

The Bond of Union': The Old School Presbyterian Church and the American Nation, 1837-1861**Peter J. Wallace****Publication Date**

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“THE BOND OF UNION”:
THE OLD SCHOOL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
AND THE AMERICAN NATION, 1837-1861

Volume II

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Notre Dame
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by

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SIX

WHEN SCHISM IS NOT AN OPTION:

THE PROBLEM OF SLAVERY, 1818-1849

In 1818 the Presbyterian General Assembly unanimously agreed that:

We consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another, as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature; as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ . . . it is manifestly the duty of all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day, when the inconsistency of slavery, both with the dictates of humanity and religion, has been demonstrated, and is generally seen and acknowledged, to use their honest, earnest, and unwearied endeavours, to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and if possible throughout the world.¹

This statement was forged in the context of a refusal to endorse the idea of immediate emancipation, even as both northern and southern Presbyterians agreed that emancipation was a desirable goal.² But as we have seen, Presbyterian moral discourse was changing,

¹Minutes (1818) 692. One important textual error crept into some versions of this statement. The published edition of the Minutes from 1789-1820 (which was compiled in the 1850s) included a statement that "The manifest violation or disregard of the injunction here given, in its true spirit and intention, ought to be considered as just ground for the discipline and censures of the Church." But as the editors of the Presbyterian pointed out, that statement was not found in the manuscript minutes. Editorial, "Baird's Digest," Presbyterian 28.7 (February 13, 1858) 26. I have been unable to ascertain how the extra phrase was added.

²The 1818 statement resulted from a controversy in Virginia over the writings and activity of George Bourne. Bourne claimed that Virginia Presbyterians regularly mistreated their slaves, but refused to name names. In 1815 he authored The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, cited as the first thoroughly

and traditional interpretations of biblical passages were being set aside as a common sense literal hermeneutic replaced the older contextual interpretation.³

Many historians have tackled the challenge of understanding the relation between antebellum religion and slavery. Edward Crowther has suggested that the traditional narrative argued that “the cessation of anti-slavery policy” was “the result of southern evangelicals caring more about converting lost souls [presumably an illegitimate purpose for a church] than in getting rid of slavery [presumably the real purpose of evangelicalism].”⁴ Crowther challenges this interpretation, suggesting that the evangelical churches in the south were not particularly anti-slavery prior to 1830. But Crowther may go too far in asserting an unqualified proslavery movement in the south prior to 1830. He is certainly correct that few southerners expected slavery to end soon, and that even fewer took any steps to bring about the end of slavery; but that is not the same thing as articulating a coherent proslavery ideology.⁵ John Patrick Daly has argued that the

abolitionist volume. Bourne was charged with slander, and deposed from the ministry by Lexington Presbytery in Virginia in 1818. The General Assembly upheld the presbytery’s decision, but also passed the above statement in order to demonstrate their opposition to slavery. See Ernest Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, Volume One: 1607-1861 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963) 328-335; John W. Christie and Dwight L. Dumond, eds., George Bourne and The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable (Wilmington: The Historical Society of Delaware and Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1969). Thompson points out that from 1805-1835 a large number of anti-slavery Presbyterians began to leave the South, resulting in a polarization between the sections (336-338).

³Noll, America’s God; Robert Bruce Mullin, “Biblical Critics and the Battle Over Slavery,” JPH 61:2 (Summer 1983) 210-226. Mullin’s study of Andover and Princeton suggests that professional biblical scholars tended to give more nuanced answers than the radicals on both sides. But nuance was not limited to the seminaries.

⁴Edward R. Crowther, Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) 58. The bracketed statements are Crowther’s.

⁵Crowther, 59. His documentation of pre-1830 proslavery writings all focuses on the pragmatic argument that scripture does not view slavery as sinful; none set forth slavery as a positive good.

difference between the pre- and post-1831 defenses of slavery is that “after 1831 proslavery ideology became much more self-conscious, more thoroughly articulated, and more central to white southerners’ identity.”⁶ Certainly southern Presbyterians believed that something changed in the 1830s.

Two events in 1835 set the context for the Old School debates. That November the Synod of Virginia debated the question of slavery. George Baxter presented a paper claiming that “Slavery is recognized by Scripture in *precisely the same way* as the other domestic relations of life. . . expressly affirming that slavery has the same scriptural authority as the marriage relation.” This prompted considerable debate. Dr. Hill objected that marriage was a divine ordinance, while slavery was an evil that was merely tolerated in scripture. When Dr. George Baxter insisted that the only way to combat the abolitionists was to insist that the “master has a moral right to retain his relation to his slaves,” Dr. Carroll, the president of Hampden-Sydney College, replied that he did not think that one had to go so far to combat the abolitionists. The Rev. Benjamin F. Stanton, thought the paper “extenuated slavery, and left false impressions upon the mind. I justify slavery, sir, not from Scripture, but from circumstances. Slavery is a moral evil, and ought to be done way as soon as possible. Better contend for immediate emancipation than for perpetual

⁶John Patrick Daly, When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002) 3. See also Douglas Ambrose, “Of Stations and Relations: Proslavery Christianity in Early National Virginia,” Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery, edited by John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 35-67. This will be the focus of chapter 6.

servitude.” Only the present condition of the slaves, he thought, could justify their continued slavery.⁷

Ruling elder William Maxwell was bothered by the claim that slavery had “precisely” the same relation as marriage. “For if the Bible sanctioned it, the thing was morally right; and if morally right, we were under no obligations to remove it. But is this scripture? Must we sit still, and do nothing for the removal of this crying evil?” There was no slavery in Eden. “It is preposterous to go to the Bible to defend slavery.” Circumstances could never make slavery right, only permissible. In a telling comment he affirmed that “I found my position not on Scripture, nor on the moral lawfulness of slavery; but simply on the fact of a necessity.” Killing a man is just as unlawful, but it may be permissible if I cannot avoid it. “Unless I do my best to get rid of the necessity, I am guilty of the sin of unjustifiable slavery.” In conclusion he declared, “God forbid, Sir, that this Synod should ever assume a position favorable even in appearance to the perpetuity of human bondage!”⁸

Dr. Baxter explained that he was not arguing for the moral rectitude of slavery in the abstract. He was dealing with the present relations between master and slave. This is what is placed on the same basis as all other domestic relations. “I grieve deeply, and as sincerely as any one, when I view the evil in its length and breadth throughout our land; and I will go as far as any one to remove it.” He agreed with Maxwell that “The principles

⁷CVR, “Debate in the Synod of Virginia on Slavery,” New York Observer 13.49 (December 5, 1835) 196.

⁸CVR, “Debate in the Synod of Virginia on Slavery,” New York Observer 13.49 (December 5, 1835) 196.

of the gospel tend to mitigate the evil, and ultimately to abolish it altogether. These are my principles, Moderator. And I am not afraid therefore to say that he relation is lawful, under existing circumstances.”⁹

Maxwell thought that Baxter’s explanation was helpful. Nonetheless, “I would rather say that slavery is *tolerated in consequence of circumstances*, than to say it is *morally lawful*. There may be no essential difference; but it is dangerous to use terms in any way that will *quiet the consciences of men*.” Therefore he still opposed Baxter’s paper. “Slavery is not lawful before God or man!”¹⁰

Cortlandt Van Rensselaer reported that the Synod seemed moved by Maxwell’s argument. The final statement of the Synod was drafted by a committee consisting of Maxwell, Baxter, Hill, Wilson, and ruling elders Caski, J. Jones and Payne.¹¹ That statement declared that the abolitionist dogma “that slavery as it actually exists in our slave-holding states, is *necessarily sinful, and ought immediately to be abolished*. . . [is] *directly and palpably contrary to the plainest principles of common sense, and common humanity, and to the clearest authority of the word of God*.” Further they declared that “it is the duty of all ministers of the Gospel to follow the example of our Lord and Savior, and of his Apostles in similar circumstances, in abstaining from all interference with the state of slavery,” focusing instead on inculcating the duties of masters and slaves.¹²

⁹CVR, “Debate in the Synod of Virginia on Slavery,” 196.

¹⁰CVR, “Debate in the Synod of Virginia on Slavery,” 196.

¹¹CVR, “Debate in the Synod of Virginia on Slavery,” 196.

¹²“Synod of Virginia,” New York Observer 13.45 (November 7, 1835) 177.

The debate, however, is instructive. Many in the Synod of Virginia found Baxter's paper disturbing and even Baxter himself insisted that the principles of Christianity would eventually remove the "evil" from the land.

Earlier that year, however, another author went a step further and declared that slavery was a positive good. According to contemporary accounts, the first overtly proslavery exegetical argument came from the Rev. James Smylie, the first settled Presbyterian minister in Mississippi.¹³ In 1854 the Rev. John H. Van Court (PTS 1820), who had settled in Mississippi shortly after his ordination in 1821, reminisced in the Watchman and Observer about the novelty of Smylie's views: Smylie had "found that the *teachings of Scripture were greatly at variance with the popular belief*" that scripture condemned slavery. His initial sermon on the subject in 1835 "gave great offence, not only to the church, but also to his brethren in the ministry, who seriously advised him to preach that sermon no more." When the Presbytery of Chillicothe wrote a letter to the South, "exhorting them to abandon [slavery] as a heinous sin," Smylie's initial response was rejected by the presbytery, and they urged him not to publish his views, since few agreed with him. But "convinced of the correctness of his own conclusions" he published anyway. Van Court reported that

for a while he was covered with odium, and honored with a large amount of abuse from the abolitionists of the North, for teaching that the Bible did not forbid the holding of slaves, and that it was tolerated in the primitive

¹³Similar ideas can be found in Thomas Roderick Dew, Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832 (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970/1832). Dew was a professor in William and Mary College. While most southerners seem to have believed that these ideas were new, Jewel L. Spangler points to Henry Patillo and William Graham who both articulated biblical defenses of slavery in the 1780s and 1790s. "Proslavery Presbyterians: Virginia's Conservative Dissenters in the Age of Revolution," JPH 78:2 (Summer 2000) 111-124.

church. *These doctrines are now received as true, both North and South, and they constitute the basis of action of the most respectable religious bodies even in the North itself.* So that Mr. Smylie has the high honor of giving the *true exposition* of the doctrines of the Bible in relation to slavery in the *commencement* of the abolition excitement, and of giving instruction to others far more learned and talented than himself.¹⁴

In 1860, the Mississippi native, Richmond McInnis (Oakland College Theological Dept 1839), editor of the True Witness, recalled hearing Smylie as a theological student at Oakland College, and how “every person without exception, thought him somewhat fanatical. The idea that the Bible did sanction slavery was regarded as a new doctrine even in Mississippi.” Yet twenty-five years later, McInnis believed that virtually all southern Christians had come to agree with Smylie. “His scriptural argument has never been answered, nor can it be.”¹⁵

While others had shown that scripture did not consider slaveholding a sin, few had argued from scripture that slavery was a positive good that should continue indefinitely.¹⁶ Smylie insisted that if Scripture was taken as the only guide, then the “the evils of slavery, like the evils of matrimony, may be traced to the neglect of the duties incumbent upon the individuals sustaining the relation.”¹⁷ The patriarchal ideology of slavery was born. After

¹⁴John H. Van Court, “Rev. James Smylie,” W&O 9.29 (Feb 23, 1854) 116. James Smylie, A Review of a Letter from the Presbytery of Chilicothe to the Presbytery of Mississippi on the Subject of Slavery (Woodville, MS, 1836).

¹⁵Richmond McInnis, “Smylie on Slavery” True Witness 7.24 (Aug 18, 1860).

¹⁶“Smylie on Slavery” Southern Christian Herald 4.48-5.4 (March 2-April 20, 1838) 193, 199, 203, 207, 208, 4, 8, 12, 13. After an introduction, Smylie treated the Old Testament, the Greco-Roman world, and then the teaching of Christ, Peter and Paul.

¹⁷James Smylie, “Slavery” Southern Christian Herald 4.49 (March 2, 1838) 193. Editor Maclean commented that while slavery was indeed encumbered with many evils “of no small magnitude,” this merely called for reform—not abolition. (p 195)

reprinting the whole of Smylie's argument, ruling elder M. Maclean commented that Smylie had convinced him.

We once doubted the lawfulness of slavery, not from any examination of the word of God, but from a sort of natural impulse of feeling, as we suppose to be the case with most who entertain similar doubt; and we entered upon an investigation of the subject, determined that to whatever conclusion the word of God might lead, we should implicitly obey its authority. The result of the investigation was a thorough conviction that the Bible as clearly warrants slavery as it does the subordination of children to parents, or of citizens and subjects, to the powers that be.¹⁸

Maclean urged greater circulation of Smylie's article, along with Hodge's statement in the Princeton Review.¹⁹

South Carolinians resonated with Smylie's article. Fearing the growing power of the abolitionists in the north, one writer praised Maclean for taking the position "*that Slavery is not sin*," but he admitted that it was still a novel view. "Which one of all the weekly religious periodicals, north or south, has assumed this ground?"²⁰

While historians have clearly demonstrated that various authors had articulated many of the elements of the proslavery position as early as the 1780s, the testimony of contemporary southerners indicates that it was only in the 1830s that a coherent proslavery ideology took root in the South.²¹

¹⁸Editorial, "Slavery," Southern Christian Herald 5.23 (August 31, 1838) 90.

¹⁹Editorial, "Slavery," Southern Christian Herald 5.23 (August 31, 1838) 90.

²⁰A Friend, Southern Christian Herald 5.13 (June 22, 1838) 51.

²¹This will be explored further in chapter seven.

This was largely due to the rise of a concerted abolition movement in the North in the early 1830s.²² John R. McKivigan has argued that while William Lloyd Garrison and a handful of abolitionist leaders renounced orthodox Christianity, a large proportion of the abolitionist movement remained within the traditional churches working to try to convince the churches to endorse the cause of the immediate emancipation of the slaves. He claims that while Christian abolitionist groups “pursued different tactics after 1840, they all contributed to moving the churches closer to abolitionist principles and practices by the coming of the Civil War.”²³ While most northern Old School Presbyterians were generally antislavery, few qualified as overt abolitionists.²⁴

²²On the rise of abolitionism, see Herbert Aptheker, Abolitionism: A Revolutionary Movement (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989); John R. McKivigan, The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969); Daniel J. McInerney, The Fortunate Heirs of Freedom: Abolition & Republican Thought (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); John Stauffer, The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Richard S. Newman, The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For Presbyterian attitudes, see Andrew E. Murray, Presbyterians and the Negro—A History (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966). Aptheker provides a useful definition of abolitionism: “the uncompensated emancipation, at once, of the slaves” which would have meant simply the “overthrow of the propertied ruling class in the only way such a class can be overthrown—by the elimination of the property upon which its power rests.” (Aptheker, xii). McInerney points out that abolitionists tended to see the world in dualistic terms: the free and republican north, and the slaveholding despotic south. (45) He also emphasizes the religious roots and evangelical focus of the abolitionist blending of Christian and republican discourse. He especially focuses on Congregationalists and Unitarians in New York, New England and Ohio. (Chapter 3). Newman’s study of early Pennsylvania and later Massachusetts abolitionism provides a useful study of the changes in antislavery tactics from the gradualist agenda of the early republic to the rise of the immediatist approach of the Garrisonians.

²³John R. McKivigan, The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) 16. McKivigan provides more nuance in his treatment of the slavery debates within the churches than many. Also see John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay, eds., Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998). But McKivigan accepts the abolitionist critique of the evangelical churches too readily. See Victor B. Howard, Conscience and Slavery: The Evangelistic Calvinist Domestic Mission, 1837-1861 (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1990).

²⁴McKivigan has identified three Old School Presbyterians who served as officers in abolitionist

The role of British abolitionism in the American project should not be underestimated. The vigorous rhetoric of the English anti-slavery movement had moved the entire nation and had successfully removed slavery from the British colonies.²⁵ But, as R. J. Breckinridge and Charles Hodge pointed out, that sort of rhetoric could only be counterproductive in America. Diatribes against the evils of slavery might inflame northern passions, but the only way to end slavery was to convince southerners—and for that task, abolitionist rhetoric had little hope.²⁶ Most Old Schoolers believed that if the church divided on the question of slavery, the nation would divide as well. Therefore they

organizations, such as the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) and the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS). The first was black, and the other two were both trained and ordained in covenant or seceder churches, both of which had a much stronger abolitionist stance than the Old School. He also mistakenly identifies James Gilleland as an Old School Presbyterian, but he only appears in the

Name	Sem	Church	Position, Society, Years
Samuel E. Cornish	private 1819	1 st African, Philadelphia (1823-45)	manager AASS 1834-37
		Emmanuel, New York (1845-51)	exec com AFASS 1840-55
Samuel Crothers	Mason 1809	Greenfield, Ohio (1820-56)	vice pres AASS 1833-37
Samuel M. Gayley	Seceder 1828	Wilmington Classical I (1832-54)	manager AASS 1838-40

Figure 6.1. Old School Officers in Abolitionist Organizations

minutes of the New School.

²⁵David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975). The following chapter will include the breakdown in the official relations between the British churches and the Old School.

²⁶The most nuanced account of Breckinridge and Hodge is found in Mark A. Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” Religion and the Civil War edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 59-61. James Turner has also written on Hodge’s moderate stance in “Charles Hodge in the Intellectual Weather of the Nineteenth Century, in Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work, edited by John W. Stewart & James H. Moorhead (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 41-62.

poured their antislavery efforts into plans for gradual emancipation in the border south and colonization²⁷

William W. Freehling has helped explain the persuasiveness of colonization in the antebellum era. Contrary to some historians, he insists that “the hope of dispatching slaves elsewhere never died in the Upper South. Nor did Garrison’s contempt for the idea prevail in the North, except among the most extreme abolitionists.”²⁸ Most viewed the south’s resolute opposition as the main obstacle to ridding the United States of both slavery and blacks.

1. The Old School Center: Breckinridge and Hodge

At the same time that James Smylie was developing his proslavery argument, Old School Presbyterians in the north and west were attempting to fashion a program of gradual emancipation that would result in the end of American slavery.²⁹ An example of

²⁷For the history of colonization see Philip J. Stadenraus, The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); the first history was written by Archibald Alexander, A History of Colonization on the Western Coast of Africa (Philadelphia, W.S. Martien, 1846); but Douglas R. Egerton shows that Charles Fenton Mercer of Virginia was the father of the colonization society, “‘Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious’: A New Look at the American Colonization Society,” in Proslavery Thought, Ideology, and Politics edited by Paul Finkelman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989) 111-128.

²⁸William W. Freehling, The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 145. Freehling points out that everyone from Henry Clay to Abraham Lincoln to Harriet Beecher Stowe favored colonization. In 1863, Abraham Lincoln urged free blacks to leave the United States, and Congress authorized \$10-\$20 million in federal bonds “to implement Lincoln’s plan in Missouri.” (147)

²⁹Also in 1835 several Presbyterians formed the Rock Creek Anti-Slavery Society in Tennessee. They declared “that slavery is contrary to the laws of God, the spirit of the Gospel and the rights of Man.” Their small society was formed to diffuse correct information, “based on the principle of immediate and entire emancipation.” American Presbyterian 1.25 (June 25, 1835) 99. The editors agreed that “Slavery is certainly a very great evil—but it is one which we had no hand in originating. That it is an evil, it is presumed no one will question—but how is it to be remedied?” They doubted that immediate and entire emancipation was practicable, but still hoped for a method that would have good practical effects for the slaves.

this was in Kentucky, where the leaders of the Old School movement were working hard to prepare a plan of emancipation for their state. In 1833 the Synod of Kentucky had indefinitely postponed any consideration of the “difficult and delicate subject of slavery” by a vote of 41 to 36. It is reported that the Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge left the meeting immediately after the vote, declaring, “Since God has forsaken the Synod of Kentucky, Robert J. Breckinridge will forsake it too.”³⁰ After further discussion, the following year the synod adopted a resolution condemning slavery by a 56-8 vote:

This Synod, believing that the system of absolute and hereditary domestic slavery as it exists among the members of our Communion is repugnant to the principles of our holy Religion. . . and that the continuance of the System any longer than is necessary to prepare for its safe and beneficial termination is sinful, feel it their duty earnestly to recommend to all Presbyteries, Church Sessions and people under their care to commence immediate preparation for the termination of slavery among us.³¹

They appointed a committee of five ministers and five ruling elders, who drafted a plan of emancipation for the state that would provide for the emancipation of all slaves by their twenty-fifth birthday.

But when the committee presented the plan the following year, the synod refused to endorse the plan, suggesting that while the church could encourage its members to end slavery, it was inappropriate for the church to determine which plan was best. This prompted many anti-slavery Presbyterian laymen, such as James G. Birney, to move across

³⁰Recounted in Ernst Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South vol 1 (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963) 345. Since Breckinridge was a member of the Presbytery of Baltimore in the Synod of Philadelphia, his presence at the meeting of synod was purely voluntary, and his departure entirely symbolic.

³¹Minutes of the Synod of Kentucky (1834) 98.

the Ohio River to free soil. But the majority of anti-slavery Presbyterians remained in Kentucky, including John C. Young (PTS 1828), president of Centre College, Lewis Warner Green (PTS 1832), professor at Centre College, and Nathan L. Rice (PTS 1832) of Bardstown, Kentucky.³²

The Virginia-born, Cincinnati minister, Joshua L. Wilson suggested a solution to the impasse. He wrote to the Hon. Belamy Storer in 1836, “I consider slavery in these United States sinful, impolitic, contrary to the revealed will of God, as unfolded in the supreme law of love, contrary to reason. . . repugnant to our declaration of independence. . . and a foul blot upon our national escutcheon,” but the only constitutional way to end slavery was by a mutual renunciation of slavery and its benefits by both the north and the south: “Let the South agree to give up the slave trade and the slave labour,” he suggested, “and let the North give up the Slave wealth. . . to indemnify the South.”³³ His younger colleagues in the Old School would try to persuade the nation of the wisdom of his plan.

R. J. Breckinridge wrote in 1833 that American slavery did not correspond to slavery as found in the scriptures.³⁴ God had never sanctioned the particular practices of

³²Thompson, Presbyterians in the South I:345. Those who left generally joined the New School in 1838, while those who stayed to work in Kentucky generally sided with the Old School.

³³Wilson to the Hon. Belamy Storer (January 21, 1836) in William Warren Sweet, ed., Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840: Vol II. The Presbyterians (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1936) 745-746. This would be the thrust of his book, Relations and Duties of Servants and Masters (Cincinnati, I. Hefley, 1839).

³⁴[Robert J. Breckinridge], “Hints on Colonization and Abolition,” BRPR 5.3 (July, 1833) 280-305. The editors noted that they did not unanimously agree with Breckinridge’s views, but hoped that his essay would prompt greater discussion on the subject. Breckinridge declared that American slavery gave the master the rights “1. To deprive them of the entire earnings of their own labour, except only so much as is necessary to continue labour itself, by continuing healthful existence, thus committing clear robbery; 2. To reduce them to the necessity of universal concubinage, by denying to them the civil rights of marriage; thus breaking up the dearest relations of life, and encouraging universal prostitution;

American slavery, such as selling children away from their parents, forbidding education, or denying the ordinance of marriage. He declared that the American slave system was “founded upon the principle of taking by force that which is another's,” namely, his labor. While the word of God called slaves to submit to their masters, it also condemned oppression and injustice. Therefore Breckinridge insisted that “Nature, and reason, and religion unite in their hostility to this system of folly and crime. How it will end time only can reveal; but the light of heaven is not clearer than that it must end.”³⁵ While Breckinridge was willing to give his fellow southerners time to formulate a wise and just plan of emancipation, he insisted that “justice never can permit one man to take without return the labour of another, and that by force.”³⁶ Suggesting that colonization could serve as “the great and effectual door which God has set for the deliverance of this country, for the regeneration of Africa, and for the redemption of the black race,” since he could not imagine the two races living together in harmony, and he was repulsed at the thought of “amalgamation.”³⁷

3. To deprive them of the means and opportunities of moral and intellectual culture, in many States making it a high penal offence to teach them to read; thus perpetuating whatever of evil there is that proceeds from ignorance;

4. To set up between parents and their children an authority higher than the impulse of nature and the laws of God; which breaks up the authority of the father over his own offspring, and, at pleasure separates the mother at a returnless distance from her child; thus abrogating the clearest laws of nature; thus outraging all decency and justice, and degrading and oppressing thousands upon thousands of beings created like themselves in the image of the most high God!” (292)

³⁵Ibid., 297. It is not surprising that Breckinridge had joined the Republican party by 1860, and was even considered as a potential candidate for the U. S. Senate by Kentucky Republicans in 1864.

³⁶Ibid., 300.

³⁷Ibid., 303.

An expatriate Kentuckian, Breckinridge took an equally strong stand against abolitionism.³⁸ Breckinridge warned in 1835 that the virulent attacks of the abolitionists would only make southerners more defensive. “Then will follow, increasing jealousy and hatred between the different sections of the Union--the breaking up of churches--the danger of personal intercourse, and finally disunion, and bloody wars.” How, Breckinridge asked, would this help the slaves?³⁹ In its place, Breckinridge urged gradual emancipation and colonization. Fearing that emancipation without colonization would result in “amalgamation” and “universal leveling,” he argued that the two races could not live in proximity to each other without a continual “alternation of bloody revolutions, and a succession of black and white servitude without end.”⁴⁰

Charles Hodge added his voice in 1836, in a review of William Ellery Channing’s Slavery. Lamenting the recent rise of the proslavery movement in the South, Hodge noted that as recently as the 1820s, “it was spoken of in the slaveholding states, as a sad inheritance fixed upon them by the cupidity of the mother-country in spite of their repeated remonstrances;”⁴¹ but now proslavery sentiment was on the rise in the north as well as the

³⁸Vivien Sandlund has explored part of Breckinridge’s efforts in “Robert Breckinridge, Presbyterian Antislavery Conservative,” JP 78:2 (Summer 2000) 145-154. She points out that the rift between antislavery conservatives and abolitionists “ultimately helped to kill the southern antislavery movement.” (146)

³⁹BLRM 1.9 (September 1835) 287.

⁴⁰“Man--Womanry: Abolitionists in the Feminine Gender” BLRM 3.9 (September 1837) 415. Breckinridge’s comments came in the context of denouncing the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women in New York City that May. He mockingly declared: “We sincerely hope that these excellent individuals have been safely restored to their homes, their housewifery and their proper cares: and that having done enough for glory, they will hereafter be content to abide in the sphere which God has appointed for them.” (411).

⁴¹Charles Hodge, “Slavery,” BRPR 8.2 (April, 1836) 267.

south, and Hodge was convinced that it was the virulent rhetoric of the abolitionists that was driving both southerners and thoughtful northerners away from the anti-slavery ranks. “The idea of inducing the southern slaveholder to emancipate his slaves by denunciation, is about as rational as to expect the sovereigns of Europe to grant free institutions, by calling them tyrants and robbers.”⁴² Appealing to the authority of scripture, and especially to the example of Jesus, Hodge argued that Jesus’ approach to ending slavery was “not by appeals to the passions of men on the evils of slavery, or by the adoption of a system of universal agitation. On the contrary, it was by teaching the true nature, dignity, equality and destiny of men; by inculcating the principles of justice and love; and by leaving these principles to produce their legitimate effects in ameliorating the condition of all classes of society.”⁴³ Hodge insisted that the biblical writers “did not regard slaveholding as in itself sinful,” but reminded his readers that they did “condemn all unjust or unkind treatment (even threatening) on the part of masters towards their slaves.” Christian masters must treat their slaves according to the law of love.⁴⁴ The slave system of the American south, however, did not meet this biblical standard for slavery. Though he defended slavery theoretically, as an institution, the actual practice of the south fell so far short of the biblical law of love that he could not justify its continuation. Hodge argued that the abolitionist attempt to declare slavery itself to be sinful was self-defeating, since an attack

⁴²“Slavery,” 270.

⁴³“Slavery,” 274.

⁴⁴“Slavery,” 279.

on specific slave laws could be much more effective in the south itself.⁴⁵ By enlisting conscience in the cause of abolition, they were driving towards “the disunion of the states, and the division of all ecclesiastical societies in this country.” While “feeling” could be aroused temporarily, “conscience” could not rest until the object was attained. “If the conscience. . . becomes the controlling principle, the alienation between the north and the south must become permanent. The opposition to southern institutions will be calm, constant, and unappeasable [sic].” No sacrifice would be too great for a conscience convinced that slavery was inherently sinful.⁴⁶

Hodge’s moral reasoning followed a line of comparison between slavery and despotism. Arguing that both are comparatively evil (free labor and republicanism being better), Hodge argued that neither were inherently evil (since Jesus and the apostles tell Christian subjects to submit to Roman government, and Christian slaves to submit to their masters).⁴⁷ Following this line of reasoning, Hodge argued that a republican society had no use for slavery. It was not a matter of conscience, but of utility, or expedience.

Since southern slavery failed to meet the biblical standard for treatment of slaves, and because slavery was inconsistent with the American vision of liberty and republicanism, it simply could not survive. Christian moral influence would eventually eliminate it—unless prevented by the reactionary forces of abolitionism and proslavery. Like Breckinridge, Hodge feared the alternative:

⁴⁵“Slavery,” 297-298.

⁴⁶“Slavery,” 301.

⁴⁷“Slavery,” 282-286. Hodge frequently cites Paley’s Moral Philosophy in his argument.

the south. . . has to choose between emancipation by the silent and holy influence of the gospel, securing the elevation of the slaves to the stature and character of freemen, or to abide the issue of a long continued conflict against the laws of God. . . . If the south deliberately keep these millions in a state of degradation, they must prepare themselves for the natural consequences, whatever they may be.⁴⁸

More than twenty years later, this essay was reprinted in Elliot's Cotton Is King.

Curiously, this concluding statement is absent. The reason is unknown. If Hodge himself edited the copy sent to Elliot in 1859-1860, he may have wished to remove such a prophetic utterance in the face of the impending crisis. More likely, however, is the possibility that since this statement is not favorable to the designs of the proslavery movement, it was quietly eliminated from the essay by the editor himself. The result has been that many scholars, who seem to have read only the Cotton Is King version have not recognized that Hodge viewed the indefinite perpetuation of the American version of slavery as utterly contrary to the law of God.⁴⁹

Mark Noll has pointed out that the hermeneutical stance of both Breckinridge and Hodge "was a tacit abandonment of biblical literalism. Both took for granted that the Bible must be an interpreted book, and that the meaning of its words must be conditioned by other realities—with Breckinridge, shifting social conditions over time, with Hodge the

⁴⁸"Slavery," 304;

⁴⁹Mark Noll and William Harris pointed me to this absence, but further exploration in the Hodge archives at Princeton Theological Seminary and Princeton University has not turned up any conclusive evidence for the reason behind its excision. Cf. "The Bible Argument on Slavery," Cotton is King (1860), 841-877, and "Slavery," BRPR 8.2 (1836), particularly pages 303-305.

fuller context of the Scriptures themselves.”⁵⁰ Whereas southerners would appeal strictly to the letter of the law, Hodge and Breckinridge attempted to demonstrate that there was more at stake.

But Hodge’s attempt to provide a distinction between slavery in the abstract and the American slave system was not appreciated by all. Samuel Steel of Chillicothe Presbytery, replied in Breckinridge’s Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine that the biblical practice of “slavery” was so unlike that of the American south that the same term should not be used for both. Pointing out that Abraham armed 318 of his servants and led them into battle, he asked, “is this the case with slaves in the South?”⁵¹ Old Testament slaves were under the same law as their masters—but not in America. Therefore, he argued *“that slavery, such as exists in these United States, is designated in the Bible by the term OPPRESSION, and forbidden to be practiced by the Jews, under the heaviest penalties.”*⁵²

⁵⁰Mark A. Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” Religion and the Civil War edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 60. Though, as we have seen, Hodge also saw changing social conditions over time.

⁵¹Samuel Steel, “The Bible Doctrine of Slavery” BLRM 3.9 (September 1837) 419. The Irish-born Steel (1796-1869) attended PTS for one year 1822-1823, before returning to Kentucky to finish his theological training. He spent nearly a decade as a pastor in Kentucky, where he befriended the young Breckinridge, before settling at the Old School church in Hillsboro, Ohio, in Chillicothe Presbytery, from 1834 to 1869.

⁵²Samuel Steel, “The Bible Doctrine of Slavery. No. 2” BLRM 3.10 (October 1837) 477. The editor, Robert J. Breckinridge, added an editorial note in the January, 1838, volume, that he did not agree with all of the arguments of this essay, but thought that they were worth hearing. Its publication resulted in some southerners accusing him of being a closet abolitionist. “Foreign Labours in the Abolitionist Controversy, No. I,” BLRM 5.4 (April, 1839) 144. The Rev. Elipha White of the independent Charleston Union Presbytery (the radical proslavery presbytery in South Carolina that had advocated a separate southern General Assembly in 1837) and Amasa Converse, editor of the Southern Religious Telegraph, the New School paper in Richmond, Virginia (about to move to Philadelphia due to lack of southern support) accused him of being an abolitionist. (For the next five years Breckinridge would accuse Converse of inciting the burning of the Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine in Petersburg, Virginia, on the grounds of mere hearsay. The published letters reveal Breckinridge’s mania for defending his honor—“Conflagration in Petersburg in 1837,” Spirit of the XIXth Century 2.6 (June, 1843) 338-348). Garrison’s Liberator and the New School New York Evangelist were those that called him proslavery.

Nonetheless, Steel agreed that gradual emancipation was the best plan for ending slavery. The fact that Breckinridge was willing to publish this article at the very moment when the Old School most needed southern support (the winter of 1837-1838) is indicative both of the fact that Breckinridge did not believe that slavery was a major factor in the debate (since he risked alienating southern support), and also of Breckinridge's inability to stay out of any controversy that came his way.⁵³

The Old School newspapers in the north generally concurred with Hodge and Breckinridge. The Philadelphia Presbyterian and the New York Observer generally supported Hodge, agreeing that the "odium brought upon the Abolition cause by the ultraism of its modern advocates" was the catalyst that "emboldened the friends of perpetual slavery to utter their offensive sentiments."⁵⁴

Breckinridge's comment was, "We have considered these opposite accusations indicative of two truths; first, that our opinions were pretty nearly correct, as both extremes denounced them; and secondly that our ecclesiastical opponents were very hard run for a handle against us." Breckinridge could never pass up an opportunity to defend himself from accusations—usually with great bluster.

⁵³He conducted a pamphlet debate with Robert Wickliffe of Kentucky in 1840-1841, after Wickliffe accused him of agitating for abolitionism. The rhetoric is so damning as to be hilarious. Wickliffe wrote: "He comes bearing to you the counsels of God--a vicegerent from heaven, charged with my utter ruin and desolation. But this boaster, fellow-citizens, will find, on Monday next, that *he is a mere man*, and among the same people he left in 1830--that he is just *Robert J. Breckinridge*, not much better than he used to be, and not a whit better than he should be, or I am much deceived." (Breckinridge become notorious for his refusal to compromise in the Kentucky legislature from 1825-1828 before his conversion to Christianity). Concluding thirty pages of self-justification, Breckinridge replied: "Yea, even him, whom, in the defence of my character, my principles and my hopes; I have been obliged to consider--nay, have been obliged. . . to prove, a faithless public servant and a dishonored gentleman; even him, slanderer as he is, may God forgive, as I freely do this day." Breckinridge, "Speech of Robert J. Breckinridge. . . in defense of his personal character, his political principles and his religious connections. More particularly in regard to the questions of the power of the Legislature on the subject of Slavery, of the Importation of Slaves, of Abolitionism, of British Influence, of Religious Liberty, etc." BLRM 7.1 (January 1841) 1-34 (quotations from pages 3 and 34).

⁵⁴"The Humiliating Pledge" New York Observer 15.17 (April 29, 1837) 66.

2. South Carolina and the Charleston Union Presbytery

In the wake of the excision of the New School synods, many presbyteries and synods divided into two or sometimes three camps (in many presbyteries a moderate party refused to side with either the Old School or the New School). One of the divisions presaged the challenges that the Old School would face over the ensuing decades.

When Elipha White returned home to Charleston Union Presbytery in 1837, some questioned his stance against the excising acts. White defended his vote, arguing that the Old School had a strong abolitionist faction, and that southern Presbyterians should form a separate Assembly in order to protect themselves from abolitionist attacks. The presbytery concurred—but not without protest. That fall, the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia faced a determined minority that wanted to refuse adherence to either Assembly, so long as the 1818 declaration against slavery remained on the books. After several days of debate, the synod approved the abrogation of the Plan of Union 94-5 (the only negative votes were Dwight, White, Legare, Yates, and ruling elder Elliott), and approved the excision of the mixed synods 84-16 (the negative votes coming exclusively from Hopewell and Charleston Union Presbyteries—the centers of New England influence in the synod).⁵⁵ But while approving of the Assembly's actions, the synod also took a stand on slavery: "Resolved 1, That this Synod consider Slavery as a civil institution, with which the General Assembly has *nothing* to do, and over which it has no right to legislate. Resolved 2, That this Synod look upon whatever acts heretofore passed by the Assembly which have

⁵⁵"Synod of South Carolina and Georgia," CO 11.47 (November 25, 1837) 185.

been of the nature of legislative acts on the subject of Slavery, as without authority and void, and shall so consider all similar acts in time to come.” Then the synod called on the Assembly to give “an open and decided assent” to the principle embraced in the first resolution.⁵⁶ Some in the deep south still wanted to agitate on slavery.

But the divisions in Charleston could not be assuaged. While the majority followed Elipha White and Thomas Magruder, the minority had a resolute champion in Thomas Smyth, the pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church. When the presbytery voted on remaining connected with the General Assembly, a 7-7 tie prompted Smyth, Basil Gildersleeve (editor of the Charleston Observer) and several others to secede from the presbytery in order to remain connected to the General Assembly. Smyth and Gildersleeve insisted that the presbytery had to accept the actions of the 1837 General Assembly: “all who fail to send in their adoption of this resolution, and their consequent adherence to the Presbyterian Church on the basis aforesaid, within one year from this time, be no longer considered as connected with this Presbytery.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶“Synod of South Carolina and Georgia,” 186. This passed unanimously after White’s more radical version failed 12-67.

⁵⁷“Charleston Union Presbytery” CO 12.49 (December 8, 1838) 195. A year later the synod (following the Assembly) made it clear that the only requirement was adherence to the Assembly—regardless of whether the presbytery approved of the actions of 1837. Smyth and Gildersleeve would come under fire from the Charleston Union Presbytery for their insistence upon presbytery approval of the 1837 General Assembly. CO 13.50 (December 14, 1839) 198; Thomas Smyth, “The Rev. Mr. Dana and the Rev. Mr. Magruder,” CO 14.15 (May 30, 1840) 57; editorial, “Notice of a Recent Letter,” CO 14.15 (May 30, 1840) 58. In the latter, Gildersleeve notes that William Dana and Thomas Magruder had argued that since Gildersleeve was not a pastor, but an editor and a school-teacher, he should not be entitled to a seat in presbytery. Gildersleeve replied that his editorial work was urged upon him by the ministers and elders of the church, and that his teaching had been taken up due to their threats that they will run the Charleston Observer into the ground, in order to ensure that the paper did not fold. Interestingly, R. J. Breckinridge and James Henley Thornwell frequently echoed some of Dana and Magruder’s arguments. See chapter 1.

The Charleston Union Presbytery was a study in contrasts. Not surprisingly for the leading southern port, it had strong connections to New England. Of its twenty-eight ministers in 1837, only two are known to have done all of their studies in the South. At least ten were born in New England, and several others had New England parentage. Of the twenty-three whose educational background is known, twelve had attended New England colleges (and another five had attended other colleges in the north), while fifteen had studied at Princeton Seminary and four at Andover. It is worth noting that only two of the New England-born ministers stayed with the Old School after 1839, and that these two were Aaron Leland (professor at Columbia Theological Seminary) and Benjamin Gildersleeve (editor of the Charleston Observer), the only two who had developed institutional connections that tied them to the Scots-Irish in the backcountry.

The irony is that these transplanted New Englanders quickly became the most zealous defenders of slavery, and the most outspoken opponents of remaining united with any northern General Assembly. Given the Congregationalist background of the New Englanders, their tendencies toward independency are understandable, but the way in which New Englanders tended to become fire-eaters in South Carolina is somewhat more complex.

Charleston's New England contingent denounced the Old School for violating the constitution of the church, and feared that the antislavery movement would follow the same procedure. William Dana called it a "consolidated despotism" which could move

against slaveholders as easily as heretics.⁵⁸ Convinced that northern Old Schoolers were just as anti-slavery as the New School, Thomas Magruder proposed a southern Assembly in the Southern Christian Sentinel of March 2, 1839, as a means of permanently freeing “the Southern Churches from *Abolitionist* aggression, and from *foreign interferences* of every description.” But when I. S. K. Legare called for the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia to declare itself independent in 1838, his motion failed 9-60, with support coming only from Charleston Union Presbytery. In an attempt to create a southern Assembly, the Cassville Convention met in 1840 with sixteen ministers and a dozen elders, but in 1840 few southern Presbyterians were willing to surrender the national influence of the General Assembly of the Old School Presbyterian Church for a regional Assembly.⁵⁹ Slavery was not a sufficiently powerful enough issue in 1840 to divide the Presbyterian church.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Thomas Erskine Clarke, “Thomas Smyth: Moderate of the Old South” (Th.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1970) 121-122. Clarke explains that when the Rev. John Witherspoon D. D., pastor at Camden, South Carolina, had said at Synod that he supported the 1818 act against slavery, Elipha White published the statement in an article in the Charleston Observer holding it up as an attack on slavery. Witherspoon replied that the 1818 act was a defense of emancipationism, which Witherspoon still supported against the radicals on both sides. Witherspoon pointed out that his slaves had all been inherited, while White had purchased his slaves. He claimed that it was New England men in South Carolina who were promoting slavery and secession.

⁵⁹Harold Parker, The United Synod of the South (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) 27-28. In an article originally written before the 1838 Assembly, one of the Charleston Union Presbytery wrote that except for Princeton and “some in the neighboring cities, there are few exceptions to the remark that the whole North believe that slavery is sinful and ought to be abolished.” “A Southern Organization,” Southern Christian Sentinel 1.3 (March 16, 1839).

⁶⁰Justice, “A Southern Organization of the Presbyterian Church to the Editor of the Courier,” CO 13.11 (March 16, 1839) 42-43. “Justice” argued that while slavery “is distasteful to them, just as it was with their fathers who organized our nation,” they are no more likely to agitate on the subject than their fathers were. It should be remembered that these discussions were held in the wake of the Nullification controversy in South Carolina. See William W. Freehling, Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

The Charleston Union Presbytery insisted that the statement of 1818 was “erroneous in itself, injurious to the Christian character of the Southern states, and unworthy of a place on the records of the Presbyterian church. If it remained “in full force,” the presbytery would be forced to withdraw from the church.⁶¹ The New York Observer astutely commented that the Charleston Union Presbytery did not speak for the whole south.⁶² Indeed, after the General Assembly of 1839 refused to even reply to the presbytery’s demand to repeal the Act of 1818, the Charleston Union Presbytery withdrew from the Old School.⁶³ The minority of the presbytery remained in the Old School as the Charleston Presbytery, confident that South Carolinians should not fear an Old School led by Breckinridge and Hodge.⁶⁴

⁶¹New York Observer 16.17 (April 28, 1838) 65. While the vote was *nemine contradicente* (no negative votes), the moderator, Benjamin M. Palmer, Sr., stated that he did “not consider himself responsible either for the preamble or resolutions adopted,” and several ministers who would later align themselves with the Old School were absent, including Aaron Leland of Columbia Theological Seminary, and William McDowell, the secretary of the Board of Domestic Missions. Of those who were present, only Benjamin Gildersleeve, editor of the Charleston Observer, stayed with the Old School after the presbytery withdrew.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 66

⁶³The presbytery remained independent from 1839-1852, when it finally reunited with the Old School synod of South Carolina.

⁶⁴Thomas Smyth, the Irish-born, Princeton-trained pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Charleston, praised Breckinridge in the Charleston Observer, assuring his South Carolina readers that while “Mr. B does not adopt the opinions circulated by many at the South on the subject of slavery,” he is one of the leading opponents of abolitionism. Thomas Smyth, “The Abolition and New School Explosion in the Charleston Union Presbytery” CO (January 26, 1839), quoted in “Memoirs, to Serve as a History of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy in the Presbyterian Church No. VII” BLRM 5.3 (March, 1839) 125.

Name	Dates	Birth	College	Seminary	Grad
Edward Palmer	(1788-1882)	SC	Phillips Academy	AndTS	1824
Reuben Post	(1792-1858)	VT	Middlebury College	PTS	1818
William States Lee	(1793-1875)	SC	CNJ	private	1812
Dyer Ball	(1796-1866)	MA	Yale College	AndTS	1829
George W. Boggs	(1796-1871)	SC	Amherst College	PTS	1831
James L. Merrick	(1803-1866)	MA	Amherst College	PTS & CTS	1833
John A. Mitchell	(1806-1838)	TN	Washington C, TN	PTS	1830
William B. Yates	(1809-1882)	SC	Aberdeen University	UTSVA& PTS	1833
William C. Dana	(1810-1880)	MA	Dickinson College	AndTS & CTS	1835
I. S. K. Legare	(1810-1874)	SC	Yale College	CTS	1834
Erastus Hopkins	(1810-1872)	MA	Dartmouth College	PTS & AndTS	1834
Elipha White		New England	?	?	
Benjamin M. Palmer, Sr		New England	?	?	
Zabdiel Rogers		CT	?	?	
Thomas Magruder	(????-1854)	GA	Franklin College GA	CTS	1835
John Dickson		?	?	?	
Aaron Leland	(1787-1871)	MA	Williams College	private	1810
William A. McDowell	(1789-1851)	NJ	CNJ	PTS	1813
Benjamin Gildersleeve	(1791-1875)	CT	Middlebury College	PTS	1818
Arthur Buist	(1798-1842)	SC	College of Charleston	private	1822
John B. Van Dyck	(1800-1840)	NY	Amherst College	PTS	1829
James Lewers	(1806-1868)	Ireland	Belfast College	PTS	1832
Adam Gilchrist	(1806-1861)	SC	Dickinson College	PTS	1830
Thomas Smyth	(1808-1873)	Ireland	Belfast College	PTS	1831
Edward T. Buist	(1809-1877)	SC	private	PTS	1831
John F. Lanneau	(1809-1867)	SC	Yale College	PTS	1832
John B. Adger	(1810-1899)	SC	Union College	PTS	1833
Joseph Wallace		?	?	?	
Bold=those who stayed with the Old School after the division of Charleston Union Presbytery in 1839					

6.2. Ministers of the Charleston Union Presbytery, 1837

3. The Northwestern Debates, 1841-1845

With the departure of the most radical pro-slavery presbytery, the northwest became the focus of the slavery discussion in the Old School, centered in the three western papers, the Presbyterian Advocate of Pittsburgh, the Protestant and Herald of Louisville, Kentucky, and from 1841, the bimonthly Presbyterian of the West of Springfield, Ohio.

In Kentucky, the Protestant and Herald generally engaged the issue of slavery only when the Ohio synods raised the subject. Though their plan of gradual emancipation had failed in 1834, Kentucky Presbyterians remained generally in favor of emancipation, but feared that the abolitionist movement had dashed any hope of a peaceful solution. Editors William L. Breckinridge and Nathan L. Rice commented in 1839 that “if the Abolition party had sufficient strength, [it] might sever the Union, but can never abolish slavery.” Both anti-slavery in conviction, they agreed with R. J. Breckinridge and Hodge that only persuasion could succeed at ending slavery.⁶⁵

In Pittsburgh, William Annan, editor of the Presbyterian Advocate, declared that “we regard slavery as in many respects an evil. We admire and most cordially approve the old Pennsylvania system of emancipation, and most heartily pray that the time may speedily come when all her sister states will go and do likewise. This is the extent of our abolitionism. . . . We are resolved to have no quarrel upon the subject” between immediate and gradual emancipation.⁶⁶ The Pittsburgh paper maintained this stance during Annan’s eighteen years as editor, periodically encouraging emancipation and colonization.

The Ohio River valley, however, was the center of a small group of Old School abolitionists. William A. Adair (WTS 1833) published an attack on Western Seminary and the Old School Presbyterian Church in the abolitionist Christian Witness in 1841. The occasion for the attack was the installation of Kentuckian slaveholder Lewis Warner Green (PTS and private 1833) as professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature in 1840. Adair

⁶⁵P&H 9.3 (December 19, 1839).

⁶⁶“Emancipation” Presbyterian Advocate 1.1 (October 4, 1838).

waxed eloquent in his tirade against the influence of slavery in the Old School: “Is it not enough that Slavery shall sit in the moderator's chair in our GAs—. . . is it not enough that it enters our seminaries and takes its seat as expounder of the Bible--is it not enough that it shall bring upon our platform to defend truth and orthodoxy against the New School, a man notorious for his robbery and murder.” Since Green was a slaveholder, he must therefore, in Adair’s abolitionist logic, be a thief and a murderer. With Green on the faculty, the seminary had become “a sanctuary to Slavery's Legions.” Therefore, Adair asked, “Will the God of Mercy and Justice, the Avenger of the poor, and the Refuge of the needy smile upon an institution which incorporate with pure religion a system which is the fittest emblem of hell there is upon earth?”⁶⁷

The editor, William Annan, remarked on his “deep and sickening sense of shame and wonder--that such an ebullition of spleen, and envy, and personal dislike, and settled hostility to, and denunciation of our church, and its institutions, and many of its most aged and venerable men, should be sent forth tho the world with the initials annexed of one of our youngest members.” Further, Annan pointed out that Adair had misfired in his attack on professor Green. No one else in the Synod of Pittsburgh has done more “both by his example and his purse, to advance the great cause of negro emancipation.” As the cousin of J. G. Birney and the brother of the late Judge Green “who led the Kentucky Emancipationists,” Green purchased slaves solely for the purpose of emancipating them,

⁶⁷W. A. A., “Beauties of Abolitionism” reprinted in the Presbyterian Advocate 3.20 (February 10, 1841). Along the way he attacked both Princeton and Western Seminaries, the General Assembly, and the Boards of Foreign Missions and Education. Annan could not help but point out that Adair had failed to attack the Board of Domestic Missions, and surmised that the reason was that Adair was a home missionary of that Board.

and had expended a “vast sum” in purchasing families to prevent them from being separated.⁶⁸ Three weeks later the facts were published in the Presbyterian Advocate. Green presently owned twenty slaves. Seven were aged, diseased, or blind, and had no means of supporting themselves. Eleven were children unable to support themselves, but had already been emancipated (which would take formal effect on their eighteenth birthdays), while the other two were healthy men who had been purchased by Green, and were presently working to pay him back for the purchase price. Annan concluded with but a single comment: “would each abolitionist be the means of emancipating one half as many, slavery would disappear very soon from our soil. Would each Presbyterian of his native State do as much, slavery would be immediately abolished there.”⁶⁹

But such anecdotes did not assuage all northwesterners. Two years later more than fifty members of churches within the bounds of Richland Presbytery (in Central Ohio) petitioned their presbytery to make a clear statement against slavery. Echoing the language of the 1818 General Assembly declaration, the memorialists urged the presbytery to do all in their power to “purge the Church of this ‘blot upon Christianity.’” Expressing traditional Presbyterian deference to authority, the members declared that they did not wish to agitate but would “submit to your authority in the Lord.”⁷⁰ The presbytery replied that its silence did not imply approval, and suggested that “there is a wide difference

⁶⁸Ibid. Adair, who had been pastor at the Second Presbyterian Church of Allegheny, demitted the Presbyterian ministry and went into business in 1844.

⁶⁹“Professor Green and Slavery” Presbyterian Advocate 3.23 (March 3, 1841).

⁷⁰“Memorial to Richland Pby from L. W. Knowlton and 50 or 60 others” Presbyterian Advocate 6.5 (October 4, 1843).

between enslaving mankind, and in certain circumstances retaining them in slavery.” It could not agree with the petition to exclude “slave holding ministers from their pulpits, and slave-holding members from their communion” because “slavery. . . has never been regarded by the church as such a crime *per se*, as disqualified from ministerial fellowship or church communion.” Abuses could certainly result in exclusion from the church, but they would need a concrete case, not an abstract question in order to do this. Echoing Hodge and Breckinridge, the presbytery reminded the petitioners that “slavery did exist in both the old and new testament churches, without depriving persons of church membership.” The New Testament is contrary to the practice of enslaving men, but where it existed the apostle merely enjoins Christian love and brotherhood between master and slave, but does not reject the relation itself.⁷¹

Later in 1843, New School minister John Rankin began to inquire if abolitionists in the Old School would be interested in forming a church that would formally exclude slaveholders from membership. John A. Dunlap (PTS 1835) and William D. Smith (private 1830), editors of the Presbyterian of the West, commented that few Old School abolitionists were likely to go. “They are, it is true, decided Abolitionists, but with very few exceptions they are not ultra. Abolitionism with them is *one thing*, and that of great importance in their estimation; but it is not *every thing*.” In 1843, even abolition-minded Old School Presbyterians were unwilling to force the dictates of their conscience on others. While they earnestly desired “to see the church take stronger ground on the subject

⁷¹Ibid. The presbytery’s response was authored by Henry Hervey (private 1828, pastor at Martinsburg, OH—the largest church in the presbytery).

of slavery than it has done, they are far from thinking it their duty to leave the church, because that is not done in the time and manner they wish.”⁷²

Therefore several northwestern presbyters took steps to reassert the anti-slavery thrust of the 1818 declaration. In November of 1843, Dr. Robert H. Bishop, a professor (and former president) of Miami University of Ohio, and a minister in Oxford Presbytery,⁷³ brought an overture to the Synod of Cincinnati resolving that “the time has

⁷²PW 2.23 (Aug 17, 1843). Rankin had sided with the New School in 1838, forming the Ripley Presbytery with like-minded Ohioans. In 1847 this presbytery withdrew from the New School to form the Free Presbyterian Church. Old School Presbyterian ministers who joined the Free Presbyterians included Edwin H. Nevin (WTS 1834) in 1849, Joseph Gordon (licentiate) in 1847, his brother George Gordon (WTS 1835) in 1850, and Wells Bushnell (PTS 1825) in 1853. Willey says that four Old School ministers came from eastern OH and western PA with their congregations to form the Free Presbytery of Mahoning in 1847; in all 72 Free Church congregations existed at one time or another from NY to IA—though most in southern OH and western PA (166). It sponsored ecumenical anti-slavery conventions, which attracted Congregationalists along with a handful of Free Presbyterian, Baptist, and Wesleyan churches. It also sponsored the American Reform Tract and Book Society, with John Rankin as president, and published over 200 books and tracts, many written by Rankin. At its peak the denomination only had around 1500-2000 members. After the division of the New School in 1857 and the Old School in 1861 many returned to their parent churches. For more on Rankin and Gordon see Larry G. Willey, “John Rankin, Antislavery Prophet, and the Free Presbyterian Church,” American Presbyterians 72:3 (Fall 1994) 157-172; John R. McKivigan, “Prisoner of Conscience: George Gordon and the Fugitive Slave Law,” JPH 60:4 (Winter 1982) 336-354. A typical Old School response to the Free Presbyterian Church can be found in R. J., “American Free Church” Presbyterian Advocate (September 27, 1848), which claimed that divisions are the scandal of Christianity. (R. J.’s series ran from August through October). Likewise a layman called attention to the formation of the abolitionist Presbyterian church with two former members of the Beaver Presbytery and a former licentiate from St. Clairsville (whose license was revoked for using “reproachful language” against the General Assembly). A Layman, “A Schism,” from the Presbyterian Advocate, reprinted in the Presbyterian 17.52 (Dec 25, 1847) 206.

⁷³Born and educated in the Church of Scotland, Bishop had come to Kentucky in 1802, where he had taught at Transylvania University from 1804-1824. Uncomfortable with slavery, he had welcomed the call as the first president of Miami University in 1824. In his twenty-one year presidency he built the university into one of the largest colleges in the country (see appendix four), and the premier college of the west. He had taken a moderate stance in the Old School/New School debate, editing the Western Peacemaker in an attempt to hold the two sides together. After the division he stayed with the Old School, though in 1845 he transferred to the New School, largely due to the issue of slavery. His tough anti-slavery language, however, upset many members of the Board of Trustees (appointed by the Ohio State legislature). In 1841 he was replaced as president by Dr. George Junkin, a former covenanter, who had served as president of Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania from 1832-1841. Junkin himself would be forced out three years later by Bishop’s abolition-minded supporters. Presbyterian (Sept 28, 1844) 154; History and Biographical Cyclopaedia of Butler County, Ohio (1882), cited in “John W. Scott” at: <http://sdsspc1.physics.lsa.umich.edu/amckay/presintr.htm>

fully come, when every minister, and every member of the Presbyterian church, whose lot is cast in any of the free States, ought to cease from defending, either directly or indirectly, *slavery*, in any of the forms in which it exists in the slave-holding States.” Bishop argued that “every attempt to justify or excuse slavery, in any of the forms in which it exists in these States, *by scripture*, is particularly unbecoming the character of the christian ministry, and must, in the present advanced state of religious knowledge, be highly criminal,” and urged the “full and friendly discussion (rather than division)” of the issue of slavery at the next General Assembly. Since the 1844 Assembly would be held in Louisville, Kentucky (the first time the Assembly had ever met in a slave state), Bishop suggested that this would be a particularly good time to discuss the matter. The fact that the Assembly “will be partaking of the hospitalities of slaveholders” would provide a healthy context for a fair discussion—and would prove that even the most zealous of the Old School anti-slavery advocates were not radical abolitionists.⁷⁴ George Junkin, president of Miami University, and Joshua L. Wilson of the First Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati led the opposition, arguing that the north needed to deal with the abolitionists first before they could effectively persuade the south to end slavery. After considerable debate and various proposals, the synod voted to indefinitely postpone the whole subject 39 to 29.⁷⁵ But emancipationist Kentuckians saw such decisions as evidence that the “great

⁷⁴“Synod of Cincinnati and Slavery” P&H 2.5 (November 2, 1843). It was well known that “abolitionists” would not accept hospitality from slaveholders—much less accept them as members of their churches. Indeed, it appears that a few Old School Presbyterian commissioners to the 1844 Assembly refused to spend the night on slave soil, and crossed the Ohio River to Jeffersonville, Indiana. P&H 2.33 (May 23, 1844).

⁷⁵“Synod of Cincinnati and Slavery” P&H 2.5 (November 2, 1843); “The Synod of Cincinnati” WS 7.14 (November 23, 1843) 56.

body of the Presbyterian church whose views are compared will be found in the main of one mind on this subject, opposed both to the system of American slavery, and to modern Abolitionism.”⁷⁶

As the General Assembly of 1845 approached, Presbyterian newspapers watched the divisions in the Methodist and Baptist churches. The Methodist church had divided in the summer of 1844, and the Baptists followed a year later. William Swan Plumer of the Watchman of the South published news of these events in successive issues, along with an article on “The American Board of Missions and Slavery,” which gave notice from ABCFM headquarters that slaveholders could not become corporate members or missionaries, and that no agents were being sent to the south to raise money, in order to avoid the taint of slave money.⁷⁷ A few months later the Charleston Observer spoke of the increasing abolitionism of the northern religious press. “Such being the tone and spirit of these papers, it is obvious that should it continue and increase, all *Christian* intercourse between the North and South must soon cease, and with it all friendly political relations. Upon the facts here stated, it is not necessary to make any comment. Our readers can draw conclusions for themselves, and supply what we may have left unsaid.”⁷⁸ A month later, as the Baptists divided, Plumer wondered if the Presbyterians would follow.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Quisquis, “Dr. Junkin” P&H 3.15 (January 9, 1845).

⁷⁷The notice of the Methodists is in WS 8.2 (August 29, 1844) 6; followed by “The American Board of Missions and Slavery” on page 8. The Baptist anti-slavery foreign missions society is mentioned on the front page of the following issue (September 5, 1844) 9.

⁷⁸“The North and the South” from the Charleston Observer” WS 8.26 (February 13, 1845) 104.

⁷⁹“More Division” WS 8.30 (March 13, 1845) 118.

But after further reflection, Plumer thought that perhaps the division of the churches would actually benefit the Union. If the churches were no longer torn apart by internal strife, perhaps these divisions would actually work toward peace.⁸⁰ Gildersleeve concurred: “Many have imagined that the large Ecclesiastical bodies in our country, each embracing under one common standard the North and the South—the East and the West—were among the greatest safeguards to the perpetuity of the Union.” But the political differences between the regions were becoming so great that he wondered whether the “separate embodiment of feelings and sentiments, as they exist in different latitudes” with respect to slavery might not suggest the wisdom of having separate southern religious organizations.⁸¹ Certainly the Baptists and Methodists were better off with separate churches “than to preserve a nominal union with embittered strife upon a subject which is foreign to the purposes of all legitimate ecclesiastical action.”⁸² Would the Presbyterians follow suit?

4. The General Assembly of 1845

In April of 1845, the English-born minister Thomas E. Thomas (private 1836), pastor at Hamilton, Ohio, launched the Christian Monthly Magazine, a monthly periodical

⁸⁰WS 8.40 (May 22, 1845).

⁸¹Editorial, “Church and State,” CO 18.26 (June 29, 1844) 102.

⁸²“The North and the South,” CO 19.21 (May 24, 1845) 82. Gildersleeve reported that Henry Clay had warned against the division of the churches: “I will not say that such a separation would necessarily produce a dissolution of the political union of these States; but the example would be fraught with imminent danger, and, in co-operation with other causes unfortunately existing, its tendency on the stability of the confederacy would be perilous and alarming.” “The Methodist Church,” CO 15.19 (May 10, 1845) 75.

designed to facilitate communication among antislavery Old School Presbyterians.⁸³

Thomas, one of the few self-proclaimed abolitionists in the Old School, both advertised and reported on the pre-Assembly anti-slavery convention held on May 14, 1845. The convention, which only managed to attract five commissioners for the upcoming Assembly, drew only three ministers and three elders from outside of Ohio. Only one of its ministerial members had attended seminary (Benjamin C. Critchlow–WTS 1836), while the rest had all trained privately—mostly in Ohio.

Presbytery	State	Ministers	Elders
Chillicothe	OH	5	5
Coshocton	OH	1 *	1 *
Cincinnati	OH	1	1
Beaver	PA	1 *	3
Steubenville	OH	1 *	
Peoria	IL	1	
Oxford	OH	2	1
New Lisbon	OH	1 *	
Indianapolis	IN	1	
St. Clairsville	OH	1	
<u>Total</u>		<u>14</u>	<u>12</u>
*Commissioners to 1845 General Assembly			

Figure 6.3. Attendance at the Presbyterian Anti-Slavery Convention in Cincinnati, 1845

Their first resolution claimed that in the “character and course of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, in reference to the sin of slaveholding, and those other sins against God and man which it necessarily involves, we see many of the principles and practices by which the scriptures designate 'the man of

sin.” Connecting anti-slavery with anti-Catholicism, they declared themselves against such tyranny, and condemned the halfway measures of their fellow northern Old School Presbyterians,

⁸³In his column, “Editor's Correspondence” *Christian Monthly Magazine (CMM)* 1.7 (August 1845) 157, Thomas declared that “our Magazine was originally established for this, among other objects-- that it might furnish a medium of communication between anti-slavery Presbyterians, through which they might become acquainted with each others views and plans in respect to ecclesiastical action for the abolition of slavery.” Since forums for “venting” their views were few in the Old School, we “cheerfully offer our pages.”

who, while they acknowledge that the enslaving of one part of the human race is utterly inconsistent with the law of God, and totally irreconcilable with the spirit of the gospel, defend it as a divine institution by appeal to the Scripture, thus proclaiming as their faith, that the God of the Bible is not infinitely holy, and that the revelation which he has given us of his will is not infinitely pure, and that on the contrary it encourages a crime which, excepting when perpetrated on the African race, is punishable with death, by the laws of every civilized nation.

Attempting to maintain a traditional Presbyterian model of the catholicity of the visible church, they declared in a second resolution that they did not desire to secede, but admitted that the presence of antichristian tendencies in the Old School might force them to do so.⁸⁴ Instead they resorted to withholding funds from the Board of Domestic Missions so long as the Board furnished monies to “persons employed in imparting oral instruction, as a substitute for the Scriptures, to slaves held, in part, by ministers, elders and members of the Presbyterian Church.”⁸⁵ Economic pressure would become the new means of communicating dissent.

The final action of the convention was to send a memorial to the General Assembly which stated their most basic concerns: “there exists in these United States, a system of personal slavery, founded on the assumed right of property in man--a system, the parallel to which can be found only in one or two Popish, and a few Pagan countries.” The Presbyterian Church, they argued, is “deeply implicated in the support of this system.”

⁸⁴“Presbyterian Anti-Slavery Convention” CMM 1:3 (June, 1845). One minister, the Rev. W. S. Rogers of Oxford Presbytery, dissented from both resolutions. William Swan Plumer commented on the convention as being mostly drawn from the Chillicothe region, and assured his southern readers that such a small contingent was no cause for concern. “The General Assembly” WS 8.40 (May 22, 1845) 158. The convention was also noticed in “The Next General Assembly,” from the Presbyterian of the West reprinted in the Presbyterian 15.17 (April 26, 1845) 65.

⁸⁵“Presbyterian Anti-Slavery Convention” CMM 1:3 (June, 1845).

After citing the 1818 declaration, they reminded the Assembly of the Assembly's letter to the Scottish United Secession Church in 1834 that stated: "We hope [your observations] may make us more sensible of the evils of this system, and rouse us to new and increased exertions to remove the iniquity from among us. *We are verily guilty in this matter.*" The convention then pressed their point home: were Presbyterian slaveholders making progress? Had the mandate of 1818 continued? Or, instead, "Is it not most manifest, on the contrary, that slavery has overleaped every barrier, civil and ecclesiastical; and that the numbers, both of slaves, and professedly christian slaveholders, are daily and hourly increasing?" Urging the Assembly to reaffirm earlier testimonies, the convention pled that such testimonies could only be reinforced by action.⁸⁶

The following day, May 15, 1845, the General Assembly opened its meeting in Cincinnati. In addition to the memorial from the convention, the Assembly had received several memorials from presbyteries asking for a resolution on the subject of slavery. Ever since the split with the New School in 1838, there had been some question as to where the Old School stood on the subject, and especially after the Methodists and Baptist divisions over slavery in 1844-45, many felt that a brief statement could help prevent suspicions on both sides from growing. The Moderator, the Rev. Dr. John Krebs of New York City, appointed a six man committee (ministers Nathan L. Rice of Cincinnati, John C. Lord of Buffalo, Alexander T. McGill of Western Theological Seminary, and Nathan H. Hall of Lexington, Kentucky, along with two elders: Judge Humphrey H. Leavitt of Steubenville, Ohio, and lawyer James Dunlap of Philadelphia) to consider the memorials and report

⁸⁶"Presbyterian Anti-Slavery Convention" CMM 1:3 (June, 1845).

back. The committee may have been stacked with northern men, but these were northern conservatives who had as little sympathy with abolitionism as they did with slavery. None had attended the anti-slavery convention. They reported back to the Assembly that since the scriptures did not condemn slaveholding as sinful, neither should the church.⁸⁷

⁸⁷“The General Assembly,” BRPR 17:3 (July 1845) 438-441. See Minutes (1845) 16-18.

The question which is now unhappily agitating and dividing other branches of the church, and which is pressed upon the attention of the Assembly...is this: Do the Scriptures teach that the holding of slaves, without regard to circumstances, is a sin, the renunciation of which, should be made a condition of membership in the church of Christ?

It is impossible to answer this question in the affirmative, without contradicting some of the plainest declarations in the Word of God. That slavery existed in the days of Christ and his Apostles, is an admitted fact. . . . This Assembly cannot, therefore, denounce the holding of slaves as necessarily a heinous and scandalous sin, calculated to bring upon the Church the curse of God, without charging the Apostles of Christ with conniving at such sin, introducing into the church such sinners, and thus bringing upon them the curse of the Almighty.

In so saying, however, the Assembly are not to be understood, as denying that there is evil connected with slavery. Much less do they approve those defective and oppressive laws by which, in some of the states, it is regulated. . . . Nor is the Assembly to be understood as countenancing the idea that masters may regard their servants as mere property, not as human beings, rational, accountable, immortal. The scriptures prescribe not only the duties of servants, but of masters also, warning the latter to discharge those duties, "knowing that their master is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him."

The Assembly intend simply to say, that since Christ and his inspired Apostles did not make the holding of slaves a bar of communion, we, as a court of Christ, have no authority to do so. . . . We feel constrained further to say that however desirable it may be to ameliorate the condition of the slaves in the Southern and Western States, or to remove slavery from our country, these objects we are fully persuaded, can never be secured by ecclesiastical legislation. Much less can they be attained by those indiscriminate denunciations against the slaveholders, without regard to their character or circumstances, which have, to so great an extent, characterized the movements of modern abolitionists, which, so far from removing the evils complained of, tend only to perpetuate and aggravate them. . . .

In view of the above stated principles and facts,

Resolved, First, That the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States was originally organised, and has since continued the bond of union in the church upon the conceded principle that the existence of domestic slavery, under the circumstances in which it is found in the southern portion of the country, is no bar to Christian communion.

Second, That the petitions that ask the Assembly to make the holding of slaves a matter of discipline, do virtually require this judicatory to dissolve itself, and abandon the organization under which, by the Divine blessing, it has so long prospered. The tendency is evidently to separate the northern from the southern portion of the church; a result which every good citizen must deplore, as tending to the dissolution of the union of our beloved country, and which every enlightened Christian will oppose as bringing about a ruinous and unnecessary schism between brethren who maintain a common faith.

The yeas and nays being called on the adoption of this report, the vote stood, affirmative 164, negative 12, non liquet 3, excused 1. Mr. Robinson and six other members presented their dissent from this decision in the following words:

"The undersigned ask leave to dissent from the action on the report on slavery, because they think it does in some important parts contravene former action on this subject, particularly the testimony of the Assembly in 1818."

Source: Minutes (1845) 16-18.

Figure 6.4. The 1845 Statement on Slavery

This report was carefully crafted to gain the support of the entire church. Its central thrust was designed to assure southern Presbyterians that the Old School had no intention of joining the abolitionists. At the same time, it attempted to remain consistent with an earlier deliverance of the General Assembly in 1818 which had declared slavery an evil that needed to be eliminated. While a few, such as the Rev. Algernon S. MacMaster, pastor at Westfield, Pennsylvania, in Beaver Presbytery and ruling elder J. L. Jernegan of Lake Presbytery, Indiana, pled for more time to consider the report (and Dr. William T. Hamilton of Alabama moved to print the report for all commissioners and hold the debate three days later), the overwhelming majority of the Assembly agreed with Dr. George Junkin of Lafayette College and Dr. John C. Lord of Buffalo, New York, that the document was plain enough.⁸⁸

After less than an hour of discussion, the Old School was ready to vote. The vote was overwhelming: 168-13. Immediately after the decision, “L” wrote back to the Watchman of the South: “When I think of the probable good effects of this action of the Assembly on the whole church and on the whole country, I thank God and take courage. I feel now, more than I have done for the last ten years, that the *Union is safe*.” Unlike those denominations that had divided in the last year, “L” was convinced that “there is a strong conservative power in the principles of Presbyterianism—”⁸⁹ strong enough to hold the union together.

⁸⁸“General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church” WS 8.42 (June 5, 1845) 165.

⁸⁹“Letter from L” [possibly Drury Lacy] WS 8.41 (May 29, 1845) 163.

But not everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Not everyone was convinced that the 1818 statement remained intact. Rev. James Robertson of New Lisbon Presbytery and six other northwestern members registered their protest against this decision: “The undersigned ask leave to dissent from the action on the report on slavery, because they think it does in some important parts contravene former action on this subject, particularly the testimony of the Assembly in 1818.”⁹⁰

Protesters				
Name	Born	Seminary	Presbytery	Church
James Robertson	?	unknown 1820s	New Lisbon	Hanover, OH
Adam B. Gilliland	NC	J. Gilliland 1824	Oxford	Riley, OH
James McKean	?	unknown 1836	Steubenville	Waynesburg, OH
John C. Eastman	?	unknown 1830s	Crawfordsville	Crawfordsville, IN
John D. Whitham	WV	PTS 1840	Coshocton	Keene, OH
Samuel E. Hibben	?	ruling elder	Chillicothe	OH
M. C. Williams	?	ruling elder	Oxford	OH
Other Negative Votes				
Varnum Noyes	?	unknown 1830s	Wooster	Guilford, OH
Algernon S. MacMaster	PA	G. MacMaster 1830s	Beaver	Westfield, PA
Stephen Bliss	?	private 1825	Palestine	Wabash, IL
Hugh Gaston	?	ruling elder	New Lisbon	OH
Ezekiel Miller	?	ruling elder	Allegheny	PA
Archibald Barton	?	ruling elder	Coshocton	OH

Figure 6.5. Protesters of the 1845 Decision on Slavery

The protesters backgrounds—most privately trained from Ohio, and all from the Northwest—suggests a distinctive regional culture that was developing in isolation from the rest of the church (similar to what was happening in the South).⁹¹

⁹⁰“General Assembly,” BRPR 17:3 (July 1845) 441; “General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church” WS 8.42 (June 5, 1845) 165.

⁹¹Since I have been able to identify all of those trained at Presbyterian seminaries, the designation “unknown” most likely refers to private training with a minister.

Most northerners, however, echoed Charles Hodge in their praise of this decision. Having watched the Baptists and Methodists divide over slavery during the previous months, the overwhelming majority of Old School Presbyterians were convinced, as the second resolution indicated, that the unity of the nation depended at least in part upon their willingness to work together across sectional boundaries. Hodge rejoiced that “Our Church we trust is thus saved from the excitement which has rent asunder other denominations, and which threatens to weaken, if not to destroy, the bonds of our national union.”⁹²

Against New School claims that the General Assembly was controlled by the South, the Watchman of the South pointed out that only 68 of the 188 members of the General Assembly came from slaveholding states.⁹³ The statement had been written by northern men for a national assembly. It was crafted with language echoing Hodge’s distinction between the acceptable institution of slavery and the unacceptable southern slave codes.

But not all were so pleased. Thomas E. Thomas, editor of the Christian Monthly Magazine, was incensed. Thomas declared that “iniquity was there” at the Assembly and claimed that southern sympathizers, such as Junkin and Lord, had hurried the committee’s report through the Assembly. Since the Assembly had made its decision with less than an hour of debate, Thomas hoped that further consideration would turn the Old School around: “On the whole, we are confident that Satan overshot himself for once (our brethren must pardon us; they are too orthodox to deny that the old Adversary has great

⁹²“General Assembly,” BRPR 17:3 (July 1845) 441.

⁹³“The General Assembly Not a Southern Body” WS 8.44 (June 19, 1845) 176.

influence, sometimes, even over good men); and that although he meant it for evil, God meant it for good.”⁹⁴

Thomas was intent on reminding the Old School of the historic Presbyterian testimony against slavery. In August he reprinted a series of presbyterial and synodical statements against slavery from Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky, from 1829-1839.⁹⁵ In September he pursued the claim that the Old School was joining forces with the papacy: insisting that southern slavery entirely “reduces human beings to the condition of chattels personal. . . and instead of the pure word of God, dooms them to live on that filthy cup with which the 'Great Whore' feeds her bantlings--*oral instruction*.”⁹⁶ If, as the Assembly now declared, slaveholding could not be a ground for discipline, then the Assembly had entered “*a covenant with death--an agreement with Hell*,” and a “Jesuitical spirit of compromise” had taken over the church.⁹⁷ Yet in spite of the violence of the rhetoric, few Old School abolitionists left the church. Indeed, sparse subscription rates led to the demise of the Christian Monthly Magazine by the end of its first year.⁹⁸

⁹⁴“General Assembly of 1845 and Slavery” CMM 1:3 (June 1845).

⁹⁵“General Assembly of 1845 and Slavery” CMM 1.5 (August 1845) 133.

⁹⁶“A New Cornerstone for the General Assembly” CMM 1.6 (September 1845) 168.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 170. The language echoes that of William Lloyd Garrison’s complaint about the United States Constitution.

⁹⁸Since I was unable to find a complete set of the Christian Monthly Magazine (numbers 3-7 were at the Presbyterian Historical Society), I could not get reliable subscription numbers. But the three months of receipts that were printed only tallied 91 new subscriptions. It is likely that Thomas started with several hundred subscribers, but there does not seem to have been much interest in the paper outside of Ohio.

5. The Brief Comment of 1846

The Assembly of 1845 did not, however, conclude the Old School's official statements on slavery. The northwest remained the center of controversy. As an example of the tensions in the northwest, when the publisher of the Presbyterian of the West slipped in an article on slavery contrary to the policy of editors Dunlap and Smith, the editors apologized to their readers, saying that if they allowed discussions of slavery in their paper, at least a third of the paper would be devoted to nothing else.⁹⁹ As expected, controversy awaited Nathan L. Rice, the major author of the Assembly's 1845 resolution, when the Synod of Cincinnati reviewed the General Assembly's actions that October. This synod, after all, contained Thomas E. Thomas, as well as the Chillicothe Presbytery, which had been famous for its anti-slavery stance for nearly twenty years, and some of its members had threatened to withdraw from the Old School if some anti-slavery action was not taken.¹⁰⁰

In particular, the synod was concerned that the wording of 1845 might be understood by southerners to contradict the deliverance of 1818, thereby releasing them from the obligation to work to end slavery. Therefore the synod passed resolutions 1) approving the Assembly's action "in refusing to make slave-holding in itself, without regard to circumstances, a bar to Christian communion;" 2) affirming that the 1845 action

⁹⁹"Slavery and the General Assembly" PW New Series 1.2 (October 2, 1845).

¹⁰⁰A convention of 32 elders and deacons from Chillicothe Presbytery had resolved in February to withdraw from the Old School if the 1845 General Assembly did not strengthen its stand against slavery. PW 4:14 (March 27, 1845) 54. In April the presbytery disavowed this resolution, refusing to postpone electing commissioners to the Assembly (proposed as a sign of protest) 2-20 with nine abstaining. PW 4:15 (April 10, 1845) 58.

should not be understood as repealing the 1818 declaration; and 3) asking the 1846 General Assembly to reaffirm the 1818 deliverance as well.

Rice and his supporters (most notably the patriarch of Cincinnati Presbyterianism, Joshua L. Wilson), objected to the third resolution as unnecessary, but each resolution passed overwhelmingly. Of ninety-nine members present, the first resolution only received four negative votes, and the second resolution only nine.¹⁰¹ The number of opponents, perhaps, was not significant. The names, however, were. Leading the roll of votes against Nathan Lewis Rice's greatest ecclesiastical triumph were Francis Monfort and Erasmus Darwin MacMaster.¹⁰²

Several presbyteries followed the lead of the Synod of Cincinnati and asked the 1846 General Assembly for greater clarity on the subject of slavery.¹⁰³ In particular, several northern presbyteries wanted to know: did the 1845 statement reverse the 1818 declaration?

In his opening remarks at the 1846 Assembly, Thomas E. Thomas acknowledged that it was obvious that the Assembly did not wish to have a lengthy discussion. "He would take occasion to say that those he represented, although opposed to slavery, were not what are called abolitionists." But they were opposed to the 1845 statement because it

¹⁰¹This is count given by the P&H (November 6, 1845). Thomas E. Thomas, editor of the CMM 1:7 (October 1845), and later a professor on the New Albany Seminary faculty, claimed that there were ten negative votes on the first two resolutions (it is possible that the synod allowed absent members to record their votes at a later time, which would explain the discrepancy).

¹⁰²"The Synod of Cincinnati" P&H 4.6 (Nov 6, 1845). Chapter seven will detail the feud between these Presbyterian leaders in the northwest.

¹⁰³The presbyteries were: Beaver, Hocking, Blairsville, New Lisbon, and Albany. Minutes (1846) 206.

was inconsistent with prior testimonies, regardless of what the 1846 Assembly might say. The Synod in 1787 and the Assembly in 1818 had recommended action in preparing slaves for freedom and working for emancipation. "It sympathized with the virtuous people of the South, but it warned its church members against using the plea of convenience for holding slaves." As late as 1834 the Assembly had admitted to the Scotch Secession Church that "we are verily guilty" in the matter of slavery. But for more than ten years we have done nothing. "Why, sir, it seems we are never to be allowed to do any thing in regard to slavery. . . . There are, I hope, many slaves in heaven. They are looking down upon this Assembly. God is looking down upon it. And how shall we act? It is one thing to say, "Lord, Lord," and it is another thing to do what he requires." Thomas urged the Assembly to 1) declare that slavery must end; 2) appoint a day of prayer and fasting; 3) declare that they will discipline those who "voluntarily engage" in slave-holding; 4) forbid ministers to hold slaves; 5) reaffirm the 1818 statement; 6) direct masters to give to their slaves what is just and fair; 7) require slave-holders to teach their slaves how to read; and 8) direct the southern synods to report their progress to the each Assembly. He understood that slavery could not be "immediately abolished. But if the Churches were labouring to abolish slavery, he wished that they would come up, from time to time, and report progress."

Dr. John C. Young admitted that the difficulty was in the measures to be pursued. "He would prefer that the Assembly should state distinctly what it thought slave-holders should do." The problem was that any ecclesiastical action "would be distorted" in the

popular mind. But he did not think that the church had changed its testimony. Slavery is an evil that should be removed, but slave-holding is not a sin in itself.¹⁰⁴

After some debate the Assembly voted 119-33 to say simply “that no further action upon this subject is, at present needed.” When the Rev. Robert M. White (PTS 1837), pastor of Fairview, Virginia (now West Virginia), attempted to add the phrase, “except to say that the action of the General Assembly of 1845 is not understood by this Assembly to deny or rescind the testimony that has been uttered by the General Assembly previous to that date,” the amendment was quickly laid on the table. But later that afternoon, White succeeded at convincing the Assembly to adopt his language,¹⁰⁵ which caused four northeastern presbyters to switch their votes, so that the final tally stood at 133-29.¹⁰⁶ The Assembly had gone on record as saying that it held together both the 1818 condemnation of slavery and the 1845 declaration that slaveholding was not a bar to communion in the Presbyterian Church.

¹⁰⁴“Debates in General Assembly: Slavery,” Presbyterian 16.24 (June 13, 1846) 93.

¹⁰⁵“Debates in General Assembly: Slavery,” 94. Dr. Philip Lindsley commented that he was somewhat troubled at the change in the south. His students at the University of Nashville had formerly written essays against slavery, now they always wrote against Abolitionism. “They look forward to emancipation as a far distant thing. And this has all been brought about by the action of the Abolitionists. . . . They had put emancipation one hundred years behind-hand.” He had once served as the president of the colonization society in Tennessee, which had sent 120 men to Africa. But now colonization was viewed by most southerners as a part of the abolitionist movement.

¹⁰⁶The Assembly also allowed commissioners who had been absent in the morning to record their votes after the afternoon resolution. Minutes (1846) 206-208. The vote came on Monday, June 1—on the tenth day of the Assembly. Of the twenty-eight commissioners who had gone home before the vote on slavery, only six were from the South, and nineteen were ruling elders.

<u>Region</u>	<u>Ministers</u>	<u>Elders</u>	<u>Total</u>
Northeast	26-4	14-2	40-6
Old Northwest	10-11	11-1	21-12
New Northwest	8-9	4-2	12-11
South	36-0	24-0	60-0
<u>Total</u>	<u>80-24</u>	<u>53-5</u>	<u>133-29</u>
State of Ohio	4-11	6-3	10-14

Figure 6.6. Votes on the “No Further Action” Resolution of 1846

The vote of the ruling elders is the most interesting. While northwestern ministers (especially in Ohio) were evenly divided about slavery, the ruling elders were convinced that no further statement was necessary. Only three of the eighteen northwestern ruling elder commissioners wanted to push the issue of slavery.¹⁰⁷ This suggests that while northwestern presbyteries were divided on the issue of slavery, in 1846 very few considered it an issue that should divide the church.

The Old School position was explained to the congregationalist General Association of New Hampshire by Alexander T. McGill, the fraternal delegate of the 1845 General Assembly.¹⁰⁸ While acknowledging that there were more pro-slavery brethren in

¹⁰⁷It should be noted that seventeen out of forty-one northwestern presbyteries failed to send ruling elder commissioners (though sixteen of twenty-seven southwestern presbyteries also neglected to send ruling elders, and while all but two northwestern presbyteries sent a minister, four southwestern presbyteries were entirely unrepresented). *Minutes* (1846) 186-188. In the 1840s that was fairly common. When the Assembly met in the midwest (Cincinnati in 1844 and Louisville in 1845), the northwest and southwest were well-represented, but when the Assembly was held in the East there were always at least twenty northwestern presbyteries that failed to send ruling elders. So a shortfall of seventeen presbyteries in Philadelphia in 1846 indicates that the northwest was trying to show up. During the same era, ministerial absences were much more rare (only 9-15 per year for the entire denomination).

¹⁰⁸It was the practice of the Presbyterian Church to send delegates to other Reformed denominations as an expression of the catholicity of the visible church. The Pennsylvania-born McGill (1807-1889) had been reared, trained and ordained in the Associate Presbyterian church, a small Scottish church tracing its roots to the Secession of the 1740s. Forced to the South for health reasons, he spent three years as a lawyer and teacher in Georgia (1829-1831), including a brief stint as a surveyor for the Cherokee Land Reservation in 1830, before returning to Pennsylvania for his theological education. After serving two short pastorates in Pennsylvania, he transferred into the Old School in 1838 with a portion of his Associate Presbyterian congregation in Carlisle. In 1841 he was called to the chair of ecclesiastical history and church government at Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny, where he served until 1852. After a year at Columbia Seminary in South Carolina, he returned to Western in 1854, only to accept a call to Princeton Theological Seminary the following year where he taught pastoral theology until 1883.

the Old School than abolitionists, McGill claimed that “the large majority of minsters and members in our church, believe that slavery is an evil; and never to be excused or indulged in the church; yet, that is an evil, over which she has no legitimate control, farther than to restrain abuses of it by individual members, and enforce scriptural injunctions respecting the relative duties of master and slave.” More precisely, McGill explained that the church does not have the authority to overthrow political despotism. “The religion of Christ is one of great principles, rather than minute precepts; and the church is commissioned to proclaim these principles, and teach them to all the world, rather than to combat specific evils with her special legislation.” As such, the statement of 1845 was “an indispensable explanation of the former [1818 statement]; giving the reason why the church spares in her communion, men who are involved in a system so strongly and justly condemned in 1818.” McGill warned against following the “clamors of the masses” lest the church surrender “all her distinctions, and subvert her most hallowed and precious institutions,” referring to the connection between the abolitionists and the teetotalers “who have reviled even the Lord's Supper, as a drunken ordinance.”¹⁰⁹ For McGill and most Old School Presbyterians, the moral issues of the antebellum era were interwoven, and the sorts of arguments that retained wine in the Lord's Supper while endorsing the temperance movement, also resulted in an emphasis on emancipation rather than abolition.

¹⁰⁹“The Slavery Question” Presbyterian Advocate 7.48 (September 24, 1845).

6. 1849: The Last Gasp in Kentucky

The 1849 General Assembly saw three memorials from Ohio presbyteries on the subject of slavery. The Presbytery of Chillicothe called upon the Assembly to “declare slavery to be a sin,” and to establish a “course of discipline which will remove it from our Church.” Likewise, the Presbytery of Coshocton asked the Assembly to create a committee to propose “a plan of abolition to be adopted by our Church.” The Presbytery of Erie requested some alterations to the statement of 1845 to come into greater conformity with the statement of 1818. The Assembly replied by stating that the proper forum for plans of abolition was the “secular Legislatures” of the various states—pointing to the emancipation efforts in Kentucky and Virginia that were being led by Old School Presbyterians. Further, the Assembly insisted that “the General Assembly is always ready to enforce” discipline against “those who neglect or violate the mutual duties of master and servant.” Concluding with exhortations for the increase of religious instruction for slaves, the Assembly refused to say anything further.¹¹⁰

That same year, 1849, Robert J. Breckinridge made his final attempt to end slavery in his native state. As Kentucky’s first superintendent of public education, Breckinridge sought to trade on his reputation as a minister and educator to persuade the state constitutional convention to include an emancipationist provision in the new state

¹¹⁰Minutes (1849) 254-255. Edwin H. Nevin, James S. Fullerton, Joseph Porter and William Bonar signed a protest arguing that the “light of divine truth alone, shining through the living organization of the Church” could “instruct and stimulate the masses” in the duty of emancipation. Minutes (1849) 256-257.

constitution.¹¹¹ His essay, The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky, urged Kentuckians to consider the benefits of emancipation for both black and white. Breckinridge objected to Kentucky's system of slavery because

1st, The rights of property are absolutely and universally abolished as to slaves. 2nd, The rights of person and character are unknown, as to them, except as the interest of the master and of the public peace may demand their recognition. 3rd, The institution of marriage between slaves, has no legal recognition, nor do marital rights exist as to them. 4th, The relation of parent and child, as between slaves, is not recognised by law, except in determining questions of property.

These rights, according to Breckinridge, were “inherent in human nature,” and “are all of divine authority.” While slaveholding was sanctioned by scripture, the state had no authority to abolish the natural rights of slaves, and such an unholy slave system as existed in Kentucky must be eliminated.¹¹²

After printing Breckinridge's essay on page one of the March 1, 1849 edition of the Presbyterian Herald, William Hill declared that he agreed with Breckinridge and Hodge in rejecting the “ultra-pro-slavery” view that claimed that God had intended blacks for

¹¹¹The emancipationist movement had been promoted by Cassius M. Clay in the True American of Lexington, Kentucky, which had started in 1845. For the details of the story, see Victor B. Howard, The Evangelical War against Slavery and Caste: The Life and Times of John G. Fee (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1996). Fee was reared in a Presbyterian church in Kentucky, but while his family sided with the Old School, he attended Lane Theological Seminary and joined the New School in 1842. He would eventually separate from the New School over his antislavery views in 1848, and was forced to leave Kentucky in 1859 after the John Brown raid, following more than a decade of abolitionist efforts.

¹¹²The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky, 13, cited in Charles Hodge, “Emancipation,” BRPR 21.4 (October 1849) 601. Dr. Henry Ruffner president of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, had published a similar pamphlet urging a more detailed plan for western Virginia in 1847. “Emancipation Movements in Virginia” PW 3.7 (November 25, 1847) 237. A Virginia native, Ruffner had been involved in the failed emancipation plan of 1832, and suggested that since the eastern portion of Virginia was the center of opposition, the plan should only have effect in the west. Ruffner's plan tried to prevent the wholesale exportation of Virginia slaves further south by insisting that “children of slaves, born after a certain day, shall not be exported at all after they are five years old, nor those under that age, unless the slaves of the same negro family be exported with them.”

perpetual slavery, and urged his readers to engage in peaceful discussion of emancipation and colonization.¹¹³ A few weeks later he printed a summary of Stuart Robinson's speech at the Kentucky Colonization Society, calling colonization a "national plan" that could eliminate the "ranting fanaticism" of both sides.¹¹⁴

Charles Hodge reviewed Breckinridge's pamphlet in the fall of 1849.¹¹⁵ Hodge reported that Henry Clay had joined Breckinridge at a convention in Fayette County (the Lexington area) which had declared "that hereditary slavery as it exists amongst us,

- I. Is contrary to the natural rights of mankind;
- II. Is opposed to the fundamental principles of free government;
- III. Is inconsistent with a state of sound morality;
- IV. Is hostile to the prosperity of the commonwealth."¹¹⁶

Throughout the spring the leading Presbyterian ministers in Kentucky, William L. Breckinridge, John C. Young, and Stuart Robinson, joined Robert J. Breckinridge in urging the emancipationist platform.¹¹⁷ The emancipationist convention met at Frankfort on April 25, 1849, elected Henry Clay as its president, and adopted a document prepared by R. J. Breckinridge:

¹¹³"Our Position on the Subject of Slavery" PH 18.23 (March 1, 1849).

¹¹⁴"Substance of the Speech of Rev. Stuart Robinson before the Colonization Society of Kentucky" PH 18.29 (April 12, 1849).

¹¹⁵Charles Hodge"Emancipation," BRPR 21.4 (October 1849) 581-606.

¹¹⁶Hodge"Emancipation," 582.

¹¹⁷Hodge commented that not a single Presbyterian minister in Kentucky was known to have spoken out in favor of perpetuating slavery. "We advert to this fact with the more satisfaction because the steady opposition of our General Assembly to the principles of the abolitionists, has subjected our church to the reproach or misconstruction of fanatical parties both at home and abroad. It is now seen that the principles which our church has always avowed on this subject, are as much opposed to the doctrine that slavery is a good institution, which ought to be perpetuated; as to the opposite dogma, that slave holding is in itself sinful, and a bar to christian communion." (584)

1. Believing that involuntary hereditary slavery, as it exists by law in this State, is injurious to the prosperity of the Commonwealth, inconsistent with the fundamental principles of free government, contrary to the natural rights of mankind, and injurious to a pure state of morals, we are of opinion that it ought not to be increased, and that it ought not to be perpetuated in this commonwealth.
2. That any scheme of emancipation ought to be prospective, operating exclusively upon negroes born after the adoption of the scheme, and connected with colonization.
3. That we recommend the following points as those to be insisted on in the new Constitution, and that candidates be run in every county in the State, favorable to these or similar constitutional provisions. 1. The absolute prohibition of the importation of any more slaves to Kentucky. 2. The complete power in the people of Kentucky to enforce and perfect in or under the new Constitution, a system of gradual prospective emancipation of slaves.¹¹⁸

The qualifications of the proposal are important. A decade before, Breckinridge and the committee of the Synod of Kentucky had urged the emancipation of all slaves. The social realities at the end of the 1840s gave them a more limited goal. Kentucky slaveholders were unwilling to surrender their present slaves, but Breckinridge hoped that they would consider prospective emancipation. Hodge admitted that if prospective emancipation was the only plan that would be acceptable to Kentucky voters, then it was better than nothing; but he urged consideration of the Spanish model, which allowed slaves to purchase their own freedom by working on the side. As soon as a slave earned enough money to purchase 1/6 of his time, he would be given one day off per week, and so on until he had purchased his entire freedom.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸Hodge, "Emancipation," 583. Howard reports that around 15% of the 150 delegates were clergymen: thirteen Presbyterians, six Methodists and a handful of others. Cassius Clay was the leader of the immediatists, while R. J. Breckinridge was the leader of the gradualists.

¹¹⁹Hodge, "Emancipation," 591. Hodge had urged this model before in his essay on "West Indies Emancipation" BRPR 10:4 (1838): 604-644.

But Breckinridge used more than pragmatic arguments, and Hodge agreed with Breckinridge that “amalgamation is contrary to the will of God,” and that natural law prohibited the two races from living together as social equals. Pointing to the destruction of the American Indians, Hodge argued that it would be better for the intellectual and social improvement of the blacks for them to be in control of their own territory, and not kept in an inferior position.¹²⁰ While Hodge shared the racial views of most of his contemporaries, he genuinely wanted to give blacks the opportunity to develop their own potential—and therefore believed that colonization was the best way to do that. Since free blacks could not be forced to leave the country, they should be given full citizenship in the United States; but emancipated slaves should be educated and trained in Christian republicanism, and then sent to Liberia as a condition of their manumission.¹²¹

Clay and Breckinridge brought great persuasive powers to their cause, but they never had a chance in Kentucky. According to newspaper reports, not more than a couple of emancipationists were elected to the state constitutional convention.¹²² Nathan L. Rice, who had been a zealous proponent of emancipation in his native Kentucky, wrote from his editor’s chair across the Ohio River in Cincinnati that if the Baptists, Methodists, and

¹²⁰Hodge, “Emancipation,” 593-594. It should be pointed out that Hodge believed that in Africa, or in the West Indies, where blacks were in the ascendancy, whites were the weaker race and would “sink and gradually perish.” 594.

¹²¹Hodge, “Emancipation,” 595-600.

¹²²Hodge, “Emancipation,” 584. Hodge lamented that if Breckinridge and Clay could not sway Kentucky in this matter, then the cause of emancipation was indeed lost for the present.

Campbellites of Kentucky had stood with the Presbyterians in the emancipation cause, it would have passed, but that “to their shame they did not so act.”¹²³

Charles Hodge suggested that there was a more complex reason for the failure of emancipation. He argued that the failure of emancipation was not due to the slaveholders (they were too few in number), but to the “natural opposition between the free whites and the slaves, both as a race and as a class.”¹²⁴ While equal in their humanity, Hodge argued that in mental and moral development, “the blacks as a race are inferior to the whites,” which led ignorant whites to a “contempt and disregard of the rights and feelings of the inferior race.” Hodge claimed that poor whites “revolt at the idea that the distinction between themselves and those whom they have always looked upon as their inferiors, should be done away. They regard it as an insult, or as robbing them of a privilege.” This was only compounded by the fear that white laborers had of competition from a free black labor force. Hodge argued that the same phenomenon would occur in New York or Philadelphia if white laborers there had to vote on whether or not to bring “thousands of negroes to be their own associates and competitors in labour.”¹²⁵ Hodge was convinced that the cause of emancipation could not succeed until poor whites were educated in the benefits of a system of free labor.

¹²³PW (October 25, 1849). I have been unable to locate responses to this charge, so I present it only as reflecting the perspective of one man. Rice had kept his readers informed of the progress of the Kentucky emancipationists, including publishing a “Letter from Henry Clay on the Emancipation of Slavery in Kentucky” PW 4.25 (March 15, 1849).

¹²⁴Hodge, “Emancipation,” 586.

¹²⁵Hodge, “Emancipation,” 587. See David R. Roediger, The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class (London: Verso, 1991).

As he had done thirteen years earlier, Hodge concluded again with a warning to the South. Slavery could not be indefinitely perpetuated. As the slaves grew in number as well as in intellectual and moral sophistication, they would eventually rebel against the inhumane laws which deprived them of their natural rights. Indeed, the light of the gospel would inevitably accomplish this: “It will be out of the power of slaveholders to make laws to keep out the light and warmth of Christian truth. . . . The slaves will cease to be minors; they will outgrow their state of pupillage, and their bonds will either drop from their limbs or be shaken off.”¹²⁶ If masters do not start “to improve the slaves and to emancipate and remove them as rapidly as they are prepared for freedom” then “national calamity” will be the inevitable result. For Hodge it seemed so simple: it was an error to bring the Africans to America; therefore correct the error by sending them back. This would constitute a national repentance for a national sin, and would substitute free white labor for black slave labor, and both America and Africa would prosper.

Old School Presbyterians in the north generally concurred with Robert Baird’s statement on slavery: “We may deplore its existence; we may wish that it had never existed; but it does exist, and the question is, How shall it be treated?” The church should insist that “the master should instruct his servants in the knowledge of the Word of God, to be imparted in every practicable way; from the written page, when that can be done, and *orally* when it is not possible to teach them to read.” This would prepare the way “for the peaceful termination of slavery.” The master should grant freedom to those who have “a reasonable prospect that they will do well for themselves in the possession of it.” Indeed,

¹²⁶Hodge, “Emancipation,” 605.

speaking directly to slaveholders, Baird pointed out that “the law of Christian love requires you to grant it promptly and cheerfully; but if this be not possible, then you must wait, and in the meantime do for your slaves what you would have men do for you, if you were in a similar condition.”¹²⁷ If masters would treat their slaves according to the golden rule, then emancipation would soon result.

Conclusion

Breckinridge and Hodge’s proposals for emancipation were also reviewed by “A Presbyterian in the Far South.”¹²⁸ The reviewer was particularly disturbed that Hodge would permit the political question of the termination of slavery into the Princeton Review. He insisted that the “church has determined that these are not ecclesiastical questions” and scored Hodge for treating the question of emancipation as a religious and moral question.¹²⁹ He was particularly astonished by Hodge’s statement that the perpetuation of slavery was “a national sin. . . and therefore will inevitably lead to a national calamity.”¹³⁰ But the reviewer preferred to deal with emancipation as a matter of political economy. Breckinridge had suggested that all freed slaves should be colonized, starting with those born after 1850 upon their twentieth birthday—around 1870. The

¹²⁷R. Baird, “Reflections upon the Acts of the Late General Assembly,” PH 27.1 (July 2, 1857).

¹²⁸A Presbyterian in the Far South, A System of Prospective Emancipation Advocated in Kentucky by Robert J. Breckinridge, D.D., and Urged and Supported in the Princeton Review (Charleston: Steam-Power Press of Walker & James, 1850). The author claimed to reside “several hundred miles” from Charleston, suggesting a resident of the Gulf States. This essay was commended in the Southern Presbyterian 3.40 (May 31, 1850) 158.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 10.

reviewer pointed out that this would entail the complete break-up of families (since the parents would remain enslaved until their death). Further, the costs of training and transportation would be astronomical (since Breckinridge championed fair reimbursement of masters).¹³¹ The plan of emancipation and colonization was simply impossible. To this author, the logical conclusion was clear: “God has cast our lot where it exists, and exists to such an extent that human wisdom has hitherto failed to devise any safe prudent plan of terminating it; and therefore we are forced to conclude that it is a part of the divine economy that it should continue to an indefinite period.”¹³² He appealed to northern Presbyterians to avoid agitation, which “neither promote the peace and edification of the Church, nor the harmony and prosperity of the commonwealth.”¹³³

¹³¹Ibid., 12-14.

¹³²Ibid., 19.

¹³³Ibid., 23.

SEVEN

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PRO-SLAVERY CONSENSUS IN THE SOUTH

As an example of the remarkable harmony of the Old School, in the heat of the South Carolina secession crisis of the early 1850s, the 1851 General Assembly debated where to meet in 1852. Dr. Aaron Leland of Columbia Theological Seminary nominated Charleston, South Carolina. Dr. Nathan H. Hall, pastor at Columbia, Missouri, nominated Nashville, Tennessee, instead, warning against a possible South Carolinian secession. Dr. James M. Brown, pastor of Kanawha, Virginia (now West Virginia) suggested that going to South Carolina would be an excellent means of emphasizing the General Assembly's commitment to the perpetuity of the national Union. Dr. John Leyburn (CTS 1836), secretary of the Board of Publication (formerly a pastor in Virginia and Alabama), said that he wanted to see Charleston's famous hospitality in action. But the final speech, from Rev. Jerome Twitchell, pastor at Lafayette, Louisiana, summarized the Old School sentiment best. Going to Charleston would show,

that we have full confidence, that she will remain loyal to this great confederacy, and thus by the strong bands of love and affection we will hold her bound to this Church and General Assembly. Even if some of her restless sons should still talk of secession, the members of the Presbyterian Church in that State can never be induced to go from under the jurisdiction of this GA. There are bonds of Union in this Church stronger than the bonds of commerce, or bands of iron. They are the bonds of love, and by

these ties, so long as this Church shall hold her high conservative position shall this Union be preserved.¹

So long as the Old School could hold together, they thought, the nation would be preserved. The vote was 127 for Charleston and 64 for New York City.

1. The Growth of Sectionalism

But such token displays of unity could not overcome the simple reality that Old School Presbyterians were increasingly divided, both physically and ideologically. The physical division was accomplished through the development of sectional institutions. While the ecclesiastical structure of synods was regional in nature, and most newspapers had a regional circulation, Princeton Seminary, the Princeton Review, the Philadelphia Presbyterian, and the New York Observer all had national influence. But regional institutions gradually became more and more important in the life of the south.²

C. C. Goen has argued that “evangelical Christianity was a major bond of national unity for the United States during the first third of the nineteenth century,” and that the division of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches along sectional lines formed “the first major national cleavage between slaveholding and non-slaveholding sections,”

¹“Debate over where to have the 1852 General Assembly” W&O 6.33 (June 5, 1851) 169. “Immediate Secession” W&O 7.5 (September 11, 1852) 17, suggested that there was little fear of immediate rash secession of South Carolina, due to the fact that considerable preparation would be needed.

²James Oscar Farmer, Jr., has spoken of a “metaphysical confederacy” preceding the physical Confederacy, The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986). Predictably generational politics also played a role. David T. Bailey reports that from 1815-1829, 65 percent of those holding leading ministerial positions in the southwest were eastern born. Cited in Randy J. Sparks, “‘To Rend the Body of Christ’: Proslavery Ideology and Religious Schism from a Mississippi Perspective,” Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery, edited by John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 276.

and that these denominational schisms “broke a primary bond of national unity, encouraged the myth of ‘peaceable secession,’ established a precedent of sectional independence, reinforced the growing alienation between North and South by cultivating distorted images of ‘the other side,’ and exacerbated the moral outrage that each section felt against the other.”³ Other historians have concurred that the division of the churches presaged the division of the nation.⁴ Such divisions, however, could take other institutional forms. While Old School Presbyterians remained one denomination, they developed regional networks of colleges, seminaries and newspapers that fostered strong regional identities. Most of these institutions had been formed in the 1820s and 1830s, so by the 1850s they had established their own character and influence.⁵

³C. C. Goen, Broken Churches, Broken Nation (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press) 13.

⁴Mitchell Snay, Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Kenneth Startup, “‘A Mere Calculation of Profits and Loss’: The Southern Clergy and the Economic Culture of the Antebellum North,” God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 217-235. John R. McKivigan has pointed out while Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun thought that these divisions represented a sectional crisis over slavery, the abolitionists generally believed that the divisions were more pragmatic than principled. He shows that even the northern Baptists and Methodists permitted border states slaveholders to remain within their communions, and that most “northern denominations. . . tempered their criticism of the institution of slavery by absolving slaveholders of any individual guilt.” John R. McKivigan, The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) 15, and chapter 4. He points out that the radical abolitionists in each denomination withdrew to form “comeouter sects” such as the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, the American Baptist Free Mission Society, the Free Presbyterian Church, the Franckean Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Anti-Slavery Friends, and the Progressive Friends, which formed as “a dramatic protest against the churches’ failure to correct their proslavery and racist practices.” (93)

⁵Southern editors noted that more southerners took northern papers, than vice versa. Few outside of the southwest paid much attention to the True Witness. The editor, Richmond McInnis often complained loudly that other Old School editors ignored his paper, and only a dozen northerners even bothered to subscribe to his paper. Cf. “Too Southern” True Witness 3.42 (January 22, 1857). McInnis had bought out the Mississippi Presbyterian after the death of editor H. J. Bardwel in 1853. Bardwel had started the paper in Mississippi in 1853 after the failure of the New Orleans Observer (1837-1840) and the New Orleans Presbyterian, formerly the New Orleans Protestant (1844-1851). Bardwel’s idea was that New Orleans papers did not attract sufficient interest from Presbyterians outside of Louisiana, so he started the paper in Kosciusko, Mississippi in the hope that he could develop a large circulation there, before moving the paper

As early as the middle of the 1840s communication between north and south was becoming increasingly difficult—and the most common obstacle was slavery. When the New York Observer in 1846 published and endorsed “some of the most thorough-going abolition articles,” P suggested that southerners should stop subscribing to such a paper and patronize “our own Southern Religious Papers.”⁶ The essays in question consisted of a series of articles by “Philanthropos” that attempted to show that the Bible taught that “that the imposition of involuntary servitude upon the servant without his contract or consent, and the withholding or deprivation of his personal liberty by the arbitrary will and authority of the master, is necessarily and essentially, always and every where, a sin against God.” The author admitted, however, that slavery may exist without sin, if the master does all he can to “respect all the rights of his slave as a creature of God.”⁷

The New York Observer was widely taken throughout the south, but after a year had passed, and no response had appeared (in spite of some written by southerners, but rejected by editor Samuel Irenaeus Prime because they covered only part of the original argument), “Alexander” wrote to say that “a large proportion of the subscribers in this part of Virginia to that paper have lately withdrawn their support.”⁸ A few, however, were satisfied with Prime’s response, and wondered why no southerner had attempted a full

to New Orleans in order to attract the large Presbyterian population there. McNinnis followed this strategy rather successfully as the True Witness moved to New Orleans in 1857 and continued to flourish in the southwest until the Federal Army shut it down in 1862.

⁶P, “The New York Observer and Abolitionism” W&O 2.2 (August 27, 1846) 5.

⁷Philanthropos, “The New Testament View of Slavery,” 34.29 (July 18, 1846) 114; the series ran through most of July and August.

⁸Alexander, “The Milk and Water Paper, or the New York Observer and Slavery” W&O 2.47 (July 8, 1847) 186.

reply. “A Southern Man with Northern Principles” hinted that perhaps the anti-slavery position was correct.⁹

Moderate southerners like Benjamin Gildersleeve feared the rising southern nationalism that developed through the wrangling over the Wilmot Proviso, the Compromise of 1850, and the reaction to the fugitive slave law, and hoped to be a voice of reason and peace. When the Synod of Pittsburgh rejected 46-24 an overture condemning the fugitive slave law, the Richmond Whig wondered how Virginia Presbyterians could remain in the same denomination with even a minority of abolitionists. Gildersleeve replied that “we believe that our church is one of the great conservative elements of the Union, and that it is as sound on the whole question, as any body of men covering the same space in the country. And we believe that Henry Clay never evinced his sagacity in a profounder degree than when he said that he would not despair of the Union until our church divided on the question of slavery.” A few extremists would not dampen his confidence. Indeed, he replied that such “injurious suspicions” were “calculated to destroy our influence as one of the great girdling bonds of the Union,” and he was determined to do his best to maintain southern confidence in their northern brethren.¹⁰

⁹A Southern Man with Northern Principles, “Communications” W&O 3.6 (September 23, 1847) 21.

¹⁰“Synod of Pittsburg” W&O 6.13 (November 7, 1850) 50. “The Synod of Pittsburg and the Richmond Whig” W&O 6.15 (November 21, 1850) 58. As late as 1859, Richmond McInnis of the True Witness in New Orleans agreed. “The Slavery Question and Our Church” True Witness 6.6 (April 30, 1859). “W” wrote of a recent visit to the northwest where he claimed that Old School churches welcomed him warmly. The Old School was still bond of union that could hold the country together. “W” warned, though, that the Old School could not do it alone. Without a significant revival of religion, the Union could not stand. “The haste to get rich has banished religion” from the minds of most—both north and south. W, letter to the editor, CP 2.43 (October 24, 1857) 169.

Thomas V. Moore and Moses Hoge agreed with Gildersleeve in 1858, after Joseph G. Monfort, editor of the Presbyter declared their views on slavery “heresy.” The Baptist paper in Richmond, the Religious Herald, wondered how southern Presbyterians could remain in the same church as Monfort. Moore and Hoge replied with a bit of a jab, “We have long since learned to make all due allowance for the weakness and prejudices of both our anti-slavery and anti-paedobaptist opponents—and we have no hesitancy in communing with either the one or the other, provided their error does not assail the essential principles of the gospel.” They were convinced of the true catholicity of their “ecclesiastical union” and were willing to maintain “Christian fellowship” even with those who considered them heretics.¹¹

But maintaining Christian fellowship did not mean remaining silent on the matter. When their ostensible friends in the North declared that slavery was a curse and delighted in the overthrow of the Missouri Compromise, Gildersleeve could only fear for the future of both the church and the nation: “Holding the power the North intends to hold it, and keep the South in perpetual subserviency to her interests.” When Samuel Irenaeus Prime of the New York Observer declared himself for free soil during the debates over the Nebraska Bill in 1854, Gildersleeve warned his readers, “And here let it be noted that the South has no better friend at the North than the Observer and the *Conservative (?)* party which it represents.” For Gildersleeve, as for many of his readers, this was not merely a

¹¹CP 4.31 (July 30, 1858) 122. Moore and Hoge took over the editorial reins of the Watchman and Observer in 1856, renaming it the Central Presbyterian.

matter of politics. “It involves all the interests of the South temporal and spiritual. It is the great question of the day.”¹²

Two years later, as the 1856 presidential campaign began to heat up, the editor of the Central Presbyterian urged his readers to “pray for your country.” Warning that disunion would be “accompanied or followed by war,” he assured his readers that such a rupture could not “be peacefully effected.” Border disputes, navigation of the Mississippi, division of military and finances, “and above all, the seduction of fugitive slaves and their recapture, that festering sore of the body politic, will inevitably break out in to fatal mischief, just as soon as the Constitution and the Union are removed.” But he hoped that the four million Christians could do something to prevent this.¹³

Even the resolutely conservative Presbyterian faced southern criticism. When editor William Engles ventured an off-hand comment that an essay in the Southern Presbyterian Review was “indiscreet and ill-considered” in its indiscriminate attacks on the north, a reply in the Watchman & Observer complained that the North was becoming increasingly hostile.¹⁴ Engles was somewhat taken aback. Who had attacked whom? “It

¹²Benjamin Gildersleeve, “The New York Observer and American Slavery--The American Board--the Combination of Heterogeneous Elements Hostile to the South” W&O 9.34 (March 30, 1854) 134.

¹³Editorial, “Pray for Your Country,” CP 1.13 (March 29, 1856) 50. This may be Gildersleeve, or it could be Thomas V. Moore or Moses Hoge who had taken over most of the editorial duties. The 1850 census revealed that four million Americans (out of a total population of 26 million) were communicant members of Protestant churches.

¹⁴The essay in question was “North and South,” SPR 3.3 (Jan 1850) 337-380. The author claimed that the South has proved the moral, religious and political point on every field for twenty years but that the North refused to listen. Since natural law and justice allowed society to “deprive of all political rights and of liberty, to imprison, or to put to death, those whose citizenship, liberty, or life would endanger the rights, property, or lives of the community.” Likewise females and minors were restricted in their rights. “If the South, then, judges the civil and social equality, and personal liberty of the blacks, incompatible with the well being, rights, property or lives of the community, she has the right to deny them that equality and

seemed to us that the whole North was placed in the same category with small minority of ultras, and involved in the same condemnation.” Engles reminded his southern readers that the Philadelphia-New York region tended to view the South very kindly. “We are well persuaded that had we drawn a comparison between the North and the South, as much to the disadvantage of the latter, as the article in question is to the former, we should have been charged with the highest kind of indiscretion.” He warned that such local prejudices could only result in evil.¹⁵

But in the same issue “Charleston” wrote to warn Engles that the SPR article “expresses the sentiments of the great body of Southern Presbyterians, as well as of other Southern people.” These are the “well-considered views of your brethren at the South.” While they granted that “our Old school brethren” disagreed with the northern fanatics who appealed to a higher law to overturn the Fugitive Slave Law, they believed that “Northern Christians generally endorse this Jesuitical morality.” They did not doubt the

liberty--in other words to keep them in a state of slavery.” (339) Insisting that “the Christian people of the South *are the South*” and that “they embrace the greater part of the wealth, influence, and intelligence of the country,” (378) he declared that the North was falling under anti-Christian forces.

Other southern authors were less sanguine about the state of affairs at the south. One South Carolinian rejected the common claim that the south had a lower crime rate than the north. Besides the crimes committed by slaves, “If there is any one thing which more than almost any other is a curse, and the mother of curses in the Southern and Southwestern States, it is a lax administration of the criminal law—allowing wealthy offenders and those having influential friends to defeat and often to spurn its demands.” B., Southern Presbyterian 7.43 (August 17, 1854) 174. (He hastened to add that South Carolina had not been as guilty as other states, and the editor, John L. Kirkpatrick attempted to soften the blow by reminding his readers of the horrible crimes of the north, suggesting that if they had kept slavery it might have been better for them.

Another writer pointed out that the laws of Mississippi made it illegal for a dying person to “will, devise, or bequeath,” money “to any Christian charity whatsoever!” Tom Beckbee, “Letter from the South-West,” Presbyterian 29.17 (April 23, 1859) 65.

¹⁵Editorial, “North and South,” Presbyterian 20.11 (March 16, 1850) 42. Washington Baird commented “This flippant condemnation of opinions in which the great mass of Southern Presbyterians are known to be unanimous, looks a little ominous.” Editorial, “North and South,” Southern Presbyterian 3.29 (March 15, 1850) 114.

North's attachment to the Union, but they did not believe that the North would uphold the Constitution.¹⁶

Predictably, Presbyterians in the deep south were more antsy than their border states brethren. While the editors of the Southern Presbyterian Review protested against the secession movement in South Carolina in 1850 as premature, they made it clear that they were prepared for that event. Acknowledging that it was possible that the "Southern States shall be driven, in vindication of their rights, their honour and their safety, to organize a distinct Government for themselves,"¹⁷ they warned their readers that the Union could not be divided without "strong convulsions, without dangers and disasters on all sides."¹⁸ Therefore they urged their fellow southerners to pursue all possible means of maintaining the Union: "As long as our voice can be heard, we shall endeavour to avert calamity--but if what we regard as rash counsels finally prevail, we have made up our minds, as God shall give us grace, to take what comes."¹⁹

Washington Baird was less gentle than Gildersleeve to the minority of the Synod of Pittsburgh that protested against the fugitive slave law.²⁰ Baird, the editor of the Southern

¹⁶Charleston, "North and South," Presbyterian 20.11 (March 16, 1850) 42. As an example of northern attitudes, the New York Independent initially urged fleeing slaves to kill those who tried to apprehend them, and urged bystanders to resist those who sought to enforce the law, but Engles noted that they had retracted that statement. Editorial, "A Charge of Slander," Presbyterian 21.4 (January 25, 1851) 14.

¹⁷"Short Notices," SPR 4.3 (December, 1850) 444.

¹⁸"Short Notices," SPR 4.3 (December, 1850) 447.

¹⁹"Short Notices," SPR 4.3 (December, 1850) 452.

²⁰"Pittsburgh Synod," Presbyterian 20.44 (November 2, 1850) 174. The Fugitive Slave Law raised serious constitutional questions for many, since it gave federal commissioners "the sole right to judge whether or not an alleged slave was a runaway and authorized him to make his decision based on evidence

Presbyterian went so far as to say that those who opposed the fugitive slave law were “*Traitors* in heart and tongue, to the Supreme law of this Republic—open enemies to the Union—debased ingrates to the people of those States, who have so long joined with them in the support of common laws and common Institutions, and from whose labors, their immense wealth has been chiefly realized.” His only solace was that the opponents of the law were generally “low in intellect and morality.”²¹ While Gildersleeve used a more moderate tone, he warned the north to rein in the abolitionists if it loved the Union. If the abolitionists seized control in the north, he feared that it would result in a battle of northern atheism and anarchy versus southern religion and order.²²

Charles Hodge had similar concerns. In 1851 he penned a review of Moses Stuart’s Conscience and the Constitution.²³ Stuart had written in the wake of the Compromise of

provided only by the master. The alleged fugitive could not testify on his own behalf and was denied a jury trial.” Laura L. Mitchell, “‘Matters of Justice between Man and Man’: Northern Divines, the Bible, and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850,” Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery, edited by John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 134-135.

²¹Editorial, “The Union and Its Enemies,” Southern Presbyterian 4.9 (October 24, 1850) 34; Editorial, “The Higher Law,” Southern Presbyterian 4.15 (December 5, 1850) 58. Occasionally a calmer voice could be heard in South Carolina: one southerner reviewed Moses Stuart’s Conscience and the Constitution, with remarks on the recent speech of the Hon. Daniel Webster, on the subject of slavery. (Boston, 1850), by remarking that southerners could forgive Stuart’s castigation of the south in return for his exposition of the abolitionists and their “perversions of scripture and not a few of their false political positions, and visited them with severe but merited rebuke.” Therefore, “in spite of certain mistakes and errors which we could mention” this reviewer expressed appreciation for dropping a bomb “into the camp of our and our country’s worst enemies.” “Short Notices,” SPR 4.2 (October 1850) 304.

²²“North and South” W&O 6.6 (September 19, 1850) 22.

²³Moses Stuart, Conscience and the Constitution, with Remarks on the Recent Speech of the Hon. Daniel Webster in the Senate of the United States on the Subject of Slavery (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1850); Charles Hodge, “Civil Government,” BRPR 23.1 (January, 1851) 125-158. John C. Lord and Henry A. Boardman preached sermons that covered the same themes in December of 1850. Lord, “The Higher Law,” in its Application to the Fugitive Slave Bill: A Sermon on the Duties Men Owe to God and to Governments (Buffalo: George H. Derby and Co., 1851); Boardman, The American Union: A Discourse Delivered on Thursday, December 12, 1850, the Day of the Annual Thanksgiving in Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1851). Both covered the same themes of the crisis over the

1850, urging northern Christians to obey the fugitive slave act, arguing that the preservation of the Union depended on it.²⁴ Hodge concurred with Stuart, recognizing that the new understanding of conscience would destroy the nation. He feared that both sides were elevating relatively trivial matters into the realm of conscience. Southerners were complaining that the admission of California destroyed the equilibrium between slaveholding and non-slaveholding states. When some southerners proposed secession as an answer, Hodge replied: “Men might as well prescribe decapitation for the head-ache, as the destruction of the confederacy as a cure for the present difficulties.”²⁵ But Hodge admitted that the real trouble came from the abolitionists—and especially those who were promoting open resistance to the fugitive slave law. The Constitution was designed to allow slavery. But what if a man came to believe that the fugitive slave law was unconstitutional and immoral? What was the proper response for the conscientious objector?

Hodge replied by setting forth traditional arguments for the “divine right of government.” Since government is a divine institution, and not merely a social compact, obedience to the laws of the land “is a religious duty.”²⁶ Whether just or unjust, “the actual

Fugitive Slave Law and the disunionist radicals in both north and south.

²⁴For reactions to Stuart, see Laura L. Mitchell, “‘Matters of Justice between Man and Man’: Northern Divines, the Bible, and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850,” Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery, edited by John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 139-149. Mitchell provides a helpful perspective on the question by examining how northerners attempted to answer the question, “who is my neighbor?” Most conservatives followed Stuart in using the Constitution to define their symbolic “neighborhood,” while abolitionists insisted that the escaped slave was more analogous to the wounded man in Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan.

²⁵Charles Hodge, “Civil Government,” BRPR 23.1 (January, 1851) 127.

²⁶Hodge, “Civil Government,” 133.

existence of any government creates the obligation of obedience,” in its proper sphere.²⁷ Only if the government commands something outside its proper sphere, may it be disobeyed. If it commands something contrary to the Word of God, then it must be disobeyed. Hodge admitted that conscience alone could decide when the law of the land conflicts with the law of God, or “which is to us the same thing, with our convictions of what that law demands?”²⁸ The proper response to an unjust law is to seek to have it repealed. Applying the old Reformed view of catholicity, Hodge argued that an executive officer of the state should only resign if he was required to sin. Likewise, private citizens could not obey commands that required them to sin, but they must still submit: “When we are required by the law to do what our conscience pronounces to be sinful, we cannot obey the precept, but we are bound to submit without resistance to the penalty. We are not authorized to abrogate the law; nor forcibly to resist its execution, no matter how great its injustice or cruelty.”²⁹ Hodge insisted that private individuals do not have the right of resistance. Only in their corporate nature as “the people” does the right of revolution obtain. “There is an obvious difference between these two things, viz: the right of resistance on the part of individuals, and the right of revolution on the part of the people.”³⁰ The people may change their government if they wish—but that does not give individuals the right to resist the laws of the land. While recognizing the rights of

²⁷Hodge, “Civil Government,” 134. The *de facto* understanding of civil government would play a large role in Hodge’s opposition to the Spring Resolutions in 1861 (see chapter eleven).

²⁸Hodge, “Civil Government,” 149.

²⁹Hodge, “Civil Government,” 151.

³⁰Hodge, “Civil Government,” 152.

conscience, Hodge wished to retain a strong sense of catholicity—both in the church and in the nation.

The seminaries were also caught up in the sectional rift. A report in the Presbyter in 1859 stated that Danville Seminary in Kentucky (which had ostensibly been formed as a seminary for the whole west) was only drawing about a quarter of its students from the free states, since northwesterners refused to have their students educated on slave soil. And while Princeton had once drawn students from all over the country (in 1851 one in three Princeton Theological Seminary graduates hailed from slave states) by 1856 only one in twenty was of southern birth. As J. G. Monfort concluded, “Princeton stood well in the South under the deliverance of the Repertory on slavery, a quarter of a century ago, and under its approbation of the action of 1845, but since the South have progressed to believe that slavery is not wrong, and that the Church has no right to recommend or promote emancipation, and Dr. Hodge has, in a new commentary, brought out very distinctly the doctrine that the gospel is opposed to slavery, and that its diffusion will bring it to an end, the figures show that Southern students are more and more disposed or advised to study at home.”³¹

Two weeks later, “Lewis” wrote to the Central Presbyterian urging both the North and the South to support Princeton Theological Seminary on the grounds that a common seminary could help avoid sectionalism.³² The editors replied that Union Theological

³¹“Princeton Theological Seminary” Presbyter 18.16 (January 6, 1859). Princeton had formerly been the school of choice for Kentucky students.

³²Lewis, “Princeton Seminary” CP 5.3 (January 21, 1859) 10. This is most likely Lewis Warner Green, former president of Hampden Sydney College, Virginia, (1848-1856), and from 1857-1863, president of Centre College in Kentucky. Green (1806-1863) was a native Kentuckian who had studied at

Seminary in Virginia would be just as good. Besides, Virginia was a “conservative region,” and Union students would not likely encounter any of the “Fourierism, Spiritualism, Higher-lawism, Women's right-ism, Mesmerism, Free-loveism, Free-soilism, to say nothing of Beecherism, Tribuneism and the like.” Southern students did not need to go north. Rather, “let Northern men come South. Let them come to see and learn for themselves.”

But northern students did not wish to come to the south any more than southern students wished to go to the north. The following week the Central Presbyterian noted that the University of Virginia had fewer than a dozen northerners enrolled.³³ Only four of the eighteen students at Union Theological Seminary were northern born, and only one of forty-three at South Carolina's Columbia Theological Seminary. One writer from the deep south suggested that the reason was that the south had “inferior institutions” with poor endowments and mediocre professors. Few northerners came south, and many southerners who went north for their education wound up as pastors of northern churches. Nonetheless, this southerner feared the results of sectional education. If southerners built up their institutions “by arousing their sectional prejudices, it must injure the true spirit of affection that ought to exist between the two great divisions of our country, in the Church, where, thus far, thank God, there has been no North! No South! But all one in Christ

Centre College and Princeton Seminary, and had served both north and south. Before his presidencies, he served as professor at Centre College, Danville, Kentucky (1832-1836), Hanover Theological Seminary, Indiana, 1834-1839, and Western Theological Seminary, Allegheny, Pennsylvania 1840-1847.

³³CP 5.4 (January 28, 1859).

Jesus.” The only way to avoid sectional jealousies was to develop institutions that northern men would wish to attend.³⁴

This growing institutional division both represented and encouraged a deepening ideological division between northern and southern Presbyterians. Mitchell Snay, in his study of religion and separatism in the South, has accurately depicted the development of a pro-slavery consensus in the South. As northerners and southerners became increasingly estranged institutionally, they also developed in completely different directions ideologically. In the South, “the biblical justification of human bondage, the portrayal of abolitionism as infidelity, the slaveholding ethic, and the religious mission to the slaves comprised a coherent ideology aimed at sanctifying slavery.”³⁵

In this climate, what may have seemed obvious to a northern emancipationist like Hodge was no longer making sense in the South.³⁶ The pro-slavery movement had gained momentum since James Smylie had articulated the divine warrant for slavery in the 1830s, and by 1850 open dissent was dying out. In the late 1830s, Virginia’s George Baxter (1771-1841)—who was considered “proslavery” in his own day—nonetheless urged

³⁴More Anon, “Our Theological Seminaries in the South,” Southern Presbyterian 8.12 (January 6, 1855) 46.

³⁵Mitchell Snay, Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 99. Ironically, though, Edward R. Crowther has argued that it was that same evangelicalism that permitted southerners to accept the providence of God in the defeat of the Confederacy and the end of slavery. Crowther, Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) 221-222.

³⁶And as Mark Noll has pointed out, the southern defense of slavery made no sense, even where their Reformed hermeneutic was appreciated, largely due to the lack of the commonsense literalism in Scotland and Canada. Mark A. Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” Religion and the Civil War edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 52-53.

slaveowners to find the “quickest and most practicable means” of eliminating slavery,³⁷ but within a decade even Virginia Presbyterians were becoming increasingly comfortable with Smylie’s biblical defense of slavery as a positive good.³⁸ While some of the older ministers could still propose emancipation in the late 1840s in the border states, such as Henry Ruffner of Virginia (1789-1861), and Robert J. Breckinridge of Kentucky (1800-1877), the next generation was developing a new model that they hoped would establish a lasting foundation for slavery in the South.

2. The Defense of Slavery

By the middle of the 1830s, southerners had begun to develop a coherent proslavery ideology—led largely by the southern clergy.³⁹ Their critique of northern

³⁷Quoted in Larry E. Tise, Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840 (Athens, GA, 1988) 329. Due to his standing as professor of theology in Virginia’s Union Theological Seminary from 1832-1841, Baxter’s position was often debated by later Virginians due to his emancipationist statements (e.g., the Armstrong/Van Rensselaer debate discussed below).

³⁸For anti-slavery southerners after the 1840s, see David B. Chesebrough, Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996); George Troxler, “Eli Caruthers: A Silent Dissenter in the Old South,” JPH 45:2 (1967): 95-111; Timothy F. Reilly, “Robert L. Stanton, Abolitionist of the Old South,” JPH 53:1 (1975): 33-49. Stanton was from Connecticut, and graduated from Lane Theological Seminary in 1836. He then went south and was licensed and ordained in Louisiana and Mississippi presbyteries respectively. After two brief pastorates in Mississippi he spent eight years as pastor of the 2nd Presbyterian Church in New Orleans (1843-1851), and three years as president of Oakland College in Mississippi before moving to the north in 1854 and becoming pastor of the most abolitionist church in the Old School in Chillicothe, Ohio. During his southern sojourn he remained cautious about promulgating his abolitionist views, but Reilly demonstrates that he was the author of New Orleans As It Is (1849), an anonymous antislavery book published in Utica, New York, while Stanton was a commissioner at the General Assembly in Pittsburgh.

³⁹Larry Tise claims that almost half of the proslavery tracts in the United States were written by ministers. And Eugene Genovese suggests that the same is true of antislavery literature. Larry E. Tise, Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840 (Athens, GA, 1988) xiii; Eugene Genovese, “Religion in the Collapse of the American Union,” Religion and the Civil War edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 75. Tise’s definition of proslavery, however, encompasses a large number of antislavery emancipationists, and perhaps would be better titled “antiabolitionism.” A somewhat more nuanced study is John Patrick Daly, When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War

infidelity and secularism prompted them to argue that a patriarchal slave society was superior to the northern free soil society.⁴⁰ In his essay on James Henley Thornwell, Eugene Genovese has correctly stated that the defense of slavery was constructed from a Christian foundation, including arguments from scripture and economics/sociology (what was then called moral philosophy), particularly rooted in a strict construal of both the Bible and the Constitution. Hence for Thornwell, since the Bible does not condemn slavery, neither can the church. As Genovese notes, Thornwell “recognized that the Bible sanctioned slavery in general. . . not black slavery in particular. For God had ordained slavery among the ancient Israelites without regard to race, as 'race' came to be understood.”⁴¹ Like many southerners, Thornwell objected to the “callous disregard of the human misery inherent in capitalist economic development” and argued that slavery was a more humane system since (at its best) it provided for the well-being of the laborer better than northern factories. Nonetheless, Thornwell, like many of his colleagues, objected to

(Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002)—though Daly makes the same error and considers antiabolitionists like Charles Hodge and Nathan Rice to be proslavery (38, 46).

⁴⁰Eugene D. Genovese, The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992) 36-38. Genovese suggests that while northern conservatives shared the southern critique of infidelity and secularism, and “the mounting assaults on the family and upon the very principle of authority,” southerners scored them for failing “to identify the root of this massive theological, ecclesiastical, social, and political offensive against Christianity and the social order: the system of free labor that breeds egotism and extols personal license at the expense of God-ordained authority.” (37) Southern patriarchal social theory provided a coherent alternative to the free-soil ideology of the north. Drew Gilpin Faust has argued that the expansion of the proslavery argument into a “comprehensive social and moral philosophy” imparted “meaning to the regional way of life” and provided for “an essential role for thought in the South.” A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1977) 131.

⁴¹Genovese, The Southern Front: History and Politics in the Cultural War (University of Missouri, 1995) 44.

many of the southern slave-laws and demanded that the institution be made to conform to biblical standards.⁴²

At the Synod of South Carolina in 1847, a committee was appointed to set forth the “position of Southern Christians” on slavery and seek to gain the confidence of evangelical Christians regarding their stance. Four years later that report, authored by Thornwell, was unanimously adopted by the Synod. In his preface, Thornwell pointed out that the situation had changed dramatically since 1847. Whereas the concern then had been the unity of the Old School in the face of abolitionist pressures, the issue in 1851 was the preservation of the national Union. Thornwell believed that the “position of the Southern, and perhaps he may say, of the whole Presbyterian Church, in relation to Slavery, is the only position which can save the Country from disaster and the Church from schism.”⁴³

The proper relation of the church to slavery, in Thornwell’s view, was simply to preach the gospel to masters and slaves. The problems of society produced by sin could not be dealt with directly by the church. Since all church power was “ministerial and declarative,” the church could not go beyond its written Constitution of the Word of God. “The Bible, and the Bible alone, is her rule of faith and practice.”⁴⁴ Therefore in a plain rejection of the 1818 General Assembly, he argued that the church had no authority to condemn slavery as a sin, or to declare that emancipation was a Christian duty. Thornwell

⁴²Genovese, The Southern Front, 38-39.

⁴³James Henley Thornwell, “Report on Slavery,” SPR 5.3 (January 1852) 380-394. The report was reprinted in the Southern Presbyterian 5.22 (January 29, 1852) 85, and is included in Thornwell’s Collected Writings (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986/1873) 4:381-397. Page numbers will come from the Collected Writings since it is the most accessible version. CW 4:382.

⁴⁴CW 4:383-384.

pointed out that “The Church was formally organized in the family of a slaveholder” [Abraham], and that the apostles taught the mutual duties of masters and slaves without demanding emancipation.⁴⁵ Therefore, Thornwell concluded, “If the Church is bound to abide by the authority of the Bible, and that alone, she discharges her whole office in regard to Slavery, when she declares what the Bible teaches, and enforces its laws by her own peculiar sanctions.”⁴⁶ While Christians could debate the political expediency of slavery, the moral and religious question was answered unequivocally by scripture that slaveholding was not sinful.

Another author in the Southern Presbyterian Review attempted to explain how slavery did not interfere with human rights. He argued that “the principle of subjection to government” was rooted in the basic doctrine of “submission to the will of God.”⁴⁷ Rejecting an idealized “state of nature,” he argued that the supposed doctrine of universal “natural rights” was also fictitious.⁴⁸ Every individual had natural rights, but those rights could vary depending upon their station in life. He pointed out that children had different rights than parents, while the rich had different rights than the poor, and slaves had different rights from masters.⁴⁹ Referring back to the American Revolution, he argued that “our fathers contended for their lawful franchises, not on abstract principles as the *rights*

⁴⁵CW 4:385.

⁴⁶CW 4:385.

⁴⁷“The Christian Doctrine of Human Rights and Slavery,” SPR 2.4 (March, 1849) 569.

⁴⁸“The Christian Doctrine of Human Rights and Slavery,” 570.

⁴⁹“The Christian Doctrine of Human Rights and Slavery,” 573.

of men, but on legal principles as the *rights of Englishmen*, and as a patrimony derived from their forefathers.”⁵⁰

What, then, had created the abolitionist movement? In this author’s opinion, there were three basic causes. One was “*humanity* excited by exaggerated, and in a great degree, false statements,” another was “*political self-interest and jugglery*,” which played on those misunderstandings. But the third root cause was “the *democratic* principle. It is the radical doctrine of ‘equal rights’--it is the idea that the slave is unjustly deprived or debarred his natural rights--that he is entitled to liberty and prepared for it.”⁵¹ Only at the end of his essay did he acknowledge that American slavery was complicated by another factor: “a *difference of race*. . . . Will Christianity, that unquestionably makes masters benevolent, ever satisfy us that it is possible for two such dissimilar races to dwell together on equal terms?”⁵² This author seemed to acknowledge that Christian social teaching had no place for a racially-based class system, but he could not bring himself to envision what such a society might look like.

The practical outworking of this was that the black members of the southern churches were invariably under the oversight of white elders. At the dedication of the Zion Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1850, a building established for the African Presbyterians in the city (and the largest church building in Charleston),

⁵⁰“The Christian Doctrine of Human Rights and Slavery,” 575.

⁵¹“The Christian Doctrine of Human Rights and Slavery,” 583.

⁵²“The Christian Doctrine of Human Rights and Slavery,” 584.

Thornwell restated the southern doctrine of slavery.⁵³ Speaking to a slaveholding audience, Thornwell insisted that slavery “stands in the same general relations to Christianity as poverty, sickness, disease or death.”⁵⁴ He went so far as to declare that “slavery is inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel, as that spirit is to find its full development in a state of glory,” but quickly added that while it was still consistent with “the spirit of the Gospel, as that spirit operates among rebels and sinners, in a degraded world, and under a dispensation of grace.”⁵⁵ But while affirming that slavery was indeed compatible with Christianity, Thornwell insisted that the southern practice of slavery was not yet in conformity to God’s standard for slavery. He called for continued efforts to reform slavery, especially promoting the religious instruction of the slaves.⁵⁶

But as southern Christians attempted to conform slavery to biblical standards, some became convinced that certain religious and social practices might also need to conform to biblical standards. Whereas traditional evangelical piety emphasized personal conversion, the biblical model of covenant placed a heavy emphasis on the household.

Therefore Thornwell and others argued at the Synod of South Carolina in 1847, that if the biblical model of slavery should be accepted, then all slave children should be

⁵³“Slavery and the Religious Instruction of the Coloured Population,” SPR 4.1 (July 1850) 105-141. Reprinted as “The Christian Doctrine of Slavery,” in the Collected Works of James Henley Thornwell (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986/1873) 4:398-436. The dedication of the building was attended largely by whites.

⁵⁴“Slavery and the Religious Instruction of the Coloured Population,” 127.

⁵⁵“Slavery and the Religious Instruction of the Coloured Population,” 129.

⁵⁶“Slavery and the Religious Instruction of the Coloured Population,” 139-141. Thornwell agreed with Hodge (and through him with Paley) that slavery merely gave the master the right to the slave’s labor (116-120).

baptized. Appealing to the patriarchal model, where Abraham had circumcised all the males of his household—slave as well as free—they argued that it is “the duty and privilege of Christian masters to bring their servants, while in infancy, before God, and dedicate them to him in the rite of baptism.”⁵⁷ Rejecting the individualistic model of American evangelicalism, they claimed that “The Church of God was thus established in the family; the covenant was made with the head of that family; and all whom he represented in the family relation, not only his children, but his servants also, obtained a membership in the visible kingdom of God, through the faith of Abraham.”⁵⁸ Unwilling to follow this logic entirely, they argued that adult servants could only be baptized upon profession of faith, but claimed that the covenantal promise should extend at least to the children of slaves.⁵⁹ The Synod was impressed and passed a resolution endorsing the baptism of all the children of slaves.

But not everyone was impressed. A North Carolinian replied that while the Synod of South Carolina should be praised for its attention to the religious instruction of the slaves, the vision of household baptism was going too far. Pointing out that many in the deep South wished to bring all slaves for baptism on the ground of the master’s faith, A

⁵⁷“The Baptism of Servants” SPR 1.1. (June, 1847) 68. The report had its origin in the Presbytery of Charleston, and was reprinted as “Baptism of Slaves” W&O 2.12 (November 5, 1847) 45. The patristic citations and style of writing suggests that Thomas Smyth was either the author or a contributor. The SPR article, however, has a somewhat different style.

⁵⁸“The Baptism of Servants,” 73. There are some exegetical howlers, such as the claim that “trained servants” in Genesis 14:14 means that they were trained religiously before they were circumcised. Since circumcision is not introduced until Genesis 17, and the “training” of Genesis 14 is plainly military training, it is obvious that the author is barely even reading the biblical text.

⁵⁹“The Baptism of Servants,” 88. Three years later Washington Baird, editor of the Southern Presbyterian authored a series in defense of slavery, following the patriarchal vision. “How God’s Views and Teachings Differ from those of Men, Number Two,” Southern Presbyterian 3.47 (July 18, 1850) 186.

North Carolinian winced at the thought of “bringing forward a number of grown, and even old, wicked, and perhaps infidel negroes, and that too by '*compulsion*,' to the holy ordinance of Baptism.” But even the less extreme arguments of the Synod of South Carolina were too much for him to handle. It was wrong to step in between slave parents and their children, “thus severing the connexion between those parents and their own children, in one of its most sacred and endearing ties, that of religious dedication.” Revealing his commitment to evangelical conversionist religion and common sense moral reasoning, A North Carolinian declared that “No system of slavery, either Jewish, Roman, or American can so obtain as to place the master, by virtue of his authority as master, between parents and their own offspring in matters pertaining to religion and conscience.” The master cannot be substituted for the parent. “The duty which the master owes to the infant servant of his household is mediate, or through its own natural parents.”⁶⁰ South Carolina’s embrace of the organic relations of society was too much even for many of their fellow southerners.

The southwest responded to the new proslavery arguments with mixed voices. When the southern New School Presbyterian, Frederick Ross, published his Slavery Ordained of God insisting that slavery was ordained by God in the same sense as the parental relation, most southwestern Old Schoolers demurred. Kentuckian Lewis Green Barbour (PTS 1851), a teacher in Lexington, pointed out that Ross’s argument was based on an entirely “Paleyan doctrine of expediency” that made right and wrong a matter of

⁶⁰A North Carolinian, “The Southern Presbyterian Review” W&O 3.21 (January 6, 1848) 81.

“what tends to produce happiness.” Barbour rejected this sort of utilitarianism, insisting that good and evil must be defined in terms of God’s nature.⁶¹

The True Witness of New Orleans argued that Ross’s book “breathes the spirit of *ultraism* against which our Church has stood so firm.” Ross’s position resulted in the perpetuity of slavery by divine fiat. If God had established it, “no government has the right to abolish what God has ordained,” yet both southwestern newspapers, the True Witness and the Presbyterian Herald, concurred that the civil power could abolish slavery if it so desired.⁶² Even in the late 1850s the southwest had not yet entirely sided with South Carolina.⁶³

Therefore, when certain southerners began to advocate the revival of the slave trade in 1856, southern Presbyterians met it with a storm of protest. Governor Adams of

⁶¹LGB, “Review of Slavery Ordained of God” PH 27.28 (January 7, 1858). Though a Princeton graduate, Barbour cited Robert J. Breckinridge’s recently published systematic theology to defend his claims. For more on Ross see Tommy W. Rogers, “Dr. Frederick A. Ross and the Presbyterian Defense of Slavery,” JPH 1967 45(2) 112-124.

⁶²An article from the True Witness reprinted in the PH 27.18 (October 29, 1857). John Patrick Daly argues that most antebellum southerners rejected both the “positive good” defense as well as the “necessary evil” compromise. See Daly, When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002) 35ff. Daly suggests that only a “small minority” of proslavery evangelicals went so far as to endorse the perpetuity of slavery, including Ross and Old School ministers George D. Armstrong, John B. Adger and James Sloan (109). The only James Sloan in the Old School was privately trained in Washington Presbytery in western Pennsylvania and served as pastor in that presbytery until his death in 1870.

⁶³Ross was widely considered an “ultraist” in the southwest. Engles reported that a distinguished minister in the southwest had written that no one from his region “concurs in Dr. Ross’s views.” Editorial, “Dr. Ross’s Slavery Views and the Old-school,” Presbyterian 27.39 (September 26, 1857) 154. Drury reports that the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans, William A. Scott, wrote in his diary for 1846 that he had told British questioners that he favored gradual emancipation, including the statement: “I believe that a century hence the United States will stretch from sea to sea & the same glorious stars & stripes wave over a hundred free and sovereign states.” Clifford Merrill Drury, William Anderson Scott: “No Ordinary Man” (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1967) 117. Drury reports that Scott emancipated all of his slaves in 1854 when his family moved to California, and paid their way either to the north or to Liberia, depending upon their preference. (121-122)

South Carolina argued that if slavery was in fact a good thing, then there could be no objection to reopening the African slave trade. The entire southern Presbyterian press responded vehemently against this. George D. Armstrong wrote in the Central Presbyterian that while slaveholding was not sinful, man-stealing was contrary to the Word of God and should be soundly rejected.⁶⁴ The Southern Presbyterian warned that the political consequences “would do the work of a fire-brand in our midst, and divide our counsels.”⁶⁵

But the most thorough review of the issue came from John B. Adger in 1858. Adger admitted that some southerners were arguing that “slavery is the best form of society,” and that “therefore it is even impious not to enslave them,” but he emphatically denied that this was the common opinion.⁶⁶ Adger believed that the proposal to reopen the African slave trade relinquished the moral high ground that the South had taken simply for the sake of economic gain. The proponents of the trade focused on how the slave trade would provide cheaper labor in order to help the South retain its competitive edge against Europe, but Adger suggested that they had neglected the moral question. The culture of southern slavery had been insulated from fresh African arrivals, and Adger feared that the

⁶⁴A. D. G., “The Re-Opening of the African Slave Trade” CP 2.1 (January 3, 1857) 1; PH 29.12 (September 29, 1859); “Revival of Slave Trade” Presbyterian Magazine 9.11 (November, 1859).

⁶⁵“The Revival of the Slave Trade,” Southern Presbyterian 9[10].6 (December 6, 1856).

⁶⁶John B. Adger, “The Revival of the Slave Trade,” SPR 11.1 (April, 1858) 103.

religious and moral “advances” with the slaves would be lost if new slaves were regularly pouring into the South.⁶⁷

A. The Mission to the Slaves

And by the late 1850s those advances were significant—even if uneven from region to region. For over twenty years Presbyterian newspapers had been filled with exhortations and anecdotes encouraging the “religious instruction of the colored people.”⁶⁸ In 1835, the Rev. Charles Colcock Jones established the Liberty County Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes, in his native Georgia.⁶⁹ This association was frequently held up as the model for how Christian slaveholders should behave toward their slaves, and it prompted greater efforts among Presbyterians to ensure that their slaves received sufficient religious training.⁷⁰

⁶⁷John B. Adger, “The Revival of the Slave Trade,” *SPR* 11.1 (April, 1858) 100-135. Ed. B. Bryan, the author of the majority report of the South Carolina House Committee, replied to Adger’s essay by arguing that they had no intention of enslaving Africans, but merely to buy those that were already slaves. Adger pointed out that “All must admit that it is not possible to regulate the trade in Africa itself. For us to reopen the slave trade, would be for us to set on fire a large part of that whole continent, and to give up once more to savage warfare whole tribes of that people.” Notice of the Rev. John B. Adger’s article on the Slave Trade, by Ed. B. Bryan Esq. (chairman of the majority of the House Committee--and author of the report on the Slave Trade) *SPR* 11.3 (October 1858) 501.

⁶⁸“Religious Instruction of the Colored People” *W&O* 1.26 (Feb 12, 1846).

⁶⁹Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999). Cornelius provides a summary of Jones’ work in chapters 1, 4 and 7. For a treatment of the evangelical mission to the slaves throughout the South see Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* and Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).

⁷⁰“Memorial Of the Presbytery of Georgia to the Presbyteries of the Southern States on the Religious Instruction of the Negroes” *Watchman of the South* 8.1 (August 22, 1844) 1. This consisted of a letter from the Rev. Charles Colcock Jones encouraging greater activity in ministry to the slaves. “No law forbids their oral instruction. . . . We need more of the humble, self-denying fervent spirit of our Divine Lord.” The southern newspapers echoed this call, encouraging further work. Cf. *Protestant and Herald* (August 29, 1844). Throughout the 1850s Presbyterian newspapers gave periodic progress reports.

At first, opposition was common. When the Liberty County association attempted to build a church for the slaves, one Georgia correspondent told Benjamin Gildersleeve that the opposition was fierce. Gildersleeve replied “Where Religious Instruction is commenced, and *opposition* springs up, as it may sometimes do, *never mind it*: that is, do not feel yourself bound to set to work to argue or preach down your opponent. . . . It is certain *he is wrong* and *you are right*.”⁷¹

I. S. K. Axson urged slaveholders to remember that their slaves were “spiritual beings,” and that the Bible required the master “to be substantially a father to his people, to give a personal attention to their spiritual interests, even as he gives a personal attention to those of his children.” For Axson, a patriarchal view of slavery required masters to treat their slaves “very much after the manner” they treat their children.⁷²

The number of ministers who worked at least part-time with the slave population is impossible to ascertain. It is easier to locate those who were identified as missionaries to the slaves. Old School Presbyterians in the South were a distant third behind the Baptists and Methodists, but they reported regular and steady growth in their slave membership.⁷³ The challenge for the missionary was to teach the slaves while retaining the confidence of the slaveholders. The solution was to ignore discipline (at least when it came to the

⁷¹“Correspondence on the Religious Instruction of the Negroes,” CO (December 12, 1840) 171

⁷²I. S. K. Axson, “Extract of an Address before the Liberty County (Ga.) Association for the religious instruction of the Negroes—at their Eighth Anniversary,” CO 17.27 (July 8, 1843) 105.

⁷³The chart is woefully incomplete, due to the unfinished character of the database. By 1860 there were seventy Old School churches that had a “colored” membership of fifty or more. All but four were in the South, including thirty in South Carolina alone. Of the more than 14,000 “colored” communicants on the roll of the Old School in that year, around 5,000 resided in South Carolina. For a list of ethnic churches in the Old School in 1860, along with those churches that had a significant “colored” communicant membership, see appendix five.

masters). C. C. Jones urged missionaries to “Hear no tales respecting their owners, or managers, or drivers; and keep within your breast whatever of a private nature may incidentally come to your knowledge.”⁷⁴ At the same time that northern churches were withdrawing discipline from the realm of economic sins, divorcing spiritual concerns from economic matters, southern churches were taking a similar route with respect to the abuses of slavery.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Charles Colcock Jones, Suggestions on the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the Southern States (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847) 28. Duke University Special Collections Library.

⁷⁵This is particularly ironic given the traditional Presbyterian emphasis on the three marks of the church: the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline. In order to establish the first two, they had to sacrifice the third.

Name	Born	Seminary	Served	Years
Charles Colcock Jones	GA	ATS/PTS 1830	GA	1832-1863
Cortlandt Van Rensselaer	NY	PTS/UTS 1833	VA	1833-1835
Lemuel D. Hatch	NC	PTS 1819	AL	1833-1866
John B. Van Dyck	NY	PTS 1829	SC	1835-1840
William McJimsey	NY	PTS 1823	MD	1837-1841
James Smylie	NC	Private 1810s	MS	1841-1852
Thomas A. Ogden	NJ	PTS 1826	MS	1841-1865
John K. Doak	TN	PTS 1841	TN	1844
Samuel P. Helme	PA	PTS 1837	LA	1846-1847
Colin McKinney	KY	LaneTS 1836	MS	1846
James Knox	NC	PTS 1844	AL	1849-1859
Robert W. Hadden	AL	CTS 1848	SC	1849
Joseph Brown	VA	PTS 1835	VA	1850-1856
James Wilson	Ireland	PTS 1850	MS	1850-1856
Edward Wurts	NY	PTS 1846	LA/MS	1850-1855
John Winn	GA	Private 1830s	GA	1851-1857
Francis R. Morton	VA	PTS/NATS 1850	MS	1851-1852
William H. Roane	AL	CTS 1852	LA	1854
William L. McCalla	KY	Private 1813	LA	1857-1859

Figure 7.1. Old School Missionaries to the Slaves

While this table is incomplete, it does reflect the growing suspicion toward the north found in the southern newspapers. Of the eight missionaries who began their service prior to 1845, four were northern born, and all but one had attended Princeton Seminary. Princeton only contributed six of the eleven that came after 1845, and of those eleven, only three were not born in a slave state. Not surprisingly, those three all served in Louisiana and Mississippi, the one region that lacked its own seminary and had a stronger connection to the north through the Mississippi River.⁷⁶ An 1844 exchange reveals the increasingly sectionalist attitudes in the deep south. The Presbytery of Georgia, under the influence of

⁷⁶William Latta McCalla (1788-1859) is perhaps the most interesting of these missionaries. He had served as a chaplain for Andrew Jackson in New Orleans during the War of 1812, and after a four year pastorate in Kentucky served several pastorates in the Philadelphia area from 1823-1854 (with a two year sojourn as a chaplain in Texas from 1839-1841). Then, at the age of 66 he decided to retire to the west. He served as a missionary to the boatmen in St. Louis in 1855, before moving to Louisiana to serve as a missionary to the slaves on the plantation of the wealthy Old School ruling elder Judge Perkins.

Charles Colcock Jones, had urged the Board of Domestic Missions to get more involved in missions to the slaves.⁷⁷ Harmony Presbytery (in neighboring South Carolina) replied that while the Board might have “honesty of purpose and heart-felt interest in the spiritual welfare of our servants,” the presbytery could not concur with the optimism of their brethren. Because of “the nature of the institution of slavery, and the necessary results of that institution, in its influence upon master and servant,” they declared that “it is inexpedient to employ the agency of any foreign body, as the organ of the Southern church in the religious instruction of our servants.”⁷⁸ The patriarchal model of social relations did not comport well with the national vision of the Boards, so most southern Presbyterians preferred to work with other southern churches. Jones’ association in Liberty County, for instance, employed ministers from various denominations to work with the slaves.⁷⁹

In 1847 southern Presbyterians in Charleston began to argue publicly for the establishment of a separate building for their black members. Like most evangelical churches, Presbyterians had traditionally allowed blacks to sit only in the balconies of their churches, but those were full, and more wished to come who could not find a seat. One author in the Southern Presbyterian Review warned slaveholders that they could only claim the moral high ground if they obeyed the directives of scripture aimed at masters. “Our domestic institutions can be maintained against the world if we but allow

⁷⁷From 1850-1853 Jones would serve as the secretary of the Board, as northern Old Schoolers sought to encourage the mission to the slaves by calling its leading advocate to this post.

⁷⁸“Presbytery of Harmony,” CO 18.49 (December 7, 1844) 194. John C. Coit was one of the leading ministers in Harmony Presbytery. See chapter ten.

⁷⁹Eighth Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia (Savannah: Thomas Purse, 1843) 12. Duke University Special Collections Library.

Christianity to throw its broad shield over them. But if we so act as to array the Bible against our social economy, then our social economy must fall.”⁸⁰ Therefore, he argued, the church must provide for the regular instruction of the slaves. But only a few congregations were ever established for the blacks, and those few were led by white ministers and elders. As Thornwell put it, “Of one thing we are satisfied--their religious teachers should never be taken from among themselves. There is too great a proneness to superstition and extravagance among the most enlightened of them, to entrust them with the cure of souls.”⁸¹

B. The Reform of Slavery

Southern Presbyterians included many reformers such as Charles Colcock Jones who admitted that there were significant problems with the slave codes.⁸² Jones was always careful to avoid giving offence to his slaveholding hearers, but he urged them to consider the example of one gentleman “who has educated and instructed a sensible female servant for the purpose of making her the head of his plantation-school for the young; and she daily assembles them, and hears their prayers, instructs them in the catechism , and teaches them to read the Scriptures.” Jones argued that in his extensive experience, plantation-schools “produce the most decided and beneficial changes over the

⁸⁰“The Religious Instruction of the Black Population,” SPR 1.3 (December, 1847) 108.

⁸¹James Henley Thornwell, “Report on Slavery,” SPR 5.3 (January 1852) 394; Collected Writings 4:397.

⁸²Donald G. Mathews, "Charles Colcock Jones and the Southern Evangelical Crusade to Form a Biracial Community," in Religion and Slavery, 489-510; Eugene D. Genovese has documented various calls for reform in chapter 1 of, A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998).

whole plantation. Civilization, intelligence, manners, habits, conversation, are all improved.”⁸³ Jones was no radical. A practical realist, he hoped to improve conditions in the present.

Likewise, in his final report in 1848, Jones suggested that if slaves were “allowed to plant and raise something for themselves, and if they find their little interests cared for and protected by their owners, and that there is an evident desire and effort on their owner’s part to make them comfortable, and to supply their wants, it will tend to cultivate honesty and industry among them in large measure.”⁸⁴ He suggested that the character of the slaves depended greatly “upon *the character of their owners and the interests which they take in restraining vice and encouraging virtue*.”⁸⁵ By comparing slavery to parenthood, Jones and other southern Presbyterians attempted to encourage slaveholders to consider the extent of their responsibility for the well-being of their slaves. The reform of slavery was a part of a coherent pro-slavery ideology designed to conform slavery to what they considered a more biblical form of patriarchy.

But southern attitudes did not change quickly. By the 1850s, one southern Presbyterian expressed concern over the tendency of whites to criticize “the spiritual attainments of our slaves.” Revealing his own bias, he asserted that the “average of piety”

⁸³Charles Colcock Jones, Suggestions on the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the Southern States (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847) 28. Duke University Special Collections Library

⁸⁴Thirteenth Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia (Savannah: Edward J. Purse, 1848) 20. Duke University Special Collections Library

⁸⁵Thirteenth Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia (Savannah: Edward J. Purse, 1848) 23. Duke University Special Collections Library

was higher among whites, but he asked white southerners to consider whether there was “some poor black in my kitchen, on my farm, on my plantation, who is by all odds, a better man than myself. Is he not more faithful to Christ? Taking our relative condition into consideration, does he not stand higher. . . in the judgment of our common Master, and will he not probably occupy a higher position than myself in the world of glory?” A truly patriarchal relation would be to set an example of holiness and humility before the slaves, which would be profitable for both whites and blacks.⁸⁶

An anonymous 1856 article in the Southern Presbyterian Review defended the institution of slavery as less than ideal, but urged masters to train up their slaves in godliness and righteousness--treating them as they would wish to be treated if the roles were reversed.⁸⁷ One author in the Review even suggested that emancipation was desirable,⁸⁸ but most focused simply on the need for reform. Such reforms were exemplified by the conference held in 1845 in Charleston, South Carolina, under the leadership of Jones, Thornwell, John Adger, and other prominent Presbyterian pastors and theologians, which produced a movement toward the formation of separate black congregations in which the slaves could worship in their own way. Viewing the slaves as “poor brothers” in Christ, the Presbyterians sought to live up to their duties as Christian masters within the context of the “paternalistic ideal of an ordered and stable society.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶“Influence of the Gospel on the Coloured People,” Southern Presbyterian 9.37 (July 12, 1856)

⁸⁷“Slavery,” SPR 9 (1856) 345-362

⁸⁸ibid, 361

⁸⁹T. Erskine Clarke, “An Experiment in Paternalism: Presbyterians and Slaves in Charleston, South Carolina,” JPH 53:3 (1975): 230.

But the patriarchal model could push some southerners even further towards reform. W. F. argued as early as 1837 that not only should slaves be baptized, but also that they should be treated as members of the master's household in other respects, such as education—including reading. He argued that

“There is not one sentiment in the Bible, strictly religious, with which the servant is not as directly interested as the child—nothing good for the son which is not equally good for the servant—nothing safe for the son to know, which is not also safe for the servant—the servant has the same Heaven or Hell before him which the son has, and is stimulated to seek the one and shun the other by the same means.”

But not all were convinced. Editor Maclean thought that such instruction could be given orally, “and not by instructing them to read; to which there are, in our opinion, insuperable objections.”⁹⁰ Indeed, when one author in the Protestant and Herald advocated the education of slaves, at least one Presbyterian slaveholder canceled his subscription.⁹¹ While oral religious instruction was flourishing among southern Presbyterians, southerners remained divided on the question of whether to teach slaves to read.⁹²

In early 1856 an article in the Central Presbyterian argued for the education of slaves as a means of perpetuating slavery. The older belief, arising after the Nat Turner rebellion of 1831, was that education would result in more uprisings, but YRN argued for what he called “the patriarchal view” and claimed that “by bestowing education on our

⁹⁰W. F., “A Master’s Duty to His Servant,” Southern Christian Herald 3.48 (February 24, 1837) 191. If W. F. are his initials, and if he is a minister, then it is most likely William Frierson (1801-1863), a pastor in Cedar Grove, Alabama.

⁹¹Protestant and Herald 2.24 (March 14, 1844).

⁹²One author in the SPR suggested that the literacy laws were counterproductive because they could not stop an unscrupulous or dangerous slave, and forced many of “our best citizens” to disregard the law. “The Christian Doctrine of Human Rights and Slavery,” SPR 2.4 (March, 1849) 582.

negroes, we shall settle its foundations deeper, and strengthen its prospects for lasting until the millennium, which may God grant!” YRN claimed that the only way to perpetuate slavery was to bring it into full conformity with the biblical teaching on slavery, which required the education of slaves. He argued that “ignorance is at the bottom of nearly all the trouble you have with your negroes as a mass.” Education would produce contentment as slaves came to “know their true interests.” It would also “greatly enhance their individual value as servants.” Especially as the foreign missions movement grew, YRN doubted that the slaves could be “the only people on the globe who can be truly and permanently christianized without education.” He concluded that “a plantation settled with intelligent, pious negroes, who serve from a sense of duty, and enlightened view of interest” would be much better than the “half-taught heathen” who populated most southern plantations.⁹³ Blithely indifferent to questions of race (not to mention the manner of enslavement in Africa), YRN admitted that American slavery was seriously deficient. But rather than call for its elimination, he wanted to reform slavery in order to perpetuate it.

X replied the following week by reminding Virginians of Nat Turner, and suggesting that YRN was too optimistic. “Education is not the panacea for all the ills to which flesh is heir.” Only God can change the heart, X argued, so training the mind would guarantee nothing. So long as abolitionists continued to pour their literature into the South, it would be inexpedient to teach slaves to read. X concluded with a providentialism

⁹³YRN, “Can It be True?” CP 1.12 (March 22, 1856) 45. Though his identity is unknown, his reference to actions of the Synod of Virginia suggests that he was probably a minister or elder in Virginia.

bordering on fatalism: "I believe slavery, yes, African slavery, to be of divine appointment, that when God sees fit to break off their chains that human instrumentality cannot prevent it, that until that time comes he will keep them as he did the Israelites in Egyptian bondage."⁹⁴ Whether intentionally or not, X borrowed a favorite image of the very Nat Turner he condemned, and compared the South to Egypt, and the slaves to the Israelites in bondage.

Presbyterians were more favorable towards reforming slave marriage laws. Thornwell chaired a committee of the Synod of South Carolina that prepared a petition to the state legislature "to protect the family relations of the slave."⁹⁵ When Basil Manly (a Baptist graduate of Princeton Seminary) led the Charleston Baptist Association in affirming the inviolability of slave marriages, many southern Presbyterians urged their synods and presbyteries to draw up a code on the subject.⁹⁶ Even though the church declared unequivocally that such behavior was sinful, it did not deter all masters, many of whom cavalierly appealed to the law of the land, which permitted such separations.⁹⁷ Southern Presbyterians may have wished to reform slavery, but unfortunately their wishes did not accomplish much more than the transformation of (some) church-going

⁹⁴X, "Some Questions and Reflections for YRN" CP 1.13 (March 29, 1856) 50.

⁹⁵Thornwell to R. J. Breckinridge, October 20, 1847, quoted in Palmer, Thornwell, 301. Thornwell also endorsed the repeal of anti-literacy laws. William W. Freehling has pointed out that Thornwell insisted that "crimes against Christian marriage and education must be outlawed, even assuming (and Thornwell denied the assumption) that the outlawing would necessarily lead to total abolition." William W. Freehling, The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 73.

⁹⁶"Marriages of Slaves," Southern Presbyterian 9[10].10 (January 3, 1857).

⁹⁷T. Erskine Clarke, "An Experiment in Paternalism: Presbyterians and Slaves in Charleston, South Carolina," JPH 53:3 (1975): 235-236.

slaveholders.⁹⁸ Freehling correctly recognizes that southerners resolutely refused to accept any reform that would weaken the absolute control of the master over the slave.⁹⁹

C. The Problem of Race

Mark Noll has suggested that the underlying issue in the slavery debates was primarily the “cultural hermeneutics.” Few whites (northern or southern) recognized that “the Bible and race was not the same question as the Bible and slavery,”¹⁰⁰ and therefore unconsciously imported commonsense attitudes toward race into their polemics. And indeed, for many Americans, north and south, slavery and African slavery were indistinguishable.¹⁰¹ But this account does not satisfactorily explain Old School racial attitudes.

One Presbyterian who seemed to understand the distinction between slavery and African slavery was Nathan L. Rice. When President Shannon of the University of Missouri declared that the Bible, nature and the Constitution all sanctioned slavery, Rice demurred. “May we not hold that the Bible *tolerates slavery where it has become*

⁹⁸The failure to create a truly patriarchal slave system caused Thornwell and some others to briefly wonder whether American slavery could endure. William W. Freehling has suggested that Thornwell feared that “merely potential paternalism” was inadequate. At one point in 1860 Thornwell even hinted that he would prefer emancipation to unbiblical slavery. William W. Freehling, The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 60.

⁹⁹Freehling, 74

¹⁰⁰Mark A. Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” Religion and the Civil War edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 61; Eugene Genovese, “Religion in the Collapse of the American Union,” *ibid.*, 77.

¹⁰¹For the development of American racial views see Winthrop D. Jordan, The White Man’s Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Stephen R. Haynes, Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

interwoven in society, as it tolerates a despotic civil government,. . . without admitting that it sanctions it as a desirable institution?” Indeed, Rice questioned whether Shannon was fit to teach moral science if he could not understand this distinction. After all, since neither the Bible nor nature sanctions “*African slavery*” as distinguished from white slavery, “unless our President can give us some philosophical principles which fix a limit to this thing, we must protest; for in the course of time we ourselves might be enslaved. If Mr. Shannon were likely to be carried into slavery, we think it probable, his philosophy would undergo some modification.”¹⁰² Rice was often condemned as being pro-slavery, but he clearly saw that there was no moral or religious ground for a racially based slavery, and he earnestly desired the end of slavery.¹⁰³

Others recognized the connection between race and slavery, but without drawing Rice’s conclusions. In the south, many became convinced that since colonization was a practical impossibility, slavery was the “normal condition” of blacks.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the editors of the Central Presbyterian suggested that the real problem in America was not slavery, but race:

“If the institution of slavery were destroyed tomorrow the real difficulties of the case would remain with vastly increased aggravation. The race would still be here, and its social and political relations must be adjusted. How would that adjustment be made? Have our Northern brethren solved

¹⁰²“President Shannon's Card” St Louis Presbyterian 12.3 (July 19, 1855).

¹⁰³JAW replied from the south, thanking Rice for his balanced position, and insisting that “most stand with you.” Blaming abolitionism for the laws against teaching slaves to read, JAW complained that fear of “agents of an underground railroad” had made it very difficult to “employ Northern ministers as missionaries among the slaves.” “Letter from JAW” St. Louis Presbyterian (December 27, 1855).

¹⁰⁴Editorial, “Theories and Facts” CP 5.5 (February 4, 1860) 18.

this problem satisfactorily? Is this race in a desirable and comfortable condition there? Is it not notoriously otherwise?¹⁰⁵

Citing racial tensions around the world, they argued that there were only four options for the interrelationship of the races: “the subjugation of the weak race to the strong, in some form of servile relations; or the extermination of the weak, either by violence as it has often been, or by slow wasting, as with the Indians, and the South sea races; or their separation, as in the cases of the Hebrews, the Moors, and others; or their amalgamation by intermarriage.” None of these alternatives seemed better than slavery to these white Virginians.¹⁰⁶

And southern Presbyterians enjoyed pointing to the problems in northern race relations. Free blacks were as unwelcome in many places in the north as they were in the south.¹⁰⁷ By 1851 Indiana had forbidden free blacks to enter the state.¹⁰⁸ Two years later the state of Illinois passed a law forbidding free blacks from settling in the state, with the penalty of a \$50 fine. “In case the offender will not, or can not pay the fine, the Justice of

¹⁰⁵Editorial, “The True Problem,” CP 4.53 (December 31, 1859) 210.

¹⁰⁶Editorial, “The True Problem,” CP 4.53 (December 31, 1859) 210. John Stauffer recognizes that the vision of his interracial friends was rare in The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁷For northern racial views see David R. Roediger, The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class (London: Verso, 1991); Eric Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995/1970) chapter 8.

¹⁰⁸“Indiana and the Free Blacks,” Southern Presbyterian 5.1 (September 4, 1851) 2. The editor commented that this was good news for the future of the blacks, since they would be better off under the care of whites—in slavery. Northwestern Presbyterians were not particularly interested in having the African race in their churches either. Of the more than 14,000 “colored” communicants on the roll of the Old School in that year, around 5,000 resided in South Carolina. The entire northwest reported 80, and no northwestern church reported more than seven colored members. For a list of ethnic churches in the Old School in 1860, along with those churches that had a significant “colored” communicant membership, see Appendix 5.

the Peace is authorized to sell him at public auction to any person or persons who will pay said fine and costs, for the shortest time, and he shall furnish said mulatto or negro with comfortable food, clothing, and lodging, during said service.”¹⁰⁹ The New Orleans True Witness gleefully commented on the enforcement of this law six years later:

Last Saturday, a piece of animated property, called George Bowlin, was put up on the block at Carrollton, Greene Co , Illinois, and sold to the highest bidder. His offence was a violation of the law which prohibits the immigration of negroes into the state. Having been tried and found guilty, he was fined \$63; and not being able to pay the money, he was sold to Mr. Felix Morton for sixteen months.¹¹⁰

With both northerners and southerners unwilling to accept a large free black population, colonization appeared to be the only way to proceed towards emancipation, but as southerners repeatedly argued, colonization was incredibly expensive.

But while virtually all southern Presbyterians agreed upon the inferiority of Africans to Europeans, a few went further and attempted to justify their racial views from scripture as well.¹¹¹ Those who embraced the strict constructionist vision of biblical

¹⁰⁹The law defined mulatto as one-fourth black. “Negro Law of Illinois from the Journal of Commerce” PW (May 26, 1853). The law prompted editor Nathan L. Rice to comment: “One extreme begets another. . . . The first blush of this new law would lead us to think that Illinois so detested slavery, as to eschew the very *color* of it; but how are we stunned on discovering that the law enacts slavery itself!”

¹¹⁰“Selling a Negro in Illinois” True Witness (September 17, 1859).

¹¹¹Mark Noll claims that this was common “among the people at large, but was largely passe among intellectual elites.” Mark A. Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” Religion and the Civil War edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 62-63. But there is no need to “imagine counter-factually” that they could have “mounted arguments from the Bible to justify the enslavement of Africans, and only Africans,” because that is exactly what they did. Eugene Genovese rightly points out that such luminaries as James Henley Thornwell, Robert L. Dabney and George Howe (three of the leading southern theologians of the Old School) “rejected it as a rationale for slavery,” but many continued to use it in their sense that they needed some biblical justification for enslaving only blacks. Eugene D. Genovese, A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 4. Genovese points out that with a number of secular theorists, such as George Fitzhugh, James H. Hammond and George Frederick Holmes, these theologians constructed social arguments to justify racial slavery. While not commonly used in

authority could not accept a merely cultural argument for African slavery. Lewis A. Lowry, pastor at Jackson, Mississippi, wrote a pair of articles on “Manifest Destiny” in the opening issues of the True Witness in 1854, endorsing the view that the blacks were simply reaping the curse of Ham. He argued that Genesis 9:24-27 (the curse of Ham, and the blessing of Shem and Japheth) revealed the future of the four races that dwelt in America: “the Indian—stern wild and untameable as the buffalo upon which he feeds; the Saxon, the Teutonic. . . intelligent, active and persevering in every enterprise that promises an outcome of glory or of profit; the African—dull, stupid, and submissive as the ox or the ass to the burden that is laid upon him; the Spaniard also—indolent, selfish and sensual in the extreme.” Insisting that these racial types could “never be amalgamated” without grievous consequences. Lowry argued that the Spaniard was an example of such “illegitimate origin” because he blended the Goth, the Saracen and the Moor, in which he “inherits the curse” of Ham—albeit in modified form. Therefore Lowry could claim that scripture itself supported the idea that African slavery “is destined to continue until it shall cease to contribute to the enlargement of Japheth”—namely Europeans. To seek the emancipation of African slaves was to fight against the will of God. In a breathtaking

Presbyterian discourse prior to the 1850s, a version of the curse of Ham is found in [Robert J. Breckinridge], “Hints on Colonization and Abolition,” BRPR 5.3 (July, 1833) 280-281. Breckinridge suggested that the American Indians were descendants of Shem, and declared that “we think we see in the very state of things which are passing before us, the evidence of the truth of God, in the exact fulfilment of a prophecy, which, from the distance of forty-two centuries, seem to point steadfastly to us. ‘God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant.’ This is very remarkable; and as far as we know, has been true no where else but here; and true no where, if its statements were reversed. Shem has not ruled Ham in the tents of Japheth; nor Ham either of them in the tents of the other; nor Japheth, been served by Ham in the tents of Shem, any where but in this western hemisphere. God enlarged Japheth, until he hath stretched him over the tents of Shem, and the liberties of Ham; the double plunderer of both his brethren.” (280-281) Since the origins of the American Indians were somewhat mysterious in the nineteenth century, they could be made to fit virtually any scenario.

exhibition of *post facto* racial logic, Lowry declared that native Americans were descended from Ham rather than Japheth because the Indians had been dispossessed, which demonstrated that they were experiencing the curse of Ham. The Saxons, he triumphantly concluded, “sustain peculiar relations to the benevolent schemes of Heaven--and in those relations we have a high and important duty to discharge. The same vessel that bears upon the stream of time our political and national interests carries with it also the hopes of the world. It is freighted by Heaven itself with the richest of the sovereign gifts and purchased blessings that were promised to our race.”¹¹² The editor, Richmond McInnis, a native Mississippian, thought that Lowry’s interpretation was novel, but suggested that there was considerable interest in the subject.¹¹³ More mainstream racial views were expressed by William T. Hamilton in response to Nott’s lectures on biblical and physical history of man, defending the unity of the human race,¹¹⁴ but Lowry pointed the way toward the future of southern racial theory. Benjamin M. Palmer would later defend the Confederate cause by

¹¹²L. A. Lowry, “Manifest Destiny,” True Witness 1.1 (March 2, 1854). Lowry (????-1855) had been ordained in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1842, but spent a year each at Centre College and Princeton Seminary before being received by the Old School Redstone Presbytery in 1849.

¹¹³Indeed, three months later Lowry published a second installment, this time considering the manifest destiny of Russia. “Manifest Destiny of Russia,” True Witness 1.15 (June 15, 1854). Since they were also of the line of Japheth, they also belong to the blessed line and must experience great prosperity. Stephen R. Hayes points out that those who adopted this stance were often explicitly indebted to the historicist racial thought of German philosophers Schlegel and Herder, with their conviction that each race had its own distinctive characteristics and purposes. Stephen R. Haynes, “Race, National Destiny, and the Sons of Noah in the Thought of Benjamin M. Palmer,” JPH 78:2 (Summer 2000) 125-143; see also his Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). David Brion Davis, Slavery and Human Progress (New York, 1984) 21-22, 36, 39, 42-43, 83, 86-87.

¹¹⁴William T. Hamilton, “Thoughts on Man, and the Bible,” Southern Presbyterian (July-September, 1850). The series was initially published in the New Orleans Presbyterian, but after it went out of business, he turned to the Southern Presbyterian and engaged further with Nott’s replies. For more on the debate over the unity of the human race, see Edward R. Crowther, Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) 97-100.

arguing that each of Noah's sons had a particular purpose in history: "Shem as the conservator of religious truth; Japhet as the organ of human civilization; and Ham as the drudge, upon whom rested the doom of perpetual servitude."¹¹⁵ Stephen R. Haynes demonstrates that the use of the biblical argument from the curse of Ham developed in the 1850s in the southwest and became central to the racial theories of the postbellum era.¹¹⁶ Thus Lowry's article may well have been novel to southwestern ears.

In the end, a significant portion of the southern defense of slavery became bound up explicitly with its racial theory. Forced by its strict constructionist constitutional theory either to defend racial slavery from scripture or to abandon it, many found the arguments of Lowry and Palmer attractive.

3. Slavery and the Breakdown of Ecclesiastical Relations with other Denominations

Those outside of the United States found such commonsense intuitions anything but obvious. The development of a pro-slavery consensus in the south created tensions between the Old School and other Reformed denominations in the United States and Britain. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century the Old School maintained friendly correspondence with several British churches and even after the termination of the

¹¹⁵Quoted in Haynes, "Race, National Destiny. . ." 131. Haynes points out that Palmer would use similar reasoning to endorse segregation after the war, arguing from Genesis 9-11 for the need for racial purity.

¹¹⁶Stephen R. Haynes, Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Plan of Union, the General Assembly maintained fraternal relations with several New England Congregationalist associations.¹¹⁷

The British churches, especially the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, expressed their concerns over slavery in 1845. The Free Church recognized that the Old School was in a difficult position, but urged it to deal with slavery quickly.¹¹⁸ The Irish Presbyterians took a stronger stance, calling for Presbyterians to remove slaveholders from their church. The 1845 General Assembly approved the reply of the committee on foreign correspondence, chaired by Alexander T. McGill, to both bodies. The Assembly pointed out that the Presbyterian Church in America could not interfere with civil government, and therefore could take no formal action against slavery (although her members certainly could). Insisting that the church should not exclude any from her membership whom Christ and the apostles had included, they sought to encourage both

¹¹⁷One little known fact is that the Old School had better ecclesiastical relations with the Congregationalists than the New School after the division. This is partly due to the regular turf squabbles between the New School and the Congregationalists in New York and the west.

¹¹⁸The Old School newspapers explained to their readers the background for this exchange. After the Free Church Disruption of 1843, several American churches sent money to assist the fledgling Free Church. Some of that money came from the slave states, especially from Thomas Smyth's congregation in Charleston. British abolitionists pressured the Free Church to return the money, but Dr. William Cunningham defended the American churches, urging the Scots to be patient with the Americans who were in a difficult situation. "The Slavery Question," CQ 15.18 (May 3, 1845) 69. For more on the situation, see George Shepperson, ed., "Thomas Chalmers, the Free Church of Scotland, and the South," Journal of Southern History 1951 17(4) 517-537. Scottish opposition to slavery remained strong. Fifteen years later Dr. Guthrie of the Free Church published a vigorous denunciation of slavery. William Engles commented that Guthrie had failed to recognize that the abolition movement was the true culprit for the failure of emancipation. Further, he pointed out that slavery had been introduced by the British, so it seemed somewhat ironic that they would now condemn America for not eliminating it quicker. In light of Guthrie's condemnation of southern ministers, Engles wondered what the Scottish ministry was doing for the black race. Finally he expressed astonishment that Guthrie had said, "the next negro insurrection, may it be successful!" Did he really desire the murder of women and children? In the light of the violence in British India and Ireland, Engles wondered whether Guthrie would be consistent in other cases of "oppression." Editorial, "Dr. Guthrie's Reply," Presbyterian 30.12 (March 24, 1860) 46.

British bodies to continue the correspondence.¹¹⁹ The following year, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland renewed its insistence upon the abolition of slavery in the United States. The Assembly approved the response by a committee chaired by Robert J. Breckinridge, who pointed out that the Presbyterian church had no more authority over slavery in the United States, than the Irish church had “over the institution of Hereditary Monarchy, or Aristocracy, or a thousand other things, which as republicans, we unanimously condemn, but which you as loyal subjects, cordially approve.” Breckinridge objected to the repeated condemnations of “sister churches in foreign countries,” arguing that the Irish Presbyterians were relying upon a misunderstanding of the true situation in the United States.¹²⁰ In 1847 the Presbyterian Church in Ireland replied by urging American Presbyterians to take the lead in removing slavery—suggesting that the Americans’ proximity to slavery might have corrupted their “moral judgments and feelings.” The Old School Assembly of 1848 replied by courteously suggesting that further discussion on the subject would not be edifying.¹²¹

Fraternal relations within the United States were also growing weaker. In the 1840s and early 1850s six congregationalist associations regularly sent fraternal delegates to the Old School General Assembly. But as New Englanders became increasingly abolitionist, these relationships began to fray. Immediately after the Old School’s decision on slavery

¹¹⁹Minutes (1845) 44-46.

¹²⁰Minutes (1846) 223-224. The 1847 Assembly received even stronger letters, but the answers were not published in the Minutes, due to a motion that required the clerk to print only those items that he was specifically requested to print. Minutes (1847) 386.

¹²¹Minutes (1848) 19, 43-45, 174-177. John M. Krebs was the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Correspondence that authored the reply.

in 1845, Presbyterian delegates to the Congregationalist associations of New England were reporting that some tension existed, but hoped that their annual visits were helping correct New England's false impressions.¹²² Indeed in 1849, the Rev. James M. MacDonald reported that he had barely persuaded the Congregational General Conference of Maine not to suspend relations with the Old School.¹²³ But for the next several years the Congregationalist representatives to the Old School General Assembly regularly denounced the Old School for its refusal to discipline slaveholders—even when the Assembly met on southern soil—as in Charleston, South Carolina in 1852, or Nashville, Tennessee, in 1855. And each year the Old School sat quietly and listened, the moderator responding merely with polite appreciation for their remarks.

But not all Old School Presbyterians were content to remain silent. In 1854 Robert J. Breckinridge replied in the Presbyterial Critic with “strictures on the Congregational harangues” on slavery. The Presbyterian church, he argued, “does not believe that slaveholding is, of itself, a sin,” but neither does she believe that it is “good in itself.” The sin was the “forcible reduction of freemen into bondage,” which the Presbyterian church has resolutely opposed. But now that slavery existed, the problem was what to do with it. Until the state could remove it, the church's job was to preach the gospel to both masters and slaves, urging both of them to live in a godly fashion toward one another. On the other hand, Breckinridge admitted that “if any one, instead of talking nonsense, and being insolent, will show her a sufficient warrant from the Word of God to preach a crusade

¹²²Minutes (1846) 225-227; Minutes (1847) 409-411.

¹²³Minutes (1849) 394-395.

against slavery, she will certainly preach it, if it were to cost her the martyrdom of half her ministers.” But until then, he begged the congregationalists to look at the peril of the country. “Society is wildly and universally agitated. Many of the Churches are torn in pieces. In the midst of this scene of confusion and danger, the Presbyterian Church, covering the whole nation--thinly--indeed, but yet with a real power--is calm, united and in thorough repose on the fundamental principles which must at last be accepted as the only basis upon which these fierce agitations can be composed, and the country return to peace and reason.”¹²⁴

New England, however, was becoming increasingly impatient.¹²⁵ In 1856 five of these Congregational associations debated whether or not to break their ties to the Old School. The Old School sent fraternal delegates to seek to persuade the New Englanders to remain in fellowship.

Nathan L. Rice was sent to the Rhode Island Evangelical Consociation. The Rhode Island congregationalists had accused the Old School of a “romanizing spirit” because the Old School appeared to think itself infallible regarding the matter of slavery, and refused to heed the New Englanders rebuke. The previous fall Rice had authored a series of

¹²⁴Reprinted in the W&O 11.12 (Oct 25, 1854)

¹²⁵It is worth noting that the Old School had a growing presence in New England during these years. In 1840 the Old School reported ten congregations and twenty-two ministers in Londonderry Presbytery (mostly in New Hampshire), with six ministerial members serving Congregationalist churches. In 1850 the numbers were about the same (eleven congregations and twenty-eight ministers--nine serving Congregationalist churches in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine). By 1860, Londonderry's numbers remained the same, but the Old School had added a new Connecticut Presbytery with five churches and nine ministers--only two of which had existed in 1850 (not including another half dozen ministers from other New York presbyteries who labored in Congregational churches in Connecticut). Minutes 1840, 1850, 1860. As conservative New Englanders were attracted to the Old School, the Congregational Associations became more and more radical.

“Letters on Slavery” addressed to the Congregational delegates to the 1855 General Assembly.¹²⁶ Rice’s point was that mere denunciation of slavery was ineffective. If they wished to be useful in ending slavery, they should come up with a plan that could persuade the south. “Tell us what we are to do, and you will do us good.”¹²⁷ But Rice was convinced that “no church has done so much for emancipation as ours. Not one is doing so much at this hour.” Tired of abolitionist rhetoric that proposed no practical solution, he claimed: “We hear much declamation, but I never yet heard a man who could tell us what to do, in addition to what we are doing, and I have asked many of them to meet the facts fairly, and tell us what we can do and have not done. I suppose I dislike Slavery as much as any man, and I would canonize any man who could tell us how to remove this evil and curse from the world.”¹²⁸ Suggesting that the “romanizing” tendency went both ways, Rice suggested that “there is a little pope in every man, and none of us are too well pleased to be told of our faults.” Defending the Old School’s distinction that slavery was evil, yet slaveholding might not be necessarily sinful, he pleaded with the Rhode Island ministers to propose a way to end slavery in a just manner. Rice’s efforts had some effect: the minister who had proposed breaking ties with the Old School changed his mind, but the Rhode Island

¹²⁶“Letters on Slavery” St. Louis Presbyterian (September 20-November 22, 1855).

¹²⁷“Dr Rice's Speeches Before the Rhode Island Evangelical Consociation (from the New York Observer)” Presbyterian Magazine 6.7 (July, 1856) 313.

¹²⁸“Dr Rice's Speeches Before the Rhode Island Evangelical Consociation (from the New York Observer)” Presbyterian Magazine 6.7 (July, 1856) 311.

Evangelical Consociation still voted 17-14 to cut off its twenty-five year relation with the Presbyterian Church.¹²⁹

Alexander T. McGill of Princeton Seminary was sent to the General Association of Massachusetts. Having spent a year teaching at Columbia Seminary in South Carolina (1852-1853), McGill spoke first-hand of the progress that southern Presbyterians were making in the religious instruction of the slaves. The statement of 1845 (which McGill had helped draft) had brought peace to the church. “Every time the nation trembles with the violence of unprincipled and turbulent men, we look to the rock where a merciful heaven has planted our feet, and then look up to thank Him and take courage. . . . And long as we are allowed to keep that position unmoved, long as there is one broad national church remaining to pour oil on these troubled waters, we humbly believe the Union is safe; and no longer.” The Old School church would seek to imitate the apostles, who did not agitate against slavery, but overthrew it by “promulgating those eternal principles of love to God and love to man, which, if left to their own native tendencies. . . will achieve the overthrow of every despotism, whether petty or grand, on the face of the earth.”¹³⁰ Indeed, McGill pointed out that when Congregationalists came and spoke against the evils of slavery every year at the Presbyterian General Assembly, they were safer than if they did the same on the floor of the United States Congress (referring to the caning of Charles Sumner in the Senate in 1856). McGill, with the majority of the Old School, was

¹²⁹“Dr Rice's Speeches Before the Rhode Island Evangelical Consociation (from the New York Observer)” Presbyterian Magazine 6.7 (July, 1856) 313-315.

¹³⁰“Dr McGill's Address before the General Association of Massachusetts (from the New York Observer)” Presbyterian Magazine 6.8 (August, 1856) 453-454.

convinced that the only way to end slavery was to deal with it through the preaching of the gospel. The “gradual emancipation of souls” would prepare both master and slave for “universal emancipation.”¹³¹ Admitting that the preferred abolitionist model of New England would be faster, McGill warned that such a method could only result in war. The Massachusetts ministers were in no mood to listen, and promptly terminated relations with the Old School.

In New Hampshire, John Krebs spoke to a state Association that had already voted to send a resolution terminating relations with the Old School to the district associations. Krebs sought to dissuade them from this action. Like McGill he pointed out that the Old School was willing to hear their rebukes year after year. Ending correspondence would do nothing to promote the end of slavery.¹³² Once again, his pleas were insufficient. The New Hampshire Association terminated fraternal relations with the Old School. The following year the Vermont Association followed suit, so that no Congregationalist body remained in fellowship with the Old School. By 1858 only the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church still sent fraternal delegates to the Old School General Assembly.

Not all were disappointed by this. The Presbyterian Herald agreed with the New Englanders that it was the occasion for too much controversy, and the discontinuance of

¹³¹“Dr McGill's Address before the General Association of Massachusetts (from the New York Observer)” Presbyterian Magazine 6.8 (August, 1856) 455.

¹³²“Dr Krebs' Speech before the New Hampshire Association (from the New York Observer)” Presbyterian Magazine 6.10 (October, 1856) 543-544.

fraternal correspondence might result in greater peace between the churches.¹³³ Indeed, the Old School's conservative stance was attractive to some Congregationalists and New School Presbyterians. While some might regard "the Old-school brother as one who makes it his principal amusement to hunt negroes with bloodhounds, and coffle them for a southern market,"¹³⁴ others had become convinced that the Old School had the only practical solution that could maintain the unity of both church and nation. Old School newspapers regularly reported on New School churches that had grown frustrated with its growing radicalism and so transferred into the Old School.¹³⁵

While the breaking of fraternal relations may seem of relatively minor import, it signifies the unwillingness of the majority of New England Congregationalists to remain in any sort of fellowship with southern slaveholders. The New School division of 1857, with the formation of the United Synod of the South, suggests that the polarization of the

¹³³PH 26.38 (May 21, 1857). As an example of the tension that could build through these exchanges, in 1856 the Congregational Delegate from Maine expressed the decided opinion that slavery was sinful. The Moderator (Dr. Francis MacFarland of Virginia) replied that "he had never heard man or woman in the South maintain that slavery was not an evil, until the rise of the Abolitionists. But since then he had heard them maintain that slavery was the very perfection of civilization (laughter)." MacFarland was misquoted in the *Commercial Advertiser* of New York, which reported that he had said, "As to slavery, sir, I never heard remarks upon the evils of the system which I could not subscribe to." Recognizing that such a statement (even if erroneous) from the Moderator of the General Assembly could create problems (especially in an election year), MacFarland asked the Assembly to verify that he had been misquoted: "Had I uttered such a sentence the Assembly would have taken me out of this chair. . . . If it were believed that any minister had uttered this sentiment, it would destroy his influence in the South."

At this point Samuel Irenaeus Prime, editor of the New York Observer, chimed in "and in the North, too." Then feeling the tension of the moment, Prime went on to make reference to how slighted he had felt when some of his remarks had been attributed to Judge Fine—"for though the Judge Fine may be very fine, sir, he is not Prime (Laughter)." Having successfully defused a tense moment, Prime assured the Assembly that the press would correct the mistake. "General Assembly," Presbyterian 26.22 (May 31, 1856) 85.

¹³⁴Calvin, "A Week in an Excised Synod," Presbyterian 30.36 (September 8, 1860) 145.

¹³⁵For instance, Presbyterian 27.34 (August 22, 1857).

mid 1850s had reached the point that few northerners had any interest in remaining united to a slaveholding South.¹³⁶ Methodists and Baptists, with their lower ecclesiology, had reached that point in 1844-1845. The New School/Congregationalist wing of the Reformed tradition took an extra decade to reach that point, leaving only the churches with the most traditional ecclesiologies intact. Old School Presbyterians and Episcopalians were the only national churches that remained—and they were increasingly isolated. If no other denominations were willing to be in fellowship with them, then they would have to try to hold the nation together alone.

4. Van Rensselaer, Armstrong and the Deepening Chasm

In September of 1857 George D. Armstrong of Virginia began a lengthy debate with Cortlandt Van Rensselaer of New Jersey in the pages of the Central Presbyterian and the Presbyterian Magazine.¹³⁷ This correspondence forms one of the most significant public exchanges between conservative and pro-slavery positions in the late 1850s, and

¹³⁶For the New School division see Parker, United Synod; Hugh Davis, “The New York *Evangelist*, New School Presbyterians and Slavery, 1837-1857,” American Presbyterians 68:1 (Spring 1990) 14-23. Davis suggests that with the defection of many abolitionists to Congregationalism and the Free Presbyterian church, the New School moved more toward the conservative center in the late 1840s. Davis admits that northwestern New Schoolers tended to be more radical, suggesting that the New School experienced some of the same geographical tensions as the Old School.

¹³⁷Of the sixteen Old School periodicals, only Monfort’s Presbyterian of the West was interested in pursuing the slavery question. “The Slavery Agitation” CP 2.9 (February 28, 1857) 34. Van Rensselaer’s letters were republished as Presbyterian Views on Slaveholding: Letters and Rejoinders to George D. Armstrong (Philadelphia: M. J. Milson, 1858). This public correspondence is remarkable for the late 1850s. The Baptist debate between Francis Wayland of Brown University and Richard Fuller took place in the 1840s. See Eugene D. Genovese, A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 8.

reveals the growing dilemma that engaged conservative emancipationists as their southern brethren moved further and further away from the older centrist stance the Old School had tried to establish.¹³⁸

Van Rensselaer and Armstrong were both northern born and trained, but both had attended Union Seminary in Virginia and had significant experience in the South.

Cortlandt Van Rensselaer (1808-1860) was born into a prominent Dutch family in New York. Graduating from Yale in 1827, he spent two years at Princeton Seminary before transferring to Union Seminary in Virginia in 1832, due to his desire to serve as a missionary to Virginia's slaves. From 1833 to 1836 he preached to slaves in Virginia, and was ordained by West Hanover Presbytery in 1835. After serving churches in New Jersey and Washington, D. C., he became secretary of the Board of Education, a position he filled from 1846 until his death in 1860.

George D. Armstrong (1813-1899) was born in New Jersey and graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1832. Also a Union Seminary graduate (1837), he spent fourteen years as a professor of physical science at Washington College in Lexington, Virginia (1837-1851), during which time he served as pastor of the Timber Ridge church outside of Lexington. From 1851-1891 he was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Norfolk,

¹³⁸This exchange between Van Rensselaer and Armstrong mirrors the argument of David F. Ericson's "Liberal Consensus Thesis." Ericson argues that "antislavery and proslavery arguments unsettled the public mind into believing that the nation was a house divided against itself that could no longer stand. . . . Because the two sides applied liberal ideas to the particular circumstances of their own society with such diverse results, it became more and more difficult to dismiss the conflict between them as peripheral to the future of a nation conceived in liberty." Ericson, The Debate over Slavery: Antislavery and Proslavery Liberalism in Antebellum America (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 3. While not convinced by his "single-tradition approach," I would suggest that Van Rensselaer and Armstrong were certainly drawing on the same traditions in reaching diametrically opposed conclusions.

Virginia. Never himself a slaveholder, Armstrong noted that “the prejudices of my early life and education have not helped me forward towards the conclusion I have reached. Their influence was all the other way. . . . My political opinions have not helped me. Their influence, too, has been all the other way.” It was simply the “careful and prayerful study of God's word” that had led him to a pro-slavery position.¹³⁹

In September of 1857 Van Rensselaer reviewed Armstrong's volume, The Christian Doctrine of Slavery, calling the Virginian, “a sound expositor of the scriptural doctrine of slavery,” with only a few exceptions. Chief among these was Armstrong's hesitation to commit to the idea of emancipation. Armstrong had merely urged the reformation of the slave codes, but failed, in Van Rensselaer's opinion, to “sufficiently impress upon the conscience of delinquents the duties growing out of their relation” as masters. Like most northern conservatives, Van Rensselaer was convinced that the reformation of slavery would invariably lead to its extinction.¹⁴⁰

In response, Armstrong published “Three Letters on Conservatism” in the Central Presbyterian (reprinted in Van Rensselaer's Presbyterian Magazine) providing a critique of the conservative stance. Armstrong suggested that a calm discussion between

¹³⁹“Dr Armstrong's First Rejoinder” Presbyterian Magazine 8.8 (August, 1858) 358.

¹⁴⁰Van Rensselaer, “Review of The Christian Doctrine of Slavery (Armstrong), Slavery Ordained of God (Ross), and Slavery and Its Remedy (Samuel Nott)” Presbyterian Magazine 7.9 (September, 1857) 421-422. Armstrong's volume had previously received notice in the Presbyterian of the West, where editor Joseph G. Monfort called upon other Presbyterian newspapers to reject it. PW 16.44 (July 23, 1857). It also was reviewed in Kentucky's PH 26.36 (May 7, 1857), where editor William Hill utilized it in an ongoing debate with the Congregationalist on the question of whether the New Testament excluded slaveholders from the church. Hill had proposed a debate between Armstrong and Dr. Dexter (the editor of the Congregationalist), where both papers would publish both sides, but the negotiations failed.

conservatives and pro-slavery advocates was necessary to facilitate better understanding between brethren who disagreed about one of the most “exciting” subjects of the day.

Armstrong argued that the conservatives failed to take a biblical stance toward slavery. Conservatives were better than the abolitionists, but they blended scriptural ideas with philosophical ones. Van Rensselaer had stated that “slavery is not *necessarily and in all circumstances* sinful.”¹⁴¹ Armstrong countered with a stronger statement: “Slave-holding is not a *sin* in the sight of God, and is not to be accounted an '*offence*' by his church (Christian Doctrine of Slavery 8). There is a different tone here. Your statement suggests that slavery is suspect, whereas scripture does not.” While admitting that there were many evils connected with slavery, Armstrong claimed that such evils could not be used to overthrow the institution, any more than the abuses of marriage should result in the abolition of marriage. He concluded that “The Word of God is *the* standard in Christian ethics. Its deliverances are the result of a better than human wisdom--better, not only as a superior wisdom, but as a wisdom guided and governed by perfect benevolence.”¹⁴²

In his second letter, Armstrong claimed that conservatives like Van Rensselaer wanted the church to engage in politics. Van Rensselaer had said that “the Christian instruction and elevation of the slaves” was a means to “the recovery of the blessings of personal liberty, when Providence opens the way for it.”¹⁴³ Armstrong repudiated this as inappropriate for the church. Further, Armstrong objected that Van Rensselaer seemed to

¹⁴¹Presbyterian Magazine 7.9 (September, 1857) 422.

¹⁴²Geo. D. Armstrong, “Three Letters on Conservatism,” CP 2.39 (September 26, 1857) 153. Reprinted in the Presbyterian Magazine 8.1 (January, 1858) 8-12.

¹⁴³Presbyterian Magazine 7.9 (September, 1857) 422.

“assume that personal freedom is an absolute good.” Instead, he argued that slavery and emancipation were political matters and that since Christ never commanded emancipation, the church had no right to encourage it. While Christian citizens may believe whatever they want on political matters, they should never confuse their political commitments with what the Word of God commands the church to do. The only goal that the church may pursue with any person is “to labor to secure in them a Christian life on earth and meetness for his heavenly kingdom.”¹⁴⁴

In his final letter, Armstrong argued that the whole anti-slavery movement was rooted in “infidel philosophy. . . which substitutes for the Bible account of the origin of civil government in the family, the theory of the 'civil compact,' as it has been called; and confounds human liberty with unbridled license.” Any argument which considered slavery to be an “evil,” he claimed, had already departed from scripture, which considered slavery to be good.¹⁴⁵ Armstrong revealed how southern Presbyterians were moving away from the older conception of multiple strands of authority with Scripture as the final authority, to a flatter approach which made Scripture the only authority.

Van Rensselaer responded with “Three Conservative Replies” in early 1858. Realizing for the first time that Armstrong was in fact thoroughly pro-slavery, Van Rensselaer hoped that their exchange would show southerners the danger of such radical

¹⁴⁴Geo. D. Armstrong, “Three Letters on Conservatism,” CP 2.40 (October 3, 1857) 157. Reprinted in the Presbyterian Magazine 8.2 (February, 1858) 65-70. The last quotation he cited from his own Christian Doctrine of Slavery 131.

¹⁴⁵Geo. D. Armstrong, “Three Letters on Conservatism,” CP 2.41 (October 10, 1857) 161. Reprinted in the Presbyterian Magazine 8.4 (April, 1858) 151-156.

views.¹⁴⁶ He claimed that scriptural teaching, “as well as the Presbyterian testimony founded upon it,” cut a middle way between pro-slavery and abolitionist doctrines. The fact that scripture enjoins “slaves to obey their masters does not approve of slavery, any more than the command to submit to 'the powers that be' implied approbation of Nero's despotism.” So while agreeing that slaveholding was not necessarily sinful, Van Rensselaer insisted that it is a relation that may be justified by circumstances.”¹⁴⁷ While Armstrong claimed that the relationship of master and slave was of the same sort as the parent-child relation, Van Rensselaer pointed out that this missed the fundamental difference between these two relations in redemptive history:

The marriage relation is divinely constituted; it existed anterior to sin; it is normal in its character and permanent in its duration; and it is honourable in all. Whereas the relation of master and slave cannot be said to be more than providentially permitted or sanctioned; it originated, as you admit, by the wickedness of 'manstealing,' and by a violation of the laws of God; it implies an abnormal condition of things, and is therefore temporary; and it must be acknowledged, that it is in discredit generally throughout Christendom.¹⁴⁸

Van Rensselaer believed that Armstrong and the pro-slavery authors had flattened scripture and neglected relevant parallels. Polygamy, for instance, was also tolerated in the Old Testament, and despotism was never condemned as sinful. But, Van Rensselaer argued, “the general spirit of the doctrines and precepts of the Bible operate unequivocally and decidedly against the permanence of slavery in the household, or of despotism in the

¹⁴⁶Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter I” Presbyterian Magazine 8.1 (January, 1858) 13.

¹⁴⁷Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter I,” 16.

¹⁴⁸Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter I,” 16.

state.”¹⁴⁹ Recalling his own years of service in Virginia as a missionary to the slaves, Van Rensselaer noted that as late as the mid-1840s, he had never heard any overtly pro-slavery sentiment in Virginia. He urged Armstrong to avoid the incursions of “ultraism” into the southern wing of the church. “We at the North are able, with God's blessing, to maintain the scriptural ground against anti-slavery fanaticism; and we ask our brethren at the South to repel the irruptions of pro-slavery fanaticism with equal determination. In order to do this successfully, the South needs a more guarded statement of doctrine than the one you have propounded.”¹⁵⁰

While agreeing with Armstrong that the church should not address the question of slavery in its political relation, Van Rensselaer nonetheless insisted that emancipation also had a moral relation, and in this sense the church had full authority “to contemplate emancipation as a righteous and lawful end.”¹⁵¹ Finding Armstrong’s biblicism too restrictive, Van Rensselaer insisted that “the Church has a right to expound, and to apply, the word of God, in reference to all the relations of life and to all the changing aspects of society. . . . The Church has, in every age, the right to expound the sacred Scriptures

¹⁴⁹Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter I,” 19.

¹⁵⁰Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter I,” 26.

¹⁵¹Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter II” Presbyterian Magazine 8.2 (February, 1858) 72. He cited the Rev. John Robinson, The Hand Book of Slavery (Cincinnati: John D Thorpe, 1852) as one of the best books on the subject. Robinson (1814-1888, WTS 1839) was pastor at Ashland, Ohio, from 1844-1884. The publisher, Thorpe, was one of the leading Old School ruling elders in Cincinnati (and for a brief time the editor of the Presbyterian of the West, one of two ruling elders to hold the distinction of editing an Old School newspaper—the other being M. Mclean of the Christian Herald of Cheraw, South Carolina in the late 1830s.

according to the light granted by the Holy Spirit, and to apply its interpretation to all cases, judged to be within its spiritual jurisdiction.”¹⁵²

Further, Van Rensselaer argued that the fact that the apostle Paul encouraged Christian slaves to seek emancipation, if within their reach, demonstrates that slavery is not a desirable relation. He pointed out that Paul had taught “the Corinthian slaves that liberty is a higher and better condition than bondage.”¹⁵³ Were southern slaveholders willing to do the same? Therefore, “if emancipation be a good which slaves may lawfully desire, it is a good which *all Christians* may lawfully desire, and labour, according to their opportunity, to *confer upon them*.”¹⁵⁴ Noting the disdain for any sort of “natural rights” in Armstrong’s biblicism, Van Rensselaer freely utilized historical as well as biblical arguments to buttress his case for maintaining what he considered the biblical and historic view of the Presbyterian church.¹⁵⁵

In his final letter, Van Rensselaer repudiated the charge that the anti-slavery movement was wholly rooted in infidel philosophy. Citing patristic evidence that spoke of churches redeeming slaves, Van Rensselaer argued that the weight of the Christian tradition was against slavery. Indeed, Van Rensselaer suggested that pro-slavery was equally indebted to “infidel philosophy,” noting that the work of Gliddon and Agassiz, “one of whose principal aims is to prove that the negro is not a descendant of Adam,” was

¹⁵²Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter II,” 77.

¹⁵³Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter II,” 79, citing 1 Corinthians 7:21.

¹⁵⁴Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter II,” 80.

¹⁵⁵Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter II,” 70-85.

gaining “extensive circulation in the Southern States.”¹⁵⁶ If both extremes have been influenced by infidelity, Van Rensselaer suggested, then perhaps southern Presbyterians should return to the center.

In an attempt to claim that center for himself, Armstrong replied by suggesting that the he and Van Rensselaer were perhaps not so far apart as they seemed. They agreed that domestic slavery and civil despotism were in the same category. “It is expedient or inexpedient, right or wrong, according to the circumstances.” The difference, in Armstrong’s view, was that Van Rensselaer wanted to suggest that slaveholding could be sinful under certain circumstances. Armstrong insisted that his approval of the relation of slaveholding did not “imply *a sanction of the incidental evils, attaching to slavery in Paul's day, or as it exists now.*” The master must provide “kind treatment,. . . adequate compensation for service,” and may not perpetuate the slave’s “ignorance and debasement.”¹⁵⁷ Indeed, if a person attempted to hold slaves contrary to the law of the land, then he would be guilty of the sin of resisting lawful authority.¹⁵⁸

Van Rensselaer was troubled by this statement. If scripture approves of an action (as Armstrong said that it approves of slaveholding), then it cannot be a sin—even if the state forbids it, or vice versa. “If a community, in their political capacity license gambling, or prostitution, the act of granting the license, or using it, is none the less sinful in both

¹⁵⁶Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, “Three Conservative Replies, Letter III” Presbyterian Magazine 8.4 (April, 1858) 157-168, quote from 167.

¹⁵⁷George D. Armstrong, “Dr Armstrong’s First Rejoinder” Presbyterian Magazine 8.8 (August, 1858) 359.

¹⁵⁸George D. Armstrong, “Dr Armstrong’s First Rejoinder,” 359.

parties, because it is done politically. . . . If the constitution of Virginia should be so altered as to prohibit masters from teaching their slaves to read the Bible, all parties to such a proceeding would be guilty of sin.”¹⁵⁹ Armstrong’s attempt to divide the political from the spiritual resulted in moral anarchy, with the decisions of civil government binding the conscience.

Again Armstrong tried to close the gap, suggesting that they agreed that the church should not make binding deliverances on the subject of slavery, and that the real difference was whether the question of emancipation was a purely political question. Armstrong argued that it must be considered purely political because slavery does not “immediate concern the interests of the life to come” and “the word of God, when fairly interpreted,” does not address the subject.¹⁶⁰ Rejecting Van Rensselaer’s appeal to 1 Corinthians 7, Armstrong argued that this passage referred merely to particular circumstances in the Corinthian church. Rejecting Van Rensselaer’s appeal to the history of the church, Armstrong argued that the union of Church and State throughout church history had poisoned the purity and spirituality of the church.¹⁶¹ The church had no business meddling with the political question of slavery. But, Armstrong hastened to add, that did not mean

¹⁵⁹“Dr Van Rensselaer’s First Rejoinder on the Proper Statement of the Scriptural Doctrine of Slavery” Presbyterian Magazine 8.8 (August, 1858) 364. Both Armstrong and Van Rensselaer appealed to the writings of Charles Hodge on the subject of slavery, but as Van Rensselaer pointed out, Hodge defended and supported both 1818 and 1845, while Armstrong ignored all testimony except 1845, which resulted in a distortion even of that document.

¹⁶⁰“Dr Armstrong’s Second Rejoinder” Presbyterian Magazine 8.11 (November, 1858) 482.

¹⁶¹“Dr Armstrong’s Second Rejoinder,” 484.

that Christian citizens could sit idly by. Christians should “promote the well-being, temporal and eternal, of the slave race which in God’s providence is among us.”¹⁶²

Armstrong argued that in his experience, slaves did not have “any intelligent desire for freedom.” Most of those who claimed to want freedom simply wanted “exemption from labour.” Further, he argued that they had no right to freedom until they were capable of exercising it for the common good. “Present emancipation would be a curse, and not a blessing to our slaves,” and without colonization, it could not work “unless the slave race could be greatly elevated above their present position before obtaining their freedom.”¹⁶³ But forced colonization, he declared, was cruel, “sundering ties both of kindred and affection,” reviving “under another name, one of the harshest features of slavery, a feature which has now, practically, almost disappeared from the slavery existing in our country.”¹⁶⁴ Voluntary colonization might be effective, but Armstrong suggested starting with free blacks, whom he considered to be in a worse condition than slaves. Once the north had finished improving the condition of their own free blacks, then the south may be willing to listen to northern suggestions regarding slavery. Until then, he argued that the south’s duty was to improve the condition of the slaves—which might someday result in emancipation.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶²“Dr Armstrong’s Second Rejoinder,” 485.

¹⁶³“Dr Armstrong’s Second Rejoinder,” 488.

¹⁶⁴“Dr Armstrong’s Second Rejoinder,” 490.

¹⁶⁵“Dr Armstrong’s Second Rejoinder,” 494.

Van Rensselaer was unwilling to allow Armstrong's claim that emancipation was entirely a political question. "No slaveholder has the moral right to keep his slaves in bondage, if they are prepared for freedom, and he can wisely set them free." Certainly the slaveholder may claim fair compensation for the cost of manumission (either from the State or from the slave), but emancipation may be a moral duty. Further, Van Rensselaer argued that slavery had reduced hundreds of thousands of blacks to "hopeless ignorance, denying the privileges of the gospel to many."¹⁶⁶ While he admitted that slaves often had confused ideas about freedom, he insisted that they still had natural rights which could not be ignored. And if they had been kept in ignorance of how to exercise freedom, who was to blame? Van Rensselaer again suggested that it was an infidel doctrine to regard Africans as fit only for slavery.

While reluctant to engage on the issue of colonization, Van Rensselaer defended Liberian colonization as the best plan available for the prosperity and self-government of the blacks. A thorough plan of emancipation that provided for the training of a generation of colonists would be of great benefit to Africa, as well as to the colonists—for Van Rensselaer feared that free blacks would continue to languish in America due to the strong prejudice against them.¹⁶⁷ The church's role is to "*enjoin* the performance of all the relative duties specified in the Scriptures, and to give general *counsel*, or *testimony*, in regard to the termination of the relation itself, as a moral and lawful end." Paul's counsel to the Corinthians applied equally to slaves today—and therefore to slaveholders as well.

¹⁶⁶"Dr Van Rensselaer's Second Rejoinder" Presbyterian Magazine 8.12 (December, 1858) 532.

¹⁶⁷"Dr Van Rensselaer's Second Rejoinder," 540-546.

“The Church has simply the right to advise and urge her members to prepare their slaves for freedom, as soon as Providence shall open the way for it.”¹⁶⁸

Armstrong provides an excellent example of the new common sense literalism that was emerging in the antebellum era. For Armstrong, if the Bible did not contain a clear statement that emancipation was a duty, then the church could not speak on the subject. Van Rensselaer, on the other hand, maintained a stronger sense of the equity of biblical teaching. For those simply looking for proof-texts, Armstrong appeared to have the stronger exegetical arguments, but as Van Rensselaer pointed out, Armstrong’s literalism resulted in a truncated view of the sufficiency of scripture. Convinced that the Bible contained principles that spoke to all of the moral issues that humanity would ever face, Van Rensselaer engaged in a more nuanced analysis of biblical teaching, also drawing on the historic understanding and practice of the church in coming to the conclusion that the church should encourage emancipation as soon as practicable. Indeed it is no accident that Van Rensselaer championed this sort of nuanced center. It was the same sort of reasoning that resulted in his vision of a pluralistic system of public education. But the older notions of equity were quickly eroding both in the north and in the south, and Van Rensselaer realized that he was a beleaguered minority both in educational and social theory. With the rhetoric of both extremes evaporating into Higher Law and proslavery, few moderates could hold onto the middle ground.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸“Dr Van Rensselaer’s Second Rejoinder,” 554.

¹⁶⁹This fits well with Ericson’s argument that the debates “increased pressure on the middle in both sections of the country to move toward either a more antislavery or a more proslavery position by portraying, on contextualist grounds, the status quo of a nation half free and half slave as an unsustainable situation.” The rhetoric helped create a truly unsustainable position by eliminating the possibility of

During the sixteen months of the published debate, most Presbyterian periodicals made passing comments on its significance.¹⁷⁰ But while Van Rensselaer received praise from many northern Presbyterians for his defense of the duty of emancipation, the abolition-minded objected that he did not go far enough. Joseph G. Monfort, editor of the Presbyterian of the West, predictably thought that Van Rensselaer had not sufficiently emphasized the sinfulness of slavery.¹⁷¹

Perhaps the most interesting response came from Edward W. Blyden, principal of Alexander High School in Monrovia, Liberia. Blyden, himself a Liberian colonist from the West Indies, had just been ordained by the West Africa Presbytery. After reading the exchange between Van Rensselaer and Armstrong, he rejoiced “that there exists in our church that degree of candour and enlightened liberality, which will allow of discussions, in a friendly and edifying manner, on that vexed question, between parties representing opposite views in the Church.”¹⁷² Blyden suggested that if more of these sorts of

remaining moderate. See Ericson, The Debate over Slavery, 161.

¹⁷⁰The two northwestern editors, David McKinney and Joseph G. Monfort, declared that this sort of discussion was exactly what the church needed, and praised Van Rensselaer for his clear stand. Presbyterian Banner 6.17 (January 16, 1858); PW 17.7 (November 5, 1857). The Central Presbyterian and the Southern Presbyterian predictably sided with Armstrong. CP 4.5 (January 29, 1858) 18. Somewhat surprisingly, few papers copied the whole exchange. The Central Presbyterian had published Armstrong’s letters months before Van Rensselaer replied, and the Presbyterian of the West published a couple of Van Rensselaer’s articles, but many editors (north and south) feared the repercussions of publishing even a calm discussion of slavery for fear of losing subscribers.

¹⁷¹PW 17.19 (Jan 28, 1858). Monfort insisted that slavery was always sinful, but that slaveholding might be a necessary evil—but only so long as necessary to eliminate the sinful institution. See the following chapter where Monfort’s views are discussed in greater detail.

¹⁷²Edward W. Blyden, “An African’s Views of the African Question. In a letter from Liberia” Presbyterian Magazine 9.12 (December, 1859) 539-540. Blyden, who had been reared in the Dutch Reformed church in the West Indies, had been appointed principal of Alexander High School, his alma mater, in 1858. In 1861 he was appointed professor of Greek and Latin at the College of Liberia. He later served as president of the college 1880-1884. In 1886 he demitted the Presbyterian ministry, voicing a

discussions had happened earlier, “the institution of slavery. . . would no doubt have long since disappeared from North America.” But Blyden chastised his white colleagues by claiming that “a delusive sophistry has been prevalent, palliating the evil, and stifling convictions which else had fastened themselves upon reflective minds.” In particular, Blyden focused on the issue of race, and the widespread “notion of the negro's absolute inferiority,” which resulted in only half-hearted efforts to remove slavery.¹⁷³

Blyden strongly objected to Armstrong’s claim that “the effect of slavery is elevating, not degrading” to Africans, but admitted that most slaves were not yet ready to exercise republican freedom—mainly because they were refused any significant preparation for it. Based on his own experience as a Liberian colonist, Blyden thought that it provided opportunities not available to Africans in the united States, and encouraged a “general exodus to Liberia, or other portions of this continent.”¹⁷⁴ White prejudice in America simply could not be overcome quickly. In a stinging indictment of American racism Blyden argued that those who were trying to change American prejudices “are wasting their physical and intellectual energies in resultless endeavours to achieve a moral impossibility.” Liberia offered African-Americans an opportunity to prove to the

severe critique of the traditional missionary approach in his Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race (1885). Moses N. Moore, Jr. points out that he also feared that his presbytery would not forever tolerate his polygamous lifestyle. Moses N. Moore, Jr., “Edward Wilmot Blyden: From Old School Presbyterian Missionary to ‘Minister of Truth,’” JPH 75:2 (Summer 1997) 103-118.

¹⁷³Blyden, “An African's Views,” 540. In order to demonstrate the falsity of such notions, Blyden gave a quite respectable Hebrew and Latin exegesis of Psalm 68:31 (which speaks of the future salvation of Cush—modern Ethiopia), showing that Africans were capable of the highest intellectual refinement.

¹⁷⁴Blyden, “An African's Views,” 542.

Europeans that they possessed “all the political, industrial, intellectual, and moral susceptibilities that Europeans possess.”¹⁷⁵

Van Rensselaer frequently published evidence that African-Americans could excel when given sufficient opportunity. In 1857 he published the inaugural address of the Rev. John P. Carter, the first president of Ashmun Institute (later known as Lincoln University—an Old School college for blacks). Carter stated that the object of Ashmun Institute was “*to educate coloured young men, with the view to their usefulness among their own people in the United States and in Africa.*”¹⁷⁶ Convinced that blacks were capable of the highest intellectual attainments, Carter suggested that medieval Saxon savages would have done worse than the Africans if placed in a similar situation. Encouraging emancipation and colonization, Carter argued that his fledgling institution could train a generation of leaders for Liberia—as well as for those who chose to stay in America.¹⁷⁷

In January of 1860 Van Rensselaer reprinted a letter from a Maryland gentleman to Gerard Hallock of the Journal of Commerce, pointing to the talented ex-slave Benjamin Bradley (who had built steam engines for the Naval Academy as a slave on loan from his master). Van Rensselaer also used this to urge northerners to be patient. The South, he

¹⁷⁵Blyden, “An African's Views,” 543.

¹⁷⁶“Address of the Rev. John P. Carter A. M.” Presbyterian Magazine 7.7 (July, 1857) 296.

¹⁷⁷“Address of the Rev. John P. Carter A. M.” Presbyterian Magazine 7.8 (August, 1857) 342-344.

believed, was improving in its treatment of the slaves, and emancipation could yet be attained by gradual measures.¹⁷⁸

Not surprisingly, this called forth a violent response from the South—in this case by a ruling elder from Georgia:

We, Old School Presbyterians, have agreed to differ on this question of Slavery; and at a time of such excitement as the present, anything *apparently* sympathizing with the *enemies* of the South (for we know them only as such) is not closely scanned, but immediately condemned, even by moderate men. Now I know you too well to suspect such sympathy; and really the article in question only announces a conviction or the *final* emancipation of our slaves, and their capacity to improve such emancipation. And for these opinions, we possibly ought not to complain. But *at this time*, any expression of opinion against the *permanence* of our social system is distasteful.¹⁷⁹

This ruling elder argued that nothing in history suggested that Africans could attain “full mental growth,” except through mingling with whites—which was not only repulsive to him but impossible to sustain, due to the “diseased and short-lived” character of the “mongrel, or hybrid race.”¹⁸⁰ Claiming the superiority of many years of personal experience with slaves, this ruling elder doubted that Africans could ever overcome their natural tendencies toward “lust. . . sloth. . . [and] deceit.”¹⁸¹ After several pages of utter pessimism, he admitted that if Van Rensselaer proved to be correct, then “*we are morally bound* to enfranchise a race who *are fit to be free*,” but he made it clear that he would take

¹⁷⁸“Freedom, When Attainable, to be Preferred” Presbyterian Magazine 10.1 (January, 1860) 21.

¹⁷⁹A ruling elder in Georgia, “Strictures Concerning Ultimate Emancipation” Presbyterian Magazine 10.2 (February, 1860) 64.

¹⁸⁰“Strictures Concerning Ultimate Emancipation,” 65.

¹⁸¹“Strictures Concerning Ultimate Emancipation,” 65.

no steps to encourage such an outcome.¹⁸² Van Rensselaer replied that the annals of Roman historians made similar claims about “our Saxon, Celtic and Teutonic ancestors.” Present character, he argued, was an insufficient ground to make claims regarding the future.¹⁸³

Conclusion

With southern Presbyterians departing from the Old School center, northern Presbyterians faced a dilemma of their own. Abandoned by Congregationalists, New School Presbyterians, and now their own southern brethren, the emancipationist vision grew ever more bleak. Common sense moral reasoning could only work if the entire nation shared a common moral compass. Since it assumed that all normally functioning people should come to the same conclusion if they were given the same evidence, the fact that the “other side” failed to come to the “right” conclusion could be taken as proof that they were moral deviants. And given the inviolable rights of conscience, once conscience was enlisted—as it was both in the abolitionist and pro-slavery camps—moderation appeared as nothing less than sniveling cowardice.

¹⁸²“Strictures Concerning Ultimate Emancipation,” 66.

¹⁸³Editorial comment, Presbyterian Magazine 10.2 (February, 1860) 66.

EIGHT

“CONFIDENCE IN HIS BRETHREN”: THE ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN THE NORTHWEST, 1848-1859

In 1856 the editors of Virginia's Central Presbyterian claimed that the Old School had never formally endorsed the act of 1818, which had condemned slavery, arguing that the 1845 statement was the only official Old School position on slavery.¹ Together with the Synod of South Carolina's formal repudiation of the act of 1818, the increasingly proslavery rhetoric from the south pushed many northwestern Old Schoolers towards a stronger anti-slavery stance. By early 1857 Joseph G. Monfort, editor of the Presbyterian of the West, engaged in a violent dispute over slavery with Nathan L. Rice of the St. Louis Presbyterian.

Some feared that the radicalism of the Presbyterian of the West would rend the church, but William Engles assured his readers from Philadelphia that any agitation would be fruitless: “Old-school Presbyterians . . . have too much good judgment and common sense to entangle themselves in such unprofitable conflicts.”² Likewise, when the New

¹Editorial, “The Two General Assemblies” CP 1.31 (August 2, 1856) 122. The Central Presbyterian was the successor to the Watchman and Observer, as Benjamin Gildersleeve handed over the editorial reins to Thomas V. Moore and Moses D. Hoge, the pastors of the First and Second Presbyterian Churches in Richmond, Virginia. Gildersleeve remained an associate editor.

²“Slavery Agitation,” Presbyterian 27.8 (February 21, 1857) 30.

School American Presbyterian claimed that the Old School had a large and powerful anti-slavery movement headed by Monfort and the New Albany Seminary faculty, Engles replied that the northwestern men themselves had denied that “the slavery question had any thing to do with that movement.”³ As this chapter will show, Engles had been deceived. But he reveals the basic confidence in the brethren that characterized the Old School. Presbyterians expected that they could trust each other. As the church grew, it was no longer possible to know all of the other ministers in the denomination personally, placing mutual confidence and trust at a premium. Since the northwestern men had said that slavery was not an issue, Engles believed them.

Monfort’s Presbyterian of the West, however, was a different matter. As he continued to agitate on slavery throughout the summer of 1857, Engles needed to prove that the northwest was not really a hotbed of antislavery sentiment. So he published a letter from a minister in one of the largest presbyteries in Ohio claiming that “not *one*” of the ministers of that presbytery “approves of the course of the *Presbyterian of the West*, and all regret it exceedingly. But *all* love the *good old Presbyterian*.” Another large presbytery in Ohio was also increasingly dissatisfied with the Presbyterian of the West: “Some of them declare that they will act no longer as agents for that paper, nor would they take it themselves. I have long been a friend of the *Presbyterian of the West*, . . . but I must drop it; it is becoming such an abolition fire-brand.” Praising the Presbyterian as a major force

³“Is It So?” Presbyterian 27.30 (July 25, 1857) 118. When the American Presbyterian pointed out that the four presbyteries of Wooster, Chillicothe, Marion and Richland were agitating on slavery, Engles replied that they had been that way for twenty years, but that these four Ohio presbyteries were more than balanced by the 13 Ohio presbyteries that were content with the church’s conservative stance (Oct 17, 1857) 166.

in the formation of Old School identity, the letter concluded that throughout that portion of Ohio, “We are *all* satisfied with the *Old-school Church as she is*.”⁴ The same week, J. D. M. wrote from the northwest that while he rejoiced that he was not “immediately connected” with slavery, he still had “confidence in our Southern brethren,” that they would deal properly with the matter. He assured the Presbyterian’s readers that the Northwestern Seminary directors and professors were not interested in establishing an antislavery school, but a “school of the prophets” for the Northwest.⁵

Nonetheless, the Presbyterian of the West continued to insist that a real antislavery movement was afoot in the northwest. In the light of the division of the Methodists, Baptists, and now New School Presbyterians, Engles could only wonder why Monfort desired schism: “Those churches which have entered into the fierce contest, have as the result reaped the bitter fruits of dissension, division, and decay.” Since the southern Presbyterian newspapers were content to leave the matter alone, he encouraged the northern press to do the same. In a parting jab, however, Engles pointed out that the Presbyterian continued to maintain high subscription rates in the northwest, suggesting that the Presbyterian of the West did not speak for the whole region.⁶

⁴Editorial, “Agitation at a Discount,” Presbyterian 27.34 (August 22, 1857) 134.

⁵J. D. M., “It Is Not So,” Presbyterian 27.34 (August 22, 1857) 134. (Possibly James Dinsmore Mason of Davenport Iowa, a native of western Pennsylvania, a WTS graduate of 1841)

⁶Presbyterian (Nov 7, 1857) 178. Unfortunately, the Presbyterian kept its subscription information tightly under wraps. It was widely known that it had the highest circulation of any Old School newspaper, and most estimates place it around 7-10,000, but its geographical spread is unknown (other than the ubiquitous complaints of other editors that people in every region of the church subscribed to the Presbyterian rather than to the local paper).

The discussion of slavery among Old School Presbyterians in the northwest occurred largely in the context of their debates about theological education. Or was it that their discussion of theological education occurred largely in the context of their debates about slavery? While Old School Presbyterians were generally convinced that the catholicity of the church required them to work with each other across political and social boundaries, they could not ignore matters of conscience. There were very few abolitionists in the Old School churches of the northwest—and virtually none that were proslavery—but the fact that almost all believed in gradual emancipation did not reduce the tensions. All agreed that slavery was a great evil, but there was a huge difference between saying that gradual emancipation should start whenever the south was ready, and saying that it should start *now*.⁷

The future of the Old School would not be determined by the south, but by the northwest. As the fastest-growing region of the church, the northwest was growing in influence in the church courts. But the definition of the northwest was changing. As late as 1840 the northwest was defined by the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers—ensuring that Kentucky and Missouri, though slave states, were still part of the region. By 1860, however, the railroads and the creation of Chicago had altered the shape of the west. For

⁷The growth of a significant anti-slavery movement in the Old School in the 1840s which became more vocal in the 1850s is consistent with John R. McKivigan's thesis that the diverse efforts of Christian abolitionists made significant inroads into the evangelical denominations during those years. McKivigan, The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

many, the Ohio River was now the border between the North and the South—and Kentuckians increasingly looked to Tennessee and Missouri for support.⁸

1. A Feud Begins (New Albany Seminary, 1848-1849)

As recounted in chapter six, the Kentuckian Nathan Rice⁹ had been instrumental at the General Assembly of 1845 in passing a resolution declaring that slaveholding was not in itself a sin. In the Synod of Cincinnati Erasmus Darwin MacMaster was one of the leading opponents of Rice's statement. While only nine of the one hundred members at the fall meeting of the 1845 Synod of Cincinnati voted to reject the General Assembly statement Rice had authored, the two names that led the list were Francis Monfort and Erasmus Darwin MacMaster.¹⁰

The following year Nathan Rice and Samuel Ramsey Wilson became joint editors of Cincinnati's Presbyterian of the West, which meant that both western newspapers were

⁸One of the few broader studies that focuses on Presbyterianism in the northwest (albeit New School Presbyterianism) is Victor B. Howard, Conscience and Slavery: The Evangelistic Calvinist Domestic Mission, 1837-1861 (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1990). David M. Potter has called attention to Stephen Douglas's conviction regarding the centrality of Chicago and the West in 1853. David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 152-153.

⁹Rice had made a name for himself as a controversialist, editor and popular preacher. He had built up large congregations in Kentucky and Ohio and in 1848 was probably the best-known and most widely read Old School Presbyterian minister in the west.

¹⁰"The Synod of Cincinnati" Protestant and Herald 4.6 (Nov 6, 1845). The Monforts were staunch supporters of Hanover College and had been furious with MacMaster for his attempted "sabotage" of their college. Now, only a year after MacMaster left Indiana in disgrace, the Monforts will begin to rehabilitate him as their anti-slavery champion. After several years as a pastor in eastern New York, MacMaster had served as president of Hanover College (which he had been accused of sabotaging), Madison University (which had failed), and Miami University (which had dwindled during his administration). His botched attempt to close down Hanover College and replace it with Madison University had earned him the mistrust of many Indiana Presbyterians.

edited by Kentuckians.¹¹ While they allowed very little material on the subject of slavery, Rice and Wilson declared their own position very plainly: “We are opposed to slavery. . . But we are no less opposed to the unscriptural and fanatical principles of ultra-abolitionists” who, they claimed, were actually retarding the progress of emancipation.¹² Later that year they published a letter from E. N. Sawtell who gave an account of how some southerners were preparing slaves for freedom through the colonization societies. Rice and Wilson hoped that this would prompt northerners to “aid the efforts of the south to remove from our country this enormous evil.”¹³

In 1848, Rice and MacMaster were the two finalists for the professorship of theology at New Albany Theological Seminary in Indiana. New Albany was designed to be as attractive as possible to the whole West—a seminary on the border between north and south, though on northern soil, with professors from each section. In this manner, it was hoped that the West could be held together.¹⁴ The original faculty consisted of John Matthews (1771-1848), a long-time pastor from Virginia (professor of theology, 1831-48),

¹¹Wilson—son of Cincinnati patriarch Joshua L. Wilson—does not seem to have contributed a great deal and resigned in 1848.

¹²Editorial, “Slavery—Our Position,” PW 2:2 (March 4, 1847) 86.

¹³E. N. Sawtell, “Letters Concerning Slavery at the South from the New York Observer” PW 2.47-48 (August 26-September 2, 1847) 181, 185, 186.

¹⁴Le Roy J. Halsey, A History of The McCormick Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church (Chicago: Published by the Seminary, 1893) 32. New Albany Theological Seminary had its origins in the theological department of Hanover College—where MacMaster had presided a few years before. But while Hanover College was under the general oversight of the Synod of Indiana, and expected to attract students from that state, from 1838 the Seminary was under the oversight of the three synods of Cincinnati, Indiana and Kentucky, and hoped to draw students from the entire West. Therefore they sought a more central location on the Ohio River. An offer of \$15,000 from ruling elder Elias Ayres (given in memory of his son who had died while preparing for the ministry) and suitable buildings was sufficient to persuade the directors that New Albany, across the Ohio from Louisville, was the best place.

and James Wood (1799-1867), a pastor from western New York who had carefully documented the congregationalist origins of the Presbyterian churches in western New York in the 1830s (professor of Biblical Criticism and Oriental Literature, 1839-51).¹⁵ The election of Rice would continue the tradition of blending north and south in the seminary for the West, but a vote for MacMaster would mean that both professors would be northerners. The board initially chose Rice, but Rice was not convinced. He believed that New Albany was the wrong location for a seminary, and wanted to see the seminary merged with Western Seminary in Allegheny and moved to Cincinnati to provide a true Princeton of the West. So instead the Board gave the job to MacMaster.

One might think that one who had voted against the 1845 statement on slaveholding would be anathema in Kentucky, but with such a redoubtable champion as R. J. Breckinridge,¹⁶ MacMaster found his chief defenders in Kentucky. Kentucky Presbyterians, after all, were among the leaders of the Kentucky Emancipationists who were attempting to get emancipation written into the state's constitution that year. R. J.'s brother, William L. Breckinridge, wrote a congratulatory letter to New Albany Seminary which was printed in the Presbyterian Herald, assuring the Board that "a better day is about to rise on the seminary."¹⁷ In fact the main opposition to MacMaster came from Indiana, where he had previously served as president of Hanover College, and had angered

¹⁵Halsey, 43.

¹⁶RJB, "The New Seminary," PW (Dec 13, 1849), followed by Rice's commentary. Breckinridge had spent the last dozen years in Baltimore and Pittsburgh, but returned to his native Kentucky in 1847 as the state's first superintendent of Public Education.

¹⁷PH 18.9 (Nov 23, 1848).

the majority of Indiana Presbyterians through a covert attempt to close down their college and create a new institution, Madison University. Nathan Rice published a letter of complaint from David Monfort of Indiana in the Presbyterian of the West, which asserted that many who had previously supported the Seminary could no longer “conscientiously cooperate with it, under its present administration. . . . Almost all the young men within the bounds of this Synod, who are now pursuing a Theological course of study are at Princeton.”¹⁸ Rice turned down another letter from Monfort’s nephew, J. G. Monfort, who had been a trustee at Hanover College during the Madison University debacle,¹⁹ and for the most part, the Presbyterian of the West maintained a watchful silence with respect to New Albany Seminary. But plainly, slavery was not yet the defining issue in the northwest. At least for Old School Presbyterians in 1848, the Ohio River was still the center of the west—but not for long.

At first, it seemed indeed that a kindly providence was smiling upon New Albany.²⁰ But as always, wherever MacMaster went, trouble was sure to follow. The

¹⁸David Monfort, PW (Nov 22, 1848). The Monforts were staunch supporters of Hanover College and had been furious with MacMaster for his attempted “sabotage” of their college. Soon, however, David’s nephew J. G. Monfort would begin to rehabilitate him as their anti-slavery champion.

¹⁹Nathan Lewis Rice, North Western Theological Seminary (np, nd [1857]) 3. [Archives, Union Theological Seminary].

²⁰ The following year, 1849, they had promise of enough funding from Kentucky to add another professor. Daniel Stewart (1811-1897) of New York (PTS 1838), taught biblical literature (1849-53), moving Wood over to church history. Stewart had ministered in Amsterdam, NY, after James Wood, and then had followed him to New Albany, taking a call to the 1st Presbyterian church of New Albany in 1844. With New Yorkers Wood, Stewart and MacMaster on the faculty, the balance between north and south was lost completely. So the seminary called Philip Lindsley (1786-1855) out of retirement from his twenty-five year presidency at the University of Nashville to teach pastoral theology (1849-1855). Halsey, A History of The McCormick Theological Seminary, 53. Lindsley, the moderator of the General Assembly in 1834, had married Mary Ann Ayres, the widow of the seminary’s chief patron, Elias Ayres, and since they were both quite wealthy, he required no payment for his teaching. Lindsley resigned in 1853 due to the uncertain future of the institution, but continued to teach until his death in 1855. Also by 1849 New Albany developed

finances of the seminary, which had brightened briefly, did not continue to improve. MacMaster had too many enemies. Indiana Presbyterians still mistrusted him due to his leadership in the Madison University fiasco. The Synod of Kentucky had raised a \$20,000 endowment for the new professorship, but rather than give the money to the seminary, they chose to keep it under their control and simply use the interest to pay Daniel Stewart, plainly signaling their distrust of the seminary, and suggesting to other southwesterners that New Albany was not a permanent investment.²¹ One prominent ruling elder in Kentucky politely stated that there were many who could not support the election of MacMaster and therefore could not provide financial support.²² The Synod of Nashville decided to support the seminary, but by an 1849 vote of 13-11 urged it to transfer to a more central location (i.e., Kentucky).²³ At the same time, the number of students remained in the low twenties. One writer in the Presbyterian Herald noted that the synods nominally supporting New Albany Theological Seminary had 41 students in Princeton, and another 29 in other seminaries, indicating that confidence in NATS remained low.²⁴

a German constituency. Several German students wished to train for the ministry in order to pastor German Presbyterian congregations (the number of which was rapidly growing in the West), so the seminary appointed John Lichtenstein as their professor (previously a minister in the First New York Presbytery, he also pastored the German Presbyterian congregation in New Albany). PH 19.47 (Aug 15, 1849), and 19.49 (Aug 29, 1849). This relationship seems to have continued through 1853.

²¹PH 19.26 (March 21, 1849). The trustees of the fund were ministers William L. Breckinridge, Edward P. Humphrey, and Leroy J. Halsey, and ruling elders Samuel Casseday and William Richardson.

²²N., "New Albany Seminary" PH 18.12 (Dec 14, 1848).

²³PH 20.6 (Oct 31, 1849). New Albany professor Philip Lindsley, a member of the Synod, spoke vigorously against this, but most six of the eight ruling elders voted with the Doak family (the leading educators in Tennessee).

²⁴PH 18.12 (Dec 14, 1848). This is borne out by the database study which indicates that Princeton graduated more western students than New Albany.

2. The Establishment of the Cincinnati Theological Seminary (1849-1853)

At the same time, some Old School Presbyterians were beginning to question the whole seminary system. Back in 1840 Robert J. Breckinridge, while pastoring in Baltimore, had suggested a “radical reform” of the seminary system to provide three major seminaries under the oversight of the General Assembly: one for the East, one for the South, and one for the West. These seminaries would focus on the professional education of ministers—not just their academic training. The present seminaries, Breckinridge claimed, simply teach “our young men to *recite* , rather than turning them out full of knowledge, thought, and force. . . . The old method of private study with some sensible, pious, and laborious pastor, is. . . much superior to these upstart seminaries.”²⁵

Breckinridge suggested that the decline of orthodoxy in New England could be attributed, at least in part, to the apostasy of Harvard, Yale and Andover Seminaries from orthodox Calvinism. He pointed out that even Princeton had not stood firm against the New School at first.²⁶ Therefore, Breckinridge called on the church to elect professors who were theologically orthodox and themselves eminent pastors and fine preachers: “After looking over the long list of professors in the theological seminaries of the United States, do you believe, gentlemen, that the churches ought to be, or would be satisfied with preachers equal to the bulk of these?. . . And we use the word *preacher*, because very many of the

²⁵Robert J. Breckinridge, “Theological Seminaries: A Few Considerations in Regard to Them. Addressed to the Rev. Dr. John McDowell, Rev. H. A. Boardman, M. Newkirk, Esq., Alexander W. Mitchell, M.D., and James N. Dickson, Esq., a Committee of the General Assembly, &c.,” BLRM 6.9 (September, 1840) 399.

²⁶Breckinridge, “Theological Seminaries,” 400-401.

professors never were *pastors*, and can of course, know nothing and teach nothing practically, about that all important office.”²⁷ Breckinridge urged the Assembly to elect men like Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller—who had taught at Princeton since 1812 and 1813, respectively, though he reluctantly admitted that Charles Hodge had been a good choice in spite of his lack of pastoral experience.

Throughout the 1840s little had been done to implement Breckinridge’s ideas. In 1849, however, Nathan Rice thought that the time had come. In August of 1848 Rice had reviewed Gardiner Spring’s The Power of the Pulpit, suggesting that Spring was correct in attributing a certain decline in power and effectiveness in the pulpit to the rise of theological seminaries. Rice also agreed with Spring that the best remedy was to pay more careful attention to the pastoral care of seminarians, and that the best means toward that end was to elect successful pastors as professors in the seminaries, and to orient the curriculum to training pastors who can preach effective doctrinal and practical sermons.²⁸

The following year Rice began an independent seminary in Cincinnati. Since all the synods in the region were pledged to support NATS, this was immediately interpreted as a factious attack on the feeble seminary. “It is fraught with evil, and only evil,” a sorrowing W. W. Hill wrote.²⁹ Rice quickly replied by setting forth his first public accusation that Erasmus Darwin MacMaster had abolitionist sympathies—plainly barring

²⁷Breckinridge, “Theological Seminaries,” 405.

²⁸“Theological Seminaries” PW 3.44 (Aug 3, 1848) 382. It is interesting that such diverse characters as Robert J. Breckinridge and Gardiner Spring should have concurred in their suspicion of seminaries. Spring was New England trained, and had protested against the exclusion of the New School synods, whereas Breckinridge was a Kentuckian who had led the charge against the New School.

²⁹“Another Western Theological Seminary” PH 19.5 (Oct 25, 1849).

him, in Rice's view, from any professorship in the merged seminary. In the Synod of Cincinnati MacMaster had "warmly advocated in that body, sentiments on the agitating subject of slavery, at war with the doctrine stated by the General Assembly of 1845." So long as MacMaster "held views materially different from those held by the Presbyterian Church," he should not serve as a professor in a Presbyterian institution. Rice declared the 1845 statement on slavery "one of the most important acts ever performed by her, and as constituting her emphatically the bond of Union to these United States. We deem it, therefore, of the first importance that our Professors of Theology take the Scriptural view of this subject. If they do not, we shall soon be again in trouble."³⁰

Rice saw this as an opportunity to show how a seminary should be operated, arguing that seminary professors should be active pastors, which would require seminaries to be placed in densely populated areas, to enable such a dual calling.³¹ For the next several months the periodical press was filled with commentary on Rice's plan—though only his own paper supported it.³² J. G. Monfort, still stung by MacMaster's betrayal of

³⁰Editorial, PW 5.5-9 (Nov 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 1849); quote from Nov 1.

³¹PW 5.10 (Dec 6, 1849).

³²Parvus, "Cincinnati Theological Seminary" PH 19.6 (Nov 1, 1849); Observer, PW 5.14-15 (Jan 3, 10, 1850). For several months Rice and Hill (who had spent several years as village pastors in neighboring towns in Kentucky) debated the wisdom and propriety of this scheme. Hill printed a defense of New Albany Seminary by two of Kentucky's leading pastors, W. L. Breckinridge and E. P. Humphrey. Rice replied to Breckinridge and Humphrey that the west could only support one seminary—and that New Albany was shrinking and dying. The only way to unite the west on one seminary was to begin again in a new location with new blood. PW 5.24-25 (March 7, 14, 1850). "Cincinnati Theological Seminary," W&O 6.3 (August 29, 1850) 11. The Richmond Watchman and Observer was noncommittal, though it approved of the pastoral tone of the general plan of the seminary. In general, though, the lack of ecclesiastical oversight, and the sense that Rice had acted too hastily prevented most Old School Presbyterians from supporting the new seminary. SDS, "General Assembly" W&O 6.32 (May 29, 1851), suggested that the western brethren tended to fight and quarrel much quicker, but also made up quicker; the problem, from his point of view was that so long as they fought, they could not be friends. From his stand point, it appeared that as of 1851, MacMaster had the larger support.

Hanover College, wrote that he still had hopes that MacMaster's professorship would fail, but that if Cincinnati Seminary could be "manned and moneyed, I would say, go ahead." Rice claimed that he received numerous letters from throughout Indiana encouraging the Cincinnati Seminary.³³

In April of 1850 the Presbytery of Cincinnati supported the creation of the new seminary, with only two dissenting votes.³⁴ But while Rice's seminary received little condemnation from the courts of the church, it also received little support. Only the Synod of Cincinnati said anything favorable, but Cincinnati, as one of the original three synods behind New Albany, was almost evenly divided between the two seminaries.³⁵ In 1851 the synod gave a qualified endorsement, voting 62-19 "rejoice in the measure of [its] success...and hope that...it may prove eminently useful."³⁶

Cincinnati Theological Seminary did not follow the Old School pattern for theological education. Indeed, it was not lost on many critical observers that Cincinnati Seminary had some striking resemblances to New School seminaries: lack of formal ecclesiastical oversight, urban environment, emphasis on professors also serving as

³³Nathan Lewis Rice, North Western Theological Seminary (np, nd [1857]) 5. [Archives, Union Theological Seminary]. Rice admitted that Monfort wanted to see a larger endowment and a more traditional seminary, but in the polemical context of 1857, wished to show that Monfort had not always supported MacMaster.

³⁴PW 5.29 (April 11, 1850). The dissenters were Samuel R. Wilson—son of the recently deceased Joshua L. Wilson and formerly Rice's co-editor, and L. G. Gaines. They would only approve if the other seminaries could be united in Cincinnati.

³⁵"Theological Seminary" PW 6.1 (Sept 26, 1850) 2.

³⁶PW 7.3 (October 9, 1851).

pastors,³⁷ and willingness to work together with Congregationalists.³⁸ Rice even cited the flagship New School seminary, Union in New York, as an example of a flourishing seminary in an urban environment which reduced costs by having pastors teach (though he pointed out that the more conservative Associate Reformed seminaries also followed the latter practice).³⁹

By the fall of 1852, Cincinnati Theological Seminary had more students than New Albany, and was able to force a compromise. Rice proposed that the Synod of Cincinnati recommend the transfer of New Albany to the General Assembly. If the Assembly was given the authority to elect new professors, then Rice was willing to close the Cincinnati

³⁷The faculty of the seminary consisted of James Hoge, professor of Ecclesiastical History, Church Government and Evidences, Nathan L. Rice, professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology and Mental and Moral Science, Willis Lord, professor of Pulpit and Pastoral Instruction, and James C. Moffat, professor of Biblical Literature and Criticism. (Hoge had moved from Virginia to Ohio in 1814 out of his disgust for slavery, and Lord would later be identified with the vigorously anti-slavery wing of the church, so this should not be seen as a pro-slavery faculty).

³⁸Halsey, A History of The McCormick Theological Seminary, 265; and database. The Presbyterian Herald wondered loudly how a Congregationalist could be expected to train Presbyterian ministers, and Rice's reply, that "circumstances may render expedient, in particular instances, that which ought not to become general," was not comforting to those who believed that Rice was more concerned with power than with principle. "Reply to Presbyterian Herald" PW 6.48 (August 21, 1851). The Congregationalist was Willis Lord, the third professor of Cincinnati Seminary in 1851. Since no Presbyterian church was prepared to call him, Lord accepted a call from the First Orthodox Congregational church in Cincinnati. The seminary did not have enough funding to pay full-time professors, and Rice thought that it would be best for seminary classes to be taught by full-time pastors. The Massachusetts-born, Princeton-educated Lord (1809-1888) had served two Congregational churches before transferring to the Old School Presbytery of Philadelphia to pastor the Pennsylvania Square Presbyterian Church (1840-51). The irony about the debate over whether he was sufficiently Presbyterian is found in the fact that at the time he was serving as the stated clerk of the General Assembly (1846-50). Nonetheless, the cooperation between the Congregationalists and Presbyterians in Cincinnati was brief. Six weeks after Rice announced Lord's call to the First Congregational Church, the Presbyterian of the West noted that Lord had resigned his pastorate under pressure, since the Congregational Church was unwilling to allow him to remain a member of the Presbytery of Cincinnati. PW 7.1 (September 25, 1851). Two months later he was called to the Seventh Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati, ending the controversy about his Congregational connection, but leaving lingering doubts about the principles upon which the seminary would operate. PW 7.9 (November 20, 1851).

³⁹PW 7.31 (May 27, 1852).

Seminary as well.⁴⁰ One by one, the seven synods with oversight over New Albany (Cincinnati, Kentucky, Indiana, Northern Indiana, Illinois, Missouri and Nashville) concurred. A Kentucky correspondent noted that the synods of Illinois and Missouri had both urged the GA to move the seminary further west, and pointed out that “there may be prejudices in various parts of the Church against the Seminaries, both at New Albany and Cincinnati. The more independent and free from these former differences, the better.”⁴¹ By January of 1853 Rice gleefully announced that his whole purpose in starting the seminary in Cincinnati was accomplished: the General Assembly would take over theological education in the West.⁴² He opposed those who wished to attempt to blend the faculties of New Albany and Cincinnati, decrying any attention to parties or factions within the church. “The men should be chosen, who, after prayerful consideration, shall seem best qualified to fill the important offices--men of well-balanced minds, of decided piety, and of undoubted soundness, and ability to teach theology-to qualify young men for the ministry.” But given his role in the affair, Rice emphatically insisted that he did not want to be considered. He had other plans.

3. A New Seminary for the West? (Danville Theological Seminary, 1853-1856)

Those plans were announced in February of 1853 when Rice declared that he had taken a call to St. Louis. Cincinnati was no longer the center of the West. There had been

⁴⁰“Theological Seminaries” PW 8.3 (October 7, 1852).

⁴¹ Kentucky, “Seminary—the Olive Branch” PW 8.10 (November 25, 1852).

⁴²“Theological Seminary in the West” PW 8.16 (January 6, 1853) 62.

some effort by Cyrus McCormick and others in Chicago to lure him northwards,⁴³ but Rice was convinced that the future of the West remained along the Ohio River. Rice noted that the Presbyterian churches in St. Louis were working together to “secure the location of the Seminary in St. Louis, in accordance with the expressed wishes of the Synods of Illinois and Missouri.”⁴⁴

Rice’s sudden removal to St. Louis, even before the end of the term at the Cincinnati Theological Seminary, caused raised eyebrows in several quarters.⁴⁵ The sudden removal occurred because Rice had become convinced that Cincinnati could not serve as the center of western Christianity, and that therefore he would be more useful at the front lines—in St. Louis. And since St. Louis was to be the future center of the West, where else should a Presbyterian seminary be located?

On March 14, 1853, just before Rice arrived in St. Louis, Missouri Presbyterians met in St. Louis to prepare their case for the General Assembly. Their rationale fit nicely

⁴³McCormick had attended Rice’s church at various times in 1845-47, while McCormick was expecting to establish his headquarters in Cincinnati. But by 1847 McCormick became convinced that the rivers no longer held the future of the northwest, and moved his reaper manufacturing center to the fledgling Chicago. William T. Hutchinson, Cyrus Hall McCormick (New York: The Century Co., 1930) I:241-253. McCormick wrote to Rice: “We do think the cause for which you have been so successfully laboring would be promoted by the change. We believe our whole church throughout the country is now sensible of the great importance of securing its proper influence upon the vast interests extending throughout the great N. Western country of which Chicago must be the principal City and commercial emporium.” McCormick to Rice Dec 3, 1854, quoted in Hutchinson, Cyrus Hall McCormick II:10. Apparently McCormick had also written in 1852 to urge Rice to come to Chicago.

⁴⁴“The Theological Seminary and St Louis” PW 8.27 (March 24, 1853). James Smith replied on April 14 that the Synod of Illinois had not endorsed any particular location, but noted that Peoria was the favorite among Illinois Presbyterians.

⁴⁵Some thought that he left for more money—but John D. Thorpe, the publisher of the Presbyterian of the West (and a ruling elder in Central Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati), pointed out that \$2,500 and the use of a manse in St. Louis was far below his Cincinnati salary; see PW 8.34 (May 19, 1853), 8.37 (June 9, 1853).

with Rice's agenda. The two leading figures in the meeting were ruling elders: the Honorable Hamilton Gamble (presiding judge of the Missouri Supreme Court, and later Governor of Missouri from 1861-1864) chaired the meeting and Charles D. Drake (a prominent St. Louis lawyer) presented the paper which set forth their rationale. The St. Louis vision was that the new seminary should be truly western, and therefore should not conflict with Allegheny Seminary. A St. Louis seminary would be located in the leading city of the West and would provide a light upon the hill to curb the vice, infidelity and false religion that endangered the future of the West. The urban environment would provide abundant opportunities for student preaching, as well as the social benefits of a larger city. Nonetheless, an astute Benjamin Gildersleeve (editor of the Watchman and Observer) noted that if the General Assembly put the seminary in St. Louis, New Albany would likely continue.⁴⁶

Indeed, just before the General Assembly met in May of 1853, the New Albany Seminary directors submitted to the wishes of the overseeing synods and drew up a resolution handing over the control of the seminary to the General Assembly—but with a new condition: the seminary could not be moved from New Albany. The actions of the synods, however, contained no such condition, and the General Assembly had little interest in keeping the seminary in New Albany.

The question of a theological seminary for the West was the prominent item on the General Assembly's agenda for 1853. The Assembly elected as moderator the Rev. Dr. John Young of Kentucky (president of Centre College in Danville), who promptly

⁴⁶“A Theological Seminary for the West” W&O 8.34 (March 31, 1853) 134.

appointed his friend and long-time New Albany supporter, Robert J. Breckinridge (also of Kentucky) as the chairman of the committee on seminaries. The committee examined the various locations that had been proposed—St. Louis, New Albany, Nashville, Tennessee, Peoria, Illinois, and Danville, Kentucky—and recommended that the seminary be transferred to Danville.

Once on the floor of General Assembly, Professor James Wood of New Albany was the first to speak. He pled the seminary's case for retaining the present location, but with little effect. After several speeches supporting different locations, William L. and Robert J. Breckinridge set forth the case for Danville, both because Kentucky was in the best financial position to fund a seminary, and because the General Assembly could show that the Mason-Dixon line did not determine the church's politics.⁴⁷ Breckinridge claimed that Peoria was too little known, and that Nashville was too close to Columbia Seminary in South Carolina.⁴⁸ St. Louis had made a liberal offer, but "in view of the condition of the church in the State of Missouri, the efforts to found the Seminary there would tend to paralyze the church in that State for some years." Although he had previously supported New Albany, he had become convinced that after twenty-five years it was a "dead failure." As the Richmond correspondent said, "Dr. B spoke upon the question for more than two hours, the effort was a powerful one, and the appeal in behalf of Danville was truly eloquent." R. J. Breckinridge analyzed the "history, present condition and prospects of the

⁴⁷"General Assembly," Presbyterian 23.23 (June 4, 1853) 90.

⁴⁸The irony is that Danville is thirty miles closer to Columbia in a straight line than Nashville, but in terms of the regional connections of the Old School, Tennessee was much closer to South Carolina than Kentucky. Many northwesterners still thought of Kentucky as part of the northwest. As evidence of this, no one appears to have pointed out Breckinridge's geographical error.

New Albany Seminary. . . in a most ludicrous strain, which excited a considerable degree of mirth in the Assembly.” He then turned to Danville and its advantages, pointing to the considerable financial resources of the Synod (\$60,000 had already been pledged by the Synod of Kentucky—including the \$20,000 theological fund that had previously been used to support a professor at New Albany), as well as its central location for drawing upon both northern and southern students and support.⁴⁹

Several speakers attempted to contradict this speech, but with little success. Dr. Wood refused to admit that New Albany was a failure. Samuel B. McPheeters defended St. Louis, calling on the Assembly to consider not merely the wants of 1853, but the future when St. Louis would be the population center of the west. He urged that the city would be the best place to learn human nature. But any hope for St. Louis was dashed when Mr. Harbeson, a fellow Missourian defended Danville, by claiming that he did not “believe in students studying human nature in large cities; they were too apt to practise it.” But even as several advocates of St. Louis rose to address the moderator, Judge John Fine of Ogdensburgh Presbytery called for the previous question, and Danville prevailed 122-78-33 over St. Louis and New Albany.⁵⁰

⁴⁹“Proceedings of the General Assembly,” W&O 8.43 (June 2, 1853) 170. The relation of East and West can be seen in Kensey Johns’ (the Chancellor of Delaware) intimation that the West had “monopolised the time of the house” through this debate—even though Rev. P. D. Young of southern Illinois (Kaskaskia Presbytery) pointed out that the great majority of that time had been used by one man (R. J. Breckinridge)—much to the dismay of those who wanted a truly *western* seminary [“Proceedings of the General Assembly,” W&O 8.44 (June 9, 1853) 173]. Cf. “General Assembly,” BRPR 25:3 (July, 1853) 505-513.

⁵⁰“Proceedings of the General Assembly,” W&O 8.43 (June 2, 1853) 170.

Most observers expected that New Albany Seminary would shut down, as ordered by the Assembly—but on July 7, the Presbyterian of the West printed New Albany's manifesto declaring their intent to maintain the seminary. The Board claimed that the Synods had never specifically authorized the transfer of the location of the seminary. Editor Thorpe was not convinced. The Synods had plainly intended an unqualified transfer, allowing the Assembly to do whatever it wished with New Albany. Nonetheless, Thorpe was not wholly unsympathetic to the continuing seminary at New Albany. Many understood that many northern students would not cross the Ohio River for theological training, and they were willing to encourage New Albany to continue in order to provide seminary education for them.⁵¹

On the other hand, the Presbyterian of the West feared that the Danville arrangement would not work. Since New Albany was still in operation (with the support of the majorities of the Cincinnati, Indiana, and Northern Indiana synods), and the far western synods of Illinois and Missouri were upset that the new seminary was so far east, Thorpe and other contributors to the Presbyterian of the West feared that the new seminary would find little support.⁵² Just because the Assembly had placed the seminary in Kentucky didn't mean that northwesterners had to support it! "Hence the demand which Dr. Young and others of the South make upon us of implicit obedience to the act of the Assembly,

⁵¹ "Address of the Directors of New Albany Seminary" PW 8.41 (July 7, 1853). This was echoed in even stronger language by A Member of Cincinnati Synod, "Theological Seminary" PW 13.1 (September 22, 1853).

⁵² "New Albany Theological Seminary" PW 8.40 (June 30, 1853).

because it is the act of the Assembly, is anti-Presbyterian and cannot be allowed.”⁵³

Therefore, many concluded, Danville would be the seminary for the southwest, leaving New Albany free to continue in the northwest.⁵⁴

In October MacMaster and the New Albany directors issued a pamphlet defending their actions against what they considered a Kentucky conspiracy. MacMaster claimed that Robert J. Breckinridge had orchestrated the whole affair. Why was it that Young organized the committee on seminaries “to include no man from all the Northwest, and no man friendly to the New Albany Seminary, while two, including the Chairman, are taken from the vicinity of Danville”? Further, MacMaster claimed that Breckinridge, as chairman, had suppressed and misrepresented the claims of New Albany, then Young, as moderator, had prevented the defenders of New Albany from gaining the floor of the Assembly, and then finally Breckinridge was rewarded for his machinations by being elected professor of theology in the new institution! New Albany, MacMaster argued, was under no obligation whatsoever to disband.⁵⁵

⁵³ A Member of Cincinnati Synod, “Theological Seminary” PW 13.1 (September 22, 1853).

⁵⁴The Danville curriculum attempted a novel experiment in theological education. Rather than divide the students into classes, each professor taught his whole department in a three year cycle (the only exception being language study). In 1857, after the experiment had been in place for four years, R. J. Breckinridge described the curriculum for the Central Presbyterian: in his didactic and polemic theology course the whole student body studied the knowledge of God 1) objectively considered, 2) subjectively considered, and 3) relatively considered (polemics). Breckinridge argued that any one of these foci could provide a useful starting point for the student. Edward P. Humphrey taught ecclesiastical history in sequence: 1) the Old Testament Church—typology and the various covenants, 2) the apostolic and ancient church, and 3) the medieval and modern church. Stuart Robinson had just been called as the third professor, so he had not fully developed the field of Church Government and Practical Theology, but Breckinridge summarized Robinson’s view as seeing the whole in terms of “objective facts regarding the church and subjective life of the church.” [“Danville Seminary” CP 2.18 (May 2, 1857) 70]. But outside of Kentucky, this method found few supporters [Q, “The Danville Pedagogick” PW (March 15, 1854) 101].

⁵⁵“The Danville and New Albany Theological Seminaries,” W&O 9.13 (Nov 3, 1853) 49.

Young replied in a tone of mock sympathy, suggesting that MacMaster should not be held responsible for his false charges, due to “his pedantry, arrogance, and other mental infirmities. . . . We attribute his moral aberrations, in part, to something peculiar in the structure of his mind--and for this, Christian charity ought to make allowance.” After refuting the conspiracy charge, Young gave MacMaster a parting jab: “He has presided over three colleges and a Theological Seminary. All of them have, unfortunately, sunk under his administration; and many of the friends of these various institutions have charged him with being the cause of their ruin.” Young’s point was clear: so long as New Albany stood by MacMaster, Kentucky would have nothing to do with it.⁵⁶

Not surprisingly, the General Assembly of 1854 urged the two seminaries to refrain from interfering with each other.⁵⁷ But even the promise to leave New Albany alone gave

⁵⁶John C. Young, “The Danville and New Albany Theological Seminaries” W&O 9.17 (Dec 1, 1853) 66.

⁵⁷At the Assembly of 1854, MacMaster arose and renewed his claims that Robert J. Breckinridge (or others from the Synod of Kentucky) had falsified documents and manipulated the whole creation of Danville Seminary. Breckinridge replied with humor that “if the Assembly were tired of their bargain, they would not find him hanging on to their skirts.” In a self-deprecating gesture, but one with a message for MacMaster, who claimed to speak for New Albany, Breckinridge declared that “when he spoke in the name of the Synod of Kentucky, or an ecclesiastical body, he spoke much more guardedly than he did when he spoke in the name of that old Dr. Breckinridge who lived within him, and gave him a great deal of trouble.” Further, he said that it appeared as though New Albany wanted to agitate on the subject of slavery. Finally, he could not see how MacMaster could oppose moving the seminary: “He wished he had time, just as a matter of amusement, to argue a point. Suppose it had occurred to him to be President of a College at South Hanover, Indiana, and suppose he had wished to change it to Madison, Indiana, and call it Madison University.” At this, MacMaster arose and indignantly protested, “I never proposed to remove a College from South Hanover.” Granting that this was technically true, Breckinridge stated it more bluntly: “Suppose then it had occurred to him to kill the College at South Hanover, and erect a new one at Madison—suppose the Synod of Indiana were to take great offence at this, and suppose his Madison University was to be broken up, and the charter given back to South Hanover—now does all this row and trouble mean nothing? Was that Institution, through all these changes, the same College? Then New Albany Seminary would be the same Seminary after the proposed changes.” Legally speaking, New Albany Seminary no longer existed. Seven synods had handed it over to the Assembly, and only three now sought to carry it on. Nonetheless, Breckinridge did not wish to interfere with New Albany—so long as New Albany would stop trying to interfere with Danville.

After further debate, Rev. McClung offered a resolution of non-interference. After defending the

little comfort to the seminary's supporters. From 1853 until 1857, a total of 33 students attended New Albany (mostly born in Ohio and Indiana, and educated at Hanover and Miami). Therefore, not only did Danville draw away the entire southwest (not a single southwesterner attended New Albany during these years), but they also drew half as many northwesterners as New Albany (15 graduates from Hanover and Miami attended Danville from 1853-1857).⁵⁸

Danville's attempt to reach out to the southwest, however, was challenged by Columbia Theological Seminary. While Columbia was formally under the oversight of the synods of South Carolina and Georgia, it trained many students from Alabama and Mississippi as well. In 1857 Columbia sought to establish a formal relationship with the

need for a northwestern seminary, he insisted that abolition was no threat: "When any body brings up abolition in their Synod, they say to him, just show us where Paul turned any body out of the Church for being a slaveholder, and we will turn any Presbyterian out that holds slaves; and then we clap down the trap-door of the previous question upon him. (Laughter)." Using humor to try to defuse a tense situation, he referred to Breckinridge as the barber of the Old School, "New Albany came in his way last year, and I thought when he was done with it, it was the cleanest shaved thing I ever saw (Laughter)." "General Assembly," Presbyterian 24.22 (June 3, 1854) 85.

⁵⁸During the same time period another six graduates each from Miami and Hanover attended Princeton though only two from Centre. These colleges had sent 5, 16, and 22 students respectively to Princeton from 1847-1853. It is worth pointing out that Hanover students only started coming to Princeton in droves shortly after MacMaster was elected professor at New Albany in 1848. Even Halsey, who is generally sympathetic to MacMaster, admits that his presence at New Albany led to the decline of the seminary—despite his fine teaching (*A History of The McCormick Theological Seminary*, 49). From 1857-1866 Miami and Hanover returned to the Princeton fold, sending 21 and 31 students respectively, as the northwest became increasingly uncomfortable with Kentucky). After the war the stream from Hanover to Princeton dried up, as no Hanover graduate enrolled in 1866, 1867 or 1868 (after averaging 4-5 per year during the war). See appendix three. Meanwhile Danville had 36 students in its first year, and Western more than doubled its attendance in five years. In its first decade (1853-1863) Danville had 136 students. Of the 100 whose place of origin is known, 38 came from the southwest (24 from Kentucky) and 18 from north of the Ohio River (13 from Ohio). An additional 20 came from states normally associated with the southern seminaries (eight from Virginia and six from North Carolina), and 18 from northeastern states (the other six were foreign born). Of the 128 whose college is known, 36 came from northwestern colleges (13 from Hanover, eight from Miami, and seven from Jefferson), 63 from southwestern colleges (50 from Centre), 11 from the southeast (six from Hamden-Sydney) and 14 from the northeast (eight from the College of New Jersey), while four were educated in Europe.

Synod of Mississippi. The Presbyterian Banner and Advocate of Pittsburgh reported that James Henley Thornwell had presented the case for Columbia “with all his admitted eloquence and his equally well known opposition to the General Assembly.” E. T. Baird responded in favor of Danville, “urging its claims upon the Synod, and forcibly presenting the argument in favor of the Assembly’s control in the case of theological institutions.” When the Synod declined the partnership with Columbia, editor David McKinney rejoiced that “this adherence of the Synod of Mississippi to the Assembly, is an indication that sectionalism is not wholly to triumph at the South.”⁵⁹ The Southern Presbyterian protested that this placed both Columbia and Dr. Thornwell in a “false light,” by suggesting that Thornwell was “habitually, and on principle, opposed to the General Assembly.” The editor, H. B. Cunningham, insisted that Thornwell was entirely within his rights to believe that theological education should be conducted at the synodical level. As for the charge of being sectional, the only sectionalism was a question of the south versus the west (not the south versus the General Assembly). Columbia Seminary, he insisted, was only arguing that Mississippi was more naturally connected to South Carolina than to Kentucky. And as for McKinney’s insinuation that Columbia Seminary was opposed to the Assembly’s stance on slavery, he insisted that “Even on the vexed question of the day, *ecclesiastically* considered, it teaches nothing at variance with what we understand to be the position of the church.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹“The Banner—Dr. Thornwell and the Seminary,” Southern Presbyterian 11.18 (February 13, 1858).

⁶⁰“The Banner—Dr. Thornwell and the Seminary,” Southern Presbyterian 11.18 (February 13, 1858). The True Witness of New Orleans concurred with Cunningham. Southern Presbyterian 11.21 (March 6, 1858).

The New Albany men, however, were not convinced that Columbia understood the position of the church correctly, but they had few resources to communicate their concerns. Their seminary was poorly attended and supported, and since the failure of the Christian Monthly Magazine in 1845, they had no forum for communication. Therefore in the fall of 1854, the Presbytery of New Albany resolved to support a new weekly paper for the northwest. Since the west already had three newspapers (the Presbyterian Herald of Louisville—right across the Ohio River from New Albany—the Presbyterian of the West in Cincinnati, and the St. Louis Presbyterian), Nathan Rice found it preposterous that New Albany Presbytery would seek to create yet another. “Local *interests* and *prejudices* have done and are doing more to cripple the energies of the Presbyterian Church in the West, than all other causes. It has been impossible to secure union either in building up institutions or in sustaining newspapers. This is the more remarkable, since there exist amongst us no theological differences.”⁶¹ As far as Rice was concerned, this growing anti-slavery subculture was a threat to the peace of both the church and the nation.

But rather than start a new paper for the northwest, the New Albany men set their sights on taking control of the one western paper north of the Ohio River. While students and funding remained hard to find, New Albany finally gained a new friend in 1854 with the buyout of the Presbyterian of the West. Whereas the editorial staff in 1853, under the influence of Nathan Rice, had signed a protest at synod against the continuing existence of New Albany, by the end of 1854 the Presbyterian of the West had passed into the hands of

⁶¹From the St. Louis Presbyterian, reprinted in the Presbyterian 24.46 (November 18, 1854) 182.

the Rev. Joseph G. Monfort, who was rapidly becoming the leading voice of the pro-New Albany wing of the northwest.⁶²

In many respects, Monfort's friendship with New Albany was surprising. He had joined the opposition to MacMaster after the Hanover College debacle, and had been one of the leading voices in opposing MacMaster's election to New Albany Seminary just six years before. Now, however, Monfort found in MacMaster a kindred spirit. Over the next decade Monfort would take on virtually every Old School newspaper in the country in his vigorous (and sometimes vituperative) defense of MacMaster and the principles of the new Northwest. Old controversies were set aside as the anti-slavery cause brought them together.

But even with Monfort's support, nothing could preserve New Albany as the location for the seminary of the Northwest. For one thing, it was too close to Danville Seminary; for another, it was simply too close to Kentucky. The old ideal of a seminary for the whole west that would unite North and South on northern soil was gone. The old Northwest, of which the Ohio River formed the center—was giving way to the new Northwest, of which the Ohio River formed its southern boundary.

Indicative of this change was the addition of Dr. Thomas E. Thomas to the faculty of New Albany also in 1854. In southern eyes, Thomas (the former editor of the short-lived anti-slavery Christian Monthly Magazine) was “a conspicuous leader of the Abolition party in Ohio.” The Southern Presbyterian feared that with his addition, the “New Albany Seminary may become an engine for the propagation of Abolitionism in the

⁶² “The Critic vs. New Albany” PW 13.50 (August 30, 1854) 198.

Northwest. Dr. McMaster, another Professor, is not free from the suspicion of a similar taint.”⁶³ But just as southern writers moved toward a more open pro-slavery stance as the 1850s progressed, so also northwestern writers became more openly anti-slavery.

4. J. G. Monfort, the Presbyterian of the West and the Rise of a Vocal Anti-Slavery Movement in the Northwest

The label of “abolitionist” was not strictly accurate for Thomas, Monfort, or MacMaster. Most anti-slavery Old Schoolers were still hoping that their southern brethren would find a way to end slavery. As southern Presbyterians began to suggest that slavery was a positive good, some northern emancipationists attempted to hold fast to the 1818 deliverance, but with greater emphasis on the conditional aspect of that statement: slaveholding was not sinful—so long as the slaveholder was preparing his slaves for their eventual status as freemen. They could agree with the Assembly’s distinction between the definite evil of slavery and the moral ambiguity of slaveholding—but the Assembly’s refusal to push southerners toward emancipation frustrated them.

By the end of Rice’s editorship in 1853, some anti-slavery material was appearing in the Presbyterian of the West. The Rev. Hugh S. Fullerton, pastor of Chillicothe Presbytery’s Salem Church⁶⁴ wrote a defense of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Rice had scorned Harriet Beecher Stowe’s best-seller as a novel (and in some Old School circles the genre itself was enough to condemn it as worthless without paying attention to its content) that

⁶³Editorial, “Our Theological Seminaries,” Southern Presbyterian 7.41 (July 27, 1854) 162.

⁶⁴A native of Pennsylvania, Hugh Stewart Fullerton (1804-1863) had studied privately with Dr. Samuel Crothers of Greenfield, Ohio, a leading abolitionist member of the Chillicothe Presbytery, and was licensed in 1830 by that presbytery. He served at Salem church from 1838 until his death in 1863.

avoided the real evils of slavery and simply sought to raise the passions of northerners.

Fullerton argued that the book focused precisely on the real evil: that slavery was a “horrible despotism.” Praising Rice for belaboring “the Catholics most manfully because they are despotic in their principles,” Fullerton asked, “what warrant have you in the word of God for opposing one kind of despotism more than another?” If Stowe had attacked slavery in the wrong way, Fullerton asked, “O! that my brother Rice would attack it in the right way and show us how!” The reason why abolitionism has become infidel is because the “American church as a body has set herself against the movement.” The anti-slavery movement has tried to overthrow domestic despotism “by proclaiming those simple truths set forth in the American declaration of Independence, and showing that those truths are consistent with the word of God.” Unless the church gets on board with this position, “slavery and infidelity will continue to fatten and grow.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵“Letter from H. S. Fullerton” PW 8.21 (February 10, 1853) 82-3. Using Uncle Tom’s Cabin to make a connection between slavery and the Roman Catholic Church was not a one-way street. It was twice placed on the Index. Simeon Brown, who took over for Rice briefly in 1853 said in “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” PW 13.3 (October 6, 1853), that “the poor old man, whom they call the Pope, has given a second kick at Mrs. Stowe’s world famous book. Twice now, has it gone into the solemnly prohibited list, and this last time as ‘damnably pernicious.’ We thought it was a capital thing, when we first read it. . . . But we are now satisfied. If the Devil were in the book, the Pope would never have put the book in the Index. He never treats in that way his most valuable and powerful ally. We take his acts, therefore, in this matter, as a demonstration that Uncle Tom is a genuine fruit of Liberty and the Bible.” [The numbering of the newspaper changed frequently. Rice’s volume numbers recorded the years as a weekly paper, since 1845, whereas Brown chose to add four more years, to reflect the bimonthly PW 1841-1845.] The Virginia-based Watchman and Observer ran a very popular series on “Uncle Tom Logic” by Theophilus (the Rev. George Junkin, president of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia), which criticized Stowe on many levels, not least for giving her African-American characters the sensibilities of the most highly educated whites. Junkin (who would return to his native Pennsylvania in 1861 after being dismissed for refusing to fly the Confederate flag) did admit “the argument of these volumes to be good and logical, and from premises too, fair and just, to this end; viz: that many slave laws require to be amended, for the prevention of two great evils: the separation of husband and wife (except for crime) and of young children from their mothers. Public sentiment in these two points, is greatly ahead of the law in most states. . . . Let the marital relation be recognised and regulated everywhere by just and Christian laws; and let children under a certain age be always an appendage of the mother and not separable from her.” Theophilus, “Uncle Tom Logic No. VIII. Gratuitous Assumptions” W&O 9.34 (March 30, 1854) 133.

Under Monfort, the Presbyterian of the West regularly published anti-slavery material, becoming the first weekly Old School newspaper to attack the conservative stance of the church. Monfort, though, was no radical abolitionist, and opposed the division of the church. When the Christian church and the Illinois Methodists divided in 1855, he warned Old School Presbyterians against divisive tactics.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, when Robert J. Breckinridge attacked Senator Charles Sumner's speeches on Kansas, Monfort argued that the redoubtable Kentuckian had misunderstood Sumner's approach. The free soil movement would let the south end slavery by itself—but would resolutely oppose introducing it to the territories. Monfort was troubled that “the conservative party in the South is constantly growing less. Men who have labored for emancipation are yielding to the clamors of proslavery men in favor of the extension of slavery.”⁶⁷ The following summer, after the caning of Charles Sumner by Preston Brooks, Monfort published a letter from the “pastor of the largest church in our connection in the Free States of the Northwest,” and suggested that this represented the unanimous opinion of northwestern ministers. “L” blamed the north for the caning of Sumner: “How much of the guilt and disgrace of this state of things attaches to men who call themselves anti-slavery, but conservatives, who *profess* to be *opposed* to slavery, but yet keep their mouths shut on the question, or open them only to censure the defenders of liberty.” The Kansas disasters as well should be “traced to the silent, speechless acquiescence of thousands of professing

⁶⁶“Divisions on the Slavery Question” PW (March 22, 1855).

⁶⁷“Dr Breckinridge's Letter,” PW (September 6, 1855). Other responses to the caning of Sumner include Nathan L. Rice, in the St. Louis Presbyterian of June 19, 1856, who thought that both sides revealed the folly that had possessed Washington, and called for the election of wise rulers.

Christians who through fear of man, prejudice, or wilful ignorance, have lent their influence in this way to swell the catalogue of enormity and crime!” Slavery must be “confined as a local institution to its own limits,” or else the nation would be judged by God.⁶⁸

Frustrated that so few Old School papers would speak on the Kansas question, Monfort continued to urge Presbyterians to work for a free soil Kansas, and frequently asked his fellow editors why they remained silent on the moral issues surrounding Kansas. If emancipation was a moral question—and Old School papers from Philadelphia to Louisville regularly urged that—why not free soil in Kansas?⁶⁹ That fall, when Governor Adams of South Carolina publicly endorsed the reopening of the slave trade, Monfort howled with horror and outrage.⁷⁰ Whereas most Old School editors refrained from political commentary almost entirely, Monfort declared only that “we shall not meddle with politics, except when politics shall meddle with us. Upon all subjects bearing upon morals and religion, in Church or State, we will utter our sentiments freely, and we hope prudently, yet none the less fearlessly and independently.”⁷¹

⁶⁸Editorial, “Signs of the Times” PW (June 5, 1856) 150 and L, “The Slavery Question,” PW (June 5, 1856) 151. If the northwest includes all of Ohio, then the author would be Henry G. Comingo of First Presbyterian, Steubenville (410 communicant members), but if Ohio is excluded, then the author is likely Samuel Newell of Paris, Illinois (257 communicant members). Possibly, since Steubenville was in the Pittsburgh orbit (which was no longer considered part of the northwest, Nathaniel West, Jr., of Central Presbyterian, Cincinnati, is intended (393 communicant members). The universality of his claims will be shown false in what follows.

⁶⁹Editorials, PW (July 3, 1856), (October 2, 1856).

⁷⁰PW (Nov 6, 1856). Old School newspapers across the country concurred with Monfort in this matter.

⁷¹PW 16.14(December 25, 1856).

With bleeding Kansas and the South Carolina discussion of reopening the slave trade in the background, Monfort printed Erasmus Darwin MacMaster's remarks on slavery at the Miami University literary society: "On slavery, where it already exists, I have seldom publicly spoken or written. . . I have been inclined to be still before God, and patient. . . . Second, because not living among a slaveholding people, I have thought it less my vocation to discuss this subject than evils existing among ourselves." While generally willing to let southerners work out their own difficulties regarding the elimination of slavery in the South, MacMaster insisted that northerners should speak plainly against the extension of slavery to the territories.⁷²

In 1857 Monfort set forth his argument for how the statements on slavery in 1845 and 1818 could be held together. The testimonies of 1787, 1815 and 1818 declare that slavery "is sinful; it can not exist without sin. There is always guilt somewhere, when any one is held under the oppressions and exposures of slavery." But 1845 does not contradict this. Monfort pointed out that "there is not a word in approbation of slavery to be found in it." It simply states that slaveholding in the south does not bar one from membership. "Our church does not think, and we do not think that every slaveholder should be excommunicated." If 1845 is understood in harmony with 1818 (as he suggested that the statement of 1846 required, when it reaffirmed all previous General Assembly statements on slavery), then "in every instance of slavery humanity is outraged, and God's law violated, but men are often so connected with the system, that the guilt of oppression does

⁷²"Our Church and Slavery" PW (Nov 6, 1856) 26.

not rest on them but on others--individual or the commonwealth.” Therefore so long as slaveholders are working towards emancipation, they should not be disciplined.⁷³

But even Monfort was considered too soft by some in the Northwest. Veritas wrote that the action of 1845 “is essentially *defective* on the general subject, and utterly *destitute* of the decided Anti-slavery *tone, style, terms, spirit* and *aim* of the former testimonies of 1787 and 1818.” Its declaration that slaveholding was not sinful retained none of the qualifications of earlier statements. The 1818 statement had called on all Presbyterians to work for the end of slavery. The 1845 statement politely avoided the issue. For Veritas, the very fact that the 1846 General Assembly felt compelled to say that 1845 was not intended to revoke 1818 reveals that it in fact did.⁷⁴

Hugh S. Fullerton agreed. “The injunction of our Assembly urging us to do all we can for the abolition of slavery, is now practically, a dead letter.” Troubled that the Old School had lost fellowship with the Congregational churches over slavery, he pointed out that the only northern church they had fellowship with was the “Reformed Dutch. . . a body as frigidly conservative on the slave question as we are ourselves.” Eschewing radical abolitionism, he agreed that the church could not cut off all slaveholders, because this would be “ultra, unscriptural, and absurd.” But Fullerton suggested that if the New School purged itself of slavery, “*we will think it our duty to seek great comfort and usefulness for ourselves and people, by taking our stand with them.*”⁷⁵

⁷³“Presbyterian Church and Slavery,” PW 16.19 (January 29, 1857).

⁷⁴Veritas, “The Truth of the Question” PW 16.22 (February 19, 1857).

⁷⁵H. S. Fullerton, “Our Church and Slavery” PW 16.43 (July 16, 1857) 170.

Fullerton argued that if southerners wanted to change slave laws, they would have by now. He prided himself on being the first to petition the Ohio legislature “for the repeal of our black school laws,” which had forbidden blacks to attend the common schools. His initial petition had been rejected, but over several years, “that unjust law, and many others of the same kind, were repealed. And now colored people have their free schools all over the state, supported from the public treasury, just as other schools are supported, and under the supervision of the same directors.” The continued existence of slavery in the South could only mean that Christians wanted it to continue. And if this was the case, then according to the 1818 statement on slavery, then “in every case of slaveholding in our Church there ought to be a judicial investigation, just as there should be and would be in every case of drunkenness.” If forced to hold slaves, slaveholders should be viewed as innocent—otherwise, Fullerton argued, they should be disciplined.⁷⁶

Monfort replied that while the South was indeed growing worse, he was optimistic regarding the future of anti-slavery in the northern Old School. Further, he suggested that Fullerton did not adequately distinguish between slavery and slaveholding. The former is a sin, the latter not necessarily. “We can not censure all slaveholders.”⁷⁷ Clericus agreed, insisting that “slavery” did not exist in the church, only *slaveholders*.⁷⁸ Further, he hesitated to presume guilt. Given that the southerners had voted for the statements of 1818 and generally agreed with the harmonization of 1846, Monfort insisted that northerners

⁷⁶Fullerton, “Our Church and Slavery, No II” PW 16.44 (July 23, 1857).

⁷⁷PW 16.43 (July 16, 1857) 170.

⁷⁸Clericus, “Church and Slavery” PW 16.44 (July 23, 1857).

were bound to assume that southern Old School Presbyterians “do not approve slavery, that they are not slaveholders by choice, and we must accept the burden of proving the contrary, in every case in which we would exclude them from the Church.”⁷⁹

That fall, as Armstrong and Van Rensselaer began their debate in the Presbyterian Magazine, the presbyteries of Wooster, Marion, and Richland joined Chillicothe in strong anti-slavery statements. When the Presbyterian called them abolitionists, Monfort objected—pointing out that none of these three presbyteries called for the discipline of all slaveholders. Instead, Monfort argued that the northwest was reacting against the southerners’ retreat from the historic testimony of the church—and now, he feared, among northerners, too.⁸⁰

As evidence for the apostasy of the south, Monfort published an article by a member of the 1818 General Assembly, who had served in the South for more than forty years. This elder statesman had tried to get his article published in the Southern Presbyterian Review, but it was refused without comment. He argued that the testimony of the previous sixty years made it clear that the Presbyterian church says that

African servitude, as practised among us, is a grievous wrong; that it is depriving man of his natural and inalienable rights; that it is contrary to the spirit of the gospel; altogether inconsistent with the law of loving our neighbor as ourself, and wholly irreconcilable with the rule of doing as we would be done by; and the Church urges and enjoins it upon all in her communion to use all prudent and proper means for putting an end to Slavery and promoting its *abolition* throughout America and the world.

⁷⁹“Brother Fullerton’s Second Article,” PW 16.44 (July 23, 1857).

⁸⁰“What the Presbyterian Thinks” PW (October 29, 1857).

The author, undoubtedly Aaron Leland of Columbia Theological Seminary, the only living southerner who had been a member of the 1818 General Assembly, pointed to previous articles where the editors of the Southern Presbyterian Review had denied that liberty is the natural and inalienable right of man, and he claimed that the south was clashing directly with the plain testimony of the General Assembly. Arguing that Christ had laid down “great moral, practical principles by which all his people must be governed,” he insisted that slavery fundamentally contradicted those principles.⁸¹

Such articles continued to encourage northwesterners to think that perhaps a silent majority in the south only awaited assistance from the north to throw off the domination of slavery. James S. Fullerton, wrote from Mount Vernon, Iowa, to encourage speedy action. Complaining of little progress towards the abolition of slavery in the forty years since 1818, Fullerton suggested that the General Assembly should “fix upon some set time, (say January 1864 or 5) on or before which, this work must be accomplished (at least as far as the Church is concerned). If some of our members are too poor to place their slaves beyond the reach of slave laws, let the Church be called upon to raise the funds needed for this purpose, and we hot bloods will be silent.” Denying that General Assembly utterances bound the church, Fullerton openly rejected the statement of 1845.⁸²

Monfort resisted such a stance: if northerners rejected 1845, then southerners could reject 1818 with impunity. In fact, within weeks of Fullerton’s article, the New Orleans’

⁸¹A Member of the Assembly of 1818, “Southern Presbyterian Review” PW 18.7 (November 4, 1858) 25.

⁸²“Letter from Rev. J. S. Fullerton of Mt Vernon Iowa” Presbyter 18.27 (March 24, 1859).

True Witness argued that the 1818 statement “was taken before the question of slavery was properly understood, and at a time when the views there expressed were the sentiments of the country, generally, North and South.” But, as Richmond McInnis argued, “the Old School Presbyterian Church has never reindorsed the action of 1818, and no man, with proper views and feelings, seeing to know the mind of our Church, would ever make this charge. . . . Whatever may be the general language of 1846, it is evident from the above facts that the action of 1818 was never reindorsed by the Old School General Assembly.”⁸³ With both sides moving quickly in opposing directions, the future looked bleak for conservatives who wished to hold the church and nation together.

5. The Synodical Northwestern Theological Seminary (1856-1859)

Meanwhile, Nathan Rice, now pastor of the Central Presbyterian Church in St. Louis and editor of the St. Louis Presbyterian, kept trying to pacify the West through his conservative anti-slavery stance. Commenting on eastern abolitionist efforts, Rice suggested that most eastern battles were fought where slavery “does not exist, and amongst a people who can do nothing whatever to abolish it.”⁸⁴ After a four-month trip to New York City and New England to attend the General Assembly of 1856 and the Rhode

⁸³Quoted in “Two Views” Presbyter (May 19, 1859). In response Monfort cited Cortland Van Rensselaer’s recent articles in the Presbyterian Magazine, along with Nathan L. Rice and R. J. Breckinridge, all of whom were conservatives who affirmed that the Assembly had in fact reaffirmed 1818 in 1846. McInnis replied with “No Law to Repeal” True Witness 6.30 (October 15, 1859).

⁸⁴N. L. Rice, “Anti-Slavery Lectures” from the St. Louis Presbyterian, W&O 10.12 (October 26, 1854). With Rice as the editor of the St. Louis Presbyterian, the paper began to draw on a wider geographical area, including much of Illinois.

Island Evangelical Consociation,⁸⁵ Rice reported to his St. Louis readers that while “the great mass of the people” were simply going about their own business, “there is, in every part of the country, excitement enough to call forth demagogues, whose only chance to become famous, is to ride into office upon some hobby.”⁸⁶ Nonetheless, Rice took heart from the stand of Old School editors. The Central Presbyterian had written against mob law, and the Presbyterian of the West warned against division. “Whilst Presbyterian ministers have never degraded their sacred office by meddling in party politics, they have ever been found ready to speak out boldly, when the evil passions of men have brought the country into peril.”⁸⁷ With the election of the Democrat James Buchanan in 1856, Rice jubilantly declared that “the crisis has passed.”⁸⁸ Little did he know that while the national crisis may have passed, an ecclesiastical one was about to explode.

In the fall of 1856 MacMaster, Monfort, and the seminary board announced their intention to move the New Albany seminary to Chicago. MacMaster’s pamphlet pointed out that the northwest alone was nine times the size of Scotland, contained around five million inhabitants, but had only 285 ministers for its 464 churches. With fully one-third

⁸⁵See chapter seven. Even with the railroads and steamships, travel from St. Louis to New York City still took around a week. (See “Notes of an Excursion to St. Louis,” Presbyterian Magazine 1.7 (July, 1851). The Assembly took only the last two weeks of May that year, but Rice was delayed by his assignment in Rhode Island until July.

⁸⁶St. Louis Presbyterian (September 25, 1856)

⁸⁷“The Presbyterian Press” St. Louis Presbyterian 13.16 (October 16, 1856).

⁸⁸St. Louis Presbyterian 13.20 (November 13, 1856). For more on the election of 1856, see Tyler Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) chapter 9.

of northwestern pulpits vacant, the need for ministers was desperate.⁸⁹ The New Albany campus would shut down temporarily in the spring of 1857 until the seminary reopened in Chicago.⁹⁰ A new board was organized to include all the interested synods of the northwest, but the exclusion of Missouri (which had formerly been one of New Albany's controlling synods—although it had not sent anyone to board meetings since 1853) led to a howl of protest from Rice's St. Louis Presbyterian.⁹¹ “Dr. McMasters, we learn, stated to the Synod of Illinois, that the Synod of Missouri had taken such a position in relation to the Seminary, that it would not have been ‘*decent*’ to ask its co-operation.” But, Rice complained, Missouri was one of the seven synods united in control, and contributed more to its funds than either of the northwestern synods (likely a reference to Iowa and Wisconsin). While it neglected to appoint directors (as did the Synod of Illinois) it had not given up the right to do so. The Synod had never identified with another seminary but desired to remain in connection with the Northwestern synods. While it is true that the Synod of Missouri had never formally renounced its control, it *had* passed a resolution questioning the continuation of the seminary after the creation of Danville Seminary, which Monfort interpreted as a hostile gesture.⁹² At the Board meeting in November, the Rev. Samuel J. Baird (a New Albany graduate, pastoring in Muscatine, Iowa)

⁸⁹E. D. MacMaster, A Theological Seminary for the North-West (n.p., n.d.) [Union Theological Seminary Archives]. The reference to the size of the northwest in relation to Scotland indicates an awareness of the magnitude of the task—and a memory of the days when the Presbyterian Church of Scotland was the one and only church.

⁹⁰CP 1.42 (October 19, 1856); PH 26.10 (Nov 6, 1856). The timing could not have been worse. Besides the divisive issue of slavery, the Panic of 1857 rendered fund-raising nearly impossible.

⁹¹“The Seminary Movement” St. Louis Presbyterian (Oct 23, 1856).

⁹²PW 16.27 (Feb 5, 1857).

recommended that the new board of the North West Theological Seminary allow the Missouri presbyteries to send representatives, but Monfort's objections prevailed.⁹³ In the eyes of MacMaster and Monfort, Missouri was no more a part of the northwest than Kentucky.

Therefore, when Monfort began publishing regular anti-slavery statements in the Presbyterian of the West the following year, Rice turned his attention to his former newspaper. He feared that Monfort's defense was "far more injurious than the charge he repels," in that it cast doubt on the meaning of the 1845 statement that Rice had so carefully crafted. After defending the 1845 statement, and its consistency with the 1818 declaration, he concluded that "Every one can see, that if the views expressed by Dr. M were to prevail, a renewed agitation would be the inevitable result." Connecting the anti-slavery discussion with the seminary debates, Rice added that "We feel the more bound to say what we have said because this discussion in the *Pres. of the West*, stands evidently in close connection with the plan by which the Synod of Missouri has been tricked out of its rights."⁹⁴ Arguing that Monfort was a closet abolitionist, Rice pointed out that Monfort defined slavery as "a heinous and scandalous sin, calling for the discipline of the church upon any of her members *who are really chargeable with its guilt*." Ignoring Monfort's distinction between slavery and slaveholding, Rice feared that Monfort, MacMaster, and Thomas E. Thomas were intent on turning the Northwestern Theological Seminary into "a

⁹³PH 26.13 (Nov 27, 1856). Together with other votes that Iowa gave, this suggests that Iowa had fairly close ties with Missouri, and hints at a conception of the west that is more oriented toward the Mississippi River than either Chicago or the Ohio River.

⁹⁴"Slavery" St. Louis Presbyterian (January 22, 1857).

thoroughly Abolitionist Seminary,” to “train young men to become agitators and destroyers of the peace of the Church. Let those who love the peace and unity of the Presbyterian Church, at once throw their decided influence against this unhallowed attempt to divide its counsels and destroy its efficiency.”⁹⁵

Throughout the spring and summer of 1857 the skirmishes continued between Monfort and Rice. Monfort argued that MacMaster and Thomas had both affirmed the General Assembly’s statements and should not be considered abolitionists. In reply Rice pointed out that Thomas had written in his Review of Junkin, that professed Christians “*who hold their fellow-men as slaves,*” were “*guilty of a sin which demands the cognizance of the Church; and after due admonition, the application of discipline.*”⁹⁶

But Rice’s polemics had not yet persuaded the rest of the church. In the east, Presbyterians generally joined Cortlandt Van Rensselaer (editor of the Presbyterian Magazine, and moderator of the General Assembly of 1857) in applauding the decision to move the seminary to Chicago. While Van Rensselaer wished that they had corresponded with Missouri to ensure harmony, and objected to the eagerness of “some of the Western brethren” for a new deliverance on slavery, he did not see “any proof that our respected brethren of the new Seminary have any desire to introduce on our records a contrary

⁹⁵“Slavery” St. Louis Presbyterian (January 22, 1857). This essay was reprinted the following week, with several hundred extra copies printed for wide distribution throughout the church. His editorial skirmishing with Monfort continued nearly every week for the next two months. Rice suggested on March 5 that he had the documents to prove his case. William Hill, editor of the Presbyterian Herald urged the two editors to print each other’s responses or else their readers would only hear half the story. PH 26.20 (Jan 15, 1857). Neither side fully complied with this request, and one has to read both papers to find out what the debate was really about.

⁹⁶St. Louis Presbyterian 14.9 (August 27, 1857).

testimony.”⁹⁷ At this point, most in the east and south were willing to believe the best concerning MacMaster and attributed Rice’s antics to their personal quarrel.

As evidence of this, Van Rensselaer published an open letter from an anonymous western ruling elder assuring the church that the seminary posed no threat. The elder urged the advantages of synodical control, arguing that General Assembly decisions were unduly engineered by a small circle of influential figures. Under the synodical system, even the smallest presbytery in the west would be represented on the board of the seminary. Further, the controlling synods would have personal knowledge of the students that the General Assembly never could. The objections to synodical control, this elder asserted, were really directed against professors MacMaster and Thomas and their “abstract views of slavery.” But have the seventy alumni of New Albany Seminary turned out as agitators of the church on the subject of slavery? And even if the seminary were overtly anti-slavery, the professors of Columbia Theological Seminary in South Carolina had articulated a new “philosophy of human society” promoting slavery (Thornwell) and condemning colonization (Adger). If a synodically-controlled seminary could have pro-slavery professors, in spite of the 1818 testimony against slavery, why could not the church tolerate a synodically-controlled seminary with anti-slavery professors? The elder concluded by pleading for mutual confidence in the brethren, in spite of political differences:

As in the political union between the States, the *strength* of the bond consists much in the *lightness* with which it bears upon the distant parts,

⁹⁷“Theological Seminary of the North West” Presbyterian Magazine 7.6 (June, 1857) 262-3. Monfort, as usual, was the one encouraging the new deliverance on slavery.

and the amount of freedom it allows for the maintenance of local policy and opinion, so is the Church safe, and strong in the affections of her children every where, as she shall refrain from imposing, by direct or indirect means, any iron rule upon our modes of thought and expression, on questions not involving sin, nor tending to a departure from vital truth. Only while the Church is content with the great doctrines of her time-honored confession and catechisms, and her principles of government, as the chief bond of union, can she expect to embrace harmoniously, the Presbyterians in every section of this vast country, under one General Assembly.⁹⁸

Once again, but this time from the “radical” wing, Old School Presbyterians revealed their fervent desire for the preservation of a single orthodoxy in the face of multiple visions of how that orthodoxy would be embedded in regional cultures.

The Louisville Presbyterian Herald (still edited by Rev. W. W. Hill) feared that these multiple visions could not withstand such “exciting issues.”⁹⁹ Hill noted that New School journals, such as the American Presbyterian, were claiming that a powerful body of anti-slavery Old Schoolers in the northwest were uniting behind the Presbyterian of the West and the new North West Theological Seminary. But he dismissed this report, suggesting that Monfort’s paper had little support and citing Rice’s St. Louis Presbyterian assurance that the seminary, “whatever may have been the purposes of a few individuals, whenever it goes into operation,” would not be “an *abolitionist* institution.” In the same issue, he noted that Rice had been called to the North Presbyterian Church in

⁹⁸A Ruling Elder to Cortland Van Rensselaer, “Theological Seminary of the North West” PW 16.45 (July 30, 1857) 177.

⁹⁹“The Slavery Agitation in the Presbyterian Church” PH (August 6, 1857).

Chicago—which would be a good thing for the church in the northwest and especially for the infant seminary!¹⁰⁰

Six weeks later, Presbyterian newspaper readers learned that the North West Board had received a letter from MacMaster defending himself from accusations regarding his views of slavery. The charge that he desired the seminary to be an anti-slavery institution was preposterous. “Slavery may have been thought of along with many other things, but the story that the Seminary was designed to be an agency specially for the agitation or discussion of slavery is so absurd that those who told it must have counted largely on the credulity of their hearers.” The seminary should have no relation to slavery

different from those which it has to twenty or forty other acknowledged evils of like character and magnitude, and to which the church and the country of the North West stand in a like relation as to slavery. It certainly is not the business of a theological seminary to organize agencies and institute measures for the removal of slavery, or of any other evil, moral, or political, or ecclesiastical, or domestic, existing in society, but to teach young men how to expound and apply the Scriptures, and to fulfill the work of a gospel ministry.¹⁰¹

The Board hoped that this statement would suffice to allay concerns and restore harmony in the northwest.

At the same meeting the Board elected both Rice *and* MacMaster to the faculty of the seminary. The minutes were published in several papers, revealing that of the 18 board members present, only 11 had voted for Rice (all the members from the older synods of Cincinnati, Indiana, and Northern Indiana; seven of the eight members from Illinois,

¹⁰⁰“Predictions” PH (August 6, 1857).

¹⁰¹“Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the North West: Meeting of the Board of Directors” PH 27.12 (Sept 17, 1857).

Wisconsin, Chicago and Iowa did not vote). Monfort had engineered the election of Rice as professor of ecclesiastical history in hope of reaching a compromise to permit the seminary to go forward. Likewise, to boost confidence in the proposed seminary, the Board passed resolutions allowing General Assembly vetoes on Board decisions.¹⁰² Two weeks later the Presbyterian Herald published a letter from a correspondent urging Rice to accept the call to North Church, Chicago (revealing that Rice would receive a salary of \$5,000—including \$2,000 from a single, unnamed individual).¹⁰³

Rice replied first to the seminary. He professed astonishment at his election, given his criticisms of the enterprise. The editor of the Presbyterian of the West (Monfort) had charged him as an enemy of the seminary, a sizeable minority of the Board had not concurred with his election, and the Board still refused to accept complete General Assembly control. Rice felt constrained to decline. The church, he believed, should not “try to plaster over” divisions, but should find any errors and correct them. In particular, MacMaster’s letter to the board was too ambiguous for Rice, and he hinted of evidence that MacMaster privately believed the General Assembly to be controlled by slavery. A seminary professor, he declared, must not have any private agendas or else he will lose the confidence of the church. Since the seminary could raise no money for a whole year, Rice was convinced that only General Assembly oversight could restore that confidence.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²“Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the North West: Meeting of the Board of Directors” PH 27.12 (Sept 17, 1857).

¹⁰³“North West Theological Seminary” PH 27.14 (October 1, 1857).

¹⁰⁴PH 27.15 (October 8, 1857).

Shortly thereafter he accepted the call to North Presbyterian Church in Chicago. A decade after he had first tried to persuade Rice to go to Chicago, Cyrus Hall McCormick (now the leading businessman and a prominent ruling elder in Chicago) had succeeded. Four years earlier, Rice had gone to St. Louis in an attempt to draw the western seminary to that location. Now he belatedly realized that Chicago held the future of the west and hoped that it was not too late for his presence in Chicago to sway the city toward a more conservative stance.¹⁰⁵

Any hope of reopening the seminary in 1857 was dashed. With the panic of 1857 tightening many pockets and concerns over the position of the proposed seminary, no one would contribute any significant amount of money. And any hope of reopening in 1858 was soon quashed as well.

Rice's declension of the professorship had referred in passing to "private letters" containing MacMaster's "true" views of slavery. MacMaster, who had studiously avoided engaging Rice in any personal controversy, published "A Card" complaining that "for nine years that individual has been allowed to print and publish, in his newspaper, and to utter otherwise about me, whatever he supposed would serve his own ends, without any notice from me; nor do I now make any reply to him." This card declared that if Rice had obtained such a letter "in violation of an obligation which all honourable men instinctively feel to be imperatively binding upon them," MacMaster would now exempt him from the

¹⁰⁵Hutchinson suggests that McCormick had been attempting to connect the northwest with the south ever since his arrival in Chicago. William T. Hutchinson, Cyrus Hall McCormick (New York: The Century Co., 1930) I:259. The following year, 1858, the United States Supreme Court ruled against McCormick in a patent infringement lawsuit. The judge who delivered the opinion was Robert Grier, also an Old School Presbyterian ruling elder. (448)

obligation to respect private letters, and give “full liberty to publish any private letter or letters, which I have written to him, or to them, or to any one of them, concerning the affairs of the Seminary,” but only so long as he would publish the whole letter—not just excerpts.¹⁰⁶

Rice, in transit to Chicago, was not editing a newspaper at that moment, so he published the letters in a lengthy pamphlet, defending his course over the previous eight years, claiming that Monfort’s continued harassment had forced his hand. Reciting his old grievances, he claimed that MacMaster’s views of slavery were “unscriptural, and tending to agitation, and division of the Church.”¹⁰⁷ At the Synod of Cincinnati in 1845, MacMaster had allied himself with Thomas E. Thomas, a self-proclaimed abolitionist, and then welcomed Thomas onto the faculty of New Albany Seminary in 1854. “And is it surprising that I should be unwilling to have a professor of theology in our Seminary, who, as I believed, aimed to introduce, however cautiously and slowly, new terms of membership, which would divide our church, as it has divided others?”¹⁰⁸ Denying any personal quarrel, Rice insisted that he opposed MacMaster’s professorship simply and solely for ecclesiastical reasons.

Further, Rice pointed out that it was Monfort—not himself—who had raised the connection between the seminary and slavery by combining a defense of MacMaster with an attack on the 1845 resolution on slavery in the Presbyterian of the West. “It was

¹⁰⁶E. D. MacMaster, “A Card” PW 17.5 (Oct 22, 1857).

¹⁰⁷Nathan L. Rice, North Western Theological Seminary (np, nd [1857]) 6. [Archives, Union Theological Seminary].

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 7.

impossible to resist the conviction that the synod of Missouri had been excluded, simply because it was a slaveholding state, and that it was the design of the Professors elect to make the Seminary a place for inculcating views of slavery which would distract and divide the church; and then it was that attention was publicly called to this phase of things.”¹⁰⁹

But it was only after arriving in Chicago that Rice found that his suspicions were warranted by hard evidence. Ruling elder Charles A. Spring (1800-189?) of Chicago had been a warm supporter of MacMaster and an avid reader of Monfort’s Presbyterian of the West.¹¹⁰ Until recently, he had viewed Rice as actuated by a “bitter uncompromising spirit.” A director of the new seminary, he had been chosen as agent of the board for 1857 to raise funds in the northwest. In May and July of 1857 he had received two letters from MacMaster encouraging him in his task, but the content of these two letters had wrought a complete revolution in his views. Now he came to Rice with these letters, which he claimed were not confidential, but public letters from a professor to a director of the seminary regarding matters of public interest.¹¹¹

The first letter accused the “hierarchs” of the southern wing of the church (he named Thornwell, Adger, Armstrong, Smiley and Stuart Robinson) of abandoning the traditional Presbyterian doctrine that slavery “is a great evil” and should prudently be brought to an end. The new doctrine claimed that slavery was a great good and should be

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 10.

¹¹⁰Spring was the brother of the Rev. Gardiner Spring of the Brick Church, New York City. Hutchinson, II:10.

¹¹¹Ibid., 11.

perpetuated—purged merely of its worst abuses. So far, MacMaster had said nothing that would raise eyebrows. But he wasn't finished:

This doctrine has been openly and zealously inculcated at the south for ten years past; and now, the way being prepared south and north, *the slave drivers* are determined, with an iron rod over our heads, to force it upon us, and to make it the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church. Any man who demurs at this new doctrine, and ventures to utter, no matter how carefully guarded his language, the old doctrine of the church, is to be ostracized, proscribed, quietly strangled, or if this cannot be done, hunted down and destroyed. This slave-driving domination has never been without injurious effect upon both political and ecclesiastical interests in the so called 'Free States.'

MacMaster went on to suggest that his allies needed to build up the Seminary quietly, avoiding public controversy on the subject until the proper time. This was precisely what Rice had suspected: MacMaster was engaged in a conspiracy which could only result in the division of the church.¹¹²

The second letter confirmed the first. While eschewing any “divisive or violent course in respect to slavery,” MacMaster urged Spring to beware of those who argued for General Assembly control. “We may rely upon it, that the scheme of our opponents is to get the Seminary put under the Assembly, with the ulterior design of putting into it men who will be sufficiently subservient to our slave-driving rulers and their allies in the so called Free States.” One sure way to prevent such a hostile takeover would be to have donors make conditions “that the Seminary shall remain under the control of the Synods now united, or which shall become united, in conformity to the provisions of the constitution, in the direction thereof; or of such of these Synods as shall continue to be

¹¹²Ibid., 12-14. Erasmus Darwin MacMaster to Charles A. Spring, May 18th, 1857.

united therein.” This would ensure the safety of all moneys raised for the seminary. After all, MacMaster queried, “Do you wish this money and all the other property you have secured to go into a concern subjected to the offensive domination referred to?”¹¹³

Rice challenged MacMaster to provide evidence that the southern men were trying to force the rest of the church to uphold their views. If that was in fact the case, then the anti-slavery Rice would “fight against them” as well. But while the southerners openly stated their views, and encouraged debate, MacMaster plotted in secret. Further, the southern men never asked the General Assembly to rid the church of abolitionists, while the abolitionists regularly overtured the Assembly to remove slaveholders. If the southerners were such tyrants, why did the slave-holding synod of Kentucky defend MacMaster so vigorously when he was elected to New Albany in 1848? For that matter, Robert J. Breckinridge notoriously promoted emancipation, yet Danville Seminary had received the approval of the Synod of Mississippi!

Rice argued that the abolitionists were the true tyrants. Rice recalled the meeting of the Synod of Cincinnati in 1844 when “a motion was made to invite a venerable minister from the Synod of Kentucky to sit as a corresponding member.” Rice declined to name names, but insinuated that MacMaster (or at least his friend—Thomas E. Thomas) opposed this “on the ground that he was charged by rumor, with being guilty of ‘the heinous and scandalous sin’ of holding slaves.”¹¹⁴

¹¹³Ibid., 16-17. Erasmus Darwin MacMaster to Charles A. Spring, July 14, 1857.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 21.

Rice declared that he would submit neither to the “odious domination” of pro-slavery or abolition. If MacMaster would be so kind as to reveal his plan to eliminate slavery, Rice would be happy to assist in any reasonable venture, but he could not be party to subversive measures. Particularly disturbing was MacMaster’s suggestion that Spring and his colleagues urge donors to insert a condition that none of the synods had authorized. “No wonder that Mr. Spring was indignant!”¹¹⁵

Underlying all of this was Rice’s opposition to operating secretly. He himself had once been charged with covert operations in the Cincinnati Seminary affair; but Rice was constitutionally incapable of keeping anything quiet for long. Like most Presbyterians, Rice was convinced that open and frank dialogue would produce good and useful results. Covert operations could only lead to suspicions and recriminations. Worst of all, Rice concluded, if MacMaster “approaches elders and other laymen with these charges, and poisons their minds; will he not approach his students in the same way?”¹¹⁶ With the conspiracy unmasked, Rice felt certain that the northwest would swiftly act to remove the conspirators and establish a seminary faithful to the whole church.

This development shocked the whole church. Cortlandt Van Rensselaer chimed in a second time on the North West Seminary controversy, but this time he sang a different tune. MacMaster’s letters

will destroy his influence and usefulness in the Presbyterian Church. Indeed, we do not see how any minister in our body could write such letters, or writing them, desire to continue in our connection. They disclose

¹¹⁵Ibid., 24.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 25.

so much bitterness of feeling on the subject of slavery, and such a want of confidence in his brethren, that no Seminary can be expected to prosper under the professorship and guidance of one who can make such revelations. . . . These letters, we presume, virtually decide the question in favour of a transfer of the Seminary to the GA.¹¹⁷

Presbyterians despised hidden agendas. If a man disagreed with a position of the church, he should say so openly. But these letters made it appear that MacMaster was involved in a covert operation to subvert the church. In order for Presbyterian polity to work, ministers and elders must have confidence in their brethren. MacMaster's private missives to his operatives smelled too much like the Jesuitical devices regularly attributed to Rome. Signaling a shift in church-wide opinion, Van Rensselaer openly encouraged Rice to persevere in his newfound Presbyterian Expositor in Chicago.¹¹⁸

But two could play at this game. On January 7, 1858, J. G. Monfort published a full account of the ugly affair of South Presbyterian Church in Chicago. The leading Old School figure in Chicago since his arrival from Virginia in 1847 was Cyrus H. McCormick. McCormick had been instrumental in founding North Presbyterian Church in 1848. Convinced that Chicago held the future of the Northwest, he longed to see Chicago filled with Old School Presbyterian churches to exercise a moderating influence over the rambunctious region. He had authored the oft-quoted statement that the Old School Presbyterian Church and the Democratic Party were the two hoops that bound the Union together—and he would devote every spare penny to see that the Union was preserved.

¹¹⁷“The Seminary of the Northwest” Presbyterian Magazine 8.1 (January, 1858) 42.

¹¹⁸Presbyterian Magazine 8.2 (February, 1858); see also Presbyterian Expositor 1.2 (January, 1858) 94-95.

Indeed, he had sought to persuade Rice to come to Chicago in 1848, but Rice's eyes were set on the Ohio River—not on some minor town on the northern fringes of the nation—so North Church called R. H. Richardson (1848-56).¹¹⁹ When McCormick had become convinced that Richardson could not adequately promote his vision, he and several others had founded South Church in 1854—but still Rice was unwilling to come. So in 1855 McCormick and South Church called R. W. Henry,¹²⁰ whose strident anti-slavery views quickly proved unsatisfactory for McCormick's vision. Only after MacMaster and the North West Seminary had settled on Chicago as the base for their operations did Rice realize what McCormick had known for years: Chicago controlled the future of the Northwest—and Chicago was already overrun by abolitionists. Therefore when Richardson resigned from North Church in 1856, McCormick returned and offered to provide over \$2,000 per year towards Rice's salary (along with subsidizing Rice's newspaper—at a total cost of \$11,000 from 1858-61).¹²¹

Since the South Church also depended upon McCormick's largesse (he owned the property where the South Church met, and his money provided for half of the pastor's rent) he offered to continue his provision for the church. But when the remaining elders (wealthy and conservative business leaders) tried to get Henry to leave South Church, the rest of the congregation came to his defense, and the elders themselves were forced out of the church. When Henry started speaking more boldly against slavery, "McCormick

¹¹⁹Richardson was a native of Kentucky and a Princeton Seminary graduate ('48), but was not a very strong presence in Chicago.

¹²⁰Henry never attended an Old School seminary.

¹²¹"The Seminary Matter" Presbyterian Expositor 1.1 (Dec, 1857) 44.

withdrew his aid to South Church; he pressed Henry for payment of his debt, cut off his supply of free coal, and most serious of all, declined to donate the lot to the church.”¹²² At this the congregation abandoned the building. The Chicago Press and Tribune complimented the congregation’s resolve to throw off their dependence upon him and “denounced McCormick as the self-appointed ‘lay-bishop’ of Presbyterianism with ‘an ambition to hold in fee simple a Church and a pastor.’ The newspaper called the former site of South Church ‘a good one for any clergyman who happens to be for sale.’”¹²³ The Presbyterian of the West was quick to point out that Rice refused to intercede, allowing the South Church to be run out of its building.¹²⁴ In his defense, McCormick argued that if the church wished to use his money against him, then they were no longer entitled to it.

Monfort and MacMaster’s frustration was growing, together with that of others in the northwest, because they believed that the 1818 testimony of the church against slavery had become a dead letter. But 1858 slowly passed, and little funding could be found for the North West Seminary.¹²⁵ Finally it became clear that synodical control would not work

¹²²Marilee Munger Scroggs, A Light in the City: The Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago (Published by the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, 1990) 11.

¹²³Ibid., 11, citing Hutchinson's McCormick p13. Scroggs points out, however, that McCormick came to the rescue of the congregation when creditors threatened to foreclose in 1865: “he was a very generous man, especially in pursuit of what he considered to be righteous--even godly--causes. He believed that his wealth was particularly valuable because it could be used to help others; but he adamantly resisted allowing his money to be used for purposes he could not support. . . . McCormick pursued his goals single-mindedly, and at this period of his life a primary goal was the preservation of the Union. If he could prevent it, the slavery question would not split the nation.”

¹²⁴Letter from the Hon. John Wilson, PW 17.16 (January 7, 1858). Wilson was a member of South Church, and was formerly Commissioner of the General Land Office under President Pierce.

¹²⁵The frustration boiled over in a particularly nasty attack on Rice’s replacement in St. Louis, James A. Paige. Paige had referred to Monfort’s “schismatic faction which lately failed to establish a sectional Seminary at Chicago,” to which Monfort replied by calling Paige, “a quondam Ohioan, in whose brief editorial career the acute inflammation of ecclesiastical acclimation has reached the point, as the doctors

in the Northwest. Two or three synods, perhaps, could work together effectively; but the nine synods of the northwest were too divided. In the fall of 1858, therefore, Cincinnati Synod took the lead (supported by MacMaster and the seminary board) in voting to hand over the seminary to the General Assembly. This time, however, all parties were committed to avoiding the debacle of 1853. For better or worse, the General Assembly's decision would be final.¹²⁶

6. The Theological Seminary of the Northwest and the General Assembly of 1859

MacMaster feared that the slave-power would seek to control the Assembly, and wrest the seminary from the anti-slavery party in the northwest. While MacMaster and his allies originally chose Chicago as the best site for the seminary, Rice's presence in Chicago presented a problem. If the new seminary were in Chicago, the Assembly would probably offer Rice a chair in the new seminary—and MacMaster had made clear to Monfort that he would refuse to serve with Rice. After consulting with their allies, MacMaster and Monfort turned to Indianapolis, and with the assistance of New Albany graduates and supporters, put together an offer of \$31,000 towards an endowment,

say, when it must necessarily soon terminate in resolution, suppuration or mortification." Paige replied with mockery: "Horror! ourself the sole subject of a long article, and that by a Doctor of Divinity in his wrath! . . . We were born in Massachusetts, raised in Indiana and once resided in Ohio. But does he reproach us for having lived there? . . . Or does he mean that Ohio is so intensely abolitionist hat, to have once breathed its air, a man must become as fanatical and hostile to everything Southern as himself?" Monfort had spoken of Paige's editorial as "born of the viper. We greatly regret that Mr. Paige fell into a fit of puerile pugnacity." To which Paige replied: "And so do we, considering the object." Paige, "Odium Theologicum" St. Louis Presbyterian (June 24, 1858) 196.

¹²⁶Monfort's tone was resigned but hopeful in the PW 18.3, 5 (October 7, 21, 1858); Rice was confident that the northwest would finally get a seminary that would not bow to sectional jealousies, but would be faithful in building up the whole church. "Northwestern Theological Seminary" Presbyterian Expositor 1.12 (November 1858) 663.

together with land and seminary buildings worth \$35,000.¹²⁷ A director of the seminary (probably ruling elder Jesse L. Williams, an influential railroad man from Fort Wayne, Indiana, and a very active supporter of the seminary) published a comparative view of the fields of the various seminaries.

	Synods	Pbies	Ministers	Churches	Communicants	Candidates	Attendance
Princeton	6	38	793	751	87,929	169	181
Allegheny	4	20	333	541	49,943	80	129
Danville	6	30	330	515	25,391	61	47
Columbia	3	12	231	363	24,317	29	42
Union	2	8	197	310	24,847	32	17
North-Western	10	44	541	815	45,969	94	NA

Source: Presbyter 18.24 (Feb 24, 1859) 90. (Attendance numbers are from my own research).

Figure 8.1. Spheres of Influence of Old School Seminaries, 1858-1859

The director reminded his readers that “the revival blessing of 1858 also calls the Church, with adoring gratitude and self-sacrificing zeal, to enter upon this work. Think, for a moment, of her sons that have been gathered into the fold, and how many of them may set their face toward the ministry, and, it may be, even now, are waiting to enter this Seminary.” The hopeful future of foreign missions, the ever-spreading American population, and the painful fact of 250 vacant Presbyterian congregations in the northwest should persuade everyone of the need for this seminary.¹²⁸ But the pages of the Presbyter revealed that even MacMaster’s supporters were not entirely united. Some

¹²⁷“Location of the Seminary” from the Indianapolis Daily Journal, Presbyter 18.23 (Feb 17, 1859). Other leaders of the Indianapolis movement included ministers Holliday and David Stevenson, and elders Ray Sheets and McIntire of Indianapolis and Jesse L. Williams and Judge Hanna of Ft Wayne. The various offers are described in “General Assembly” CP 4.23 (June 4, 1859) 89.

¹²⁸A Director, “Theological Seminary of the North West” Presbyter 18.24 (Feb 24, 1859) 90. “Candidates” refers to those under care of presbyteries, and does not reflect seminary attendance. It includes many who were still in college.

preferred a location in Illinois—while others wondered if the checkered history of New Albany Seminary indicated that divine providence opposed any northwestern seminary.¹²⁹

With General Assembly only a month away, tempers began to fray. When Hill's Presbyterian Herald urged both sides to remember that they were brethren, Monfort's Presbyter (formerly called the Presbyterian of the West) reminded Hill that during the Cincinnati Theological Seminary skirmish, Hill had attacked Rice and defended New Albany, only to turn against it when Danville was founded. Monfort concluded that "Until the editor of the Herald has brought forth fruits meet for repentance, *we respectfully suggest to him that it would be well for him to hush.*"¹³⁰ Somewhat more amused than angered, Hill wondered whether this was "a specimen of Christian politeness such as is common in the circles in which our neighbor mingles, but if so, we hope he does not teach it to the young ladies under his charge [Monfort was president of the Glendale Female Seminary in Ohio]. They might be indicted as common scolds, should they imitate it." Hill could not resist pointing out that

When we were upholding New Albany Seminary, he, though a director of it, was turning the cold shoulder to it, mainly because of Dr. MacMaster's connection with it, and encouraging Dr. Rice, whom he now so bitterly opposes, to go on with an opposition school. He not only refused to vote for Dr. MacMaster for Professor, and tried hard to prevent us from doing so, but desired to publish an article against his acceptance, which Dr. Rice says he refused to publish. Having been for New Albany Seminary and against it, for Dr. MacMaster and against him, and now for him again, we respectfully suggest to our neighbor that he lives in a glass house, and ought not to throw stones at his neighbors for inconsistency.¹³¹

¹²⁹Presbyter (February-April, 1859).

¹³⁰"The Seminary War" Presbyter 18.30 (April 14, 1859).

¹³¹"The Presbyter and the Seminary War" PH 28.43 (April 21, 1859).

Hill had enjoyed the battles of his youth, but now as the most senior editor of the western papers, he urged his brethren to moderate their tone and listen to each other more carefully.

The hour for moderation, however, had passed. By May, when the General Assembly met in Indianapolis, Nathan Rice had announced that Cyrus McCormick was willing to give \$100,000 for the new seminary if it were in Chicago. And since McCormick's offer was strictly verbal, everyone understood that it depended upon the character of the seminary coinciding with McCormick's conservative views.

On the floor of the Assembly, David Stevenson (PTS 1851), pastor of Third Presbyterian in Indianapolis, laid forth the claims of Indianapolis—joined by Samuel R. Wilson (PTS 1840), formerly co-editor with Rice of the Presbyterian of the West and pastor of First Presbyterian in Cincinnati (where his father, Joshua L. Wilson, had been pastor). Ruling elder Ray Sheets of Indianapolis chimed in, gently suggesting that since Indianapolis had a number of donors, it would provide a broader foundation than the munificence of one man.¹³²

Dr. Rice replied in “a good humored speech of about an hour and a half,” reminding the Assembly that those who now advocated Indianapolis had previously preferred Chicago.¹³³ If they had failed to provide the finances for New Albany, how would that change by moving the seminary to Indianapolis? In a pointed reference to

¹³²“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 29.23 (June 4, 1859) 92.

¹³³“North West Theological Seminary” CP 4.30 (July 23, 1859) 117.

MacMaster's earlier debacle, "he advised his Indiana brethren to lend their energies to put South Hanover College on its feet. It (the College) had passed through troubles enough to kill any thing that wasn't Presbyterian (Merriment). But these good brethren have hung on to it, and kept it from dying." At this point elder Ray Sheets chimed in with a little theological humor of his own: "We believe in the perseverance of the saints." But in this speech Rice demonstrated that he had finally converted to the vision of Chicago as the center of the new West, and MacMaster and his allies were placed in the unenviable position of arguing for a location that was plainly second-best.

The Rev. David Stevenson, however, argued that placing the seminary in Chicago would give in to the wiles of one man. Voicing what many felt, he pointed out that Rice had first tried to unite Pittsburgh and New Albany seminaries in Cincinnati when he was a pastor in Cincinnati. Then he had argued in 1853 for a seminary in St. Louis, and had moved to St. Louis just before that year's Assembly. Now he argued for Chicago because he lived there. The only constant in Rice's convictions regarding the seminary seemed to be that "it must be where Dr. Rice is."¹³⁴ Rice's former colleague in Cincinnati, the Rev. Dr. Samuel R. Wilson thought Indianapolis a more central location. He, too, worried that the Chicago offer was based on one pledge alone. While he accepted McCormick's good faith, he preferred broader support to the deep pockets of one individual.¹³⁵

Others, however, like ruling elder John C. Grier of Peoria Presbytery, thought that Rice had demonstrated that Chicago's superiority. As the debate continued, the Rev. John

¹³⁴"General Assembly," Presbyterian 29.23 (June 4, 1859) 89.

¹³⁵"General Assembly," Presbyterian 29.23 (June 4, 1859) 89.

Marshall Lowrie (PTS 1843), pastor at Ft. Wayne, Indiana, called the whole matter a personal quarrel. Dr. MacMaster immediately interrupted: “A personal quarrel between whom?” “Between Dr. Rice and Dr. MacMaster,” Lowrie replied. MacMaster pressed further, “Does the brother mean to say that I have ever–*ever* been a party to any personal quarrel on this subject?” “Mr. Lowrie stated that he had a general impression that there was a quarrel between Dr. M. and Dr. R, on this subject, and he thought others had the same impression, but he knew nothing about it personally. When Mr. Lowrie sat down, a dozen men rose to speak,” but the Rev. David H. Cummins (WTS 1838), pastor at Mount Carmel, Tennessee, “obtained the floor, and moved the previous question.” The motion was sustained, and the vote was taken:

Indianapolis	71
Chicago	240
Non-liquet	2

Contrary to the claims of the supporters of Indianapolis, the northwest preferred Chicago. Among the eight northwestern synods who had previously had control of the seminary, the vote stood at 50-33 in favor of Chicago.¹³⁶ The details of the seminary’s organization were referred to the committee on seminaries, selected to represent the church as a whole—exclusive of the disputing parties in the northwest.¹³⁷

Predictably, MacMaster and Rice headed the list of nominations for the professorship of theology. In fact, all three surviving members of Rice’s Cincinnati

¹³⁶“North West Theological Seminary,” CP 4.30 (July 23, 1859) 117. The official vote was 253-71 (due to the practice of allowing absent members to record their votes, so long as the outcome was not altered).

¹³⁷“General Assembly” CP 4.23 (June 4, 1859) 90. (Only two of the thirteen men came from the northwestern synods).

Theological Seminary faculty were nominated for professorships at the Northwestern Seminary. The Presbyterian noted that lobbyists were even busier than usual in between sessions of the Assembly, urging their cases both for the location and the faculty of the seminary.¹³⁸

The day's business closed before the election, and the correspondent of the Central Presbyterian hurried off this perceptive note to his paper:

The truth is that underneath all this question of location, the main difficulty is in the personal relations of Drs. Rice and McMaster. There has been, as is well known, a painful controversy between these brethren, which has become complicated with this Seminary question to a lamentable extent. Parties have been formed as much in view of these personal relations, and from sympathies for or against the individuals concerned, as from any other cause. And unhappily, the decision of the Assembly on one side or the other, which may have no real or intended relation to this personal controversy will be regarded a triumph or a defeat of the one or other party.¹³⁹

Presbyterians found personal controversy distasteful (as MacMaster and Rice would have agreed). Parties formed around ideas or principles could be tolerated—but not ones focused around personalities.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 29.23 (June 4, 1859) 94.

¹³⁹“Editorial Correspondence” CP 4.23 (June 4, 1859) 90.

¹⁴⁰This anti-party mentality mirrored that of antebellum political culture. See Rogan Kersh, Dreams of a More Perfect Union (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

The following day, just before the election of professors, the Rev. Dr. Erasmus Darwin MacMaster moved to refer the election of professors to the following General Assembly (1860). MacMaster declared that:¹⁴¹

The various public and official relations in which I have been made to stand to this Seminary for the last few years, seemed to make it incumbent on me to represent the affair to the General Assembly, so that it should be fully understood. On the other hand, the personal relations I bear to the subject seemed to make it very difficult for me to do this without violating the proprieties and decencies of life.

For ten long years his footsteps had been followed with accusations to an extent and with a bitterness which he was sure was without a parallel in the history of any member of this church. To these he had never replied; but, being a very imperfect Christian, he did not claim this silence as due to Christian grace. . . .

From the time of the establishment of the Seminary, efforts had been made to injure it by allegations in regard to the opinions of the Professors on the subject of slavery. Specific charges were made by newspapers, and through other agencies, that Drs. McMaster and Thomas were endeavoring to form a thoroughly Abolition Seminary in the Northwest, with the view to educating men to become agitators on this subject--to train men to divide and destroy the church in the Northwest.

Dr. McM then went into a very long history of the action of the Synod of Missouri, in regard to this Seminary, and noticed in this connection certain charges made by the St. Louis Presbyterian, 'edited,' he said, 'by a person I prefer not to name.' . . .

He then read from articles written in September, 1853, in defence of the Seminary, extracts designed to show that upon the directors of the Danville Seminary, rested the charge of having excited this opposition.

It became apparent to the friends of New Albany that the Seminary could not be sustained without the support of additional Synods, and therefore the project of establishing the Seminary of the Northwest was drawn up in August, 1856 at New Albany, signed by the two Professors, and a number of the trustees, and sent to all the ministers of the eight Synods, and to many of the prominent laymen in them. . .

[Continuing into the night session, he] inveighed bitterly against what he termed the slave power in the church, and concluded by saying

¹⁴¹Note that the reporter frequently lapses into the third person. "General Assembly" CP 4.24 (June 11, 1859) 93. The reporter for the Presbyterian claimed that MacMaster read the speech. "General Assembly," Presbyterian 29.23 (June 4, 1859) 94.

that, if defeated now, he would go away reverencing the General Assembly, but he would meet them next year--he would meet them at Philippi--continuing to contend for the truth until the end. Here, upon his own free soil, he would fight.¹⁴²

MacMaster's speech lasted a full two and one half hours. The written report does not do justice to the impression that the speech left upon its hearers. The whole speech, including the last half hour, which contained his first public denunciation of the slave power, and his bitter challenge to the General Assembly, was met by silence. The Central Presbyterian noted that MacMaster's speech was

an outpouring of the concentrated wrath of five or ten years, in a form so intense, and acrid, that it astonished even those who had charged him with cherishing such feelings. . . . I will only say that his deadliest enemy, if he has such a one, could not have asked him to do more. It was simple ecclesiastical suicide, in its most aggravated form. . . . Before the speech great sympathy was felt for him by many, in view of his ability, age, &c., and a strong desire expressed to put him in the new faculty.¹⁴³

Discussions at the General Assembly suggested that MacMaster may have lost as many as one hundred votes through this speech. MacMaster had turned many against him through his clandestine operations in the past; now he sealed his fate through his open declaration of war on the Assembly.

When MacMaster finished, Nathan Lewis Rice rose and briefly outlined the proofs of "the charges against Dr. McMaster of a design to establish an institution for indoctrinating Abolitionism, and for sending out Abolition agitators." Dr. MacMaster's

¹⁴²The speech was later printed as The Presbyterian theological seminary of the north-west: speech in the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church, May 30th, 1859 (Cincinnati: Gazette Co. Steam Print, 1859), which compared with the above report appears to be a faithful transcription. Hodge later reviewed it in the Princeton Review, to which MacMaster replied in the Presbyter.

¹⁴³CP 4.25 (June 18, 1859) 98.

letters had suggested—and now his speech definitively proved that he wanted the North West Seminary to combat the slave power.¹⁴⁴ Without any further discussion, MacMaster’s motion was tabled, and the Assembly proceeded to the election of professors. Before MacMaster’s speech, pundits around the church had predicted that the election would be close. The final tally showed Rice with 214 votes, MacMaster with 45. The whole faculty was connected either to Rice or to Kentucky, which boded well for those who sought to prevent the division of the West—which in their minds would presage a division of the church—and of the nation.¹⁴⁵

The Journal of Commerce, a conservative political paper, applauded the Old School for its patient handling of MacMaster and the radicals: “This body of christians have learned to agree to differ in non-essentials, while in matters cardinal and essential they are one, and apparently indivisible.”¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, many political and religious papers had a field day with this speech. Southern papers used it to show that the Old School was allowing abolitionist agitation in the Assembly, while Northern papers reviled the Old School for failing to come to MacMaster’s defense—although some took hope that

¹⁴⁴“General Assembly” CP 4.24 (June 11, 1859) 93.

¹⁴⁵Willis Lord (1809-1888) was born in Connecticut, briefly attended PTS in 1833, and had previously served as a colleague of Rice’s at Cincinnati Seminary. He was called from the Second Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn. [Ecclesiastical History].

Leroy Jones Halsey (1812-1896) was born in Virginia, graduated from PTS in 1840, and was called from Chestnut Street Church in Louisville, Kentucky. [Pastoral Theology].

William McKendree Scott (1817-1861) was born in Ohio, graduated from PTS in 1846, and after serving as professor at Centre College, Kentucky, from 1847-54, and was called from Seventh Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati. [Biblical Literature].

¹⁴⁶“Old School General Assembly” from the Journal of Commerce, printed in the CP 4.24 (June 11, 1859) 93.

perhaps the 45 who voted for MacMaster demonstrated that abolitionist sentiment was growing in the Old School.

But no Old School paper was willing to defend MacMaster's speech. Even Monfort's Presbyter temporarily distanced itself from MacMaster. While sympathetic to MacMaster's aims, Monfort recognized ecclesiastical suicide when he saw it. Indeed, Monfort suggested that the result was not a complete disaster. Referring to McCormick's famous "hoop" statement, Monfort conjectured that

Mr. McCormick's hundred thousand dollars is a new hoop to keep the Union from falling to staves, as well as to raise up ministers in our Church. Nevertheless, as his offer has been made unconditionally to the GA, we may not travel out of the record for a motive. . . . The location is good, the donation is liberal, and the control is safe. . . . The necessity of patronage will forbid this to be a Northern Seminary with Southern principles. Indeed Dr Rice found it necessary to take high anti-slavery ground before the Assembly. He declared himself in favor of the action on slavery by the Assembly of 1818, to the letter, and he said he was opposed to the views of his pro-slavery brethren in the South. The Seminary at Chicago could not be maintained under any other colors.¹⁴⁷

The last portion of MacMaster's speech, in Monfort's opinion, contained several unwise and erroneous items. Indeed, he believed that the motive for the whole speech was selfish. Knowing that Rice would be elected to one professorship, MacMaster preferred to "make his speech, though he should lose every vote by so doing," which may have had the effect of preventing the election of other men who might have agreed with him. Further, MacMaster wrongly blamed the slave power for his overthrow, whereas the real opposition came from those troubled by his alleged abolitionism—a misunderstanding he did nothing to correct. After all, Southern men had been MacMaster's chief defenders

¹⁴⁷Presbyter 18.38 (June 9, 1859).

from the start. “There is no evidence that Southern men in our Church are in any sense responsible for the opposition made to Dr. MacMaster.” Indeed, Monfort suggested that a large majority of southern men were prepared to vote for MacMaster until his violent speech convinced them otherwise. Monfort assured his readers that MacMaster was not a “victim of his views on slavery--these, as he read them to the Assembly, have been widely published, and are confessedly consistent with the action of our Church--but because in a tone of defiance and threatening he claimed that the only question to be settled by the Assembly was, whether it shall sanction the usurpation and domination of this pro-slavery power in the Church.” The result was inevitable because MacMaster said that to vote against him was to vote for the slave power--and to vote for him was to vote against it. Few even of his supporters were willing to vote for him after that. Monfort lamented that “the Church is to be deprived of the labors of a man as Professor of Theology, who is eminently qualified, and who has been, and no doubt still is, in this region, preferred to any other for this service.”¹⁴⁸

Monfort’s willingness to criticize his decapitated head called forth a quick answer from “headquarters” (as Monfort put it). “Vindex,” writing with the sanction of MacMaster himself, defended his fallen chief in every respect. McCormick did not sign a legal contract until after Rice’s election. If Rice had not been elected, everyone knew that McCormick would have been free to withdraw his offer. It was, in short, a bribe--and what is more, a bribe that would give the slave power a controlling interest in the seminary. Further, everyone knew that the Assembly was trying to put both Rice and MacMaster on

¹⁴⁸“Dr MacMaster's Speech” Presbyter 18.39 (June 16, 1859).

the faculty, and for MacMaster, “it was infinitely more important to him to preserve his own integrity, to maintain his principles, and to perform his duty, than that he should be put into any place in that Seminary.” Finally, Vindex insisted that MacMaster’s tone was measured and calm—not defiant and threatening.¹⁴⁹

Monfort replied that if MacMaster had been concerned with the financial arrangements, he should have said so openly (here suggesting that even he had grown weary of MacMaster’s indirect methods). There was no southern conspiracy against MacMaster. He had sunk himself! Monfort concluded that MacMaster suffered from a “morbid state of mind” which contributed to his constant paranoia.¹⁵⁰

Still, Monfort refused to cooperate with the new seminary, and prophesied that “4/5 of the Synod of Cincinnati, 9/10 of Indiana, 2/3 of Northern Indiana and Iowa, 1/4 of Illinois and Chicago, and 1/10 of Wisconsin and Southern Iowa, will not support the Seminary at Chicago as now organized.” Rice’s persistent opposition to the seven synods had earned him their disdain, and his pro-slavery reputation was widespread. The rest of the faculty had little support in the northwest: Willis Lord was an associate with Rice at Cincinnati and waffled back and forth twice to Congregationalism; William M. Scott regularly opposed MacMaster and had recently voted against continuing the seminary at all; Leroy J. Halsey was less objectionable—except for the fact that he was on the

¹⁴⁹Vindex, “The Presbyterian on Dr MacMaster’s Speech” Presbyter 18.41 (June 30, 1859).

¹⁵⁰“Vindex” Presbyter 18.41 (June 30, 1859).

Rice/McCormick ticket. At that, Monfort lapsed into a stony silence on the seminary question for several months.¹⁵¹

In October Monfort broke his silence only long enough to report the synods' reception of the new seminary. His own Synod of Cincinnati agreed to disagree regarding seminary selection, and "pronounced our territory common ground from the Seminaries of the Assembly." Western and Danville both commanded greater support than Chicago, while Princeton remained popular as well (an opinion well supported by the fact that Miami University sent 21 students to Princeton from 1857-1866).¹⁵² The Synod of Indiana was the only synod that formally dissented from the formation of North West Theological Seminary and stated its preference for other seminaries, but Northern Indiana voted 28-13 to withdraw its exclusive attachment to the seminary. The Synod of Illinois recommended both Chicago and Danville to its churches 29-20 (with the 20 signing a protest against this), while the Synod of Southern Iowa seemed generally pleased with the new seminary and the Synods of Chicago and Wisconsin were overwhelmingly in favor of it. After all its complaining about being left out, the Synod of Missouri, he noted, took no action whatsoever.¹⁵³

Formal synodical action, however, was not the only response. R. S. (probably a ruling elder) reported that while the Synod of Southern Iowa took no action against the seminary, "hundreds of our laity [and the synod contained fewer than 3,000 communicant

¹⁵¹"The North-West Seminary" Presbyter 18.42 (July 7, 1859).

¹⁵²"Synod at Hillsborough" Presbyter 19.3 (Oct 6, 1859) 10.

¹⁵³Presbyter 19.7 (Nov 3, 1859).

members], and a goodly number of the ministry, believe the Assembly inflicted a grievous wrong” in its decision on the seminary. “Moreover, we believe that the Slave-Power is now exerting an influence upon our beloved church, which, if not checked, must be disastrous in the extreme.” Determined to join MacMaster in his stand against the encroaching evil, R. S. declared that “it is the birth-right of a Presbyterian to think for himself. Having these opinions, we dare maintain them.”¹⁵⁴

Elsewhere, the Central Presbyterian concurred with Monfort that many voted for MacMaster out of their respect for him and out of their indignation over Rice’s provocative course of action—not because of any abolition sympathies.¹⁵⁵ The Philadelphia Presbyterian commented that MacMaster’s speech “might readily have produced an explosion” even in less excitable bodies, but as one Indianapolis resident said, he “had never before seen so big a stone thrown into so large a body of water without making even a ripple upon its surface.” The editors hoped that the West would unite and put aside contention and strife.¹⁵⁶

Charles Hodge reviewed MacMaster’s speech that July, calling it a “manly avowal of opinions which he knew to be unpopular, and which he must have been aware would place him out of sympathy with the body which he addressed.”¹⁵⁷ Nonetheless, Hodge could not understand why MacMaster had destroyed his chances of election, when no one

¹⁵⁴R. S., “Synod of Southern Iowa” Presbyter 19.9 (Nov 17, 1859).

¹⁵⁵“North West Theological Seminary” CP 4.30 (July 23, 1859) 117; “Dr. MacMaster’s Speech” Presbyter 18.39 (June 16, 1859).

¹⁵⁶Cited in “The Assembly and the Seminary” Presbyter 18.40 (June 23, 1859).

¹⁵⁷Charles Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR 31.3 (July, 1859) 590.

called on him to speak—or why he engaged in personal controversy on the floor of the Assembly. But after examining MacMaster’s doctrine of slavery in the speech, Hodge declared that it made a strange distinction between slavery and slaveholding that made “all slaveholding, under all conceivable circumstances. . . a crime. There can, according to his definition, no more be justifiable slaveholding, than there can be justifiable murder.”

Hodge objected that MacMaster defined slavery as “a system which makes a man a chattel; a thing which denies to him the rights of a husband and father; which debars him from instruction and means of improvement.” But Hodge pointed out that in many nations slavery had not included these things. “Slavery. . . is nothing but involuntary servitude—that is, the obligation to render service not conditioned on the will of the servant.” Hodge insisted that unjust laws did not necessarily define slavery—otherwise the scripture would be guilty of condoning injustice.¹⁵⁸ The irony, for Hodge, was that by defining slavery according to the unjust laws of the South, MacMaster was attacking something that no Presbyterian defended. If slavery, by definition, denied men the rights of a husband and father, then no southern Presbyterian was pro-slavery, and if the south ever reformed its slave laws, then MacMaster would have no grounds to object to the continuation of slavery!¹⁵⁹

While MacMaster remained silent in the face of all other criticisms, Hodge’s response goaded him to speak. His reply to Hodge contained the most detailed public statement on slavery that he ever made. MacMaster insisted again that he had no personal

¹⁵⁸Charles Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR 31.3 (July, 1859) 591.

¹⁵⁹Charles Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR 31.3 (July, 1859) 592.

controversy with “the person you name” (he would resolutely refuse to name Nathan Rice). “Although it may have been your good fortune, that your controversies have been with gentlemen, yet you no doubt are aware, that there are some men with whom one chooses not too have a controversy of any kind whatever.” As to the matter of slavery, MacMaster insisted that any distinction between slavery and slaveholding is unsound. The “holding of slaves *as slaves*,” is always wrong. Distinguishing between slaves and bond-servants, MacMaster admitted that it may be necessary at times to hold slaves as bond-servants, but never as slaves. MacMaster objected that Paley was an unsafe guide in defining slavery as “nothing but involuntary servitude,” because neither Paley nor Hodge considered the actual definitions of slavery under law. Giving several state laws from the South, MacMaster insisted that slavery makes “the legal status of men to be that of *property*; that is, of *real estate*, or of *chattels*: which takes them out of the category of *persons*, having the personal character and rights which God has conferred on and made inseparable from humanity even in its lowest estate, and putting them into the category of *things*, having no rights.” He desired to reveal how the minions of the pro-slavery power were interfering with the Northwest—in spite of the fact that northerners scrupulously avoided any such interference in the South. “I admit that it is an ugly charge,” but since no other ground was given except his views on slavery, what other reason could exist?¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰EDM, “Reply to the Criticism of the Princeton Review on Dr MacM's Speech” Presbyter 18.51 (September 8, 1859). MacMaster had originally submitted it to the Princeton Review, but Hodge declined to publish it on the grounds that the Review was not the place for such exchanges. Monfort added an editorial note that complained that MacMaster was giving up the distinction between slavery and slaveholding—which Monfort still found essential. MacMaster’s failure to distinguish between “real estate” and “chattels” is somewhat strange for one who claimed to have thoroughly studied the southern slave codes.

With their champion disgraced, and divided over whether to support the Northwestern Seminary, it seemed that northwestern anti-slavery activism was finally defeated. But Monfort's prediction that Rice would be forced to emphasize his antislavery colors in Chicago soon came true. Since the political and religious papers in Chicago had immediately labeled him "proslavery," he set out to prove them wrong.¹⁶¹ That fall he published his lectures on slavery, taking very similar ground to MacMaster. After all, the real difference between the two had more to do with tone than with content. J. G. Monfort commented that he was "pleased with the main sentiments of these lectures. . . as adapted to do much good and but little harm."¹⁶²

Delighted New School papers quickly declared him an abolitionist and hoped to see counterblasts from Old School papers. The Presbyterian Herald dashed such fantasies. Hill commented that he disagreed with certain items in Rice's articles but insisted that wise and good men who have confidence in each other's piety and purity of intention "can agree to disagree."¹⁶³ Even throughout the tension-filled election year of 1860, the Old School press remained remarkably civil to one another (with the occasional exception of the Presbyter) even while disagreeing, because as Rice had put it, "sometimes we must endure certain evils, because the alternative is worse."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹Whitmarsh, "Dr. Rice on Slavery," Presbyter 19.19 (January 26, 1860).

¹⁶²"Dr Rice's Lectures on Slavery," Presbyter 19.27 (March 22, 1860) 106.

¹⁶³"Dr Rice on Slavery" PH 29.35 (March 1, 1860).

¹⁶⁴PH 29.37 (March 15, 1860).

Nonetheless, Rice's support in the Presbyterian Expositor for President Buchanan's attempt to open the territories to slavery called forth a patient rebuke from Monfort's pen: "The Seminary and the paper will stand we doubt not as monuments of [McCormick's] beneficence, and in the end do great good; but we have as little doubt that in the Seminary and in the paper his wishes and aims on the question of slavery and its relation to the church are doomed to disappointment. There is no amount of money devoted to religious foundations, and no amount of talent appertaining to teachers or editors placed upon them that can bring the Church in the North-West to yield a jot or tittle of principle or policy on the vexed question." Monfort was willing to wait—because he saw that in the end, the North-West was really on *his* side. All they had to do was patiently "resist the money power" and wait until the press and the seminary sounded the right note. "The Old School Presbyterian Church of the West and North-West will stand firm. She will help to save the Union by giving to the South all that the Constitution guarantees, and she will oppose slavery extension by all lawful means."¹⁶⁵ Anti-slavery Old Schoolers were not abolitionists—but they were determined free-soilers.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵"Presbyterian Expositor," Presbyter 19.17 (Jan 12, 1860).

¹⁶⁶While as late as 1855 the Presbyterian Banner had insisted that since the Constitution left slavery to the states, it refrain from agitating on slavery, [Editorial, "American Slavery," PB 4.1 (Sept 29, 1855)], by 1860 David McKinney had finally had enough of the southern proslavery rhetoric. When the Central Presbyterian declared that the church did not have the right to interfere with slavery because slavery was a civil relation, McKinney could not help but ask what they meant by "civil relation." He retorted that

if slavery is the carrying out of that law by the master--ruling his servant; giving him no right in nor control over his person, time, or the fruits of his toil; selling from him his children; into distant and perpetual bondage; denying him the sacredness of marriage; separating him from the woman whom he claims as his wife, by selling the one or the other to a far-off master; preventing him from learning to read, and so shutting him out from a perusal of God's Word and from all the joy and edification which comes from the glorious arts of writing and printing; and keeping him from worship, or restricting his

Conclusion

Both Rice and MacMaster desired to see slavery eradicated as quickly as possible from the United States. Both rejected abolitionism and agreed that slaveholding was not necessarily sinful. Both endorsed colonization. And both agreed that their understandings of slavery and the best means for its eradication were mutually exclusive.

If MacMaster's story is plainly a tragedy—as he systematically destroyed three colleges and a seminary, before ruining his own career—Rice's story is no less tragic. In 1861, after the outbreak of the Civil War, Rice resigned his pastorate, theological chair, and editorship, and took a call to the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City—a more congenial location for a reputed southern sympathizer.¹⁶⁷ More pragmatic

worship according to the master's whim and pleasure--if this is slavery, then we say again, the Church has a right to interfere with slavery. Not only has she the right, but she is bound to interfere with such iniquity and oppression.

The Central Presbyterian had objected that McKinney's view would turn "the Church into an umpire to decide on the expediency or legitimacy not only of slavery, but of all other civil institutions. It was bad enough when the *ecclesiastical* was subordinate to the *civil*. But it is downright Popery in its most objectionable form, when it is reversed as the *Banner* would reverse it, by giving the Church the right to interfere with a civil institution." But now McKinney replied that if "man by his institutions, should annul God's law," then it was incumbent upon the church to say something. McKinney, "What Does it Mean?" Presbyterian Banner 8.38 (June 9, 1860).

¹⁶⁷Rice's health was broken and his doctors assured him that the triple load would soon kill him. In 1869, Rice returned to Missouri to preside over Westminster College—the literary and theological institution of the independent Synod of Missouri (from 1870-1874 the only purely Old School church in the United States). When the Missouri Synod finally entered the Southern Presbyterian Church, he returned to the northern Assembly, spending his final years teaching theology at Danville Theological Seminary (1874-77). When Rice left Chicago, Cyrus McCormick sold his interest in both of the city's Democratic political papers, declined to continue supporting the Presbyterian Expositor, and spent most of the war living in New York, attending Fifth Avenue Church as well. A. H., "Letter from Illinois," Presbyterian 31.17 (April 27, 1861) 66. As for their friends and colleagues in Chicago, both Willis Lord and Charles Spring voted for the Spring Resolutions at the 1861 General Assembly. They were conservative Republicans, as were most of McCormick's friends, lawyers, and office employees (while McCormick did not apply a political test to his business relations, he did surround himself with Presbyterians (Hutchinson, II:25, 39). The Rev. Fielding N. Ewing, a close friend of McCormick's, appears to have been one of the few Democrats around McCormick, revealed by Ewing's support for Vallandigham (28).

than the strictly principled MacMaster, Rice sought to accomplish the impossible by means of the improbable. Perhaps in retrospect it looks absurd to suppose that intelligent men such as Rice and McCormick could have believed that a church, a seminary, and a weekly religious newspaper could have altered the political course of a whole region; but from the vantage point of 1859, the landscape looked very different. Many—Rice and McCormick included—had envisioned the likelihood of disunion and war, but these Old School Presbyterians were convinced that *if* God desired the Union to be preserved, then he would doubtless accomplish it through the spoken and written word—directed to the hearts of men and women throughout the northwest.

J. G. Monfort continued editing the Presbyter, and delighted in welcoming the Pittsburgh Presbyterian Banner and the Philadelphia Presbyterian Standard into the rolls of the Old School Republican newspapers in the early 1860s. He reveled in his newfound position as a leader of the majority party in the General Assemblies after the 1861 secession of the Southern synods, and rejoiced in the discomfiture of Rice and the old conservative bloc, that now found themselves scrambling to explain their position in the light of new political realities.

And Erasmus Darwin MacMaster? He remained in quiet seclusion for seven years, writing much (but publishing little).¹⁶⁸ He attempted to publish a religious monthly in 1862, but lack of subscribers prevented the first number from ever appearing. One cannot help but sympathize with MacMaster's frustration at the refusal of his church to deal with

¹⁶⁸One of the most significant exceptions was E. D. MacMaster, "The Princeton Review on the State of the Country," Presbyter 20.21 (February 14, 1861) 81.

the southerners' flagrant disregard for the church's traditional teaching on slavery. He could not imagine that he himself might have had anything to do with the demise of each school over which he presided. It must have been the slave power—personified in their puppet, Nathan Rice—which was forcing him into an ever smaller and smaller sphere of influence until his glorious vision for the northwest was smashed to pieces.

After the departure of the southerners in 1861, MacMasters supporters gained considerable political advantage in the General Assembly, and in 1866 the General Assembly restored Erasmus Darwin MacMaster to the chair that—in the eyes of many—should have been his from the start. Monfort was exultant: “his retirement from active service, under the circumstances, for more than seven years, was a festering wound in the heart of the Church of the North-West, to which his election. . . by a vote of 204 to 22 was an excellent oil.”¹⁶⁹ The seminary had been restored to the vision of the founders. But vision alone could not give life—or money. Within six months Erasmus Darwin MacMaster lay dead, and the “Republican” supporters of the North West Theological Seminary could only raise a pittance towards the maintenance of the Northwest Seminary.¹⁷⁰

Cyrus McCormick's reaper played an ironic role in the debacle. While McCormick's money enabled conservative Old School Presbyterians to maintain a

¹⁶⁹“Rev. Dr. E. D. MacMaster” Presbyter (December 19, 1866); cf. “Rev. Dr. E. D. MacMaster” Presbyter (June 20, 1866).

¹⁷⁰ After a long, ugly attempt by MacMaster's friends to wrest McCormick's money for MacMaster's purposes, the General Assembly returned the seminary to the control of Rice's old friends—just in time for the Old School/New School reunion of 1869. For the Seminary controversy, see also Hutchinson, II: chapters 6-7. Hutchinson notes that McCormick admired MacMaster's integrity and contributed towards MacMaster's monument at Xenia, Ohio. (II:217).

foothold in the northwest, his reaper was part of the very engine that drove the freesoil movement of the northwest. McCormick had recognized the importance of Chicago, as railroads and abolitionism relegated the once-central Ohio River to a cultural backwater. And while his incredible wealth gave him considerable power (of the first \$1.2 million donated to the Northwest Theological Seminary, over \$800,000 came from McCormick and his immediate family) McCormick did not, after all, get what he wanted: the seminary failed to keep the union together—and after the war his munificent gifts to Virginia's Union Seminary and Washington College (the latter during the presidency of Robert E. Lee—much to the chagrin of northern patriots) could not knit northern and southern Presbyterians back together again. In the end, neither the Old School Presbyterian Church nor the Democratic Party were strong enough hoops to hold together the barrel of the Union.

NINE

COVENANT AND CONVERSION: THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE CONTROVERSY

While it is tempting to move directly from the slavery debates to the Civil War, that would leave the impression that only slavery divided the church. In fact, the Old School coalition was fragmenting in more ways than one—and not all of the divisions fell into neat sectional patterns. The next two chapters will explore further constitutional developments in the 1850s.

Presbyterian government and discipline had originally been formulated under the parish system in Scotland where virtually every resident of the parish was a baptized member of the same church. Even after the American church had made several changes, the principles in the book did not always correspond to the practices of American Presbyterians. The conversionist piety of the nineteenth century had rendered certain traditional Presbyterian practices nearly obsolete. The proposed revisions to the Book of Discipline, offered to the 1858 General Assembly, suggest that Old School Presbyterians were wrestling with how to maintain a balance between their contemporary setting and their more covenantal heritage.

Presbyterians traditionally affirmed three marks of the church: the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline. Without discipline the church could not exist. Nonetheless, Presbyterians acknowledged that churches could be “more or less pure,” depending upon how well they maintained these three marks.¹ In the 1850s, many believed that Presbyterian discipline was less pure than it had been.

The 1857 General Assembly appointed a committee to revise the Book of Discipline. The immediate occasion arose from the Presbytery of Philadelphia’s concern over unclear procedures for ecclesiastical trials. Part of the problem, as articulated by Robert J. Breckinridge on the floor of the Assembly, was that in an appeal to the General Assembly, the whole 300 members sat as a court. Few cases could receive a truly thorough hearing. Indeed, Breckinridge argued that judicial cases at the Assembly were a farce. He feared that this rendered the Old School “practically a Church without discipline, and must change or be forsaken of God.”² He declared that he “would rather come blindfolded into the house take the first ten members he happens to touch, to try a case, than take the whole three hundred of you as at present. (Laughter).”³ Breckinridge argued that a body of three hundred was much too large to engage in significant debate, and urged the Assembly to move from presbyterial representation to synodical representation and to adopt a ratio system to keep the number of the Assembly set at one hundred. But even further,

¹Westminster Confession of Faith 25.4

²“General Assembly,” CP 2.25 (June 20, 1857) 97.

³“General Assembly” Presbyterian 27.24 (June 13, 1857) 94.

Breckinridge argued that a judicial commission would enable the church to provide thorough justice for all appeals. Breckinridge distinguished between a committee and a commission. A committee was designed “to examine and report,” while a commission’s task was “to examine and conclude.” The Presbyterian church already used commissions to conduct the work of missions, education, and publication (the boards), and Breckinridge argued that a judicial commission would enable the church to handle judicial appeals more effectively.⁴

In response to the debate, the Rev. Dr. William M. Scott (PTS 1846, and pastor of the Seventh Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati) moved to appoint a committee to revise the Book of Discipline. One of the most cautious voices in the ensuing discussion was that of a ruling elder, Judge William F. Allen of western New York. “His experience was unfavourable to changing codes. . . . It is sometimes better to bear the acknowledged evils of an old code than run the risk of greater ones.”⁵ Others, though, hoped that the entire Presbyterian system of trials could be conformed more closely to American jurisprudence. The Rev. Jaheel Woodbridge (PTS 1835 and pastor at Henderson, Kentucky) thought that

⁴Charles Hodge, “General Assembly,” BRPR 29.3 (July 1857) 491. Breckinridge had argued back in 1848 that the General Assembly did not “derive its power from the Presbyteries, nor is it limited to the exercise of powers named in the Constitution of the Church. It derives its power, and its very right to exist and act from God himself, and may, *the Bible alone considered*, do every act which any lawfully constituted Church court may do.” Therefore he approved of commissions as the best way to conduct judicial cases. RJB, “Some Thoughts on the Development of the PCUSA during the ten years which have elapsed since its Disruption in 1838,” SPR 2.3 (December, 1848) 337. Likewise, Stuart Robinson suggested in 1855, after some debate at the General Assembly, that the simplest procedure would be to reduce the size of the Assembly, but otherwise to appoint a commission. Echoing Breckinridge, he claimed that “no sane man, who had a just cause, but would prefer that any ten, of three hundred respectable gentlemen, should *try* his cause—rather than let the whole three hundred try it.” “The General Assembly of 1855,” Presbyterial Critic 1:8 (August, 1855) 348-349.

⁵Charles Hodge, “General Assembly,” BRPR 29.3 (July 1857) 492.

the civil “forms of criminal proceeding certainly seem to be far in advance of ours” and suggested that the church should follow suit.⁶ After further discussion, the Assembly voted 108-76 to appoint a committee to propose revisions to the Book of Discipline. The moderator, Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, appointed an honor roll of Presbyterian legal minds: the Rev. Drs. Thornwell, Breckinridge, Hodge, James Hoge, Alexander T. McGill, Elliott E. Swift, and Judges George Sharswood, William Allen, and Humphrey Leavitt.

The committee reported a year later, and its work appeared in the Old School newspapers in the summer of 1858. The initial comments of the editors generally approved. The Philadelphia Presbyterian called it a “vast improvement,” while the Central Presbyterian of Richmond declared the revision “judicious and wise,” and both thought that most of the revisions would please the church.⁷ The procedures for trials were indeed clarified, but in light of the sweeping changes proposed by the committee, these revisions were largely ignored.

At the Assembly of 1859 the committee, represented by its chairman, James Henley Thornwell, explained the most significant changes. The committee wanted to produce a shorter, more direct statement of Presbyterian discipline. Removing many statements of principle, the committee believed that the Book of Discipline should refrain from “preaching” or explaining the principles of discipline. “The doctrine upon which discipline is founded, and the motives with which it should be enforced, must all be

⁶Charles Hodge, “General Assembly,” BRPR 29.3 (July 1857) 493.

⁷Editorial, “Revised Book of Discipline,” Presbyterian 28.34 (August 21, 1858) 134; CP 3.35 (August 28, 1858) 138.

presupposed.”⁸ The new book would focus less on principles and more on statutes. It included significant changes in principle as well.

1) It redefined an offense worthy of discipline. The old book defined an offense as a belief or practice of a “church member” contrary to the Word of God “or which, if it be not in its own nature sinful, may tempt others to sin, or mar their spiritual edification.” The committee proposed a narrower definition: any belief or practice of a “professed believer” contrary to the Word of God as defined in the Confession and Catechisms. This would restrict discipline to communicant members and would further restrict discipline by excluding things that offended others without being sinful themselves.

2) As implied above, the revision proposed removing baptized non-communicant members from the discipline of the church. Thornwell argued that “it was no more illogical to exempt them from discipline, than to exclude them from the Lord's table.”⁹ He claimed that a church member only becomes subject to church discipline through a profession of faith. Since a profession of faith was required for admittance to the Lord's Supper, he argued that such profession should be required for discipline as well.¹⁰

3) The new book proposed allowing communicant members to renounce membership by stating that they no longer believed themselves converted. Such persons then could be dropped from the membership rolls without a trial. “This right to withdraw had been spoken of as opening a back door to the church. He did not care whether back

⁸J. H. Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” SPR 12.3 (October 1859) 376.

⁹“Book of Discipline,” CP 4.23 (June 4, 1859) 90.

¹⁰“General Assembly” Presbyterian 29.23 (June 4, 1859) 89.

door or front door, if persons got in improperly, it mattered little at which door they went out, so they certainly got them out.” Since Thornwell viewed the church as the assembly of the converted, it made no sense to make the unconverted remain. “It had been objected besides, that this right of withdrawal at pleasure made the church a voluntary society. He was surprised at such an objection. The glory of their church was that it was a voluntary society. God wanted no worshippers but voluntary worshippers.” Thornwell argued that no censure should be inflicted upon the spiritually dead. “He would have them bear in mind that the church did not punish--it did not bear the sword; its censures were designed as penitential--as a means of restoring an erring brother.” The unconverted were not brethren at all. “The proper way to deal with a member who wished to withdraw, was not to drive him out disgraced by censure, but simply to reduce him from the position of professed believer, to the condition of a non-professor--to the condition of the baptized children of the church-members over whom the church is watching--with whose errors it is bearing, and whom it is ever remembering in its prayers.”¹¹

4) The revision proposed allowing ecclesiastical inquests--allowing church courts to “demand and receive satisfactory explanations from any of its members concerning any matters of evil reports” without process.

5) It proposed allowing parties to the case to be called as witnesses (only those who denied the existence of God or a future state of rewards and punishments could not testify).

¹¹“Book of Discipline,” CP 4.23 (June 4, 1859) 90.

6) It proposed allowing the lower court to sit as a constituent part of the higher court during appeals.¹² Since appeals were not taken from one part of the church to another, but from a regional part to the whole, the lower court should logically not be excluded from deliberating and voting on appeals. This proposal was rooted in Thornwell's organic model of Presbyterian polity, which saw lower courts as integral parts of higher courts.¹³

The Assembly decided not to debate these points at length. The Rev. Dr. Edward P. Humphrey of Kentucky declared his opposition, insisting that as the present book had lasted for forty years, it would be good for another forty.¹⁴ He was especially troubled by the withdrawal of discipline from baptized children. He feared that this indicated a decreased interest in infant baptism and moved the Presbyterian church towards the Baptists. Nonetheless, he moved that the revised Book be published and sent to the presbyteries, so that they could send their comments to the next Assembly. The Assembly concurred.¹⁵ The ensuing constitutional debate revealed much about the divisions in the church.¹⁶

¹²"Book of Discipline," CP 4.23 (June 4, 1859) 90.

¹³"General Assembly" Presbyterian 29.23 (June 4, 1859) 89. As it turned out, at least two members of the committee, Charles Hodge and Alexander T. McGill, disagreed with Thornwell on the question of the status of baptized children, and the practice of letting the lower court sit with the higher court in judgment on an appeal. The practice of submitting minority reports, however, was not very common.

¹⁴"Book of Discipline," CP 4.23 (June 4, 1859) 90.

¹⁵"General Assembly" Presbyterian 29.23 (June 4, 1859) 89.

¹⁶After several months of unremitting criticism in the church newspapers, Thornwell commented that "The contrast between the courtesy with which the members of the Committee, personally considered, have been treated, and the freedom with which their production has been handled, may be taken as an apt illustration of the genius of Presbyterianism, which teaches charity to the man without concessions to his

1. The Status of Baptized Children

The change that called forth the most opposition was the proposal to move baptized children outside of the discipline of the church.¹⁷ The initial notices tended to be generally agreeable. The editors of the Central Presbyterian noted that the revision would subject only communicant members to judicial proceedings. Since they had never heard of a case where judicial proceedings were instituted against a baptized non-communicant, they didn't consider it much of a change. It would be useless "to excommunicate one who has never communicated and who has no desire to communicate." The Richmond Herald, the Virginia Baptist newspaper, claimed that this was "a manifest departure from Presbyterian Pedit-baptism of the Old School," but the Central Presbyterian rejected this claim. Baptized persons were still church members—only not subject to judicial process. The editors did object, however, to the removal of all discipline from baptized youth. They argued that discipline was a far broader term than mere judicial process, and since baptized children were disciples, they were properly under the discipline of the church, in this broader sense. But in the end, they regarded this revision as simply bringing the book

errors." J. H. Thornwell, "Revised Book of Discipline," SPR 12.3 (October 1859) 373.

¹⁷A survey of southern sacramental debates can be found in E. Brooks Holifield, The Gentleman Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978) chapter seven.

into conformity with Presbyterian practice.¹⁸ Indeed, in 1853, the Synod of Pittsburgh had declared that baptized children were not properly the subjects of church discipline.¹⁹

J. E. L. argued in the Presbyterian that forbidding discipline practically denied that baptized infants were in fact “members of the household of faith.”²⁰ Many feared that the change would move the church towards a more Baptist conception of church membership. In confirmation of this the Presbyterian cited an Irish Episcopal minister who had once said that “There are but two places in the whole universe of God from which infants are excluded. The one is hell; and the other is the Baptist Church.”²¹

The Home and Foreign Record reprinted an excerpt from the Rev. Joshua H. McIlvaine’s Princeton Review warning that such baptistic views of the relation of children to the church “was deeply embedded. . . in the principles of the Puritans.” The author insisted that children should be treated as though they were “presumably of the elect,” being trained under the teaching and discipline of the church. He objected to the tendency in Presbyterian churches to speak of children “joining the church” when they came for their first communion, noting that revivalism and other “spasmodic efforts” had been

¹⁸“The Committee's Report,” CP 3.36 (September 4, 1858) 142. It is interesting to note how often Pittsburgh and South Carolina concurred, in spite of their radical difference on slavery.

¹⁹Presbyterian Advocate 16.19 (February 22, 1854); cf. Presbyterian Advocate 16.5 (November 23, 1853). While young children were often left at home during worship services, one Virginian complained that parents were leaving their eight to fourteen year old children home in order to take care of their younger siblings. Whatever might be done with the younger ones, by the time children reached the age of eight, it was expected that they would at least come to worship. “Children Absent from the House of God,” W&O 7.12 (Oct 30, 1851).

²⁰J. E. L., “Revised Book of Discipline,” Presbyterian 28.38 (September 18, 1858) 149.

²¹Presbyterian 28.40 (October 2, 1858) 158.

relied upon rather than “religious education and discipline, the Divine ordinance to which the promise of regeneration and salvation for the children of believers” was attached.²²

Concerned that such views were growing in the Presbyterian Church, an anonymous author in the Southern Presbyterian Review set forth the case that all baptized members should be subject to the discipline of the church. Failure to profess faith could be grounds for discipline at a certain point. He disagreed sharply with Thornwell that “voluntary assent” was necessary for discipline. Presbyterians had historically rejected the idea that the church was a “voluntary society.” Further, the emphasis on personal profession destroyed the Reformed doctrine of infant baptism. “If the act of the parents in bringing the child under the covenant of baptism cannot properly place him under church jurisdiction, except it be confirmed by the child's own assent, why should they perform it in his infancy at all? Let the baptismal covenant be *something*, or *nothing*.” Thornwell’s proposal gave away too much to the Independents and Baptists. Rejecting the voluntary principle, he insisted that “God has not given to any human soul the right to choose whether he will belong to His visible kingdom or not.”²³

In reply, Thornwell insisted that he was not challenging the doctrine of infant baptism—he agreed that all baptized persons were “bona fide members of the Church.”²⁴

²²[Joshua H. McIlvaine], “Covenant Education” Home and Foreign Record 12.4 (April 1861) 105-6. The full essay was, “Covenant Education,” BRPR 33.2 (April, 1861). McIlvaine (PTS 1841), who had been ordained in the New School, brought the First Presbyterian Church of Rochester into the Old School in 1853. From 1860-1870 he was professor of Belles Lettres at the College of New Jersey.

²³Anonymous, “The Changes Proposed in our Book of Discipline” SPR 12.1 (April, 1859) 49-50. He also pointed out that the Form of Government (15.4) allowed all baptized persons in who submit to the discipline of the church and contribute to it, to vote for pastor. The proposed revision would render the Form of Government meaningless.

²⁴J. H. Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” SPR 12.3 (October 1859) 398.

But just as baptized children were excluded from the “privilege of the Lord’s Table,” he argued that they should also be excluded from the “the disability of judicial discipline”? Both, he claimed, were determined by profession of faith: “To those who profess no faith in Christ it is as unmeaning and absurd to dispense the spiritual censures of the Church, as it would be to tie a dead man to the whipping post and chastise him with rods.” For Thornwell, profession of faith included a claim to be converted: “The possession or non-possession of faith divides the Church into two classes so widely apart, that it is simply ridiculous to think of treating them in the same way.” The church seeks the conversion of baptized children, who should be considered dead in their sins. The converted are “already alive, and are to be dealt with as living men,” whereas baptized children are “dead, and the whole scope of spiritual effort is to bring them to Him who can quicken the dead. Discipline is for the living and not for the dead.”²⁵ Indeed, Thornwell argued that his opponents erred in seeing discipline as “a punishment for the offender.” Rather, Thornwell insisted that “There are no punishments in the Church of God, it is founded upon a dispensation of grace and not of law.” Indeed, “When men show by their contumacy that they were not sons, they are then cut off from the Church, on the very ground that they are incapable of discipline.”²⁶ Excommunication, for Thornwell, was not really discipline at all, but the declaration that discipline had failed.

Thornwell particularly objected to the idea that baptized members could be disciplined for failing to profess faith. Citing the Directory for Worship, he agreed that

²⁵Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” 400.

²⁶Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” 401.

“when they come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord’s body, they ought to be informed, it is their duty and their privilege to come to the Lord’s Supper”²⁷ Thornwell stood within the historic Presbyterian mainstream when he claimed that baptized children should not be disciplined for lack of profession and declared that the church should not “revoke their privileges, but bear with them as patiently as her Master;” but he departed from the traditional view because he failed to see that the Directory did not require a profession of conversion. Indeed, the Directory did not even require a public profession, but only that they be “free from scandal, appear sober and steady and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord’s body.” But for many on both sides of the debate this requirement had long been overlooked.²⁸

A. Profession and Discipline: the Edwardsean Background

Thornwell’s proposal grew out of a gradual alteration of Presbyterian sacramental theology and practice. For over a generation, Presbyterians had been diverging from the formal requirements of their Directory for Worship. Presbyterians had traditionally taught that baptism gave “an interest in and a right unto” the Lord’s Table, which right could be exercised by faith. At baptism the infant entered into covenant with God and with the church. Therefore all baptized persons were members of the church. Admission to the Lord’s Table did not change the person’s relation to the church, but was merely the proper

²⁷Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” 401-402, citing “Directory for Worship” 9.1 (1839).

²⁸Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” 405.

response of the one who had been baptized into Christ.²⁹ This approach had grown out of the parish system in the established church of Scotland, where virtually every member of the community was also a member of the church. Prior to the advent of revivalism in Scotland in the eighteenth century, it was common to have 75-80 per cent of the adult population of the parish partake during communion.³⁰ Revivalism would gradually alter Scottish practice in some places, but its effect in America was quicker and more comprehensive due to the voluntary nature of the church.

All changes in practice have effects on the theology of the church. The emphasis on conversion as a prerequisite for both the Lord's Table and the baptism of one's children led to a corresponding decrease of attention to the nurture of baptized children.³¹ By 1841, "L" was concerned that many Presbyterians did not consider baptized children to be true members. "There are no empty forms in the institutions of our holy religion; there is a living, practical import in every ordinance. But where is the efficiency? where the great utility of this covenant relation, when parents and pastors and church sessions, for the most

²⁹For more on traditional Reformed and Presbyterian sacramental theology and practice, see Hughes Oliphant Old, The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); E. Brooks Holifield, The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Lewis Bevens Schenk, The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940).

³⁰John Macpherson, "The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology" in Anthology of Presbyterian and Reformed Literature Vol. V, edited by Christopher Coldwell (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1992). For a brilliant study of the development of Presbyterian discipline in Scotland, see Michael F. Graham, The Uses of Reform: 'Godly Discipline' and Popular Behavior in Scotland and Beyond (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996).

³¹Glenn A. Hewitt has provided a study of some of the theological paradigms in the controversy. Glenn A. Hewitt, Regeneration and Morality: A Study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin, and Horace Bushnell (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991).

part, treat it as a mere name, a theoretic not a practical relation?” Urging the church to take its covenant obligations more seriously, he urged the church to consider baptized children as “indeed ‘baptized into Christ.’”³²

Throughout the 1840s discussion had continued as to the nature and import of baptism. The Charleston Observer reflected the New England influence in a debate between “Justice” and “Discipulus.” Discipulus insisted that “The seed of unbelievers are not regarded as fit subjects for the ordinance of baptism”; therefore only the children of communicant members should be baptized.³³ Justice, however, pointed out that this was not the historic Reformed practice. Citing Samuel Rutherford and Theodore Beza, he argued that all who professed the true religion should have their children baptized—and a professor was “one who having been baptized and thus incorporated into the visible Church, makes an outward profession of his faith by a continued attendance upon public worship.”³⁴ If baptized persons were truly members of the church, then because they were a part of the covenant community, their children should also be baptized. Both sides acknowledged that baptism was a sign of the covenant, but for those influenced by New England theology, the covenant was mediated directly through the parent’s individual

³²L, “Baptized Non-Professors” Presbyterian (August 14, 1841) 130. The Synod of Virginia addressed these concerns in their “Pastoral Letter Of the Synod of Virginia on the Baptism and Instruction of the Children of Church Members,” Watchman of the South 8.11 (Oct 31, 1844) 41.

³³Discipulus, “The Proper Subjects of Infant Baptism,” CO 15.7 (February 13, 1841) 27.

³⁴Justice, “The Children of Baptized Parents the Proper Subjects for Baptism,” CO 15.11 (March 13, 1841) 43. Justice noted that Beza had urged that even the children of the excommunicated should be baptized in hope of their repentance. This was part of Beza’s argument for the validity of Roman Catholic baptism: “Popery is an erring of the Christian Church. Wherefore the Lord hath in the midst of that gulf of Papistry preserved baptism, that is, the first entering into the Church.” Justice cites Beza’s “Epistle 10,” Works (London, 1574) 623.

faith, while for traditional Presbyterians, the covenant had a more corporate aspect, and thus they could accept a more general profession of faith.

In 1847, Horace Bushnell published Discourses on Christian Nurture, a pamphlet that caused no small stir in New England for its attack on the premises of revivalism. Charles Hodge responded by suggesting that while Bushnell's views might be "strange" and "distorted" in certain respects, his "organic" treatment of the relationship of the child to the church had a downright "'Old school' cast."³⁵ While disagreeing with Bushnell's naturalistic mode of expression, he agreed entirely with the basic thrust of Bushnell's argument, endorsing "a confident expectation, in the use of the appointed means, that the children of believers will become truly the children of God."³⁶ While appreciative of the effects of revivals, Hodge objected that under the revival model, many "seem to regard this alternation of decline and revival as the normal condition of the church," forgetting the regular means of grace.³⁷

But by the 1850s the Edwardseans had the upper hand in the Presbyterian church. In 1852 one author set forth the Edwardsean position, attempting to defend its usage in the context of the Presbyterian constitution. He started with the traditional argument that since circumcision brought persons into the covenant in the Old Testament, so also baptism must be seen as bringing persons truly into covenant in the New Testament. And if they

³⁵Charles Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," BRPR 19.4 (October 1847) 501.

³⁶Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," 503. It is not accurate to say that Hodge initially approved of Bushnell's work, and then later came to question it. Hodge states serious objections both at the beginning and the end of his review, stating only that he approves of Bushnell's goal, not his naturalistic explanations.

³⁷Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," 518.

are members of the visible church, then their children should be baptized. “We are to regard all baptized children as members of the church” and therefore also the proper subjects of church discipline. And since professing Christ is a duty of all church members, he argued that those who failed to profess faith should be subject to discipline. “If the Presbyterian practice were as good as Presbyterian theory, then all baptized persons, by the time they become parents, would stand either as regular communicants of the church or as suspended members of the church. Such as refused to come forward and confess Christ before men would be suspended for their neglect of duty.” The fact that the church had failed to suspend them, however, was only a legal failing. Practically speaking, they were treated as though they had been suspended by all Presbyterian sessions. Therefore, he argued, “I would proceed upon the warrant of *the common law*, with such ungodly and disorderly baptized persons, and refuse baptism to their children.” The common practice of the church, therefore, could in the eyes of some, provide sufficient grounds for ignoring the direction of the constitution. As he concluded, “Unless they have such faith, as in our honest judgement would entitle them to come to the Lord's Supper, they have no right to come, with their offspring, to the other Sacrament.”³⁸

Another Virginian agreed that only the children of the “professedly pious” should be baptized. He argued that “to render the dedication of a child to God by baptism an

³⁸Hortor, “Familiar Letters--No. 7,” W&O 8.22 (January 13, 1852); Points to Minutes of 1816 p618 and to Ashbel Green's 69th lecture on the Shorter Catechism. This constitutional claim to the importance of precedence was rejected by R. J. Breckinridge, who argued that Presbyterian law was rooted in Scotch and Roman law—not English or American law. Scottish courts, he claimed, did not decide cases *en thesi*, but always required an actual case. Precedent, therefore, while useful, was not binding on the courts of the church. The constitution remained the authority, regardless of the practice of the church. Charles Hodge, “General Assembly,” BRPR 29.3 (July 1857) 491.

acceptable offering, the baptism must be connected with faith, on the part of the parent or parents who make the offering.” Claiming that the “custom of baptizing the children of all who desire it, has grown out of the unscriptural idea that there is inherent benefit in the ordinance itself,” he argued that infant baptism relied upon the personal faith of the parent and therefore could not be given to the children of those who lacked such personal faith.³⁹

In the fall of 1856, George D. Armstrong and “Old School,” spent more than seven months wrestling with the issue of excommunicating baptized children. The occasion for the discussion was the Dutch Reformed reprinting of Dr. John B. Romeyn’s 1812 report urging the church to cut off baptized children who failed to profess faith by a certain time. Armstrong argued that Presbyterian practice uniformly opposed this. He argued that while baptized children were subject to “discipline,” this did not include judicial discipline. Armstrong argued that the practice of the Presbyterian church was the proper interpreter of its law: “It is a general rule that the interpretation of any law which is sanctioned by uniform practice under that law, must be received as the true interpretation until set aside by competent authority.” And the practice of the Presbyterian church was clear: baptized children were never excommunicated.⁴⁰ Indeed, Armstrong argued that baptized children cannot be removed from the “communion” of the church because they have never been received into communion in the first place.⁴¹ Baptized non-communicants have no “vital

³⁹Silvanus, “The Children of Believers Only, Proper Subjects of Baptism,” CP 1.28 (July 12, 1856).

⁴⁰GDA [George D. Armstrong], “The Relation of the Church to her baptized children No 1,” CP 5.39 (September 29, 1856) 153.

⁴¹GDA, “The Relation of the Church to her baptized children No 2,” CP 5.40 (October 6, 1856) 157.

union with Christ,” and so they are shut out from the table. Armstrong took a literal definition of the word and argued that excommunication cut one off from the communion of the church.⁴²

“Old School” replied by objecting that Armstrong was asking the church to trade in her principles just because her practice has not conformed to her standards. “Our standards teach that the children of the church are *members of the church*, and yet it is notorious that the ‘uniform practice’ of the church is *not* to treat them as members.” Citing Samuel Miller’s complaints in the 1820s as evidence of degeneration in America, “Old School” pointed out that historically the Scottish and colonial American churches had treated children as proper subjects of discipline.⁴³

Further, Old School argued that scripture and church order defined excommunication more broadly than just being cut off from the “communion of the church.” Rather, it cut one off from the church itself. He took four weeks to trace the exegetical and historical understanding of excommunication, demonstrating that “the term ‘excommunicated’ is equivalent to ‘being destroyed from among the people,’ and the former expression is used instead of the latter because it is shorter and more convenient.”

⁴²GDA, “The Relation of the Church to her baptized children No 3,” CP 5.41 (October 13, 1856) 161.

⁴³Old School, “The Relation of Baptized Children to the Church--No 1,” CP 5.41 (October 13, 1856) 165. He cites the Scottish authority, Pardovan, as saying that males at 14 and females at 12 could be the proper subjects of judicial discipline, and pointed out that the 1798 General Assembly affirmed the principle that baptized persons were in fact subject to discipline.

Since baptized children formed part of the visible church, they were, by definition, subject to the penalty of excommunication if they refused to “hear the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴⁴

Armstrong replied by citing Thornwell: “The baptized non-professor is actually in the very position in relation to the sacraments and communion of the church, in which excommunication put the professing offender. The key is turned and both are shut out from the inner sanctuary.”⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Armstrong also agreed with Hodge’s presumption of election—that the church baptizes a person because “we presume he is one of the elect.”⁴⁶

In their lengthy debate over the meaning of excommunication and whether baptized non-communicants could suffer it, both assumed that if discipline were applied to non-communicants, then it would require the church to excommunicate those who failed to profess faith.⁴⁷ This reflects the degree to which Edwardsean principles had gained a foothold in the Old School. As covenant theology became more and more identified with individual conversion, the idea of an adult non-communicant member was becoming increasingly difficult to hold together with the idea that all baptized persons were full members. The Thornwellians, therefore, reduced baptized non-communicants to nominal

⁴⁴Old School, “The Relation of Baptized Children to the Church--No 2-5,” CP 5.42-26 (October 20-November 17, 1856) 169, 173, 177, 181. Quote from p177.

⁴⁵GDA, “The Relation of the church to her baptized children No 4 (in reply to Old School’s No’s 1 and 2),” CP 5.48 (December 1, 1856) 189.

⁴⁶GDA, “The Relation of the church to her baptized children No 5,” CP 5.49 (December 8, 1856) 193.

⁴⁷The debate continued almost weekly until May 4, 1857.

members, while their opponents sought to eliminate the category of adult non-communicants altogether.

Only a few recognized the false dichotomy. The Rev. J. G. Shepperson was one. He published a defense of the traditional Presbyterian view in the Southern Presbyterian Review in 1853.⁴⁸ The editors (who included Thornwell), noted that they preferred the Edwardsean view, but would allow Shepperson to present his case. Shepperson argued that “A Christian profession does not consist, either wholly or in part, in a declaration that he who makes it either is, or believes himself to be, a regenerate person.” Shepperson rejected the claim that “the Church is to consist solely of regenerate persons,” and fretted that Thornwell and others claimed that members could dissolve their connection with the church simply by claiming to be unconverted.⁴⁹ He pointed to both the Old and New Testaments, where professions of faith made no claims to regeneration or conversion but simply declared belief in “the Lord Jesus.”⁵⁰

Therefore, Shepperson argued, “The Church is the visible kingdom of God, distinguished from every other society by this important circumstance, that all her members, and no others, are bound by a solemn and public covenant to the evangelical service of Jehovah.” Through baptism, each member is obligated to keep covenant with God: “As it is by baptism one is made a member of the Church, it is , of course, by that

⁴⁸Rev. J. G. Shepperson, “On the Nature and Importance of a Christian Profession, and its Connexion with Membership in the Visible Church,” SPR 6.4 (April, 1853) 484-507.

⁴⁹Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 490.

⁵⁰Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 490-491. R. J. Breckinridge made a similar argument at least on this point in , “The Nature and Import of a Christian Profession,” Danville Quarterly Review 1.2 (June, 1861) 230-247.

ordinance he is brought into this covenant. And a Christian profession is simply a cordial and open acknowledgement of the obligation which the covenant imposes.”⁵¹ Shepperson rejected the evangelical emphasis on personal experience, and emphasized the objective reality of the sacraments. Whether infant or adult, baptism “is the same, and its symbolical meaning the same; moreover, it seals the same promises, and imposes the same obligation.”⁵²

Likewise, Shepperson argued that very young children could make valid profession of faith: “it cannot be consistently maintained concerning any human being, that he is too young to become a communicant, unless it is maintained that he is likewise too young to become an evangelical believer; and that the command to believe has, as yet, no application to his case.”⁵³ In reply to those who claimed that children were “not competent to transact serious business,” Shepperson argued that “a child is capable of deciding, which is preferable, the service of Christ, or the service of Satan.” Indeed, he argued that it was “*in the Church* we enjoy those means which the Saviour has appointed for *confirming the souls of the disciples*; hence the more pressing the danger, the more urgent the necessity for such a connexion.”⁵⁴ Therefore the only proper ground of excommunication was when someone explicitly, by word or deed, “renounced the baptismal covenant. . . his

⁵¹Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 494.

⁵²Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 500.

⁵³Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 504.

⁵⁴Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 504.

allegiance to the Lord Jesus.”⁵⁵ While Thornwell might wish to allow a member to withdraw, Shepperson argued that withdrawal from the church was nothing less than excommunication—and excommunication required an “explicit avowal” that the offender was an apostate—an enemy of Christ.⁵⁶

B. The Creation of a New Ritual: Public Profession

But as Presbyterians gradually adopted the New England practice of requiring a personal profession of conversion, they also began adopting the Congregationalist ritual of public profession as well. The Presbyterian Form of Government stated that the session had the power to receive members. Traditionally this had been done by examination. The only public ritual that accompanied the admission of a person to the Lord’s Table was the Lord’s Supper itself. Gradually, however, Presbyterians began to imitate the rite of public profession found in the New England Congregational churches. Predictably, the New School took the lead, but even they were cautious. In 1865, the New School General Assembly declared that new members were received by the vote of the session, and except in the case of new converts who needed to be baptized, no further rite was required. Nonetheless, they permitted sessions to “prescribe a public profession of faith before the whole church as a convenient usage, and for this purpose may employ a church confession and covenant.” But they insisted that these public professions were entirely optional and must never be presented as though this were the real entrance into church membership.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 505.

⁵⁶Shepperson, “Christian Profession,” 506.

⁵⁷Moore, Digest 129.

The reunited General Assembly of 1872 added that if a session chose to have a public profession for covenant youth it must show a clear distinction from that used for public professions associated with adult baptisms.⁵⁸ The Presbyterian church, though influenced by congregational forms, was still intent on keeping the sacrament of baptism distinct from its new rites of public profession.

But these official developments simply reflected the growing practice of the church. Numerous churches were creating a new ritual in Presbyterian worship—the public profession of faith. But these changes did not come without objections. In 1847 Samuel Miller declared that the practice of receiving members by public profession was “not a child of Presbyterianism, but wholly inconsistent with it, and the real offspring of Congregationalism. . . . The church with us is regulated by the *Session*, made up of *representatives* of the church members.” Miller went on to insist that “Our fathers of the Church of Scotland know nothing of the public parade in the middle aisle now so common.”⁵⁹

Several presbyteries also weighed in on the issue. In 1855 the Presbytery of Elizabethtown in New Jersey wrote a letter to all sessions throughout the Old School, urging them to return to the Presbyterian practice of receiving communicants directly by the session, “without receiving publicly on consenting to a confession read to them.”⁶⁰ In 1856 the Presbytery of Cincinnati received a complaint regarding the practice of the

⁵⁸Moore, Digest 671-678.

⁵⁹“Dr. Samuel Miller to the Rev. Smith Sturges,” June 21, 1847, quoted in Samuel Miller, Jr., The Life of Samuel Miller, D.D., LL.D. (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1869) II, 485.

⁶⁰St Louis Presbyterian 11.45 (May 10, 1855).

Seventh Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati which had permitted the public profession of baptized persons at the same time as the baptism of new converts. One observer commented, “in coming to the ordinance of the Lord's supper for the first time nothing is required of them in the constitution of the church, but simply, ‘that they shall be examined as to their knowledge and piety.’ That is all.” Indeed, he suggested that anything more communicates the wrong message. He feared that this would “necessarily lead to error in doctrine as well as disorder in practice.”⁶¹ New rituals invariably led to new theology. By introducing the innovation of public profession, Old School Presbyterians were functionally creating a new sacrament.

In 1862 “A True Presbyterian” objected that many Kentucky churches had begun to “ask the member or members received, to stand up in the aisle or pew, and give their assent to certain articles, and make pledges in regard to their future conduct, and avow their sense of the fearful responsibility connected with a public profession of religion.” He argued that this approach placed the focus on the new communicant himself rather than Christ. The session should call him to fix his eyes on Christ as the source of his hope, and not point him to his own profession. Further, it “conveys the impression that the person thus assenting is then and thus introduced into the Church. Whereas, according to the theory of the Presbyterian Church, such an one was ‘engrafted into Christ,’ and partook of the benefits, (to some extent) of the New Covenant, and became members of the visible Church, when baptized.” In addition, he said that such public professions created a new

⁶¹Observer, “Unconstitutional Practice in the Church,” PW 16.1 (September 25, 1856).

catechism for the church, ignoring the church's catechisms.⁶² The editor, Stuart Robinson, concurred that the practice was foreign to Presbyterian doctrine. He pointed out that the Synod of Kentucky had "formally censured the use of the abbreviated creeds framed by pastors for such purpose" many years before.⁶³

C. The Decline of Infant Baptism?

In 1857 Charles Hodge suggested that a careful analysis of Presbyterian baptismal statistics over the past fifty years indicated that the Old School was seeing a significant decline in the practice of infant baptism. At first glance, Hodge's statistics seemed startling to most. While the birthrate had dropped considerably in the nineteenth century, that was inadequate to explain the fourfold decline in infant baptisms. But traditional Presbyterian baptismal practices had changed considerably since 1800.

⁶²A True Presbyterian, "Mode of Admitting Baptized Persons to the Lord's Supper," True Presbyterian (June 12, 1862).

⁶³Editorial, "Mode of Admitting Baptized Persons to the Lord's Supper," True Presbyterian (June 12, 1862).

other Churches, assured that the labour of an examination will be fully repaid.

TABLE No. 1.*

The proportion existing between the number of members and the children baptized in the Presbyterian Church, for the last fifty years, excepting 1813, 1822, 1823, and 1835:

Year.	Adult baptisms.	Members.	Members to each baptism.	Baptisms per 1000 members.	Infants baptized.
1807,	170	17,871	6.3	158	2,834
1808,	330	21,270	5.1	195	4,142
1809,	711	25,208	5.3	189	4,782
1810,	503	28,901	5.9	167	4,835
1811,	461	23,639	5.1	198	4,677
1812,	507	37,699	6.4	151	5,909
1814,	617	37,767	6.6	151	5,693
1815,	745	39,685	7.1	142	5,621
1816,	667	37,208	7.1	141	5,263
1817,	1,317	47,568	7.8	129	6,128
1818,	1,295	52,822	7.3	136	7,189
1819,	1,489	63,997	7.7	131	8,352
1820,	1,611	72,096	8.2	122	8,792
1821,	2,101	71,364	8.8	114	8,105
1824,	2,217	104,024	11.5	87	9,016
1825,	1,709	103,531	10.7	94	9,730
1826,	3,453	99,674	10.6	94	9,397
1827,	2,965	135,285	13.2	76	10,229
1828,	3,389	146,308	13.6	74	10,790
1829,	3,982	162,816	13.4	75	12,171
1830,	3,255	173,329	14.2	70	12,202
1831,	4,390	182,017	15.0	67	12,198
1832,	9,650	217,348	16.4	61	13,246
1833,	6,950	233,580	16.6	60	14,035
1834,	5,738	247,964	19.1	53	13,004
1836,	2,729	219,126	19.8	51	11,089
1837,	3,031	220,557	18.9	53	11,697
1838,	2,692	177,665	17.5	57	10,164
1839,	1,644	128,043	16.6	60	7,712
1840,	1,741	126,583	16.1	60	7,844
1841,	1,842	134,443	16.1	62	8,365
1842,	2,748	140,433	14.7	68	9,567
1843,	4,363	159,137	14.9	67	10,625
1844,	3,287	166,487	15.1	66	10,996

* This table contains, as will be observed, the infant baptisms; the number of members; a column showing the number of members each year, for each infant baptized; a column showing the number of children baptized for each one thousand communicants, for each year; and, as a mere matter of interest, the adult baptisms are also introduced.

Year.	Adult baptisms.	Members.	Members to each baptism.	Baptisms per 1000 members.	Infants baptized.
1845,	1,929	171,879	17.8	56	9,608
1846,	2,036	174,714	18.1	55	9,677
1847,	1,794	179,453	19.2	52	9,342
1848,	2,338	192,022	19.5	51	9,837
1849,	2,412	200,830	20.3	49	9,895
1850,	2,772	207,254	20.0	50	10,372
1851,	2,918	210,306	19.1	52	10,994
1852,	2,549	210,414	19.1	52	11,006
1853,	2,942	219,263	18.8	53	11,644
1854,	3,597	225,404	18.7	53	12,041
1855,	3,433	231,404	19.7	50	11,734
1856,	3,189	233,755	19.6	51	11,921
116,211	6,312,233	Av. 14.8	Av. 68	424,470	

TABLE No. 2.

A Synopsis of Table No. 1, for periods of five years:

Years.	Adult baptisms.	Members.	Members for each baptism.	Baptisms per 1000 members.	Infant baptisms.
1807-1811,	2,178	116,979	5.5	182	21,270
1812-1816,	2,536	152,359	6.7	149	22,486
1817-1821,	7,813	307,847	7.9	125	38,566
1824-1826,	7,379	307,229	10.9	92	28,143
1827-1831,	17,981	799,755	13.9	72	57,590
1832-1836,	25,067	918,018	17.9	57	51,374
1837-1841,	10,950	787,291	17.2	58	45,782
1842-1846,	14,363	812,650	16.1	62	50,473
1847-1851,	12,234	989,865	19.6	51	50,440
1852-1856,	15,710	1,120,240	19.7	51	58,346
1807-1856,	116,211	6,312,233	14.8	68	424,470
1807-1831,	37,787	1,684,169	10.0	99	168,055
1832-1856,	78,324	4,628,064	17.9	56	256,415

TABLE No. 3.

Number of members for each child baptized in four different Presbyteries, for six different decennial periods:

	1807.	1817.	1827.	1837.	1847.	1856.
New York,	5.6	10.2	14.2	15.4	15.1	10.3
New Brunswick,	7.4	6.6	11.8	25.2	30.4	31.1
Philadelphia,	4.8	11.8	13.7	15.6	16.9	19.1
Baltimore,	3.3	16.1	7.3	18.9	18.2	19.3
	5.0	11.2	11.7	18.8	20.1	19.9

Figure 9.1. Hodge's Statistics on Baptism
from BRPR (January 1857) 82-83

Through the eighteenth century Presbyterians had baptized the children of all members, and since all baptized persons were considered members, they did not require parents to profess faith personally before bringing their children for baptism.

Edwardsian influence led to a growing number of Presbyterians who would only baptize the children of those who had personally professed faith. When the Synod of New York and Philadelphia refused to endorse the Edwardsean view in the 1770s, the Rev. Jacob Green formed the independent Morris Presbytery in 1780. In 1794 the General Assembly insisted that all that was necessary was a “visible and credible profession of Christianity,” refusing to require a profession of conversion.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, by the 1810s a number of younger ministers were switching to the Edwardsean practice. Jacob’s son, Ashbel Green, however, returned to the Presbyterian church and defended the traditional Presbyterian practice, resisting his father’s innovations throughout his life.

After the excision of the New School, the baptismal rate increased slightly because the New School was largely Edwardsean in its baptismal practice, whereas the Old School was divided. By 1857, however, many Old School churches had adopted the Edwardsean plan of baptizing only the children of communicant members—and only allowing those who believed themselves to be converted to become communicant members.⁶⁵ The traditionalists were now in the minority. While some authors were able to show that

⁶⁴Baird, Digest, 81.

⁶⁵B. “Is Infant Baptism Neglected?” Presbyterian 27.5 (January 31, 1857) 17. He cites Ashbel Green and Archibald Alexander as two defenders of the traditional Presbyterian practice.

Hodge's statistics were considerably off mark, nonetheless it was clear that Presbyterian baptismal practices had changed.⁶⁶

D. The Debate

Thornwell's proposal to restrict discipline to those who had personally professed faith, therefore, came at a time when Old School Presbyterians already worried about the declining importance of infant baptism in their church. Of course, given the Edwardsean majority in the church, many agreed with Thornwell, who generally disagreed with him in church polity. William Engles, editor of the Presbyterian, and ordinarily a strong supporter of Princeton, concurred that baptized children were not proper subjects of discipline: "they have made no covenant vows; they have never, by any act of their own, acknowledged their subjection to the authorities of the Church."⁶⁷ The Thornwellian view assumed a theory of republicanism that insisted upon the consent of the governed—or in this case, the consent of the disciplined.

One Pittsburgh writer went further. He argued that the long practice of calling baptized persons "*Church members*. . . is a misnomer." He insisted that a "profession of faith in Christ" was necessary for both government and discipline. "Without 'faith in Christ' the merely baptized are not a whit better than others." The only advantage they

⁶⁶Editorial, "The Supposed Decline of Infant Baptism," True Witness 3.47 (February 26, 1857).

⁶⁷Presbyterian 29.16 (April 16, 1859) 62.

have is the “special interest, sympathies, and prayers of the Church for their conversion and salvation.”⁶⁸

But others objected to this line of reasoning. “Conservative” wrote in the Presbyterian objecting to the “radical” implications of this change. Claiming that the “consent of the governed” was not accurate even in politics, he pointed out that we have no choice as to whether we will be born into God’s covenant, any more than whether we will be born into civil citizenship.” A citizen cannot avoid the penalties of the law by claiming that he did not agree to it personally. Further, “Conservative” wondered what the church could then do about gross immorality in a baptized person? Thornwell had argued that the church only has jurisdiction of baptized persons through their parents—but what happens under that theory when they reach the age of 21? “It is incorrect to say that our system of government predicates discipline on the possession of spiritual life in its subject, and that its object is only to reclaim the backslider and recall to repentance.” Thornwell had failed to articulate the correct doctrine of discipline: “A just excommunication of a church-member proceeds on the supposition that he has now done something so thoroughly inconsistent and obdurate that it shows he is not a true child of God.” Another object of discipline, therefore, was to lop off dead branches. But “Conservative” did not then side with those who desired to discipline adult noncommunicants for unbelief. “As long as they live morally, and attend the means of grace regularly, the privileges of that

⁶⁸L. D., “The Revised Discipline--Baptized Members,” Presbyterian Banner 6.52 (September 18, 1858).

minor citizenship in Zion will by no means be cut off by expulsion.”⁶⁹ Standing firmly with Hodge and McGill, “Conservative” refused to surrender the traditional Presbyterian doctrine of children in the covenant.

The basic question at stake was whether the church should approach baptized children as a part of the covenant community, or as outsiders. William Engles, editor of the Philadelphia Presbyterian joined Thornwell in taking the latter view. While admitting that they had a preferred status to the heathen, Engles argued that baptized children were “heirs of promises which they have not yet embraced.” As such they had the “status of avowed unbelievers,” and were considered “dead in trespasses and sins.” Further, excommunication would be pointless, since “the baptized nonprofessor is actually in the very position in relation to the sacraments and communion of the Church, in which excommunication puts the professing offender.”⁷⁰

The Central Presbyterian of Virginia, on the other hand, agreed with Hodge. While it was not possible to suspend a non-communicant from the Lord’s Table, there might be cases where a rebellious non-communicant should be removed from the church.⁷¹ The editors argued that judicial process was generally unwise, but they rejected Thornwell’s view that the baptized were not under the general discipline of the church.⁷²

⁶⁹Conservative, “The Revised Book of Discipline, Concluded,” Presbyterian 30.1 (January 1, 1860) 1. William Engles, the editor, replied that he remained convinced by Thornwell’s argument “that you cannot apply spiritual discipline except to those who profess to be spiritually minded.” Editorial, “Revised Book of Discipline,” Presbyterian 30.1 (January 1, 1860) 2.

⁷⁰Editorial, “Revised Book of Discipline,” Presbyterian 30.16 (April 21, 1860) 62.

⁷¹Editorial, CP 4.33 (August 13, 1859) 130.

⁷²“The Status of the Baptized Child,” CP 5.22 (June 2, 1860) 86.

One Virginia correspondent suggested “that the arguments of the Columbia Doctor [Thornwell] are framed to support a system of rules, elaborated upon principles applicable to the discipline of an ideal church, which blends in its constitution the elements of purity and fallibility, in which however, the pure greatly predominates.”⁷³

David McKinney, editor of the Presbyterian Banner of Pittsburgh, objected that Thornwell’s view “*unchurches* our baptized youth.”⁷⁴ Appalled that Thornwell would consider baptized children to be “of the world,” and no better than excommunicants, McKinney declared that Thornwell had “no right so to speak of the children of the Church. They are born in the family. They are the offspring of God’s handmaidens. He says of them: They are mine.” He admitted that the church’s practice fell short of this doctrine, but that simply meant that “We have been sinners against the Word of God and our Standards; and now the effort is being made to alter our Standards, so as to make them conform to our sinful practice.” Calling upon the church to return to its roots, he called upon the Pittsburgh region to “teach our children that they are Christians, educate them as Christians, and treat them as Christians,” in the confidence that God would in fact give them the grace promised in their baptism.⁷⁵

Likewise M. Peden argued in the New Orleans True Witness that baptized children are “included in the covenant which God has ratified with their parents.” If they are capable of moral action, then they are subject to discipline. The elders should care for the

⁷³Anonymous, “Revision of the Book of Discipline,” CP 5.5 (February 4, 1860) 17.

⁷⁴Editorial, “The Proposed Changes,” Presbyterian Banner 7.32 (April 30, 1859).

⁷⁵Editorial, “The Revised Book of Discipline,” Presbyterian Banner 8.35 (May 19, 1860).

entire flock. And if discipline is exercised with the goal of repentance, then it might be the means of drawing the baptized to true faith.⁷⁶

2. “But What If I’m Not Converted?”

Conversion having become the central theme of American Protestant piety, some members rushed to profess faith, but later concluded that they had deceived themselves, and wished to withdraw from the church. Desiring an orderly departure, they requested the session to remove their names from the rolls of the church. But the church order had no provision for simply “leaving.” Presbyterian church order was designed for a parish church system in Scotland, in which conversion played a relatively minor role. But under pressure from the individualism of evangelical pietism, Presbyterian church order would be reworked. The question came to the General Assembly in 1848 as an overture from the Presbytery of Montgomery in southwestern Virginia, “asking whether church sessions have the right, under the constitution, to allow members to withdraw from the communion of the church who are not guilty of any immoral conduct, and who do not manifest an intention to connect themselves with any other Church.” The Bills and Overtures Committee, chaired by the Rev. Dr. James Henley Thornwell, recommended that the Assembly should answer in the affirmative.

The Rev. Dr. Edward P. Humphrey of Kentucky immediately objected. The constitution plainly only allowed for a member to be removed “1. by regular trial, 2. by dismissal to another body, and 3. by death.” Humphrey argued that “The obligation

⁷⁶M. Peden, “The Discipline of the Baptized Children of the Church--Its Extent and Method,” True Witness 5.19 (August 13, 1858).

which a man takes upon himself is a vow to God, and God only can absolve him from it. It is a fundamental principle of Protestantism, that while the church cannot be the Lord of the conscience, neither can it interfere to relieve the conscience of its responsibilities.” Unless guilty of immorality, a member could not be removed from the church.⁷⁷

After several others agreed, Thornwell replied that they had not understood the point of the question. “It is asked whether persons may withdraw from the Church who have been received unadvisedly, and are now satisfied that they are not converted persons, yet are regular in all their private and public duties.” Thornwell argued that such persons should not be disciplined, because the point of discipline was “to ascertain whether a man is or is not a member of Christ’s body? But if he confesses that he is not, it is the best evidence that can be given, and the session may declare the fact to the church.” Further, while Thornwell agreed with Humphrey’s statement on conscience, he turned it on its head, allowing church members to withdraw according to the dictates of their own consciences. “The Protestant church knows no man unless he is voluntarily subject to her authority: and the vow of subjection is binding no longer than he feels that he has a right to submit to them.”⁷⁸

Judge Hepburn objected that members should not be allowed to dissolve their relation to the church at pleasure. He “spoke with much energy” against Thornwell’s view, comparing the “union of the church and members to the marriage relation. . . which should

⁷⁷Charles Hodge, “The General Assembly,” BRPR 20.3 (July, 1848) 407. Hodge’s quotations came from the New York Observer.

⁷⁸Charles Hodge, “The General Assembly,” 408.

be protected with the most sacred care.” Dr. Lord concurred. He feared that if the “new principle were adopted it would be a virtual declaration that absence from communion is no offence, and any man who wishes to get out of the church would simply stay away, and then withdraw.”⁷⁹

Thornwell replied to the marriage analogy “by showing that the invisible church, the whole number of believers wherever found, in Presbyterian, Episcopal or Romish communions are the bride, the Lamb's wife, and no organization that may embrace believers and unbelievers is to be spoken of as in such union with the Saviour.” The visible church, he argued, did not merit such exalted language. He urged church sessions to work diligently to ascertain whether an individual member was truly in “vital union” with Christ, but “if it did not exist, he would have the professed union dissolved.”⁸⁰

The Rev. B. M. Smith of Virginia contended that both abstaining from the Lord's table and professing Christ when not a Christian were offenses worthy of discipline. If the church would excommunicate such offenders, it would “prevent hasty applications for admission into the church, and thus save the necessity of casting out. He would make the way out of the church the more difficult that unworthy persons might be deterred from coming in.”⁸¹

In his annual review of the Assembly, Charles Hodge argued that at times it could be proper to allow a person to absent himself from the Lord's Table. “But we would not

⁷⁹Hodge, “The General Assembly,” 409.

⁸⁰Hodge, “The General Assembly,” 409.

⁸¹Hodge, “The General Assembly,” 409.

call this withdrawing from the church.” Hodge objected that Thornwell had articulated a basically congregational approach, “which makes the regenerate the materials and confederation the formal cause of a church covenant.”⁸² This explained Thornwell’s insistence that church membership was a “voluntary compact and association.” But Presbyterians taught, according to Hodge, that “a man can no more withdraw from the church, than he can withdraw from the moral government of God. . . . He cannot free himself from the obligation of submitting to the discipline of the church, of communing with it, and of discharging all the duties of a church member, any more than he can free himself from the obligation of the moral law.” If through rejecting the gospel or moral lapses, he departs from the faith, then he should be disciplined. But through his baptism (whether infant or adult) “he has incurred obligations and responsibilities from which he can never free himself, he has assumed a yoke which he can neither cast off, nor have removed by any human hand.” Hodge agreed that the church is a voluntary society “in the sense that. . . no one can be forced to enter it, or coerced to remain in it,” but no one can depart from it without censure.⁸³

While Thornwell’s position was soundly rejected in theory in 1848, a judicial case from the Presbytery of Sangamon in the Synod of Illinois brought the issue back to the General Assembly in 1851. Mr. Ambrose Stone “repeatedly requested the session [of Irish Grove Presbyterian Church] to *dissolve* his connection with the Church of Christ, assigning as the only reason for this course of conduct that he believed he had never been

⁸²Hodge, “The General Assembly,” 410.

⁸³Hodge, “The General Assembly,” 412.

born again, and that he had no love to Christ.”⁸⁴ The session finally concurred and “dismissed him to the world, removing him from the roll of the church.” When Sangamon Presbytery reviewed the minutes of the Irish Grove session, it declared this a declaration of excommunication without process, therefore null and void, and thereby restored Mr. Stone to his unwanted membership. After the Synod of Illinois affirmed the judgment of the presbytery, the session, led by the Rev. William Perkins, pastor of the Irish Grove church, appealed this decision to the Assembly, insisting that erasure was appropriate for one who had simply erred in judgment in professing faith in the first place.

After considerable discussion, the Assembly denied the appeal, 38 to sustain, 43 to sustain in part and 79 to deny. The winning vote, though in line with the 1848 decision, fell short of a majority. Supporters of the Assembly’s denial argued that the session acted unconstitutionally because it did not charge Stone with sin but simply dismissed him from the church. They claimed that membership was a lifetime commitment and refused to permit members to throw off their connection as if the church were “no more than a literary society.”⁸⁵ The Assembly’s judgment declared flatly: “no Church Session has authority to dissolve the connection of a communicant with the Church of Christ, except by excommunication.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴Minutes (1851) 33.

⁸⁵Chorepiscopus [Robert L. Dabney], “The Last General Assembly” W&O 6.51 (July 31, 1851) 201.

⁸⁶“General Assembly” W&O 6.44 (June 12, 1851) 174. While the vote of the Assembly was not recorded in the Minutes, the makeup of the committee is suggestive of who was arguing for the strict construction of the church’s constitution on this point. The moderator, the Rev. Edward P. Humphrey of Kentucky, appointed ministers James K. Burch (Cincinnati), Lewis Cheeseman (Philadelphia), John Stockton (Washington), Elisha P. Swift (Ohio), and Joshua F. Green (Arkansas), along with ruling elders Alexander Downing (Mississippi) and Hugh Nelson (East Hanover) were appointed a committee to express

However, a slim majority thought the session's action in some sense appropriate but divided on its constitutionality. Thirty-eight commissioners voted to sustain the appeal, arguing that "if the action of the session was not strictly according to the letter of the Constitution, it was in the spirit," while another forty-three declared that "while the Session did right in dismissing Mr. Stone under the circumstances, its action was not strictly constitutional, according to the letter, and that therefore the appeal should be sustained in part."⁸⁷ Indeed, some argued that discipline could not be applied, because Stone had done nothing deserving discipline. They claimed that "the candour and honour of such persons in acknowledging their self-deception as soon as it is ascertained, and in wishing to throw off the christian name which they feel they have no right to wear, deserves praise rather than censure."⁸⁸

Robert L. Dabney observed in the Watchman and Observer that the basic question was "what shall be done with those church members who, without any open immorality, have lost their interest in spiritual religion, and desire to put an end to their connexion with the church?" Dabney agreed with the principle adopted by the Assembly. But "we were sorry to hear it urged, that a self-deceived, unregenerate church member cannot be *disciplined* out of the church, *because there is nothing for which to discipline him.*" In Dabney's view, Ambrose Stone was in fact guilty of a sin worthy of excommunication. "The self-deceived and unconverted professor of religion acknowledges a sin that is the

the Assembly's judgment.

⁸⁷Charles Hodge, "The General Assembly," BRPR 23.3 (July, 1851) 548.

⁸⁸Chorepiscopus [Robert L. Dabney], "The Last General Assembly" W&O 6.51 (July 31, 1851) 201.

master sin of all. . . . *Let him be disciplined* therefore, for the confessed sin of UNBELIEF.”⁸⁹

So by the late 1850s, the church was thoroughly divided on the wisdom and meaning of allowing members to resign. One correspondent wrote to the Presbyterian, asking whether someone who regretted taking membership vows could simply withdraw from the church. The editor replied that he could only be removed by regular judicial process (i.e., through excommunication). In light of this, he urged churches to take greater care in admissions to the Lord’s Table, suggesting that churches adopt a more thorough catechetical course to prevent “hasty admissions.”⁹⁰ When some argued that the apostles admitted converts immediately, “Vigilans” countered that the apostles had “the supernatural gift of discerning spirits.” Since the Lord’s Supper was “only for regenerate souls,” hasty admissions were dangerous, and the church should ensure that potential communicants clearly bore the fruit of regeneration.⁹¹ Benjamin Gildersleeve complained that sessions no longer took the time with potential communicants to ascertain the “evidences of their qualifications to be admitted into the fellowship of the church.”⁹² If the church would invest more time in investigating professions, it would have less need to discipline later.

⁸⁹Chorepiscopus [Robert L. Dabney], “The Last General Assembly” W&O 6.51 (July 31, 1851) 201.

⁹⁰A Church Member, “Release from Church Membership,” Presbyterian 26.34 (August 23, 1856) 134.

⁹¹Vigilans, “Hasty Admissions,” Southern Presbyterian 7.2 (October 27, 1853) 5.

⁹²Editorial, “The Sealing Ordinances of the Church,” W&O 8.14 (Nov 11, 1852) 54.

These arguments showed how far the Presbyterian church had come from its former practice of requiring communicants only to believe the gospel and live free from scandal. These authors assumed that the Lord's Supper was only for the professed regenerate. When Hodge and Shepperson argued for the traditional Presbyterian view, they found themselves in a shrinking minority.

So when Thornwell's committee proposed in 1858 to modify the Book of Discipline to allow sessions to simply remove the names of members who wished to withdraw, he had reason to believe that the church would accept his proposal.

One of the earliest responses came from the Rev. Nathan Hoyt, pastor at Athens, Georgia. After thirty-five years of pastoral ministry, Hoyt called for mercy for those who recognized their mistake in believing that a work of grace had truly happened.⁹³ As another author in the Philadelphia Presbyterian put it, the church could not avoid spurious professions, so the proper response was to allow withdrawal without discipline. Otherwise churches would end up excommunicating "one who has been guilty of nothing more than mistaking spurious exercises of mind for genuine, and taking upon himself a profession of religion under an erroneous impression—for what, in other words, was his misfortune rather than his fault." Further, the practice of the church already showed some change to be needed. Without it, sessions and individuals would continue to find a "back door," ignoring the law of the church.⁹⁴

⁹³N. H. (Athens, Georgia), "Revised Book of Discipline," Presbyterian 27.44 (October 30, 1858) 173.

⁹⁴Presbyterian 29.16 (April 16, 1859) 62.

But many hesitated to authorize a “back door” to the church. One southerner insisted that “church membership is an enlistment for life, and should be an indissoluble tie.”⁹⁵ Concerned that those guilty of serious sin would use dismissal as a quick escape, he argued that expulsion from the church meant “dismissal to the kingdom of Satan.” It amounted to excommunication—but gave no clear warning to the person removed.⁹⁶

Thornwell disagreed. He argued that withdrawals without judicial process were in fact a form of discipline. Those erased from the church’s rolls were not, in fact, excommunicated but suspended “for an indefinite time.” Excommunication was too harsh, and inappropriate for one who did not claim to be regenerate, “as it might repel him from all those influences under which his continued connection with the Church would probably still keep him.”⁹⁷ Nonetheless, Thornwell insisted that the one “withdrawing” should be “treated as an offender” and removed from the membership of the church⁹⁸

Few seemed to understand this distinction. Since Presbyterians had historically viewed discipline as a judicial process, Thornwell’s category of cases without process seemed like a privilege rather than discipline. For “Conservative,” this confusion argued against Thornwell’s proposal. If the church didn’t understand it, then it would be used improperly as a back door out of the church.⁹⁹

⁹⁵Anonymous, “The Changes Proposed in our Book of Discipline” SPR 12.1 (April, 1859) 59.

⁹⁶Anonymous, “The Changes Proposed in our Book of Discipline” SPR 12.1 (April, 1859) 36-83.

⁹⁷J. H. Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” SPR 12.3 (October 1859) 397.

⁹⁸Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” 398.

⁹⁹Conservative, “The Revised Book of Discipline, No. II,” Presbyterian 29.50 (December 10, 1859) 177.

3. “Caesar Is No Model for Christ”

Thornwell also proposed that the new Book of Discipline include the principle of ecclesiastical inquest: “that every church court has the inherent right to demand and receive satisfactory explanations from any of its members concerning any matter of evil report.”¹⁰⁰ Some, such as Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, objected that this “inquisitorial” power was contrary to free government. Thornwell replied that, under the present system, a slandered person had no way to redress the situation without a messy trial. An ecclesiastical inquest allowed the vindication of the innocent by requiring members to answer the session’s questions. Thornwell professed to be “greatly astonished to find it made an objection to this power, that it might require men to criminate themselves. If they have done wrong, this is precisely what a church court ought to try to do.” Thornwell objected that the Presbyterian church was beginning to model itself after American civil courts—with their rights-based jurisprudence. “A spiritual court aims at producing and fostering a given state of heart; a civil court is for the protection of rights. . . . Caesar is no model for Christ.”¹⁰¹ Therefore, Thornwell argued that sessions and presbyteries should have power to pass summary judgment on sins committed or confessed in their presence.

This claim caused quite a stir among those who wanted Presbyterian judicial process to conform to American legal traditions. “Justice” objected that passing sentence

¹⁰⁰Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” 378.

¹⁰¹Thornwell, “Revised Book of Discipline,” 379.

without a trial was dangerous. He admitted that a written confession might obviate a trial, but he feared abuse of such a wide-ranging power.¹⁰²

Thornwell's suggestion that the lower court not be excluded from voting in appeals to a higher judicatory received a similar response. While Charles Hodge supported this, agreeing that the lower court formed an organic part of the higher court, others objected. "Conservative," writing in the Presbyterian, argued that Hodge and Thornwell were utopian. While their proposal made theoretical sense, in practice large presbyteries could sometimes control the outcome of a synodical vote, with the effect of denying the right of appeal in some synods.¹⁰³ The Central Presbyterian concurred, adding that no analogy to civil courts applied, because lower court justices do not sit on appellate courts.¹⁰⁴

The other main proposed revision altered the definition of an offense—that sin for which a member could be brought to trial. The old book included not only behaviors sinful in themselves but anything "*which, if it be not in its own nature sinful, may tempt others to sin, or mar their spiritual edification.*"¹⁰⁵ Thornwell argued that this contradicted the Confession's statement that the Word of God is the sufficient standard for faith and life. He proposed making the Confession and Catechisms the standard by which the church

¹⁰²Justice, "Revised Book of Discipline," Presbyterian 28.37 (September 11, 1858) 145. The editor, William Engles, had made similar comments earlier. Presbyterian 29.16 (April 16, 1859) 62.

¹⁰³Conservative, "The Revised Book of Discipline, No. V," Presbyterian 29.53 (December 31, 1859) 189. Engles had made similar arguments earlier. Presbyterian 29.16 (April 16, 1859) 62.

¹⁰⁴"Revised Book of Discipline," CP 4.32 (August 6, 1859) 128.

¹⁰⁵J. H. Thornwell, "Revised Book of Discipline," SPR 12.3 (October 1859) 384.

defined offenses. This, in his view, did not elevate the Confession to scriptural status, because

if a thing is proved to be wrong directly from the Bible, our Confession of Faith requires us to condemn it. . . . If a thing is shown to be wrong from our standards, we, as Presbyterians, have declared, that it is so taught in the Sacred Scriptures. To us the propositions are identical: Whatever the Bible condemns, our Confession of Faith condemns, and whatever the Confession of Faith condemns, the Bible condemns. They are the same authority; the Confession is nothing except as the Bible speaks in it and through it; and in adopting it, we have averred it to be an honest and faithful interpretation of God's teachings.¹⁰⁶

A confessional church, Thornwell argued should take its confession seriously. Therefore he claimed that "nothing is heresy which is not repugnant to our standards of doctrine; and nothing is unlawful which is not repugnant to our standards of practice. . . . This creed, in its whole compass, covers all that we believe to be necessary to the salvation and spiritual prosperity of the soul. It is, therefore, the standard by which we are to try and to judge one another."¹⁰⁷

William Engles strongly objected to this line of reasoning. The revision erred, in his opinion, by making the Westminster Standards the only rule for an offense. The Confession set forth the faith of the church, and did not contain an exhaustive list of all offenses! Nonetheless he saw some wisdom in Thornwell's argument. An offense should be defined as anything contrary to the Word of God and the standards. The old book made it clear that "Nothing, therefore, ought to be considered by any judicatory as an offence. . . which cannot be proved to be such from Scripture; or from the regulations and practice of

¹⁰⁶Thornwell, "Revised Book of Discipline," 386.

¹⁰⁷Thornwell, "Revised Book of Discipline," 387.

the church, founded on Scripture.”¹⁰⁸ Engles insisted on retaining Scripture as the primary standard for defining an offense.¹⁰⁹ “Conservative” concurred, objecting that Thornwell’s revision exchanged an infallible standard for a fallible one.¹¹⁰

4. Later Developments

The General Assembly of 1860 was supposed to vote on the revised Book of Discipline, but got bogged down in a debate over the status of baptized children. Finally the Assembly voted to table the matter until the following year.¹¹¹ The following year, the church divided, and the discussions took on a very different character in the two churches.

A. Northern Discussions

The northern Old School continued its committee, but eliminated the most radical of Thornwell’s proposals without much dissent. The new chairman, Alexander T. McGill, led the committee in restoring the old book’s position that baptized youth came under the discipline of the church. It also removed the “back door” provision allowing communicant members to withdraw from the church.¹¹² Nonetheless, the 1865 General Assembly noted that sessions increasingly hesitated to discipline for fear of the consequences of a

¹⁰⁸Book of Discipline I.iv. Constitution (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1839) 460.

¹⁰⁹Presbyterian 29.16 (April 16, 1859) 62.

¹¹⁰Conservative, “The Revised Book of Discipline, No. III,” Presbyterian 29.51 (December 17, 1859) 181.

¹¹¹“General Assembly,” CP 5.22-23 (June 2-9, 1860).

¹¹²“Northern Items, from the New York Observer,” reprinted in CP 7.36 (September 4, 1862).

protracted judicial case, “an evil in the Church, which, if not eradicated in time, may result in her total corruption and disintegration.”¹¹³

The big arguments in the north returned to Breckinridge’s original proposal to establish a judicial commission. One pastor argued that the present appeals system was essentially unsound. “Large bodies *debate*; small bodies alone can *confer*.”¹¹⁴ Hovey K. Clarke, a Detroit lawyer, agreed, pointing out that the Assembly’s judicial committee had in fact become a judicial commission without the authority of the church’s constitution. He pointed to two recent cases where the aggrieved parties believed that the judicial committee misunderstood the facts, but the Assembly never heard them because it merely accepted the Committee’s report without entering judicial proceedings. “How long will it be, under such a system,” asked Clarke, “before all discipline will actually become ‘impossible’?” Clarke argued that a permanent judicial commission could at least receive constitutional authority to decide cases.¹¹⁵

The 1864 Assembly created a committee to examine this subject at the request of four northeastern synods. The committee submitted its report the following year, which went down to the presbyteries for study. The makeup of the committee suggested the changing of the guard since 1861: three ministers, Elijah R. Craven (PTS 1848), pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church of Newark, New Jersey, John Krebs (PTS 1830), pastor of

¹¹³“Narrative on the State of Religion,” Minutes (1865) 598.

¹¹⁴A Pastor, “The Constitution of Courts of Appeal in the Presbyterian Church,” (np, nd) 9. originally published in the Presbyterian.

¹¹⁵Hovey K. Clarke, “The Book of Discipline and the Next Assembly,” (Detroit: n.p., 1865). The cases were the Hamilton case from the Synod of Sandusky and the Worrell case from the Synod of Illinois at the 1863 General Assembly.

Rutgers Street Church in New York City, and Isaac Candee (PTS 1828), pastor at Galesburg, Illinois, were joined by two judges, ruling elders Martin Ryerson of New Jersey and Samuel Linn of eastern Pennsylvania.¹¹⁶ Only Krebs had strong connections to the pre-1861 Old School leadership.

The committee started by stating the obvious: since scripture does not prescribe how to prosecute appeals, any number of systems might be permissible. But it insisted that a judicial commission was desirable due to the need for more careful discipline. It pointed out that in 48 of 79 cases of discipline, the Assembly had overturned the synodical decision—the synod and the Assembly disagreeing in three-fifths of the cases. While admitting that the synods could be in error, the committee suspected a faulty appeals process as the culprit.

It offered two possible solutions. First was a temporary commission appointed at the end of each Assembly, remaining behind to decide judicial cases. The committee did not favor this, because such men, already weary of deliberation, might have to remain away from their congregations for several extra weeks. The second option was a standing commission of four ministers and four elders, each serving a four year term. While the Assembly would retain power of review, appeal from the commission would only be allowed in cases of heresy. While admitting that the commission might err, the committee argued that error was far more likely in an Assembly of 300 than in a commission of eight who would have time to hear the case thoroughly.¹¹⁷ Eventually the church concurred.

¹¹⁶Minutes (1864) 314.

¹¹⁷Report of Committee on Appellate Courts (New York: Edward O. Jenkins, 1865).

B. Southern Presbyterian Canons of Discipline (1866)

The southern Old School, on the other hand, continued to wrestle with the status of non-communicant members. After the war, as the southern Presbyterian church debated its “Canons of Discipline,” this question remained at the fore. The proposed revision distinguished between a general discipline that included baptized children and judicial discipline that did not.

The Rev. A. W. Miller objected that the former sort of discipline lacked teeth. It would be impossible, under this provision, to enforce “general” discipline because only in judicial discipline could any censure be imposed—even the milder forms of admonition and rebuke.

John B. Adger replied that this was the point. Baptized children did not have “the grace of God in them, and discipline being intended for the living members but not to be wasted on the dead, it is not possible to be felt or understood by them. Such are our baptised children until the light of God illuminates their souls.” Adger defended the position of the late James Henley Thornwell admirably. He insisted that baptized children already stood outside the communion of the church; therefore, “to excommunicate them would be folly, for they are now just exactly where they would be if we proceeded so unwarrantably.” Baptized non-communicants must be instructed in the Word of God, not disciplined for their failure to follow it. If they are outside of Christ, then they do not yet have the grace necessary to obey God.

Miller replied that if instruction failed, discipline must follow. “If the want of qualification to be admitted to communion be a misfortune, then it should not terminate with censure; but if the want of qualification be unbelief, it is not a misfortune, but a crime, and such a crime will send the soul to hell.” The debate still focused on the non-communicant adult who refused to profess faith. Miller argued that the church had a duty to warn the unbelieving member both in word and in deed. “If the Head of the Church may justly cast the child out of the Church into hell, may not the Church cast their children into the world, and possibly be the means of bringing them into the right path, and benefit the whole of the Church?”

But as before, not all were happy with the dichotomy that Adger and Miller proposed. The Rev. Dr. Rice sided with Miller when he asserted that he could not find the distinction between two kinds of discipline in scripture, but he disagreed with both when he added, “I cannot see any difference between one member and another.” He thought that Adger was correct in saying that excommunication was the wrong approach for those who do not profess faith, but he feared that if they removed discipline from all baptized non-communicants, then they could not deal with severe moral failings either.

Most, however, remained preoccupied with the problem of the non-communicant member who lacked faith. The Rev. Dr. Benjamin Palmer defended the committee, objecting to casting out non-professing members simply because they have not professed faith.¹¹⁸ In the end the southern church adopted Thornwell’s vision of the halfway membership of covenant children.

¹¹⁸“General Assembly,” Southern Presbyterian 1.48 (November 29, 1866).

Conclusion

The debates over the revision of the Book of Discipline reveal how Old School Presbyterians were developing a more constitution-driven view of the church. The more or less constant flow of amendments to the church order after the 1850s signaled the trend toward a more statute-based polity. At the same time, the debates demonstrated that the southern church generally had a lower view of the status of baptized children, which may well be connected to southern appreciation for revivals. While many northern Presbyterians recovered a more covenantal emphasis on Christian nurture, southerners emphasized conversion as the central moment of Christian identity.

TEN

CONSTITUTIONAL CONSTRUCTION AND PRESBYTERIAN BOARDS: LAW, EQUITY, AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH

Even trivial matters can reveal significant changes. On Wednesday, May 27, 1846—six days after the General Assembly had convened—the Committee on Elections “reported that the Rev. James W. Moore had been nominated or selected by the Presbytery of Arkansas at their meeting in last September, but that the Presbytery had been prevented by high waters from meeting since, and consequently there could be no election.” Since the Form of Government required that commissioners be elected less than seven months prior to the Assembly, it would be a clear violation of the letter of the constitution to allow him a seat. All he had was a letter from the moderator of the presbytery attesting that he had been nominated. But after a short debate the Assembly admitted him to a seat nonetheless.¹

Fifteen commissioners, led by George Musgrave of Baltimore, William L. Breckinridge of Kentucky and Francis McFarland of Virginia, signed a protest against this act. There was no personal animosity toward Moore (a fellow southerner)—it was strictly a

¹Minutes (1846) 211. Just three years before the Rev. David M. Smith of Columbia Presbytery appeared with a commission from the presbytery—but there was not a quorum of presbytery when he was elected. Even though those who were assented to his election, the Assembly refused to seat him. “Debates in the General Assembly,” Presbyterian 13.21 (May 27, 1843) 83. So the Assembly was not inclined to allow the rules to be broken willy-nilly.

constitutional question. They argued that this violated of the church's constitution in two ways: 1) because the Form of Government 22.2 required each commissioner to present a commission signed by both the moderator and the clerk of presbytery certifying his election; and 2) because the Form of Government 22.1 required that the election occur within seven months of the General Assembly. Since neither of these constitutional rules had been followed, the Assembly should not have seated him. Fearing that setting aside constitutional rules would lead back to the "committee-men" of the New School, the protest warned that this action would establish a precedent of laxness.²

The Assembly appointed two ministers, Samuel Beach Jones and John Dorrance, to reply to the protest.³ They agreed that the Assembly had violated the letter of the constitution, but argued that the Assembly was not bound merely to the letter of the law, but to the equity of the law—the principles of justice established by the constitution. Every year the Assembly appointed a Committee of Elections to "examine and report on defective claims and doubtful cases," which demonstrated "*that the spirit, and not the mere letter of our Form of Government is to be our guide in all such cases.*"⁴ Since the Presbytery of Arkansas intended to follow the letter of the book but had been providentially hindered from electing their nominee, it would be unjust to deprive them of

²Minutes (1846) 211-212. It is noteworthy that Robert J. Breckinridge did not sign the protest.

³While both were serving northeastern churches, both also had southern connections. Jones was born in South Carolina, had graduated PTS in 1836, and was pastor at Bridgeton, New Jersey; Dorrance was from New Jersey, had graduated PTS in 1826, and was pastor at Wilkes-Barre, PA (but he had served as pastor in Baton Rouge, LA, from 1827-1830).

⁴Minutes (1846) 213.

representation at the Assembly—especially since the Rev. Moore had journeyed fifteen days to reach Philadelphia.⁵ Indeed, the committee argued, the Assembly should

feel its obligation to act not merely according to law, but according to equity, and where an adherence to a mere municipal regulation would conflict with the manifest claims of equity, it would endeavour to follow out the principle embodied in the declaration of the Master, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.’ It believes that rules were made for judicatories, and not judicatories for rules: and hence where the maintenance of a rule would inflict a manifest wrong and injury upon Christ’s cause. . . as a court of equity it ought to do that which *is* right, rather than that which merely *appears* right. If it be lawful and safe to violate the letter of a divine statute—like that of the Sabbath—in order to preserve the spirit of such a statute; much more is it lawful and safe to disregard a human enactment, rather than perpetuate a serious wrong.⁶

This sort of nuanced moral reasoning was rapidly evaporating in certain portions of the church—especially in the south. Of the fifteen who signed the protest, only four were northerners:

⁵It is worth noting that the entire Synod of Mississippi had only six representatives at the Assembly (including Moore), out of the sixteen to which it was entitled. Stretching from Mississippi to Texas and Indian Territory, it was perennially vying with the Synod of Illinois (which included Wisconsin and Iowa) for the lowest representation. This played a significant factor in their argument. Minutes (1846) 214.

⁶Minutes (1846) 215. At a time when abolitionists regularly used the letter/spirit distinction to justify their attacks on slavery, the Old School use of it suggests a certain independence of thought.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Born</u>	<u>Seminary</u>	<u>Presbytery</u>	<u>Church</u>
Thomas H. Barr	PA	PTS 1838	Wooster	Wayne, OH
Thomas B. Bradford	?	private 1837	Philadelphia 2 nd	Germantown, PA
William L. Breckinridge	KY	private 1831	Louisville	1 st Presbyterian, Louisville, KY
James A. Lyon	TN	PTS 1836	Tombeckbee	Columbus, MS
Francis McFarland	Ireland	PTS 1820	Lexington	Bethel, Augusta Co., VA
Donald McQueen	?	private 1837?	Harmony	Sumterville, SC
William McWhorter	SC	private 1836	South Carolina	Liberty Spring, SC
Thomas V. Moore	PA	PTS 1842	Carlisle	Greencastle, PA
George W. Musgrave	PA	PTS 1828	Baltimore	3 rd Presbyterian, Baltimore, MD
Benjamin M. Palmer	SC	CTS 1841	Charleston	1 st Presbyterian, Columbia SC
William S. Andres		ruling elder	Fayetteville	NC
Mark Hardin		ruling elder	Louisville	KY
Joseph Turner		ruling elder	Transylvania	KY
Egbert C. Vaughan		ruling elder	West Hanover	VA
John Woodman		ruling elder	Iowa	IA

Figure 10.1. Regional Identification of the Protesters of 1846

The names of Lyon, Moore, Breckinridge and Palmer read as an honor roll of the up-and-coming generation of southern Presbyterian churchmen. Moore is a particularly interesting case, since he was northern born and bred, but in 1847 he accepted a call to the First Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA, and shortly thereafter became the co-editor of the Central Presbyterian. It also bears noting that McFarland was the only elder statesman in the group. He and Musgrave were the only two ordained prior to 1830.⁷ In other words, the strict constructionist perspective in Presbyterian constitutional interpretation appealed especially to the younger generation in the South.

But it is equally interesting to consider those leading southerners in attendance at the Assembly who did *not* sign the protest:

⁷Musgrave appears to be the primary author (usually the author's name was placed first in protests). Ironically, as the corresponding secretary of the Board of Domestic Missions from 1853-1861, he would become one of the central targets of the strict constructionists during the Boards controversies of the 1850s.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Born</u>	<u>Seminary</u>	<u>Presbytery</u>	<u>Church/Position</u>
Daniel Baker	GA	UTSVA 1818	Chickasaw	Holly Springs, MS
Philip Lindsley	NJ	Private 1810	West Tennessee	President, U Nashville, TN
William S. Reid	PA	M. Hoge 1806	West Hanover	Lynchburg, VA
William A. Scott	TN	PTS 1834	Louisiana	1 st Pres., New Orleans, LA
Samuel K. Talmage	NJ	private 1823	Hopewell	President, Oglethorpe U, GA
Isaac W. Waddell	GA	private 1829	Cherokee	Marietta, GA
John C. Young	PA	PTS 1828	Transylvania	President, Centre College, KY
James K. Douglass		ruling elder	Harmony	SC
Gilbert T. Snowden		ruling elder	Charleston	SC

Figure 10.2. Leading Southerners Who Did Not Protest

With the exception of William A. Scott, all had finished their studies before 1830. Three were college presidents, and as such taught moral philosophy—including political economy—which may have inclined them towards the equity argument. The older generation found the more nuanced argument of Jones and Dorrance persuasive and the strict constructionist argument of their younger colleagues less satisfying.⁸⁹

This comparatively trivial episode points to a paradigm shift in southern Presbyterian constitutional thought. The debate over the spirituality of the church was a

⁸For a similar situation in antebellum politics, consider John C. Calhoun's switch from nationalist "hawk" in the 1810s to states'-rights strict constructionist in the latter 1820s. Don E. Fehrenbacher, Sectional Crisis and Southern Constitutionalism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995) 126-127. Randy J. Sparks has suggested that since the older generation of southern ministers had a strong northern background (either by birth or training) they "did not feel threatened by the market revolution and the more competitive economic system that accompanied it," while those reared and trained exclusively in the South tended to be more skeptical of northern ideas and practices. Randy J. Sparks, "'To Rend the Body of Christ': Proslavery Ideology and Religious Schism from a Mississippi Perspective," Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery, John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay, eds. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 277-279.

⁹Three years earlier the Assembly had refused to seat a Mr. Smith of Columbia Presbytery (western New York) because he had been elected at a presbytery meeting where they did not have a quorum present. Even though they later obtained the consent of the absent ministers to Smith's election, the Assembly refused to seat him because they refused to set a precedent for allowing business without a quorum. When the Rev. William J. Fraser of Knoxville, Iowa, argued for equity in that case, the 1843 Assembly refused, on the grounds that equity should not be used to allow presbyteries to circumvent the law. In the Arkansas case, the 1846 Assembly was convinced that the presbytery was not trying to get around the church's constitution, but had been providentially hindered from following the church order. "Debates in the General Assembly," Presbyterian 13.21 (May 27, 1843) 83.

matter of hermeneutics and constitutional law. At a time when John C. Calhoun was pressing a similar line of argument in the United States Senate, the younger generation of southern Presbyterians took a particularly hard-line stand on a strict construal both of the Bible and Presbyterian church order, while older southerners and most northerners preferred to make room for the concept of equity.

1. Strict Construction and the Spirituality of the Church

The doctrine of the spirituality of the church has often been viewed as a nineteenth-century invention. Jack Maddex has claimed that southern Presbyterians were theocrats who used the spirituality of the church to ensure that the church would not speak on the matter of slavery.¹⁰ Likewise, E. Brooks Holifield suggests that the “spirituality of the church” doctrine was “merely a protective gesture during the slavery controversy” and that in reality the “Southern churches never truly abstained from social comment.”¹¹ Erskine Clarke argues that Thornwell’s doctrine of the spirituality of the church was formulated to ensure that the church did not speak to the matter of slavery—much as Calhoun’s doctrine of States’ Rights functioned in the political sphere. While acknowledging that both of these doctrines need to be seen in a larger context, Clarke insists that both doctrines were

¹⁰Jack P. Maddex, “From Theocracy to Spirituality: The Southern Presbyterian reversal on Church and State,” *JPH* 54 (Winter 1976) 438-457; cf. John Bodo, The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, 1812-1848 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960) 3-60. Farmer also tends to follow Maddex: James Oscar Farmer, Jr., The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986) 258-261.

¹¹E. Brooks Holifield, The Gentleman Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978) 154.

used in the south, both before and after the war, as “props to racial injustice.”¹² There is certainly some truth to these claims, but these authors all regularly ignore the distinction regularly made by southern Presbyterians between what individual ministers might say and do and what the church courts might say and do. While it was used effectively in the service of southern pro-slavery ideology, the doctrine of the spirituality of the church was more complex than most historians have been willing to admit.

It is perhaps better to see it as a nineteenth-century version of an ancient Christian doctrine, with roots in Augustine’s vision of the city of man and the city of God. In the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo distinguished between the earthly city and the heavenly city. Writing to defend the Christian church against claims that it sabotaged the Roman Empire, he insisted that the heavenly city “is on pilgrimage in this world.” While it cannot compromise its religious claims, it seeks peace with the earthly city “so far as may be permitted without detriment to true religion and piety.”¹³ This distinction between the two cities played an important role in defining the relationship between church and state for the next fifteen hundred years.

The doctrine of the spirituality of the church has medieval roots as well. While Pope Gregory VII also may have had designs on temporal lordship, many of his reforms

¹²Ersine Clarke, “Southern Nationalism and Columbia Theological Seminary,” American Presbyterians 66:2 (123-133). For treatment of the constitutional issues see Arthur Bestor, “State Sovereignty and Slavery: A Reinterpretation of Proslavery Constitutional Doctrine,” in Proslavery Thought, Ideology, and Politics edited by Paul Finkelman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989) 13-76. In his 1961 essay Bestor argued that state sovereignty was a “*legal* postulate,” to be distinguished from the idea of decentralized government as a “political *philosophy*.” He argued that the states’ rights doctrine was not especially an emphasis on local self-government, since the same southerners argued for strong federal authority in the case of the enforcement of fugitive slave law, rejecting the attempts at nullification by northern states (16-17, 58-59).

¹³Augustine, City of God 19.17 (London: Penguin Books, 1984) 878.

emphasized the spiritual nature of the church. In the eleventh century, it had become common for bishops and other ecclesiastics to be invested with their office by kings and princes. Gregory VII insisted that since the church is a spiritual body, only the church could invest men with spiritual authority.¹⁴ The medieval church exercised significant temporal power, but the seeds of the distinction had been sown.

The Reformed churches renounced the exercise of temporal power, but remained closely allied to the state. Scottish Presbyterians, in particular, jealously guarded the “spiritual independence of the church” against the English to resist state encroachment on ecclesiastical prerogatives.¹⁵ But for the Scots, as for most Christians since the days of Augustine, the state was supposed to support and encourage the church, even to the point of enforcing church discipline.

The question for Old School Presbyterians was how to adapt this vision of the spirituality of the church to their disestablished denominational status in the United States. Certainly its defenders claimed that they were simply articulating a traditional Presbyterian doctrine, purified from centuries of Constantinian influence. They argued that they were merely being more consistent than their forefathers.¹⁶

¹⁴See Brian Tierney, The Crisis of Church and State, 1050-1300 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988/1964) 45-52.

¹⁵John Macpherson, "The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology" in Anthology of Presbyterian and Reformed Literature Vol. V, edited by Christopher Coldwell (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1992).

¹⁶“The Ancient Presbyterian Theory of the Relation of the Civil to the Ecclesiastical Power--Testimony of the Scotch Reformers,” True Presbyterian 1.1 (April 3, 1862); “The True American, as Contrasted with the New England Doctrine touching the Relation of the Civil to the Spiritual,” True Presbyterian 1.1 (April 3, 1862). The editor, Stuart Robinson, regularly insisted that he was simply defending the old Virginia plan of the relation between church and state against the “Erasianism” of Massachusetts Puritanism.

But consistency also meant redefining documents originally written under an establishment system. American Presbyterians had altered the Westminster Confession to make denominationalism a matter of confessional orthodoxy, but that one explicit change now forced a reinterpretation of other parts of that confession, such as: “Synods and councils are to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or, by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.”¹⁷ In Scotland, the national Kirk spoke on many issues that would be considered purely “civil affairs” in the United States, simply by virtue of its established position.

But since their confession plainly permitted it, even those who defended the strict spirituality of the church allowed for a certain amount of social and political action. The civil government was unlikely to ask the Presbyterian General Assembly for advice, but the route of “humble petition” was still open. Therefore when the Presbytery of Baltimore brought a resolution to the 1852 General Assembly encouraging the religious rights of United States citizens traveling abroad—especially in Roman Catholic countries¹⁸—Stuart Robinson, who would become one of the leading advocates of the spirituality of the church, offered a substitute that would emphasize the aspect of petition. Rejoicing in the “increasing intimacy of intercourse between the several nations of the earth,” and hopeful

¹⁷Confession of Faith 31.4

¹⁸This matter had become an important issue in the Protestant movement after the imprisonment of some English Protestants in Italy. The American and Foreign Christian Union took up the cause in 1853. Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938) 267-269.

that such communication would promote “universal peace,” Robinson suggested that such intimacy required “special attention to the terms of intercourse between the citizens of various nations.” In particular, since “freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religious worship,” were not only “essential and inherent rights of American citizens” but were also “extended by the American people to citizens of all nations without restraint, it is but just and equal that this privilege should be extended to our citizens by all nations between whom and our country treaties and amity and commerce exist.” Therefore Robinson argued that the Assembly should petition the president of the United States that all “treaties with foreign nations” should include “provision made for securing to the American citizen travelling or resident in foreign countries, the right to profess his faith, and worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.”¹⁹

This resolution, however, was fiercely contested, and barely escaped a motion to table the whole subject by a vote of 78-82. New York and South Carolina found themselves oddly allied against southwestern strict constructionists and the northwest.²⁰

¹⁹Minutes (1852) 226.

²⁰Southerners voted 43-29 to table this, while northerners voted 35-43. Of course, a vote to table does not necessarily mean that a person was against the motion. One might wish to defeat the motion outright, and therefore vote not to table. The geographical spread is interesting:

NY/NE	14-4	(Albany, Buffalo and New York)
Mid-Atlantic	9-20	(New Jersey and Philadelphia)
Old NW	9-23	(Pittsburgh, Ohio, and Cincinnati)
New NW	3-7	(Indiana, Northern Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin)
Upper SW	6-5	(Kentucky and Missouri)
Lower SW	8-12	(Nashville, Memphis, Mississippi, Texas)
Upper South	10-6	(Virginia and North Carolina)
Deep South	19-6	(South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama)

It is worth noting that the entire Synod of South Carolina voted to table 10-0, while Alabama divided 3-4. Outside of South Carolina, however, strict constructionists led the vote to defeat the motion to table, such as Stuart Robinson of Kentucky and William A. Scott of New Orleans.

But many, like one Mr. Thompson deemed the whole project inexpedient.²¹ Churches should not interfere in matters of state. Stuart Robinson insisted that his substitute followed the confession in bringing a humble petition. “He wished to test the principles of the Papal nations,” to see if they would be willing to give foreign Protestants religious freedom.²² Nonetheless, Professor Nicholas Murray of Washington College, Pennsylvania, opposed it, warning the church to keep the door closed on agitating subjects. After considerable debate the Rev. Dr. Samuel Beach Jones moved that it be given to a committee to report back to the 1853 Assembly. In reply the Rev. Isaac M. Cook of western Pennsylvania urged immediate action. “He was ashamed of the extreme caution exhibited by the Presbyterian Church on this subject. It made his Scotch blood boil and tingle to his finger ends.”²³ Finally, the Assembly agreed to give the paper to a committee consisting of ministers William Swan Plumer, Samuel Beach Jones and Alexander T. McGill, along with ruling elders Robert C. Grier (a justice on the United States Supreme Court) and Humphrey H. Leavitt (a judge from Steubenville, Ohio).

The correspondence of the committee reveals that none of the members wanted to do much work, and the report was generally referred to as “Dr. Plumer’s Report on the Rights of Conscience.” Leavitt wrote to Plumer (the chairman), that he had “taken it for granted, that he and the other clerical members would prepare the report.” While generally

²¹There were three Thompsons at the 1852 Assembly. This is either the Rev. William S. Thompson of Virginia, George Thompson, a ruling elder from Nashville Presbytery in Tennessee, or John B. Thompson a ruling elder from Tuscaloosa Presbytery in Alabama. It is most likely William S. Thompson, since ruling elders were frequently identified as such in the record.

²²Charles Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR 24.3 (July, 1852) 499.

²³[Charles Hodge,] “General Assembly” BRPR 24.3 (July, 1852) 500.

favorable to taking some action on the rights of conscience, he admitted that he had not thought about the subject, and was not likely to have time for a few months.²⁴ A few months later he admitted that he was still too busy to think, but agreed to “affirm the argument and conclusions you recommend.” He noted that Congress was considering a bill on the subject, but doubted that it would do much good. “It is not likely that the Papal Governments will consent to any treaty provision exempting foreign Protestants from their intolerant and bigoted church polity. Still, it will be well for our country to let the world know the position she occupies in relation to the subject, and the rights she insists on in reference to her citizens.”²⁵

Grier (the supreme court justice) apologized that he was so accustomed to hearing arguments on both sides before coming to a conclusion, that he was reluctant to give an opinion. “I should like to examine treatises on the law of nations, how far any nation has a right to *enforce* toleration of their peculiar creed, in case of their own citizens choosing to reside in another country, when such creed is not tolerated to its own citizens.” His main hesitation with the Robinson report was that “as a general rule, no nation has a right to compel another to believe in toleration as a religious dogma, or practice it as a political principle.” Further he wondered “how far a merely ecclesiastical body, wholly dissevered from the State can with propriety interfere, *as such*, with the action of the government (either by petition or remonstrance) on a subject, which though affecting rights of

²⁴H. H. Leavitt to William S. Plumer, July 30, 1852, in “Dr. Plumer’s Report on Rights of Conscience,” Watchman & Observer 9.9 (October 8, 1853) 33. The report was submitted to the 1853 General Assembly in May, but was not published until October.

²⁵H. H. Leavitt to William S. Plumer, February 26, 1853, in “Dr. Plumer’s Report on Rights of Conscience,” Watchman & Observer 9.9 (October 8, 1853) 33.

conscience, yet, in this respect may be classed as political.”²⁶ The ruling elders on the committee—both deeply involved in American politics—were reluctant to see the church get involved.

The ministers, however, urged immediate action. Alexander T. McGill was convinced of the value of the petition. “As a Church, we are bound to see that our people have the word and ordinances of God freely secured to them, wherever they travel, and wherever they reside.” The secretary of Foreign Missions, the former U. S. Senator Walter Lowrie, frequently traveled to Washington to “so influence and move the government, as to secure protection to our missionaries.” Therefore it was equally appropriate for the Assembly to communicate directly with the government. “The aim of our Assembly, in this matter, is not to school the powers that be, or even to invest their policy with a moral character and religious accountability, but to deal with it as policy; averring that the churches of this country have as much right to reciprocal privilege in the oversight of their children abroad, as the banks of our country have to an equitable and free control of their deposits abroad; or the merchants of their cargoes abroad, where similar immunities are guaranteed to the foreigners here.” But he also demurred from being involved in the writing of the report and promised to support the chairman.²⁷

Plumer’s report to the 1853 General Assembly sided with McGill, and urged “that it is every way just and equal that American citizens residing abroad should be free to

²⁶R. C. Grier to William S. Plumer, August 18, 1852, in “Dr. Plumer's Report on Rights of Conscience,” Watchman & Observer 9.9 (October 8, 1853) 33.

²⁷A. T. McGill to William S. Plumer, September 13, 1852, in “Dr. Plumer's Report on Rights of Conscience,” Watchman & Observer 9.9 (October 8, 1853) 33.

profess their religious convictions, and to worship God without any hindrance or molestation whatever.” Further, it declared that the Assembly approved of the provisions of the recent treaty with Uruguay which provided for mutual religious rights for citizens of both countries, urging the United States government to apply the same principles to other countries as well. Asking the members of the church to communicate their desire for such treaties to the government, the General Assembly also sent a copy of these resolutions to the President of the United States, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.²⁸

After Plumer gave his report, Dr. Robert Baird advocated its adoption, mentioning that President Millard Fillmore and Secretary of State Edward Everett were both in favor of the principle. The real opposition, he suggested, came from Roman Catholics: “Rome was well aware that her interests would be the loser by any change.”²⁹

Once again, it was a ruling elder who objected to church involvement in politics. Kensey Johns, Chancellor of Delaware, agreed with the principles of the report, but he “thought it a dangerous interference with the affairs of the government. He was opposed to anything like a coupling together of the church and State.”³⁰ He insisted that the church, in its corporate capacity had no business speaking on political matters. “By attempting this, we encroach at once upon that sacred principle of our Constitution—the perfect separation

²⁸Minutes (1853) 460. Plumer also pointed out that the Methodists and Baptists were considering similar petitions. “Dr. Plumer’s Report on Rights of Conscience,” Watchman & Observer 9.9 (October 8, 1853) 33.

²⁹Charles Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR 25.3 (July, 1853) 524.

³⁰“Proceedings of the General Assembly,” W&O 8.44 (June 9, 1853) 174.

between Church and State.” If the advocates of the report were concerned about Rome, then they should reconsider their actions. “In every Popish country the very first step of Rome was to get the supremacy over the civil power. . . . We had no more right to memorialize Congress as an Assembly, than Congress had to memorialize us as a General Assembly.”³¹ Johns contended for a fundamental principle that “No civil court could interfere with our action as an ecclesiastical body, nor could we, as such, with the action of Congress.”³²

But Johns’ objection found little support. Ruling elder Thomas Montgomery of Kentucky agreed that the church should not interfere in civil matters, but argued that since this was a moral and religious question, involving the rights of conscience, the church should speak.³³ The Rev. Dr. John McDowell of Philadelphia expressed his surprise with Johns’ argument, pointing to the Confession’s statement that the church courts—as well as individuals—have the right of petition. The Rev. Dr. George Junkin, president of Washington College in Virginia protested against the Chancellor’s position, insisting that it was no infringement of the separation of Church and State to memorialize Congress. The memorial was adopted and recommended to religious journals for publication.³⁴ The Old School press hailed the Assembly’s decision as a triumph of proper principle. The

³¹Charles Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR 25.3 (July, 1853) 524.

³²Charles Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR 25.3 (July, 1853) 525.

³³“Proceedings of the General Assembly,” W&O 8.44 (June 9, 1853) 174.

³⁴Charles Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR 25.3 (July, 1853) 526. Drs. Magie and Neil also advocated adoption of the report.

Southern Presbyterian rejoiced that Johns stood “virtually alone” in his opposition,³⁵ and delighted in the passage of Plumer’s report.³⁶

It is not particularly surprising that the Old School was able to unite around a petition to Congress urging religious freedom for Protestants traveling in Roman Catholic countries. Broad support could be found to counteract Roman Catholic “tyranny.” But in domestic matters, the Old School was increasingly divided as to the proper limits of church authority.

2. The Boards Controversy

During the 1850s these debates swirled around the Boards of the church. In the 1810s-1830s, the Presbyterian Church had established agencies to promote domestic missions, foreign missions, ministerial education, and religious publication. These boards resembled the presbygational “American” Boards, except that they reported to the General Assembly and worked directly through the Presbyterian system of church courts.³⁷ As a strict constructionist interpretation of scripture and church order gained influence, some Old School Presbyterians questioned whether the church had any business creating such agencies.

³⁵Southern Presbyterian 6.37 (July 7, 1853) 147.

³⁶Editorial, “Rights of Conscience,” Southern Presbyterian 7.2 (October 27, 1853) 6.

³⁷The debate over the boards in the 1840s has some interesting connections with the debates over the centralized “American System” of Henry Clay which, like the American Boards had been established in the 1810s and 1820s, but had come crashing down in the late 1830s with the Jacksonian ascendancy and the Old School/New School division.

Not surprisingly, Robert J. Breckinridge originated the strict constructionist criticism of the boards. No sooner had he cast out the New School than he sought to exorcise the remnants of “congregationalist” influence in the Presbyterian Church. In 1840 he published A Village Pastor’s “Hints on the Agency System,” which proposed eliminating permanent agents from the General Assembly’s boards. Fearing the creation of a new “order of clergy” he argued that the church should rely upon the efforts of pastors and elders to foster proper notions of “systematic benevolence,” rather than the “new measures” approach of the agents, who merely “manufacture, then exhibit public opinion.”³⁸ Breckinridge went a step further that fall and argued that ecclesiastical boards were too much like voluntary societies in form and function, giving too much power to a few people not directly accountable to the church—but to a “board” with no real responsibility. Directing his anger against the Philadelphia/New York corridor that dominated the boards, he argued that “these boards, with other nominal ecclesiastical operations, are all so located and filled, that in truth, the Presbyterian church is managed, through these contrivances, by about two or three dozen persons--in all its great practical operations. Their efficient managers are as absolute a hierarchy as exists upon the face of the earth.”³⁹ Throughout the discussions of the Boards, regional jealousy and suspicion played a significant role.

³⁸A Village Pastor, “Hints on the Agency System” BLRM 6.3 (March, 1840) 118.

³⁹“Considerations on the Reports of the Ecclesiastical Boards of the Presbyterian Church” BLRM 6.10 (October, 1840) 448. Breckinridge was no respecter of persons. His brother John, whom he credited as the human agent in his own conversion, was secretary and general agent for the Board of Foreign Missions at the time that he wrote.

The Old School maintained four boards: Foreign Missions, Domestic Missions, Publication, and Education (focused on ministerial education). Each board had 80-120 members elected in four classes for four-year terms. While the boards drew members from all over the country, only members from the Philadelphia-New York area attended meetings regularly. Indeed, including such positions as trustee of the General Assembly, Director of Princeton Seminary, and Trustee of Princeton Seminary, Breckinridge pointed out that eight men served on all, or all but one of these seven boards:

<u>Ministers</u>	
Cornelius C. Cuyler	pastor of Second Presbyterian, Philadelphia
Henry A. Boardman	pastor of Tenth Presbyterian, Philadelphia
John McDowell	pastor of Central Presbyterian, Philadelphia
William W. Phillips	pastor of First Presbyterian, New York City
<u>Ruling Elders:</u>	
Matthew L. Bevan	Philadelphia merchant
Solomon Allen	New York bookseller
James Lenox	New York merchant
Alexander Henry	Philadelphia merchant
Source: <u>BLRM</u> 6.10 (October, 1840) 448.	

Figure 10.3. Breckinridge's Elite Eight

Objecting to the centralization of power in the hands of a few, Breckinridge urged the church to develop small standing committees with different men, “thoroughly Presbyterian, in reality as well as in name.” Objecting to the system of allowing persons to buy “honorary” memberships in the board as reeking of congregationalism, and to the practice of appointing long lists of vice presidents as a means to attract big money, Breckinridge

called for reform in fund-raising by the Old School.⁴⁰ Encouraged by Breckinridge's support, "A Village Pastor" chimed in, urging presbyteries and sessions to take the lead in benevolent work, so as to make agents and boards irrelevant to the life of the church.⁴¹ James Blythe, vice president of Hanover College in Indiana, agreed. Agents generally only visited wealthy congregations—creating class divisions within the church.⁴²

The board that got the least criticism was the Board of Foreign Missions. Foreign missions were the sacred cow of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. While other boards and organizations came under fierce attack, Old School foreign missions remained largely immune. One of the few who dared to criticize the board, predictably, was Breckinridge—and his criticism used the excuse of anti-Catholicism to justify itself. Walter M. Lowrie, a Princeton graduate serving as missionary in Macao, China, wrote in the Missionary Chronicle that Roman Catholic missionaries had the advantage in Hong Kong over Protestant missionaries, who were generally young and inexperienced, lacked sufficient funds, and were "cramp[ed]. . . by instructions," from mission agencies, "which. . . if they venture to go beyond them, reprove them for acting too independently."⁴³ Breckinridge commented that the root of the Protestant problem lay in the organization of its missions boards. "Our testimony against all these ecclesiastical corporations has been

⁴⁰"Considerations on the Reports of the Ecclesiastical Boards of the Presbyterian Church" BLRM 6.10 (October, 1840) 450. See appendix six for the development of the idea of systematic benevolence.

⁴¹A Village Pastor, "More Hints on the Agency System" BLRM 6.10 (October, 1840) 465-470.

⁴²James Blythe, "The Present State and Duty of the Church" BLRM 7.2 (February, 1841).

⁴³Lowrie went on to insist that he had no complaints about the Presbyterian Board—but Breckinridge only mentioned that at the end of his comments. Missionary Chronicle (February, 1843) 45-6.

considered purely theoretical, if not visionary: but here is a *practical* testimony from one of their own missionaries.” Breckinridge argued that if foreign missions were handled at the presbyterial level, then such cramping instructions would be eliminated. “How much better to carry out the true laws and ordinances of God’s house, than to pick up at second hand the devices of a close corporation under the laws of Massachusetts.”⁴⁴

A. Thornwell and Smyth

In the fall of 1840, the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia debated the system of church boards. Led by James Henley Thornwell (at that time the young pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, South Carolina), the minority condemned the policy “of conducting benevolent enterprizes by a system of Boards, and permanent agencies, as unpresbyterian, unscriptural, and dangerous.” After some debate, however, the synod voted 53-7 (with five abstentions) in favor of the board system.⁴⁵ While only a handful supported him, Thornwell was convinced that Breckinridge was correct that the board system contravened scripture and Presbyterian polity.

In April of 1841 Breckinridge’s Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine published “A Calm Discussion of the Lawfulness, Scripturalness, and Expediency of Ecclesiastical Boards.”⁴⁶ The author (later revealed to be Thornwell) argued that the

⁴⁴Breckinridge, “Action of the Presbyterian Church in Spreading the Gospel; Insufficient and Ill-Directed,” Spirit of the XIXth Century 2.3 (March, 1843) 179-180.

⁴⁵“Ecclesiastical Boards,” Presbyterian 11.1 (January 2, 1841) 2. This is strong evidence that the strict constructionist approach was not prominent in South Carolina prior to Thornwell.

⁴⁶[James Henley Thornwell,] “A Calm Discussion of the Lawfulness, Scripturalness, and Expediency of Ecclesiastical Boards” BLRM 7.4 (April, 1841) 145-161.

boards lacked divine warrant and should therefore be scrapped. Suggesting that in the excitement of the New School controversy, the Presbyterian church had “overlooked the inherent evils of the system itself,” he insisted that the board system involves “a practical renunciation of Presbyterianism.”⁴⁷ Presbyterian polity only recognized the offices of elder and deacon, but the secretaries and agents of the boards were neither. Likewise, Presbyterians had long utilized committees, but the boards did not report to the General Assembly like a committee. “They are confidential agents--acting upon their own suggestions and their own views of expediency and duty, without pretending to wait for positive orders from the General Assembly. They are clothed with plenary power to act and do as to them shall seem most advisable in all matters embraced in the general subject entrusted to their care.”⁴⁸ Thornwell suggested that the boards should be replaced by “benches of deacons, commissioned only to disburse funds under the direction of the spiritual courts.”⁴⁹ Rather than lord it over the church, such committees would serve the church.

⁴⁷Thornwell, “A Calm Discussion,” 146.

⁴⁸Thornwell, “A Calm Discussion,” 149.

⁴⁹Thornwell, “A Calm Discussion,” 151. One cannot avoid noticing the parallel with Calhoun’s doctrine of the federal government as “charged with a limited number of responsibilities and invested only with the power to carry them out.” Don E. Fehrenbacher, Sectional Crisis and Southern Constitutionalism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995) 130. Ironically, Thornwell’s arguments regarding the creation of extra officers not known to the Presbyterian Constitution sound similar to the arguments of Representative James Wilson of Indiana who argued regarding the Fugitive Slave Law: “Does it not recognize an officer unknown to the Constitution? Does it not deny the trial by jury in the issue of liberty? Does it not deny the sovereignty of the State?” See Arthur Bestor, “State Sovereignty and Slavery: A Reinterpretation of Proslavery Constitutional Doctrine, 1846-1860,” in Proslavery Thought, Ideology and Politics edited by Paul Finkelman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989) 29-30.

Benjamin Gildersleeve was first to reply. He pointed out that Thornwell's claim that the officers of the boards were new offices was false. The American boards (the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the American Home Missions Society, the American Education Society, etc.) were perhaps guilty of creating new offices, but not the Presbyterian boards. A Presbyterian board was not an ecclesiastical court but directly subordinate to the courts of the church. "Can it license? Can it ordain? Can it even locate a Missionary within the bounds of any Presbytery without its consent?" Gildersleeve insisted that the boards acted merely as agents of the church courts. As such they might overstep their bounds, and so "all their transactions should be subjected to a rigid scrutiny." But that possibility did not warrant their elimination.⁵⁰

In October, Thomas Smyth (pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and the leading contributor to Gildersleeve's Charleston Observer) also weighed in to defend of the boards.⁵¹ Having recently watched the Charleston Union Presbytery divide from the Old School out of its extreme pro-slavery mania, Smyth noted that "the tendency of the human mind is to extremes."⁵² Smyth saw

⁵⁰editorial, "The Boards of the Church," CQ 15.16 (April 27, 1841) 62. A year later Gildersleeve gleefully pointed out that the Secession church in Ireland (which Thornwell often pointed to as the "great sticklers for the purity of her forms and order," and the "pattern of excellence in a rigid maintenance of the faith") had adopted the system of church boards. A Presbyterian, "The General Assembly of the Irish Church and Boards," CQ 16.22 (May 28, 1842) 87.

⁵¹[Thomas Smyth,] "A Serious Review of 'A Calm Discussion of the Lawfulness, Scripturalness, and Expediency of Ecclesiastical Boards'--being a Defence of the Ecclesiastical Boards of the Presbyterian Church" BLRM 7.10 (October, 1841) 457-465. The second part was published in 7.12 (December, 1841) 561-572. The identity of the authors is confirmed not only from the style and content, but also by an editorial note from Breckinridge, that both were "living remote from the centre of our ecclesiastical operations, and near each other; and who, therefore, view these matters wholly from the same position, and without the least personal bias."

⁵²Smyth, "A Serious Review," 457.

this extremist attitude manifested in Thornwell and Breckinridge. If the work of missions and ministerial education were to be carried out upon the national and international scale that lay before them, the Presbyterian church would need a stronger organization than the traditional system of church courts would allow. The church needed a “permanent body of some kind, entrusted with discretionary powers. . . . If, therefore, as is admitted, the church is imperatively required to carry forward these enterprises, then are some ecclesiastical bodies separate and distinct from the ordinary courts of the church not only occasionally and for a short term indispensably required.”⁵³

Turning to Thornwell’s proposal of a bench of deacons, Smyth insisted that such a plan could not possibly work. Deacons did not have the authority to give moral direction to the operation, and the scheme provided no way to deal with the “thousand contingencies which may arise during the course of every year.”⁵⁴ Smyth reminded his readers that the Boards had been established precisely because the Assembly had found that standing committees had insufficient authority to act. Further, Smyth denied that the boards usurped the power of the presbyteries. Pointing to various regulations governing the boards, he showed that the boards were designed to be the servants of the presbyteries. The Board of Education could only fund candidates approved by the presbyteries, and the Missions Boards could only send missionaries approved and ordained by the presbyteries.⁵⁵

⁵³Smyth, “A Serious Review,” 461.

⁵⁴Smyth, “A Serious Review,” 464.

⁵⁵Smyth, “A Serious Review,” 7.12 (December, 1841) 566-567.

In conclusion, Smyth turned to Thornwell's central argument: the claim that boards were unscriptural. Smyth agreed. The board system "cannot be deduced from [the scriptures] by necessary inference." But that does not mean that it should therefore be eliminated as mere human invention. After all, "if it could be made to appear the wisest means to secure an end which the scriptures do make necessary, and for securing which no exact system of means is there provided in detail, it might be expedient and proper." But then again, Thornwell's own proposal was equally unsupported by scripture. "The scripture teaches us that deacons were instituted as officers of particular churches and for the single purpose of taking care of the poor, and of distributing among them the collections which were raised for their use. . . . To make deacons, then, the officers of Presbyteries and Synods, is to create new officers unknown to scripture, and to constitute benches of deacons for the purpose of disbursing funds for missionary and other operations. . . is nevertheless to assign to them duties not given in the word of God." Ironically, Thornwell's proposal was burdened with precisely the same theoretical problems as the board system that he attacked.⁵⁶

Thornwell replied that Smyth had missed the point. The development of ecclesiastical boards was merely symptomatic of "a general decline of all true religion."⁵⁷ Boards appealed to the natural sympathies of man, not to the faith of the saints. "Unlike the ordinances of God which thrive by opposition and flourish amid reproach, these sickly

⁵⁶Smyth, "A Serious Review," 464-465.

⁵⁷[James Henley Thornwell,] "Reply to a 'Serious Review of a 'Calm Discussion of the Lawfulness, Scripturalness and Expediency of Ecclesiastical Boards,' being a Defence of the Ecclesiastical Boards of the Presbyterian Church;"—by the Author of the Calm Discussion," BLRM 1.4 (April, 1842) 145.

creatures of human benevolence and folly can accomplish nothing without the treasures of Egypt at their feet; and will attempt nothing until the great and mighty men of the earth are duly consulted, flattered and cajoled.” Insinuating that they resembled the “Jesuits of Rome,” he argued that “if they were more spiritual, they would have fewer friends among the enemies of God.”⁵⁸ Arguing that his system depended upon faith and renounced the power of the world, Thornwell insisted that “we must abandon all the expedients of human wisdom, which in spiritual matters, ever has been and ever will be *folly*.”⁵⁹ Thornwell insisted that his plan—and only his plan—remained consistent with the standards of the church. Smyth had claimed that God had given a certain amount of discretionary power to the church. Thornwell, on the contrary, insisted “that the word of God was a perfect rule of practice as well as of faith, and that the church has no right to add to it or to take from it.”⁶⁰ Where Smyth claims that the church had general principles, Thornwell insisted that the church had specific laws.

The real point at issue between the reviewer and myself is—whether the church as organized by Jesus Christ and his apostles is *competent* to do all that her Head has enjoined upon her, or does she require additional agents to assist her? This is the real question, did Christ give the church all the furniture she needed, or did he partially supply her, with a general direction to make up the deficiency?⁶¹

⁵⁸Thornwell, “Reply to a ‘Serious Review,’” 146.

⁵⁹Thornwell, “Reply to a ‘Serious Review,’” 146.

⁶⁰Thornwell, “Reply to a ‘Serious Review,’” 151.

⁶¹Thornwell, “Reply to a ‘Serious Review,’” 153.

For Thornwell, the word of God determined all controversies: “The *silence* of the word of God concerning these inventions, seals their condemnation.”⁶² The discretionary power claimed by Smyth interfered with the crown rights of Jesus Christ over his church. Thornwell insisted that scripture taught that the church is “a mere instrumentality employed by Christ, for the purpose of accomplishing his own ends. . . . She is not his confidential adviser to whom he reveals his purposes, and whom he consults concerning his plans. . . . She is a *positive institution*, and therefore, must show a definite warrant for every thing that she does.”⁶³ Blending secular and ecclesiastical politics, Thornwell argued that “like the Congress of the United States, she acts under a written constitution, and must produce her *written authority* for all that she undertakes. Hence, so far is the church from having the power to ordain means, that she is herself the *very means* by which her glorious Head accomplishes his purposes in the world.”⁶⁴

Therefore Thornwell turned to show that the church was in fact equipped to do all that Christ had commanded. Even for Foreign Missions, the presbytery can ordain, and the deacons can collect and send the money. Nothing more was needed. The presbyteries could control the entire work of foreign and domestic missions, along with education and publication. Thornwell argued that the presbytery is the radical foundation of Presbyterian polity. The form of government, he pointed out, gives the power to start new churches (missions) to the presbyteries.

⁶²Thornwell, “Reply to a ‘Serious Review,’” 156.

⁶³Thornwell, “Reply to a ‘Serious Review,’” 168.

⁶⁴Thornwell, “Reply to a ‘Serious Review,’” 168.

The Synods and Assembly are courts of *union*, having reference only to churches already existing. The Presbyteries are also *formative* bodies, giving existence to the parts to be united. The only way in which the Assembly or Synod can plant a mission is by ‘directing the Presbyteries to ordain evangelists or ministers without relation to particular churches.’ (FG xviii). How undeniably plain, then, that our Constitution never contemplated any other agencies for missions but Presbyteries, with whom it has lodged the power to ordain ministers and form new churches—which includes the chief business of missions.⁶⁵

Part of Thornwell’s concern was that South Carolina churches might be required to finance abolitionist missionaries: “Under the system of Boards, the churches in South Carolina may be supporting a man sent out by a Presbytery denouncing them as unchristian and hypocritical—a Presbytery that would silence all their ministers and excommunicate all their members.” Therefore Thornwell argued that all mission work should be done at the presbytery level—perhaps allowing synods to assist “as all the Presbyteries in the same Synod are personally known to each other.”⁶⁶

But together with his principled arguments, Thornwell also leveled personal attacks against Smyth. Besides the “Jesuit” comment (one of the nastiest names a Protestant could employ), Thornwell noted that “the reviewer” gloried in being a moderate—and he reminded his readers what the Moderates in Scotland stood for: laxity in doctrine and subservience to civil domination of the church.⁶⁷ So when Breckinridge

⁶⁵Thornwell, “Reply to a ‘Serious Review,’” 170.

⁶⁶Thornwell, “Reply to a ‘Serious Review,’” 171.

⁶⁷Thornwell, “Reply to a ‘Serious Review,’” 147. Recall that this was in the heat of the Scottish debates that would lead in the following year to the formation of the Free Church of Scotland. Smyth, an Irishman by birth, had close ties to Thomas Chalmers and other leaders of the Evangelical party, so this barb was designed to sting.

offered Smyth an opportunity to reply, he demurred, claiming that the personal references were growing too heated.⁶⁸

B. Missions and Slavery in South Carolina

While Thornwell did not design his view of the spirituality of the church *in order to* defend slavery, Thornwell's particular application of that doctrine to the boards of the church was explicitly used in order to ensure that southern money and manpower were not perverted to northern abolitionist ends. South Carolina's Harmony Presbytery (where Thornwell's views took root most quickly) had a foreign missionary connected with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, John Leighton Wilson.⁶⁹ When the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions was founded in 1838, Wilson decided to remain with the American Board because he wished to remain in western Africa and he did not want to divide the mission. Further, even though the ABCFM came under fire for having a slaveholder as a missionary, the American Board had defended him, and he remained confident in its support.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Charlestonensis, Letter to the Editor, CQ 16.33 (August 13, 1842) 130.

⁶⁹John Leighton Wilson (1809-1886) was born in South Carolina and graduated from Union College (1829—where he was close friends with John B. Adger), and attended Columbia Theological Seminary (1831-1832) and Andover Theological Seminary (1832-1833), before being ordained by Harmony Presbytery in 1833 as a foreign missionary to Africa. From 1834-1841 he served at Cape Palamas, before moving to Gaboon in 1842. Returning to the United States in 1852 due to ill health, he was elected associate secretary of foreign missions by the 1853 General Assembly, where he remained until war broke out in 1861. He served the southern General Assembly as its first secretary of missions (both foreign and domestic) from 1862-1872, and after the two were separated, from 1872-1884 as the secretary of foreign missions.

⁷⁰For further details, see Hampden C. DuBose, Memoirs of Rev. John Leighton Wilson, D.D., Missionary to Africa, and Secretary of Foreign Missions (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1895).

But with Thornwell's vision of presbyterial missions in view, Harmony Presbytery considered asking Wilson to drop out of the ABCFM. The presbytery appointed the Rev. John C. Coit to chair a committee to correspond with Wilson.⁷¹ In the summer of 1843, the committee published a ten-part letter to Wilson, written by Coit, in the Charleston Observer.⁷² The strategy of the committee was unique in Old School history. Old School committees regularly waited for the approval of the church court before publishing its work. But this committee published its letter in the region's weekly newspaper before sending it to Wilson *and* before the presbytery approved it. While the letter was nominally addressed to John Leighton Wilson, it was plainly directed to the membership of the Presbyterian church in South Carolina and Georgia.

With the ABCFM withdrawing from the South and looking increasingly abolitionist to southern Presbyterians,⁷³ Coit's letter adopted Thornwell's emphasis on local control. Coit asked Wilson whether "it is not impossible to maintain your

⁷¹John C. Coit (1799-1863) was a lawyer in Cheraw, SC from 1823-1834. He studied theology privately in Harmony Presbytery, and then served as pastor at Cheraw from 1838-1857. Cheraw was the location of the Southern Christian Herald, the Old School weekly newspaper in South Carolina from 1835-1838. He was originally from New England, but in 1840 published an all-out attack on the New England theology. Charles Hodge commented that he had "not been long enough in the church of which he is so over-zealous an advocate and rebuker, to learn its principles or to imbibe its spirit." Hodge, "Discourse on Religion by Mr. Coit," BRPR 12.4 (October, 1840) 588. He also pointed out that while Coit condemned Taylor, he seemed to advocate the same sort of understanding of human agency as Taylor (588-589). But particularly reprehensible to Hodge was Coit's declaration that Presbyterianism was the only true religion, and that Methodists, Baptists, and other so-called "sister churches" were in fact not Christian at all (589-590). New Englanders in the South often became the most radical Presbyterians.

⁷²Harmony Presbytery, "To the Rev. John Leighton Wilson," CO 17.26-35 (July 1-September 2, 1843) 101, 106, 109, 113-114, 117-118, 121-122, 125-126, 129-130, 133-134, 137-138. While the letters were written in the name of the presbytery, they were authored by J. C. Coit, and approved by a committee of Thomas R. English, William M. Reid, William Wilson, Lawrence Prince, and William E. James. William E. James was Wilson's uncle—a wealthy ruling elder at Darlington church, and very influential in the presbytery and the synod.

⁷³"The American Board and Slavery," CO 17.32 (August 12, 1843) 126.

ecclesiastical relations with this Presbytery while you continue in connection with the ABCFM?” He declared that the presbytery would supply the entire funding for the mission if Wilson dropped all ties to the ABCFM.⁷⁴ Arguing that affiliating with the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions would only take a half step towards a biblical model,⁷⁵ he echoed Thornwell’s case for direct presbyterial supervision of foreign missions in order to properly form and receive churches according to presbyterian church order.⁷⁶ The letter concluded with an ultimatum: “If the Presbytery should sanction the doctrine of this letter, and you should be of a contrary mind, you can unite with a Presbytery where you will find sympathy, but you could not abide with us. But remember that we have warned you in the name of the Lord, and we beseech Him to vouchsafe to incline your heart to his holy testimony.”⁷⁷

Before Wilson even received this letter, Benjamin Gildersleeve responded with an attack on its logic. According to presbyterian church order, a presbytery consists of all ministers in a given district. Gildersleeve wondered how, on a strict construction of the constitution, “the jurisdiction of a Presbytery can be so extended as to embrace congregations in remote parts of the world.” After all, if notice of presbytery meetings must be given within ten days to all ministers, then that would include Mr. Wilson in

⁷⁴Harmony Presbytery, “To the Rev. John Leighton Wilson,” CO 17.26 (July 1, 1843) 101.

⁷⁵Harmony Presbytery, “To the Rev. John Leighton Wilson,” CO 17.33 (August 19, 1843) 129-130.

⁷⁶Harmony Presbytery, “To the Rev. John Leighton Wilson,” CO 17.34 (August 26, 1843) 133-134.

⁷⁷Harmony Presbytery, “To the Rev. John Leighton Wilson,” CO 17.35 (September 2, 1843) 138.

Western Africa. Thornwell and Coit might believe their system to be more presbyterian, but it directly contradicted the requirements of the Presbyterian constitution. Further, he suggested that if the presbytery worried that unsound presbyteries might be sending out heretical missionaries, then it should not want presbyteries operating foreign missions, since it was far easier for a single presbytery to become unsound than for the entire General Assembly. If committees were acceptable, despite the lack of biblical warrant for them, then boards were equally acceptable, “for a Board is nothing but a Committee with specified powers appointed for a limited time, and all their acts subject to the review and control of the body appointing them.”

In conclusion, Gildersleeve concluded that Harmony Presbytery was acting inconsistently with its rhetoric. If so convinced of the “deformity” of the Boards, and “their evil tendency, and their anti-Presbyterianism, and their hostility to the Scriptures,” that it would call them the “abomination of desolation,” then it should “secede from the Church which supports such a monster as Boards—and set up for themselves another fragmentary body under the style of ‘the very latest Reformed Presbyterian Communion.’”⁷⁸

In November, the presbytery refused to approve the letter to Wilson 6-9 (with three abstentions—including Wilson’s uncle, William E. James).⁷⁹ The presbytery instead affirmed 12-5 the right of the General Assembly to conduct foreign missions, although

⁷⁸editorial, “The Letter to the Rev. J. L. Wilson,” CO 17.35 (September 2, 1843) 138.

⁷⁹“Minutes of Harmony Presbytery,” CO 17.46 (November 18, 1843) 182. The ayes were Revs. Reid, English, McQueen, Auld, Gregg and Coit; the noes were Revs. Campbell, Pierson, Ketchum, Brown, and Fraser, along with ruling elders Wilson, C. R. Douglas, J. E. Robinson, and W. C. Robinson. W. E. James, Jos. Dwight and J. McCreight were excused from voting.

“convinced that there are many irregularities and improprieties in the present mode.”⁸⁰ The following spring, Harmony Presbytery approved a more moderate letter, urging Wilson to rely entirely upon his presbytery but without issuing any ultimatums.⁸¹

More than a year later (not surprisingly, given the difficulties of communication between western Africa and South Carolina), Wilson replied to his presbytery. Wilson pointed out that the presbytery had ordained him for the particular work of the ABCFM in western Africa, and the fact that it had changed its mind did not alter either his or its obligations. The ABCFM had been faithful to its obligations. Pointing to the failure of various synodical attempts at foreign missions, Wilson declared: “I duly appreciate your kindness to me, and I honor your zeal for the cause of Missions, but I cannot refrain from the conclusion that you have proposed an enterprise, the cost of which you have not counted.” No presbytery had the time or the resources to devote to the questions and concerns of a foreign missions field.⁸² Replying to some of Coit and Thornwell’s concerns regarding schools and printing presses under church control, Wilson pointed out that if the church surrendered these, the Roman Catholics would quickly overwhelm Protestant missions. Wilson could not help but point to the irony of the result, that Roman Catholics

⁸⁰“Minutes of Harmony Presbytery,” CO 17.46 (November 18, 1843) 182. The notes were McQueen, Auld, Gregg, Coit and Jos. White.

⁸¹Harmony Presbytery, CO 18.17 (April 27, 1844) 66.

⁸²“Letters of the Rev. J. L. Wilson in Reply to the Committee of Harmony Presbytery,” CO 19.26 (June 28, 1845) 102.

might be victorious through the use of schools and printing presses—the same instruments that the Reformed churches had utilized so effectively during the Reformation.⁸³

Plainly the issues were much larger than slavery. But the abolitionist sympathies of the American Board, and southern fears of a growing anti-slavery movement in the northern-controlled Presbyterian Board certainly played a significant role in the desire for local control over missions and education. After all, once the southern church had its own General Assembly, southerners had little difficulty entrusting the entire oversight of missions and education to the Assembly—even turning the seminaries over to Assembly control (something strenuously resisted during the antebellum era).⁸⁴

C. The Response of the Boards

Nonetheless, the criticisms of Breckinridge, Thornwell, and others, guaranteed that secretaries and agents of the boards would go out of their way to assure the church that the boards were servants of the presbyteries, not their masters. In 1845 the Watchman of the South published a sketch of the history and the purposes of the Board of Education, explaining that the General Assembly had first tried to depend entirely upon the presbyteries, but the vast frontier portions of the church were so destitute of ministers that another agency proved necessary. By 1831, under the supervision of John Breckinridge (R. J.'s brother) the Board “had taken the work almost entirely out of the hands of the Presbyteries, and managed it by its own agency, with an ability and power seldom if ever

⁸³“Letters of the Rev. J. L. Wilson in Reply to the Committee of Harmony Presbytery, IV” CO 19.29 (July 19, 1845) 114.

⁸⁴Jack P. Maddex, “Presbyterians in the South, Centralization, and the *Book of Church Order*, 1861-1879,” American Presbyterians 68:1 (Spring, 1990) 24-45.

surpassed.” But the church feared to see such power centralized and saw the need of the “wisdom and watchfulness of the Presbyteries.” Therefore the Assembly had required the presbyteries to “select, supervise and judge the beneficiaries of the board.” The Board of Education depended entirely on each presbytery to supervise ministerial training. “The Board of Education is only her organ, guides its operation by her wisdom, and submits every question touching her interests to her own jurisdiction.”⁸⁵

But throughout the 1840s and early 1850s, the question of the boards festered. Few agreed with Thornwell that the boards contravened scripture or the church’s constitution. Rather, complaints arose about practical problems—usually centralization of power in the Philadelphia-New York corridor or inadequate General Assembly oversight.⁸⁶ Virtually every General Assembly saw minor controversy over one or more boards—and virtually every General Assembly overwhelmingly decided the case in favor of present practice. Some Old School newspapers grew so weary of the constant sniping that they refused to publish any but the most serious attacks on the practices of the boards. Inevitably, dissidents charged a cover-up. Most Presbyterians, though, remained convinced that the boards functioned well.⁸⁷

⁸⁵“Ministerial Education” Watchman of the South 8.28 (February 27, 1845) 109. Since the article came from the Education Rooms in Philadelphia, the author was likely the secretary of the board, Matthew B. Hope. Many similar articles were written throughout the controversy in order to defuse concerns.

⁸⁶These criticisms were frequent throughout the period, e.g., Presbyterian Advocate (May 16, 1849) 510; “Debate on the Boards of the Church in the General Assembly, Baltimore, May, 1848,” Presbyterian Treasury 1.6 (June, 1848) 81-83; Parity, “Ministerial Aristocracy” Presbyterian Standard 3.30 (October 22, 1863).

⁸⁷Presbyterian Advocate (May 9, 1849) 506. As an example of the sorts of minor squabbles that regularly occurred, in 1857 the Board of Domestic Missions urged that all churches that contributed nothing to the boards “should not be considered as in good standing.” This prompted a vigorous response. R. J. Breckinridge said that “he would be willing to open his throat very wide, and swallow most things which

3. Variations on the Spirituality of the Church

Thornwell's distinctive view of the church did not take root immediately. As president of the College of South Carolina from 1852 to 1855, he had perhaps more influence in the state than the church. By the end of the 1840s, outside of Harmony Presbytery, Thornwell had made only a few converts.⁸⁸ As late as 1845 even his own Charleston Presbytery listened more to Thomas Smyth and Benjamin Gildersleeve, along with Aaron Leland and George Howe, the professors at Columbia Theological Seminary. Only Benjamin Morgan Palmer, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia was of like mind with Thornwell. But slowly this changed. Gildersleeve departed for Richmond to edit the combined Watchman and Observer in 1845, leaving the deep south with no Old School periodical. In 1847 Thornwell and Palmer started the Southern Presbyterian Review, a monthly theological journal designed to provide a forum for their distinctive vision of the church. Through its pages the Thornwellian vision began to move the minds of the South.⁸⁹

would be brought in here by committees, but he could not get that down." John B. Adger agreed. It was inappropriate to censure all churches who fail to support the Boards—especially those who were giving hundreds of dollars to presbyterial home missions. Charles Drake, a ruling elder from 2nd Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, wondered why his church should send its money all the way to Philadelphia, when it knew the needs locally. He feared that there was "a tendency in our Church to centralization, and a danger from it." In the end, Judge John Fine killed the motion by suggesting that it be recommitted to the committee. "General Assembly," Presbyterian 27.22 (May 30, 1857) 86.

⁸⁸See Farmer, 72-73.

⁸⁹By the end of the 1850s the SPR was able to report on an experiment in Thornwellian polity. G. C. Gregg argued for the presbyterial control of missions with a central agency merely to provide "pecuniary equilibrium." He argued that there was no need for the General Assembly to get involved with the management of home missions. Each presbytery should have a committee on Domestic Missions to implement the decisions of the presbytery. The one presbytery that had tried this in South Carolina (Harmony) reported that its annual contributions have exceeded by three times what they had previously been, and they had planted seven churches in the last few years. G. C. Gregg, "Our Domestic Missions--The

Shortly thereafter, a weekly newspaper, the Southern Presbyterian, started in Milledgeville, Georgia, under the editorial charge of Washington T. Baird. Since the seminary and the quarterly were in Columbia, Georgia Presbyterians thought it proper to have the newspaper alongside the synodical college of Oglethorpe. After the return of the Charleston Union Presbytery (which was independent from 1839-1852), however, Baird and the Southern Presbyterian moved to Charleston, where Thomas Smyth became something of an associate editor.⁹⁰ Neither Baird nor Smyth had much sympathy for Thornwell's views, and the Southern Presbyterian remained a firm supporter of the boards throughout its first decade.⁹¹

Indeed one contributor to the Milledgeville weekly complained that many of the articles in Thornwell's Southern Presbyterian Review were "feeble and worthless," and while a Georgia respondent thought this too harsh, he did agree that at least on the subject of denominational education the SPR was not "in accordance with the views of the great majority of Presbyterians in our land, and with the sentiments of our Presbyteries, our Synods, and our General Assembly." When one leading minister wrote an article on parochial education, the SPR "violently opposed [it], and had it not been insisted on,

True Theory of Their Conduct and Management," SPR 11:3 (October, 1858) 402-419.

⁹⁰"Change of Location," Southern Presbyterian 6.19 (February 24, 1853) 74.

⁹¹Thomas Smyth, in his Autobiographical Notes comments that Old School ruling elder Job Johnston (Chancellor of South Carolina) had written him in 1849 that Thornwell's "severely analytical mind carries him to positions and holds him there and makes him regardless of all consequences." Nonetheless, Johnston insisted that "wherever his head is, his heart is right and his charity warm." Cited in James Oscar Farmer, Jr., The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986) 68.

would not have been given to the public through the pages of that Review.”⁹² In contrast to such editorial censorship, Baird’s Southern Presbyterian vowed “never [to] degenerate into the organ of any clique or party, in or out of the church. It shall be catholic in its spirit, and be devoted to the edification, and not the distraction, of the great body of believers.”⁹³ For his part, Thornwell stayed aloof from the Southern Presbyterian. When Baird published a list of “special contributors” who had pledged to write frequently for the paper, it contained the honor roll of South Carolina and Georgia ministers, but not Thornwell.⁹⁴

⁹²Chrysostom, “The SPR,” Southern Presbyterian 3.13 (November 23, 1849) 51. The SPR would later refuse to publish R. C. Smith’s, “Defence of Denominational Education.” Cf. “Editorial Exchange,” Presbyterial Critic 1:1 (January, 1855) 51.

⁹³“Principles on which this Paper will be Conducted” Southern Presbyterian 6.19 (February 24, 1853) 74.

⁹⁴The list contained such luminaries as Thomas Smyth, Aaron W. Leland, George Howe, Benjamin M. Palmer, John B. Adger, Samuel K. Talmage, and C. C. Jones, as well as one of the best-known southern ruling elders, the Honorable E. A. Nisbet. Southern Presbyterian 7.26 (April 13, 1854) 102. Given the glowing account of Thornwell in Benjamin Morgan Palmer’s, The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1875), perhaps it is only fair to give some space to the gossipy, and somewhat negative portrait of Thornwell given in the Presbyterian Banner in 1861 by a former student. He explained that his reason for speaking of Thornwell’s faults was because “his creed and mine” denied perfection to anyone. He claimed that Thornwell displayed a “spirit of self-appreciation--a full confidence in his own powers and attainments, and a manifest unwillingness to confess that he could learn anything from anybody, or that any one could be more fit for any station than he was. . . . Thus it was that with the declaration that there was no one in Princeton, or in any Presbyterian Seminary, that could teach him Hebrew, he went to Harvard to study under Dr. Palfrey.” He suggested that “it was characteristic of Dr T that he never openly did himself what could be done by any satellite or follower,” and claimed to have personally witnessed this while a student at Columbia Seminary, when Thornwell opposed professors Leland and Howe in 1838. (April 4, 1861)

This assertion drew a reply from George Howe of Columbia in the April 18th issue, emphatically rejecting this scandalous portrait of Thornwell.

The former student claimed that he simply wrote “just my estimate of one, whom, as myself, an imperfect, sinful man, I could with even the imperfections of which I spoke--not so great as my own, probably--still call a friend.” But he pointed out that Howe’s letter did not refute his claims. Every seminarian in 1838 knew that “Dr T stood in the attitude of hostility to the Professors,” and “the feeling among the students was that he desired the chair of Theology for himself.” The students would debate whether Thornwell and Richard S. Gladney (the editor of the Southern Christian Herald) should replace the present professors, and when a “Mr D” (an associate of Gladney--possibly James Bulloch Dunwoody who arrived at the seminary in 1838) came to the sem, they initially viewed him as a spy. “Can we forget the interest with which we watched every meeting of the Presbyteries of Bethel and South Carolina, before which, all the time, was the question of the orthodoxy or heresy of our instructors? . . . I Could as well forget that I was ever in the Seminary, as to forget the whole course of thought there.” And we all agreed in

By the end of the 1850s, however, Thornwell was called the “Calhoun of the Southern Church,” and his distinctive views were spreading.⁹⁵ Indeed, in the fall of 1860, after the relatively benign editorships of J. L. Kirkpatrick and H. B. Cunningham, Abner A. Porter bought the Southern Presbyterian and moved it to Columbia.⁹⁶ For the first time Thornwell’s supporters had a weekly newspaper of their own. In an early article, one author suggested that southern Presbyterians focused on perfecting presbyterian polity due to the relative uniformity of southern evangelical churches. The northern and western churches had to battle against false doctrine. Since all southern denominations preached the same basic doctrines, only church polity divided them. Southern Presbyterians, therefore, had come to “believe that our denomination has a vitality in its ordinances and officers, as well as in its doctrines, fitting it to do the work of evangelizing the masses in a

attributing “this whole crusade against Drs Howe and Leland to the working of Bro. Thornwell.”

The former student explained why he had always mistrusted Thornwell. He claimed that when Thornwell was considering coming to the College of South Carolina, he had defended Howe and Leland privately to Thornwell, apparently to the latter’s satisfaction, but at the next presbytery meeting Thornwell had spoken loudly against the professors. When the student asked why, Thornwell allegedly replied that “he was compelled to speak as beforetime, or the brethren would say that he had changed his course because he was going to Columbia. Then my estimate of Dr. T’s character was formed, and I never saw any reason to change it.” (April 25, 1861)

“Recollections of Columbia SC, by a graduate of the Theological Seminary,” Presbyterian Banner (January-August, 1861). The author was William W. Eells, who was born in Connecticut, attended Yale College, and then Columbia Theological Seminary from 1835-1838. After two short pastorates in North Carolina and Washington, DC, he settled in the 2nd Presbyterian Church of Newburyport, Massachusetts (1847-1855), before accepting a call to Carlisle, Pennsylvania (1855-1862). After the war, the Southern Presbyterian replied by insisting that “Much of what he says is not true; and many of the truths he utters are such that no Christian minister should delight in raking them up and spreading them before the public.” “Who is the Slanderer?” Southern Presbyterian 1.18 (May 3, 1866). Even Thornwell’s defenders could not affirm that all of Eells claims were false.

⁹⁵This change in attitude is not particularly surprising. Calhoun himself was strongly criticized within South Carolina until after his death. See James O. Farmer, Jr., The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986) 39.

⁹⁶A. A. Porter, “Prospectus of a New Series of the Southern Presbyterian,” Southern Presbyterian 12.51 (September 29, 1860).

manner superior to that of any other Christian sect.”⁹⁷ But how a Thornwellian paper would have differed from other papers is not clear. The election of Abraham Lincoln, the secession movement, and the outbreak of the war resulted in Porter filling his pages with political commentary virtually every week—somewhat ironic for a paper endorsing the spirituality of the church.

A. Stuart Robinson and the Presbyterian Critic

In Baltimore, Robert J. Breckinridge’s quest for reform found a new voice. In January of 1855, two Baltimore pastors, Stuart Robinson (Central Presbyterian Church) and Thomas E. Peck (Broadway Street Church) launched the Presbyterial Critic and Monthly Review, a magazine in the tradition of Breckinridge’s Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine, though with less anti-Catholic material.⁹⁸ The editors conceived their paper as a forum for discussion of church polity, accessible to all officers of the church. From the start they argued that the boards had been “hastily devised” and did not accord with a “‘strict construction’ of the powers conferred by the Constitution on the

⁹⁷*, “The Eldership Question in the South,” Southern Presbyterian 1.3 (November 17, 1860).

⁹⁸While Robinson and Peck were the main writers, R. J. Breckinridge, R. L. Dabney, B. M. Smith, John H. Boccock, C. R. Vaughan, and William H. Ruffner were also contributors to the journal. Robinson (1814-1881) was born in Ulster, and had studied at Union and Princeton seminaries (1841), while Peck (1822-1893) was a South Carolinian who had studied theology privately with Thornwell, before being licensed in 1844. The only book-length treatment of Robinson is 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). Graham passionately agrees with Robinson’s stance, but identifies Robinson and Thornwell as being representative of the “true” Old School position (17, 21). The fact that virtually *all* of the Old School weeklies criticized his paper might suggest that he was not as mainstream as Graham thought. Further, because of Breckinridge and Robinson’s fallout in the late 1850s and early 1860s, Graham seems to miss the fact that Breckinridge was in fact the source of Robinson and Thornwell’s reforms. (Cf. page 26 where he anachronistically calls Breckinridge a “Thornwellian.”) The reason why historians have failed to understand Breckinridge is because they assume that Thornwell was the leading figure, whereas in fact, Breckinridge called no man master.

Judicatories of the Church,” and they served notice that they would oppose “all tendencies within the church itself, to the centralization of power.”⁹⁹ While both Robinson and Thornwell emphasized the spirituality of the church, Robinson concerned himself more with the centralization of power.

After the first issue, the gloves came off, and Robinson launched his assault on the boards of the church. He had authored a review of the 1854 General Assembly in the Southern Presbyterian Review, echoing Breckinridge and Thornwell’s claim that the Boards were a residue of Congregationalism and calling for reform “either peacefully or forcibly, through the Boards, or over the Boards.”¹⁰⁰ Robinson argued that the “radical differences amongst us, as to the polity and measures of the church,” amounted to “two distinct Presbyterianisms.” In a telling comparison, he suggested that “It is a difference analogous in some respects, to that which divides the two political parties of the country,—the theory of ‘strict construction,’ as it is called, against the theory of large powers to the General Government.”¹⁰¹ Robinson would defend the strict constructionist position, convinced that the constitution of the church provides for “all the agencies and means necessary to carry out the purposes of the church.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹“Our Idea,” Presbyterial Critic 1:1 (January, 1855) 4. William Engles rightly perceived the new paper as devoted to Breckinridge’s reformation: “A New Monthly Magazine,” Presbyterian 25.5 (February 3, 1855) 18.

¹⁰⁰Reprinted as “The General Assembly of 1854,” Presbyterial Critic 1:2 (February, 1855) 92. A critique of the Boards that sounds very much like Robinson is found in “More Boards in the Presbyterian Church,” Presbyterial Critic 1:5 (May, 1855) 197-204.

¹⁰¹“The General Assembly of 1854,” Presbyterial Critic 1:2 (February, 1855) 92.

¹⁰²“The General Assembly of 1854,” Presbyterial Critic 1:2 (February, 1855) 92-3. Predictably, this called forth a response from William Engles in the Presbyterian defending the Boards as the reason for the church’s unprecedented growth. He pointed out that even the New School was developing their own

Robinson's rhetorical jabs at his colleagues provoked a war of words and wit. Virtually every issue of the Presbyterial Critic included lengthy sparring with other editors, liberally spiced with sarcasm and ridicule.¹⁰³ Robinson was constitutionally unable to keep quiet in the face of criticism. He kept up a regular exchange with other editors, exercising a caustic tongue at times.¹⁰⁴ While David McKinney, editor of the Presbyterian Banner, criticized certain aspects of the boards, he thought Robinson paranoid. Robinson's insinuations and personal attacks disgusted him.¹⁰⁵ McKinney sought some minor reforms to improve the efficiency of the boards, but Robinson's all-out assault disturbed him.

boards in recognition of their effectiveness. "The Last General Assembly," Presbyterian 25.6 (February 10, 1855) 22.

¹⁰³E.g., "Who Are the Revolutionists?" Presbyterial Critic 1:6 (June, 1855) 249-256; "The Critic and Its Censors," Presbyterial Critic 1:7 (July, 1855) 329-336. In this respect Robinson continued Breckinridge's approach from the 1840s, but with one key difference: Robinson took himself too seriously. While Breckinridge could use humor as a weapon, he could also poke fun at himself and his friends. When the portly John Adger apologized to the Assembly of 1857 for being late for his own report, he gave as his excuse that Dr. Breckinridge's horse was too slow, at which Breckinridge called out from the floor, "that is because he seldom has such a load of divinity behind him as Dr. Adger." "General Assembly," Presbyterian 27.22 (May 30, 1857) 86.

¹⁰⁴His initial reference to David McKinney of the Presbyterian Banner was humorous: McKinney "treated us just as we would have expected from a mountain man, not yet long resident among her brick and mortar parallelograms—plain out-spoken, manly" (February, 1855) 93. But the underlying insult was made plain a year later, when McKinney suggested that the Presbyterial Critic's clamor against the Boards was insane: Robinson retorted that "the very idea of insanity. . . implies the possession originally of powers of mind of which we never suspected the existence in the editor of the *Banner*." "Editorial Caustic" Presbyterian 26.12 (March 22, 1856) 46.

¹⁰⁵"Presbyterial Critic, Rev. Stuart Robinson, and Ourselves," Presbyterian Banner (April 21, 1855). Stuart Robinson, "Who Should Be Just and make the Amende?" Presbyterial Critic 1:4 (April, 1855) 185-193. Robinson had insinuated that George Musgrave had accepted the office of secretary of the Board of Missions, when elected by one vote (and that one vote had been cast by a man who was not even a member of the Board). McKinney objected that this cast Musgrave in a dishonorable light—especially since Musgrave had actually declined the election. Only after the Board reconsidered and unanimously called him, did he accept. Ordinarily the Banner was the "opposition" paper, while the Presbyterian defended the Boards. Robinson was astonished that McKinney was now found defending the Boards and attempted to demonstrate the "crooked" machinations of the Board. After the demise of the Presbyterial Critic the Banner returned to chiding the Presbyterian for its perennial defense of the Boards. Presbyterian Banner 6.52 (Sept 18, 1858).

Nonetheless, Robinson hoped that his efforts would bear fruit in continuing the Breckinridge reformation of the church. Indeed, he suggested that the reformation had largely succeeded, and that virtually all ministers now agreed that “the form of the Church is of divine authority.”¹⁰⁶ He identified three positions within the church: 1) “thorough Presbyterianism” that affirmed the “Act and Testimony” of 1834, sometimes called “High Church Presbyterianism,” characterized by Thornwell and Dr. John Krebs of New York;¹⁰⁷ 2) the “Virginia School” of Archibald Alexander and William Swan Plumer, which joined in the reform of the church in 1837 but was not entirely committed to further reform; and 3) the “Princeton Party” led by Charles Hodge, which “driven to make election by the events of 1837 and ‘38, preferred the Old School” but had firmly stood against further reform.¹⁰⁸ Robinson made it clear that he stood for “thorough Presbyterianism.”

In 1856 Robinson was called to Danville Theological Seminary, where he joined R. J. Breckinridge on the faculty. In 1858 he published The Church of God As An Essential Element of the Gospel, setting forth his conviction that “an ecclesiastical

¹⁰⁶“The General Assembly of 1855,” Presbyterial Critic 1:10 (October, 1855) 446. Robinson’s debt to R. J. Breckinridge may be found in his reference to the distinction between the “orthodox” and the “moderates;” his disparaging references to William Swan Plumer and Henry A. Boardman as having been halfhearted in the mid-1830s; his references to several documents written by Breckinridge; and his assumption that the “real” Old School was devoted to Breckinridge’s reforms. “The General Assembly of 1855,” (September, 1855) 400. He also sided with Breckinridge’s emancipationist approach to slavery (442). The key to attributing authorship to Robinson is found in his states’ rights philosophy—describing the south as “fifteen, free, christian, fair and noble commonwealths” (443)—and in the fact that Robinson published it together with his (acknowledged) review of “The General Assembly of 1854.” See “Advertisement,” Presbyterial Critic 1:11 (November, 1855) 532.

¹⁰⁷The identification of Krebs with Thornwell is misplaced, as shown later. In 1855 Krebs had spoken strongly in favor of creating a Committee on Church Extension, rather than a “Board.” This created the false impression in some minds that Krebs opposed the board system.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 446-447.

reformation was no less important than the reformation doctrines of justification by faith and the exclusive authority of Scripture.”¹⁰⁹ Robinson suggested a historical progression in the development of doctrine. Whereas the early church articulated the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology, and the Reformation first clearly stated the doctrines of salvation, he believed that the American Presbyterian Church had the opportunity to clarify the doctrine of the church:

Do not the providences of God toward the American Church, in freeing her from the civil domination which, by violence or seduction, silenced the martyr voice of her Scotch mother when she would testify for Christ's crown and covenant, and in placing the Church here in a position (For the first time, perhaps, since the Apostles), to actualize fully and without hindrance her true nature and functions as a spiritual commonwealth--do not all seem to indicate that the time has fully come for the final development of the visible Church as a governmental power on earth, yet a kingdom not of this world, a people not reckoned among the nations?¹¹⁰

The spirituality of the church, for Robinson, flowed from the old Scottish doctrine of the church, once the church was freed from the encumbrance of the state.

¹⁰⁹Stuart Robinson, The Church as an Essential Element of the Gospel (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1858) 122. The reviews of this book were mixed. Samuel J. Baird thought that Robinson over-emphasized the kingship of Christ in the government of the church, suggesting that Christ's offices of prophet and priest should be equally treated. Samuel J. Baird, “The Beauty of God's Witnessing Church,” SPR 11.3 (October 1858) 357-385. On the other hand, Robinson's friend Thomas Peck called it one of the finest books on the doctrine of the church, and argued that “in every great effort to amend the social and political condition of this country, which shall be successful, the principles of this Church will be the standard of reform.” Thomas E. Peck, “Stuart Robinson's Church of God,” SPR 11:3 (October, 1858) 488. Another criticism objected that Robinson rooted civil power in God as creator rather than in Jesus Christ, making Christ king over the church, but not over the state. Therefore, for Robinson, “reason, not revelation, is the rule for civil rulers.” While deploring the union of church and state, this author feared that Robinson was tending in the opposite direction. A Subscriber, “Dr. Robinson's Church of God,” PH 28.22 (Nov 25, 1858).

¹¹⁰Robinson, The Church 27-28, quoted in Peck, “Stuart Robinson's Church of God,” 485.

B. William A. Scott in San Francisco

The most extreme version of the spirituality of the church was expressed by the pastor of the Calvary Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, California, William Anderson Scott.¹¹¹ Scott was a controversial figure in California, largely because only he among the clergy had opposed San Francisco's Vigilance Committee in 1856. All of the city's other Protestant ministers supported the vigilante approach as a regrettable necessity, given the failure of government to control crime, but Scott declared that he could not "for one moment approve of the proceedings of the Committee," even though nine of the eleven officers of his congregation belonged to it.¹¹² Since California's religious newspapers shut him out, he wrote to the Philadelphia Presbyterian that he could not support the Vigilance Committee, in its "overturning our constitutional laws, by banishing and hanging some of our citizens." In particular he objected to the San Francisco clergy speaking in favor of the

¹¹¹Scott (1813-1885) was born in Tennessee, studied at Cumberland College and Princeton Seminary and was ordained in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1835, but his doctrine was too Calvinistic for the Cumberland Presbyterians, so after three years he transferred to the Old School Nashville Presbytery, where he served as principal of the Nashville Female Academy and as stated supply for two congregations, including the Hermitage Church, where former president Andrew Jackson was a member. After a brief pastorate at Tuscaloosa, Alabama, he was called to the First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans from 1843-1855, before coming to San Francisco. The reason for his call to San Francisco is that at least 15 of the 101 communicant members of the First Presbyterian Church in San Francisco had come from Scott's church in New Orleans. The southerners in California desired to have a southern pastor. The standard biography of Scott is Clifford Merrill Drury's William Anderson Scott: "No Ordinary Man" (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1967). Scott was accused of sabotaging the presidential campaign of Henry Clay in 1844 when Scott mentioned that he had seen Clay gambling on a riverboat in 1830. The remark had been taken out of context and it was widely reported that Scott had seen Clay gambling on a riverboat *recently* on the Sabbath. Since Scott did not fully correct the error until after the election, he was accused of duplicity. Andrew Jackson wrote to encourage Scott that "a wise providence has. . . saved our country from the rule of as great a profligate as has ever lived. Our republic & glorious honor is safe. *The Lord reigneth. Let the people rejoice.*" (Quoted in Drury, 103-104). This episode prompted R. L. Stanton of the Second Presbyterian Church of New Orleans to bring charges against Scott for "Deliberate and wilful falsehood." The Presbytery of Louisiana cleared him almost unanimously.

¹¹²Drury, 186.

Committee. He admitted that “corruption, vice, and bloodshedding have prevailed to an alarming extent,” but he urged Californians to rely upon the laws of the land to correct the problems. Refusing to lend his support to mob violence, he declared: “My platform is the *Bible*, and the *Constitution*, and the *Union*, just as they are.”¹¹³

William Engles commented that Dr. Scott’s stance had “brought down a storm of vituperation” in the California papers, resulting in a crowd hanging him in effigy before his church on Sunday morning.¹¹⁴ Engles believed that such actions would only convince the east to support Scott. He also noted that Calvary Church remained full and that the secular press of San Francisco praised him: the Daily Herald said that his “life is luminous with acts of beneficence to his fellow-men—whose piety is proverbial—whose electric eloquence, the emanation of his piety, touches all hearts,” while the Sun lays a tribute that he is “an honest man and true disciple of his Great Exemplar—Jesus of Nazareth.”¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, with opposition rising both without and within the congregation, Scott finally tendered his resignation given the “considerable dissatisfaction with me and my labours in the pulpit, on account of my well-known views of the Vigilance Committee.” But by this time new elections had swept the Vigilance Committee men into public office. The congregation replied that “however much many of us may differ with him in opinion concerning recent local events, we feel united to him by an attachment too sincere and

¹¹³W. A. Scott, “The Church and Lynch Law,” Presbyterian 26.36 (September 6, 1856) 141.

¹¹⁴Drury provides the horrified responses of several San Francisco newspapers, along with those that were mildly supportive of the act (190-191).

¹¹⁵Editorial, “Dr. Scott of San Francisco,” Presbyterian 26.44 (November 1, 1856) 174.

strong to be dissolved *with our consent*, by any differences that have yet occurred.”¹¹⁶ With some hesitation, Scott agreed to remain in San Francisco.

Three years later, however, Scott’s distinctive views on the separation of church and state provoked controversy when rumors spread eastward that he argued “*against* the Bible in schools, against Chaplains in the Legislature, against *all* Sunday laws, and generally goes in for the largest liberty on religious subjects, insisting that ours is not a Christian country or Government.” J. G. Monfort of the Presbyter was horrified: “The new ideas of the Church and the State will lead us far astray if we do not keep in the watch-tower.”¹¹⁷ Monfort noted that the Rev. Dr. William C. Anderson, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of San Francisco (and former president of Miami University in Ohio, 1849-1855, the successor and colleague of Erasmus Darwin MacMaster) was debating Scott on the topics of the Bible in the common schools and the Sabbath laws.

The occasion for the brouhaha was Scott’s The Bible and Politics, published in San Francisco in May of 1859.¹¹⁸ William Engles pointed out that the secular papers supported Scott, claiming that “ours is not a Christian country or government, in distinction from

¹¹⁶“Dr. Scott of San Francisco and His Church,” Presbyterian 26.51 (December 20, 1856) 202. Drury also provides a large excerpt from a letter from William Tecumseh Sherman, major-general of the California State Militia in the San Francisco area, to Scott urging him to remain in the city, because he was the only minister who had sufficient conviction to stand resolutely for the Constitution and the rule of law. “We need just such men as you who think for themselves, who drink their principles of action from a more holy source than the Evening Bulletin. . . . Your Master bore taunts, ignominy, and death itself to establish on earth the Rule of charity and kindness.” (Drury, 194-195). Sherman, nominally a Roman Catholic (due to his wife’s convictions), would later become famous for his march through the South during the Civil War.

¹¹⁷“Controversy in San Francisco,” Presbyter 18.50 (Sept 1, 1859)

¹¹⁸William A. Scott, The Bible and Politics: or, an Humble Plea for Equal, Perfect, Absolute Religious Freedom, and against all Sectarianism in our Public Schools (San Francisco: H. H. Bancroft & Co., 1859).

Mormon, Mohammedan, or heathen.” Engles believed that Scott desired simply that religious matters “should be left to the general influence of the gospel, and not be made matters of legislation,” but Engles feared that this position would “aim a very serious blow at the moral and religious interest of California.” Fearing lest Scott’s logic undermine the progress of Sabbath laws, Engles argued that “the Sabbath question, especially, is the great issue of the day between infidelity and the gospel, and it is indispensable that the ground which has been occupied from the beginning in this country should be steadfastly maintained.”¹¹⁹

In response Scott insisted that the Constitution, the Confession, and the Bible supported him. “The New Testament and the early fathers of the Church, in fact the whole Church for three hundred years understood Christ’s kingdom to be wholly a spiritual one, and as having no alliance with Caesar. And I believe *Christ’s kingdom still is not of this world*, and that the only weapons to be used for converting men are spiritual—the truth in love, and not legislative statutes.” Scott opposed “*any statute to compel me or my child to read, or hear the Bible read any where, or that shall compel my neighbor, or his child, to hear, or read the Bible any where contrary to his wishes, and the honest convictions of his own conscience.*” The Legislature cannot “*introduce, or exclude, or do any thing in regard to the use of the Bible in the public schools, and not have the same right to do the same thing in regard to the Bible in our families and churches.*” The state, in his view, had no authority over religion whatsoever; and no church had a right “to employ the civil or secular power, in any way, or to any extent, or by any means, to oppress or do violence to

¹¹⁹Editorial, “Objectionable Views,” Presbyterian 29.43 (October 22, 1859) 170.

the conscience of a single individual citizen.” All individuals, as far as Scott was concerned, should be free to exercise their own conscientious religious views.

He therefore objected to enforcing the Sabbath by legislative decree. He believed that the Sabbath should be kept, and he agreed it proper “to have some laws concerning the Lord’s day as a civil institution—a police or municipal law; but great care should be taken in the making of such laws.” We cannot enforce a religious observance. The same logic would exclude chaplains from the military. “I do not see that our government has any right to require or to pay for the performance of a single religious rite or act.” He even pointed out that nothing in the Constitution forbade a Muslim Imam from “reading a chapter from the Koran” at the opening of Congress, if that is what the members wanted (“which,” he added with the degree of religious pluralism more typical of his era, “may the God of our fathers in mercy forbid”). But he was convinced that these views plainly accorded with the scriptures, the Confession of the Presbyterian Church and the Constitution of the United States.¹²⁰

Incensed that an Old School Presbyterian minister advocated such views in an already irreligious California, William C. Anderson and Fletcher M. Haight of the First Presbyterian Church in San Francisco argued that the United States was a Protestant nation

¹²⁰W. A. Scott, “Letter from Dr. Scott,” Presbyterian 29.52 (December 24, 1859) 186. In July of 1859, Scott started publishing a monthly magazine, the Pacific Expositor, in order to provide a voice for Old School Presbyterians on the west coast. It also allowed him a forum to explain and defend his views on the spirituality of the church. “Religious Laws and Objectionable Views,” Pacific Expositor 1.9 (March, 1860) 404-408. Later, in an article on “Sunday Laws,” Pacific Expositor 1.11 (May, 1860) 482, he argued that “The only efficient way to secure the keeping of the Lord’s day in a Christian manner is for all those who regard it as a holy day, to observe it as such. . . . Nor has the time past when they that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” His vision of the church is also seen through his reprint of Stuart Robinson’s “State and Church,” from the Scottish Presbyterian reprinted in Pacific Expositor 1.12 (June, 1860).

and therefore should support the Protestant religion.¹²¹ Likewise, the Philadelphian Engles feared that “the principle he is so strenuously contending for will, probably, have an influence far beyond what he designs, and that his views will be used for purposes which he would heartily deprecate.” After all, Engles thought the tendency of Scott’s views was to “render the state virtually godless and atheistical.” While he had to admit Scott logically correct in his interpretation of the Constitution, “yet in our opinion he runs logic into the ground.” Engles insisted that the United States was a Christian country, and its laws should reflect that.¹²²

While Scott would attempt to keep politics and religion separate, after the outbreak of the Civil War, he found it impossible to remain entirely silent. Drury cites a San Francisco newspaper from 1861: “Dr. Scott, we understand, during a prayer at Calvary Church last Sunday, invoked a Divine blessing upon the Presidents and Vice Presidents of both Confederacies.” Another paper commented “If he continues to insult the Union sentiment, so nearly allied to religion, he must expect to be disgraced by being stripped of the power to do mischief.”¹²³ As Scott continued to “pray for treason,” as one paper called

¹²¹William C. Anderson was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of San Francisco, and Haight (a U. S. District Judge, whose son Henry was governor of California from 1868-1872) was a member at First Presbyterian Their articles first appeared in the Pacific, the Congregationalist newspaper in California, but were later bound together and published as Notes on Dr. Scott’s Bible and Politics and Constitutional Review of Dr. Scott’s Bible and Politics (San Francisco: Towne & Bacon, 1859).

¹²²Editorial, “Dr. Scott on Religious Laws,” Presbyterian 29.52 (December 24, 1859) 186. Scott’s vision of the spirituality of the church took him in a somewhat different direction than Thornwell and Robinson. While Thornwell objected to ecclesiastical control of educational institutions, Scott believed that parochial schools and synodical colleges were the only way to provide a religious education. Part of the distinction is that while Scott agreed with the general doctrine of the spirituality of the church, he never bought into Breckinridge’s reforms.

¹²³Drury, 240-241.

it, the desire to evict him from San Francisco grew in the city that had twice before turned to vigilante justice. Then when the Presbytery of California adopted a declaration of loyalty pledging the church to support the Lincoln Administration, Scott stoutly opposed it. His protest was misquoted in the San Francisco papers, and several citizens called for his lynching. On Sunday, September 22, 1861, Scott was once again hanged in effigy, and when the police chief warned him that he could not guarantee his personal safety, Scott realized he had to leave. Nine days later he and his family set sail for Europe, chased from his pastoral charge by an unruly mob.¹²⁴

C. The Spirituality of the Church and Constitutional Construction

By the end of the 1850s two competing visions of the church clashed at the General Assembly. It is not entirely accurate to say that the conflict was about the “spirituality of the church,” because all of the participants in the debate affirmed that the church was a spiritual institution. The debate revolved more particularly around certain constitutional and hermeneutical questions. Do the scriptures give the details as well as the principles of church government? How far can the church go in speaking to non-ecclesiastical issues? What does the Confession mean when it says that some circumstances of church government are to be ordered according to the light of nature? Is the constitution a limit of powers or a grant of powers? Is the church the agent of Christ, with a certain measure of discretion, or is the church strictly limited to do only that which Scripture states?

¹²⁴Drury, 258-267. In 1870 he would return to pastor St. John’s Presbyterian Church in San Francisco (303).

As we have already seen repeatedly, Thornwell and Robinson had the distinct advantage of a well-articulated doctrine of the church that provided a clear paradigm for answering these questions. But while that paradigm was clear and cogent, it also contradicted Presbyterian church order at certain points, convincing many that it was an unwarranted novelty.¹²⁵

While R. J. Breckinridge was the font of Thornwell and Robinson's reformist agenda, he set his own path in the 1850s. He particularly disliked Robinson's claim that the General Assembly had limited powers like the federal government. He pointed out that the General Assembly did not "derive its power from the Presbyteries, nor is it limited to the exercise of powers named in the Constitution of the Church. It derives its power, and its very right to exist and act from God himself, and may, *the Bible alone considered*, do every act which any lawfully constituted Church court may do."¹²⁶

In this respect Breckinridge agreed with his Princeton counterpart, Charles Hodge. Hodge had consistently articulated the thesis that the church's constitution was a limitation of powers—not a grant. Unlike the United States' Constitution, which granted specific powers to the federal government, Hodge argued that the Presbyterian constitution limited powers otherwise indefinite. Since Jesus Christ was the Lord of the Church, he alone was the source of ecclesiastical authority. All church courts had the same powers, given by Christ. The constitution limited the exercise of those powers, or as Hodge liked to say, the

¹²⁵For instance its claims that ruling elders and ministers were of the same order, and that the Boards of the church should be replaced by benches of deacons.

¹²⁶R. J. Breckinridge, "Some Thoughts on the Developement of the PCUSA during the ten years which have elapsed since its Disruption in 1838," *SPR* 2.3 (December, 1848) 337.

constitution functioned as a treaty between church courts, whereby Presbyterian churches and presbyteries agreed to operate under certain rules for the sake of peace and order. Hodge suggested that some argued as though ministers and church courts received their power through the constitution, while he believed that it came directly from Christ. For Hodge the constitution was “but the declaration of the powers which belong to ministers and judicatories, and the stipulations agreeably to which those who adopt it agree to exercise their respective functions.”¹²⁷ Therefore, Hodge argued that if the constitution did not address how to handle a certain situation, the church should do what it deemed best—always following the general principles laid down in scripture. As an example, he said that “a presbytery does not derive from the constitution. . . its right to ordain; but by adopting the constitution it has bound itself to exercise its inherent right of ordination only under certain conditions.”¹²⁸ In another case he pointed out that “a church session does not derive its power to admit members or exercise discipline from the constitution. The constitution simply states that such and such powers pertain to a church session; and the various church sessions embraced under the constitution agree to exercise those powers in a certain way.”¹²⁹ The constitution, for Hodge, is “a treaty entered into by primary church organizations [sessions or presbyteries] as to the manner in which they shall exercise the

¹²⁷Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR (July, 1843) 440. Hodge pointed to Timothy and Titus whom Paul commanded to ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5), without any suggestion that a full presbytery was required for the validity of the ordination.

¹²⁸Charles Hodge, “General Assembly,” BRPR 19:3 (July, 1847) 400.

¹²⁹Charles Hodge, “General Assembly,” BRPR 22:3 (July, 1850) 469

powers inherent in them and derived from Christ.”¹³⁰ The result was that “a session or presbytery is simply bound by contract not to violate the constitution, but the exercise of its prerogatives is not circumscribed by that instrument. It can do what it pleases, as a church court, provided it infringes on no article of its contract with other courts, and on no principle of the word of God.”¹³¹ Hodge worried that some Presbyterians were beginning to assume that “no session has any power in the premises but what it derives from the constitution.” This would create a never-ending stream of alterations to the church’s constitution, because no constitution could be expected to cover all possible situations.¹³²

4. The Spirituality of the Church and the General Assembly

One of the first debates on the “spirituality of the church” revolved around the question of whether the church could endorse the work of voluntary societies. While the Old School had insisted that the church alone should carry out missions and ministerial training, it regularly encouraged its members to participate in various reforms, even recommending certain voluntary societies to the church. But in 1848 James Henley Thornwell challenged this practice. Early in its sessions the Assembly passed a resolution endorsing the American Colonization Society and recommending that all churches hold an “annual collection for its support, to be made early in July.”¹³³ But at the end of its

¹³⁰ibid., 469.

¹³¹Ibid., 469-470.

¹³²Ibid., 470.

¹³³Minutes (1848) 32. That evening, the secretary of the American Protestant Society, the Rev. H. Norton, addressed the Assembly after Alexander T. McGill’s sermon on Popery (33).

sessions the Assembly considered a proposal to endorse the American Temperance Union, Thornwell (who chaired the Bills and Overtures committee) recommended that the Assembly answer this and all “secular institutions for moral ends” with a statement that since the church “is a spiritual body” whose purpose is to preach the gospel of salvation, and not simply seek moral improvement, it may not confuse its spiritual purpose with the temporal goals of benevolent societies. “In this kingdom of God the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners, and no church judiciary ought to pretend to make laws which shall bind the conscience, or to issue recommendations which shall regulate manners, without the warrant, explicit or implied, of the revealed will of God.” Therefore the church could not require people to join temperance, moral reform, colonization or any other society.¹³⁴ In their role as “good citizens, as patriotic subjects of the State. . . Christian people may choose to adopt this particular mode of attempting to achieve” whatever moral reform they wish. Further, contradicting the earlier statement regarding the Colonization Society, the resolution declared “this General Assembly, as a court of Jesus Christ, cannot league itself with any voluntary society” and demanded that “these societies must appeal not to church courts, but to church members.”¹³⁵ The church might bear testimony in their favor—or might condemn them if they promulgate wickedness—but should not become linked to them in any formal way. Since everyone was eager to go

¹³⁴Minutes (1848) 58.

¹³⁵Minutes (1848) 59.

home, there was very little discussion, and Thornwell's statement of the spirituality of the church was enshrined in the Assembly's Minutes.¹³⁶

Eleven years later the General Assembly of 1859 was faced with several memorials urging them to take action regarding colonization, temperance, and the slave trade.¹³⁷ Once again Thornwell sat on the Committee on Bills and Overtures and urged the defeat of these memorials. The resulting committee recommendation moved beyond 1848:

Resolved, That while the General Assembly on the one hand, disclaim all right to interfere in secular matters, and on the other, assert the right and duty of the church, as God's witness on earth, to bear her testimony in favor of truth and holiness, and against all false doctrines and views, wherever professed and committed, yet in view of the often repeated action of the Assembly in reference to the subjects above referred to, it is inexpedient to take any further action in relation thereto.

In 1848 the Assembly had declared that the church could not require its members to join voluntary societies. Now Thornwell hoped to move the church away from dealing with secular matters entirely. In explaining this position, Thornwell declared, "The Church is exclusively a spiritual organization, and possesses none but spiritual power." While individual Christians might wish to participate in social or moral reform efforts, the church as a body had no commission from Christ to directly engage in such matters. "The Church deals with men *as men*, as fallen sinners standing in *need of salvation*; not as citizens of the Commonwealth, or philanthropists, or members of society. Her mission is to bring

¹³⁶There was very little discussion of this in the newspapers. Charles Hodge merely reported it in his annual review of the Assembly, without comment. "General Assembly," BRPR 20:3 (July, 1848) 423-425.

¹³⁷One Virginia author, in anticipation of the Assembly, suggested that while the Assembly had declared its support for the American Colonization Society 12 times from 1817 to 1853, it was time to admit defeat. CP 5:16 (April 21, 1859) 62.

men to the Cross, to reconcile them to God through the Blood of the Lamb, to imbue them with the Spirit of the Divine Master, and then send them forth to perform their social duties, to manage society, and perform the functions that pertain to their social and civil relations.”¹³⁸ The church could teach men their duty, but it could not perform that duty for them.

The recommendation passed unanimously without significant debate.¹³⁹ Likewise when the Presbyterian Historical Society, formed in 1852, asked the Assembly to call for a collection on its behalf, the committee recommended:

The Church of Jesus Christ, as a spiritual body, commissioned only to execute the revealed will of God, can sustain no direct relation to any voluntary associations, however praiseworthy in their aims, formed for the purpose of promoting the interests of art, literature or secular morality. When such societies involve no wrong principles, it is a matter of Christian liberty to join them or not join them, encourage them, or otherwise—and therefore the Church should leave them where Christ has left them, to the sound discretion of his people.¹⁴⁰

Some southerners hailed this as the triumph of Thornwell’s doctrine of the spirituality of the church. The church had disclaimed “all right to interfere in secular

¹³⁸Thornwell, “Speech on African Colonization,” Collected Writings, IV 473. B. M. Palmer, the editor, commented that this edition of the speech was reprinted from the newspapers, with alterations from Thornwell’s own handwritten abstract.

¹³⁹CP 5.23 (June 9, 1859). Besides Thornwell, the moderator, William L. Breckinridge, had appointed ministers Nathan L. Rice, J. M. Lowrie, Henry Ruffner, and W. W. Eels, along with ruling elders Mark Hardin, Robert Carter, A. H. Conkey and John J. Gresham. Minutes (1859) 511.

¹⁴⁰Minutes (1859) 533. It should be pointed out that this day, Monday, May 30, was the same day as the election of professors for the Northwest Theological Seminary. Less than six hours later, Erasmus Darwin MacMaster would launch his two hour diatribe against the slave power. But that morning the Assembly was still trying to bring the two sides together. And by the way, Nathan Rice was the chairman of the Committee on Bills and Overtures—it was he who presented this to the Assembly. While MacMaster and his allies might have wished to challenge this recommendation, they could not do so without appearing to be attacking Rice.

matters” and had affirmed that it could have “no direct relation to any voluntary associations.” The North Carolina Presbyterian rejoiced in particular that “The Assembly have unequivocally and heartily indorsed the theory in its resolution concerning the Presbyterian Historical Society; and as this Institution is of a far more decidedly religious character than the Colonization Society, the principle will apply much more powerfully to the latter than to the former.”¹⁴¹ Confident that Thornwell’s position would “secure the attention and approval of the Church in the South,” the writer urged the church to see that it was “the true, the safe, the logical and the Scriptural position. It is the only position which is consistent with the integrity of the Church.”¹⁴² While southerners no doubt believed the principle of the spirituality of the church on its own merits, there is no doubt that they especially liked it because of how it squelched northern agitation regarding slavery and colonization.

Many in the Northwest, on the other hand, grumbled at this development. J. G. Monfort believed that “this doctrine. . . is relied upon in the South to get rid of all our deliverances on Slavery without a formal repeal.” Nonetheless, Monfort insisted that the church would continue to testify against wickedness.¹⁴³ David McKinney questioned whether the Assembly had indeed sided with Thornwell. There had been no debate. Further, the language of the recommendation still permitted the church to maintain indirect relations, such as encouraging its members to support a certain voluntary society. Finally,

¹⁴¹Quoted in, “The North Carolina Presbyterian on Dr Thornwell’s theory of the church,” Presbyterian Banner (Aug 20, 1859).

¹⁴²Quoted in, “Colonization and the Assembly,” Presbyter (June 23, 1859).

¹⁴³“Colonization and the Assembly,” Presbyter (June 23, 1859).

he pointed out that the resolution merely stated that the church should not be engaged in promoting “secular morality,” but slavery was a matter of biblical morality and therefore not outside the bounds of church action. McKinney pointed out that the resolution itself merely stated that the church may not establish a colonization society--that would go beyond her calling; but “it may yet very properly, in the exercise of a ‘sound discretion,’ do, as it had often done, speak encouragingly of the cause as undertaken by Christian men, executed on Christian principles, and affording joy to a Christian people by its Christian results.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, McKinney pointed out that a strict construction of Thornwell’s resolution could produce exactly the opposite of what Thornwell intended.

That December, McKinney offered a reply to the Thornwellian doctrine of the church. McKinney insisted that it was incorrect to call the church “*exclusively* a spiritual body,” and suggested that Thornwell’s views were “so *ultra* in this matter, in the last General Assembly, that some have spoken of his dogma as *new*, and have given it his name--the Thornwell theory.” Thornwell had argued at the Assembly that since Christ had not commanded the church to “engage in the business of transferring men from one place to another,” therefore the church could not be identified with the colonization society. But McKinney pointed out that no one had urged the church to identify herself or associate herself with the colonization society, but merely to recommend the American Colonization Society “to the benevolent consideration of the churches *as being promotive of the interests of humanity and religion*.” Since the main point of colonization was to promote

¹⁴⁴“The North Carolina Presbyterian on Dr Thornwell’s theory of the church,” Presbyterian Banner (Aug 20, 1859). On December 24, McKinney reported that several synods and presbyteries (even some in Kentucky) had specifically gone on record opposing Thornwell’s view of the spirituality of the church.

the evangelization of Africa, it certainly lay within the scope of the church's authority to recommend it. Further, if Jesus himself paid attention to the sick, the blind, and the demoniacs and taught the church to do the same, then the church must "ameliorate man's condition during his life on earth, and teach him the way and help him onward to the life above. In order to this [sic], she is to instruct, rebuke, command, and warn. And in all these things she is to *note the whole of human conduct* IN THAT ASPECT IN WHICH IT IS TO COME BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST."¹⁴⁵ McKinney spoke for many northern (and some southern) Presbyterians who feared that Thornwell's doctrine of the spirituality of the church would produce a truncated religion that neglected the body and focused solely upon the mind and heart.

One such southerner was R. J. Breckinridge's brother William, president of Oakland College, Mississippi, elected as the commissioner of Louisville Presbytery to the 1860 General Assembly (he had stayed a member of his Kentucky presbytery due to uncertainty about his future with the college). When his presbytery requested its commissioners to sustain the General Assemblies of 1859 and 1848 on the subject of voluntary societies, Breckinridge insisted that he could not sustain both. The 1848 decision had declared "that the Church has no power to require of its members the support of the societies in question; while it asserts the right, and, on occasion, the duty of the church to favor or oppose them, according to its judgment of their merits." With this Breckinridge could agree. "But the action of the Assembly of 1859 denies to the Church all right to have

¹⁴⁵David McKinney, "The Nature and Province of the Church," Presbyterian Banner (Dec 31, 1859).

anything to do with such institutions. . . . I find no warrant for it in the letter of the Divine Word, or in the spirit of the Gospel.”¹⁴⁶ Protesting that the presbytery should not give such instructions to its commissioners, Breckinridge resigned his commission on the eve of the Assembly.

5. The General Assembly of 1860

The Assembly received several memorials and overtures regarding “Colonization, Temperance, the Slave Trade, &c.” With William A. Scott as chairman of the Committee on Bills and Overtures, one might have expected the committee to take a hardline stand, but Scott’s committee was well-balanced.¹⁴⁷ They recommended that

while the General Assembly on the one hand, disclaim all right to interfere in secular matters; and on the other, assert the right and duty of the Church, as God’s witness on earth, to bear her testimony in favour of truth and holiness, and against all false doctrines and sin, wherever professed or committed, yet in view of the often repeated action of the Assembly in reference to the subjects above referred to, it is inexpedient to take any further action in relation thereto.¹⁴⁸

This was plainly designed to placate all parties, and it received the unanimous assent of the Assembly, but it also served as a significant assertion of the center of the Old School understanding of the spirituality of the church. It affirmed the right of the church to speak

¹⁴⁶“Dr Breckinridge's Declinature,” PH (May 10, 1860).

¹⁴⁷The committee included Charles Hodge, William M. Paxton (pastor of Pittsburgh’s First Presbyterian Church), Daniel Stewart (pastor at Camden, New Jersey, and formerly professor at New Albany Theological Seminary), and Benjamin M. Smith (professor at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia), along with a diverse cross-section of leading ruling elders from all over the country.

¹⁴⁸Minutes (1860) 44.

to all matters of sin and righteousness but denied the need to speak to an issue every time someone demanded a statement.¹⁴⁹

But the General Assembly of 1860 also witnessed the climax of the boards controversy, in the first Assembly where James Henley Thornwell and Charles Hodge debated each other personally.¹⁵⁰ The occasion was a proposed alteration in the structure and location of the Board of Domestic Missions. The previous Assembly had appointed a committee to consider changes, and Henry A. Boardman reported that the committee recommended no changes necessary, although it suggested that the board might appoint advisory committees for each region (it suggested San Francisco, St. Louis, and Louisville as likely centers for those committees).

Benjamin Mosby Smith, professor at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, replied that he was concerned with the structure of the boards in general. Reminding the Assembly of the history of the American Education Society and the American Home Missionary Society, he argued that the Assembly had created large boards in order to “checkmate the Voluntary Societies,” by enlisting the support of men all over the church

¹⁴⁹One author in the Presbyter pointed out that this decision was “a complete triumph to those who adhere to the ancient testimonies of the Church. It is a triumph, too, in the least offensive way, made upon the great underlying principles of the case, and without any such measures as might have produced heart-burnings and estrangements which is more likely to be permanent.” He noted that the committee only came to unanimity after the board question was resolved. Thornwell had told the Committee on Bills and Overtures that “he does not deny the right of the Church to commend secular societies; that he only insists that the Church can take no action which shall bind the consciences of its members.” Hodge agreed entirely with this, and accordingly drew up the resulting action. “Inside Views of the Late General Assembly, by an outsider,” Presbyter (July 19, 1860) 174.

¹⁵⁰ While both had been commissioners to Assembly of 1847, Thornwell had served as Moderator, rendering debate impossible. This was Thornwell’s tenth Assembly, and Hodge’s sixth (since 1837). Thornwell was a commissioner in 1837, 1840, 1845, 1847, 1848, 1855, 1856, 1857, 1859 and 1860, while Hodge had served in 1842, 1846, 1847, 1849, 1854, and 1860.

to tie them to the boards. But the boards exercised no practical oversight over their executive committees, and therefore were “a fungus upon our ecclesiastical body.” He claimed that “the smaller the executive body, the easier to hold them to a close and strict responsibility.”¹⁵¹

Several speakers objected to this line of reasoning. Dr. Gardiner Spring of Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City pointed out that Smith admitted that the boards were doing well. He had merely objected to their size. He was puzzled as to what principle was actually at stake. Another speaker agreed that the Assembly could exercise as much authority over a large as a small body. If ecclesiastical control was the principle of the boards from the start, then how was this now imperiled?¹⁵²

Thornwell disagreed that the difference was “merely that ‘twixt tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee.” If it were just a minor difference, why would not the Assembly yield to those who conscientiously desired the change? “Ought not the strong to bear with the infirmities of the weak, in order that the union and harmony of this great body may be preserved?” Because for those desiring change, “We, sir, are conscientious in our opinions; they are, with us, matters of *faith*.” After a lengthy discourse on the history of the debate, he concluded that

Great principles lay at the bottom of this diversity. . . . There are ministers in our Church who believe that God gave us a *church* as well as a *faith*—that He has revealed in his word an organization of his kingdom—given it a form, a constitution, laws, and ordinances, and *set* in

¹⁵¹“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 30.21 (May 26, 1860) 85.

¹⁵²“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 30.21 (May 26, 1860) 85.

the Church official agencies, presbyteries, and assemblies, by which the laws and ordinances of his kingdom are to be administered.

Others, Thornwell suggested, believe that God “has left to *man* to organize his Church, and that it may be organized, like civil government” by expedience. Thornwell insisted that the “*oneness* of the Church, or federative unity, is one great principle pertaining to our system; representative agency is another, and a representative agency accordant with scripture authority.” Thornwell believed that “the Lord has given a Church fully organized, and that her form is of positive institution.” If the Bible does not set forth boards, then the church may not adopt boards. Thornwell defined a board as “a whole organization. . . . It is so constituted as to exist and to go alone.” It is as completely an organism as any of our church courts. It “performs all acts that a church court can perform. . . and is practically less accountable than the inferior courts.” Boards are commissions of the Assembly, “*representatives* of the Assembly, and it is contended in acting through a Board the Assembly acts.” But Thornwell insisted that the church may not delegate her power to another body. As an analogy, he asked whether Congress could appoint another body to make laws in its place? Objecting that the boards sometimes ignored the instructions of the Assembly, Thornwell insisted that the Assembly needed commissions that would be “part of the living body—it *is* the living body, having organic union with the living head. It can act *directly*, and hold all its employees and missionaries to a direct accountability.”¹⁵³

¹⁵³“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 30.21 (May 26, 1860) 85. Thirteen years before, Thornwell had argued that commissions were acceptable, but not as a “separate and independent body entrusted with delegated powers,” but simply as “the *court* itself, resolving to be constituted *as such*, with less than a majority of its members. The appointment of certain persons by name precludes none others from attending.” Thornwell, “The General Assembly of 1847,” Collected Writings IV:487.

Thornwell's speech lasted from Friday evening into Saturday morning. When he had finished, Charles Hodge arose, admitting that the eloquence of Thornwell had nearly persuaded him at moments of radical error in the board system; but in the end he thought the real differences minuscule—the difference between a committee and a board. “But now we are called upon to believe that a certain form of church government and order, in all its details and with all its appliances for the evangelical work, is revealed in the Word.” Hodge thought that absurd. Turning to Smith's claim that the boards were formed under the New England plan, or by men under New England influence. Hodge reminded the Assembly that the boards had been created by Ashbel Green, Jacob Janeway, William Engles, George Junkin, George Baxter, David Elliott, Elisha Swift, Walter Lowrie, Samuel Miller and the Breckinridges—none of whom could be accused of partiality for New England. Whereas earlier opposition to the boards had come from Congregationalism, now the opposition came from “hyper, *hyper*, HYPER-Presbyterianism of the *jure divino* stamp. Once the allegation was that the Church had no such power given her as is requisite to conduct missions; now that *all power* is from and in the clergy—the eldership.” Hodge argued that the truth lay in the middle. He claimed that the Holy Spirit is the guide of the church: “by his word and providence, and under the general principles laid down for her guidance in the holy word, ministers, elders, and *people* are to do the work of the Church. . . . She *has discretion*, sir; she cannot be bound.” Hodge replied to Thornwell's principles of Presbyterianism by enunciating his own: “1st, the parity of the clergy; 2d, the representative element—the right of the people to take part by suffrage in the government of the Church; and that power, indeed, is originally deposited with the people. And 3d, the

unity of the Church; that all its members are parts of one great whole.” In the end, Hodge could see no fundamental difference between a board, a committee and a commission. They are all delegations of power. Hodge would not yield to the strict constructionists. “The Church has freedom of discretion in selecting the modes of her operation.” We cannot surrender this.¹⁵⁴

When the Assembly returned to the matter on Monday morning, John Adger of South Carolina objected that it was “perfectly absurd that the Board should do the work of the Presbyteries. We have a divine system of government, Sessions and Presbyteries, and Synods.” The reason why half of the churches in the Presbyterian church did not contribute to the Board was “that they do not like the system. . . . We hate the origin of the Boards. . . . We hate the system of Boards; but we want to cooperate with you. . . but we must work apart, if you insist on your present system.” Adger called for a central committee to distribute funds to missionary fields—but to leave presbyteries alone.¹⁵⁵

The Rev. William M. Scott (professor at Northwest Theological Seminary), the author of the committee report on the board, objected to the strong language of condemnation that Adger had used. But he could not see any major problems in the working of the board. The Hon. Samuel Galloway (a ruling elder from Columbus Presbytery in Ohio) was perplexed by the indefinite nature of the objections. If no definite charges would be brought, then what was the problem? “Let us see what you propose.” But Galloway insisted that if they demanded biblical authority for everything, they should

¹⁵⁴“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 30.21 (May 26, 1860) 85.

¹⁵⁵“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 30.21 (May 26, 1860) 86.

make sure to provide biblical authority for their proposals. But, Galloway pointed out, “where is the Bible authority for the General Assembly? Where is the mention in the Scriptures of a Committee on Bills and Overtures (Laughter). . . . Where is there any authority for an executive committee more than for a Board?”¹⁵⁶

In reply Thornwell argued that there was a chasm yawned between a committee and a board. Referring to his extensive study of logic, he claimed that Hodge’s logic was incomprehensible.

My brother has said my principle is hyper, *hyper*, HYPER Presbyterianism; and I must retort that *his* principle is no, *no*, NO churchism. He alleges that the Church is where the Holy Ghost is. Moderator, is not the Holy Ghost in the *heart*—in the soul of the *individual*? Who can conceive of—where is the authority for believing that the Holy Ghost dwells in the *Church* in any other sense than as he dwells in the hearts of those who are members of the Church.

True to his redefinition of presbyterian polity, Thornwell rejected Hodge’s assertion of the parity of the clergy, preferring to call it “the parity of presbyters,” including both ruling and teaching elders. Further he rejected the power of the people as congregationalism, and the unity of the Church as popish. In their place he restated his principles: 1) representative assemblies composed of presbyters duly appointed and ordained (not forgetting their election by the people); 2) two houses—ministers and elders—as checks and balances; 3) parity of the eldership, not just the clergy; and 4) unity of the church under one government, including all presbyters in that one government. In conclusion he argued that Hodge’s Presbyterianism was not Presbyterianism at all—and in a parting jab he claimed

¹⁵⁶“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 30.21 (May 26, 1860) 86.

that Hodge's views were not shared by his colleague at Princeton, Alexander McGill.¹⁵⁷

Hodge interjected that his hasty remarks should not be taken as his whole system, but

Thornwell continued by arguing that the boards were not "an executive agency at all" but a "missionary society outside the Church—a distinct organism"—that was not controlled by the church.¹⁵⁸

Thornwell's rhetorical powers unsettled his listeners. The Rev. Levi Janvier, who had served as a missionary to India under the Board of Foreign Missions for twenty years, admitted that his confidence was shaken, and wondered if the church had gotten it wrong.

Dr. John Krebs, pastor of Rutgers Street Church in New York City, rose to defend the boards. He argued that by having members scattered all over the country, they could bring influential men to use their power for the boards. Their large size was useful in case

¹⁵⁷"General Assembly," Presbyterian 30.21 (May 26, 1860) 86. Alexander McGill arrived the next day to clarify his views. He did not appreciate being dragged into the debate, and declared that he stood between Hodge and Thornwell. While he disagreed with a recent article in the Princeton Review on the eldership, he was generally in complete harmony with Hodge (90). The real difference between Hodge and Thornwell's definitions of the church was that Hodge was articulating a doctrine of the *church*, while Thornwell focused on what distinguished presbyterianism from other churches. The real difference with Thornwell was minimal, except that Hodge could not accept the idea that the details of church order were specified in Scripture. Hodge's attempt to articulate a doctrine of the church that could include the whole church was expressed in "The Idea of the Church," BRPR 25.2-3 (April-July, 1853) 249-290, 339-389. Hodge argued that the church was simply the entire number of those who professed the true religion, together with their children, regardless of visible organization. In a followup essay, "The Visibility of the Church," BRPR 25.4 (October 1853) 670-685, Hodge argued that if Christ's "body consists of those, and of those only, in whom he dwells by his Spirit, then the Church is visible only in the sense in which believers are visible." (671) The external organization was not the true church. The external Church is "not the Church, any more than the body is the soul; but they are its manifestation, and its residence." (673)

¹⁵⁸"General Assembly," Presbyterian 30.21 (May 26, 1860) 86. William Engles commented on Thornwell's speeches by suggesting that Thornwell would refuse to allow private members any place in the work of the church—restricting it solely to officers. The theory demands that the courts of the church do everything, and therefore when Thornwell admitted that they would allow for committees, they destroyed their own theory. Boards, Engles pointed out, are merely large committees with subcommittees. Further, he pointed out that Thornwell never gave details for his plan. "The present system in our church must be good, as so very little can be said against it by fault-finders." Editorial, "General Assembly," Presbyterian 30.21 (May 26, 1860) 87.

of an emergency requiring impartial counsel. Without a board, an executive committee could choose its own counselors, but by retaining a board, the Assembly could tell the committee to whom to turn.¹⁵⁹ The boards provided a check on both the executive committee and the secretary. But Krebs “ridiculed the idea of asking the Boards to send up their minutes and papers for review and control.” While he admitted that this might sound like a good idea, he suggested that the mountain of paperwork would be difficult to transport and impossible to read during the sessions of the General Assembly.¹⁶⁰

B. M. Smith marveled at how Krebs had “apostatized” after speaking with the strict constructionists at the Assembly in Nashville for a Committee of Church Extension in 1855. He also explained that those in favor of changing the structure of the boards wanted the executive committee to report directly to the Assembly, direct election of the secretary of the board every four years, and a reduction in the number of the members of each board. He thought that somewhere around 9-30 members would be more efficient.

By this point it had become clear to most that the practical changes desired were minor. A motion for the previous question carried, and the Assembly voted 234-56 to maintain the status quo.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 30.22 (June 2, 1860) 89.

¹⁶⁰“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 30.22 (June 2, 1860) 90.

¹⁶¹“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 30.22 (June 2, 1860) 91. Including those who recorded their votes later, the final vote was 248-59. The regional shape of the vote is remarkable. The north voted 196-7 for the motion, while southerners split 52-52. Minutes (1860) 36.

A fascinating appendix followed this action. Initially, Thornwell submitted a protest against it. Then Krebs brought a series of resolutions seeking a modest compromise:

That it shall be the duty of the Secretaries of the Boards to notify the members thereof of their appointment, and of all the meetings of the Boards, whether stated or special, and when such meetings shall be for special purposes the subject of discussion shall be named in the notice.

That it shall be the duty of the above named Boards, to send up to the assembly, with their Annual Reports, their book of minutes, and the books of minutes of the respective Executive committees for examination; and it shall be the duty of said Committees to bring to the attention of the Assembly any matters in these minutes which in their judgment calls for the notice of the Assembly.¹⁶²

After these resolutions passed, Thornwell arose and requested permission to withdraw his protest, since the distance “had greatly narrowed.”¹⁶³

The response in the church was predictably mixed. David McKinney of the Presbyterian Banner, though delighted to see full accountability required of the boards, felt perplexed that Thornwell, Smith and Adger could call the present system “anti-Presbyterian, unscriptural, and dangerous” and yet withdraw their opposition after such a minor reform.¹⁶⁴ One author in the Presbyterian Herald suggested a fundamental fallacy in Thornwell’s logic, because no material difference separated a board from a committee.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶²A third resolution also eliminated the practice of allowing people to buy “honorary” memberships.

¹⁶³“Proceedings of the General Assembly,” Presbyterian 30.22 (June 2, 1860) 91.

¹⁶⁴“The General Assembly,” Presbyterian Banner (June 9, 1860).

¹⁶⁵Nassau, “The Assembly of 1860,” PH 29.52 (June 28, 1860). While declaring the debate between Hodge and Thornwell “magnificent. . . comprehensive and profound,” though he thought “it was painful to hear Dr. T. signalize the character of Dr. H’s theory of the Church as non-Presbyterian to such a degree that he thought the old Covenanter blood of Dr. Magill must recoil from it, and he had consulted him, and was authorized by him to say that the sentiments of Dr. T. had his approbation.” Likewise it was “painful to hear Dr. H. rejoin that his tractate on Presbyterianism was submitted to Dr. Magill and received his sanction, and he would not retain his chair in Princeton another moment if he though the Assembly

That winter, as the nation burst at the seams, Hodge and Thornwell each attempted to defend his own definition of Presbyterianism.¹⁶⁶ A somewhat amused critic replied in the Central Presbyterian that after reading both Hodge and Thornwell,

it would appear, from their respective and opposing statements, doubtful which of them is a Presbyterian, if either of them is so! This sounds passing strange. What, Dr. Hodge who has been teaching Theology at Princeton for thirty years, *not a Presbyterian!*--Dr. Thornwell, who has been teaching and preaching for twenty years in the Presbyterian church, not understand what Presbyterianism is! Yet this is the position which these excellent men occupy."

While he admired much in Thornwell's view, he thought his article "spiced much too strongly with personalities, and with an undue severity towards his opponent. . . . I think it will appear that in the effort to demolish Dr. Hodge by showing that he entertained extreme and erroneous views, he has himself gone to the opposite extreme on many points." He pointed out that in one sentence Thornwell differed from the church's

would sanction the criticism pronounced against him." And of course it was "painful to see Dr. Magill feel compelled to rise and define his position as being neither so high-church as Dr. T nor so low-church as Dr. H, as if these venerable men of Princeton needed to vindicate themselves to the Church!" He feared that Hodge had provoked these personalities "by describing the noble theory of Dr. T. as hyper-hyper-hyper-Presbyterianism, and snapping his finger--an act liable to be interpreted as contemptuous--at Dr. T.'s distinction between a Board and a Committee." Nassau also pointed out that later Hodge and Thornwell served together in one of the evening religious services--a reminder of how Presbyterians might have vigorous debates, but then remember that they were brethren. In reply "Thomson" did not find the debate "painful" at all. Even Hodge's snap of the fingers should not be taken as an insult. "It was merely a playful act of the moment; taking many of us with surprise, without doubt, having in remembrance Dr H's character for staid sobriety and dignity. . . though that snap convulsed the Assembly very nearly." But the debate avoided personalities almost entirely. "Drs T and H seem to hold different dogmas respecting Church government, the former holding that the details in full are revealed from Heaven, as is our Faith, the latter teaching that only fundamental principles are given, and the rest is all to be filled up by human wisdom." Hence their characterizations of each other were simply accurate descriptions of how each sees the other. Thomson, "The Rochester Assembly," PH 30.3 (July 19, 1860).

¹⁶⁶The entire exchange was originally published in the BRPR and the SPR, but has been reproduced in Thornwell's Collected Writings 4:217-296, 616-632.

constitution on five different points. The simplest argument against Thornwell was that the church's Standards and soundest divines were "against him."¹⁶⁷

Conclusion

In one sense, all Old School Presbyterians believed in the spirituality of the church. Their differences arose from the increasing gap between law and equity in antebellum constitutional thought. While the board controversy was in many respects a tempest in a teapot, it did reveal a growing chasm in Presbyterian constitutional theory.

But in the end, Thornwell's strict constructionism had less to do with how he interpreted the Presbyterian constitution and more to do with establishing an alternative vision of Presbyterian church order. He was more interested in changing the established order to conform to his ideal vision than in maintaining the status quo. Those who portray the doctrine of the spirituality of the church as fundamentally conservative are deceived by the conservative rhetoric used to advance his truly radical ideas concerning church polity. But if Thornwell's critics were correct in accusing him of advancing novel ideas, they were equally guilty. America was the land of innovation in part because it was impossible

¹⁶⁷F. J., "Presbyterianism--Dr. Thornwell versus Dr. Hodge," CP 6.12 (March 23, 1861) 45. The five points were: 1) that the minister has "precisely the same relation to the church with the ruling elder." This, he argued, was the fundamental error, because plainly contrary to the Form of Government. 2) Thornwell claimed that the minister is a representative of the people, while the Form of Government only said that ruling elders are such. 3) Thornwell said that "their duties in the church courts are exactly the same," which was patently untrue--since only ministers could preach at the opening of the courts or preside at these meetings. For that matter presbytery did not require the presence of a ruling elder, while there had to be three ministers. 4) Thornwell's claim that both are to declare the word of the Lord ruined the distinction between the teaching and ruling elder that he elsewhere affirmed. And 5) the idea that both are clergy and both are laity is contrary to the Form of Government, where elders were members of particular congregations, but ministers were members of presbytery.

to maintain traditional practices. And given the fever of the late 1850s and 1860s, little once thought sacred would remain standing.

ELEVEN

THE COLLAPSE OF THE CENTER

AND THE END OF OLD SCHOOL PRESBYTERIANISM

Suddenly everything changed. Newspapers that had engaged in friendly debates over the book of discipline and other ecclesiastical topics now were embroiled in the all-consuming passion of secession and civil war. Throughout 1860, most of the Old School press sought to avoid political topics (the main exception was J. G. Monfort's Presbyter in Ohio). But after the November elections, every paper, north, west and south, wrote of little else.

1. The Political Climate of 1860

The emergence of the Republican Party as a sectional party pressing anti-slavery claims forced northern Democrats to distance themselves from their southern colleagues. And as the Democrats divided over a presidential candidate, many northern moderates embraced the Republican party as the only viable alternative.¹ While many were attracted

¹Don E. Fehrenbacher, Sectional Crisis and Southern Constitutionalism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995) 48. For the emergence of the Republican Party, see William E. Gienapp, The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Eric Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995/1970). Gienapp points out that the Republicans did not simply draw former Whigs. They dominated formerly Democratic states such as Maine and New Hampshire, and drew former Democrats from Illinois and the northwest. (10) Foner points out that the radical abolitionists chastised Republicans for failing to oppose slavery where it existed—in the south—but he goes on to suggest that the

to the principles of Bell and Crittenden's Constitutional Union party, they recognized that Bell had no real chance of election.²

Nonetheless, as late as the summer of 1860, Old School unity was considered inviolable. Even the New School New York Evangelist concluded that the Old School was not likely to split. After watching the New School divide, the Evangelist declared that Old School conservatism was too deeply engrained. In a particularly astute summary of Old School dynamics, it declared:

1. Her strongest men are on the conservative side. 2. Her Southern men are of a more pacific character than the faction who left the New School Church. Those of strongest Southern sentiments, as Drs. Thornwell, Adger, and Smith, are men of mild and excellent spirit. 3. The Assembly is kept in admirable discipline by her leaders. There are no such bishops elsewhere in Protestant Christendom, as may be found to number of a dozen or more in the Old School Church. These men can be accused of no unfair means in gaining their power, and are not to be blamed for possessing it. Nay, and it works well for the harmony of the body, as a whole, though it may lay an uncomfortable suppression upon the real sentiments of the rank and file. 4. The Old School press is interested in maintaining its Northward and Southward patronage, and will of course use its utmost influence to prevent agitation. 5. An all controlling Church pride--the idea of belonging to the National Church--will hold in silence very many who otherwise would either speak out, or come out.³

Republicans recognized that they needed to form a coalition which would include moderates and conservatives in order to gain power. (303-306). Victor B. Howard argues that free soil also included free religion and free schools in his Conscience and Slavery: The Evangelistic Calvinist Domestic Mission, 1837-1861 (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1990) xiv.

²See the arguments of Hodge and Breckinridge below, both of whom voted Republican. Also see Peter B. Knupfer, The Union As It Is: Constitutional Unionism and Sectional Compromise, 1787-1861 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) chapter 6. For the political history of the 1850s leading up to disunion see David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). Not surprisingly, the leaders of the Constitutional Union party were in their sixties and seventies--an older generation that still believed in the merits of compromise (Potter, 417).

³Quoted in "Prophesying Again" Presbyterian Herald (June 21, 1860).

These “bishops” (such as Nathan Rice, Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell, Thomas Smyth, George Junkin, and, of course, Robert J. Breckinridge) had come into their own as young ministers in the 1830s and 1840s. Now, a quarter of a century later, they wielded a commanding influence. So long as the nation remained united, the Old School would not divide.

But the pockets of opposition to the conservative front identified in chapters 7-8 were growing—especially in the northwest and in the south. J. G. Monfort’s Presbyter continued to press the anti-slavery agenda. Convinced that many southerners wanted to end slavery, Monfort commented after the trial of John Brown that “if the South would allow, on her own soil, liberty of speech, and if the North would only abide by the constitution, there might be hope. We do not, however, expect either section to act again with much wisdom or discretion.” Monfort was convinced that “The South began the difficulty in persecuting unto death men who opposed slavery, and in this she had her Northern allies. The tables are about being turned in the North, and there is reason to fear equal lawlessness here.” Monfort feared that the day was past when the two sides could work together because northern conservatives and southern conservatives were no longer on the same page.⁴

The northwest was the center of Old School political discussion early in 1860. Robert J. Breckinridge wrote an open letter to his nephew, John C. Breckinridge (vice-president of the United States), defending the importance of maintaining the union. As rumors of southern secession came to northern ears, the Danville theologian urged his

⁴Editorial, “John Brown” Presbyter 19.12 (December 8, 1859).

nephew (and other southern Democrats) to reconsider their rhetoric. In a wide-ranging survey of the issues before the nation, he denounced slavery as “contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and the natural rights of man,” and declared his conviction that the Dred Scott decision was a travesty of justice. If southerners were intent on breaking up “the confederacy, the alleged tenor of the Republican party will answer as pretext.”⁵ But Breckinridge was convinced that disunion was not a legitimate option.

J. G. Monfort concurred with the basic point, but was disappointed—and indeed offended, “that he should feel himself called to throw such contempt and odium upon the political party which commands the largest vote in the country, a party to which nine-tenths of the ministers and members of his own church in the North-West belong.” While Monfort was given to exaggeration when identifying the strength of his party, it does appear that a large majority of Old School Presbyterians in the northwest had come to favor the free soil agenda of the Republican party.⁶ Monfort, however, was convinced that the Republican party posed no threat to the South or its “peculiar institution.” What Monfort did not know was that Breckinridge himself favored the Republican party.

Southerners could see this, and therefore they replied to Breckinridge with even greater fervor. The North Carolina Presbyterian declared that Breckinridge had practically

⁵“Dr. Breckinridge on Disunion,” Presbyter 19.19 (January 26, 1860).

⁶“Dr. Breckinridge on Disunion,” Presbyter 19.19 (January 26, 1860). William E. Gienapp, in his The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), has attempted to identify the denominational voting trends in various states. For 1856 he estimates that 91% of Pennsylvania Presbyterians voted Republican along with 76% in Ohio, but only 22% in Indiana and 47% in Illinois. (He suggests 44% of Indiana Presbyterians voted for Buchanan, while Illinois Presbyterians were split between the Democrats and the Know-Nothings). (541-542) Unfortunately he does not give the numbers for 1860, but the Republican numbers definitely went up.

rejected the United States Constitution by opposing the Dred Scott decision,⁷ while the Mississippian (a political paper) asked whether Breckinridge's statements on slavery were not "perfectly in keeping. . . with the dogmas which emanate from the vilest bigots of the Republican party?" The rhetorical level of the political newspapers went far beyond the normally calm debates of the Old School papers. With an invective simply not found in antebellum Old School papers (except for some of Breckinridge's own writings), the Mississippian declared: "When the people of the South become so abject as to seek or accept the counsels of one who has by such record vindicated his claim to their unmitigated abhorrence, they will be fit subjects for the yoke which their Northern enemies are preparing for their necks."⁸

As the election of 1860 drew nearer, Old School Presbyterians could not agree about the prospects for the future. Some still hoped that the Democratic party and the Old School church would prevail. O. S. P. argued that these bodies might offer the best hope for the Union, because they were the "only party and church having strength in both sections of the Union. . . In the light of history and providence, we may learn that great evils are not often speedily removed; nor are great reforms hastily accomplished." Northern Old Schoolers could pursue their conservative anti-slavery measures with confidence. "The church is safe. The Union will stand. Truth shall prevail."⁹ Nathan Rice's

⁷"Dr. B and the South," Presbyter 19.21 (February 9, 1860) 82. They argued that the constitutional powers given to the Supreme Court meant that the Dred Scott decision should be considered final and binding.

⁸Quoted in Presbyter 19.23 (February 23, 1860) 90. Breckinridge's "record" on emancipation was the ground for their complaint.

⁹O. S. P., Presbyter 19.47 (August 9, 1860).

Presbyterian Expositor refrained from political commentary, but it was widely known that Cyrus McCormick was the money behind the paper (as he was behind the two Democratic political papers in Chicago). In the opinion of the more politically-oriented Presbyter, this was an attempt to use money to sway the minds of the northwest. Indeed, one author thought that McCormick's influence in both the religious and the political press of Chicago was "surely an anomalous mixing up of the world and the Church-- of politics and Presbyterianism."¹⁰

Eastern papers, though, agreed with Rice's quieter stance. The Presbyterian reminded its readers to approach the election in the light of God's providence. Engles warned that the masses "can be wrought on to believe that the very existence of our noble union is dependent on the success of a particular candidate, while they spurn as fanatical delusion the much more certain testimony from God, that the life of their immortal souls is dependent on their full belief in Jesus." Because Christians believed in the sovereign government of God, "we should discard the feeling that the welfare of our country depends on the ascendancy of this or that party, For God can confound the counsels of both alike." Only a religious people, he argued, could withstand the pressures of party passions.¹¹

2. The Election of 1860 and Its Aftermath

The election of Lincoln prompted comment from all over the Old School. J. G. Monfort, the Old School's most politically engaged editor, rejoiced, though with most

¹⁰Another Subscriber to the Expositor, "The Expositor's Politics," Presbyter 20.2 (September 27, 1860).

¹¹Editorial, "The Heated Season," Presbyterian 30.29 (July 21, 1860) 114. Cf., Editorial, "God Reigns," Presbyterian 30.36 (September 8, 1860) 146.

northerners he remained convinced for several months after the election that the Union would remain intact. While South Carolina and a few other states might temporarily secede, Monfort naively believed that “the ‘poor white folks’ in the South are really deeply interested in the abolition of slavery, and they will all know, in a month after civil war begins, that this is their interest, and that now is their time.” He thought that the south’s peculiar institution “levels them with slaves.” Betraying his ignorance of southern social relations, Monfort claimed that the southern army would consist solely of slaveholders who could not cook their own meals.¹²

Others in the northwest were less sanguine. On Sunday, November 18, 1860, the Rev. Samuel R. Wilson preached a sermon on “The Causes and Remedies of Impending National Calamities.” Convinced that the “Central States, the borders of which are washed by the waters of the Ohio” would determine the future of the United States,¹³ Wilson identified three main causes of civil unrest. First he warned that pride, the “sin of the Devil, the sin of Sodom, Egypt and Babylon, the sin of Tyre and Rome, the sin of God’s own chosen Israel, has become our sin already.”¹⁴ Second, he declared that America had become a nation of oppressors, not merely on the plantations of the south, but also in the north. “And if I should confine my remarks to the colored race alone it would be no difficult matter to show that the laws of the free states, and the intense prejudice of the populace are more unreasonable and oppressive than are to be found in most of the

¹²“Disunion,” Presbyter 20.13 (December 20, 1860).

¹³Samuel R. Wilson, The Causes and Remedies of Impending National Calamities (Cincinnati: J. B. Elliott, 1860) 2.

¹⁴Ibid., 9.

slaveholding commonwealths.”¹⁵ In the tradition of the jeremiad, Wilson called his hearers to accept their own responsibility for the national crisis. While the abolitionist’s “taunting finger may point to the slave-mart, the whipping-post, and the loose marriage-tie of the slave,” northern states were guilty of rising rates of “pauperism, prostitution, homicides, and divorces.” Finally, Wilson spoke of the growing prevalence of “lawlessness.” Southern secession aped northern nullification of the fugitive slave law, both equally lawless. In order to avert the impending calamity, Wilson called both north and south to restore the national covenant and obey the law of the land. J. G. Monfort, a Cincinnati colleague of Wilson’s, declared that Wilson was “not only in error, but he has so delivered his views as to do great damage to others, and to the cause of truth and righteousness.” Monfort insisted that there was no “powerful faction in the North who have a settled purpose to trample down the Constitution and break up the national covenant.” A significant portion of the Old School in the northwest refused to acknowledge any complicity in the destruction of the union.¹⁶

In the east William Engles reminded his readers of his track record repudiating the “higher law,” protesting against radical reformers, and condemning sectional jealousies and divisions. “The recent political canvass which has stirred up the feelings of our country in so unusual a degree, has darkened our firmament, and awakened many fears for the future. . . . Forbearance is essential, and wise counsels requisite to soften the acerbity

¹⁵Samuel R. Wilson, The Causes and Remedies of Impending National Calamities (Cincinnati: J. B. Elliott, 1860) 10.

¹⁶Editorial, “Dr Wilson's Sermon,” Presbyter 20.15 (January 3, 1861) 58.

and compose the differences which may arise.” The only way to save the country was to rally behind the Constitution. The south should not assume that platform speeches by radicals expressed the true sentiments of the north. Engles, a northern Democrat, felt sure that a union based on the constitution could still stand.¹⁷ And Engles still had some hope in the oft-cited dictum of “sagacious politicians, that as long as the Presbyterian Church remained united in its wide ramifications North and South, there was hope for the country amidst the turbulence of political feeling.”¹⁸ But he knew the country needed more than Old School unity. The only solution, he claimed, lay “in the re-awakened good sense of the people, and in their determination to make all necessary concessions for the sake of harmony.” Either the whole nation accepted the provisions of the Constitution, or the Union would be lost.¹⁹ In the worst case, he hoped the church could stay united even if the country split.

A southern Presbyterian concurred: “We of the South will never introduce the *vexed question* into the General Assembly; I take it for granted that you of the North will not; and if so, there will be no contention, we will still ‘dwell together in unity.’” He insisted, though, that the dissolution of the union was “inevitable” unless the north quickly repealed the anti-constitutional personal liberty laws.²⁰

¹⁷Editorial, “State of the Country,” Presbyterian 30.46 (November 17, 1860) 186.

¹⁸Editorial, “Position of the Presbyterian Church,” Presbyterian 30.50 (December 15, 1860) 198.

¹⁹Editorial, “Threatening Clouds,” Presbyterian 30.50 (December 15, 1860) 198.

²⁰Border South, “Position of the Church,” Presbyterian 30.52 (December 29, 1860) 205.

In Pittsburgh, one author noted that James Henley Thornwell had prayed for God's favor "upon all those States which have *a common interest with us*," in his prayer before the Legislature of South Carolina. "Is not this a prayer for the success of the plans of Southern fanatics, in their attempts to break up this great Republic?" Accusing Thornwell of treason, he made it clear that in his view, support for secession was rebellion against God and man.²¹ Likewise, when Kentucky's Presbyterian Herald called on the extreme south not to secede unless the Republicans actually violated the Constitution, the editor of the Presbyterian Banner, David McKinney, replied that "Secession can never be constitutional. There is no provision made for it. It is a violation of the compact, by which the people of these States become one government. . . . Let the laws be executed with promptitude and impartiality, and *under the Constitution*, and *in accordance with law*, let the majority rule. Such is Republicanism, and such is Democracy; such is right reason and such is holy Scripture."²² Hinting at the policies of the war years, McKinney identified Republicanism with Christianity, thereby transforming political dissent into heresy.

But in early 1861 the Pittsburgh editor was still attempting to find a middle ground. While he insisted that northerners could not yield to "unrighteous demands," such as the spread of slavery to the territories, he insisted that slavery should be left to the states. All northern Christians could legitimately ask of their southern brethren was "*that they regulate slavery by Christianity*. . . . If the institution can stand the application of those

²¹Consistency, "Does Dr. Thornwell Pray for the Success of Treason?" Presbyterian Banner 9.10 (November 24, 1860).

²²Editorial, "Submission to the Majority," Presbyterian Banner 9.12 (December 8, 1860).

principles, let it stand forever; if it cannot stand the application of these principles, no wisdom of statesmen can prevent its fall.” Convinced that the preaching of the gospel would eventually eliminate slavery, he advocated a compromise to restore the Union—or even an amicable division. The north would “do justice and even more than justice, to the South. But they are not ready to sacrifice their conscience.”²³

Southerners now doubted R. J. Breckinridge’s qualifications as a moderate, but his January 4, 1861, sermon in Lexington, Kentucky, still sought a middle ground. He warned that “national judgments never come except by reason of national sins; nor are they ever turned aside except upon condition of repentance for the sins which produced them.”²⁴ Rejecting both northern nullification of the fugitive slave laws and southern secession, Breckinridge pleaded for moderation. Preaching before a crowd of Kentucky’s political leaders, Breckinridge insisted that only if the border slave states stayed in the Union could reunion work.²⁵

In Virginia, Robert L. Dabney also hoped to preserve the Union. In a sermon at Hampden-Sydney College just before the election, Dabney called upon the Church to show a Christ-like love that would put an end to strife.²⁶ Dabney’s discourse drew praise from

²³Editorial, “The Christian and the Crisis,” Presbyterian Banner 9.16 (January 5, 1861). See also the editorial of March 16.

²⁴“Discourse of R. J. Breckinridge, delivered at the Day of National Humiliation, January 4, 1861, at Lexington, Ky,” Danville Quarterly Review 1.2 (June, 1861) 320.

²⁵“Discourse of R. J. Breckinridge, delivered at the Day of National Humiliation, January 4, 1861, at Lexington, Ky,” Danville Quarterly Review 1.2 (June, 1861) 319-341.

²⁶This sermon was published in several southern newspapers, and was also included in a collection entitled, Fast Day Sermons: or The Pulpit on the State of the Country (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1861) 81-97. Five of the eleven sermons in the book were by Old School Presbyterians. The other four were: Thornwell’s “Our National Sins,” Palmer’s “Slavery a Divine Trust,” and Henry J. Van Dyke’s “The

Engles as “Conservative in its character.” If such moderate southerners could mediate between north and south, there might still be hope.²⁷

Further south, however, moderation was hard to find. South Carolina Presbyterians did not lag behind their fellow citizens in condemning the North. The Rev. A. A. Porter, the new editor of the Southern Presbyterian, declared that “while the infatuated multitude who have chosen Lincoln to the Presidency, thereby inflicting a cruel wound on the people of the South, and placing in imminent peril the most precious interests of the country, are celebrating their triumph with a joy that is indeed crazy, let us bow humbly and calmly at the mercy seat.” The time for discussion had ended: “the South cannot continue to endure the perturbations and harassments of the past.”²⁸ On December 1 Porter set forth his rationale for secession: 1) Lincoln was pledged to prevent the extension of slavery to the federal territories; 2) the northern states refused to enforce the fugitive slave law; 3) northern attempts at inciting slave revolts went unhindered; 4) the Republican party was pledged to run the country for the benefit of the free states alone; 5) the Republican party had rejected the decisions of the Supreme Court on Dred Scott; and 6) the sections simply differed to widely as to what was right and fair. In sum, he saw “the election of Lincoln as the final and solemn decision of the Northern States and people against the rights which

Character and Influence of Abolitionism.”

²⁷Presbyterian 30.51 (December 22, 1860) 202. David McKinney also praised this sermon. Presbyterian Banner 9.15 (December 29, 1860). McKinney also noted the pro-Union sermon of Dr. Watson of Natchez, Mississippi in February of 1861.

²⁸Editorial, “The Election,” Southern Presbyterian 1.2 (November 9, 1860).

the South claims under the constitution, and in favor of the policy and the principles of her irreconcilable enemies.” The South had no choice but to secede.²⁹

When the Synod of South Carolina met in November of 1860, W. B. Yates and William States Lee (members of the former Charleston Union Presbytery who had call for a separate southern Presbyterian church in 1838) “offered a paper stating that the action of 1818 relative to slavery, remained unrepealed by the GA, and that the North had shown its fanaticism in the election of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency, and that fidelity to the South required a separation from the Northern churches.” John B. Adger called separation premature, and the synod laid the proposal on the table, 72-21. Instead it declared the 1818 action “virtually rescinded” by the statement of 1845. While deploring northern tendencies to get mixed up in political questions, the Synod insisted that the present political crisis had a moral and religious bearing, and declared flatly, “that the people of South Carolina are now solemnly called on to imitate their Revolutionary forefathers, and stand up for their rights.”³⁰

Further west, on November 29, 1860, the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Morgan Palmer preached a sermon in New Orleans entitled “Slavery a Divine Trust. Duty of the South to Preserve and Perpetuate It.”³¹ Palmer had rarely touched on politics, but when he did he deployed the rhetorical skill that had made him one of the finest pulpit orators in the

²⁹Editorial, “Politics,” Southern Presbyterian 1.5 (December 1, 1860).

³⁰“Synod of South Carolina,” Presbyterian Banner 9.13 (December 15, 1860).

³¹Benjamin Morgan Palmer, “Slavery a Divine Trust. Duty of the South to Preserve and Perpetuate It,” Fast Day Sermons: or The Pulpit on the State of the Country (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1861) 57-80.

nation. Palmer believed that the question of slavery “which now places us upon the brink of revolution,” was initially a “question of morals and religion,” debated in the church before it reached the national stage.³² He insisted on the duty of the south to “*conserve and to perpetuate the institution of slavery as now existing.*”³³ Although admitting that slavery might one day come to an end, Palmer urged his influential congregation to secede from the Union and establish a slaveholding republic. Declaring that “no despotism is more absolute than that of an unprincipled democracy, and no tyranny more galling than that exercised through constitutional formulas,” Palmer insisted that Lincoln was but the pawn of the Black Republicans, intent on destroying the south.³⁴ The only way to preserve slavery was to secede.

Two weeks later, the Rev. Dr. Joseph R. Wilson, a native of Ohio and a graduate of Jefferson College (1844), but now a pastor on the South Carolina border at Augusta, Georgia, wrote to the Presbyterian Banner, that northerners were misinformed if they thought South Carolina divided regarding secession. “Never were a united people more immovably resolved to alter their political relations than are the people of South Carolina.” And, Wilson added, within a few weeks Georgia would be as unanimous. “The sole ground of disagreement is upon the question of *time*.” Some urged delay, to see what the

³²Palmer, “Slavery a Divine Trust,” 61.

³³Palmer, “Slavery a Divine Trust,” 62.

³⁴Palmer, “Slavery a Divine Trust,” 72.

North would do, but none spoke against secession in principle. Wilson insisted that only northern states' repeal of the "personal liberty bills" could save the Union.³⁵

David McKinney replied to the southerners that they were doing precisely what the abolitionists had hoped for. "You are rushing into the very abyss into which William Lloyd Garrison, Wendel Phillips, and men of that class have been long anxious to see you fall. . . . For years they have been wishing you out of the Union." In contrast, he insisted that the great mass of the North wanted to work with southerners, if only they would be patient and wait.³⁶

3. Hodge on the State of the Country

In January of 1861, Charles Hodge weighed in from Princeton. While on purely political matters, Hodge had generally remained silent, this, he argued, was not purely a political matter:

There are periods in the history of every nation when its destiny for ages may be determined by the events of an hour. There are occasions when political questions rise into the sphere of morals and religion; when the rule for political action is to be sought, not in considerations of state policy, but in the law of God. On such occasions the distinction between secular and religious journals is obliterated. When the question to be decided turns on moral principles, when reason, conscience, and religious sentiment are to be addressed, it is the privilege and duty of all who have

³⁵J. R. W. (Augusta, GA), "Southern Feeling," Presbyterian Banner 9.13 (December 15, 1860).

³⁶Editorial "A Word to Our Southern Brethren," Presbyterian Banner 9.15 (December 29, 1860). Eric Foner points out that the Republican Party had a significant conservative element, and that the radicals were generally focused in "rural and small town New England, and in the areas of rural New York, Pennsylvania, and the West settled by New England migrants." Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men, 106. Given that the conservative Whigs generally sided with the Republicans, this is not surprising.

access in any way to the public ear, to endeavour to allay unholy feeling, and to bring truth to bear on the minds of their fellow-citizens.³⁷

Arguing for the oneness of the nation on the basis of ethnic, linguistic, and geographical unity throughout the United States, Hodge claimed that the union was “determined by the homogeneity of its people, by its history, and by its physical character. It cannot be permanently dissevered.” But even more important was the national covenant—the constitution—which bound the nation together.³⁸ Hodge insisted that the Republican party “is not an antislavery, much less an abolition party.”³⁹ Lincoln won in 1860, not because the abolitionists had conquered the hearts of the north, but because the Democrats had utterly failed to provide a workable solution to the slavery crisis of the 1850s and then demonstrated their incompetence by dividing at their 1860 Convention in Charleston.

Hodge then turned to the reasons for southern secession. While he doubted that the south would prosper as a result of secession, he did acknowledge that it had “some just grounds of complaint, and that the existing animosity towards the North is neither unnatural nor unaccountable.” Nonetheless, he argued that “these grievances are greatly exaggerated, and that this animosity arises in a large measure from misapprehension.”⁴⁰ Granting the justice of southern complaints against the language and conduct of the abolitionists, Hodge nonetheless argued that abolitionists were a tiny minority. “We do not know of one clergyman among the Roman Catholics, or the Episcopalians, or the Dutch

³⁷“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 1.

³⁸“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 2.

³⁹“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 4.

⁴⁰“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 9.

Reformed, belonging to the class of abolitionists. Of the three thousand Old-school Presbyterian clergymen in the country, we do not believe there are twelve who deserve to be so designated.” While northern Methodists had “more of that spirit,” the northern clergy as a whole had a “strong conservative element.” The election of Lincoln did not indicate the growth of abolitionism, because “the Republican party consists of those who desired to enter their protest against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and the attempts to force slavery upon Kansas, joined by thousands who wish for a protective tariff, and thousands more, who, from dislike of one candidate, and distrust of another, preferred to vote for Mr. Lincoln.”⁴¹

Hodge also acknowledged that the south had good reason to complain about northern attempts to assist fugitive slaves, but he pointed out that the “conduct of a small band of fanatics over which the people have no control, and for which they are not responsible” could not warrant the division of the nation. But Hodge severely strained his credibility when he claimed that not more than one thousand northerners could be found who approved of the violation of the fugitive slave law.⁴²

Hodge then turned to the constitutional question. Had the north violated the terms of the national compact? The federal government remained committed to the enforcement of the fugitive slave law, and no southerner could complain of the fidelity of the federal government in the matter. In contrast, Hodge pointed out that the provision of the Constitution, that gave citizens of one state the same privileges in all others had been

⁴¹“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 12.

⁴²“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 14.

“formally nullified by law” with respect to free African-Americans who wished to move to the South. A free black citizen was denied his constitutional right to move to another state. If southern states could nullify the federal constitution through their state laws, why did they object when northern states did the same?⁴³ Moreover, Hodge argued that the so-called “personal liberty laws” were perfectly consistent with the constitution. Even if unconstitutional, the proper remedy was for the Supreme Court to declare the state law unconstitutional. There is no “breach of contract, so long as the Federal Government, the party bound, is faithful to its duty.”⁴⁴ The southern complaint was merely a pretext.

The real issue, Hodge believed, was the south’s insistence on keeping control of the national government. As the northern states grew in population and as more free states joined from the west, the south feared losing its veto power in the United States Senate. Southerners insisted that there could be “no law enacted, no measure adopted, without its approbation, and consequently for its benefit.” But, Hodge pointed out, “this supposes that the interest of the slaveholders is antagonistic to all others, and is so important that it may rightfully be dominant, or at least co-ordinate and limiting.” This insistence, Hodge argued, was contrary to the Constitution, which did not recognize “sections,” but only states.⁴⁵

Finally, Hodge turned to the question of secession. After all, even if all the grievances were imaginary, if states had the right to secede, no one could stop them. But

⁴³“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 16-18.

⁴⁴“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 21.

⁴⁵“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 22-26.

Hodge claimed secession legally impossible because the several states formed one nation, indivisible except by revolution or common consent. The constitution itself declared the union to be “perpetual.” “A perpetual union is one which cannot be dissolved except on the consent of all the parties to that union. Secession is a breach of faith. It is morally a crime, as much as the secession of a regiment from the battle field would be.”⁴⁶

As for a solution, Hodge had little to offer. He suggested that the federal government reimburse southerners for escaped slaves and urged restoration of the Missouri Compromise, “the abrogation of which is the immediate source of all our present troubles. The adoption of these measures, both of which have been repeatedly proposed, would meet the views, as we cannot but believe, of the great body of moderate and good men in every part of the country.”⁴⁷

The response to Hodge was mixed. From his forced retirement in Indiana, Erasmus Darwin MacMaster replied that Hodge’s position at Princeton Seminary gave “his deliverances an influence to which they are not always entitled upon their own merits. This is especially true of all his deliverances in general on the subject of slavery, and in particular of his late article on the state of the country.” Rejecting Hodge’s definition of slavery (involuntary servitude) as “absurd,” he insisted that slavery was in fact “the system which makes the legal status of men, and women, and children to be that of *property* that is, of *real estate*, or *chattels personal*, as the case may be; and *slavery* is condemned as a sin against God, and the most gross outrage upon man.” MacMaster denied being an

⁴⁶“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 28.

⁴⁷“The State of the Country,” BRPR 33.1 (January 1861) 36.

abolitionist. He recognized that a Christian could hold slaves—but only for the good of the slaves as he worked diligently to end slavery.⁴⁸

As to the character of the Republican party, MacMaster claimed that Hodge had grossly misrepresented its purpose. The Republican party *was* an anti-slavery party, and MacMaster believed that the church should be ashamed that rather than inculcating “a right public opinion” regarding the moral outrage of slavery, it had left it to “statesmen and politicians, and subjected herself to be reproached by them, as succumbing to the impudent assumption of the pro-slavery power, and, like the dominant political party, proscribing men who refuse to bow the knee to this Baal.” The great glory of the Republican party was exactly that it was anti-slavery, and Hodge had no business obscuring its true purpose.⁴⁹

MacMaster rejected Hodge’s proposed solution just as firmly. He insisted that the north should only pay the full value of fugitive slaves if the slave states embraced the full “religious and industrial training” of their slaves, along with a system for the “gradual emancipation of those thus prepared for freedom,” along with their colonization, either in the tropical regions of our own continent, or, what would be every way far better, and not impracticable, in Africa.” But if the south would not agree to this, then he insisted that the north should not “pay for their runaway slaves.” As for the restoration of the Missouri Compromise, MacMaster argued that it was so “abhorrent even to an obtuse moral sense,

⁴⁸E. D. MacMaster, “The Princeton Review on the State of the Country,” Presbyter 20.21 (February 14, 1861) 81.

⁴⁹MacMaster, “The Princeton Review on the State of the Country,” 81.

that it was the political death of every man from the Free States who voted for it.”

Emancipation or resolute opposition to slavery within the bounds of the constitution were the only two options for MacMaster.⁵⁰

Nonetheless, MacMaster admitted that he was pleased with Hodge’s movement toward the Republican party. While the Princeton Review, in his opinion, had “done ten-fold more than all the other publications together, periodical and occasional, to perplex the minds of the simple, and to pervert the conscience of multitudes in the Church,” now Hodge was moving with the times. In a prescient commentary on the trajectory of his eastern brethren, MacMaster predicted that most of the Old School press would eventually come around. Since they tended to ride the tide of popular opinion, they would now no doubt “fall altogether into the gulph stream, and still going with the stream and the wind, will ride upon the top of the wave with all sails filled.” The time had passed for “another dishonest compromise about slavery in the Confederacy.” The anti-slavery forces would remain silent no longer. “Slavery must fall. Man is against it. God is against it. . . . If the nation and the Church do not bring it to an end, it will bring them to an end.” As to his long silence on the subject, MacMaster admitted he had found his ostracism difficult to bear, but at least it had given him the confidence and the right to speak out boldly.⁵¹

From the other extreme, the Rev. Dr. Charles Colcock Jones of Liberty County, Georgia, declared Hodge’s article “an unfair, one-sided, and lamentable attack.” Hodge’s logic respecting the unity of the nation would have repudiated the American Revolution,

⁵⁰MacMaster, “The Princeton Review on the State of the Country,” 81.

⁵¹MacMaster, “The Princeton Review on the State of the Country,” 81.

and his geographical argument would bring Canada and Mexico under American rule. Examining the Republican party platform and publications, Jones argued that “they are intensely, thoroughly anti-slavery and abolition, and this is their life-blood, upon which they run their candidates.” Jones insisted that “it is not the opinion of the North in regard to slavery that aggrieves the South, but the acts of the North growing out of that opinion.”⁵²

Hodge rarely sought publication in the weeklies, preferring to write for his magisterial Princeton Review; but he sent a reply to Jones. He acknowledged that neither extreme had appreciated his essay, but it wasn’t intended for them. He had hoped to “convince the South that the mass of Northern people are not Abolitionists or hostile to the rights and interests of the South,” and then to convince the North that the abolitionists were wrong.⁵³ A. A. Porter, the editor, replied that southerners were “well informed as to all the shades and variety of opinion in the North on the different religious, moral and political questions involved in the present controversy.” But, citing the North Carolina Presbyterian, he pointed out that Hodge had reviewed each allegedly just grievance and “each one is in turn frittered away by special pleadings and sophisms, until it appears very manifest that *the South has no grievance whatever to complain of*.” Hodge had even argued that even the personal liberty laws were not a breach of the Constitution, so long as the Federal Government enforces its own laws. Porter agreed with the North Carolina

⁵²Charles Colcock Jones, “The Princeton Review on ‘The State of the Country,’” Southern Presbyterian 1.16 (February 16, 1861).

⁵³Editor of the Princeton Review [Charles Hodge], “A Response from Princeton,” Southern Presbyterian 1.12 (January 19, 1861). The same day Hodge’s communication was printed in the Central Presbyterian as well. “A Communication from Rev. Charles Hodge DD,” CP 6.3 (Jan 19, 1861) 10.

Presbyterian's conclusion: "We read attentively, but with increasing sadness of heart, as the truth became more and more apparent, that another strong and venerable oak of the forest had yielded to the storm, and *the Princeton Repertory had gone over to the enemy of our country's peace and happiness.*"⁵⁴

Some northerners, though, defended Hodge. The Presbyterian Banner declared it a "noble, patriotic, Christian treatise on the 'State of the country.'"⁵⁵ One author reminded his readers of Hodge's role in the maintenance of the unity of the Old School church: "Some fifteen or twenty years ago, when the anti-slavery feeling ran very high at the North, and many minds in the Presbyterian Church were disposed to either cast off their Southern brethren, or themselves to leave the body, Dr Hodge came out, in the *Repertory*, with a few powerful and most convincing arguments, showing that the relation of master and servant was Scriptural, and would be blessed of God for good, where the parties faithfully performed their mutual duties." Hodge's arguments had convinced the church that just because "a Christian holds bond-servants, and holds them even under oppressive and unjust laws, it does not hence follow that he is actually oppressive and unjust." We think that Hodge did more to prepare the minds of ministers and people for the resolution of 1845 than anyone else. "For this a debt of gratitude is due; and if our Southern brethren esteem a united and peaceful Church a blessing, their share in that gratitude should be great."

⁵⁴Editor of the Princeton Review [Charles Hodge], "A Response from Princeton," Southern Presbyterian 1.12 (January 19, 1861).

⁵⁵Presbyterian Banner 9.17 (January 12, 1861).

But now Hodge had performed another great service. “The peace of the country is in danger. . . . Dr Hodge again takes his pen, and in his own strong, fearless, and even-handed style of treating matters. . . reproves the North for failures of duty under the Constitutional compact, and for aggression on Southern feeling. He shows also that the South is wrong, and wrong especially in the mode adopted for a redress of grievances.” But this time the South turned against him. Of all the southern papers, only the True Witness had treated Hodge with respect. As one correspondent of the Presbyterian Herald had put it, “if I ever saw a man that had the ‘spirit of Christ’ Charles Hodge is that man; and I see nothing in that article to change my views on that subject. The excited people seem to be willing to endure nothing which is not all on their side. Not a syllable must be conceded to the other side. And the very speeches which are made for peace are pressed into war.”⁵⁶

Influential circles of ministers and laymen joined together throughout the country to cool down the heated rhetoric.⁵⁷ An honor roll of northern clergy including Episcopal Bishop Charles P. McIlvaine, Methodist Nathan Bangs, Charles Hodge, Gardiner Spring and many others called for all sides to return to the Constitution. Admitting that “too much of this fratricidal work has undeniably been done by the pulpit,” and “far more by the

⁵⁶“Dr Hodge and the South,” Presbyterian Banner (February 9, 1861).

⁵⁷“Circular Letter to the Clergy and Laity in the Southern States of the Union,” CP 6.4 (Jan 26, 1861) 13. Seventeen of the thirty-three signatories were Old School: Gardiner Spring, William W. Phillips, George Potts, John McElroy, John M. Krebs, Nicholas Murray, David Magie, Charles Hodge, Alexander T. McGill, John McLean, Henry A. Boardman, Charles Wadsworth, Charles W. Shields, William P. Breed, Robert Watts, James M. Crowell and Joseph H. Jones. Five Episcopalians, three Methodists, and two each of the Baptists, Dutch Reformed and New School Presbyterians, rounded out the list along with the secretaries of the American Bible Society and the Evangelical Knowledge Society.

press,” they called for peace and Union. Responding in kind, Robert L. Dabney and his colleagues in Virginia circulated a “Pacific Appeal,” urging the southern states to avoid disunion. At the same time they warned the north that if southern states are “persistently refused their full rights in the confederacy and its common territory and the protection granted by the constitution to their peculiar property, then in our opinion, . . . the catastrophe, however lamentable, must be met, sorrowfully indeed, and yet with the resolution of freemen.” They hoped that patience and discussion could yet resolve the impasse.⁵⁸

As he left office, President James Buchanan, himself a Presbyterian, urged the nation to pray to God “to restore the friendship and good-will which prevailed in former days among the people of the several States; and above all, to save us from the horrors of civil war and ‘blood-guiltiness.’ Let our fervent prayers ascend to His Throne, that He would not desert us in this hour of extreme peril, but remember us as He did our fathers in the darkest days of the Revolution, and preserve our Constitution and our Union, the work of their hands, for ages yet to come. An Omnipotent Providence may overrule existing

⁵⁸“An Address to the Clergy and Laity of the Christian Church of the Country,” *CP*, 6.4 (January 26, 1861) 13. The appeal was signed by: Robert L. Dabney, Samuel B. Wilson, Benjamin M. Smith, and Thomas E. Peck, the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, along with the President and one Professor from Hampden-Sydney College, the Editor of the *Central Presbyterian*, three other Presbyterian ministers, an African church, the late President of Davidson College, and five professors from the University of Virginia (twelve of the sixteen signatories were Old School Presbyterian ministers). Others in general agreement included the entire faculty of Washington College in Virginia (Presbyterian) and two professors from the Virginia Military Institute, along with one minister each from the Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. The President, Presiding Elder, and Chaplain of Randolph-Macon College (Methodist) appreciated the address and still hoped for a peaceful solution, but feared that secession was necessary. Once again it was Old School Presbyterians who were trying to hold the Union together.

evils for permanent good. He can make the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He can restrain.”⁵⁹

4. Fort Sumter and the General Assembly of 1861

The firing on Fort Sumter convinced most that amicable resolution was impossible.⁶⁰ J. G. Monfort reported that “The signs of the times indicate that this war is to be made by the South a conflict for the extension or destruction of slavery. We of the North have not so desired, and we still do not wish it to be so. We abhor slavery; we desire its abolition; but we feel ourselves bound by the Constitution to protect it in the slave States.” But if the south went to war for slavery, then slavery would be abolished. Ironically, in Monfort’s perceptive opinion, the only way for the south to preserve slavery was to remain in the Union.⁶¹ By the beginning of May, as reports came from southern presbyteries that they would not attend the Assembly, Monfort became cautiously optimistic as to the possibilities for General Assembly action. Still, he warned that anti-slavery forces must be wary of “Northern pro-slavery opposition to any action of the Assembly on secession and rebellion. . . . If our church stands back at this time, and is dumb, she will be disgraced before the world.”⁶²

⁵⁹James Buchanan, “To the People of the United States,” Presbyterian 30.51 (December 22, 1860) 202.

⁶⁰Rogan Kersh points out that at least in the north, April of 1861 was “the first time since the 1780s” when there was “no confusion over the union’s meaning.” Dreams of a More Perfect Union (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 191.

⁶¹Editorial, “The War,” Presbyter 20.31 (April 25, 1861).

⁶²Editorial, “The Next Assembly,” Presbyter (May 2, 1861).

In Philadelphia, the conservative William Engles mourned that “the war spirit has been widely diffused.” Reluctant as he was to see the disasters of war, he agreed that “the government must and will be sustained, and the issue we must leave with God, who has doubtless some great purposes to be accomplished by this sudden revulsion of all the harmonies of our great confederation.”⁶³ Noting the sudden “tornado” of war excitement,⁶⁴ Engles called on Presbyterians to remember that God would bring justice in the end.⁶⁵ On the following page he informed his readers of the secession of Virginia.⁶⁶ Still, he hoped that the Old School Presbyterian Church could be a force for mediation and peace-making.

Robert L. Dabney, however, did not see any such hope. In an open letter to Samuel Irenaeus Prime of the New York Observer he reminded him that Virginia had held out the olive branch, “even after it had been spurned again and again.” The north had simply refused to listen. But now Virginia’s “magnanimous, her too generous concessions of right have been met by the insolent demand for unconditional surrender of honor and dignity.” Lincoln’s call for troops to “wage war without the authority of law, and to coerce sovereign states into adhesion, in the utter absence of all powers or intentions of the federal compact to that effect,” would now force Virginia into secession. Dabney reminded his northern brethren that the American union had formed on the “right of freemen to choose their own form of government. This right the North now declares the South shall

⁶³Editorial, “State of the Country,” Presbyterian 31.17 (April 27, 1861) 66.

⁶⁴Editorial, “The Excitement,” Presbyterian 31.17 (April 27, 1861) 66.

⁶⁵Editorial, “The Trial of Faith,” Presbyterian 31.17 (April 27, 1861) 66.

⁶⁶Editorial, “The War,” Presbyterian 31.17 (April 27, 1861) 67.

not enjoy. . . . The North undertakes to compel its *equals* to abide under a government which they judge ruinous to their rights! Thus this free, Christian, republican North urges on the war, while even despotic Europe cries shame on the fratricidal strife.” Dabney insisted that the Federal Government had initiated the war by seeking to fortify South Carolina’s forts against her. Calling upon like-minded northerners to come to the South, Dabney declared, “For you we have open arms and warm hearts; for our enemies, resistance to the death.”⁶⁷

This was the context in which the General Assembly of 1861 met. As the Assembly approached, Nathan Rice of the Presbyterian Expositor and William W. Hill of the Presbyterian Herald urged presbyteries to send their wisest men to the Assembly to meet the crisis of the country. Monfort, however, urged the church to “Let Caesar alone. He is doing very well.” This was not based on any “spirituality of the church” doctrine. Monfort’s rationale was purely political: “The men who rule the General Assembly—the united South and the great lights of our commercial cities—are not prepared to do anything for freedom.”⁶⁸ He was in for the biggest (and most pleasant) surprise of his life.

Three weeks later, William McMillan, pastor of Hamilton, Ohio, disagreed, calling this Assembly the perfect opportunity for anti-slavery action. If it reaffirmed the 1818 deliverance, Thornwell and Palmer would secede from the church, ridding it of “this monster of iniquity, which has for years and years stood in the very gateway of progress.”

⁶⁷R. L. Dabney “On the State of the Country,” CP (April 20, 1861) reprinted in Discourses vol. 4. pages 42 1ff.

⁶⁸Editorial, Presbyter 20.27 (March 28, 1861).

The 1861 Assembly would be “the very body and meets at a very good time and place, to pronounce authoritatively that we now as heretofore wash our hands of its guilt.”⁶⁹

In South Carolina, Thomas Smyth urged southerners to remain united with the northern Old School. So long as they could hold different political views, the church could remain one. Porter, the Southern Presbyterian’s editor, commented that many southern Presbyterians desired a “separate ecclesiastical organization,” simply due to the awkwardness of crossing national boundaries for church meetings. But acknowledging that northern sentiment would not likely accept the repeal of 1818, he argued that “Our Northern brethren owe it to us to be perfectly candid and explicit on this subject. Let them frankly say whether they regard that act as reversed or not, and whether it is now an exponent of their views.”⁷⁰

The Southern Presbyterian explained the refusal of the Charleston Presbytery to send commissioners to the General Assembly on the ground that “when the Assembly meets at Philadelphia, Northern legions will be mustering for the invasion of our homes, if not actually engaged in the horrid work of slaughtering our families and friends.” They could not sit in deliberations with men whose “mercenaries” were invading the south, when “for all they knew even then the mangled corpses of these loved ones were lying bleeding on the altars of liberty.” David McKinney of the Pittsburgh Presbyterian Banner

⁶⁹[William] Mc[Millan] of Hamilton OH, “Slavery--General Assembly,” Presbyter 20.30 (April 18, 1861).

⁷⁰T. S., “Shall Our Church Divide?” Southern Presbyterian 1.22 (March 30, 1861). One of the minor acts of the 1861 Assembly was to take exception to the Minutes of the Synod of South Carolina, when it declared the acts of 1818 to be “virtually rescinded” by the act of 1845. The Assembly declared that the 1846 action had plainly reaffirmed the earlier action of 1818. Minutes (1861) 333.

remarked that “This is about as cool a thing as we have ever known men in an excited condition to perpetrate. The whole world knows this war was altogether brought about by the conduct of the Secession party, South Carolina taking the lead. . . . Well may they be in terror under apprehension of the visitation of God’s providence upon their crimes.”⁷¹

While Monfort rejoiced that the Presbyterian and the New York Observer had sided with the Union, he complained that they still hoped for peace. Monfort preferred the New School American Presbyterian’s view that “there are times when humanity, Christianity, and the Gospel of Christ join to impel us to war.” But when the Presbyterian Herald commented that its exchanges breathed the spirit of devils on both sides of the borders, Monfort could only ask, “With the Presbyterian Banner, we wonder with what *Northern* papers the Herald ‘exchanges.’”⁷²

5. The Spring Resolutions

With comments like these in view, the General Assembly of 1861 becomes easier to understand. On Saturday, May 18, the third day of the Assembly, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Spring “offered a resolution, that a Special Committee be appointed to inquire into the expediency of this Assembly making some expression of their devotion to the Union of these States, and their loyalty to the Government.” Before any significant debate occurred, the Rev. James W. Hoyte of Nashville, Tennessee, moved to lay the motion on the table.

⁷¹Presbyterian Banner 9.33 (May 4, 1861).

⁷²“Spirit of the Religious Press,” Presbyter 20.32 (May 2, 1861) 126.

His motion passed 123-102.⁷³ A small majority of the Assembly wished to avoid such exciting topics.

But immediately, ruling elder Hovey K. Clarke of Detroit moved to take the resolution up from the table, which produced a long debate, resulting in a determination to consider the matter later. The debate in earnest began on Friday, May 24, when Spring himself proposed a series of pro-Union resolutions, and took the whole of Saturday, and large parts of Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.⁷⁴ The entire debate took place in front of a large audience (overwhelmingly in favor of Dr. Spring's resolutions), which had a significant effect on the debate.

Gratefully acknowledging the distinguished bounty and care of Almighty God towards this favoured land, and also recognizing our obligations to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, this General Assembly adopt the following resolutions:

Resolved, 1. That in view of the present agitated and unhappy condition of this country, the fourth day of July next be hereby set apart as a day of prayer throughout our bounds; and that on this day ministers and people are called on humbly to confess and bewail our national sins; to offer our thanks to the Father of light for his abundant and undeserved goodness towards 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 about to assemble; and to implore him, in the name of Jesus Christ, the great High Priest of the Christian profession, to turn away his anger from us, and speedily restore to us the blessings of an honourable peace.

Resolved, 2. That this General Assembly, in the spirit of that Christian patriotism which the Scriptures enjoin, and which has always characterized this Church, do hereby acknowledge and declare our obligations to promote and perpetuate, so far as in us lies, the integrity of these United States, and to strengthen, uphold, and encourage, the Federal Government in the exercise of all its functions under our noble Constitution: and to this Constitution in all its provisions, requirements, and principles, we profess our unabated loyalty.

And to avoid all misconception, the Assembly declare that by the terms "Federal Government," as here used, is not meant any particular administration, or the peculiar opinions of any particular party, but the central administration, which being at any time appointed and inaugurated according to the forms prescribed in the Constitution of the United States is the visible representative of our national existence.

Source: Minutes (1861) 329-330.

Figure 11.1. The Spring Resolutions

⁷³Minutes (1861) 303. The vote was not recorded.

⁷⁴Minutes (1861) 315-330. The text of the resolutions as adopted is found on page 329-330.

The Rev. Dr. Thomas E. Thomas, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Dayton, Ohio, and formerly professor at New Albany Theological Seminary, opened the debate, arguing that Caesar deserved the church's loyalty: "Is it not the duty of ministers and members of churches to promote the interest and integrity of these United States, by a faithful adherence to the laws of our country?" Since the government had protected the church, "now if our blood is demanded, the people of the Presbyterian Church of the United States, should freely pour it out for his support." At this the gallery broke into loud applause—silenced by the moderator, John C. Backus of Baltimore. Mindful of the audience, Thomas continued, insisting that "public sentiment will condemn that General Assembly which will not sustain the Government."⁷⁵

The southwest uniformly opposed the resolutions. Rev. James H. Gillespie of Denmark, Tennessee replied that he had come to Philadelphia to save the church. He feared that the North and the South did not understand each other. These resolutions were proof. They would divide the church. He pointed out that southern Presbyterians had been told that if they came to the General Assembly they would be hanged as traitors, and some had believed these lies. The Presbyterian church needed to maintain clear channels of communication.⁷⁶

The northwestern ministers divided. Kentucky-born Charles Lee, pastor in Scipio, Indiana, declared that the church must sustain the government and the army and therefore urged passage of the resolutions. But others, like the Rev. Dr. John G. Bergen, a retired

⁷⁵"General Assembly," Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

⁷⁶"General Assembly," Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

minister in Springfield, Illinois, insisted that while he loved the Union, he would have to vote against the resolutions because they would divide the church.⁷⁷

At this point, the Rev. Dr. Charles Hodge, professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, arose and presented a substitute for Spring's resolutions. He admitted that he personally had no objections to Spring's resolution. "It expresses the sentiments of the people of the North." But, Hodge argued, loyalty to the government required something else: "A Member of the President's Cabinet on being consulted on the subject, said, 'the best thing you can do for the Union is to keep unbroken the unity of your Church.'" At this point, the Rev. Dr. J. T. Backus of the First Presbyterian Church of Schenectady, New York, said that he had a telegraph from this cabinet member to prove it, which caused quite a sensation amongst the gallery. Hodge continued that since the Old School was "the most conservative Church in the land," their action could work to save the Union. By "pleading for the Church we are pleading for the Government, for the entire Church in this land, and for the entire world."⁷⁸

The Rev. Dr. William C. Anderson, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of San Francisco (a colleague of Erasmus Darwin MacMaster at the failed Madison University in 1844, and MacMaster's successor as president of Miami University in Ohio from 1849-1855), objected that "If we desert our national flag, the backbone of our Church, the Scotch Irish element, 'the blues' of the West and Northwest, will leave our Church in a body, and join the nineteen hundred ministers of the New School Church, together with

⁷⁷"General Assembly," Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

⁷⁸"General Assembly," Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

the Associate Reformed Church.” Hodge’s resolution offers us “milk and water—mostly water. . . . Shall it be said that we are afraid of offending rebels in arms against us, for this is the whole reason why Dr. Hodge’s paper is offered.”⁷⁹ Scorning Philadelphia/Princeton conservatism as mere appeasement of southern interests, Anderson insisted that the church must support the government.

Spring, genuinely taken aback at the opposition to his resolutions, claimed to “mourn over the South, for I have friends there.” But the duty of the hour required the church to “sympathize with the North, to sympathize with the right.” Judge Martin Ryerson of New Jersey agreed that “no such efforts as Dr. Hodge’s resolutions could save the Union against a conspiracy of thirty years’ standing.” The south would leave, regardless of what the Presbyterian church did. Therefore, he argued, the church must sustain the government. Likewise, the Rev. John M. Hastings, pastor at Wilkesburg, Pennsylvania, insisted that the southern church had already declared for the confederacy. “If so, will the General Assembly, the greater portion of it gathered here from the North, bow in submission to their conspiracy?” To which a loud voice declared, “No, sir.”⁸⁰

The Irish-born Rev. Robert Watts of Westminster Church in Philadelphia reminded the Assembly that they “were indirectly called upon by venerable men to divide the Church.” Watts was convinced that the church might yet succeed. “There had been nothing yet to prove that the Old School Presbyterian Church has not in her ranks a conservative power, which might blend together in one Union the entire States of this Confederacy.”

⁷⁹“General Assembly,” Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

⁸⁰“General Assembly,” Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

Further, Watts argued that scripture called the church to honor the civil magistrate, but it never required the church to pass resolutions of support. It is interesting to note that the only person to question the constitutionality of the Spring resolutions was an Ulster Presbyterian (who would return to Northern Ireland to teach theology in the Assembly's College in Belfast from 1866-1895).

The Rev. Dr. George Washington Musgrave, secretary of the Board of Domestic Missions, insisted that this was not a mere sectional controversy. The United States was one nation. "If it be a moral duty to honor our rulers, to be loyal to the lawful Government, if it be a moral duty for us as citizens and as Christians to pray for our rulers, and to encourage and sustain them, my conscience will not allow me to refuse to say that this is right and obligatory." Southerners had no different obligation. They were required to affirm their loyalty to the Federal Government. Therefore the Assembly should say so.⁸¹

As the hour was late, the Assembly adjourned until the next morning. That morning (Saturday), the Rev. E. C. Wines, President of the City University of St. Louis, read a telegram from the Hon. Edward Bates, Lincoln's attorney general, and an Old School Presbyterian ruling elder from Missouri, stating that in his opinion the Presbyterian

⁸¹"General Assembly," Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

Church should abstain from deliverances in order to maintain the unity of the church.⁸²

Wines then offered a substitute:

Whereas the General Assembly has come to believe that the National Administration itself is of the opinion that the silence of this body on the present fearful crisis in public affairs as tending to preserve the unity of the Presbyterian Church, would at the same time and for that reason be in the interest of peace and of National Union, and would strengthen the hands of the General Government;

And whereas further, the minsters and elders present in this Assembly, true to their hereditary principles as Presbyterians, have already in their civil and social relations given the most decisive proof of their devotion to the constitution and the laws under which we live, and are ready at all suitable times and at whatever personal sacrifice to demonstrate their loyalty to the American Union; therefore,

Resolved, That the General Assembly think it inexpedient at this time to give any formal expression of opinion touching the existing crisis, and that, consequently, the whole subject be indefinitely postponed.⁸³

The Rev. Dr. William C. Matthews, pastor at Shelbyville, Kentucky, objected that the entire discussion had become too political. The church needed some pastoral concern for the flock in the border states. “Do not oppress us! Do not crush us with this burden! (The speaker was here almost in tears.) We feel here too much political spirit; our debate here is not spiritual enough. Remember the handle our California brother [Anderson] made of Dr. Hodge’s resolutions, to ridicule our Philadelphia brethren and to ridicule Princeton.” Matthews believed that there was too much “passion kindled in the Assembly

⁸²Bates, along with secretary of war Simon Cameron, were pewholders with Lincoln in the Old School New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. George M. Apperson, “Lincoln, the Churches, and Memphis Presbyterians,” American Presbyterians 72:2 (Summer 1994) 98. Bates had been the conservative Republicans’ candidate at the Republican Convention of 1860, but “there was so little anti-slavery in Bates’s record that he was unacceptable to all but the most conservative Republicans.” This resulted in the nomination of Lincoln—the moderate candidate—over radicals Salmon Chase and William Seward. Eric Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995/1970) 213. His status as a ruling elder is affirmed by the CP 6:27 (July 6, 1861) 108.

⁸³Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

by the outside pressure, such as crowds, telegraphic dispatches and letters. Why, sir, it is just so at the South.” If only the two sides could calm down long enough to realize their folly: “Oh! If this Church is to be severed in twain I feel like throwing my arms about both divisions and crying, ‘Oh! My mother! Oh! My mother!’” His plea for the Union and the Church was a powerful speech that apparently moved many to tears.⁸⁴

As the debate continued, it became clear that Hodge’s resolution had no real chance. Therefore Hodge withdrew his resolutions and threw his support to Wines. One Ohio minister declared that as an “Old Line Whig” who had voted for Abraham Lincoln, he still could not divide the church. A Wisconsin minister agreed that Wines was the best alternative, but if that failed, he said that he would have to vote for Spring’s resolutions rather than say nothing. The Rev. Henry M. Robertson, pastor at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, argued that without a declaration of loyalty, the Northwest would not listen to the Presbyterian Church. “It had been asked who doubted the loyalty of the Old School Church? The speaker said that he, for one, doubted its loyalty.” Anything short of Spring’s resolutions would cripple the Presbyterian Church in the Northwest.⁸⁵

On Monday morning, May 29, at least twelve substitutes were proposed, from the Rev. Joseph Glass Monfort’s (editor of the Presbyter, in Cincinnati, Ohio) detailed patriotic declaration of loyalty to the Rev. William M. Stryker’s (pastor at Clarinda, Iowa) acknowledgment of impotence: “that as this Assembly can do nothing, it sit still and see the salvation of God.” As the debate continued to go in circles, the Rev. Dr. John W.

⁸⁴“General Assembly,” Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

⁸⁵“General Assembly,” Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

Yeomans objected to the development of a “Northwestern sentiment. . . he would have but one sentiment pervading all. And when he saw this North-western sentiment leaping up into the saddle behind Dr. Spring, the connexion with the great question now agitating the civilized world was apparent. Our conservative position must be sustained.”⁸⁶

The Rev. Dr. Willis Lord, who had been associated with Nathan Rice, both at the Cincinnati Theological Seminary, and at the Northwestern Theological Seminary, demonstrated his independence from Rice, by arguing for the Spring resolutions. He rejected Watts’ contention that they were unconstitutional, insisting that this was a “a new doctrine introduced from the region of State rights,” which, he pointed out, even the Synod of South Carolina could not live with—since they had passed resolutions endorsing the formation of the Confederacy.⁸⁷

In the final speech of the night, the Rev. William Baker, pastor at Austin, Texas, revealed that he had spoken and voted against the secession of Texas—“and in my soul I hate secession. Now, if slain, I am likely to have a monument erected neither in the North or the South (Laughter).” But he was beginning to see that division was inevitable. If the Presbyterian Church passed these resolutions they would force southern Presbyterians to identify solely with the Confederacy, “and henceforth her destiny will be our destiny.” After this speech, Charles Hodge thought that the momentum had turned. He moved to postpone the whole subject indefinitely. But he had judged incorrectly, and his motion

⁸⁶“General Assembly,” Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

⁸⁷“General Assembly,” Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

failed 87-153.⁸⁸ While many men had hoped to avoid the subject altogether, now that the debate had progressed this far, they felt that the church must speak.

At this juncture, David McKinney, editor of the Presbyterian Banner, had to send an incomplete record of the debate to his western Pennsylvania audience. He added a comment that the departure of the south would be a comparatively small evil to the departure of the northwest. Therefore, if for no other reason than to keep the northwest, the church must speak.⁸⁹

Tuesday morning, the matter was referred to a committee of ministers George Musgrave of Philadelphia, Charles Hodge of New Jersey, William Anderson of San Francisco, John Yeomans of Pennsylvania, and E. C. Wines of St. Louis, together with ruling elders M. Ryerson of New Jersey, Jackson B. White of Nashville, William Semple of Ohio, and Hovey K. Clarke of Detroit (all judges). While Musgrave, Ryerson, and Clark had all spoken for Spring's resolutions, they were willing to seek common ground with Hodge, Yeomans and Wines. They reported a compromise document that afternoon that simply softened Spring's resolutions to avoid the danger of division. They simply altered the words, "this General Assembly," to "the members of this General Assembly," which had the effect of making the resolution a mere expression of the opinions of those who happened to be at the Assembly, rather than a statement of the whole church.⁹⁰

⁸⁸"General Assembly," Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

⁸⁹"General Assembly," Presbyterian Banner 9.37 (June 1, 1861).

⁹⁰This device had been used in 1829 to affirm that the members of the 1829 General Assembly pledged not to drink ardent spirits, without committing the entire church to that stance. Minutes (1829) 375-6 (in Baird, 796).

But Anderson could not agree with this, and reported as a minority of one, giving Spring's resolutions in full (except changing the day of prayer from July 4 to July 1). The majority had divested the resolution of all binding authority, rendering it ambiguous—which in Anderson's view, did not meet the crisis.⁹¹

The debate resumed in earnest on Wednesday morning. Finally, after three days of debate, the southerners gained the floor. The Rev. Richmond McInnis, editor of the True Witness of New Orleans, realized that the church had already made up its mind, but he wished to remind his brethren that “the Southern churches are. . . perfectly loyal to the Presbyterian Church, and they are loyal to Government. They have in the South a Government which they are as much bound to obey as you in the North are bound to obey your Government. If Dr. Spring's resolutions are passed, they place us in rebellion to the Government *de facto* at home.” He argued that the resolutions were unconstitutional because they decided a political question. He could vote for neither set of resolutions.⁹²

The Rev. Thomas A. Ogden of Natchez, Mississippi, identified himself as a native of New Jersey and a graduate of Princeton Seminary, who had devoted 34 years to the religious education of slaves. He opposed the constitutional views of the previous speaker (McInnis). He did not object to the church speaking on the subject, but he could not vote for Spring's resolutions, because it pledged the church to the Administration—a political party pledge. Nonetheless, he would vote for the majority report.⁹³

⁹¹“The General Assembly of 1861,” Presbyterian Banner 9.38 (June 8, 1861)

⁹²“The General Assembly of 1861,” Presbyterian Banner 9.38 (June 8, 1861)

⁹³“The General Assembly of 1861,” Presbyterian Banner 9.38 (June 8, 1861)

Encouraged to speak for the south, a couple of younger ministers weighed in from the border states. The Rev. George Frazier of Newstead, Kentucky, insisted that the Assembly had no right to fix and pronounce upon any man's political allegiance." He was opposed to secession, but he feared that the Assembly was not considering the effect of their actions on the border states.⁹⁴ Likewise, the Rev. S. A. Mutchmore of Fulton, Missouri, said that the suspicion in his region was terrible. "King Jesus was the only King they would acknowledge in the Church; nor could the Church say there was not such a thing as the right of revolution."⁹⁵ At this, the Rev. John Crozier of Olney, Illinois, called the speaker to order, insisting that he should avoid "exciting topics." Mr. Mutchmore replied that "if his remarks excited the gentleman, he begged pardon. Mr. Crozier said he was not excited, but could not bear to listen to treason." To this Mutchmore replied that abolitionism and secessionism were "alike of the devil." But he feared that this resolution would create a new term of communion. Sessions would debar a man if he were not as loyal as they wished.⁹⁶

After other speakers had insisted that there was nothing objectionable in Spring's resolutions, Hodge arose to admit that if Spring's paper were presented in the Synod of NJ, he would vote for it, but here allegiances were unclear, and the Assembly was called on to decide a political question. Therefore he could not vote for it.⁹⁷

⁹⁴"The General Assembly of 1861," Presbyterian Banner 9.38 (June 8, 1861)

⁹⁵"The General Assembly of 1861," Presbyterian Banner 9.38 (June 8, 1861)

⁹⁶"The General Assembly of 1861," Presbyterian Banner 9.38 (June 8, 1861)

⁹⁷"The General Assembly of 1861," Presbyterian Banner 9.38 (June 8, 1861)

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Edwards then presented a telegram from Salmon P. Chase (secretary of the treasury), in which Chase declared that he could think of “no valid objection to unequivocal expressions in favor of the Constitution and Freedom.” The reporter commented that “the reading of the latter paper elicited a perfect furor of applause. A number of hisses followed, and it was with considerable difficulty that order was again restored.”⁹⁸ But if there was any doubt before the telegram was read as to the direction of the Assembly, afterwards there was none. The majority report, softening the Spring resolutions, was voted down 84-128 and the Assembly adopted the minority report of Anderson/Spring 154-66.⁹⁹

The northwest was set on Spring’s resolution by a 5-1 majority. The northeast, as usual, was ready to find a compromise to preserve the unity of the church. Had the entire south been present, they would have had the extra fifty votes necessary to pass the compromise report. But the absence of the south guaranteed that the northwest could control the Assembly. And the northwest was finished with compromise. The lower northwest led the way. Of the twelve northwestern

	Table	Compromise	Spring
Northeast	38-50	48-31	56-27
Northwest	17-102	23-97	97-11
South	32-1	13-0	3-28
	87-153	84-128	156-66

Figure 11.2. Votes on the Spring Resolutions, 1861

⁹⁸“The General Assembly of 1861,” Presbyterian Banner 9.38 (June 8, 1861)

⁹⁹“The General Assembly of 1861,” Presbyterian Banner 9.38 (June 8, 1861)

presbyteries that bordered the Ohio River, only three (Washington, St. Clairsville, and Vincennes) supported the compromise report crafted largely by easterners.¹⁰⁰

The geographical division of the speakers reveals the same distribution. Of the twelve ministers who spoke in favor of Spring's resolutions, eight were northwesterners. Of the twelve ministers who spoke against the resolutions, five were southwesterners, and another four were from the northeast. But otherwise, the backgrounds of the speakers were nearly identical. Half of each cohort were Princeton Seminary graduates (though each side was supported by one Andover graduate and one New Albany graduate, along with a handful who had been privately trained). The only significant difference was that two of those speaking against the Spring resolutions were born in the south.

¹⁰⁰Minutes (1861) 321-322, 329-330. The eleven northwesterners who persistently rejected the Spring resolutions came from the presbyteries of Clarion, two from Washington, two from St. Clairsville, Marion, two from Coshocton, Maumee, Vincennes, and Chippewa. In other words, seven came from western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, two from northern Ohio, one from southern Indiana, and one from Wisconsin. Others were willing to compromise: three from Iowa, two from Minnesota, two from northern and central Indiana, and one each from central Illinois, central Ohio, and Michigan. Notably absent from these lists are Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Chicago, or the Ohio River presbyteries.

<u>For:</u>	<u>Born</u>	<u>Seminary</u>	<u>Pastorate or other position</u>
Gardiner Spring (1785-1873)	CT	AndTS 1810	Brick Church, New York City, NY
Thomas E. Thomas (1812-1875)	England	Private 1836	1 st Church, Dayton, OH (Former NATS prof)
Thomas M. Hopkins (1827-1901)	OH	PTS 1855	Bloomington, IN
Charles Lee (1817-1863)	KY	NATS 1855	Scipio, IN
William C. Anderson (????-1871)	??	Private 1820s	1 st Church, San Francisco, CA
John M. Hastings (????-????)	??	??	Wilkinsburg, PA
George W. Musgrave (1804-1882)	PA	PTS 1828	Secretary, Bd of Domestic Miss, Phila.
L. H. Long (????-????)	??	??	Urbana, OH
Henry M. Robertson (1822-1899)	NY	PTS 1848	Fond du Lac, WI
David J. Waller (1815-1893)	PA	PTS 1837	Bloomsburg, PA
George C. Heckman (1825-1902)	PA	PTS 1848	Janesville, WI
Willis Lord (1809-1888)	CT	PTS 1833	professor, NWTs, Chicago, IL
Martin Ryerson			Judge in New Jersey
William F. Allen			Judge in Western New York
Against:			
James H. Gillespie (1804-1888)	TN	PTS 1830	Denmark, TN
John G. Bergen (1790-1872)	NJ	Private 1812	retired, Springfield, IL
Charles Hodge (1797-1878)	PA	PTS 1819	professor, PTS
Jonathan T. Backus (1809-1892)	NY	PTS 1830	1 st Church, Schenectady, NY
Robert Watts (1820-1895)	Ireland	PTS 1852	Westminster Church, Philadelphia, PA
James W. Hoyte (????-1886)	??	NATS 1852	Smyrna, TN
E. C. Wines (????-????)	??	??	President, City Univ., St. Louis, MO
William C. Matthews (1805-1880)	NC	PTS 1830	Shelbyville, KY
J. P. Lloyd (????-????)	??	??	Crestline, OH
Samuel Mehaffey (1816-1887)	PA	PTS 1844	Concord, OH
John W. Yeomans (1800-1863)	MA	AndTS 1826	Mahoning Church, Danville, PA
William M. Baker (1825-1883)	DC	PTS 1848	Austin, TX
T. Charlton Henry			Ruling elder, Philadelphia

Figure 11.3. Speakers on the Spring Resolutions

Six protests were filed against the Assembly's action, signed by sixty-two commissioners, fifty-eight of whom signed the protest authored by Charles Hodge. Hodge's protest denied "the right of the General Assembly to decide the political question, to what government the allegiance of Presbyterians as citizens is due."¹⁰¹ Presbyterians disagreed among themselves as to whether allegiance to the state or federal government was paramount, but the Assembly had required all Presbyterians to declare allegiance to

¹⁰¹Minutes (1861) 339.

the federal government, “making that decision practically a condition of membership.”¹⁰²

Hodge claimed that the action was unnecessary, because Old School Presbyterians throughout the north had demonstrated their loyalty, and stated his fear that such an act would weaken the church “and expose it to the danger of being carried away more and more from its true principles by a worldly or fanatical spirit.”¹⁰³

Dr. Thomas E. Thomas, finally in the majority at the Assembly, was appointed chairman of the committee to respond to the protests.¹⁰⁴ Turning Hodge’s “State of the Country” address against him, Thomas admitted that the Spring Resolutions were political, but affirmed that “There are occasions when *political* questions *rise into the sphere of morals and religion*.”¹⁰⁵ There was only one supreme government in the country, and that was the federal government of the United States. The General Assembly could not acknowledge traitors as a legitimate government. The church was called “to warn men against prevailing sins,” and since the most prevalent sin in the southern part of the church was treason against the government, the church needed to warn them.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰²Minutes (1861) 340.

¹⁰³Minutes (1861) 341. The regional breakdown of the protesters fits the earlier pattern. Twenty-five of the protesters were from the southwest.

¹⁰⁴The rest of the committee consisted of William C. Anderson of San Francisco, Willis Lord of the Northwestern Theological Seminary, and ruling elders Jesse L. Williams of Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Nathaniel Ewing of Redstone Presbytery in western Pennsylvania. Since Anderson was a northwesterner serving in California, the committee entirely consisted of northwesterners. Minutes (1861) 333.

¹⁰⁵Minutes (1861) 342, quoting Hodge.

¹⁰⁶Minutes (1861) 343. There is no statement in the Minutes that this response was adopted, but its inclusion in the Minutes probably means that it was.

The responses were predictable. The northwestern papers were delighted. J. G. Monfort rejoiced that “The day is past when this section can be ignored and vetoed, as it has been for several years, by the help of the East and South. The Northwest is true to the doctrines, policy and deliverances of the Presbyterian Church, and hereafter her parity will not be called in question.”¹⁰⁷ But both he and David McKinney of the Presbyterian Banner were upset with Hodge’s protest. McKinney insisted that Hodge “misrepresents the position of the majority to a great degree, and does more to mislead and inflame the Southern section of our Church than any thing that occurred during the entire discussion.”¹⁰⁸

From the south, “A Sexagenarian Elder” (probably Judge E. A. Nisbet, since the editor commented that he was a “high-standing” elder from Georgia) wrote an open letter to Gardiner Spring, chiding him as one who should have known better. The south had counted him as one of its best friends in the north. Convinced that the north was set on a “crusade against the South” with the object of “the emancipation of our slaves, an end which every rational man is fully convinced will result in their ultimate ruin.” He argued that the Africans had progressed further towards Christianity and civilization under slavery in the south than they had with freedom in the north. Now Spring had turned his back on the south and his “own principles, the cause of truth, of right and of justice,” all for the praise of the crowds. Indeed, Spring’s success at the Assembly had resulted in the division

¹⁰⁷“Dr Spring’s Resolutions,” Presbyter (June 13, 1861).

¹⁰⁸Editorial, “The Action of the Late General Assembly on the National Crisis,” Presbyterian Banner 9.38 (June 8, 1861).

of the church. “With ruthless hand, you seized the pillars that sustained it, and its mouldering ruins now lie prostrate before you. By your resolution, antagonistic to every principle of Presbyterianism, of civil and religious liberty and Christian charity, you formed a Procrustes bed, and reared a guillotine, to adapt to it the dimensions of every member of the Church. Your object was on a *purely political question*, that all should stand on your platform, or be ejected from the Church.”¹⁰⁹ From the perspective of this Georgian ruling elder, Gardiner Spring had betrayed the church for the sake of the state.

Charles Hodge mourned the division of the church. “It was the case of a mother who was called upon to take part for one child against another. It was in vain she urged that both were her children; that it was not her province to decide the point in dispute between them.”¹¹⁰ He blamed the pressure of public opinion for the church’s failure of nerve: “The scourge of public indignation was lifted over their heads. It was threatened that the people would desert a church by thousands which hesitated to speak out in such a time as this.”¹¹¹ But Hodge himself felt the weight of that “scourge” and felt compelled to explain how loyal men could vote against the Spring Resolutions. He said that it was “For the same reason that they would refuse, at the command of an excited multitude, to sing the “Star Spangled Banner” at the Lord’s table. They refused because in their judgment it was wrong and out of place.”¹¹² The church did not have the authority to determine which

¹⁰⁹A Sexagenarian Elder, “A Letter to Rev. Gardiner Spring, D. D., New York City,” Southern Presbyterian 1.48 (September 28, 1861).

¹¹⁰Charles Hodge, “The General Assembly,” BRPR 33.3 (July, 1861) 541.

¹¹¹Hodge, “The General Assembly,” 542.

¹¹²Hodge, “The General Assembly,” 543.

view of the constitution was correct. Hodge was convinced personally that the establishment of the Confederate government was an act of treason, but he could not find authority in the word of God to enforce his views in the church courts. He warned northern Presbyterians not to allow political matters to dominate the church.¹¹³

But southerners viewed Hodge's efforts on their behalf as halfhearted at best. After perusing his annual review of the General Assembly, the Rev. A. A. Porter, editor of the Southern Presbyterian wondered why Hodge would want "us in the Church when he thinks that our right place is the gibbet?"¹¹⁴ Analyzing three fast day sermons by James Henley Thornwell, Benjamin Morgan Palmer, and Thomas Smyth, Edward Crowther underlines the deep conviction which these ministers shared with many southerners that the north had substituted majority rule, both in political and religious life, for the orderly and beneficent dictates of scripture.¹¹⁵ The "inability" of their old friend and mentor, Charles Hodge, to perceive what they viewed as a creeping liberalism, as Eugene Genovese puts it, "exposed a widening and unbridgeable chasm in theology, worldview, and ultimately in sectional politics."¹¹⁶ While these southern ministers championed the concept of the spirituality of the church, they still maintained the traditional Presbyterian attitude of engagement with the political world as individual citizens. They sought to bring the theological resources of

¹¹³Hodge, "The General Assembly," 557-567.

¹¹⁴"Dr. Hodge on the Last General Assembly," Southern Presbyterian 1.48 (September 28, 1861).

¹¹⁵Edward Riley Crowther, "Southern Protestants, Slavery and Secession: A Study in Religious Ideology, 1830-1861," (Ph.D. dissertation, Auburn University, 1986) 284-296.

¹¹⁶Eugene Genovese, The Slaveholders' Dilemma 35. Genovese plainly thinks that sectional politics was the driving force, but there was also a significant divide over ecclesiology which cannot be ignored. Of course most southern Presbyterians were more comfortable with Hodge's ecclesiology than with Thornwell's (as the debates over southern church order reveal).

the Reformed tradition to bear on the antebellum political world, but that political world also shaped the way that they interpreted their own tradition.

The border states were the most hotly contested. E. E. reviewed the 1861 General Assembly for Kentucky's Danville Quarterly Review.¹¹⁷ He suggested that if a member from South Carolina had asked the Assembly to give spiritual counsel to help him determine which government rightly required his submission, the Assembly could have answered (though he thought that it still might be prudent to avoid the question—like the Presbyterian Synod during the Revolutionary war).¹¹⁸ In this case there was “no judicial case before the Assembly involving the question of allegiance, nor a formal appeal from any party for the solution of a case of conscience.” The Assembly had the right to speak, but it spoke unwisely. There was a question as to which government demanded the allegiance of the southern members.

It did not make a whit's difference whether secession under the Constitution be a just or an unjust claim, a right or an impudent lie—the very meanest lie, if you please, whereby the devil has ever attempted to beguile men into a revolt—still the manifest fact was, a government over ten States, claiming to be independent of that at Washington, did actually exist. It may have been set up without sufficient cause; it may have been as bad as Nero's; it might prove permanent or not; no matter: it was a government.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷E. E., “The Late General Assembly—Church and State,” Danville Quarterly Review 1.3 (September, 1861) 498-534. If E. E. are his initials, then it is likely Ebenezer Erskine, pastor of Sterling, Illinois, who went on to become the moderate editor of the Northwest Presbyterian after the war (friendly toward Kentucky).

¹¹⁸E. E., “The Late General Assembly,” 502.

¹¹⁹E. E., “The Late General Assembly,” 514.

The proper manner of handling the situation was to deal judicially with those synods who had “encouraged rebellion against the powers that be. . . and if the case can be reached in no other way, excise it, according to the precedent of 1837.”¹²⁰

E. E. was troubled by the “young giant” of the northwest, and especially J. G. Monfort’s intimations that reunion with the New School was a centerpiece of their agenda. Having driven the “*domineering slave power*, as they call it, out of the Church. . . . [t]he way would then be open to strike for a new combination at the North.”¹²¹

Further, E. E. claimed that the Assembly of 1861 was “not a free Assembly,” because the building “was crowded with ministers and members of other denominations as well as our own. . . urging the adoption of the obnoxious resolution; the populace demanded it with loud cries and threatening demonstrations of fearful import; the streets of Philadelphia were thronged with thousands of troops and vast trains of baggage and munitions of war, intensifying to the highest pitch the popular enthusiasm in behalf of the government.”¹²²

The south was no better. He reminded his readers of what James Henley Thornwell had said on the floor of the 1859 Assembly: “Sir, the salt that is to save this country is the Church of Christ—a Church that does not mix up with any political party, or any issues

¹²⁰E. E., “The Late General Assembly,” 514-5.

¹²¹E. E., “The Late General Assembly,” 519. For New School antislavery activity see Victor B. Howard, Conscience and Slavery: The Evangelistic Calvinist Domestic Mission, 1837-1861 (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1990)

¹²²E. E., “The Late General Assembly,” 519.

aside from her direct mission.”¹²³ Yet now Thornwell’s own Synod of South Carolina “of which he is the animating spirit,” had “plunged headlong into the political whirlpool. They manifested an eager haste to soil the fair garments of the Church with the filth of the world. When the time came to test their allegiance to the principle that was to save the Church and the country, they were found wanting.”¹²⁴ The frenzy of the hour had “muddled [the] brain” of both northern and southern churchmen. In time both would return to their senses. But E. E. reassured his readers that the Spring Resolutions did not bind the church. General Assembly declarations, if not in accord with the Word of God, had no force. It was only if the Assembly ruled judicially as the Supreme Court of the Church, that the minority must “submit, or else renounce her communion or be put out of it.”¹²⁵ Gardiner Spring’s resolution “is just as incapable of doing harm to any man’s rights, civil or religious, as was Mr. Lincoln with the South in the Union.”¹²⁶

E. E. disagreed with Breckinridge, though, regarding the situation at the south. He rejected the claim that there was a reign of terror at the south. But he further rejected the southern claim that the Spring Resolutions caused the secession of the southern church. “It is but a pretext to cover up a purpose formed and settled before that Assembly met. . . .

¹²³E. E., “The Late General Assembly,” 520.

¹²⁴E. E., “The Late General Assembly,” 520.

¹²⁵E. E., “The Late General Assembly,” 522.

¹²⁶E. E., “The Late General Assembly,” 523.

The division of the Church was a foregone conclusion,” and just as the division of the nation awaited a pretext—so also the church.¹²⁷

6. The Southern General Assembly of 1861

With the division of the nation, however, the southern Presbyterian church had no intention of ever meeting with the northern Old School again. Many southerners thanked the Spring Resolutions for making their job easier, but a southern General Assembly was inevitable. J. G. Shepperson insisted that southerners should act as though the northern church had seceded—which he claimed it virtually had by its unconstitutional action.¹²⁸

After some debate as to the best manner in which to proceed, the first southern General Assembly gathered on December 4, 1861. The Central Presbyterian gushed over the magnificent gathering of ecclesiastical statesmen. Among the thirty-eight ruling elders were twelve lawyers (including two states’ chief justices)¹²⁹ and of the 93 members, 48 were Scots-Irish, 11 Scottish and 27 English (including nine of Puritan ancestry). The moderator, Benjamin Morgan Palmer, the editor pointed out with pride, was a lineal descendent of Herbert Palmer, one of the Westminster Divines.¹³⁰

¹²⁷E. E., “The Late General Assembly,” 526. He pointed to the growing sense of self-sufficiency in the south during the 1850s as it drew away from their northern brethren as evidence that the south had anticipated this.

¹²⁸CP 6.30 (July 27, 1861) 117.

¹²⁹CP 6.51 (Dec 21, 1861). Judges included ex-Chancellor Job Johnstone of SC (SC Pby), Judge J. G. Shepherd of NC (Fayetteville Pby), Judge J. T. Swayne of TN (Memphis Pby), and Wm A. Forward Judge of the Supreme Court of FL (Florida Pby).

¹³⁰CP 7.3 (Jan 16, 1862)

While James Henley Thornwell was one of the most influential members of the first southern General Assembly, his distinctive views still met fierce opposition in the south. The southern Assembly established “committees” instead of “boards,” but over Thornwell’s objections they required all presbyteries to take up collections for the denominational work of domestic missions, in addition to any collections designated for presbyterial missions.¹³¹ Jack Maddex has pointed out that the Southern Presbyterian church order was not decentralized. While Thornwell had opposed the boards, he did not oppose centralized power in the General Assembly.¹³²

But the highlight of the 1861 southern General Assembly was the adoption of Thornwell’s “An Address to All the Churches of Jesus Christ Throughout the Earth,” which opened by setting forth the southern church’s justification for its action in forming a separate Assembly. Denouncing the Spring Resolutions as yielding to “the mandates of Northern phrenzy,” and insisting on the propriety of following national lines in organizing the church, Thornwell declared that the catholicity of the church remained intact through this proper “division of labor.”¹³³ Erskine Clarke rightly points out that this document articulates a southern nationalism, as Thornwell declared that the United States and the

¹³¹CP 7.2 (January 9, 1862). Likewise, John Leighton Wilson was able to defeat Thornwell’s attempt to rename the secretary of each committee simply the “convener.” The debate later revealed that the majority of the Assembly was against Thornwell’s approach, but, as S. D. Stuart put it, they were willing to compromise with him so as not to “impose a yoke upon the conscience of the brethren.” 7.3 (January 16, 1862).

¹³²So the southern church initially permitted the General Assembly to take original jurisdiction over a minister, without waiting for a trial at the presbytery. Jack Maddex, “Presbyterians in the South, Centralization, and the *Book of Church Order*, 1861-1879,” *American Presbyterians* 68:1 (Spring, 1990) 24-45. Maddex points out that the move towards decentralization came from Stuart Robinson after 1869.

¹³³Thornwell, “Address to All Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the World,” reprinted in *Collected Writings* 4:451, 453.

Confederate States differed in “manners, habits, customs and ways of thinking, the social, civil and political institutions of the people,” just as much as the United States differed from Scotland. But what were these differences? Thornwell states it plainly: “the antagonism of Northern and Southern sentiment on the subject of Slavery lies at the root of all the difficulties which have resulted in the dismemberment of the Federal Union, and involved us in the horrors of an unnatural war.”¹³⁴

Conclusion

The “bond of union” was no more. Or rather, there were now two bonds of union (two General Assemblies) for two separate republics. Perhaps Old School Presbyterians should have known better than to think that a church could hold together a nation, but their historic understanding of the catholicity of the church had convinced them that they held the moral fabric of the nation.

They reckoned not with the power of the conscience. With northerners convinced that slavery must not expand into the territories, and southerners convinced that the north

¹³⁴Thornwell, “Address,” 454. This statement launched a nine page defense of slavery, thus forming more than half of the “Address.” Erskine Clarke, “Southern Nationalism and Columbia Theological Seminary,” American Presbyterians 66:2 (1988) 123-133. For treatment of the constitutional issues see Arthur Bestor, “State Sovereignty and Slavery: A Reinterpretation of Proslavery Constitutional Doctrine,” in Proslavery Thought, Ideology, and Politics edited by Paul Finkelman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989) 13-76. In his 1961 essay Bestor argued that state sovereignty was a “*legal* postulate,” to be distinguished from the idea of decentralized government as a “political *philosophy*.” He argued that the states’ rights doctrine was not especially an emphasis on local self-government, since the same southerners argued for strong federal authority in the case of the enforcement of fugitive slave law, rejecting the attempts at nullification by northern states (16-17, 58-59). Don E. Fehrenbacher notes that it is remarkable how much the Confederate Constitution “transcended those principles [of states-rights] in order to build a nation. The national supremacy clause remained, and no provision for nullification was included. Sectional Crisis and Southern Constitutionalism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995) 142-144. Likewise, Bestor shows that the Confederate Constitution gave national protection to slavery—practically eliminating the possibility for a state to abolish slavery, “State Sovereignty and Slavery,” 72-73.

was intent on ending their peculiar institution, neither side could trust the other. And this was partly due to the fact that northerners and southerners spent so little time interacting with each other. The Methodists and Baptists had divided, and no longer met together. The Old School General Assembly had few counterparts to its harmonious annual sessions of northerners and southerners between 1846-1860.

One fruit of this long union was the prominence of Old School Presbyterians among dissenters during the war—both north and south. Clement L. Vallandigham, an Old School Presbyterian from Dayton, Ohio, and a Democratic congressman, was one of Lincoln’s most vocal critics during the early months of the war. Arrested for his “*implied treason*,” he was banished to the Confederate States in 1863. Vallandigham requested a writ of *habeas corpus* before Humphrey H. Leavitt of the United States District Court for Southern Ohio.¹³⁵ Leavitt, an Old School ruling elder, denied the request on the ground

¹³⁵James L. Vallandigham, *A Life of Clement L. Vallandigham* (Baltimore: Turnbull Brothers, 1872). Clement L. Vallandigham (1820-1871) was the son of a Presbyterian minister, and had served as a Democratic state legislator and Congressman from Ohio (1857-1863). He had united with the First Presbyterian Church of Dayton, Ohio, in 1855, while James H. Brookes was pastor (Brookes, an early dispensationalist from Tennessee, left for St. Louis in 1858 where he would become known as a champion of the “spirituality of the church” doctrine in Missouri during the Civil War). Vallandigham withdrew from the Presbyterian church when Brookes was replaced by Thomas E. Thomas, one of the most vigorous abolitionists in the Old School, and attended the Lutheran church. On July 4, 1861 Vallandigham spoke publicly on the floor of Congress against the “executive usurpation” of Congressional rights and for peace, which he hoped could eventually restore the Union through negotiation rather than warfare. His constant criticism of the Lincoln administration peaked in his objection to General A. E. Burnside’s Order No. 38, which forbade “*implied treason*,” and Order No. 9, which prohibited criticism of the civil or military policy of the Administration. On May 4, 1863 he was arrested on General Burnside’s orders and tried before a military commission on the charge that he had declared the present war “a wicked, cruel and unnecessary war.” (263) He was found guilty and sentenced to confinement in Fort Warren, Massachusetts, later changed to banishment to the South. (296) After reaching the South, Vallandigham departed for Canada, where he resided in Windsor, across from Detroit, for a year. He returned to Ohio in 1864 to serve as a delegate to the Chicago Democratic Convention, daring the Lincoln Administration to arrest him again.

that there was a “type of treason. . . that was not covered by the U. S. Constitution and the laws of the land.”¹³⁶

In the border states, Stuart Robinson, the editor of the True Presbyterian, clashed with R. J. Breckinridge over the best policy for Kentucky. Robinson had avoided any public advocacy of secession, but he had made the mistake of writing to Breckinridge in January of 1861 that if the Crittenden Compromise failed, Kentucky, “as the least of evils, should go to a Southern Confederacy,” rather than be left in “a confederacy with Ohio.” Naturally, when Breckinridge wished to demonstrate Robinson’s “true” political loyalties, he published the letter.¹³⁷ Robinson’s tendency to sarcasm and ridicule did not help him during the war years, and in the summer of 1862, he fled to Canada to avoid prosecution.¹³⁸ Others, like Samuel B. McPheeters of St. Louis attempted to stay out of politics entirely, only to find themselves driven from their pulpits by military order.¹³⁹

¹³⁶Frank L. Klement, Lincoln’s Critics: The Copperheads of the North (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 1999) 180. Lincoln was pleased with Leavitt’s decision because Vallandigham’s criticisms “weakens the Union cause as much as he who kills a Union soldier in battle.” (181) After the war the U. S. Supreme Court rebuked Leavitt’s decision in *Ex Parte Milligan* (1866) declaring that military courts should not be used for political ends. Klement argues that the Copperheads were not particularly pro-southern, but were focused on economic and constitutional objections to the war. They were dissenters, not traitors.

¹³⁷“In Memoriam. A Tribute to Rev. Stuart Robinson and others,” Danville Quarterly Review 2.1 (March, 1862) 155, citing Stuart Robinson to Robert J. Breckinridge, January 24, 1861.

¹³⁸Preston 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) 53-54.

¹³⁹For more on this fascinating episode see Joseph H. Hall, Presbyterian Conflict and Resolution on the Missouri Frontier (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987) chapter 7; Charles Hodge, “The General Assembly,” BRPR 36 (July 1864); John S. Grasty, Memoir of Rev. Samuel B. McPheeters (St. Louis: Southwestern Book and Publishing Co., 1871); A Correspondence between Some of the Members of the Pine Street Presbyterian Church and Its Pastor (Saint Louis: Printed for the Information of the Members of that Church, 1862).

The south sounded like a reverse echo of the north. The violence against northern sympathizers in the south included several who were driven from their pulpits for their failure to pray for Jefferson Davis and the success of the southern armies.¹⁴⁰ When John H. Aughey called his central Mississippi church to submit to the authority of the federal government on the ground that the election of Lincoln had been constitutionally held, he was tried by a vigilance committee, including one of his own ruling elders. When he tried to escape to the north, he was captured, charged with sedition and was sentenced to death, but finally escaped.¹⁴¹ On the other hand some Unionists, like James Lyon, who had established himself in Columbus, Mississippi since 1841, avoided major problems by remaining submissive to the *de facto* government in their region. David Chesebrough is probably correct when he suggests that the reason why southern Presbyterians included a significantly higher number of northern sympathizers was that the other southern denominations had long since divided from their northern brethren, while southern

¹⁴⁰David B. Chesebrough, Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996) 24, 51-85. Chesebrough gives six Presbyterian examples:

Name:	Birth	Sem	Church (Presbytery) Tenure	
Eli Caruthers (1793-1865)	NC	PTS 1820	Alamance NC (Orange) 1821-1861	forced to retire
Robert J. Graves (?-?)	VA	UTSVA 1860	Bethlehem NC (Orange) 1860-1862	arrested/treason
James Sinclair (1827-18??)	Scotland	WTS 1857	Smyrna NC (Fayetteville) 1857-1862	arrested/treason
Thaddeus McRae (?-?)	SC	private ?	Port Lavaca TX (Western Texas) 1861	
John H. Aughey (?-?)	?	private ?	Poplar Creek MS (Tombeckbee) 1861	arrested/treason
?? Galladet (may be New School)			Aberdeen MS	

Figure 11.4. Southern Presbyterian Dissenters

Sinclair served as a colonel in the Confederate Army, and was excommunicated by Fayetteville Presbytery in 1866 for treason. The North Carolina Presbyterian declared as early as November of 1859 that those who preached against slavery were no better than “cut-throats and assassins, and the sword of the civil magistrate is the instrument which God had appointed for their punishment.” (Quoted in Chesebrough, 39).

¹⁴¹Chesebrough, Clergy Dissent 74-78.

Presbyterians had cherished cordial relations across the Mason-Dixon line until the outbreak of the war.¹⁴²

A second parallel between the two sections was their perception of the moral deviance of their erstwhile colleagues. David McKinney attempted to understand how someone like Dr. Thomas V. Moore of Richmond who was born and reared in western Pennsylvania could have so rapidly turned to treason and perjury:

What has caused the moral defection in Dr Moore? (a dear friend whom we do not wish to harm). . . . We would reach and expose the monstrous destroyer of truth, honor and virtue. What then is the fatal cause of the evil which we mourn? It is THE SYSTEM OF OPPRESSION which prevails in Mr Moore's new surroundings.

McKinney suggested that the corrupting influence of the slave system “was never adequately known until the breaking out of the present rebellion.” But he admitted that he should have seen it coming. After all, “what may we not expect from those who will enslave, in indefinite perpetuity, a whole race of their fellow-men; depriving them of the first rights of manhood, in man's state of innocence, and of manhood, under a dispensation of grace?”¹⁴³

Likewise, the Southern Presbyterian attributed the division of the nation to a problem of a misinformed conscience in the north. Operating on the assumption that if the

¹⁴²Chesebrough, Clergy Dissent 92. For Lyon's attempt to reform slavery, see James A. Lyon, et al, “Slavery, and the Duties Growing Out of the Relation,” SPR 16.1 (April, 1863): 1-36. Also see R. Milton Winter, “James A. Lyon: Southern Presbyterian Apostle of Progress,” JPH 60:4 (Winter 1982) 314-335. Fehrenbacher suggests that many southerners could not see the difference between the oppression of the north and the oppression of the Davis Administration as the military enforced conscription and the impressment of goods. The Confederate Congress authorized the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus twice, totaling seventeen months, and enforced conscription. Don E. Fehrenbacher, Sectional Crisis and Southern Constitutionalism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995) 156-157.

¹⁴³“Effects of a System of Oppression upon the Morals and Judgments of the Oppressors,” Presbyterian Banner 10.19 (January 25, 1862).

intelligence misinformed the conscience, the conscience would pronounce a false judgment, editor A. A. Porter suggested that “for the last twenty years the conscience of the North has been wilfully and fearfully perverted by gross misrepresentations. The idea of slavery is associated in the Northern mind with every species of cruelty and barbarism.” The result was that the north had become “so unrelenting just because it does everything in the name of law and conscience.” And once it was elevated to a matter of conscience, there was no hope for any compromise to adjudicate the differences.¹⁴⁴

But the most radical statement of northern declension came in 1863 from Richard S. Gladney, who penned a forthright rejection of the Declaration of Independence, which he saw as tending towards the leveling of the abolitionist movement. He declared that such principles as:

that all men are created, or born, free and equal; that they are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and the dogma that men can only be rightfully governed by his own consent, as received and understood by the great mass of the people, are subversive of every precept in the decalogue. Infidel in their origin, they are practically atheistic. . . . They assert a freedom in opposition to that state of subjection to law in which every man is born.¹⁴⁵

Gladney saw a “connection between the political and theological heresies of the present century.” Just as the Revolution had protested against taxation without representation, so now nineteenth century theology was denying the imputation of Adam's sin because it

¹⁴⁴Shadow, “The Northern Conscience,” Southern Presbyterian 1.43 (August 24, 1861).

¹⁴⁵R. S. Gladney, “The Downfall of the Union,” SPR 16 (1863) 49-50. Gladney here echoed the statement of John C. Calhoun in 1850 that the theory of the natural right of equality was false: “it never did nor can exist.” Men were inherently unequal. Quoted in John Niven, John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) 332.

eliminated personal choice. The results of the Declaration of Independence were the heresies of Albert Barnes and Harriet Beecher Stowe, along with the “demand for an anti-slavery Bible and an anti-slavery God,” together with Atheism, Communism, Woman's Rightsism, Free-Loveism, Mormonism, and Agrarianism.¹⁴⁶ While few writers in the Southern Presbyterian Review spoke as radically as Gladney, many articulated more subdued criticisms of northern ideology and called for a society founded upon “biblical,” rather than “rationalistic” principles.¹⁴⁷

Presbyterian ecclesiology functioned as a strong force in maintaining the bonds of union throughout the 1850s. But Presbyterian ecclesiology itself was being remade into the image of American political culture. While the transformation of attitudes in the newspapers appears stark and sudden—from calm statements of mutual confidence to strident cries of fratricidal hatred—the transformation in institutional location and ideological vision took place more gradually. While Old School convictions regarding the catholicity of the visible church had helped keep the church together, Old School convictions regarding the relationship between church and state helped drive the church apart.

¹⁴⁶ibid.

¹⁴⁷“Dr. Thornwell's Memorial on the Recognition of Christianity in the Constitution [of the Confederate States of America],” SPR 16 (1863) 77-87; Thomas Smyth, “The Character and Conditions of Liberty,” SPR 16 (1864) 201-236; John B. “Northern and Southern Views of the Province of the Church,” SPR 16 (1866) 384.

CONCLUSION

THE REALIGNMENT OF AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM

In the antebellum era, the Old School Presbyterian Church was determined to remain a national church that could hold the nation together. When that purpose failed, the Old School disintegrated. The northern General Assemblies of 1862-1867 condemned the south with increasing bitterness, thereby ensuring that no ecclesiastical reunion would be possible, and driving off portions of the synods of Kentucky, Missouri, and Baltimore in the process.¹

The postbellum Presbyterian Church would be strictly sectional, thereby encouraging reunion with the New School. The southern churches reunited in 1863-1864, and the northern churches followed suit in 1869-1870.² But an even more ambitious union

¹The most comprehensive study of Civil War Presbyterianism is Lewis G. Vander Velde, The Presbyterian Church and the Federal Union, 1861-1869 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932). Henry A. Boardman feared that the Presbyterian church was becoming allied to a political party and had lost sight of its obligation to treat dissenters according to the constitution of the church. The General Assembly of 1866 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1867). Boardman argued that the church had departed from its high constitutional position of 1837, and was affirming the absolute authority of the General Assembly. While Boardman had agreed with Hodge that the church had some discretion, this was a “court without restraint” at all (42).

²After the war, every northern Presbyterian newspaper was filled with debates over the wisdom of reunion. Most Old Schoolers were initially wary of the New School, but eventually became convinced that the errors of 1837 no longer existed (and some came to believe that they never had existed) in the New School. Victor Howard points out that division between Finney’s Oberliners and the New School led the New School to a more conservative stance as radicals departed and moderates were thrust into the arms of the conservatives. He agrees with George Marsden that this helped create a more orthodox Presbyterianism in the New School. Victor B. Howard, Conscience and Slavery: The Evangelical Calvinistic Domestic Missions, 1837-1861 (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990) 87; cf. Marsden, New School.

project was attempted when representatives from five Presbyterian churches gathered in Philadelphia on November 6-8, 1867, to discuss the union of the Old School, New School, Reformed Presbyterian, United Presbyterian and Cumberland Presbyterian churches (one Dutch Reformed and one southern Presbyterian also attended). If those attending the conference had been representative of their churches, then all but the Cumberland Presbyterians would have united.³

In fact, by 1869 the differences between the Old School and the New School were difficult to discern. While many still felt that the New School was “looser” in doctrine, it was notoriously difficult to demonstrate.⁴ In fact, the most notorious “heretic” of the 1870s, David Swing, was an Old School Presbyterian! A student of Nathan L. Rice at Cincinnati Theological Seminary, Swing had been ordained in 1854 by the Old School Oxford Presbytery, while serving as a professor at Miami University. After supplying several Old School churches around Miami during his tenure there, he was called to

³Though the Reformed Presbyterians were almost evenly divided, the United Presbyterians, Old School and New School were overwhelmingly for the union. Robert J. Breckinridge was the only noisy opponent present. Speaking to the moderator, George H. Stuart, a Reformed Presbyterian ruling elder, he said, “Sir, I seldom prophesy. . . . there is no possibility of getting all these bodies into an organic union now” Two at a time, perhaps, but not five. He insisted that the Cumberland Presbyterians and the New School, in particular, had no business proposing terms of union, since they had seceded from the Old School. Further, he was not particularly impressed by the theological abilities of the Old School men on the Committee of Correspondence (at which cries of “order” caused the moderator to gavel him down and call him to order). Breckinridge fumed “I did not come here to be lectured by the Moderator. My opinion is we have changed the whole tone of this assembly by making a layman president of it. Such a thing was never before heard of. If this body is to be governed by intrigue, the curse of God will rest upon it. [Amid loud expressions of disapprobation, Dr. Breckinridge retired from the platform.]” Presbyterian National Union Convention (Philadelphia: James B. Rogers, 1868) 20-21. Breckinridge had made a career of seeking to elevate ruling elders, but when a ruling elder tried to shut him up from the moderator’s chair, he quickly decided that ruling elders were getting too uppity!

⁴Lyman Atwater, “Doctrines of the New-School Presbyterian Church,” BRPR 39.4 (October, 1867); Charles Hodge, “Presbyterian Reunion,” BRPR 40.1 (January, 1868); Atwater, “Truth, Charity, and Unity,” BRPR 40.2 (April, 1868).

Westminster Presbyterian Church (New School) in 1866, by which time northwestern Presbyterians were generally committed to the reunion.⁵

So while the reunion of 1869 may indeed have signaled the “broadening church” as Lefferts A. Loetscher has suggested,⁶ the process had started long before. In the 1830s and 1840s Presbyterians had been faced with many serious questions regarding the relationship between the church and the nation—or the church and the culture. Would the church drift along with the tide, or would it stand as a court prophet and challenge the cultural consensus. The Old School had initially attempted to stand. Its initial decisions were to refuse to side with temperance extremists, and to reaffirm its confessional stance on marriage. Northern Old Schoolers refused to follow the abolitionists and in the border states Presbyterians worked for emancipation against the rising tide of pro-slavery rhetoric. North and south, the Old School pledged itself to a system of parochial education that would maintain distinctive Presbyterian teaching even as the common school system progressively watered down its religious content.

But none of these decisions remained intact. R. J. Breckinridge had attempted to exalt the office of ruling elder in order to preserve the Presbyterian church, but those same ruling elders were the lawyers and businessmen who were unintentionally creating the culture that the church could no longer withstand. By 1847 the Old School had wavered on the marriage question. By 1854 the Old School was abandoning the idea of parochial

⁵Scroggs, Marilee Munger, A Light in the City: The Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago (Published by the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, 1990) 18-23.

⁶Lefferts A. Loetscher, The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954).

schools. By the 1850s total abstinence from alcoholic beverages was increasingly seen as a Christian duty, and radical proslavery and antislavery schools were growing in the south and northwest.

After 1861 the Presbyterian church was no longer the “bond of union.” After 1861 both the southern and northern Presbyterian churches simply reflected their regional cultures. What is most interesting is the relative peace and calm found in both the southern church and the northwestern church. While often spewing bitter and angry words against their enemies across the Mason-Dixon line, neither the Thornwells and Palmers nor the Monforts and MacMasters appear to have harbored any doubts or misgivings about the actions of the church or the nation. But among the old conservatives in the northeast and border states, chaos reigned. Those who had invested themselves in the “bond of union” motif now found themselves bereft of ideological capital, while those who had built sectional identities were safely fortified against such losses. But neither southerners nor northwesterners understood the price of such security. Perhaps Stephen Colwell had been right after all:

Few seem to perceive what appears fearfully evident to the writer, that our existent Christianity is almost universally corrupt, and is becoming more so continually; that unless its present tendencies be speedily reversed, a state of worse than medieval darkness will soon settle upon Christendom; not a state of intellectual decrepitude and enslavement, but one of intellectual triumph and haughty independence; not a state in which the Church, like a besotted despot, will drag men in chain-gangs behind her bloody car, but one in which man will rise in proud supremacy, and either trample the Church under foot, or else spare her in Gibeonite degradation, to become a ‘hewer of wood and a drawer of water’ about the gorgeous

Temple of Mammon! Or, to say the very least, the Church and the world will move on in harmony, neither disposed to assert its own peculiarities.⁷

The 1861 Spring Resolutions, as well as Thornwell's 1861 "Address to All Churches of Christ," signified that the "Gibeonite degradation" of the church was well under way. American or Confederate nationalism trumped Presbyterian ecclesiology in the disintegration of the Old School Presbyterian church. Sectional political ideologies overran the earlier emphasis on catholicity. Robert J. Breckinridge and James H. Thornwell had played key roles in the attack on distinctively Presbyterian schools, transferring a sense of visible catholicity from the church to a Protestant vision of the nation. Not surprisingly, they played fundamentally similar parts (though on opposite sides) in the nationalist fervor of the Civil War.

Presbyterian theology and ecclesiology thus played an important role in shaping the Old School's centrist stance throughout its twenty-four year history. The Presbyterian General Assembly did indeed function as a bond of union for the United States. But ironically, by identifying the Assembly so closely with the Union, Presbyterians allowed—or even encouraged—the very transference of catholicity from the church to the state. The mystical union that once defined the church now referred to the nation. Nowhere was this better expressed than by Robert J. Breckinridge in June of 1862. Reflecting on the General Assembly's statement of loyalty to the federal government that he had drafted just

⁷A Protestant Clergyman [Stephen Colwell], Charity and the Clergy (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1853) xi-xii. Certainly a church that hoped to be the bond of union should have given greater consideration for the poor, as Colwell said (especially the urban poor and the enslaved poor, since the Old School had a considerable number of poor congregations in rural areas). The fact that the southern church remained theologically orthodox for a generation longer than the northern church simply demonstrates that the southern Presbyterian church adopted postbellum southern conservatism.

weeks before, he declared that no “loyal church” could have done other than to remain “*loyal* to Christ—*loyal* to his truth—*loyal* to the free and noble civil institutions he has given us—*loyal* to the magistrates he has set up over us—*loyal* to the flock committed to her charge—*loyal* to the fallen race it is her sublime mission to evangelize!”⁸ Loyalty to Christ and loyalty to the Union had become identical. The “bond of union” was firmly bound.

⁸R.J.B., “The General Assembly of 1862, of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America,” DQR 2.2 (June, 1862) 301-370.