew the answer to: "The two ends which this 'Southern Bishop' labors for, chiefly, are the social equality of the races and an 'organic union' with our Church. How do you like the programme?" For Kentucky's white Methodists, the implication was explicit: Their true religion was one to be practiced without northern white or African American influence or interference.⁴

The case of the state's white Methodists illuminates a larger trend that occurred among evangelical whites in Kentucky in the ten years following emancipation. A decade after the end of slavery—and, to be sure, long after that—white Protestants in the South continued to rely on aspects of proslavery ideology, most blatantly its white supremacism, to give shape and meaning to the world they inhabited. Where the state's conservative believers once found themselves arguing over God's will for American slavery as it existed, they had never fought over white supremacy or ideas about "slavery in the abstract." With slavery removed as the issue of contention, Kentucky found itself in lockstep with the rest of the white Christian South, institutionally securing solidarities of

⁴ S. C. Shaw, "Western VA. Conference. Historical Sketches. Number Three.," *Central Methodist*, 2 May 1874; "The Difference," *Central Methodist*, 5 January 1875; "How Do You Like It?," *Central Methodist*, 26 July 1873.

region and race. Kentucky whites not only enthusiastically endorsed racial segregation as a way of life for their churches but also for a broader range of social affairs and contexts. Additionally, they joined their coreligionists in the South by renouncing connections to northern religious bodies and rejecting any overtures for intersectional reunion.

The slavery question remained an animating ideological force for these developments. As years passed, however, and as Kentuckians moved further and further from slavery times, the proslavery argument subtly changed. Arguments against northerners' ostensibly politicized religion came to dominate the religious discourse of white conservatives. The slavery question was not dead and white believers in Kentucky did not make that suggestion. But in the religio-political context of the post-emancipation United States, justifications for a bygone slavery alone were not a strong enough basis for continued religious disunion. Yet when added to arguments against political religion and racial integrationism—the residue of abolitionist agitation in the minds of white Kentuckians—slavery continued to occupy a central place in white Kentucky's religious mind. Translated to the postwar, post-slavery context, Kentucky whites deployed their longstanding proslavery beliefs as a sanction for the “spirituality of the church” doctrine, which thus secured alignment with a southern sectional form of Christian belief.

Much of the debate between southern and northern believers in the Reconstruction era centered on the differences—or for some, the potential for unity—between the sectional branches of various Protestant denominations. The terms of that debate were construed to increase friction and division between South and North because, as Daniel Stowell has put it in his pathbreaking study

of religion and Reconstruction in the South, "The northern and southern wings of the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches . . . each insisted that their interpretation of the Civil War"—and, by implication, slavery—"was correct."⁵ White religious Kentuckians had remained with the Union during the Civil War, but they overwhelmingly questioned the war's emancipationist consequence. Furthermore, as evangelicals committed to traditionally southern forms of biblical interpretation, which highlighted the Christian mandate for slaveholding, whites in postbellum Kentucky found little affinity with northern belief. Their postwar trajectory aligned more and more closely with that of the former Confederacy.

In 1867 the *Christian Observer*, a Southern Methodist newspaper published in Catlettsburg, Kentucky—located at the confluence of the Ohio and Big Sandy rivers, the dividing line between Kentucky and West Virginia—and the forerunner to the *Central Methodist*, condemned the idea of "Methodist Re-Union" because the northern church required extra-biblical standards of intersectional denominational fellowship: "loyalty to the general Government" and "opposition to slavery." Such a basis for church union flew in the face of the Holy Writ's revealed truth. "Christ said, My kingdom is not of this world" and "also the Savior said to his disciples, ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world." Yet, according to the *Observer*, northern Methodist "Bishops make the Church not only of the world, but require its members to conform to the world, even to the most dangerous feature that the world

⁵ Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863–1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 162–63.

presents." Sectional rapproachment between Methodists, the paper contended, would only happen "when we are willing to adopt their *political creed and receive the mark of the beast*." The northern church, in the words of these Kentucky Methodists, had made an illicit deal with the devil for their church's soul. It was a deal the white South wanted no part of.⁶

As far as these Methodists were concerned, northerners had never really understood the South's religious position. As S. C. Shaw of Parkersburg, West Virginia, wrote in 1867, "[I]t was not slavery or abolitionism that caused the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church as it existed in 1844, but rather, it was disregard of a plighted faith on the part of the North."⁷ Earlier in 1867, the *Christian Observer* editorialized that "Northern Methodist preachers in particular" insist on "the idea that in 1844 the M. E. Church was divided . . . because of the question of slavery." But that was simply not true. Rather, "The separation was caused by the fact that the majority" of northern Methodists "claimed the right to interfere with the acts and doings of civil government on matters of a political character." Antislavery Yankees "did then interfere, and inflict disabilities upon a Bishop"—James O. Andrew of Georgia, the slaveholder whose case precipitated the antebellum Methodist Episcopal Church split—"and other ministers of the Church, not for *moral* wrongs or moral delinquencies, but for doing that which the laws of the State in which they lived allowed them to do in matters purely political." Northern adherents had long since abandoned any

⁶ "Methodist Re-Union," *Christian Observer*, 20 August 1867.

⁷ S. C. Shaw, "Fragments. Number Seven.," *Christian Observer*, 20 August 1867.

respect for the church's spiritual, nonpolitical character, and the Yankee "disposition as a Church to intermeddle in political affairs" had sickeningly "been growing more and more" in recent years.⁸

Kentucky's white Methodists, in attacking the North's ostensibly politicized religion, claimed their own contention had little to do with the slavery question itself. It is difficult to imagine, however, the course of the postbellum debate without reference to slavery. Indeed, it was the legacy of the slavery debates that gave rise to similar intersectional fights in the Bluegrass State's other denominations. In January 1866 Louisville's *Free Christian Commonwealth*—the Presbyterian newspaper that succeeded Stuart Robinson's *True Presbyterian* as the primary arbiter of Southern Presbyterianism in Kentucky—published an exceedingly favorable report on an 1865 declaration by the Southern Presbyterian Church on the Civil War and slavery. The document so succinctly summarized the white Christian South's view of the stakes of the old religion-and-slavery dispute for the post slavery order that it merits lengthy quotation:

While the existence of slavery may, in its civil aspects, be regarded as a settled question, an issue now gone . . . the lawfulness of the relation as a question of social morality, and of Scriptural truth, has lost nothing of its importance. When we solemnly declare to you brethren, that the [abolition] dogma which asserts the inherent sinfulness of this relation, is unscriptural and fanatical; that it is condemned not only by the word of

⁸ "What was and is the Difference," *Christian Observer*, 7 July 1867.

God, but by the voice of the Church in all ages; that it is one of the most pernicious heresies of modern times; that its countenance by any Church is a just cause of separation from it, (1 Tim. 6:1–5.) we have surely said enough to warn you away from this insidious error, as from a fatal shore.⁹

That purposive language preceded the 1867 publication of the best-known defense of slavery after the Civil War, authored by the cantankerous Virginia Presbyterian Robert L. Dabney—former chaplain to the highly memorialized Confederate General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson. Dabney opened his argument with a satirical question and answer: “Is not the slavery question dead? . . . Would God it were dead!” For Dabney, the “slavery question” posed a moral dilemma only for those who resided outside the realm of southern religious orthodoxy. And he intended to show that abolitionists were such a people: “in the Church, abolitionism lives, and is more rampant and mischievous than ever, as infidelity.”¹⁰

Such arguments resonated quite broadly in Kentucky. As religiously conservative whites in the Commonwealth had affirmed prior to 1865, the mixing of politics and religion was a grave religious error. The spiritual nature of the church, as expounded upon in previous chapters, was a rudimentary tenet of their faith. But there was no denying the fact that slavery proved the incendiary catalyst for a postbellum sectional conflagration among believers.

⁹ “The Platform of the Southern Church,” *Free Christian Commonwealth*, 25 January 1866.

¹⁰ Robert L. Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia, and Through Her, of the South* (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1867), 6.

Just after Confederate surrender, in the summer of 1865, Kentucky Baptists found themselves embroiled in a controversy that would highlight their growing distance from northern believers. In May 1865 the northern American Baptist Home Mission Society met in St. Louis, Missouri. A substantial part of the meeting contained speeches suggesting how northern Baptists, like the Methodists before them, might contribute to the South's religious reconstruction. As one speaker put it, thanks to emancipation and Union military victory, "Slavery has received its death-blow." Now northern Baptists found themselves faced with the task of providing "missionary care" for freedpeople. And, as slave soil, the mandate clearly applied to Kentucky. James M. Pendleton, the Kentucky native who rose to prominence in the antebellum era before leaving the South in the early 1860s due to his gradual emancipationist views and pro-Unionism, made a special case for his home state. He argued that northern Baptists had avoided the Bluegrass State "[b]efore the war" because "it was under the general jurisdiction of the Southern Baptist Convention." However, since that denomination's "formation was owing to the existence of an *institution* which we may pronounce as abolished," there was little hope that the "Southern Baptist Convention" might "be revived" in Kentucky or anywhere else. Northern Baptists could thus reasonably treat former slave soil as fertile ground for missionary endeavor. Following Pendleton's speech, the Home Mission Society passed a resolution to that end.¹¹

Prior to Pendleton's address, D. W. Phillips, a New Englander who had been working as a Baptist missionary in East Tennessee, expressed his hope that

¹¹ "St. Louis Anniversaries," *Western Recorder*, 10 June 1865.

the Home Mission Society would be able to gain “the cooperation of the Baptists among whom they labor” and, specifically in the case of Kentucky, draw its missionaries from within the state. Of course, Phillips admitted, such local collaborators would have to prove their mettle as “suitable men.” For Phillips that term meant Baptists “of unquestionable loyalty to the Government of the United States, men who approve of the policy of the Government in slavery.” Northern Baptists would not ally themselves with “pro-slavery ministers” of any kind, nor with those “whose hearts throbbed for four sad years in favor of the rebellion of the South.” To be sure, Phillips acknowledged his “fear” that such candidates would be hard to find in the Commonwealth, but he believed “many loyal preachers” existed “in Kentucky in the Baptist denomination” from which to cultivate a northern-aligned missionary base.¹²

In point of fact, Phillips’s suspicion that most white Kentucky Baptists would treat northern overtures confrontationally proved exceedingly perceptive. As chapter five demonstrated, Kentucky’s evangelical whites had signaled their disdain in 1863 and 1864, when northern Methodists began religious reconstruction efforts in Louisiana and other Deep South states. Now in 1865, as Kentucky itself became a focus of northern missionary endeavor, Bluegrass Baptists were predictably appalled. The *Western Recorder*, which published the bulk of Pendleton’s and Phillips’s Home Mission Society speeches, printed a reactionary riposte from Henry McDonald. At the time, McDonald was serving as pastor of Waco Baptist Church in Madison County, Kentucky, and had

¹² Ibid.

developed a reputation as one of white Kentucky's most "popular preachers." In his response to the meeting of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the Kentuckian spared no polemical verbiage. McDonald had "watched" the churches of "the North, with 'continual sorrow in my heart' at the abundant evidence of terrible apostasy from the truth as it is in Jesus Christ." Long before the Civil War, northern "altars of the faith [had been] polluted by the blasphemous debaucheries of the Protestant carnivals." Now in the immediate aftermath of the war, "the fanaticism of a few clerical foplings, led on by some Mucklewrath, whose zeal is set on fire by his consuming patriotism," completely permeated Yankee pulpits. Northern churches had devolved into little more than fora for "[t]he most difficult questions of national policy, demanding rarest statesmanship." The clearly extrareligious matters of "the negro subject," "Confiscation of rebel property, and the just punishment of the rebels" received full-throated discussion. And Yankee believers betrayed their true opinions with constant cries of, "Negro suffrage, negro bravery, negro superiority." As McDonald saw it, northern Christians could make no claim to the title because, rather than a pure faith, "They have determined to know nothing among the people but the negro and him crucified."¹³

According to McDonald, the proposals heard by the American Baptist Home Mission Society in St. Louis blatantly demonstrated how far "the mighty"

¹³ Henry McDonald, "The Session of the Home Mission Society at St. Louis," *Western Recorder*, 22 July 1865. For biographical information on McDonald, see J. H. Spencer, *A History of Kentucky Baptists: From 1769 to 1885*, vol. 2 (Cincinnati: J. R. Baumes, 1885), 211; and George Braxton Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 5th ser., 1902–1914 (Lynchburg, Va.: J. P. Bell, 1915), 99–102.

northern church had “fallen” from “the cherished faith of an ‘unsecularized Church.’” McDonald contended that he could not understand “[w]hy should it be requisite in a missionary to endorse the policy of the government *on slavery*” when missionaries did not have to signal agreement with other federal “policy” on matters such as “finances, agriculture, commerce, tariff, &c.” Northern Baptists, the Kentuckian argued, elevated “*fealty* to a *party* above *fealty* to God.” In so doing, they had proposed a “whole scheme” that was “destructive of Baptist principles, [and] subversive of the law of Christ.” To condone religious policy like that suggested by D. W. Phillips would fundamentally change church membership standards. Rather than the biblical test of church membership called for by the New Testament book of 1 Peter, “give a reason for the hope that is in you”—in other words, faith in Christ alone—prospective Baptists would be asked, “do you approve the policy of the government?” If the northern American Baptist Home Mission Society’s “abolition evangelists” got their way, such a blatantly political “law of membership in the Churches” would receive direct sanction. Moreover, in the choosing of missionaries, the implication of the northern platform was plain: a potential missionary “must be a radical abolitionist. It is not enough that he is a good man, sound in faith, apt to teach, approved by his Church.” Kentuckians wanted no part of such a program. In a sentence, McDonald summarized the opinion of most of his state’s fellow white believers: “Kentucky Baptists have their own plans and can do their own work.”¹⁴

¹⁴ McDonald, “Session of the Home Mission Society.” The biblical reference is 1 Peter 3.15.

For his part, the native Kentuckian James M. Pendleton attempted to prevent such a critique of northern Baptist efforts. Prior to McDonald's letter, Pendleton wrote to the *Western Recorder's* editors to contend that the paper published a flawed copy of his Home Mission Society address, one filled with "inaccuracies" and seemingly "mixed up in a sort of inextricable confusion with the [more hostilely political and abolition-minded] speech of Mr. Phillips." Furthermore, to show his distance from other northern Baptists, Pendleton assured his Kentucky readers that "two or three of Mr. P[hillips]'s statements did the South such injustice that I protested against them." In Pendleton's view, Phillips drew his views on the South's religiosity from "exaggerated accounts." Indeed, the Kentucky native maintained that he "was the only man who publicly complained" of such a false portrait of the South. In his *Western Recorder* correspondence, Pendleton wrote that he did not "wish my old friends [in Kentucky]—the friends of my youth—to be under the erroneous impressions in regard to me." This son of the Bluegrass State did not mind being "held responsible only for what I believe," but he knew the South well and did not wish to be reflexively lumped in with more radicalized religious practitioners. As a visible proponent for gradual emancipation in the antebellum era and a theological conservative, there is no compelling reason to doubt Pendleton's argument. He probably did indeed hope to remain on cordial terms with Kentucky's Baptists. To be sure, he likely did remain—as he claimed in 1891 at the end of his life—uneasy with immediate abolition, as well as with stereotypical denunciations of the white South.¹⁵

¹⁵ J. M. Pendleton, "Elder J. M. Pendleton," *Western Recorder*, 24 June 1865; James

Nevertheless, even if Pendleton denied it himself, the fact that he appeared closely linked with an abolition-oriented faith proved enough to undermine much of his influence in Kentucky. As a direct target of much of Henry McDonald's venom, little distinction appeared between James M. Pendleton—currently in an Ohio pastorate and sympathetic to the aims of the northern American Baptist Home Mission Society's labors to religiously reconstruct Kentucky—and more radicalized northerners. It was an intellectual move that Pendleton himself was quite familiar with. As chapter one of this dissertation elucidated, Pendleton painted antislavery immediatists with a similarly broad stroke in the 1840s, making little religious distinction between evangelicals and more theologically speculative abolitionists. Now, in the wake the Civil War and emancipation, Pendleton found himself on the receiving end of that sort of rigid religio-political typecasting. As McDonald interpreted the matter, "I do not know—however highly esteemed Elder J. M. Pendleton may be—that he was entitled to represent the Baptists of Kentucky." In the wake of emancipation, the religious bonds of sectional solidarity against abolitionism proved too strong for white Kentuckians to even attempt to break.¹⁶

In registering his antipathy for notions of African American civil rights, the North's ostensibly politicized religion, and the heretical legacy of abolitionist activism, Henry McDonald highlighted the main themes that persisted throughout white Kentucky into the 1870s and gave shape to the state's religious

M. Pendleton, *Reminiscences of a Long Life* (Louisville: Press Baptist Book Concern, 1891), 112–113.

¹⁶ Henry McDonald, "The Session of the Home Mission Society at St. Louis," *Western Recorder*, 22 July 1865.

sense of unity with the former Confederacy. The 1865 Baptist debate over missionaries, however, was somewhat sublimated compared to the fights that occurred on a national denominational level among Methodists and Presbyterians. As had been the case in the 1845 creation of the Southern Baptist Convention, due to the Baptist commitment to congregational polity and the doctrine of “democratic exclusiveness”—which vested ecclesiastical authority in local churches and, contrasted with other Protestant denominations, downplayed the significance of broad Christian unity—nineteenth-century Baptists tended to deal with matters of political religion and slavery on a local, congregational level.¹⁷ Kentucky Baptists, in other words, resolutely agreed with other white evangelicals in their state about the nature of slavery, abolition, and African American civil rights, but because the local congregation was the highest ruling body for matters of Baptist faith and practice, their ecclesiology allowed for a discourse that often avoided large-scale denominational confrontation.

Kentucky’s Presbyterians, by contrast, fought tooth-and-nail for many years over who would control their denomination’s religious future in the state. Because of the caustic and protracted nature of their national intersectional fights, the Presbyterians provide perhaps the clearest and most illustrative example of white religious Kentucky’s postwar rejection of northern religiosity. As with the Baptists, 1865 proved particularly fractious. As previous chapters have detailed, every year since the start of the war, the Presbyterian Church

¹⁷ On Baptist “democratic exclusivism,” see Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 88–90.

U.S.A.'s General Assembly—the denomination's overarching ruling body—made nationalistic, pro-Union proclamations that border state Presbyterians found highly disconcerting. In 1865, however, the Assembly went too far for border state taste. Meeting less than a month after Confederate surrender, in May 1865, the General Assembly passed two major resolutions on the nation and slavery. Noting that there were some ministers who had sided with the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America during the war who might seek to reapply for ordination in the northern Presbyterian Church, the General Assembly required two tests. First, ministers who had in “any way, directly or indirectly” been involved in “aiding or countenancing the rebellion and the war” were required to “confess and forsake” that action as sin. Second, ministers had to disavow the idea that “the system of negro slavery in the South is a Divine institution, and that it is ‘the peculiar mission of the Southern Church to conserve the institution of slavery as there maintained.’” Any southern minister who refused to repent of these errors would not be allowed to preach in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.¹⁸

Those proclamations, while couched in language of sectional reconciliation, only served to intensify the schism between northern and southern Presbyterians. Southerners, including many in the Border States, in the description of Daniel Stowell, perceived these proclamations not as an olive branch of Christian goodwill but instead a Yankee rod of chastisement designed

¹⁸ Joseph M. Wilson, *Presbyterian Historical Almanac and Annual Remembrancer for the Church, for 1866* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1866), 45.

to humiliate a conquered enemy.¹⁹ For adherents in Kentucky, the actions of the 1865 General Assembly proved the beginning of the end of their fellowship with the northern branch of the denomination. While many religious Kentuckians had not ever willingly taken arms against the United States, the idea that slavery was an inherently sinful institution proved too difficult to accept. Moreover, since the Emancipation Proclamation did not apply to Kentucky, slavery remained legal in the state at that time. To Kentuckians, the General Assembly was speaking to political affairs it had no business addressing.

In anticipation of such a pro-Union, pro-abolition ruling in the northern General Assembly, Kentucky's southern-sympathizing Presbyterian press marshaled much of the vitriol at its disposal to decry "political preaching." A late April 1865 article in the *Free Christian Commonwealth* reviewed the course of northern commingling of religion and politics in the Civil War. Relying on tropes well familiar to white evangelicals in the South, the essay argued, "Antislavery fanaticism is malignant and ferocious." Abolitionists had forced the Civil War because they "denounced the Federal Constitution as a 'covenant with hell and an agreement with death' because it recognized and protected slave property." There was indeed more. "A preacher, closing a sermon on the war, and speaking of the Secessionists, exclaimed, 'Kill the devils! kill the devils!'" Yet another Yankee abolitionist "preacher declared," in the *Free Christian Commonwealth's* telling, "The devil will never have his rights until he has the exquisite pleasure of roasting the leaders [of the rebellion] 'in hell!'" Stated succinctly, "The Abolition

¹⁹ For an explication of broader northern religious attitudes toward the defeated South, see Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 49–64.

clergy hate Slavery, hate slave-holders, and hate and abuse all men who oppose their mad and destructive schemes." Throughout the antebellum era, Kentucky Presbyterians never doubted the resolve of abolitionists who hoped to spoil their true religion. The time for action against such a debased faith had come.²⁰

In response to the actions of the 1865 General Assembly, the Presbytery of Louisville produced a monumental document. Though former Ohio resident Samuel R. Wilson, by that date pastor of Louisville's First Presbyterian Church, principally authored the missive, it is widely assumed that Stuart Robinson collaborated with Wilson. While there is no direct evidence to substantiate this claim, Robinson was an initial signatory, and, as historian Preston Graham has argued, his influence on the document is unmistakable.²¹ Titled *Declaration and Testimony Against the Erroneous and Heretical Doctrines and Practices . . . Propagated in the Presbyterian Church, in the United States, During the Last Five Years*, the document represented a fundamental rejection of the political theology of northern Presbyterianism. It denounced fourteen "errors" in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., including the beliefs that the "Courts of the Church" had "the right to decide questions of State Policy"; that the church owed allegiance to any "human Rulers or Governments"; and that the church and state were in "alliance" toward a

²⁰ "The Clergy and Politics," *Free Christian Commonwealth*, 20 April 1865. Brackets in original.

²¹ See Preston D. Graham Jr., *A Kingdom Not of this World: Stuart Robinson's Struggle to Distinguish the Sacred from the Secular During the Civil War* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2002), 150–51.

common goal. Also, the *Declaration and Testimony* denounced the General Assembly's rulings "on the subject of slavery and emancipation."²²

Not only did the church disregard the commonly held white opinion "that immediate, indiscriminate emancipation of the negro slaves amongst us would be unjust and injurious to both master and slave," but it had also "laid down a new doctrine" on slavery, "unknown to the apostolic and primitive church; a doctrine which has its origin in infidelity and fanaticism." Slavery, "an institution which has always existed in the Church uncondemned, and which was recognized by Christ and his apostles, is pronounced an 'evil and guilt,' condemned as 'SIN' and affirmed to be the 'root of rebellion, war, and bloodshed, and the long list of horrors which follow in their train.'" By perpetuating such ideas, the "General Assembly," the *Declaration* argued, "has become the support[er] of heresy, the abettor of injustice and despotism, the fomentor of discord." The document ended with a somber word: the signers of the *Declaration* would no longer recognize any religious authority for matters of church polity "other than the written Word of God," and, until the course was corrected, they would withhold all financial contributions from denominational boards.²³

Just a month after the Louisville Presbytery endorsed the *Declaration and Testimony*, the Synod of Kentucky—which represented all the state's smaller presbyteries—met. There, Robert J. Breckinridge, Stuart Robinson's longtime

²² *Declaration and Testimony Against the Erroneous and Heretical Doctrines and Practices Which Have Obtained and Been Propagated in the Presbyterian Church, in the United States, During the Last Five Years*, 2nd ed. (n.p., 1865), quotes 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 21, 22, 24. Emphasis in original.

²³ Ibid.

adversary, called for a flat condemnation of the document's signers. The treatise advocated "OPEN REBELLION AGAINST THE CHURCH, AND OPEN CONTEMPT AND DEFIANCE OF OUR SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY." The *Declaration and Testimony*, as such, made "EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM UNQUALIFIED, UNFIT, AND INCOMPETENT TO SIT AND ACT AS A MEMBER OF THIS OR ANY OTHER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH." Samuel R. Wilson, the chief author of the *Declaration and Testimony*, offered a spirited and lengthy response to Breckinridge, reasserting the main claims of the document.²⁴ As an aged and distinguished theologian with a long record of service to the denomination, Breckinridge certainly maintained a position of influence in the church's General Assembly, but the unconditional Unionist was losing authority in his home state. After much debate, the Synod of Kentucky ruled against Breckinridge, though a noted minority joined him in denouncing the *Declaration and Testimony*.²⁵

Breckinridge's opinion did speak, however, to the dominant view in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. When the General Assembly reconvened the following May, Stuart Robinson traveled to the meeting along with Samuel R. Wilson, hoping to take their seats as elected representatives of the Louisville Presbytery. The General Assembly came down hard on the signers of the *Declaration and Testimony*. Robert L. Stanton, the viscerally Unionist Danville Theological Seminary professor who had condemned religious neutrality in

²⁴ Samuel R. Wilson, *Reply to the Attack of Rev. R. J. Breckinridge, D.D., L.L.D., Upon the Louisville Presbytery, and Defence of the "Declaration and Testimony," made in the Synod of Kentucky, October 16, A. D., 1865* (Louisville: Hanna & Duncan, 1865), quote 4. Emphasis in original.

²⁵ Louis B. Weeks, *Kentucky Presbyterians* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 90–91.

1864—and also a close friend of Breckinridge—was elected moderator and made it his mission to crush the dissident Presbyterians. Robinson, Wilson, and other signers of the *Declaration and Testimony* were denied seats. Then the General Assembly passed a motion that would dissolve any presbytery or synod that kept any *Declaration and Testimony* signer on its membership rolls.²⁶

The Louisville Presbytery responded by renouncing the General Assembly and declared independence. In the Synod of Kentucky, while several leaders remained loyal to the national church, the vast majority moved to create an “Independent Synod.” In 1867 the northern Presbyterian General Assembly essentially confirmed what had already taken place and dissolved the Synod of Kentucky, creating a new one to facilitate the activity of loyal Presbyterians in the state. At the same time, Stuart Robinson began pressing the Independent Synod to look to the Southern Presbyterian Church. After debate in 1867 and 1868, individual presbyteries under the Independent Synod opted to send representatives to the 1869 General Assembly of the southern church. At the meeting Stuart Robinson was elected moderator and Kentucky Presbyterians voted overwhelmingly to join a denomination founded in 1861 as the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, which rested much of its postbellum identity in an embrace of southern sectionalism.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., 91–92.

²⁷ Ibid., 98–99. For a more extensive analysis of the move to the Southern Presbyterian Church, see Harold M. Parker Jr., “The Synod of Kentucky: From Old School Assembly to the Southern Church,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 41 (March 1963), 14–36.

This denominational dispute carried into the 1870s, where it was most visibly manifest in a fight for institutional control over Centre College and Danville Theological Seminary, Kentucky’s flagship institutions of the

The Kentucky Presbyterian realignment with the southern branch of the denomination had much to do with a theological understanding of the church's place in the civil society as a "nonsecular" institution, but that view was also closely connected to white supremacy. As a *Free Christian Commonwealth* essay contended in 1865, abolitionists intended to destroy the human race as it presently existed by forcing race mixing through interracial sex. The paper's stereotypical abolitionist did not trust the Christian God, who had divinely ordered the races: rather the radical antislavery activist "exults, he blesses himself, and congratulates posterity, in view of the redeeming and elevating

Presbyterian Church U.S.A. The state's Southern Presbyterian majority tried assiduously to wrest control of the schools from the northern church but, after many protracted legal battles, realized by 1872 that Centre was "lost to this Church." They would have to create their own distinctively southern institution of higher learning. The new college's name only slightly distinguished it from the old: in 1874, an "Alumni Association" of pro-southern Presbyterians founded "Central University" in Richmond. The members of the alumni association included longtime leading Kentucky Presbyterians Stuart Robinson and Robert L. Breck, as well as Robinson's son-in-law Bennett H. Young (1843–1919), a prominent Louisville attorney and a former Confederate rider in John Hunt Morgan's highly memorialized cavalry raiders, who went on to serve as commander-in-chief of the United Confederate Veterans in 1913. Through his various influential volumes on Kentucky's history, Young helped to shape white Kentucky's understanding of its mythological Confederate past. See Young, *History and Texts of the Three Constitutions of Kentucky* (Louisville: Courier-Journal, 1890); and Young, *Confederate Wizards of the Saddle: Being Reminiscences and Observations of one who Rode with Morgan* (1914; Nashville: J.S. Sanders, 1999). *Memorial of the Education Convention [Held at Lexington, Ky., May 7th and 8th, 1872.] To the Synod of Kentucky*, Central University Collection, Financial Series, Donation and Subscription lists 1874–1900 folder, RG 127, 84A2, Box 2, Eastern Kentucky University Library, Special Collections and Archives, Richmond, Ky.; Alumni Association Minutes, 29 April 1873, Central University Collection, Alumni Association Series, Minutes of Meetings April 29, 1873–June 19, 1901 folder, RG 127, 84A2, Box 1, Eastern Kentucky University Library, Special Collections and Archives. On the founding of Central University, see William E. Ellis, *A History of Eastern Kentucky University: A School of Opportunity* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 1–19.

power of 'miscegenation!'" In the view of the article's Presbyterian author, the abolitionist "would mingle his blood with the blood of the African. He would take and wear somewhat of the dark hues of the African." The "Fanatic" abolitionist "would degrade and dishonor the whole white race to effect his purpose. Nay, he would degrade and dishonor himself" by "sink[ing] himself to the lowest depths of humanity, that the negro may seem to be exalted." There was nothing new about these white supremacist ideas, but they gained new religious traction in the context of America's emerging post-slavery society.²⁸

In the years to come, such opinions would closely align with those held by white religious conservatives further South. In an 1870 essay justifying the course of the antebellum white South and the Confederate cause, South Carolina Presbyterian Arnold W. Miller (d. 1891/1892) lashed out at the Fourteenth Amendment (1869). To Miller, the words of the South's most highly regarded antebellum politician, John C. Calhoun (1789–1850), had come true in the wake of emancipation: the South had experienced "degradation greater than has yet fallen the lot of a free and enlightened people." The amendment, after three years of arduous debate and controversy in Congress, had passed only months before and in spite of unanimous Democratic opposition. It did not extend the vote to freedpeople—that would come in 1870 with the Fifteenth Amendment—but did include African Americans as U.S. citizens. It also represented a congressional attack on the infamous Black Codes, southern laws passed in the wake of the Thirteenth Amendment's slavery ban that greatly hampered freedpeople's legal

²⁸ "The Clergy and Politics," *Free Christian Commonwealth*, 20 April 1865.

rights, civil liberties, and geographical mobility (usually these laws sanctioned labor contracts and antivagrancy statutes that bound former slaves to white-owned farms recovering from the devastation of the war). Miller, quoting Calhoun, argued that the result of such political action meant southern whites were “fleeing the homes of our ancestors and . . . abandoning our country to our former slaves.” The South was “to become the permanent abode of disorder, anarchy, poverty, misery, and wretchedness.” Indeed, Kentucky’s *Free Christian Commonwealth* had made a similar case against African American civil rights—a “New Negrophile Erastian Crusade” in the Presbyterian paper’s terminology—a few years earlier. Thus the idea of “making an inferior race predominant over a superior one”—or, giving African Americans citizenship rights and political power—in Miller’s quote of a northern conservative, was abhorrent.²⁹

Not surprisingly, southern African Americans interpreted the end of the war differently. For freedpeople, as for whites, God was in the conflict and Providence had moved decisively. Former slaves shared with Confederates and Yankees the belief that they were a chosen people. However, unlike a conquering or vanquished chosen race, freedpeople read themselves into the Exodus narrative, where God had liberated his chosen people from Egyptian slavery. The Christian religion provided the once enslaved populace with a means of emphasizing their value as persons, since God loved all people equally. Although before the war blacks and whites had worshipped together in biracial

²⁹ Andrew W. Miller, “Southern Views and Principles Not ‘Extinguished’ by the War,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 21 (January 1870), 85; “Symptoms of a New Negrophile Erastian Crusade,” *Free Christian Commonwealth*, 19 October 1865.

churches—indeed, the church often provided slaves their only outlet for public expression—the end of the war created an opportunity to form racially autonomous denominations, which African Americans seized immediately. Daniel Stowell has mapped out five major tenets of postbellum African American religion: the belief that former masters had no claim over their religious life; the need for churches outside white influence; the need for black preachers; the acceptance of northern white economic support and education, so long as it did not come with strictures that dictated the shape of black religious life; and the need for schools and colleges to educate the newly freed African American populace. The implementation of these aims led to the creation of many educational institutions, the abrupt withdrawal of southern blacks from white denominations, and the establishment of separate African American denominations (or of links to black denominations already existing in the North). Such moves led southern African Americans to “cross Jordan” into their own religious “promised land,” but as was the case for biblical Hebrews, more challenges awaited them on the other side.³⁰

Freedpeople’s open assertions of autonomy deeply disturbed the South’s evangelical whites. In the proslavery mind, blacks were docile, infantile creatures, certainly not ready for the freedom provided by a federal government under the spell of heterodox abolitionists. In 1868 John Bailey Adger (1810–99), a South Carolina southern Presbyterian clergyman, joined with Presbyterian George James Atkinson Coulson of Maryland to claim that emancipation brought

³⁰ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 80–99.

an important religious dilemma: how could devout southern whites continue to follow God's command and provide religious education for African Americans who, no doubt, were unable to produce mature religious reflection for themselves? As former slaves, "suddenly freed, suddenly invested with new and extraordinary privileges, and suddenly inspired with vague apprehensions of their own importance, with indefinite expectations of ease and affluence to be conferred upon them by governmental authority—are thrust upon the hearts and consciences of a Christian nation, the question assumes an aspect both perplexing and threatening." If southern whites forswore their prior duties as masters—to provide physical and spiritual care for their racial dependents—"[a] whole race" might "perish in the midst of us" and thereby bring "a lasting curse on the American name." The situation was dire, Adger and Coulson exclaimed: "The slave—may God pity him! Has no friend except his former master." But the former slaveholding class "has been legislated into a condition in which [the slaveholder] is utterly powerless to aid the servant born in his house, or even retard his doom."³¹

Adger and Coulson, like other proslavery southerners, believed former slaves incapable of governing themselves religiously because, as people with dark skin, African Americans could never acquire the same intellectual acumen as whites. Adger and Coulson, like proslavery divines in the antebellum era, did affirm the common ancestry of all humanity and did decry the scientific racism of polygenesis theory—"the pitiful work of [polygenetecists Josiah] Nott and

³¹ John Bailey Adger and G. J. A. Coulson, "The Future of the Freedmen," *Southern Presbyterian Review* 19 (April 1868): 281–83, 292.

[George] Gliddon"—because the Gospel message was given for all. But the "grave discussion of the relative capacities" of the races was a short-circuited one. The main point was clear to Adger and Coulson: "the elevation of the black people to a position of political and social equality with the whites, is simply an impossibility." The difference between the races was so plain, the Presbyterians argued, that obviously "God has so constituted the two races as to make their equality *forever* impossible." Every true believer knew that it was "[v]ain" to attempt "to resist the decrees of God," a fact that explained why "It is not possible to take an infant from the banks of the Niger, and educate him up to the intellectual status of Newton, because God hath made them to differ." If that image did not resonate with their readers, Adger and Coulson pressed harder to show just how far the gap between black inferiority and white superiority really was: "[I]f it were possible for the cultivated and Christianized races of the world to unite and devote all their energies to the elevation of the African race, giving each individual of this multitudinous family a separate and competent preceptor, the result of their labors would not be an intellectual equality, after long years of incessant application." For that reason, Adger and Coulson argued, blacks lived under the cruel delusion of so-called freedom. The former slaves had to now provide for their own physical and spiritual wellbeing, which freedpeople simply could not do without the help of good, Christian, paternalist masters.³²

³² Ibid., 269–70, 276, 279, 280. Emphasis in original. In denouncing Nott and Gliddon, Adger and Coulson were writing against their work in the well-known multi-author volume, *Types of Mankind: Or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and upon their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Co., 1854).

Kentucky's religious whites overwhelmingly agreed with this southern white evangelical portrait of African American limitations. An early 1868 editorial in the Methodist *Christian Observer* contended that African Americans had been so thoroughly disrupted by emancipation that the population would become "extinct" in short order.³³ That speculative article had been published to promote provocative conjecture among the paper's readers about the thoroughly debilitating nature of emancipation for African American life. But just a few months later, the Methodist paper went a step further and printed a report on the state of religious affairs in Catlettsburg, Kentucky, that showed even more unmistakably the white bias against the possibility of black self-determination. The article recorded the existence of "an African Church in town, with a pastor of their own color, and a new house of worship." In the estimation of the *Observer's* white author, the black church was "doing, we suppose, as well as they can," but were "surrounded" by insurmountable "disabilities imposed upon them by the bondage of freedom."³⁴

In the white religious mind of the Bluegrass State, along with the South in general, African Americans held only a limited capacity to assert independent religious agency. When such assertions occurred, they were easier for whites to understand by crediting the influence of once-abolitionists, "the influence of unscrupulous white emissaries" from the North. For its part, the *Free Christian Commonwealth* reflected much white opinion on the matter in October 1867,

³³ "The Freedmen," *Christian Observer*, 18 February 1868.

³⁴ "Catlettsburg," *Christian Observer*, 18 April 1868.

decrying "the persistent efforts of unprincipled political schemers to get the negro separated from the influence of their old masters."³⁵ Indeed, in Kentucky, white evangelicals seemed quite perplexed by the idea of independent African American religious agency. As early as November 1864, the South Benson Baptist Church of Franklin County wrote, "As a church we lament that out Colored Brethren do not meet with us as they did in days past." The white church hoped to "obviate the difficulty in the way" and saw it "necessary to take some steps to bring back these our brethren to their place in the church of God." By the next year, however, South Benson's white members realized that those "who for some unknown cause have for some time absented themselves" were unlikely to return to fellowship. And, in July 1865, presumably after a number of overtures, the white Baptists decided to remove from their membership roles those who had become blatant in their "non attendance + indifference towards the church." Similarly, the Forks of Otter Creek Baptist Church in Hardin County, recorded in November 1866 that "all the colored members of the church" had "gawn off without makeing application for letters of dismissal," following proper ecclesiastical standards, and were thus "excluded" from membership.³⁶

These more localized African American withdrawals from white congregations preceded a wider withdrawal of southern African Americans from

³⁵ "Alarm of Christian Men in the South concerning the Religious prospects of the Negro," *Free Christian Commonwealth*, 10 October 1867.

³⁶ South Benson Baptist Church Records, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Ky., October, November, 1864; June, July 1865; Transcript, Forks of Otter Creek Baptist Church, Forks of Otter Creek Cemetery Association, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Ky., 18 November 1866, p. 97. For another account of "colored members [who] absented themselves from the church", see Buck Run Baptist Church Records, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Ky., August 1865.

white denominations. The December 1870 creation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Jackson, Tennessee, was a watershed moment in what historians have come to know as the mass "African-American exodus" of southern blacks from white denominations following emancipation. Given the blessing of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for the creation of a separate black denomination, as historian Daniel Stowell has explained, "the formation of the CME church marked the end of most white southern involvement in the religious lives of black Methodists."³⁷ Yet that signal event gave southern white Methodists yet another chance to assume their own religio-racial superiority. In the report on the CME's founding, African American Methodists "gratefully acknowledge[d] the obligations we are under to the white brethren of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for what they have done for us, as a people." Moreover, in the *Christian Observer*, Kentucky whites pilloried a northern critique that called the creation of the CME "an abuse of denominationalism" because race, not "honest differences in evangelical belief or church politics," was the only reason for religious segregation.³⁸

In many ways, this contention was quite accurate. Racial separation was a familiar and easily accessible solution to the unwanted problem of interracial interaction. Indeed, for more than fifty years, religiously conservative whites in

³⁷ See Katherine L. Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus: The Segregation of the Southern Churches* (New York: Carlson, 1991), especially 132–38, 160–68, on the formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 89.

³⁸ "Colored General Conference," *Christian Observer*, 7 January 1871; "Brief Editorials," *Christian Observer*, 21 January 1871.

the Commonwealth had been advocating racial segregation in the name of colonizationism. Although the historical scholarship on white support for African American expatriation after 1865 is considerably underdeveloped, there can be no question that it remained a popular idea in the white mind well into the late nineteenth century. The end of slavery did not obviate the need for black removal from white America. As a *Western Recorder* appeal put it in 1869, "colored missions" were required for the "preaching of the gospel to this unfortunate and needy race." Or, perhaps funds could be generated for "efforts to evangelize Africa" using "colored ministers" from the U.S. In that proposed plan, African American believers would work for the Christianization of a heathen continent, and then hopefully "this same people in our own midst" would not "be left to retrograde into superstitious errors, and perhaps to barbarism."³⁹

To be sure, whites in the Commonwealth who endorsed colonization in the postslavery era did express concern for African American souls. However, like antebellum arguments, such articulations always came in a racially paternalistic mode that assumed black inferiority. In April 1869 Thomas S.

³⁹ "Colored Missions—The Envelope Plan," *Western Recorder*, 26 June 1869; "The School for Colored Ministers," *Western Recorder*, 20 November 1869.

Despite the fact that the American Colonization Society did not dissolve until 1964, though it operated in an exceedingly limited capacity after 1912, almost every major study of the white colonization movement ends in 1865. See, for example, P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816–1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); and Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005). An exception is William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the White Quest for Racial Control, 1861–1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 138–67.

Malcolm of Philadelphia—who pastored Louisville’s Second Baptist Church during the 1840s—appealed for “Emigration” in the name of the “missionary cause.” Malcolm was a manager of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society and, as he saw it, there existed a divine “call upon pious freedmen to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to the perishing millions of heathen in Africa.” Just under a decade later, the *Western Recorder* published a succession of articles on “Our African Missions,” detailing “the great amount of human happiness” among the “moral and religious” colonists in Liberia. The solution to America’s race problem, which produced the tangible benefit of Christianizing and civilizing a pagan continent, was colonization.⁴⁰

Perhaps the fullest articulation given to the colonization imperative for the post-slavery United States came from Danville Theological Seminary’s Edward P. Humphrey, a Presbyterian colleague of Robert J. Breckinridge who had been resolute in his Unionism and gradual emancipationism. In an 1873 address to the American Colonization Society, Humphrey argued that America’s “free people of color” should “consent” to “colonize in Africa.” According to Humphrey, “the destinies of five millions of the African race in this country, and a hundred million on the other side of the sea,” depended on the success of American black expatriation to Liberia. Post-emancipation colonization, “the Divine plan of missions,” had “arisen” in the benevolence of providence to correct the legacy left by “slavery and the slave-trade, the hostile relations which have long existed

⁴⁰ Thomas S. Malcolm, “Emigration to Liberia,” *Western Recorder*, 24 April 1869; “Pennsylvania Colonization Society,” *African Repository* 49 (January 1873), 28; T. “Our African Missions. VI.—Liberia,” *Western Recorder*, 3 January 1878.

between the white and colored races." Liberian "society" was in fact "a Christian State, originated for the purpose of securing 'the blessings of the Christian religion, and political, religious, and civil liberty.' The African nation, stated another way by the white Presbyterian minister, was a "new civilization" that "will resemble our own." Not only would the society serve as a bulwark against "the Mohammedan kingdoms and Pagan tribes of Africa," but it was also constituted as a racially separate society.⁴¹

Humphrey would have resented the charge that his address held much in common with the old proslavery logic because he enthusiastically praised the death of American slavery. Yet, as was the case in the antebellum era, because of colonizationism's overt emphasis on racial separatism—expressly due to white assumptions of black inferiority—advocates of the scheme shared fundamental aspects of the racial ideology of other white, more secular, political and racial conservatives. Indeed, it required only a small conceptual jump for Kentucky's white evangelicals to move from advocating racial separatism along religious lines to supporting rigid segregation in all other social and political arenas. In August 1869 the *Western Recorder* printed a letter from Thomas C. Teasdale, a noted Baptist minister with roots in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Teasdale assessed the state of race relations around him by commenting, "How strange it seems that negro children should sit side by side with white children in our

⁴¹ Edward P. Humphrey, "Address of Rev. Edward P. Humphrey, D.D.," *African Repository* 49 (April 1873), 107, 109–110, 111, 112, 113, 116. See also Humphrey, *The Color Question. A Letter Written for the Sixtieth Annual Meeting of the American Colonization Society, Washington, D.C., January 16, 1877* (Washington, D.C.: Colonization Room, 1877).

schools, and churches; that negroes should be elected to seats in the American Congress; that the judicial ermine should be enjoyed by black men." Teasdale, writing from New York City, contended that "even here in the North" there existed sustained, "strong repugnance" from whites to the idea of "social equality with the negroes." It was a sad day for America, Teasdale argued, when "the colored man should be thus thrust into place and power, without much regard to qualifications" required for "these prominent positions."⁴²

Similarly, an early 1871 *Christian Observer* editorial reported the "Considerable excitement" in "the District of Columbia" over a "a bill" proposed by noted Republican senator Charles Sumner (1811–74)—the prominent congressional abolitionist from Massachusetts and a favorite "radical" target of southern white derision—"compelling colored children to attend the white schools of [the] city." As whites throughout the South contended, the article's author "conceded that it will utterly ruin the public school system." The fact, as the white Methodist paper saw it, was that "The schools are now separate and are in a most flourishing condition." Frankly, "Every right-minded man will condemn this action as unjust, humiliating, and intended to disgrace the white children who are too poor to attend select schools." School integration was nothing more than "a crime deserving the just indignation which it cannot but evoke from the friends of humanity everywhere." For Kentucky whites, their racial superiority was an unquestioned assumption. Thus the segregation of the

⁴² Thomas C. Teasdale, Letter from New York, 26 July 1869, *Western Recorder*, 7 August 1869.

racism, already underway in the churches, extended for Kentucky's religious conservatives to every aspect of life.⁴³

The racial separation of the churches—formalized among Southern Methodists but ubiquitous throughout the South after emancipation—became a critical component in the making of a distinctively white southern religion after the Civil War. Evangelical in tone, stridently anti-northern in geographical outlook, and constructed for whites only, this brand of Christianity made for a potent ideological amalgam that fueled a long-lasting white southern racist hegemony.⁴⁴ During the Reconstruction era, as Daniel Stowell has contended, white southerners collectively developed a religious “Confederate understanding” of defeat. That view taught that “God had not deserted the South: the righteousness of the southern cause, the justice of God, and Confederate defeat could and would be reconciled.” For ex-Confederates, their convictions about the course of the war were inextricable from beliefs in the righteousness of slavery, white supremacy, and anti-abolitionism.⁴⁵

That whites in Kentucky came to broad religious agreement with such a Confederate-minded religious outlook is ironic given the state's maintenance of a

⁴³ “Negroes in the Schools,” *Christian Observer*, 11 February 1871. On Sumner and the proposed integration of D.C. schools, as well as the significant moderate Republican opposition to the proposal for reasons of white supremacy, see Robert Harrison, “An Experimental Station for Lawmaking: Congress and the District of Columbia, 1862–1878,” *Civil War History* 53 (March 2007), 47–50.

⁴⁴ For a compelling synthetic survey that analyzes the formation of a distinctive variety of white southern religion, connected to evangelical theology and “nonpolitical” in outlook, see John B. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

⁴⁵ See Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 33–48, quote 40.

Union allegiance during the Civil War. But it is not surprising. During the Reconstruction era, white Kentuckians drew on long-standing theological arguments in defense of slavery and the racial ordering of society that they themselves had held for decades. For Kentucky—an antebellum border state with an antislavery legacy and a slave state that remained with the Union during the Civil War—proslavery religion proved a critical ideological building block in the making of the Commonwealth's postwar Confederate identity.

EPILOGUE

KENTUCKY'S REDEMPTION

In 1877 Louisville Presbyterian Stuart Robinson was the most politically and culturally influential white minister in Kentucky. For most of the Civil War era, the staunchly Unionist Presbyterian Robert J. Breckinridge had rivaled Robinson in the Commonwealth. But by the late 1870s, Robinson had no challenger. Breckinridge died in his Danville home in December 1871, but for nearly a decade prior it had been clear that the Bluegrass State's evangelical whites were more sympathetic to Robinson's proslavery, pro-southern religious outlook. Like Breckinridge, the Louisville minister had once openly opposed slavery. During the emancipation canvass of the late 1840s, he cooperated with other religious whites in statewide efforts to gradually end the institution in the Commonwealth. Yet Robinson never relinquished the idea that slavery in the abstract, along with white supremacism, had been ordained of God. Robinson never supported northern abolitionism and what he saw as its heretical, radical agenda to immediately end slavery. With the escalation of the sectional crisis to the Civil War and the death of American slavery that followed, Robinson became a representative voice among the majority of Kentucky's religious whites in defying what he saw as a heterodox, abolition-driven federal agenda. Immediately after the war, the Louisville minister not only led the vast majority of his fellow Kentucky Presbyterians to align with the Southern Presbyterian Church, but he also became the preeminent voice of the proslavery, white southern cause in the postwar Commonwealth.

Emblematic of his influence and renown, Robinson was chosen to introduce the new U.S. president, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes (1822–93), at a massive political rally in Louisville in mid-September 1877. Hayes had only become president a few months earlier, in an election known as one of the most controversial in American history. The three-term Ohio governor lost the 1876 popular contest to Democratic challenger Samuel J. Tilden of New York by roughly 250,000 votes. Yet the electoral returns were contested in Florida, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Oregon. As it turned out, it was the former Confederate states that made all the difference in the election. In early January 1877 a Congressional Electoral Commission of 15 members was appointed to investigate the returns and ultimately voted 8-7 along partisan lines (8 Republicans to 7 Democrats) to award the election to Hayes. The decision had been anything but straightforward. Behind the scenes of these more public political dealings, a compromise had been brokered. Hayes would be allowed the presidency if he agreed to remove the last federal troops still occupying the South—not coincidentally remaining only in Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana—thereby paving the way for southern “home rule,” a euphemism for the restoration of white Confederate political dominance in the South. Northern Republicans had long grown weary of the effort to remake the South’s racial and political order. After gaining token assurances that the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments would be enacted and honored in the South, Hayes agreed to the compromise, secured the presidency, and brought an end to the Reconstruction era. After such a protracted struggle for the office, and acknowledging the sectional enmity that continued to persist, Hayes felt the need

to make a goodwill tour of several influential southern cities in order to secure support for his administration. Louisville was his first southern stop.¹

As the event was reported in the *Baptist Western Recorder*, white Kentuckians could hardly contain their enthusiasm. It was as if the country had entered a new "era of good feeling." In the paper's telling of the sympathetic environment surrounding the president's arrival, "Men of all parties seem willing to forget the past and to look forward to more kindly relations between all sections of the Union." The air was filled with "Patriotism, love of country, [and] National pride," because, as the article's author contended, "'Union' . . . ceases to mean 'sectionalism.'" Moreover, "Men seem persuaded that the war is at last over, that the 'last hatchet is buried.'"²

Yet that description was not entirely accurate. Rather, white Kentuckians were excited about the new president's visit to the Falls City because Hayes had acquiesced to the demands of the former Confederacy. As the *Western Recorder* put it, "A few brief months of fair dealing and simple justice have turned the tide of popular feeling." Since they believed Hayes's ending of Reconstruction instantly afforded the white South "equal justice," Kentuckians could wholeheartedly embrace the new president. They had long felt an affinity with

¹ The literature on the 1876 presidential election and the Compromise of 1877 is vast. For an introduction, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 564–87. See also Ari Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes: Warrior and President* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 276–325. On Hayes's southern tour and the Louisville stop, see Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro, from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (1965; New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 21–25.

² "The Welcome to the President," *Western Recorder*, 20 September 1877.

the Confederate South. Now, with the recognition of its legitimacy, Commonwealth whites had become infused with a sense of national pride.³

In Stuart Robinson's introductory address, he explicated the point. The Falls City was "the gateway of the great South and Southwest." Hayes's "entrance into Louisville . . . has revived the drooping hopes of the Southern people," who Robinson claimed to represent. "We desire to express, as a Southern people," the minister explained, "our high esteem for [Hayes] as a statesman." Ostensibly demonstrated by his ending of Reconstruction, Robinson praised Hayes's "steadfast determination to rise above all partisan consideration." By Robinson's analysis, "our Chief Magistrate has won for himself" a "high place in Southern confidence." As a true "minister of religion," the Louisville Presbyterian had admitted to his audience what many of his followers presumably already knew: he did not believe in coupling his religious views with political causes. However, since Hayes was a non-partisan sectional uniter—through his presidential restoration of power and legitimacy to former Confederates—Robinson "deem[ed] it an honorable tribute to the Christian ministry" to serve as such a politician's "mouthpiece."⁴

In his speech, Stuart Robinson did not explicitly link Kentucky to the Confederate cause. But Rutherford B. Hayes did. To the crowd's applause, Hayes

³ Ibid. On the longer history of conservative white Protestantism's contribution to late-nineteenth-century national reunification at the expense of African American rights, see Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865–1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

⁴ "The Welcome to the President," *Western Recorder*, 20 September 1877.

asked his audience, "My friends, my Confederate friends, do you intend to obey the whole constitution and amendments?" Never mind the fact that Hayes himself planned to do little to protect the rights secured for freedpeople by those amendments, the Civil War had ended. "And now my friends," the president asked, "that being over, why shall we not come together?" Drawing his audience's cheers, Hayes continued, "Oh, we have come together. The demonstration in Louisville tells the whole story." Yet, contrary to Hayes's claim, it was far from the whole story. As he addressed his Louisville audience as "Confederate friends," Rutherford B. Hayes undoubtedly held a broader audience in mind, especially the cities farther South he was soon to visit. Just the same, however, there can be no doubt that Hayes was also acutely aware of the beliefs and allegiances of his white Kentucky audience. They were now part of the Confederacy, and the president of the United States recognized them as such.⁵

For the Confederate South, Hayes's administration represented a turning point in their nineteenth-century history. With the end of Reconstruction and the restoration of the political legitimacy of former Confederates, southern whites widely claimed to have been "redeemed." Historians have long debated the meaning of the term as it applied to the post-Reconstruction southern political order, but historian Daniel Stowell has provided the fullest explanation of the term's significance for a section marked by white evangelical dominance. "White southerners," Stowell contends, "feared that Northerners would destroy

⁵ Ibid.

Southern political institutions, Southern churches, and ultimately Southern identity as they understood it. From this perspective, 'redemption' involved both the eradication of Southern sins and the removal of the yoke of 'Yankee and negro rule,' most tangibly in the form of Republican political leaders."⁶ The white South's redemption, in other words, drew from a deep well of religious opinion, forged in the context of antebellum debate about the nature of slavery.

The death of slavery itself, however, did not spell the death of proslavery religion's influence. For southern whites the term "redemption" connoted that they would be allowed to rightfully participate in the national U.S. political system as recognized equals in the fabric of white American life. The end of slavery was a radical break with the past and had inaugurated a new arrangement for the South's racial relationships. Because actual slavery no longer existed, white religious southerners faced a social and political landscape that they found uncomfortable and threatening to their racial categories. They could no longer rely on the full force of proslavery ideas to sustain their cause. However, since they were familiar with contours of the old argument, proslavery Protestants in the postwar South could apply selected aspects of it to make sense of the world that they confronted. Thus the proslavery theology did not disappear, and its racial aspect proved the easiest part to retain. As James L. Roark cogently wrote in his classic study of white southern planters in the Civil

⁶ Daniel W. Stowell, "Why 'Redemption'? Religion and the End of Reconstruction, 1869–1877," in Edward J. Blum and W. Scott Poole, *Vale of Tears: New Essays on Religion and Reconstruction* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2005), 140.

War era, after the war “Fundamental ideas gave way, but old habits lived on.”⁷ Much the same could be said about southern proslavery religious thought. With slavery removed, white southern clergy set about shoring up defenses of the cause lost in Confederate defeat and bequeathed vitality to a white supremacist social order. The proslavery religio-racist orthodoxy of the antebellum era sustained a post-emancipation orthodoxy on race that affirmed a segregationist mandate.⁸

Thus, the racial orthodoxy of the postwar South was nothing new. Yet when added to southern whites’ sense of righteousness about the Confederate effort, it gave rise to what Charles Reagan Wilson has termed the “religion of the Lost Cause.” The origins of that sectionally encompassing “southern civil religion” drew in part from—and relied on the language and styles of—historic southern evangelicalism. Postbellum ministers of the religion of the Lost Cause drew upon all sorts of connections to the antebellum proslavery Christian argument in supporting agendas of white supremacy and segregation. Summarizing the centrality of race in the period, Wilson wrote, “racial heresy was more dangerous to a preacher’s reputation than was theological speculation”—that is, to defend racial equality was perceived as more

⁷ James L. Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 208.

⁸ See H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But . . . : Racism in Southern Religion, 1780–1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1972), 258–305.

threatening than to advance non-orthodox views on ordinary theological questions.⁹

Those pervasive postwar white southern beliefs, connected as they were to historic forms of southern evangelicalism, opened social and cultural space for the emergence of terrorist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, which first appeared in 1866 to fight "Black Reconstruction." No serious observer ever considered the Klan's language densely or precisely theological, but the paramilitary organization had been founded by lay evangelicals from Tennessee and benefited from the white South's postwar religio-racist civil religion: the Klan's blend of religious rhetoric and racial animosity reflected the force of the postbellum racist orthodoxy, to say nothing of its violent potential. Indeed, the KKK's most enduring symbol of white supremacist terror, the burning cross, suggested a relationship between Christianity and maintaining the racial status quo.¹⁰ Although it might be an exaggeration to say that the Klan acted on the

⁹ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 1–17, quote 101. Several historians, including Gaines Foster, whose *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) remains with *Baptized in Blood* as one of the key histories of the cult of the Lost Cause, finds "civil religion" a slippery term too amorphous to give tangible meaning as an explanatory device. Civil religion, Foster suggests, is an idea that proposes to support too many competing ideas at once. See Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 7–8. There is much good sense in what Foster writes, but *Baptized in Blood*, in no small part because of its skillful argumentation and analysis of the relationship between race and informal religious ideas in southern culture, remains an important contribution to the subject of religion of the white postbellum South.

¹⁰ See Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 110–118. According to Allen W. Trelease's authoritative history of the Ku Klux Klan, cross burning was an ancient Scottish Highlands ritual that did not gain currency in the United States until the publication of Baptist Thomas W. Dixon's infamous *The Clansmen* (1905). Whatever its origin, perhaps no image more clearly linked religion and white

behalf of the entire white South, its tactics and its understanding of African Americans as dehumanized beings had much resonance among southern whites in the decades after the Civil War. White evangelicals did not visibly endorse its vigilantism, but they also did not do much to stand in the Klan's way.¹¹

Within just a few short decades, similarly deep religious roots sustained the epidemic of lynchings in the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. To be sure, unlike practitioners of what historians have termed the "religion of racial violence," proslavery Protestants in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War did not call for black extermination—even as many supported racial separatist efforts that resembled the colonization schemes of the antebellum period. But without the strong continuation of the general ideology surrounding and undergirding antebellum proslavery belief, it is hard to imagine how the racist violence accepted by postbellum white religious society—and not only in the South—could have been maintained.¹²

supremacism in American life. See Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (1971; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 55–56.

¹¹ The tone of moderation toward the KKK was certainly apparent among Kentucky's conservative white Protestants. When the United States Congress passed a bill in April 1871 designed to severely limit the activities of the so-called "fraternal" organization, the *Western Recorder* editorialized that the bill represented an extension of federal power that infringed too far upon the rights of free American citizens. See "The Kuklux Bill," *Western Recorder*, 29 April 1871.

¹² See Darren E. Grem, "Sam Jones, Sam Hose, and the Theology of Racial Violence," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 90 (Spring 2006): 35–61; and Donald G. Mathews, "Lynching is Part of the Religion of Our People: Faith in the Christian South," in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Beth Barton Schweiger and Mathews (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 153–94. For other discussions of religiously motivated white-on-black violence and white understandings of black inferiority,

This dissertation has tracked a blending of religious, political, and racial thought in the mid-nineteenth century American South. The combination of those ideological forces made for a potent amalgam that proved foundational for the Jim Crow South and left a lasting impact on the region. In a recent provocative interpretation of the Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s—oftentimes referred to as the “Second Reconstruction”—historian David Chappell has argued that southern arguments in favor of segregation during the mid-twentieth century lacked a solid theological foundation. White religious people may have lined up in order to preserve social separation on the basis of race, but they did not publicly defend their positions with classic sources of Christian reflection, whether the Bible or theology. Rather, as explained differently by historian Paul Harvey, the “folk theology of segregation” was mostly culled from social convention, with a bit of religious language packed on top to give arguments a sense of moral authority. Thus, in this interpretation, when religious segregationists were finally confronted with an integrationist civil rights agenda that did in fact draw upon biblical injunctions, segregationists could not muster convincing Christian support for their cause and wilted before the moral power of the civil rights movement.¹³

In making this argument, Chappell frequently draws comparisons between the religious proslavery argument of the antebellum South and

see those throughout Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*.

¹³ David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Paul Harvey, “God and Negroes and Jesus and Sin and Salvation: Racism, Racial Interchange, and Interracialism in Southern Religious History,” in *Religion in the American South*, 283–329.

ideological defenses of segregation after World War II. In the earlier era theological writing on slavery was rigorous and compelling enough to convince a great number of white southerners to give their lives to the Confederacy; it was also strong enough to convince many moderates and conservatives in the North that all-out opposition to slavery was a major theological mistake. According to Chappell, the same cannot be said about the intellectual basis for segregation. No segregationist "seems to have articulated anything equivalent to the 'Positive Good' position of the antebellum slaveholders." By Chappell's interpretation, segregation ideology faded quickly and, despite much hotly charged rhetoric in opposition to federally mandated integration, no southern revolt like that of the 1860s occurred a century later. More than six hundred thousand Americans died during the Civil War. According to Chappell's accounting, the forty who died in the name of Civil Rights represent only a fraction of that number.¹⁴

It may be the case, as Chappell has argued, that the intellectual vitality of ideological segregationism suffered a relatively quick death.¹⁵ But the same did not happen a century prior. Slavery died, but proslavery religion did not die with it. Indeed, it proved central to the making of the white South's postbellum, century-long, segregationist social, cultural, intellectual, and political order.

¹⁴ Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, 2, 5–8, 121–23, quote 122.

¹⁵ Scholarship by historians and sociologists studying the very recent past does not necessarily contradict Chappell's contention, but it does seem to implicitly question it. On the lasting influence of racial division in American evangelical life, see Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Emerson with Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and J. Russell Hawkins, "Religion, Race, and Resistance: White Christians and the Dilemma of Integration in South Carolina, 1955–1975" (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 2009).

Proslavery religion may have been transformed by the reality of emancipation, but for decades it remained vital to the white South's sense of racial order.

Indeed, so strong was proslavery evangelicalism that by the Reconstruction era it served to create a broad sense of Confederate identity in white Kentucky—a state where little had existed prior to 1865. The Bluegrass State did not join the Confederacy during the Civil War, but it had long participated in the evangelical religious culture of the white South and zealously agreed with its views on race and slavery. After the Civil War, when white religious Kentuckians confronted the prospect of an interracial, egalitarian political and social order, they overwhelmingly became a people who defined themselves forthrightly by regional and racial distinctions. In the wake of emancipation, whites in the Commonwealth made common cause with the majority of the white religious South and directed their energies toward the development of a segregationist and anti-northern theology. That religious bond led Kentucky whites to embrace the South's Confederate cause as their own. Kentucky did not fight for the Confederacy, but it joined in Confederate redemption. In so doing, it completed the ideological journey from border South to Solid South, a political and cultural course driven by racist religion.

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