

"THE SOUTH CAROLINA
OF KENTUCKY":
RELIGION AND SECESSION
IN THE JACKSON PURCHASE

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"The South Carolina of Kentucky" has long been the term given to the antebellum Jackson Purchase region of western Kentucky.¹ Indeed, historians have convincingly established that residents of the Purchase overwhelmingly supported the Confederacy during the Civil War. A large amount of literature demonstrates this point.²

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¹ The phrase was first used in J. H. Battle, G. C. Kniffen, and W. H. Perrin, *Kentucky: A History of the State* (Louisville, 1885), 7. Both Kentucky and Tennessee gained western lands as a part of the purchase of land from the Chickasaw in 1820. The Kentucky portion became the Jackson Purchase, while the addition to Tennessee simply became West Tennessee. Originally an extension of Christian County, the eight counties of the Jackson Purchase today and the year that they were formed are: Ballard (1842), Calloway (1822), Carlisle (1886), Fulton (1845), Graves (1823), Hickman (1821), Marshall (1842), and McCracken (1824). The Jackson Purchase will be referred to as the Purchase.

² Lon Carter Barton, "The Civil War in the Purchase," *Jackson Purchase Historical Society Journal* 17 (1989): 79-91; Lon Carter Barton, "The Reign of Terror in Graves County," *Register of The Kentucky Historical Society* 46 (1948): 484-95 (hereafter *Register*); Jack Calbert, "The Jackson Purchase and the End of the Neutrality Policy in Kentucky," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 38 (1964): 206-223 (hereafter *Quarterly*); Philip M. Cochran, "Historical Overview of Ballard County," *Survey of Historical Sites in Kentucky, Ballard County* (Frankfort: The Kentucky Heritage Commission, 1978), 12-13; Berry F. Craig III, "The Jackson Purchase Region of Kentucky in the Secession Crisis of 1860-1861" (M.A. Thesis, Murray State University, 1973) and "Kentucky's Rebel Press: The Jackson

Yet, there remains little discussion of why the region was different in sentiment from the rest of the state. It is not surprising that state historian James C. Klotter would therefore identify regional studies as an important area of Kentucky history in need of study during the twenty-first century. Specifically, he noted the need for work dealing with areas of the state other than the Bluegrass and Appalachia and for studies that examine "the role of churches in the secession crisis of Kentucky."³ Likewise, Hughie Lawson correctly argued that regional history "need not be intellectually parochial."⁴ This is especially true for regional studies of Kentucky during the secession crisis. Jack Calbert, for example, argued the long-standing desire of the Purchase to secede from Kentucky played an important role in the strengthening of pro-Union sentiment in central and eastern Kentucky.⁵ Thus, according to Calbert, understanding the secession crisis in Kentucky is dependent upon an understanding of choices made in the state's different regions. To use Lawson's term, there is nothing "intellectually parochial" about attempts to learn more about the secession sentiment in the most important of all the border states, Kentucky.

This essay will answer, in part, Klotter's call by highlighting the role of evangelical religion in the Jackson Purchase region of Kentucky during the secession crisis. Ralph Erickson has correctly

Purchase Newspapers in 1861," *Register* 75 (1977): 20-27; Hughie G. Lawson, "Geographical Origins of White Migrants to Trigg and Calloway Counties in the Antebellum Period," *Quarterly* 57 (1983): 286-304; Phillip M. Shelton, "Camp Beauregard: Graves County, Kentucky," *Register* 61 (1963): 148-57; David Perry Sullivan, *Purchase Overview: The Early History of the Jackson Purchase* (Melber, Kentucky: Simmons Historical Publications, 1986), 111; and Hunter B. Whitesell, "Military Operations in the Jackson Purchase Area of Kentucky, 1862-1865," *Register* 63 (1965): 141-67.

³ James C. Klotter, "Moving Kentucky History into the Twenty-First Century: Where Should We Go From Here?" *Register* 97 (1999): 83-112.

⁴ Lawson, "Geographical Origins," 288.

⁵ Calbert, "Jackson Purchase," 206-23.

argued that, "Historical studies have paid insufficient attention to the importance of religion in the ethos of the Confederacy."⁶ Fortunately, historians are working to correct this shortcoming. Indeed, one need only peruse the growing literature that points to the role of religion in the South's move towards secession to gain an appreciation of how important this topic has become.⁷ Repeatedly, historians have recognized how religious belief caused the South to view its cause as just. This was the case in the Purchase; its inhabitants believed they were on the side of God and therefore chose secession with great confidence.

Moreover, a study of the attitude in the Purchase toward secession, while important in its own right, is made all the more interesting because of its strategic importance. The western theater of the war, although long unappreciated, was ultimately critical to the out-

⁶ Ralph Erickson, "The Clergy and the Confederacy," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 54 (2000): 61.

⁷ Among the many important works on this topic, all of which point to a Southern clergy that saw secession as ordained by God, are: David E. Chesebrough, ed., *God Ordained this War: Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order: 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980); Donald G. Matthews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998); Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Kenneth Moore Startup, *The Root of All Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1997); and Steven E. Woodworth, *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

come of the war.⁸ Confederate General Leonidas Polk knew how important the Purchase was to the Confederacy. In September 1861, he wrote to Governor Beriah Magoffin of Kentucky that it was "of the greatest consequence to the Southern cause in Kentucky or elsewhere that I [Polk] should be ahead of the enemy in occupying Columbus and Paducah."⁹ His strategic concerns were understandable since control of the Purchase territory equaled control of river access into and out of the South. Finally, the Purchase is an attractive topic for study because, as R. Charles Blair wrote, in the Purchase one can examine all "the political, geographical, and theological influences involved in the settlement of the frontier."¹⁰

Freehling identified "one-fourth of Kentucky," from Lexington southwest to Bowling Green as "a typical borderland plantation" territory.¹¹ It was home to what historian Stephen Aron called the Bluegrass System of Central Kentucky.¹² Yet, it was the Purchase region, and not the Bluegrass, that became the hotbed of Confederate sentiment in the state. Largely because of its official neutrality, the attitude and importance of Kentucky's regions in the secession crisis were long mischaracterized despite the plea of James E. Copeland, who once warned scholars to not portray Kentucky as a place of

⁸ William Freehling, *The South vs. The South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 65.

⁹ General Leonidas Polk to Governor Beriah Magoffin, 1 September 1861, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1882), Ser. I, 4:179 [hereafter O.R.].

¹⁰ R. Charles Blair, "A History of Baptist Ministerial Education in the Kentucky Counties of the Jackson Purchase" (M.A. thesis, Murray State University, 1974), 3. This remains difficult to do, however, because of the poor supply of primary sources dealing with the Purchase.

¹¹ Freehling, *South vs. The South*, 23.

¹² Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 124-49.

"monolithic neutrality during the Civil War."¹³ Indeed, while the political leaders in Frankfort struggled to maintain Kentucky's official neutrality, the Purchase chose a different direction, one so firmly in support of secession that the region's unofficial name became "The South Carolina of Kentucky." Henry C. Burnett, congressman from the First District, left little doubt about the stance of the region with regard to neutrality. He declared in the *Paducah Tri-Weekly Herald*, "There is not the slightest hope of any settlement or adjustment of existing troubles."¹⁴ To readers in the Purchase, Burnett's beliefs did not come as a shock. Nor did they cause any particular concern, because as Jack Calbert demonstrated, "Almost the entire population [of the Purchase] was in full support of the South" on the eve of the Civil War.¹⁵

An 1861 editorial in *The Hickman Courier* further highlighted the level of secessionist sentiment in western Kentucky. The *Courier* wanted the Purchase to secede from Kentucky and the Union to become a part of Tennessee:

The Kentucky legislature has not, and is not, doing a thing towards the adjustment of our national difficulties. Better, far better for the State, that this Legislature had never been convened, than that it should thus mock the pride and wishes of the citizens of Kentucky. We know not what are the feelings of the citizens of the upper portion of Kentucky, but we can not believe that their representatives are reflecting their feelings in this present Legislature. Certain we are, that Southern Kentucky will per force link her destiny

¹³ James E. Copeland, "Where Were the Kentucky Unionists and Secessionists?" *Register* 71 (1973): 350.

¹⁴ Quoted in Berry F. Craig, "Henry Cornelius Burnett: Champion of Southern Rights," *Register* 77 (1979): 266.

¹⁵ Calbert, "Jackson Purchase," 206.

with that of chivalrous Tennessee.—Wild as the assertion may appear, thousands of hearts have long anxiously favored such a transfer. Only a state pride separate us now, when that is wantonly abused by those who should adorn it, where is the link that binds us?¹⁶

E. I. Bullock, editor and publisher of the *Daily Confederate News*, another Hickman County publication, struck an even more ominous tone when he wrote: "We'd think no more of scalping a dead Yank than we would of cutting the throat of a midnight assassin... not a shade's difference between the murderer and the deceitful Yank."¹⁷

When he finally moved his troops into Columbus, Leonidas Polk wrote to Governor Isham Harris of Tennessee on 4 September 1861, to assure him that his occupying the region was "entirely acceptable to the people of Kentucky, or at least this portion of Kentucky."¹⁸ As if to confirm Polk's belief that the people of Columbus were glad to see his troops, the next day he received a letter from George Taylor, ostensibly written on behalf of the people of Columbus. Among other things, Taylor told Polk that it was with "sincere delight" that they [the residents of Columbus] viewed the approaching occupation of Columbus by the Confederate army.¹⁹

Prosecession sentiment was overwhelming in the Purchase. Understanding why the region's inhabitants dismissed neutrality in favor of rabid support for the Confederacy continues to require more study. John Edward Lever simply argued that the antebellum Pur-

¹⁶ *The Kentucky Statesman*, 12 February 1861, p. 3.

¹⁷ Quoted in "A Century of Newspaper Service in Hickman County," *Hickman County Gazette*, 30 April 1952, section 1A.

¹⁸ General Leonidas Polk to Governor Harris, 4 September 1861, *O.R.*, Ser. I, 4:180.

¹⁹ George C. Taylor, et al. to General Leonidas Polk, 5 September 1861, *O.R.*, Ser. I, 4:184.

chase was "out-of-step with the rest of the state."²⁰ Lever pointed to geographic remoteness as the factor that made the Purchase different from most of Kentucky. Indeed, the last portion of Kentucky to be settled, the Purchase is physically separated from the rest of Kentucky; it "forms a virtual Kentucky peninsula that juts outward from Tennessee, and is bounded by the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers to the east, north, and west."²¹ However, physical separation alone is insufficient to explain why the region so adamantly rejected neutrality. The settlement patterns of the Purchase were as unique in Kentucky history as its geographic isolation. Hughie Lawson has shown how the majority of the region's settlers came not from other portions of Kentucky but directly from the South, "from and through Tennessee."²² For example, Lawson demonstrated that even as late as 1850 the majority of the adults living in Calloway County, for example, were born outside of Kentucky in Southern states.²³ Thus, the region owed little to the larger portion of Kentucky east of the Tennessee River in terms of its culture because its residents were not native Kentuckians but transplanted Southerners. Culture plus geographic isolation made for potent combination. Free of influence from the moderating forces of Frankfort politics, Purchase residents looked south for their intellectual bearings. Specifically, they accepted the Southern brand of evangelicalism because it was the most familiar to them.

Donald G. Matthews has argued that: "During the years when the Southern ideology was taking shape, . . . Evangelicalism became in the

²⁰ John Edward Lever, "West, To The Iron Banks" (M.A. thesis, University of Louisville, 1961), 1.

²¹ Hunter M. Hancock, "Jackson Purchase," in John E. Kleber, ed., *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 461.

²² Lawson, "Geographical Origins," 287.

²³ *Ibid.*, 304.

view of many Christian theorists one of the distinguishing marks of what it meant to be a Southerner."²⁴ Mitchell Snay agreed with Matthews, and in part he extended the argument with regard to secession: "Southern ministers invested the sectional conflict with religious sentiment."²⁵ Finally, John Boles, demonstrated that "there were no more principled supporters of both secessionism and the Confederacy than the evangelical ministers and their flocks."²⁶ In the Purchase, settlers from the South instinctively looked southward for their ideology and identity. As indicated by Matthews, Snay, and Boles, Purchase residents determined their identity as Southerners, in part, through their evangelicalism. Therefore, as the sectional dispute became a religious battle they could, ultimately, only choose to support one side—the Confederacy.

Methodists and Baptists were not the only religious believers in the antebellum Purchase. Representatives from both the Christian and Presbyterian churches located to western Kentucky as did some Catholics and Jews. One does well to follow the advice of Matthews not to fall prey to the "myth" of Southern "evangelical homogene-

²⁴ Matthews, *Religion of the Old South*, 4.

²⁵ Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, 11.

²⁶ John B. Boles, "Forum: Southern Religion," *Religion and American Culture* 8 (1998): 173. For the purposes of this study, I have used the following definition of evangelicalism:

Although the style of public discourse varies with social standing and level of education, it is always governed by the preacher's attempt to speak for as well as to the congregation, and to elicit from each believer a renewed "personal" bonding with the Divine (in Christ) and commitment to the holy life. The personal expression of this mood is shaped by a persistent sensitivity to the implications of this bonding and commitment for personal morality and, frequently, for social responsibility.

See Samuel S. Hill, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 243.

ity."²⁷ In the Jackson Purchase, however, other groups simply never sustained the numbers necessary to challenge the domination of the region's belief structure by Methodists and Baptists. Only in Paducah is there any evidence that the Catholic and Jewish population had even the mildest impact upon the "radical stand on slavery of the Baptists and the Methodists."²⁸

In his study of where Kentucky Unionists and Confederates came from, Copeland demonstrated the "extreme reluctance" of the Jackson Purchase to provide men for the Union.²⁹ He did not believe that slavery, geography, or settlement patterns were sufficiently strong enough to determine the region's choice with regard to secession. To prove his point, he used the same Bluegrass region discussed by Freehling as an example. That it was an area with far greater slave interests than the Purchase but one that exhibited far less secessionist activism than West Kentucky was, said Copeland, significant. Nevertheless, his explanation for the difference was still largely economic. To explain why "secessionists" were "in control in the west," Copeland argued their economic ties to Nashville and Memphis caused their sympathies to be predisposed to the Confederacy.³⁰ Copeland was correct to point to the strong relationship that the Purchase had to these two Tennessee cities, but he failed to recognize the importance of issues beyond economics. Cultural and spiritual similarities also served to tie the Purchase to Nashville and Memphis.

Hunter B. Whitesell concluded that the Purchase was remote not only geographically from the rest of Kentucky during the antebellum

²⁷ Donald G. Matthews, "We have left undone these things which we ought to have done": Southern Religious History in Retrospect and Prospect," *The American Society of Church History* 67 (1998): 306.

²⁸ John L. Robertson, *Paducah: 1830-1980* (Paducah, 1980), 25.

²⁹ Copeland, "Kentucky Unionists and Secessionists," 347.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 349-50.

era but also philosophically.³¹ Likewise, Christopher M. Paine has argued that: "Ideology offers the real key to understanding the secession crisis in Kentucky."³² Nowhere in Kentucky is this truer than in attempts to understand the secessionist impulse that dominated the people of the Jackson Purchase. Paine recognized that the Purchase "had more in common with West Tennessee than with the rest of the Commonwealth."³³ Furthermore, he convincingly demonstrated that although slave ownership did influence some persons to support secession, it was not reason enough to "determine the loyalty of counties, regions, or the state [of Kentucky]."³⁴ Like others, Paine used a comparison of the Purchase and the Bluegrass regions to illustrate the differences across Kentucky. The Bluegrass had the densest population of slaves in the state and would therefore appear to have had the strongest economic incentive to ensure the survival of slavery. Yet, again like earlier historians, Paine showed how the Bluegrass always maintained a substantial Unionist majority.³⁵ Economics during the secession crisis would suggest that the central portion of the state where the Bluegrass System existed should have supported the Confederacy, while the subsistence farmers of the Purchase should have been largely neutral. However, the opposite occurred. Unlike others, Paine extended the arguments of Whitesell through his understanding of sectional ideologies. Paine recognized that different regions of Kentucky looked in different directions for their ideological underpinnings; in the Purchase, they looked south. While economic attachment to Nashville and Memphis and physical separation from the rest of Kentucky made the Purchase different from the

³¹ Whitesell, "Military Operations," 347.

³² Christopher M. Paine, "Kentucky Will Be The Last to Give Up The Union: Kentucky Politics, 1844-61" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1998), 9.

³³ *Ibid.*, 334.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

rest of the commonwealth, the significant role of evangelical religion in the shaping of the region's ideology and thus its response to the secession crisis also deserves examination.

Snay's work on religion and disunion is useful to consider at this point. His demonstration of how religion and sectionalism connected to help form a sense of Southern distinctiveness is a useful way to appreciate what occurred in the Purchase.³⁶ These connections were visible in the region's dominant religious groups, the Methodists and the Baptists. Purchase area Methodists looked to their conference headquarters in Memphis for leadership. The Landmarkism debates centered in and around Nashville had a significant influence upon Baptists in the territory.³⁷ Thus, the dominant intellectual and spiritual ethos of the Purchase came not from the Bluegrass region of Kentucky but from the South. Indeed, from the relatively late settlement of the Jackson Purchase in the 1820s through secession, it was the Methodists and Baptists who transformed the region from a rough frontier territory into a settled Southern community. The heavy influence of Southern ideas upon these evangelicals had important consequences for the Purchase.

Despite the physical demands of the circuit, the Methodists quickly gained a strong foothold in the Purchase. In 1821, the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church named Lewis Garrett, Jr. as "presiding Elder of the Duck River District and Superintendent of the Missions in the Jackson Purchase."³⁸ In 1828, the Methodist church assigned the Purchase territory to the Tennessee Conference on a permanent basis. This was an important decision because it meant that the region's future ministers would come from

³⁶ Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, 1-15, 181-209.

³⁷ For a discussion of landmarkism, see below pages 513-14.

³⁸ A History of the Memphis Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, <http://www.Memphis-umc.org/history/html>, March 1998.

the South. Ultimately, they would bring to the territory distinctly Southern ideas regarding secession.

After 1830, the Methodist church in the Purchase changed in nature. It moved away from its frontier origins and became a settled sectional (Southern) church. A number of permanently established campgrounds began to appear in the Purchase region, and camp meetings became institutionalized.³⁹ Throughout the 1830s, Methodist influence in the Purchase grew as churches formed and then prospered in important towns such as Murray, Mayfield, and Paducah. The rapid growth of Methodism in the Purchase, argued A. H. Bedford, meant that it was "destined" to play a "prominent part" in the life of the region.⁴⁰ In 1840, because of the continuing growth of Methodist membership in both west Tennessee and the Purchase, the territory grew beyond that of a mission field and the now-settled region obtained its own Conference. On 4 November 1840, at the First Methodist Church in Jackson, Tennessee, the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was established.

As the church became more settled, it became, like all Southern churches, more interested in discipline. For example, in 1835 Luke Dees, who had previously lost his license to preach, applied to have it reinstated. The minutes of the annual meeting of the Wadesboro and Murray Circuit show that he lost his application for reinstatement because there was "no sign of repentance." Although the exact nature of Dees's sin does not appear in the minutes, it was serious enough that he was "no longer considered a member of the church."⁴¹ No longer interested solely in church growth, the Wadesboro and

³⁹ Elmer Harrell Phillips, "Methodism in the Jackson Purchase, 1818-1845" (M.A. thesis, Memphis State University, 1968), 57-58.

⁴⁰ A. H. Bedford, *Western Cavaliers: Embracing the History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Kentucky from 1832 to 1844* (Nashville, 1876), 37.

⁴¹ Patricia T. Crawford, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church South in Calloway County: Wadesboro & Murray Circuits, 1832-1878* (Murray, Kentucky, 1993), 5.

Murray Circuit wanted trustworthy and dependable men to guide its members because only such men could provide the necessary discipline for personal growth.

The movement from frontier church to settled sectional church is probably best demonstrated in evangelical attitudes toward alcohol. At the same 1835 proceedings that addressed the sins of Luke Dees, the ministers in attendance turned their attention to "the evils resulting from intemperance in drinking ardent spirits." These west Kentucky Methodist ministers strongly believed that they had the power to determine the behavior and social attitudes of their congregants. Thus, they agreed to "use their influence in suppressing the evil [of alcohol] both by precept and example."⁴² On 30 July 1836 they issued the following statement detailing how they planned to reduce alcohol consumption in the region.

Wee the members of the Wadesboro qm [quarterly meeting] conference conscientiously believing that the use of intoxicating liquor Except in Extreme cases of sickness [is] not only useless but absolutely Injurious to the temporal and spiritual interest of man do agree to sign and inviolably keep the following pledge: That we will not use nor traffic in it that we will not provide it as an article of Entertainment or for persons in our Employment and that in all suitable ways wee will discountenance the use of it through the community and in pursuance of the means to obtain this desirable End wee deem it Expedient to adopt the following resolutions: Resolved that wee will not traffic or deal with venders of intoxicating liquor unless it be for articles that cannot be readily obtainable Else whare. Resolved that we will

⁴² Ibid.

not keepe company with persons drinking or under the influence of intoxicating liquor unless it be cases of Extreme necessity.⁴³

Unquestionably, the Methodist ministers who signed this pledge believed that they had the power to play an important role in their local communities. In fact, they did. Like their counterparts across the South, they used church discipline to exercise an important daily influence in the lives of their congregants. They shamed people into acceptable behavior and always maintained an important voice in local politics. Furthermore, from its inception, Purchase Methodist churches were an important part of the Memphis Conference. They regularly, for example, hosted conference meetings in Paducah. Indeed, Paducah's Methodists supplied numerous leaders for the conference throughout the antebellum years.⁴⁴

By 1844, as sectionalism became a key issue in national affairs, the Methodist church that had played a significant role in transforming the Purchase territory into the home of settled communities had largely "conformed" to Southern culture.⁴⁵ Thus, when the Methodist church split along regional lines over slavery in 1845, the Methodist churches in the Purchase unanimously aligned themselves with their Southern brethren and ultimately, therefore, with the Confederate cause. Church historians Glenn Clark and Jean Denton recognized the Southernism which was significant in the founding of their church. Their church in Graves County, Trinity Methodist Church, was founded by two immigrants from South Carolina, Benjamin and Jeremiah Adams; Clark and Denton said that they "were [both] defi-

⁴³ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁴ "Historical Sketch of Broadway Methodist Church." *Year Book and Directory, Broadway Methodist Church* (Paducah, 1928), 9.

⁴⁵ Phillips, "Methodism in the Jackson Purchase," 172-73.

nity in the M. E. [Methodist Episcopal] Church, South."⁴⁶ Likewise, Phillips believed that by 1844, Purchase Methodists had taken "their place in the ranks of staunch sectionalism."⁴⁷ This places the Adamses in the mainstream of Methodist thought in the Jackson Purchase.

The Methodists of the Wadesboro and Murray District justified their aligning with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, with the following statement: "We believe that slavery is a civil institution, subject to the control of the civil powers alone, and whereas we believe that any interference of our Ecclesiastical tribunal with our civil rights and privileges is to be deprecated."⁴⁸ This attempt to declare slavery a civil institution, in all ways outside of the moral responsibility of the church, was a common Southern tactic. The Purchase Methodists, therefore, clearly took a distinctly sectional approach to their defense of slavery, arguing that if slavery were legal within a particular state, then outside agitators should respect the rights of the residents of that region. The Southern tint to their argument is telling because it was a territory that profited in substantial fashion from slavery.

Cynthia Lynn Lyerly demonstrated that in the late eighteenth century the Methodists were opponents of slavery. Yet in the antebellum South, the Methodist church took on a sectional identity in order to survive and prosper. Thus, according to Lyerly, the Methodist Church gained acceptance in the South by defining itself as a supporter of slavery.⁴⁹ Christine Leigh Heyrman argued that the Southern Methodist church had spent years "proving" itself in

⁴⁶ Glenn Clark and Jean Denton, *Through the Years with Trinity Methodist Church* (Mayfield, Kentucky: Leon Dick & Son Printing, 1984), 5.

⁴⁷ Phillips, "Methodism in the Jackson Purchase," 172-73.

⁴⁸ Crawford, *Methodist Episcopal Church*, 144.

⁴⁹ Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

“recognizably southern ways.”⁵⁰ In other words, to improve its standing in the South the Methodist church became a defender of slavery. Then because of that action, Southern Methodism became a crucial supporter of secession in order to save the culture in which it had prospered. The growth of Methodism in the Purchase had few obstacles to overcome. The region’s late settlement coincided with the rise of evangelicalism to religious ascendancy in the South. Thus as the region’s settlers arrived, they brought their religion with them. Methodist compromises with slavery were under way before Purchase settlement making the transfer proslavery culture into the region relatively easy.

The Southern nature of Purchase evangelicalism was also evident in the region’s other dominant religious group, the Baptists. In their classic work of early Kentucky history, and the only comprehensive history of the early Purchase, J.H. Battle, G.C. Kniffen, and W.H. Perrin write that the first Baptist meeting in the Jackson Purchase occurred on 13 May 1820, in the home of William ‘Bill’ Owen.⁵¹ This meeting led to the formation of the Clark’s River Baptist Church (Graves County).⁵² Importantly, of the fifteen founding members of the Clark’s River congregation, ten were from Southern states.⁵³ Indeed, the congregation traces its history back to the revivals in the “Watauga settlement in east Tennessee.”⁵⁴ At the same time in Murray, James P. Edwards, along with Virginia immigrants H.W. and Gilbert Harding, established the first Baptist church there during

⁵⁰ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 248-49.

⁵¹ Battle, Kniffen, and Perrin, *Kentucky*, 64.

⁵² *Ibid.*; and Wendell H. Rone, Sr., *A Short History of the Graves County Baptist Association (In Kentucky), 1893-1973: With Antecedent History, 1824-1893* (1973), 13. Clark’s River Baptist Church became Soldier Creek Baptist Church during 1838.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

1846.⁵⁵ However, it is probable that the first church in the Purchase was actually the Iron Banks Baptist Church, a congregation formed in 1810 before the purchase of the territory had even occurred. This congregation probably merged with the Columbus Baptist Church around 1850, but unfortunately, its records were lost in the flood of 1927.⁵⁶ While contention over which was the first Baptist congregation in the Purchase might always exist, it is clear that Baptists with Southern roots inhabited the region from its beginning. Thus, like their evangelical cousins the Methodists, they would eventually hold significant influence over the culture of the region.

The Baptists of the Purchase asserted their authority in the region's developing communities by taking an interest in even the smallest details of their member's lives. In February 1851, for example, First Baptist Church, Murray, disciplined a number of its parishioners for their "dereliction of Christian duty."⁵⁷ These supposed derelicts committed the sin of attending social dances. Eight years later, in 1859, the Murray Baptists accused Mr. G.I. Sherman of occasionally occupying their "pulpit against the will of this church." The church minutes never explain how he accomplished this feat, but the congregation did "unanimously" pass a resolution forbidding Sherman future entry "into the house."⁵⁸ Whatever Sherman's sins were, the church was determined to ostracize him and thus ensure its authority over both its pulpit and in the eyes of the community.

⁵⁵ First Baptist Church Records, Murray, Kentucky, April 1846 – March 4, 1890, microfilm edition, special collections, Murray State University, Murray Kentucky; Don Simmons, *Calloway County, Kentucky, Census of 1840* (Melber, Kentucky: Simmons Historical Publications, 1974), 16.

⁵⁶ "Columbus," in *Hickman County History, Clinton, Kentucky* (Clinton, Kentucky: Taylor Publishing Company, 1983), 42; and "Reason To Believe Columbus Baptist Church Was Organized As Early As The Year 1810," *Hickman County Gazette*, 30 April 1952, section 5.

⁵⁷ First Baptist Church Records, February 1851.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, February 1859.

In January 1860, the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church of Graves County charged James Cargill with "a continuance in the habit of intoxication" and then dismissed him from the membership.⁵⁹ Like the Methodists, alcohol was often on the minds of Purchase Baptists. Indeed, Cargill's dismissal followed the decision of the West Union Association of Baptist Churches to place additional emphasis upon the "evils" of alcohol in the region. During its 1859 Annual Meeting, the Association heard a report from its Committee on Temperance, that among other things concluded:

WHEREAS, The use as a beverage, and the traffic in ardent spirits, has been and Continues to be a great evil in our bounds-Resolved, That it is the duty of this Association, and of the several churches Composing the same to use their influence on the side of temperance, and Especially to discountenance the selling and using, as a beverage, ardent Spirits by members of our churches.⁶⁰

Thus, just as the Methodists had done with their earlier proclamation concerning alcohol, the Baptists involved with this declaration firmly believed that they had the ability to shape the tenor of life in the Purchase region.

Purchase Baptists, like their Methodist brethren, also looked south for theological and civil guidance. Purchase Baptists overwhelmingly chose to affiliate with the Southern Baptist Convention, formed in 1845, during the sectional disputes that saw Baptists split into Northern and Southern churches. Affiliation with the Southern

⁵⁹ Don Simmons, *Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, Graves Co., KY, Minute Books, 1834-1881* (Melber, Kentucky: Simmons Historical Publications, 1992), 57.

⁶⁰ "Appendix," *Minutes of the Twenty-sixth Annual Session of West Union Association held with the Church at Clinton, Hickman County, Kentucky* (Paducah, Kentucky, 1859), 8.

Baptists meant that Purchase Baptists, like the region's Methodists, looked south for their leaders. In particular, the rise of Landmarkism, which had its beginnings in Nashville, had a large influence upon Purchase-region Baptists. The Landmark movement "claimed exclusive validity for Baptist churches, Baptist ministers, and Baptist ordinances."⁶¹ Landmarkism fit well with the nature of the Baptists in the Purchase. Adherence to Landmarkism allowed the region's Baptists to draw clear distinctions between themselves and other evangelicals in the competition for adherents in the Purchase, an always-important goal in the evangelical competition for membership. Landmarkers emphasized the "unchangeability of Scripture," and traced the history of the Baptist church back through an unbroken line to John the Baptist.

According to Louis Harper, Landmarkism was "an exclusivist doctrine" that fit well in the Purchase because "the western counties of Kentucky tended toward exclusivist isolationism."⁶² The geographic and cultural distance of Purchase Baptists from most of Kentucky made a fertile ground for Landmarkist ideology and further helped to tie them to Baptists in the South. Eventually, Baptists in the region gained numerical superiority in all but one of the eight modern counties.⁶³ Thus their continued allegiance to Landmarkism influenced the reaction of the entire region to sectional crisis. Residents of the Purchase were firmly convinced that their support of the Southern position during secession was correct and they were severely disappointed when Kentucky declared neutrality. The exclusivist nature of Landmarkism caused them to see attacks against

⁶¹ Walter B. Shurden, "Southern Baptist Convention," in Hill, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, 722.

⁶² Louis Keith Harper, "The Historical Context for the Rise of Old Landmarkism" (M.A. thesis, Murray State University, 1986), 70.

⁶³ William A. Franklin, *Regional Atlas of the Jackson Purchase, Kentucky* (Murray: Murray State University, 1974), 65.

slavery as unwarranted and, even more importantly, as an outside attack upon their culture. Their honor and sense of distinctiveness meant that they were predisposed to defending their sense of being Southern when such attacks began.

The Purchase culture was southern and to attack slavery would have meant, for evangelical churches, running the risk of becoming outsiders within their own communities. In 1951, Maurice Knott demonstrated how any Protestant church in Kentucky that had attempted to "discipline members to the extent that non-slaveholding should have been made a test of fellowship, the church instituting such a policy would probably have started on the path to self-liquidation."⁶⁴ This was particularly true in the Purchase, where Landmarkism caused Baptists to become convinced of their rightness in doctrinal matters. The evangelical leadership of the region was Southern in culture and could hardly contemplate a South without slavery; it was certainly unacceptable to have even suggested such a possibility publicly.

Southern ministers, of course, used the Bible "to justify the institution of slavery as divinely approved. They argued that the obvious presence of slaves in their congregations proved the Southern claim that slavery was the means God had chosen to bring Christianity to the Africans."⁶⁵ It is interesting that the idea that God ordained slavery was not confined to the South. Mark Noll convincingly argued that, despite the presence of abolitionism in the United States, a growing number of Americans actually believed that "the Bible did sanction slavery."⁶⁶ Indeed, such an argument became increasingly

⁶⁴ Maurice F. Knott, "The Protestant Churches of Kentucky and the Question of Slavery" (M.A. thesis, University of Kentucky, 1951), 180.

⁶⁵ John B. Boles, "Forum: Southern Religion," 173.

⁶⁶ Mark A. Noll, "The Bible and Slaver," in Randall M. Miller, et al., eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 43.

common as secession neared, and in the Purchase, no dissenting voices have yet to be located. To avoid confronting the issue theologically, Purchase Methodists argued that slavery was a civil institution and so out of the church's realm of authority. Meanwhile, Purchase-area Baptists saw only the need to evangelize the African-Americans in their midst; they had no desire to see slavery ended. No evangelicals in the Purchase were willing to openly deny the basic goodness of slavery, for primarily they all saw in slavery an opportunity for increased membership by means of evangelizing African-Americans.

The First Baptist Church of Paducah was proud that it had seventy-three African-American members in 1855. Its continuing evangelical efforts led to an increase in slave memberships, so in 1856 the congregation decided to form a new church exclusively for them. The Second Baptist Church of Paducah, which eventually became the Washington Street Baptist Church, was the first "exclusively black congregation in Western Kentucky."⁶⁷ Meanwhile in 1859, on the eve of secession, African-Americans remained members at the First Baptist in Murray. That congregation never ceased to emphasize the importance of its mission to the town's African-American population even in the midst of secessionism. For example, after the conclusion of the sermon the fourth Sunday in April 1859, the congregation entered its regular business session. On this Sunday, after "the usual business was attended to," the pastor, Brother J.L. Morton, suggested that it be placed into the minutes of the church that: "The pastor is required and directed to open the door of the church on Sunday evening for the benefit of coloured people."⁶⁸ Morton wanted a clear statement of endorsement from his

⁶⁷ Christopher Beckham, "Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1856-1927" (M.A. thesis, Murray State University, 1997), 33.

⁶⁸ First Baptist Church Records, 24 April 1859, Murray, Kentucky.

white congregants for his efforts to evangelize Murray's African-Americans.

Morton's stance was similar to one adopted by the Twenty-sixth Annual Session of West Union Association of Baptist Churches, held in Hickman County in 1859. At that meeting, questions regarding the ministry to slaves made their way into the meeting minutes. "The Committee on Ministerial destitution" chose to "call the attention of our churches to the fact that there is a large class of our population that are almost entirely destitute of preaching." The report of the committee continued: "We refer to the colored people, and would advise every church to request their pastor to preach at least one sermon in every month to the black people of their neighborhood."⁶⁹ For the Purchase Baptists there was no thought of confronting the evils of slavery; to them it was a Biblically ordained and natural system. Their sole concern was to ensure ongoing efforts of proselytizing among the African-Americans of the region. The Southern belief structure that claimed that God had ordained slavery meant that the people of the Purchase became defenders of the right to own slaves.

Of Purchase residents, Whitesell argued: "The Rebels, though quite amply endowed with a religious spirit, suffered under the delusion that Providence was on the side against the wicked Yankees."⁷⁰ In the Purchase, this belief continually held sway; thus inhabitants of the territory followed the lead of their Southern clergy in believing that their fight was godly and just. They were so convinced of their rightness that the *New York Daily Tribune* reporter sent to write about the secession conference in the Purchase wrote that in the minds of the people of the region the only thing the North was de-

⁶⁹ "Appendix," *Minutes of the Twenty-sixth Annual Session of West Union Association*, 7.

⁷⁰ Whitesell, "Military Operations," 141.

servicing of was "hell!"⁷¹ Purchase sentiments clearly echoed those of W.J. Cash, who wrote that the Southern clergy believed "that the God of the Yankees was not God at all but the Antichrist loosed from the pit."⁷²

The Nashville Republican Banner, a newspaper of influence in the Purchase, also wrote of hell. It left no one in doubt regarding its feelings for the new Lincoln administration: "We now have had a Government six weeks—a government attaining to power, upon the heels of one retiring, as corrupt, as unpatriotic, and as infamous, as the Devil ever attempted to originate for the ruin of man, or the damnation of souls."⁷³ After the Union army occupied Cairo, Illinois, John C. Noble, the editor of the *Paducah Herald*, cried out: "To Arms! To Arms!!, In God's name let it be done."⁷⁴ Berry Craig called the *Herald* "the most widely read [newspaper] in western Kentucky"; its calling the people of the region to arms in the name of God is obviously hyperbole, but it remains an important example of the rhetoric of the region.⁷⁵ Purchase citizens believed that the Confederacy was fighting a holy war, and in such a war their defense of all things Southern had to be absolute. Craig's account of Mayfield's Judge Rufus King Williams highlights this attitude. Williams was one of the rare Union sympathizers found within the Jackson Purchase. Edward Bullock, editor of the Purchase area's *Confederate News*, wrote of Williams, declaring that he was "doomed" and that "nothing but curses and execrations will ever greet his ear from his old friends and

⁷¹ "What a Secession Convention is Like," *New York Daily Tribune*, 10 June 1861, quoted in "Secession Meeting Held in Mayfield," *Jackson Purchase: 150 Years, 1819-1969—Sesquicentennial* (Mayfield: *The Mayfield Messenger*, 1969), section A, 12.

⁷² W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941), 80.

⁷³ "Spoils in their God," *The Nashville Republican Banner*, 16 April 1861, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Berry F. Craig, "Kentucky's Rebel Press: The Jackson Purchase Newspapers in 1861," *Register* 75 (1975): 23.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

constituents."⁷⁶ Williams in the eyes his neighbors had chosen to oppose God by questioning the legitimacy of secession. Eventually, he had to flee the region for his own safety.

In November 1862, the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, authorized its ministers to begin raising "collections in their respective charges for the benefit of the families of members, who are, or may be in Federal prisons."⁷⁷ No mention was made of those in Confederate prisons. Although this was no oversight, there were few representatives in the Union armies from the territories of the Memphis Conference. From Calloway County, for example, there were over nine hundred men who served in the Confederate army and only forty-seven who fought for the Union.⁷⁸ The region's churches, therefore, had little emotional or physical attachment with the Union forces. Without either, the sympathies of Purchase Methodists and Baptists remained with the Confederacy throughout the conflict.

Evidence of this continued attachment to the Confederacy is visible in November 1864. The Memphis Conference began to survey the substantial damage done to its churches "resulting from the condition of the country." The committee appointed to that task reported:

Not content with despoiling our people of what they have, leaving them in many instances without food to eat, or even raiment to put on, these rabble hordes must, as they have in many instances done, destroy or desecrate our churches whenever they felt it safe to go. Alas for creatures in human shape, who can stable

⁷⁶ Ibid., 26-27.

⁷⁷ *The Minutes of the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for the Years 1862-1867* (Memphis: The Commission on Archives and History Memphis Conference, The United Methodist Church, 1984), 16.

⁷⁸ Berry F. Craig, "Jackson Purchase Confederate Troops in the Civil War," *Jackson Purchase Historical Society Journal* 2 (1974): 4.

their horses in the temple of God, or display their beastly orgies in the Sanctuary of the Most High! We have been further robbed by the same inglorious hands, of Church records, Sunday School papers and libraries. Neither the altar nor the furniture of the Solemn Sacrament, nor has the Holy Bible itself escaped their vindictive hate.⁷⁹

Even though the war went badly from its beginning for the Confederates in the Purchase, the residents remained stable in their support for secession.⁸⁰ As the committee's report demonstrated, the Memphis Conference remained quite belligerent in its language toward the Union.

This unwavering belief in the Confederate cause is also evident in a letter from Lieutenant Payne Ridgeway, a young Confederate officer from Graves County, to his sweetheart in which he confidently declared: "The Yankees can't ever succeed in such an unholy, unconstitutional war as has been inaugurated by dictator Lincoln."⁸¹ Likewise, while in a Union prison, Murray native Jim Melton wrote to Confederate Senator Henry C. Burnett asking him to help provide him relief from his "most cruel and unnatural persecutors." Melton pleaded with Burnett: "Hear me I adjure for my cause, for your cause, as sacred a cause as ever brought and bound a people together – the cause of our country and our God."⁸² Sam House, a Confederate soldier in Columbus, believed that "behind the cloud the sun is still shining & that if we trust in God & do our duty like men everything

⁷⁹ Ibid., 59.

⁸⁰ See Berry F. Craig, "Northern Conquerors and Southern Deliverers: The Civil War Comes to the Jackson Purchase," *Register* 73 (1975): 17-39.

⁸¹ Quoted in Barton, "Civil War in the Purchase," 484.

⁸² Captain Jim Melton to Henry C. Burnett, 30 March 1863, quoted in Mary Lou Brand, "Captain Jim Melton of the Confederate Secret Service," *Jackson Purchase Historical Society Journal* 5 (1977): 19.

will turn out for the best."⁸³ Echoing these words, the attendants of the 1861 Quarterly Conference of the Murray Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, declared, "The sun was shining just behind the cloud."⁸⁴ Like Ridgeway, Melton, and House, they too believed that the Confederate cause was just and that God would grant them victory at any moment. It was a sentiment shared by evangelicals across the South. Eugene Genovese described the Southern attitude as such: "Until the very end, surprisingly large numbers of Southerners refused to believe that God had abandoned their cause and remained convinced that He would deliver a last-minute victory against all odds."⁸⁵

Christopher Waldrep argued that, "Historians have long recognized the importance of social culture, especially religion, in the formation of political values."⁸⁶ Recognizing the impact of evangelical religion upon antebellum culture in the Jackson Purchase helps one to understand why that region's residents saw secession differently from the majority of Kentuckians. With little economic incentive to support slavery, evangelicals in the Purchase chose to defend slavery because they were, first and foremost, Southern in their culture and ideology.

Thus, the Purchase was different from the rest of Kentucky because its largely homogeneous population of Southern migrants used evangelical religion to bring order to their lives on the last

⁸³ Sam House to Sam C. House Esquire, as quoted in, John K. Ross, Jr., "Five Civil War Letters," *Jackson Purchase Historical Society Journal* 18 (1990): 29.

⁸⁴ South Pleasant Grove United Methodist Church of Hazel, Kentucky, Consisting of Quarterly Conference Records, July 1861, microfilm, special collections, Murray State University.

⁸⁵ 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), 45.

⁸⁶ Christopher Waldrep, "The Making of a Border State Society: James McGready, the Great Revival, and the Prosecution of Profanity in Kentucky" *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 783.

frontier in Kentucky. Then, as the evangelical churches of the region came to dominate life in the Purchase, they extended their interest into all aspects of their congregants' lives. Indeed, these Southern churches emphasized congregational discipline and evangelicalism, while choosing to support the institution of slavery. While more work remains necessary, it is fair to argue that the Southern evangelicals who dominated the culture of the Purchase believed that they were choosing the side of God when they chose to support the Confederacy during secession. Ultimately, evangelicalism in the Purchase provided a moral impetus for the support of secession that helps explain why "The South Carolina of Kentucky" came into being and lasted so long.