
The Bond of Union': The Old School Presbyterian Church and the American Nation, 1837-1861

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

Volume I

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
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by

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

Abstract

by

Peter J. Wallace

This dissertation argues that the Old School Presbyterian Church was a significant “bond of union” to the American nation during the antebellum era. How did a phrase from the Presbyterian constitution, describing the relationship of the Presbyterian General Assembly to its congregations come to play such a central role in how Old School Presbyterians thought of their role in the civil Union?

There are several interwoven questions that this dissertation will seek to answer. One set of questions involves the problem of disestablishment: given that the United States rejected the concept of an established church, what would church/state relations look like? The transformation in identity from “church” to “denomination” took time. The older understanding of the unity—or catholicity—of the visible church could not help but be eroded as “liberty of conscience” began to trump catholicity.

A second constellation of questions revolves around ethnicity and culture. An overwhelming proportion of Old School Presbyterians were of Scottish and Ulster descent. Virtually every debate spawned numerous appeals to Scottish Presbyterian beliefs and practices. Even non-Scottish Presbyterians seem to have adopted the Scottish heritage of their co-religionists. While considered theologically antiquated by many for their confessional Calvinism, Old School Presbyterians also lived in the mainstream of social, economic, and political power.

A third array of issues probes the intellectual milieu. The constitutional issues underlying the ecclesiological disputes of the Old School are central for understanding why they took the positions that they did with respect to slavery, education and other social issues. Commonsense moral reasoning, with its emphasis on universally accessible moral intuitions, produced an emphasis on persuasion, both in written and oral debate. This dissertation relies upon records of oral debates more than many previous works.

With Methodists and Baptists divided north and south, and the less numerous Episcopalians largely residing in urban areas, Old School Presbyterians were the only Protestant denomination with significant representation in every region of the nation. This dissertation explains how the imagined self-concept of “the bond of union” influenced the Old School’s decision-making process in debates over education, slavery, temperance, marriage, and church order.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Educational Institutions:

CNJ--College of New Jersey
CTS--Columbia Theological Seminary
DTS--Danville Theological Seminary
NWTs--Northwest Theological Seminary (Chicago, IL)
PTS--Princeton Theological Seminary
WTS--Western Theological Seminary (Allegheny, PA)
UTS--Union Theological Seminary (Hampden-Sydney, VA)

Periodicals:

AHR--American Historical Review
BLRM--Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine
BRPR--Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review
BRTR--Biblical Repertory and Theological Review
CA--Christian Advocate
CH--Church History
CMM--Christian Monthly Magazine
CO--Charleston Observer
CP--Central Presbyterian
DQR--Danville Quarterly Review
JAH--Journal of American History
JPH--Journal of Presbyterian History
NYO--New York Observer
P&H--Protestant and Herald
PA--Presbyterian Advocate
PB--Presbyterian Banner
PH--Presbyterian Herald
PM--Presbyterian Magazine
PW--Presbyterian of the West
SCH--Southern Christian Herald
SPR--Southern Presbyterian Review
SRT--Southern Religious Telegraph
SXC--Spirit of the XIXth Century
W&O--Watchman and Observer
WS--Watchman of the South

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where I preached for three months. The Rev. Michael and Mary Obel of Gwynedd Valley Orthodox Presbyterian Church graciously offered us hospitality for the entire three months of our stay in Philadelphia. The scotch, cigars, and delightful conversations on the back porch helped keep me from living entirely in the nineteenth century that summer (whisky had largely vanished from the Presbyterian church by 1837).

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But one that surpasses them is the joy of being married to Virginia Lee Wallace. Martin Luther once called Katherine von Bora, “my epistle to the Galatians.” I think I now understand what he meant.

INTRODUCTION

“The Bond of Union” is intentionally multivalent. It is taken from an 1849 statement by Nathan Lewis Rice regarding the Old School position on slavery: “We regard the stand taken by our Church in 1845, as one of the most important acts ever performed by her, and as constituting her emphatically the bond of Union to these United States.”¹ A similar sentiment was expressed by an anti-slavery ruling elder who emphasized the need for “the bond of union” to weigh lightly on both church and nation in order to maintain unity in the midst of hotly contested political and social differences.² The phrase is also found in the Presbyterian church order, stating that the General Assembly should “constitute the bond of union, peace, correspondence, and mutual confidence, among all our churches.”³ Samuel Winchester, a leading Old School ruling elder argued at the 1834 General Assembly that “The Constitution of our Church is the bond of its union, and if this be intrenched upon, mutual confidence is destroyed, and that which professes to unite us, becomes itself the subject of protracted and angry discord.”⁴

¹Editorial, Presbyterian of the West (PW) 5.5 (Nov 1, 1849).

²A Ruling Elder, “Theological Seminary of the North West” PW 16.45 (July 30, 1857) 177.

³“Form of Government” xii.4 in The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: Board of Publication, 1840) 430.

⁴Quoted in Henry A. Boardman, The General Assembly of 1866 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1867) 19.

Its covenantal roots (from the German *bund*) are essential to my usage of it, not to mention its convenient connection to the bonds of slavery as well.

1. Thesis:

This dissertation will not attempt to argue that Nathan Rice was literally correct. The Old School Presbyterian Church was not *the* bond of union that held the nation together. Unionists came from every religious and irreligious background imaginable. Instead, this dissertation will seek to examine the interplay between the various usages of “the bond of union” outlined above. How did a phrase from the Presbyterian constitution, describing the relationship of the Presbyterian General Assembly to Presbyterian congregations come to play such a central role in how Old Schoolers thought of their role in the civil Union?

The idea of the Union transcended that of government or national state and functioned as “a symbolic source of loyalty and a concrete instrument of political power.”⁵ While the “Union” originally had the aspect of an experiment, it gradually developed an absolute character that brooked no talk of dismemberment.⁶ Such orators as Daniel Webster declared the United States Constitution “the band which binds together twelve million of brothers.”⁷ Virtually all American politicians agreed that the Constitution preserved the Union in true liberty. But even as it attained a mystical status

⁵Rogan Kersh, *Dreams of a More Perfect Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 10.

⁶Paul C. Nagel, *One Nation Indivisible: The Union in American Thought, 1776-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) chapter 1. Nagel sees the technological advances of the nineteenth century as indispensable agents in forming the image of the absolute Union.

⁷Cited in Nagel, 55.

in political rhetoric, it revealed the inherent tensions within the Union. The festering sore of slavery created a fundamental divide between multiple visions of liberty and union. Even John C. Calhoun, the arch-secessionist when history is read backwards, attempted to save the Union through his proposal of concurrent majorities.⁸

Rogan Kersh draws attention to the religious roots of the language of “union” in British American discourse regarding the unity of the church. Pointing to the “considerable influence of religious-union rhetoric on political talk” during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he argues that denominational conferences “served as an important early foundation of intercolonial unity.”⁹ Indeed, Kersh argues that in the 1770s the word union “was used to denote the whole American people in affective ways formerly reserved for religious relations.”¹⁰

Thirty-four years ago, George Marsden published the first major study of New School Presbyterianism, attempting to illuminate the nineteenth-century roots of the evangelical ethos.¹¹ While numerous essays and dissertations have covered various aspects of Old School Presbyterian history in the intervening years, no one has ventured a comprehensive interpretation. This dissertation does not claim to cover every aspect of

⁸Kersh, 141.

⁹Kersh, 26-32, quotation from 31.

¹⁰Kersh, 53.

¹¹George M. Marsden, The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

Old School history, but rather attempts to explain the relationship between the Old School's preoccupation with ecclesiology and its resolute Unionism.¹²

In order to accomplish this task, there are several interwoven questions that this dissertation will seek to answer. One set of questions involves the problem of disestablishment: given that the United States rejected the concept of an established church, what would church/state relations look like? Presbyterian church order had originally been designed for the established Church of Scotland. As the common school movement unfolded, Old School Presbyterians frequently drew on their Scottish heritage to articulate an educational vision that would provide a Christian education in the context of the separation of church and state.¹³ Anti-Roman Catholic literature engaged the problem of religious and civil liberty in a disestablishment setting.¹⁴ Most American Presbyterians had come from Scotland through Northern Ireland, where they had experienced the establishment from a dissenter's point of view.¹⁵ They willingly (and in most cases eagerly) gave up their inherited notions of an established religion by 1776. What were the effects of this transformation upon succeeding generations?

¹²I do not claim that every Old School Presbyterian shared the same theological (or political) vision. Many exceptions to the Old School center will appear on the pages of this dissertation.

¹³See chapter seven.

¹⁴See chapter four.

¹⁵Irish law stated that if a Presbyterian married a member of the Anglican church, the ceremony had to be performed by an Anglican priest. If a Presbyterian minister attempted to perform the ceremony, the marriage was considered illegal and any children of that union would be considered illegitimate. In practice this law was rarely enforced, but the early 1840s saw tensions arise on the subject. See "The Irish Presbyterian Marriage Question," Charleston Observer (CO) 16.21 (May 21, 1842) 82-83. The paper later noted an Irish Presbyterian Marriage Bill which would give relief to the Irish Presbyterians. [CO (Oct 12, 1844)]

These questions can also be framed as the problem of denominationalism. The older Reformed and Presbyterian churches had all insisted upon the catholicity of the visible church, which usually entailed the organizational unity of the church in a given region. The American modifications to the Westminster Confession in 1789 included the first reference to denominations in any Reformed confession: “it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest.”¹⁶ The transformation in identity from “church” to “denomination” took time. The older understanding of the unity—or catholicity—of the visible church could not help but be eroded as “liberty of conscience” began to trump catholicity. But the older tradition could not be eliminated completely, and Old School Presbyterians sought to preserve some sense of catholicity even in the midst of the swirling chaos of a democratized conscience.

A second constellation of questions revolves around ethnicity and culture. An overwhelming proportion of Old School Presbyterians were of Scottish and Ulster descent. Virtually every debate spawned numerous appeals to Scottish Presbyterian beliefs and practices.¹⁷ But even non-Scottish Presbyterians seem to have adopted the Scottish heritage of their co-religionists. How much did this “ethnic” background play

¹⁶Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America 23.3. (Commonly called the “Westminster Confession of Faith,” but renamed after it was modified and adopted by the PCUSA in 1789. Whenever Old School Presbyterians refer to it as an official document they call it the “Confession of Faith (and catechisms) of the Presbyterian Church”).

¹⁷While appeals to Ulster were fewer in number, not all forgot their Irish sojourn. See David N. Livingstone and Ronald A. Wells, Ulster-American Religion: Episodes in the History of a Cultural Connection (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999). The influence after 1850 tended to be from Princeton to Belfast. Also see Peter Wallace and Mark Noll, “The Students of Princeton Seminary, 1812-1929: A Research Note,” American Presbyterians 72:3 (1994) 203-215.

into the debates? For that matter, how possible is it to isolate the “ethnic” from the “religious,” or vice versa? Presbyterians did relatively little evangelism of non-Scots, but spent most of the antebellum era trying to keep up with the spread of “their own.”¹⁸ But these colonies of Presbyterians were located in larger communities, and outside western Pennsylvania, these communities were not dominated by Presbyterians. While most Scots delighted to be Americans, their ethnicity did not simply evaporate. Instead, Old School Presbyterians maintained a decidedly confessional identity in the midst of an increasingly anti-creedal environment—and a self-conscious appropriation of a sense of Scottish identity aided in maintaining this confessional identity.

Old School Presbyterians generally prided themselves on this insider/outsider status. As William Engles, editor of the largest Old School weekly, put it: “Our theology is ridiculed as antiquated; as a relic of the dark ages. . . . Our attachment to our peculiar Church polity is regarded with affected contempt as at once silly and ridiculous. On these topics the changes are ceaselessly rung, and every method is resorted to to make us thoroughly ashamed of our denominational strictness.” Nonetheless, for Engles this was precisely the reason why “at this present moment, when error is so rife, the Presbyterian Church of the Old-school stands before the world as the noblest witness for the truth, and as most conservative of the precious interests of that religion which Christ taught and his apostles promulgated.” Only through maintaining a distinctively Old School doctrine and polity would the Presbyterian church be of any real use to the American religious world.

¹⁸This is especially true in rural areas. In the cities the situation was somewhat different. Ernest Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963) 1:236, 353.

He warned that if leading ministers or seminary professors “do any thing to lower the tone of denominational feeling in our Church,” it will result in “denominational apostasy.”¹⁹

But while often mocked for their “antiquated” theology, Old School Presbyterians were not an “outsider” ethnic group, like the German Reformed or Irish Catholics. Old School Presbyterians lived in the mainstream of social, economic, and political power. Living in a social context that was alternately friendly and hostile to the influence of religion, Presbyterians sought to influence the world around them. That world inevitably influenced them as well. As the debates surrounding the place of the ruling elder suggest, democratic pressures were unavoidable.²⁰ Leo P. Hirrell has shown how the main reform movements of the day (e.g., temperance, anti-Catholicism, anti-slavery) were influenced by New School Calvinism, but Old School Calvinists were also concerned about the same issues.²¹ For example, in 1844-1845 Old School Presbyterians were involved in starting the publication of no less than five anti-catholic periodicals.²² In reform matters, the difference between Old and New School Calvinism was not so much in the goal desired, but in the means utilized to achieve that goal. Hence emancipationist Old School Presbyterians in Kentucky prepared a plan for the gradual emancipation of all slaves in

¹⁹editorial, “Denominational Feeling” Presbyterian 22.10 (March 6, 1852) 38.

²⁰See chapter two.

²¹Leo P. Hirrell, Children of Wrath: New School Calvinism and Antebellum Reform (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1998).

²²William L. Breckinridge and E. P. Humphrey, True Catholic (Louisville, 1844-47); A. A. Campbell, Jackson Protestant (Jackson, TN, 1844-45); Nathan L. Rice, Western Protestant (Cincinnati, Feb-Nov, 1845); J. B. Warren, New Orleans Protestant (New Orleans, 1844-47); Hiram Chamberlain and Alexander Van Court, Herald of Religious Liberty (St. Louis, 1844-49). The latter two went on to become Presbyterian weeklies. See chapter four for further detail on Old School anti-Catholicism.

1849, which was supported by most prominent Kentucky Presbyterians. It failed, according to its proponents, due to the lack of support from other denominations.²³

A third array of issues probes the intellectual milieu. Several scholars have documented the ascendancy of common sense realism.²⁴ Antebellum Americans believed that intellectual and moral reasoning should be conducted on the ground of universally accessible intuitive principles, inductively gathered from the data of human consciousness and experience.²⁵ But still relatively unexplored are the ways in which antebellum Americans utilized texts, both biblical and otherwise, in marshaling their arguments. While the written word had become a chief means of persuasion, the art of rhetoric had not yet departed from oral argumentation. Most general assemblies could expect a handful of one to three hour speeches when crucial issues were debated on the floor. This dissertation will rely upon records of those oral debates more than many previous works.

The issues that prompted the most significant discussion were matters of constitutional theory and practice. As Old School Presbyterians engaged in the

²³See chapter six.

²⁴Theodore Dwight Bozeman, Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977); Sydney Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," Church History 24 (1955) 257-272; E. Brooks Holifield, The Gentleman Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978). Paul Kjoss Helseth has provided a useful critique of the rationalist interpretation of Princeton's use of the common sense tradition, which should be applied to the Presbyterian thought more broadly. "'Right Reason' and the Princeton Mind: The Moral Context," Journal of Presbyterian History (JPH) 77:1 (Spring 1999) 13-28. Cf. Mark A. Noll, America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to America's God (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 317-318, 414-415.

²⁵See also Henry May, The Enlightenment in America (New York, 1976); Norman Fiering, Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981). To see it in practice among Old School Presbyterians, see Mark A. Noll, ed., The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001).

constitutional debates of the antebellum era, they also wrestled with their own ecclesiastical constitution. Morton J. Horwitz points to two legal developments in the early republic that are particularly relevant: 1) the dethronement of the common law tradition by 1810, which opened the way for 2) the development of an “instrumental perspective” in American law by which judges could “reason about the social consequences of particular legal rules.”²⁶ The transformation of the common law tradition resulted in a greater emphasis on codifying statute law, and on allowing considerable judicial discretion.²⁷ But together with this growing emphasis on constitutional and statute law came the gradual erosion of the older organic model of society. This older model declared that God had given authority to certain institutions (family, church, and state) and that constitutions functioned within that authority. For the newer federal model, authority was itself mediated through the constitution.²⁸ Many of the constitutional debates within the Old School should be understood in the light of this development.

Orthodoxy was at the heart of the Old School. In the minds of those who organized the excision of the New School synods, traditional Presbyterian orthodoxy was

²⁶Morton J. Horwitz, The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).

²⁷Horwitz, 22. Horwitz suggests that by 1820, “Law was no longer conceived of as an eternal set of principles expressed in custom and derived from natural law. Nor was it regarded primarily as a body of rules designed to achieve justice only in the individual case. Instead, judges came to think of the common law as equally responsible with legislation for governing society and promoting socially desirable conduct.” (30)

²⁸For further discussion see Daniel J. Elazar, Covenant & Constitution: The Great Frontier and the Matrix of Federal Democracy (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998) 3ff. Elazar suggests that the covenantal model of Reformed Protestantism was a significant influence in the formation of American society, but that the covenant idea had to be transformed by “the new science of politics” into a more secular theory in order to provide broad and free institutions. (10)

at stake—and indeed, since they considered the opposition to have fallen prey to the ancient Pelagian heresy, Christian orthodoxy itself was on the line. Church polity also played a significant role, because Presbyterians generally considered the doctrine of the church to be an integral part of their theology.²⁹

After the excision of the New School synods, the Old School continued its emphasis on orthodoxy. Throughout their debates in the church courts and in the periodical press, Old School ministers and elders recited exegetical, confessional, and historical arguments that were grounded in a long-standing tradition of Presbyterian orthodoxy. Even those that argued for new practices and different ways of thinking attempted to locate their views in previous apostolic, patristic, and/or Presbyterian and Reformed teaching. While innovation was generally deplored, most Old School Presbyterians prized fresh insight—the difference being that the former called orthodoxy into question while the latter sought to build upon it.

Frequently thinking of themselves as the only truly national church after 1846, the Old School Presbyterian church believed that it was a (if not *the*) bond of union that held the United States together. With Methodists and Baptists divided north and south, and the less numerous Episcopalians largely residing in urban areas, Old School Presbyterians were the only Protestant denomination with significant representation in every region of

²⁹For a detailed examination of the theology of the leading southern Presbyterian theologians, see Morton H. Smith, Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987/1962). Smith's work is somewhat polemical, since he was trying to convince the southern Presbyterian church to recover its heritage, but it gives provides a one volume summary of the center of southern Old School theology.

the nation.³⁰ This dissertation will explain how this imagined self-concept influenced the Old School's decision-making process in the major debates of the 1840s and 1850s. It will demonstrate that the constitutional issues underlying the ecclesiological disputes of the Old School are central for understanding why they took the positions that they did with respect to slavery, education and other social issues. At the same time, this dissertation will also demonstrate that Presbyterian polity did not remain the same through its encounters with antebellum culture.

2. The Geography of Old School Presbyterianism

This dissertation relies heavily upon the periodical literature of the Presbyterian Church. While most of the authors wrote anonymously, I have been able to uncover the identity of many authors. There are some non-ordained persons, including a few women, who contributed to the newspapers, but from editorial comments it is clear that most of the authors were ministers or ruling elders.³¹

A second major resource is a database of Old School ministers and congregations that I have compiled over the last decade. It includes not only the biographical details for ministers, and membership statistics for congregations, but also voting patterns at General Assembly (and perhaps eventually at synod as well). While only around 90% complete

³⁰Presbyterians generally viewed Roman Catholics as foreigners who needed to be assimilated to Protestant American culture. Of course, in fairness, Presbyterians had only a nominal presence in New England—fewer than twenty churches. But from New York west and south, Old School Presbyterians had a significant presence in every state and territory of the union.

³¹The culture of deference remained intact in Old School Presbyterianism longer than in most of American society, and the newspapers remained the preserve of the clergy and ruling elders.

(due to the time-consuming process of identifying obscure ministers), the statistics complement the anecdotal evidence of the newspapers.

A. The Presbyterian Location in the American Mainstream.

Most historians claim that the antebellum era witnessed the decline of the old established churches—Congregational, Episcopal and Presbyterian—and the rise of their more democratic counterparts—especially the Baptists and Methodists. Most historians acknowledge that Presbyterians were initially involved in the West, but since they were outstripped by the Methodists and Baptists, they are generally portrayed as falling “far behind.”³² It is certainly true that the Methodists and Baptists grew faster than the Presbyterians did, but Presbyterian growth itself was staggering. The old eighteenth-century colonial establishment (Congregational in New England and Episcopal in New York and the South) still had prestige among the elites in those regions, but found little sympathy in the West. Presbyterians, however, spread throughout the West and had significant influence in every portion of the country save New England.³³ While the

³²Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New York: Doubleday, 1975) I, 528; cf. Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 153, 167; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) 26. Finke and Starke acknowledge that Presbyterian growth managed to keep pace with the population, but suggest they could not keep up with the Methodists and Baptists due to their frequent divisions over doctrine and polity. Roger Finke and Rodney Starke, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 56, 74. This is not a very satisfying explanation, since Methodists and Baptists experienced at least as many divisions as the Presbyterians. The classic work on the growth of these traditions is Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). Also see John Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Christine Heyrman has explored the growth of evangelicalism in the south prior to 1840 in *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

³³By 1850, only one county (Cuyahoga, OH) outside of the original thirteen states had more than five Episcopal churches. Congregationalists remained a New England denomination, with a small presence in the Western Reserve of Ohio, northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. Neither had any significant

official rolls counted only around 200,000 communicants in 1850, one Presbyterian newspaper suggested that the Old School had nearly one million members (e.g., baptized persons under the general influence of the church).³⁴ Therefore it would be more accurate to say that whereas Presbyterians had played second fiddle to the Congregationalists and Episcopalians in the colonial era, they continued to play second fiddle in the antebellum era—with Baptists and Methodists moving into the first chair—at least numerically.

Number of Churches:	1740	1780	1820	1860
Episcopal	246	406	600	2,145
Congregational	423	749	1,100	2,234
Presbyterian	160	495	1,700	6,406
Baptist	96	457	2,700	12,150
Methodist	0	0	2,700	19,883
Lutheran	95	240	800	2,128
Roman Catholic	27	56	124	2,550

source: Gaustad, Historical Atlas 4, 43

Figure 1. Growth of American Churches, 1740-1860

presence in the southwest. In comparison, Presbyterians had five or more churches in 50 Ohio counties, 17 Indiana counties, 16 Kentucky counties, and 12 Illinois counties (and 9 other counties in Iowa, Wisconsin and Michigan). In the southwest Presbyterians had five or more churches in 31 Tennessee counties, 12 Alabama counties, 7 Mississippi counties, 4 Texas counties, and 1 Arkansas county. Since nearly half of all New School churches were in New York state, most of these churches were Old School. Edwin Scott Gaustad, Historical Atlas of Religion in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 60, 67, 89.

³⁴“Relative Position of the Roman Catholics and Protestants in the U. States in 1851,” Watchman & Observer 3.30 (March 4, 1852) 120. Roman Catholics claimed to have 1.6 million adherents, and the Watchman was replying that if Presbyterians counted adherents simply by counting baptisms, there would be as many Presbyterians (Old School and New School together) as Roman Catholics. The baptismal statistics of the Old School would seem to suggest that he was exaggerating, but only slightly—since the Old School baptized 10-15,000 infants and around 3-4,000 adults per year (and since dozens of congregations failed to report these statistics, the numbers are doubtless much higher). Finke and Starke suggest that there were around 909,000 baptized Presbyterians in 1850, as compared to 1.6 million Baptists, 2.7 million Methodists, and 1.1 million Roman Catholics. Finke and Starke, The Churching of America, 113. Christine Heyrman has argued that by 1835 close to two-thirds of southern whites were “adherents” to one of the three main evangelical churches. Heyrman, Southern Cross, 265.

But in spite of their numerical disadvantage, Old School Presbyterians believed that they were the most influential religious denomination in the country. While this sort of claim would be impossible to prove, it certainly affected the way they talked and acted. While never a majority in any state, Presbyterians had often been among the first settlers in the territories, and so had been able to establish themselves, their churches, and their educational institutions early in the old northwest and southwest. Old School laity (especially their ruling elders) were leaders in politics, business, and law. Old School ministers dominated education—especially in the South and West—even controlling ostensibly state colleges in South Carolina and Ohio. In spite of the fact that the Methodists had three times as many churches, the census of 1850 revealed that the value of their church property was virtually equal.³⁵

Methodist	\$14,636,671
Presbyterian	\$14,369,889
Episcopal	\$11,261,970
Baptist	\$10,931,382
Congregationalist	\$7,963,952
Source: <u>W&O</u> (May 10, 1855)	

Figure 2. Value of Church Property, 1850

Any attempt to explain either the success or the failure of Old School Presbyterian growth in the antebellum era must take into account the Old School's emphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy and its ethnic character (which are woven together). In any chaotic environment, there will be those who desire the rootedness of a traditional religious community. As an example of lay commitment to orthodoxy, the Presbyterian Magazine

³⁵From the New York Observer (NYO), "Wealth of the Different Denominations," Watchman & Observer 10.40 (May 10, 1855) 161. This chart was based upon the census of 1850. This is at a time when the giving to the churches matched the total budget of the federal government. See Robin Klay and John Lunn, "Protestants and the American Economy in the Postcolonial Period: An Overview," God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 40.

reported in 1857 the endowment of a scholarship at Princeton Seminary by Robert and Marian Hall (brother and sister), who had been brought up in Scotland under the ministry of John Brown of Haddington. They had immigrated to Orange County, New York, and after decades of teaching school, they said in their bequest:

Whereas, after a life of nearly fourscore years, much of which has been spent in examining the Word of God, we are fully satisfied of the correctness of the doctrines of religion as laid down in the Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, drawn up by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and as held by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States, we desire that the scholarship which is endowed by this our bequest of two thousand five hundred dollars, be called the ED Scholarship, as a witness between us and the Theological Seminary, that the Lord he is God, agreeable to the said Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

Farther, it is our will, that the Professors in said Seminary be careful, that no person holding sentiments inconsistent with the Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, be ever admitted to the benefit of said Scholarship.

The lawyer who was drawing up the will was puzzled as to the meaning of the name “ED.” Marian Hall replied, “And dinna ye ken, young mon? E'en go and read your Bible.” “Well, I have read it, and still I do not recollect the meaning or use of ED.” After explaining its significance as the name of a monument in Joshua 22:34, the elderly lady summarized the heart of the issue—as far as she was concerned: “I dinna like your Hopkinsian. I believe in the doctrines of the Bible, as expressed in the Confession of Faith.”³⁶ Orthodoxy was important not only for the pastors, but also for the laity as it gave them an anchor in the midst of the storm.

³⁶“The ED Scholarship at Princeton Seminary,” Presbyterian Magazine 7.8 (August, 1857) 369-70.

B. Presbyterian Ethnicity: From Scots to Americans (and back again)

The leaders of the Old School had few immigrants among them (with some notable exceptions). Most were second or third generation Americans who had been born between 1785-1820. The older leaders of the Old School, such as Ashbel Green of Philadelphia (1762-1848), Samuel Miller of New York and Princeton Seminary (1769-1850), Archibald Alexander of Virginia and Princeton Seminary (1772-1851), George A. Baxter of Virginia and Union Seminary (1771-1841), John A. Matthews of Virginia and New Albany Seminary (1772-1848), Joshua L. Wilson of Cincinnati (1774-1848), and Francis Herron of Pittsburgh (1777-1860), had grown up in the excitement of the early republic. Deism had been the challenge of their youth, and the Presbyterians had played a central role in overcoming it.³⁷

One implication of the rapid growth of the church that has rarely been mentioned, is that the Old School—together with other American denominations (and indeed, with the nation as a whole)—was a young church. In 1840, more than half of all Old School ministers had been ordained in the previous decade. Nearly 60% were under the age of forty. In contrast, twenty years later, in 1860, only around 40% were under the age of forty. The generation that came of age in the 1820s and 1830s came to positions of leadership at a relatively young age, and maintained their standing for nearly forty years.³⁸

³⁷The references to this generation in Old School literature are glowing with praise for their courageous stand for the gospel and their success at stemming the tide of Deism.

³⁸Examples include Robert J. Breckinridge (1800-1877), Charles Hodge (1797-1878), James Henley Thornwell (1812-1861), Nathan L. Rice (1807-1877), and William Swan Plumer (1802-1880), all of whom had gained national reputations by the age of thirty-five.

Older ministers were respected (and often were able to defeat the young turks), but generational politics cannot be ignored.

Joyce Appleby has called attention to the role of the “first generation” of Americans—born between 1776 and 1800.³⁹ While that generation played a significant role in the formation of the Old School in 1837, it was the second generation that came to define the Old School during the 1840s. The younger generation had watched their fathers defeat the rising tide of deism—or were like the Breckinridge brothers who had a deist father. It is interesting to note that the fathers of the two most outspoken leaders of the Old School party, Ashbel Green and Robert J. Breckinridge (1800-1871), were not orthodox Presbyterians. Jacob Green (of New England descent), had departed from the Presbyterian Church with a handful of other ministers to form the Morris Presbytery in 1780 in order to practice his Edwardsean views of the sacraments.⁴⁰ Ashbel himself was tempted by Deism during the Revolutionary war, through his contact with “infidel” army officers. His contemporary, John Breckinridge (1760-1808), however, fell prey to Deism and departed from the Presbyterian Church, serving eventually as Thomas Jefferson’s Attorney General. At least two of his sons, John Cabell and Robert Jefferson, initially followed in his steps, both politically and religiously. R. J. studied at the College of New Jersey with Ashbel Green in 1817-18, but Green’s influence appears to be minimal: R. J. was expelled from the college for fighting. After the death of John Cabell Breckinridge in

³⁹Joyce Appleby, Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generations of Americans (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁴⁰Peter J. Wallace “Visible Saints and Notorious Sinners: Puritan and Presbyterian Sacramental Doctrine and Practice and the Vicissitudes of the Baptist Movement in New England and the Middle Colonies,” unpublished paper, 1999.

1823, R. J. took over the family's financial affairs, since the second son, John, had entered the ministry.

A major flaw in the Jeffersonian agenda was that they did not sufficiently take women into account. How was a young man like R. J. Breckinridge supposed to maintain his Deist beliefs, when his Presbyterian mother had catechized him from his childhood, and his wife, Ann Sophonisba Preston, became a devout Christian?⁴¹ By 1835 the three surviving Breckinridge sons were orthodox Presbyterian ministers, and R. J., in his first pastorate in Baltimore, had already joined Ashbel Green of Philadelphia and Joshua L. Wilson of Cincinnati as a leader of the Old School movement.

Having successfully blocked the infidel invasion through a cooperative arrangement with the Congregationalists, the first generation of Presbyterians had hoped that they could continue to reap the harvest of their triumph. But the issues of the 1830s were not as easy as the open threat of Deism. While most Presbyterians had fervently embraced the American Revolution, and repudiated the concept of ecclesiastical establishment, as the nineteenth century progressed many began to express concerns about the future of Presbyterianism in an increasingly democratic culture. Several factors combined in different ways to leave many Presbyterians (perhaps even most) increasingly ambivalent about their place in American culture. All but a tiny handful were enthusiastically patriotic and wholeheartedly approved of the American project, but most

⁴¹Ann Sophonisba Breckinridge (1803-1844) was the daughter of General Francis Preston, and granddaughter of Patrick Henry's sister. She married Breckinridge in 1823, and the following year professed faith in McChord Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Kentucky, and was baptized with her first child by her husband's brother, John Breckinridge. She bore eleven children, eight of whom survived her. Her grieving husband wrote in her obituary that she was "one whose life was as nearly perfect as that of a child of Adam could be." Presbyterian 15.4 (January 25, 1845)

saw developments in the nineteenth century that threatened to marginalize them.⁴² Old School Presbyterians differed over which factors were the central causes for concern, and most embraced at least some of the them, but a whole array of issues were now before them:

- 1) the democratizing trends in antebellum religion
- 2) the Jacksonian turn in American politics⁴³
- 3) the secularization of education
- 4) the established power of northeastern business elites
- 5) the increasing Roman Catholic immigration
- 6) the rise of Romantic and Idealist thought
- 7) the “young West,” and especially the growing influence of the Northwest
- 8) the growing tension between abolition and proslavery advocates

Old School Presbyterians had enthusiastically embraced America and had not initially thought much about their Scottish identity as they sought to participate in the making of the new nation. But, as that new nation departed further and further from their imaginative vision of what it should be, they began to draw more and more consciously from their Scottish Presbyterian heritage. They were always selective, but when an Old School Presbyterian became unhappy with a certain aspect of American culture/religion, his first recourse was frequently to the mother Kirk.

⁴²Mark Y. Hanley has offered a useful corrective to the normal portrait of the Protestant clergy as flag-waving patriots. Most Old School clergy and ruling elders would have considered themselves as patriotic, but that true love of country required a serious self-critique of national sins that might bring down the judgment of God if they were ignored. See Beyond a Christian Commonwealth: The Protestant Quarrel with the American Republic, 1830-1860 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

⁴³Andrew Jackson was himself an Old School Presbyterian, but a large number of his fellow churchmen did not care for his politics. Richard J. Carwardine has attempted to provide something of a typology in his Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). He sees Old School Presbyterians as largely Democratic, and New School Presbyterians as primarily Whig, but this typology breaks down as this dissertation will demonstrate. One example of how politics did *not* follow denominational lines is exemplified in James D. Bratt’s, “From Revivalism to Anti-Revivalism to Whig Politics: The Strange Career of Calvin Colton,” Journal of Ecclesiastical History 52 (2001) 63-82.

This is particularly interesting because not all of these men were Scots. Samuel Miller, for instance, was of English descent, while Robert L. Dabney was of Huguenot origin, yet both fully embraced their Scottish heritage as Presbyterians. Further, some like Thomas Smyth, who had been born in Ulster, tended to be more enthusiastic about certain American ideals than others who were third or fourth generation Americans.

Hence, ethnicity appears to be almost as much a function of frustration with the American project as it is a matter of birth. Or, to put it differently, Presbyterian religion was the way in which Scottish ethnicity adopted non-Scots into its cultural patterns. It is not the case that American Presbyterians actually did things in a Scottish way, but that ideas and practices imagined and described as Scottish frequently carried significant weight.

In their own self-identification, Old School Presbyterians frequently remarked on their ethnic heritage. One correspondent wrote to the Presbyterian Herald that the General Assembly of 1857 “has a peculiarly Scotch-Irish cast of form and countenance. They look like men of firmness and decision who would be ready to do or die, the stuff of which martyrs, but not fanatics, might be made.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴“The General Assembly,” Presbyterian Herald (PH) (May 28, 1857). For more on the Scots-Irish, see Kenneth W. Keller, “The Origins of Ulster Scots Emigration to America: A Survey of Recent Research,” American Presbyterians 70:2 (Summer 1992) 71-80; James G. Leyburn, The Scotch-Irish—A Social History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962); David Hackett Fischer, Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Leroy V. Eid, “Irish, Scotch, and Scotch-Irish,” American Presbyterians 64 (1986) 211-225; M. Perceval-Maxwell, The Scottish Migration to Ulster in the Reign of James I (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973); Ian C. G. Graham, Colonists from Scotland: Emigration to North America, 1707-1783 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956); R. J. Dickson, Ulster Emigration to Colonial America (Belfast: Ulster Heritage Foundation, 1988); Marilyn J. Westerkamp, The Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Ned C. Landsman, Scotland and Its First American Colony, 1683-1765 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

C. Presbyterian Conservatism

Both in its numerical growth and in its cultural place in the American mainstream, Old School Presbyterianism took a mediating stance between the democratic culture of the Baptists and Methodists and the more aristocratic Episcopalians. The general opinion in the Old School was that Presbyterianism was the best hope for America to avoid both the extremes of mobocracy or aristocracy. David McKinney, editor of the Presbyterian Banner, the Pittsburgh newspaper, offered a perspective that held true for most Old School Presbyterians. Presbyterian conservatism was not merely in favor of keeping things the same. The true conservative “acts from principle instead of impulse,” and therefore is also the true progressive. Presbyterian theology was inherently conservative, tending “to exalt God and humble man. It teaches that all are sinful and unworthy of favor, that God has a right to do as he will with his own, that he makes men to suffer according to his sovereign pleasure. It teaches that every one has his appointed work, with which he is to be content, and that he is to be clothed with humility.” One who lives by Presbyterian doctrines and principles “becomes an aggressive Conservative, from whom the world has much to hope and nothing to fear.”⁴⁵

Four years before Lyman Atwater had stated in the Princeton Review that the church needed to be both conservative and progressive. Unless she made “constant advances in her understanding, or consciousness of the import, the reach, the limits, the

⁴⁵Editorial, “Presbyterian Conservatism,” Presbyterian Banner (PB) (February 16, 1856). Cf. Eugene D. Genovese, The Slaveholders’ Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992) 11-12.

applications of this truth, especially to new and varying circumstances; and unless she makes unceasing efforts to bring men under its saving power, the truth itself will become stagnant and impotent, a dead orthodoxy.”⁴⁶ The constant innovations of the radicals contradicted the slow but steady progress of the true conservative.

The Old School’s moderate stance may help explain its relative obscurity in antebellum historiography. As Peter B. Knupfer has said regarding political moderates more broadly, “they have not as a group received the attention that reformers, reactionaries, ideologues, and idealists have received.”⁴⁷ This dissertation will attempt to cast some light on at least one institution that nourished the moderate stance.⁴⁸

D. Institutional Geography

The local cultures of the Old School were expressed institutionally in at least three ways: 1) educational institutions, 2) periodicals, and most importantly 3) a system of church courts.

1) Educational Institutions. Old School Presbyterian colleges, seminaries, and academies were some of the most advanced educational institutions outside of New

⁴⁶Lyman H. Atwater, “The True Progress of Society,” Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review (BRPR) 24.1 (January, 1852) 24.

⁴⁷Peter B. Knupfer, The Union As It Is: Constitutional Unionism and Sectional Compromise, 1787-1861 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) x. Ironically, Knupfer himself largely emphasizes the national political leaders, such as Henry Clay, and spends little time looking at the “group.”

⁴⁸For congressional networks, see David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

England,⁴⁹ and their academies, colleges and seminaries became centers of Presbyterian identity. Every Presbyterian minister was expected to have a college degree, and by 1840, around ninety per cent of newly ordained ministers had also attended seminary.⁵⁰ In contrast, Finke and Starke report that in 1823 only 100 of the 2,000 Baptist clergy had a liberal education, while fewer than 50 of the more than 4,000 Methodist itinerants in 1844 had more than a grammar school education.⁵¹ Nearly every Old School synod either operated its own Presbyterian college, or had considerable influence in a private or state operated college.

Theological seminaries were influential in shaping the distinctive vision of a region, although since professors were chosen largely by the ministers and elders in the region, there is even greater reason for suggesting that the church shaped the seminary to perpetuate its own character. In both respects, the seminary was one of the most prized institutions in each region, and the boards of the seminaries generally consisted of the most influential ministers and elders in the region. As one editor pointed out, the seminaries were somewhat diverse due to various local influences. Echoing the Jeffersonian wariness of party, he warned that this boded ill, if “under those ever active outward causes, the Seminaries will partake more of the local spirit of the church, than will be consistent with either the great commission or the expansive spirit of the gospel.”

⁴⁹Eugene D. Genovese has argued that southern intellectuals easily “matched their northern counterparts in learning and creativity.” The Slaveholders’ Dilemma, 2; cf. Drew Gilpin Faust, A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

⁵⁰See appendix 4 for details on seminary attendance.

⁵¹Finke and Starke, The Churching of America, 76.

Because behind the Jeffersonian fear of party lay a far older tradition: the catholicity of the church. The triumph of local spirit could only be counterproductive for the catholicity and orthodoxy of the church. “It is a fair conclusion, then, that if the church continue sound, her seminaries will also be sound; if she become corrupt, the infusion of her spirit into them would be but to pollute the fountains, and render the streams that issue from them more noxious.”⁵²

In the 1820s and 1830s most Old School candidates attended Princeton Seminary. By the 1850s this was no longer the case. While nearly half of all ministers attended Princeton Seminary, attending Princeton Seminary did not mean that men would agree with each other in later years; rather, it provided a common framework for discussion. The diversity of seminary training emerges not so much in the initial years (when the faculties were largely Princeton-trained) but as the regions develop their own character independent of (and often in opposition to) Princeton.⁵³

2) *Periodicals*. Antebellum Americans were inundated with periodicals. The 1860 census revealed 4,051 periodicals with a total circulation of over 927 million, more than half of which circulated in New York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts alone. Eighty per cent were political, while only seven per cent were religious. For Old School editors,

⁵²Editorial, “Theological Seminaries,” Southern Presbyterian (December 23, 1852) 66.

⁵³See appendix 4. Princeton Seminary is often remembered for being the last bastion of confessionalism in the early twentieth century. In the antebellum era it was unique among the Old School seminaries in its constant engagement with the intellectual and theological world of New England and Germany from the standpoint of confessional Presbyterianism. In contrast, most Old School seminaries tended to focus on their own tradition, at times falling into the very regionalism that the Southern Presbyterian feared. A comparison between the Princeton Review, the Southern Presbyterian Review and the Danville Quarterly Review reveals that Princeton was regularly engaged with issues in the broader church, while Columbia and Danville tended to focus on narrowly Presbyterian issues.

these statistics demonstrated the power of the periodical press and the need for religious periodicals to be more zealous in the work of spreading the gospel.⁵⁴

Each region maintained (at least sporadically) its own weekly newspaper, and the major centers produced at least one or two monthly and/or quarterly journals as well. I have been able to identify at least eighty distinct titles that were edited by and for Old School Presbyterians between the years 1837-1870. The subscription lists and editorials of these journals suggest that there was a general consensus that each region should have its own weekly Presbyterian paper, designed for a lay audience.⁵⁵ Monthlies and quarterlies tended to be more specialized and thus sought to reach a narrower audience amidst a wider geographical scope.

I have not attempted to include every Old School paper in the following regional survey. Instead I have attempted to give a sense for how the newspapers became institutional centers for regional identity. The Old School sustained from eight to twelve weekly newspapers throughout its history (the New York Observer was formally a nondenominational paper, but after 1840 its editor was in the Old School, and it engaged more with Old School issues than any other denomination).⁵⁶ The following is a list of those that lasted for at least a decade:

⁵⁴“The American Press,” Central Presbyterian (CP) 8.28 (July 2, 1863).

⁵⁵See appendix 2 for full list. Generally 90% of subscribers were laity, including 25% women.

⁵⁶The Presbyterian, however, did not appreciate the Observer’s rival influence. “What has been the influence of the *Observer* on the distinctive character of the Presbyterian Church? What are its boastings in its recent article, but of its non-denominational character? Is not its influence in Presbyterian churches where it is to any extent circulated, gradually to neutralize the efforts of our pastors to identify their people with the great enterprises of their own denomination?” Editorial, “The New York Observer,” Presbyterian 23.5 (January 29, 1853) 18.

Location:	Title(s):	Dates:
New York, NY	<u>New York Observer</u>	1823-1912
Philadelphia, PA	<u>Presbyterian</u>	1831-1923
Pittsburgh, PA	<u>Presbyterian Advocate/Presbyterian Banner</u>	1838-1937
Cincinnati, OH	<u>Presbyterian of the West/Presbyter</u>	1841-69
St. Louis, MO	<u>Herald of Religious Liberty/St. Louis Pbn/Missouri Pbn</u>	1844-62, 66-97
Louisville, KY	<u>Protestant & Herald/Presbyterian Herald</u>	1836-62
Richmond, VA	<u>Watchman of the South/Watchman & Observer/Central Pbn</u>	1837-1909
Fayetteville, NC	<u>North Carolina Presbyterian</u>	1858-99
Charleston, SC	<u>Charleston Observer</u>	1829-45
GA/SC	<u>Southern Presbyterian</u>	1847-1909
New Orleans, LA	<u>NO Observer/NO Prot/NO Pbn/True Witness/Pbn Index</u>	1837-40, 44-51, 54-62, 66-8

Figure 3. Leading Old School Weeklies, 1840-1870

It is worth pointing out—as numerous Old School editors did—that despite the fact that two-thirds of the Old School resided in the north, of these ten papers (since the Southern Presbyterian is the geographical successor of the Charleston Observer),⁵⁷ six were in the south. Northern editors generally suggested that this was due to southerners’ local pride, and noted that the northern papers had twice the circulation of the southern papers. Of course, both the Kentucky and Missouri papers had a significant circulation in the northwest, and the location of five of these papers along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers demonstrates the way in which Americans tended to think of the rivers as the center of the West—rather than the border between North and South.⁵⁸

⁵⁷The Southern Presbyterian was initially located in Milledgeville, Georgia. The original idea in 1847 was that since the region’s seminary and quarterly were in Columbia, South Carolina, the newspaper should join the college in Milledgeville. Charleston, the largest city in the region was then divided between two rival presbyteries. By 1853, after the Charleston Union Presbytery had returned to the Old School, the editor moved the paper to Charleston, in order to benefit from the resources of the larger city. “Public Meeting in Charleston,” Southern Presbyterian 6.19 (February 24, 1853) 74; “Change of Location,” *ibid.*

⁵⁸From a purely economic standpoint, a central location was important for getting papers out on time.

3). *Church Courts*. The session consisted of the minister(s) and elders of the local congregation. The presbytery consisted of all of the ministers, and one ruling elder from each congregation in the presbytery, which could embrace anywhere from 3-60 congregations. The presbytery met at least twice a year, so most presbyteries sought a compact geographical range. The synod included 3-12 presbyteries, and its boundaries frequently (though not always) followed state lines.⁵⁹ Every minister in the synod and one ruling elder from each congregation could vote in the synod's annual meeting.

Old School identity was closely bound up with this presbyterial and synodical structure. Educational institutions and periodicals were frequently supported by the synod—and the presbytery and the synod formed centers of activity. Meetings of college trustees or seminary directors were often called to synchronize with synods, and whenever the regional newspaper hit hard times, a special meeting would be held at synod in support of the editor. For that matter, editors often announced which synods they would attend, so that their readers could send their payments along with their pastor.

The synod coordinated regional missionary activity and provided a court of appeal to correct errors made by sessions and presbyteries. Synods frequently registered their approval or disapproval of General Assembly actions, and functioned as a forum for debate and discussion of controversial topics. When discontent over the policy of one of the General Assembly's boards flared up in a region, the board would frequently send a

⁵⁹Geographical factors, like mountains or rivers, were initially more important than state lines in defining presbyteries and synods. Only after the Old School/New School reunion in 1870 did Presbyterians decide to follow state boundaries rigorously in defining synods.

representative to meet with the synod—hopefully dealing with the issue before it caused major problems for the Assembly.

Presbyterians prized openness and candor. “Confidence in our brethren” was crucial in such a large and growing church. The only way to remain united was to maintain open communication and to provide an outlet for discussion—and dissent, if need be.⁶⁰

E. Regional Geography

Some historians have mistakenly identified the Old School as a predominantly southern denomination.⁶¹ In fact, only one-third of the church resided in the south. By 1860 another third resided in the northwest. Most Old Schoolers recognized that while the south had some influence, the leading region remained the northeast—especially the Philadelphia-New York corridor. The regions were bound together by various institutions: colleges, seminaries, periodicals, and synods. The following regional definitions will be utilized in this dissertation:

⁶⁰See chapter eight for a vivid example.

⁶¹Cf. John Patrick Daly, When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002) 75-77.

Northeast (often called the East):	
New York/New England:	the synods of Albany, New York and Buffalo (all of New York and New England)
Mid-Atlantic:	the synods of New Jersey, Philadelphia and Baltimore (New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland)
Northwest (sometimes called the West—with or without the Southwest):	
Old Northwest:	the synods of Pittsburgh, Allegheny, Wheeling, Ohio and Sandusky (western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio and northern West Virginia)
New Northwest:	the synods of Cincinnati, Indiana, Northern Indiana, Illinois, Chicago, Wisconsin, Iowa, Southern Iowa and St. Paul.
Southwest (sometimes with the Northwest called the West, or defined with the South):	
Upper Southwest:	the synods of Kentucky, Missouri, Upper Missouri and Kansas (including Nebraska)—sometimes included with the Northwest
Lower Southwest:	the synods of Nashville, Memphis, Mississippi, Arkansas and Texas (including Oklahoma and Louisiana)
Southeast (often called the South):	
Upper South:	the synods of Virginia and North Carolina
Deep South:	the synods of South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama (including Florida)

Figure 4. Definitions of Old School Regions

While perhaps somewhat too neat, the rationale for these divisions is provided by the institutional connections that these synods shared. Certain synods had close working relationships with others around them. The synods of Virginia and North Carolina jointly controlled Union Theological Seminary in Prince Edward, Virginia, and until 1858 both patronized the Richmond newspaper. The synods of Wheeling and Allegheny remained close to their parent synod, Pittsburgh, in support of Western Theological Seminary and the Presbyterian Advocate (later the Presbyterian Banner), a relationship shared at a distance by the Synod of Ohio. South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama were united in their support for Columbia Seminary and the Charleston Observer (later the Southern Presbyterian). Other synods appear to have operated more or less independently from

those around them. While their ministers and elders had regular contact with each other through the Boards of the church, Philadelphia, New Jersey and New York (the three largest and wealthiest synods in the church) do not seem to have had much formal contact with each other. The main reason for distinguishing the New York synods from the Mid-Atlantic ones is due to the significant New England influence in New York. Baltimore was originally a part of the Synod of Philadelphia, and it continued to support Princeton Theological Seminary and the Philadelphia Presbyterian.

It should be noted, however, that “border” synods were frequently looking in two directions. North Carolina, for instance, had strong ties to Columbia Seminary, as well as Union, and members of the Tennessee synods of Memphis and Nashville could be drawn towards the Louisville newspaper as easily as New Orleans.

And of course, the influence of Princeton Seminary and the Philadelphia-New York corridor was felt everywhere. Princeton had trained nearly half of all Old School ministers, and they spread to every corner of the church. The Presbyterian and the New York Observer circulated widely in the South (a frequent source of complaint for southern editors), and the Home and Foreign Record (a monthly magazine devoted to reporting on the work of the boards of the church) was published in Philadelphia.

While regional and sectional distinctiveness was on the rise in the 1840s and 1850s, many regions maintained a strong national identity. Well into the 1850s, Georgia remained firmly connected to the national church. The Southern Presbyterian, a weekly

newspaper founded in 1847, endorsed “all our institutions,” and not until the late 1850s did the paper endorse James H. Thornwell’s vision of the church.⁶²

F. The General Assembly

Only one institution brought these disparate institutions, and the regions they represented, together: the General Assembly. As the Presbyterian Form of Government put it, the General Assembly was to be the “bond of union, peace, correspondence, and mutual confidence among all our churches.”⁶³ The Assembly consisted of one minister and one ruling elder from each presbytery. In order to prevent the unnecessary multiplication of presbyteries, the constitution allowed large presbyteries (those consisting of 25 or more ministers) to send two ministers and two ruling elders.⁶⁴

⁶²“Prospectus,” Southern Presbyterian 1.4 (September 15, 1847) 16. The prospectus of the paper declared that its character would be “Southern in its designs and its spirit; decidedly Presbyterian in its principles—an exponent of our doctrines and order, a medium of communication for all our Churches, an advocate of all our institutions.” This was signed by a committee of the Synod of Georgia: A. M. Nisbet, Otis Childs, J. W. Baker, S. K. Talmage and D. C. Campbell.

⁶³“Form of Government” xii.4 in The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: Board of Publication, 1840) 430. The “Form of Government” had been ratified by the General Assembly and the presbyteries in 1821.

⁶⁴“Form of Government” xii.2. As the Assembly grew more unwieldy (due to the multiplication of presbyteries), various proposals were made to reduce it to a more manageable size. One proposal was to create a system of proportional representation. Suggesting that 120 members was the ideal size for a

Albany	6	Pittsburgh	12	Missouri	2	Northern India	2
Buffalo	2	Wheeling	6	Kentucky	6		
New York	8	Ohio	6	Virginia	8		
New Jersey	12	Cincinnati	6	North Carolina	6		
Philadelphia	14	Indiana	4	West Tennessee	2		
		Northern Indiana	2	South Carolina	6		
		Illinois	4	Georgia	4		
				Alabama	4		
				Mississippi	4		
Northeast	42	Northwest	40	South	42	Total	126

Figure 5. Proposal for Synodical Representation to General Assembly, 1847

The Assembly began each year on the third Thursday in May, and usually continued in session for at least two weeks. Including travel time, commissioners coming from a distance could expect to spend as much as two months (May and June) in this service. While this would be a considerable sacrifice for a minister to be away from his congregation for so long, it was often prohibitively expensive for ruling elders.⁶⁵ Most presbyteries elected their commissioners based on their experience and wisdom, but some operated on a rotation plan that enabled all ministers to have the experience of going to General Assembly.⁶⁶ From 1800-1843 it had met in Philadelphia every year except for 1835 and 1836 when it met in Pittsburgh. But from 1844 through the reunion of 1869 it began a wandering pilgrimage, visiting key cities from Charleston, SC, to Indianapolis, IN, and New Orleans, LA. This peripatetic approach communicated effectively the Old School's desire to maintain the unity of the church and nation. By providing the opportunity for each region of the church to give hospitality, they hoped to cement the bonds of union between the regional churches. Ministers and elders could experience for themselves the various local cultures—which would hopefully bring understanding and trust.

deliberative assembly, one author proposed a proportional system, in which each synod would have representation based on its communicant membership. Since the church was evenly divided between northeast, northwest, and south, it would have given each portion of the church equal representation. Mathetes, "Representation," Presbyterian 17.18 (May 1, 1847) 69.

⁶⁵One writer suggested that presbyteries should reimburse ruling elders for lost income in order to encourage them to attend General Assembly. Watchman and Observer (W&O) 10.1 (August 10, 1854) 1.

⁶⁶Editorial, "The Principle of Rotation," Presbyterian 18.42 (October 14, 1848) 166. He pointed to an article from the Watchman and Observer condemning the growing practice of sending ministers in rotation to the Assembly. The editors agreed that presbyteries should send only men of wisdom and discretion.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Moderator</u>	<u>state of residence</u>
1835	Pittsburgh	William W. Philips	New York
1836	Pittsburgh	John Witherspoon	South Carolina
1837	Philadelphia	David Elliott	Pennsylvania
<u>Location, 1838-1861</u>			
1838	Philadelphia	William S. Plumer	Virginia Northeast-4
1839	Philadelphia	Joshua L. Wilson	Ohio Northwest-4
1840	Philadelphia	William M. Engles	Pennsylvania Southwest-5
1841	Philadelphia	Robert J. Breckinridge	Maryland Southeast-2
1842	Philadelphia	John T. Edgar	Tennessee
1843	Philadelphia	Gardiner Spring	New York
1844	Louisville	George Junkin	Ohio PA-4
1845	Cincinnati	John M. Krebs	New York NY-3
1846	Philadelphia	Charles Hodge	New Jersey NJ-3
1847	Richmond	James H. Thornwell	South Carolina KY-3
1848	Baltimore	Alexander T. McGill	Pennsylvania OH-2
1849	Pittsburgh	Nicholas Murray	New Jersey SC-2
1850	Cincinnati	Aaron W. Leland	South Carolina VA-2
1851	St. Louis	Edward P. Humphrey	Kentucky MD-2
1852	Charleston	John C. Lord	New York TN-1
1853	Philadelphia	John C. Young	Kentucky MO-1
1854	Buffalo	Henry A. Boardman	Pennsylvania CA-1
1855	Nashville	Nathan L. Rice	Missouri
1856	New York City	Francis McFarland	Virginia
1857	Lexington KY	Cortlandt Van Rensselaer	New Jersey Northeast-11
1858	New Orleans	William A. Scott	California Northwest-3
1859	Indianapolis	William L. Breckinridge	Kentucky Southwest-5
1860	Rochester	John W. Yeomans	Pennsylvania Southeast-4
1861	Philadelphia	John C. Backus	Maryland Far West-1
<u>Northern Old School</u>			
1862	Columbus	Charles C. Beatty	Ohio
1863	Peoria	John H. Morrison	India
1864	Newark	James Wood	Indiana
1865	Pittsburgh	John C. Lowrie	New York
1866	St. Louis	Robert L. Stanton	Ohio
1867	Cincinnati	Phineas D. Gurley	District of Columbia
1868	Albany	George W. Musgrave	Pennsylvania
1869	New York City	Melanchthon W. Jacobus	Pennsylvania
1870	Philadelphia	J. Trumbull Backus	New York

Figure 6. Location of Old School General Assemblies, 1838-1869. With united Assemblies of 1835-1837 and 1870.

Wherever it met, it dominated the local news, and frequently provided headlines for the national papers as well. After the divisions of the Methodist (1844) and Baptist (1845) churches, the Old School Presbyterians and the Protestant Episcopal Church were the only national protestant denominations that had not split over slavery. As the larger and more influential of the two bodies, the Old School prided itself on its “conservative” influence in society. As the 1850s progressed, many marveled at the harmony and peace of the Presbyterian General Assembly—in spite of the fact that its leading elders were diametrically opposed to each others’ political views. For instance, at the 1856 General Assembly, Judge Humphrey Leavitt of Ohio (a staunch Republican later known for his role in the Clement Vallandigham trial),⁶⁷ worked side by side with Chancellor Kensey Johns of Delaware, and Judge D. C. Campbell of Georgia. As one observer put it: “It seemed almost incredible, among all the political strifes and fierce encounters of the day, to see a body of men from every section of the country. . . moving on from day to day in undisturbed tranquility of temper and harmony of sentiment. Where on earth shall we find another like it?”⁶⁸ Another elder, Cyrus H. McCormick, the inventor of the reaper, even stated that the Old School Presbyterian General Assembly and the Democratic party were the two hoops that bound the Union together.⁶⁹ And whether praising them or damning them, the American press agreed.

⁶⁷Both Leavitt and Vallandigham were Old School Presbyterians. See chapter 10.

⁶⁸“The Late General Assembly,” PH 25.41 (June 12, 1856).

⁶⁹I have been unable to trace the quotation to its origin, but the press regularly attributes it to McCormick. Cf. Presbyter (June 9, 1859).

The New Orleans Picayune commented on the General Assembly that met in its city in 1858, that “Not only intellectual power, but a spirit of conservatism, admirably blended with that of progress, characterized the men who guided its deliberations. It was worthy of note that every thought, every sentiment uttered, was eminently national.” In a common comparison to one of the few other national assemblies, the author added that “The dignity of the deliberations of the Assembly, the courtesy exhibited in the debate, the directness of the speeches to the point at issue, and the regard to points of order, were such as might even furnish the Congress of the United States a happy example for imitation.” In spite of sectional differences, the unity of the Presbyterian Assembly should encourage New Orleans and the South in the hope of “the preservation of fraternal relations between opposing sections.”⁷⁰

Three years earlier the Nashville True Whig opined regarding the Assembly: “Indeed, in point of logical acumen, clearness, elegance of diction, and power of forensic eloquence, we have never seen them equalled.” Impressed by the collegiality and confidence that existed on both sides of the sectional divide, the author pointed out that

⁷⁰Quoted in “The General Assembly,” Presbyterian 28.23 (June 5, 1858) 90. Four years before, Mr. Swan, a ruling elder from Mississippi, wrote to the True Witness that the General Assembly was “a far, very far, better looking body of men (the writer, of course, excepted), than our Senate or House of Representatives at Washington. There is a gravity, mixed with hopeful cheerfulness--an easy dignity, without pretension--a serious thoughtfulness marked on every brow--a benignant expression in every eye--all well befitting a body of men believing in the Sovereignty of God, trusting in His grace, rejoicing in His salvation, and Laboring and planning for the restoration and conversion of the world to God. . . . I never knew my privileges before, as a member of the good old Presbyterian household, though the most unworthy of them all. I never saw the power of our church so fairly set before me--the faith, the zeal, the love, the solemn earnestness, the high consecration, the intellectual power, the burning eloquence, the resistless logic, the fraternal concord, the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace, which distinguish the ministry--saying nothing of her humbler eldership--they present a force which must, under God, take this world!” Cited in “The Late General Assembly,” W&O 9.47 (June 29, 1854) 186.

while “eminently conservative” northerners might frankly state their own views, “yet there was no disposition to make these opinions an issue.”⁷¹

A northern daily paper offered a different sort of tribute: “Of the large Protestant denominations, the only ones that retain a national organization are the old Calvinistic ironside Presbyterian and the Episcopal Churches. But the Methodist, Baptist, and New-school Presbyterian divisions represent in both sections of the Union a sufficient body of communicants to keep alive the slavery agitation North and South, as a religious element, whatever the compromises and adjustments of politicians and statesmen.”⁷²

But the Old School does not easily fit into political boxes.⁷³ While many appear to be Democrats as Carwardine’s typology should make them,⁷⁴ Old School Presbyterians seem to have been as divided as the nation in their political allegiances. Some liked Andrew Jackson, himself an Old School Presbyterian, but the Princeton Seminary faculty was Whig—though not as “cotton Whig” as Howe calls them,⁷⁵ and both R. J.

⁷¹“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 25.23 (June 9, 1855) 90.

⁷²Cited simply as “a secular paper,” in Presbyterian (November 3, 1855) 174.

⁷³Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution, 1815-1846 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Daniel Walker Howe and Richard Carwardine have offered useful critiques of Sellers (especially regarding his antinomian/arminian polarity). See God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 54-98. Methodists had strong Jacksonian Democratic allegiances, seeing the Whigs as a Calvinist establishment party, but in the northwest they were largely Whig as they became cultural insiders. Carwardine, “Methodists and the Market Revolution,” God and Mammon 90-92.

⁷⁴Carwardine, Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁷⁵Daniel Walker Howe, “Charles Sellers, the market revolution, and the shaping of identity in Whig-Jacksonian America,” God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Kimberly C. Shankman has argued that the brilliance of Clay’s political strategy was his ability to find compromises that “might require significant concessions of interest,” without requiring “any one to make an explicit repudiation of principle.” Compromise and the

Breckinridge and James Henley Thornwell joined the Know-Nothings,⁷⁶ but both Breckinridge and Hodge voted for Abraham Lincoln in 1860. The sort of political monolith apparent in modern evangelical churches simply did not exist in the nineteenth century.⁷⁷

There were very few things upon which Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun agreed. But they agreed that the unity of the Old School Presbyterian Church boded well for the national union. Calhoun's famous March 1850 speech (delivered by another due to his weakness) stated: "The cords that bind the states together are not only many but various in character. . . . The strongest of those of spiritual and ecclesiastical nature, consisted in the unity of the great religious denominations, all of which embraced the whole union."

Constitution: The Political Thought of Henry Clay (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999) 19. The Old School would attempt a number of similar compromises throughout the 1840s and 50s (and not just in matters related to slavery). Charles Hodge would articulate this view of the Presbyterian Confession in "Adoption of the Confession of Faith," BRPR 30.4 (October 1858) 668-691.

⁷⁶Breckinridge was one of the leaders of the American Party in Kentucky. See Albert D. Kirwan, John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962) 298. Crittenden's daughter, Cordelia, married the Rev. John C. Young, president of Centre College in Danville, Kentucky (160). Edward Bates, Lincoln's Attorney General, was an Old School ruling elder from Missouri—and a life-long Whig. David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 418.

⁷⁷David Murchie, "Charles Hodge and Jacksonian Economics," JPH 61:2 (Summer 1983) 248-256. Murchie draws on Hodge's letters to his brother to demonstrate Hodge's concern with the Jacksonian agenda in the 1830s and 1840s; Edward R. Crowther, Southern Evangelicals and the Coming of the Civil War (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) 151. James Pollock, the Whig governor of Pennsylvania (though he joined the Know-Nothings after his election in 1854) was "a devout Presbyterian of Scotch-Irish ancestry." He was also responsible for suggesting the addition of "In God We Trust" as Director of the Mint during the Civil War. Tyler Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 58. See also William E. Gienapp, The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Gienapp has attempted to identify the denominational voting trends in various states, and suggests that in 1854 Pennsylvania Presbyterians (which were overwhelmingly Old School) voted decidedly for the Whig Party (while Lutherans went Democratic, and Baptists and Methodists went American). (508) In 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)

But since the Methodists and Baptists had divided he feared that continued agitation would “finally snap every cord, when nothing will be left to hold the States together except force.” Likewise Clay in 1852 declared “this sundering of religious ties which have hitherto bound our people together, I consider the greatest source of danger to our country. If our religious men cannot live together in peace, what can be expected of us politicians, very few of whom profess to be governed by the great principles of love.”⁷⁸

In their own minds, this national service was an important part of the purpose of the General Assembly, but by no means the most important. As the church grew from one synod of 419 churches in 1788 to 33 synods of 3,592 churches in 1860, the General Assembly became more and more important as the place where Old School Presbyterians came together. By 1830 the PCUSA was larger than its parent Church of Scotland. Even after the excision of the New School synods, the Old School could claim more congregations than the Church of Scotland, and after the Free Church disruption of 1843, the Old School was in every category the largest Presbyterian denomination in the world.⁷⁹

⁷⁸Quoted in David B. Chesebrough, Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996) 5. On Calhoun see Irving H. Bartlett, John C. Calhoun: A Biography (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993); John Niven, John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988). While reared in a Presbyterian home, Calhoun himself was a Unitarian (104). On Clay, see Maurice G. Baxter, Henry Clay and the American System (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995); Kimberly C. Shankman, Compromise and the Constitution: The Political Thought of Henry Clay (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999); Robert V. Remini, Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991). Clay’s biographers have not paid as much attention to Clay’s religious views as his contemporaries did. Cf. “The Synod of Pittsburgh and the Richmond Whig,” Watchman and Observer 6.15 (November 21, 1850) 58; Presbyterian of the West 2.42 (July 22, 1847) 166.

⁷⁹Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843-1874 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975) chapter 5. Minutes of the GA of the PCUSA (Philadelphia, 1851) 156, compared with corrected statistical records of 1850 (see below).

1851	Congregations	Ministers	Attendance
<u>Scottish churches</u>			
Church of Scotland	1,183		350,000
Free Church of Scotland	889		290,000
United Presbyterian Church	465		160,000
<u>American churches</u>			
PCUSA (Old School)	2,675	2,027	400,000* (220,000 communicants)
PCUSA (New School)			
Sources: Drummond, <u>Church in Victorian Scotland</u> ; <u>Minutes</u> (1851)			

Figure 7. Scottish and American Presbyterian Churches, 1851. The Old School attendance estimate is quite conservative, estimated from anecdotal testimony regarding the relationship between communicant membership and Sunday morning attendance (baptized children, for instance, are not included in the communicant membership). The Scottish figures were obtained from a headcount performed throughout Scotland on one Sunday, and are considered quite reliable.

For the sake of narrative coherence, I have used several General Assembly debates as windows into larger issues in the church and culture. I have attempted to select debates that were recognized as important in their own day. In some cases the debates were at the center of American culture (e.g., slavery or education), but in other instances the issues may seem rather parochial (e.g., whether a man could marry his deceased wife's sister, or whether ruling elders could lay hands on ministers during ordination). But even seemingly trivial matters can reflect important transformations in thought and culture.

Besides the Congress of the United States, the Old School General Assembly appears to be the last major annual gathering that drew members from every part of the nation after 1845. Political parties only gathered their national constituencies every four years. The Episcopal General Convention met once every three years. Voluntary and literary societies might draw on a diverse regional base, but participation was frequently limited to regional auxiliaries. While only a small percentage of Old School ministers and

elders could personally attend the Assembly, every speech was reported back home in all the weekly newspapers, and the major issues at the General Assembly usually became fodder for discussion in the newspaper for months. In this way the General Assembly truly functioned as “the bond of union” for the Presbyterian church.

The General Assembly executed its day-to-day work through the year by means of several boards. The boards of the church were the hands and feet of the Assembly in conducting the work of missions, education and publication.⁸⁰ The northeast played a smaller role in the Old School than it had in the united church. While still providing 44% of the funds for the denominational boards throughout the era, that was considerably lower than the 55% in 1836. The most striking change in the funding of the boards came from the southwest. The presbyteries of Mississippi and New Orleans each provided over \$22,000 for the boards in 1860, while St. Louis provided \$41,000. Only New York (\$82,000), Philadelphia (\$36,000), and Rochester (\$29,000) gave more than this. Meanwhile the entire northwest, still recovering from the Panic of 1857, could barely match the total contributions of New York Presbytery.⁸¹

⁸⁰David Paul Nord has pointed out that the first Bible and tract societies were charity organizations designed to provide literature for the poor, but as their distribution systems flourished in the age of the market, there was an increasing trend toward retail sales. David Paul Nord, “Benevolent Capital: Financing Evangelical Book Publishing in Early Nineteenth-Century America,” God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 147-170. Nord argues that the 1840s saw “the creation of centrally administered national distribution systems.” (148) The Presbyterian Board of Publication was created in 1838. The corporate form of the early voluntary societies was reproduced by the church boards in order to “accumulate, manage, and perpetuate capital.” (149).

⁸¹This played a significant role first in the location of the Committee on Church Extension in St. Louis in 1855, and then also in the failed attempt to relocate the Board of Domestic Missions in the west in the late 1850s. See Appendix six for more on church finance.

G. Intellectual Geography

The influence of the Scottish common sense philosophy and Baconianism on Old School Presbyterianism has been well-documented.⁸² Mark Noll has argued that the hermeneutic of most antebellum Reformed Protestants was identified by three classic features: *sola Scriptura* (the sole final authority of scripture against any other religious authorities), the regulative principle (that scripture regulates the entirety of Christian worship and practice), and the third use of the law (that the Old Testament law was not merely given to Israel, but was also given to direct Christians in their daily lives). But in addition he argues that there was an increasing movement toward a commonsense literalism that treated the Bible as though it was written directly to the modern reader. Noll explains the development of this hermeneutic by suggesting that “the engine that drove Reformed approaches to Scripture into uncharted American territory was social transformation. The revolution in American society from hereditary, deferential hierarchy to democratic, ideological antihierarchy. . . created a distinctly American form of biblicism.”⁸³

Eugene Genovese has taken this a step further, pointing out that “In North and South, the scriptural and constitutional arguments were of a piece.” He rightly argues that

⁸²Theodore Dwight Bozeman, Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977); Sydney Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” Church History 24 (1955) 257-272; Mark A. Noll, ed., The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001).

⁸³Mark 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) 47-48. Noll cites Robert Wiebe, Nathan Hatch, and Gordon Wood as the best historians of this transformation.

“The doctrine of strict construction began with Scripture and ended with the constitutional structure of the republic.”⁸⁴ This dissertation will demonstrate that ecclesiastical constitutional debates were central to the shaping of the both northern and southern Presbyterian approaches to slavery.⁸⁵

Old School Presbyterians utilized these philosophical traditions because they appeared congenial to their confessional commitments. One author in the Danville Quarterly Review highlighted Lord Bacon’s commitment to divine revelation: “SO AS WE OUGHT NOT TO ATTEMPT TO DRAW DOWN OR SUBMIT THE MYSTERIES OF GOD TO OUR REASON; BUT CONTRARIWISE TO RAISE AND ADVANCE OUR REASON TO THE DIVINE TRUTH.”⁸⁶ Revelation, he argued, is the standard by which all philosophies and sciences must be judged.

⁸⁴Eugene 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) 83, 84.

⁸⁵For constitutional political debates during the antebellum era, see Don E. Fehrenbacher, Sectional Crisis and Southern Constitutionalism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995). Fehrenbacher points out that “States-rights constitutionalism. . . was a logical defensive posture for a minority section conscious of its growing vulnerability as a slaveholding society.” The development of the idea of a concurrent majority also functioned to neutralize “the tyrannical strength of the majority by investing constituent communities or interests with some kind of veto power.” (xix) He argues that southern constitutional theory, as exhibited in the Confederate Constitution, reveals certain regional concerns, such as “a clause limiting the president’s power of appointment” and other antiparty features. (xx) Southern state constitutions restricted the power of the governor, and preferred direct election of judges and either direct or legislative election of attorneys general, state treasurers, etc. (96) Several southern state supreme courts had acted on the principle of judicial review before *Marbury v. Madison* (1803), though they regularly emphasized their reluctance to overturn significant legislation (99-100).

⁸⁶“The Relation which Reason and Philosophy sustain to the Theology of Revelation,” Danville Quarterly Review (DQR) 1.1 (March, 1861) 40, quoting Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, in Works (London, 1838) I. 34. The author claimed that “The notion of the sufficiency of unaided human reason, or the light of nature, as a guide to the attainment of theological truth, never seems to have entered the mind of the Pagan world; and is met with only since the publication of Revelation itself. It is avowed only by those who having become acquainted, at least to some extent, with the announcements of Revelation, have availed themselves of the light which it imparts, for the purpose of disproving its necessity.” (24)

Old School Presbyterians generally objected when so-called evangelicals used reason to overturn revelation. When Edward Beecher claimed that

“If any alleged actions of God come into collision with the natural and intuitive judgments of the human mind concerning what is honorable and right, on the points specified,” [i.e., those which relate to human probation,] “there is better reason to call in question the alleged facts, than to suppose those principles false, which God has made the human mind intuitively to recognize as true.”⁸⁷

Such a claim astounded the Old School. Common sense moral reasoning could never trump divine revelation. Reason may not “sit in judgment upon the truth of the facts, to the verity of which God has confessedly testified.”⁸⁸

Throughout the three decades of Old School history, there were relatively few controversies over the doctrinal content of that revelation. Outside of their significant debates on ecclesiology, Old School Presbyterians rarely argued over important theological matters. There were some differences of opinion as to the nature of imputation (some Hopkinsians remained with the Old School), and sporadic debates about the timing of the millennium, but none of these debates came anywhere close to producing the sort of controversy that ecclesiological issues did. For the most part, Old School Presbyterians were content with the doctrines of the Westminster Confession.⁸⁹

⁸⁷Edward Beecher, Conflict of Ages, p 29, quoted in “The Relation which Reason and Philosophy sustain to the Theology of Revelation,” DQR 1.1 (March, 1861) 46. Brackets original.

⁸⁸“The Relation which Reason and Philosophy sustain to the Theology of Revelation,” DQR 1.1 (March, 1861) 49-50.

⁸⁹There is a considerable literature on the millennial discussion. See Ernest R. Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Robert Whalen, “Calvinism and Chiliasm: The Sociology of Nineteenth Century American Millenarianism,” American Presbyterians 70:3 (Fall 1992) 163-172. Whalen lists J. J. Janeway, John Lillie, and Willis Lord among his lists of prominent Old School premillennialists, along with ruling elder Joel Jones. Unfortunately, his lack of attention to the south and west leads him to conclude that chiliasm was a product of Calvinistic New England. For another

The life of the church revolved around what they called the ordinary means of grace. The reading and preaching of the word, the sacraments, and prayer, formed the center of Old School Presbyterianism. While deploring what they considered the excesses of Charles Finney, they continued to delight in revival, which they viewed as seasons of refreshing where the baptized youth, as well as those outside the church, would be brought to saving faith through the preaching of the word. The 1849 General Assembly rejoiced that “The God of revivals has exerted that exceeding greatness of his power by which the dead in sin are made alive, and his own people are changed into the same image from glory to glory.”⁹⁰ In its pastoral letter, which was published in all of the newspapers of the church, it exhorted the church that “they who would enjoy extensive and powerful revivals of religion must also put a high estimate on them.” Indeed, the old camp meetings, were encouraged by the 1849 General Assembly and continued in some places in the Old School well into the 1850s.⁹¹

perspective on the question see Carl E. Sanders II, The Premillennial Faith of James Brookes: Reexamining the Roots of American Dispensationalism (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001).

⁹⁰“Narrative of the State of Religion,” Minutes (1849) 389. Every year’s narrative includes a statement of the presbyteries which claimed to have experienced significant revivals (from a low of 20 in 1846, which they attributed to the Mexican War to a high of over 70 in 1858, during the great revival). For Presbyterian attitudes to revival, see Philip N. Mulder, A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Anne C. Loveland, “Presbyterians and Revivalism in the Old South,” JPH 57:1 (Spring 1979) 36-49.

⁹¹“Pastoral Letter on Revivals of Religion,” Minutes (1849) 427. The Southern Presbyterian makes frequent references to camp meetings in the 1850s, such as 7.43 (August 10, 1854) 171. An example of the southern attitude to the 1858 revivals is J. O. Lindsay, “The Religious Awakening of 1858,” Southern Presbyterian Review 11.2 (July 1858) 246-263. Lindsay pointed to “the commercial panic, the efforts of the YMCA, the ordinary labors of the ministry, the activities of private Christians, and other things” as the instruments of a revival that had spread through both urban and rural churches throughout the country.

Historians have often portrayed the New School as more evangelistic than the Old School, but the growth patterns of the two denominations do not support their claim.

	1840	1850	1859
Old School	126,583	207,254	259,335
New School	102,060	139,797	153,615

Figure 8. Old School and New School Membership, 1840-1859 (The New School numbers include the United Synod of the South in 1859)

Figure 7 shows that the two denominations were almost evenly matched in 1840, but the Old School more than doubled in the next twenty years, while the New School only saw 50% growth. And in the key statistic, members added on examination, the New School gained around 5,000-6,000 per year, while the Old School averaged over 10,000. Indeed, even after both the Old and New Schools lost their southern wings, the northern Old School still outnumbered the northern New School 260,000 to 190,000 at the reunion in 1869.⁹²

Presbyterian worship was quite similar to that of other evangelical churches. Indeed one southern Presbyterian claimed that the only distinctive Presbyterian practice was that of standing for prayer, a practice that was in decline.⁹³ By the 1840s there were only a few congregations that retained the traditional Presbyterian practice of singing only

⁹²See the statistical tables in Minutes (1840-1870). The northern Old School tripled in size between 1840 and 1870 (from around 85,000 to 260,000), while the northern New School only doubled (from around 95,000 to 190,000). This was largely due to the New School's constant hemorrhage of congregational churches that departed from their ranks during the 1840s and 1850s.

⁹³Bucer, "Presbyterianism," Southern Presbyterian 1.4 (September 15, 1847) 15. The importance of worship in the life of the Presbyterian laity is documented by Julius Melton, "A View from the Pew: Nineteenth-Century Elders and Presbyterian Worship," American Presbyterians 71:3 (Fall 1993) 161-174. Among other things, Melton details the importance of Levi A. Ward, ruling elder in Rochester, New York, in 1852 in the formation of St. Peter's Church, the most liturgical congregation in the Old School. Ward was mayor of Rochester at the time.

Psalms in worship. The General Assembly of 1849 even debated whether to say that “the sacred songs contained in the book of Psalms are every where suitable and proper for the purpose of singing in the churches.” Dr. Robert Steel, pastor at Abington, Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia suggested that this be deleted. The Rev. John Munson, pastor of Centre Church in Mercer County, Pennsylvania, concurred, arguing that “there are some things, however suitable for Old Testament worship which I believe, and the Presbyterian Church at large believe, unsuitable to New Testament worship.” The Rev. Edwin H. Nevin, pastor at Mount Vernon, Ohio, also chimed in, claiming that a “spirit of catholicity” militated against the usage of the Psalms in worship. But others defended the usage of the Psalms and in the end the Assembly retained the sentence, largely because they hoped to attract the Associate and Reformed Presbyterians who maintained the traditional practice of exclusive psalmody.⁹⁴

The sermon was the climax of Old School Presbyterian worship, and much ink was spilt in discussions of sermon style and delivery. The chief question was whether it was permissible to preach from a written manuscript. After the 1849 Assembly had declared that it was “more scriptural” to preach without a manuscript, one southern writer protested that scripture did not prescribe a mode. The question was one of expediency. “All men are not equally endowed,” he argued. Some do not have the memory or powers of concentration to preach without a manuscript. Written sermons encouraged greater mental culture. The goal of preaching was to edify the congregation. “Some of the most

⁹⁴“General Assembly,” Presbyterian 19.22 (June 2, 1849) 85. Due to the focus of the dissertation, I have chosen not to include a chapter on the frequent discussions and debates between Old School Presbyterians and their seceder and covenanter brethren over psalmody.

animated and deeply impressive speakers we have ever heard were those who read and that closely. It is the fire of the soul, it is the power of the thought, that melts down or carries away an audience.” For this southern writer, the manner of delivery was the key.⁹⁵ Others complained that extemporaneous preaching could be too easily disconnected from the text. One layman went so far as to suggest that he would rather hear a good commentary read from the pulpit than a lousy extemporaneous sermon.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, the majority of Old School Presbyterians discouraged the practice of reading sermons.

Conclusion

There is a general chronological flow in the order of the chapters that follow, but the content of each chapter is largely topical. The sorts of arguments that worked in the 1830s and '40s were increasingly untenable in the '50s and especially the '60s. As the Old School became institutionally divided along sectional lines (both North/South and East/West), the sorts of networks or cultures that emerged over the years were increasingly separated from each other. Presbyterians had to make difficult decisions about regional and ideological loyalties. In the end, the General Assembly alone could not hold two nations together.

⁹⁵Editorial, “Written and Unwritten,” Southern Presbyterian 3.7 (October 12, 1849) 26. Cf. Scriptor, “Written or Extempore,” Southern Presbyterian 5.19 (Jan 8, 1852) 73.

⁹⁶Elihu, “A Layman’s Homily” Presbyterian (March 29, 1845).

ONE

CATHOLICITY AND CONSCIENCE: THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1837 AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF BRITISH-AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM

Between 1837 and 1845 most of the leading denominations of North Atlantic Protestantism were rocked by a series of church splits. The Church of Scotland lost nearly half of its ministers to the Free Church Disruption of 1843, as 40% of the church departed in order to maintain the spiritual independence of the church against state interference.¹ In 1844 and 1845 the Methodist and Baptist churches in America divided north and south over the question of whether slavery was sinful. It might appear that these divisions were unrelated, but the American Presbyterian division of 1837 may cast some light on the tendency toward fragmentation that existed in nineteenth-century Protestantism, and indeed, in nineteenth-century culture. The 1830s and 1840s saw the first massive

¹For a study of the British churches in the political context of the first half of the nineteenth century, see Stewart J. Brown, The National Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland, 1801-1846 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Brown argues that the first quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a significant project of “Protestant nation-building,” based on the assumption that the established churches could play a significant role in forming the identity of the nation. But with “the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, the passing of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, and the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832,” the British churches found themselves overwhelmed by the tide of dissent. By the 1830s the question was whether to have an established church at all. The parallels with the American fragmentation are significant (404). See also John Shelton Reed, Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996); Peter Brooke, Ulster Presbyterianism: The Historical Perspective, 1610-1970 (Belfast, 1994); Stewart J. Brown and Michael Fry, eds., Scotland in the Age of the Disruption (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993); A. L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, The Scottish Church, 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates (Edinburgh, 1973); Drummond and Bulloch, The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843-1874 (Edinburgh and St. Andrews, 1975).

divisions in four of the seven largest British-American denominations. The exceptions were the Congregational churches (which had already split into Unitarian/Trinitarian camps by 1820), the Church of England and the American Episcopal church (both of which were divided internally by the Tractarian movement and the Gorham case but did not separate).²

For centuries the concept of the catholicity of the visible church had sufficient symbolic power to hold churches together in the face of significant disagreements. When heresy disrupted the unity of the church, this understanding of catholicity provided for the discipline of heretics, setting the boundaries of orthodoxy for the whole church.³

The Protestant Reformation did not reject the idea of catholicity. It simply claimed that the Pope was a usurper, who had arrogated to himself power that did not rightly belong to him. The Reformers insisted that each regional church should be allowed to establish its own creed, church order, and liturgy, maintaining fellowship among regional churches, without requiring organizational unity. The Reformed confessions, catechisms, church orders, and liturgies of the sixteenth century exhibit similar structures, patterns

²There had been secessions from Protestant churches prior to this, but such divisions had either been geographical (e.g., the formation of the New Side Presbyterian Synod of New York in 1745), or else had consisted of small groups of dissenters (e.g., the Covenanters who separated from the Church of Scotland in 1690—but who could not find three ministers to form a presbytery for more than a generation, or the English Independents). Such movements certainly suggest the rising emphasis on individual conscience, but it should not be forgotten that the vast majority of Reformed ministers and members considered such actions schismatic—even when they sympathized with the concerns of the seceders. See [give literature on Scottish churches]. The fact remained that while some Protestants were developing more radical views of conscience, the overwhelming majority remained convinced of relatively traditional views of catholicity.

³For two examples of the changing relationship between catholicity and orthodoxy, see R. P. C. Hanson, The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: the Arian Controversy, 318-381 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988); M. D. Lambert, Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus (London: Edward Arnold, 1977).

and doctrines.⁴ When the Dutch church faced a crisis over the teaching of Jacob Arminius in the early seventeenth century, it called for all the other Reformed churches to send delegates to the Synod of Dordt. When the English Long Parliament sought to unite the British Isles, it called for an assembly of ministers (the Westminster Assembly, 1642-48) to unify the churches in doctrine, government, worship and discipline. The churches of Ireland, Scotland and England would remain separate in structure, but would have common standards.⁵

At least through the seventeenth century, the principle of catholicity remained theoretically intact. The ideal was to have one orthodox church in any given region. But cracks were growing in the practice of catholicity. The Lutherans and the Reformed were only partly in fellowship with each other—and in many places in Germany they co-existed in the same area. In England a group of Independents had split off from the Church of England, and while most Puritans remained within the Anglican Church, there was a growing divide between Episcopalians and Presbyterians. The claims of conscience had been relatively easy to press when the opponent was Rome—one could simply identify Rome as the Babylon of Revelation and call for all true believers to “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins!” But it became more difficult when the opponent was the Church of England—whose Thirty-Nine Articles were reformed, and whose liturgy

⁴See Bard Thompson, ed., Liturgies of the Western Church (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1961); Hughes Oliphant Old, The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975); Mark A. Noll, ed., Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991).

⁵See John L. Carson and David W. Hall, eds., To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994); also see Thomas Scott, The Articles of the Synod of Dort (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1993/reprint).

was formally similar to those of the continental Reformed churches. But the Church of England had retained a few “Popish ceremonies,” and there were some in the Anglican church who plainly preferred certain Roman practices over those of the Reformed. While the vast majority of English Puritans were faithful Anglicans, desirous merely of reforming the church, not a few moved in a more radical direction. The Congregationalists and Independents emphasized the purity of the local congregation and rejected the concept of the regional church. Baptists went a step further and rejected infant baptism as a relic of Romanism. From there it was only another step to the Quakers who rejected ministers and sacraments entirely—or to the Seekers who felt that the church had been entirely destroyed and waited for God to send new apostles to reorganize the church.

It was in this context that the Westminster Assembly declared in chapter 25 of its Confession that “The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.” In the fourth section they stated that “This catholic church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.” The phrase “particular churches” commonly referred to the national or regional churches such as the Church of Scotland, or the Church of Saxony.

1. The New “Catholicity”

It was in America that this older understanding of catholicity utterly disintegrated. While Europe was trying to maintain catholicity through established churches that “tolerated” dissent, Americans faced a new challenge. Most of the early settlers of the New World were in favor of church establishment—but only if *they* were the established church! New England Congregationalists quickly established the Congregational church in New England, while Anglicans were established in the South, and after the Dutch Reformed Church’s brief establishment in New Amsterdam, the Anglican Church also took over New York.

The one region where establishments did not take root in the colonial era were the middle colonies. Pennsylvania and New Jersey both had large Quaker populations (which rejected establishments altogether) while Maryland sought toleration for Roman Catholics, which under British rule meant toleration for all dissenters. It was particularly in Pennsylvania where America’s religious future was anticipated. In Pennsylvania all of the old established churches of Europe met: the German Reformed from the Church of the Palatine, Lutherans from the Church of Saxony, Presbyterians from the Church of Scotland, Anglicans from the Church of England, together with the dominant Quakers, a few Welsh Baptists and a scattering of Mennonites.

There was some talk of merger. The Dutch and German Reformed nearly merged with the Scottish Presbyterians. But the Lutherans and Anglicans were not interested in this. Radicals, such as the Baptists, Mennonites and Quakers, argued that denominational

pluralism was good—and as time went on, the old established churches began to agree. Each denomination tended to attract “its own” people—the Presbyterians were overwhelmingly Scots-Irish, the Lutherans were German and Scandinavian, the Anglicans and Baptists were generally English (and Welsh). The old idea of catholicity—one church per region—had broken down.

But American Protestants were not willing to surrender the idea of catholicity.⁶ When Roman Catholics accused them of being divided and divisive, Protestants replied that they were still united in doctrine and fellowship. After all, in the early Republic there was a general Reformed consensus in American Protestantism. The Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Baptists—and even Methodists—were confessionally similar to the Presbyterians—the most significant differences were in polity.⁷ Such newspapers as the *True Catholic* (edited by Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists in the 1840s) emphasized the consensus among evangelical Protestants against both the high church exclusivists (Roman and Anglo-Catholics) as well as the schismatics on the radical wing—both denying the catholicity of the church.

By the 1840s the alignment of American Protestants had changed. The Baptists were no longer on the fringe—they had come into the mainline, as the Disciples of Christ

⁶George M. Frederickson claims that the “church-centered, organic view of society, with its stress on tradition and authority, was held by a small minority” in America. The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993/1965) 28. For his circle of “intellectuals” that is probably true—as well as for the Finneyite revivalists. But catholicity remained an important principle for the Reformed center, even as its definition was altered significantly.

⁷The case for the inclusion of the Methodists in the general category of “Reformed Christianity” is persuasively made in Paul K. Conkin, The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Certainly Old School Presbyterians viewed Methodists as generally one of “us,” while such radical sects as the Disciples, Mormons, and Millerites were outside the pale of orthodox Christianity. See chapter 3 for more on this.

and a whole array of smaller radical groups had emerged (Mormons, Millerites, Swedenborgians, etc). The mainstream of American Protestantism attempted to maintain a sort of catholicity that was not organizational, but based upon a general harmony of doctrine and piety—especially piety.

The Old School vision of catholicity included a sense of common conscience (or confession) on the denominational level, insisting that each denomination should maintain high confessional standards, but allowed for liberty of conscience by recognizing other denominations as fellow churches with whom they maintained fellowship. Presbyterians sought to remain in fellowship with Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists (as well as the German and Dutch Reformed). Since their official standards of doctrine were generally harmonious—the Thirty Nine Articles for Methodists and Episcopalians, and various modified versions of the Westminster Confession for Congregationalists and most Baptists—Presbyterians sought to maintain fellowship with them.

But problems developed. Methodist preachers were famous for preaching anti-Calvinist sermons, and often accused Presbyterians of all sorts of awful teachings. Some of their most popular hymns were overtly anti-Calvinistic, mocking the doctrine of predestination.⁸ How could Presbyterians maintain fellowship with a sister church that mocked them? Many Baptists refused to accept transfers from Presbyterian churches without rebaptizing people. How can two churches remain in fellowship without a

⁸Nathan O. Hatch provides some samples in The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 227 ff.

common recognition of each other's sacraments? Then the Anglo-Catholic movement hit the Episcopal church, and some Episcopalians (who had generally been closest to the Presbyterians in the early 19th century) started insisting that Presbyterian ministers were not validly ordained because they had not been ordained by a bishop.

2. The New "Conscience"

If the older understanding of catholicity maintained a tenuous existence in the early nineteenth century (experiencing gradual erosions from the middle of the seventeenth century), the concept of conscience had been undergoing a revolution of its own. "Conscience" referred to an understanding of the right of the individual to decide what he or she believes on any given subject. The nineteenth century saw conscience gradually become a more central symbol than catholicity in defining religion and morals, resulting in the inward and outward fragmentation of Anglo-American Protestantism.

The older understanding of catholicity did not deny the rights of conscience, so much as it gave a corporate context for the exercise of conscience. The Reformers affirmed the right of private judgment (insisting that human laws could not bind the conscience), but also insisted that human laws could indeed bind practice. The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, following a traditional medieval distinction, both affirmed and limited the rights of conscience:

Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the Traditions and Ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, (that others may fear to do the like,) as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth

the authority of the Magistrate, and woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren. (Article 34)

The Westminster Confession of Faith expanded the role of conscience, but retained clear boundaries for conscience as well:

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also. (20.2)

And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And, for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation), or to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the church. and by the power of the civil magistrate. (20.4)

Both the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Westminster Confession insist that while human laws (whether of the church or the state) do not bind the conscience, they do bind practice.⁹ In other words, they were trying to show people how to maintain a clear conscience within the context of a Reformed catholicity.

As liberty of conscience became more prominent, most still tried to retain a modified version of catholicity. In the midst of division and fragmentation, nineteenth-

⁹The Westminster Confession is adding further emphasis on the rights of conscience due to their conviction that the Church of England had gone too far in enforcing “human traditions” in the church.

century evangelicals frequently affirmed the catholicity of the visible church. But the definitions had changed. Now catholicity usually meant either 1) a lowest common denominator view of the church which would allow the broadest toleration of interpretation within a single denomination, or 2) fellowship across denominational lines while enforcing strict orthodoxy within the denomination. In either case, conscience trumped catholicity, and catholicity was redefined in terms of the assumption that the rights of conscience were paramount.

Some might suggest that this model fails to take into account the fact that the Americans had experienced denominationalism from the seventeenth century. But this is only true in places. After all, the several denominations that existed in America were simply transplants from Europe. Until the rise of the Disciples of Christ in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, no major denomination had originated in the new world.¹⁰ The Congregational establishment in New England retained the older concept of one church per region, and the very language of “dissenter” and “toleration” indicates that these separations were viewed as improper and temporary. Baptist Rhode Island and Quaker Pennsylvania were the two colonies to allow full liberty of conscience, which fits with the Baptist and Quaker rejection of the concept of catholicity in the seventeenth

¹⁰The Separate Baptists in New England reveal the extent to which the primacy of conscience had taken root in New England soil, but Baptists such as Isaac Backus were concerned to demonstrate their continuity with the English Baptist movement and the heritage of New England Puritanism—whereas the Disciples of Christ were proud of their break with tradition. See Backus, A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists 2 vols. (Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871); cf Hatch, Democratization 162 ff.

century.¹¹ But the dominant paradigm remained the older vision of the catholicity of the visible church.

It was only in 1789 that Presbyterians revised their Confession of Faith¹² to become the first Christian confession to make denominational pluralism an article of faith:

Civil magistrates may not. . . in the least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest. . . . And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance. (23.3)

¹¹The London Baptist Confession (1689), which was a revision of the Westminster Confession along Baptist lines, eliminated any reference to the catholicity of the visible church. It stated, “The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (26.1). With respect to the visible church, it simply stated that “All persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ according unto it, not destroying their own profession by any errors evverting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are and may be called visible saints; and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted” (26.2). They also revised the chapter on conscience, removing any reference to civil or church authority, stating only that “They who upon pretence of Christian liberty do practice any sin, or cherish any sinful lust, as they do thereby pervert the main design of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction, so they wholly destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of all our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our lives” (21.3). Presbyterians initially rejected this spiritualization of conscience. One could argue that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the political clash between Episcopal emphasis on catholicity and Baptist emphasis on conscience, with Congregationalists and Presbyterians attempting to maintain a middle ground (though increasingly moving in a Baptist direction).

¹²Formerly known as the Westminster Confession of Faith, after 1789 the formal title was The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, though it was still often popularly referred to as the “Westminster Confession.” The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1839).

This new section, added in 1789, had the effect of altering the meaning of the Confession's statement on the catholicity of the visible church (25.2-5), rendering the older concept of one church per region untenable. Prior to this revision, the magistrate was to suppress blasphemy and heresy, and to ensure that the worship of God was conducted in accordance with the Word of God (original Westminster Confession 23.3). But in 1789 American Presbyterians not only eliminated this section of the Confession, but also removed the clause in their Larger Catechism which condemned "tolerating a false religion" (question 109), thereby endorsing the principle of religious liberty.¹³

The changes in the wording of their confession paralleled developments in the discussion of conscience among moral philosophers. Samuel J. Cassells, principal of Chatham Academy in Georgia, explained that conscience was variously referred to as "the moral principle" or a faculty or power of the soul "by which it perceives the difference between right and wrong, approving the one and condemning the other."¹⁴ While objecting to the utilitarianism of Paley and Bentham, Cassells acknowledged that the conscience had become the driving force of modern moral philosophy. Most Old School Presbyterians still hoped to form the conscience according to a communal

¹³Presbyterians generally expected that Christianity would be the official religion of the United States (they did, after all specify that the magistrate should not prefer one denomination of Christians above another).

¹⁴S. J. Cassells, "Conscience--Its Nature, Office and Authority" Southern Presbyterian Review (SPR) 6.4 (April 1853) 454. Cf. J. La Placette, "Essays on the Conscience" Spirit of the XIXth Century (SXC) 2.2 (February, 1843).

norm—as exemplified by their regular endorsement of the shorter catechism as a tool in training children.¹⁵

Conscience’s ability to trump catholicity can be seen in the Disruption of the Free Church, where the spiritual independence of the church was considered a principle too sacred to compromise,¹⁶ as well as in the Baptist and Methodist schisms in the 1840s over slavery. While southerners eschewed the personal liberty laws of the north in the 1850s, Eugene Genovese has pointed out that they concurred with the “higher law” doctrine in principle—they admitted that if it was a matter of conscience, then the individual had no choice but to disobey the unacceptable law.¹⁷

While this distinction between catholicity and conscience is an explicitly theological one, the implications for politics and culture are significant. As had been the case for millennia, religious thought and political thought were intertwined. The shift from catholicity to conscience signaled a change in the symbolic world paralleled by the trends in political thought toward democratization, and in economics toward the individualism of the market. Indeed, while he does not refer to “catholicity” per se, Nathan Hatch’s whole argument in The Democratization of American Evangelicalism

¹⁵Practically every General Assembly commented on the importance of catechetical instruction in the annual “Narrative of the State of Religion,” e.g., Minutes (1840) 452. Newspapers also regularly encouraged this practice. Among literally hundreds of similar exhortations, see Watchman of the South 7:19 (October 19, 1843); Presbyterian 27.47 (November 20, 1858) 189.

¹⁶Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843-1874 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975) 38ff.

¹⁷Eugene 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) 83.

rests upon this movement from catholicity to conscience.¹⁸ Further, the idea of catholicity easily transferred into political discourse, and not surprisingly many Americans found it easier to discuss the catholicity in nationalistic terms.¹⁹

3. Catholicity, Conscience, and the Division of 1837

Old School Presbyterians lived in this new symbolic world. But more than most other mainline denominations, they retained a significant attachment to the older concept of catholicity. In an increasingly fragmented religious world, they clung to the older ideal in the hope that they could stave off the disintegration of their own tradition. But ironically, their conscientious stand for catholicity entailed the division of their church.

The actions and statements of Old School Presbyterians in the division of 1837 need to be read in the context of the sweeping changes occurring in the symbolic world of antebellum America. What did it mean to be one denomination among others? As American culture was becoming increasingly democratized and populist, did that mean that the churches would invariably follow? Or did their theological tradition provide a middle way that they could steer between the Scylla of High Church Episcopalianism and the Charybdis of Baptist populism.²⁰

¹⁸Hatch, Democratization 40-43.

¹⁹Ernst H. Kantorowicz has demonstrated that the transference of theological language from church to state is nothing new. See Kantorowicz's discussion of the transformation of the language of the church as "mystical body" to the secular state as "mystical body," in The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997/1957) 193-232.

²⁰The most thorough treatments of the division are Earl A. Pope, New England Calvinism and the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church (New York: Garland, 1987), and George M. Marsden, The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

A. Catholicity and the Plan of Union

In 1801, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America and the General Association of the State of Connecticut entered into a “Plan of Union” in order “to promote union and harmony in those new settlements which are composed of inhabitants from these bodies.”²¹ Settlers from the Congregational church of Connecticut and the Presbyterian church would work together in planting churches, and not allow minor differences in polity to result in the establishment of two different denominations in the same region. Since both bodies agreed in doctrine—except in ecclesiology—the plan arranged for Congregational ministers to pastor Presbyterian churches, and vice versa. Indeed, the plan succeeded beyond the expectations of its framers when in 1808 the Congregational Middle Association accepted an invitation from the Presbyterian Synod of Albany to become a presbytery within its bounds. Throughout the state of New York and the Western Reserve of Ohio, Congregationalists flocked to the Presbyterian churches until by the 1820s there were hardly any separate Congregational churches left west of New England. At least within the British Reformed world, catholicity had triumphed.

Or had it? Part of the older doctrine of catholicity included the idea that even rules of human invention should be followed (though they could not bind the conscience). And if they could not be followed, they should be changed in an orderly fashion—or else the dissenter should quietly submit. Rumors began to spread that the “presbygational” churches of New York and eastern Ohio were violating terms of the Presbyterian constitution. Even worse, doctrinal innovations from Yale College, in New Haven,

²¹Minutes (1801) 224.

Connecticut, regarding the nature of the atonement, original sin, and human ability seemed to find echoes in those portions of the church that stemmed from the Plan of Union. To top it off, Charles Finney's radical revivalism took these new doctrines and gave them a most unpleasant form in its "new measures" and perfectionist tendencies.²²

Simultaneously, questions began to be raised regarding the voluntary associations established to promote joint missions and education between the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians (including some Dutch Reformed and Associate Reformed churches). The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810), the American Education Society (1815), and the American Home Missionary Society (1826) had all been formed as joint endeavors among Reformed Christians in order to conduct the work of missions and ministerial training in a co-operative fashion. Their supporters claimed that these organizations were simply "the church in her organized and social capacity," and pointed to their immense success in spreading Presbyterianism throughout the West.²³ Catholicity was being defined as individual cooperation between Christians.²⁴

²²For Finney's revivals and the surrounding debates, see Whitney R. Cross, Burned Over District: Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950); Charles Hambrick-Stowe, Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Keith J. Hardman, Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987); and Glenn A. Hewitt, Regeneration and Morality: A Study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin, and Horace Bushnell (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1991).

²³The American Biblical Repository (1839) 479ff, quoted in Maurice W. Armstrong, et al, The Presbyterian Enterprise: Sources of American Presbyterian History (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956) 160-161.

²⁴The history of the evangelical united front is told by Charles I. Foster, An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960) and Charles C. Cole, Jr., The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1826-1860 (New York, 1954); Lois Wendland Banner, "The Protestant Crusade: Religious Missions, Benevolence, and Reform in the United States, 1790-1840," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1970). Banner argues that denominational mission boards prior to 1840 were unable to compete with the better structure and flexibility of the voluntary societies. She attributes the

But as New York and New England tended to support the “American” boards, the Presbyterian church also established agencies of the General Assembly in order to plant churches and oversee ministerial training. The General Assembly organized boards of Domestic Missions (1816–reorganized with greater powers in 1827) and Education (1819–likewise reorganized in 1829) in order to supervise missions and the education of ministers. Foreign missions, however, continued as a joint endeavor through the ABCFM, although the Synod of Pittsburgh (one of the strongest bastions of Scottish Presbyterianism in the United States) started the Western Foreign Missions Society in 1831, which quickly drew support from Old School synods in the south and west.

New School advocates claimed that the catholicity of the visible church was replaced by the Old School with a narrow sectarianism that focused on the institutional church. Indeed, this was the question: does the catholicity of the visible church simply mean unity among individual Christians in missionary and reform efforts across denominational boundaries (the New School vision)? Or does it mean cordial relations among denominations while each pursues its own missionary efforts in different regions (the Old School vision)?²⁵

Of course, to ask the question in this fashion is to reveal the fact that the older concept of the catholicity of the visible church was already dead. It was impossible for antebellum Presbyterians to affirm the older vision of the church, because they no longer

demise of the United Front to the denominational jealousy of the 1830s (350ff).

²⁵Foreign missions movements in the Reformed churches in the nineteenth century intentionally avoided sending missionaries to places already occupied by other Reformed churches. The goal was to establish only one church in each foreign region—indicating that a measure of catholicity was still operative.

believed in that older idea that each region should have only one church. The idea of “catholicity” had been redefined: the New School grounded the concept of catholicity in the invisible church (harmony between individual Christians), while the Old School emphasized the visible church (harmony between denominations).

B. Orthodoxy and Catholicity

The Plan of Union was intended as a means of furthering orthodoxy. But as New England’s orthodoxy was called into question, the Plan of Union became increasingly problematic. The center of the controversy swirled around the question of human ability. Did fallen, sinful human beings have the natural ability to do what God commanded or not? Would God condemn human beings for failing to do something that they could not do apart from his grace? The “New Divinity” rising in New England suggested modifications to traditional Calvinist language to say that while human beings had the natural ability to obey God, they lacked the moral ability on account of sin. This raised subsequent discussions regarding original sin, immediate versus mediate imputation of sin and righteousness, and a host of related issues.²⁶ For orthodox Calvinists, the New

²⁶The best book on Taylor is Douglas A. Sweeney, Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Sweeney has challenged the dominant tendency to view Taylor as the symbol of the decline of Edwardsian Calvinism, and calls him “a symbol of the vitality of Edwardsian Calvinism throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.” (4-5) And while Finney plainly attempted to popularize Taylor’s views, Taylor himself was not impressed (151). See also Joseph A. Conforti, Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism, the Congregational Ministry, and Reform in New England between the Great Awakenings (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1981); David W. Kling, A Field of Divine Wonders: The New Divinity and Village Revivals in Northwestern Connecticut, 1792–1822 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); and Mark Valeri, Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England: The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Allen C. Guelzo, Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989).

Englanders sounded as though they were moving closer and closer to the dreaded heresy of Pelagianism.²⁷

Concern regarding the orthodoxy of New England was voiced as early as 1798 when the Presbyterian General Assembly “reprimanded Hezekiah Balch” of Tennessee “for espousing the views of Samuel Hopkins.”²⁸ In 1817 the pastoral letter of the Synod of Philadelphia warned against the “heresy” of Hopkinsianism. The General Assembly, however, warned the Synod that such expressions were “offensive to other denominations” (especially Congregationalists), and might “introduce a spirit of jealousy and suspicion against ministers in good standing.”²⁹ Throughout the 1820s the concern over New England theology grew, and from 1829-1837, the Princeton Review remonstrated with its New England neighbors against their novel views.³⁰

If the New Divinity had remained a New England and New York phenomenon, most Presbyterians would have left it alone. But when the New School majority at the

²⁷Referring to the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius regarding sin and grace. See Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

²⁸James H. Moorhead, “The ‘Restless Spirit of Radicalism’: Old School Fears and the Schism of 1837,” JPH 78:1 (Spring 2000) 23.

²⁹Minutes (1817) 653-655, quoted in Samuel J. Baird, A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856) 646.

³⁰Among the doctrinal essays combating New England in the Princeton Review were Archibald Alexander, “The Early History of Pelagianism,” 2.1 (January 1830); Alexander, “The Doctrine of Original Sin as Held by the Church, Both Before and After the Reformation,” 2.4 (October 1830); Alexander, “An Inquiry into that Inability under which the Sinner Labours,” 3.3 (July 1831); Charles Hodge, “Review of an Article in the June number of the Christian Spectator, entitled, ‘Inquiries respecting the Doctrine of Imputation,’” 2.3 (July 1830); Hodge, “The New Divinity Tried,” 4.2 (April 1832); Hodge, “A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. . . by Moses Stuart,” 5.3 (July 1833); Hodge, “Barnes on Romans,” 7.2 (April 1835); John S. Hart, “On the Extent of the Atonement,” 7.4 (October 1835); Albert B. Dod, “Views in Theology, by Lyman Beecher,” 9.2-3 (April-July, 1837).

1831 General Assembly suggested bringing the Presbyterian Boards of Education and Missions under the interdenominational AES and AHMS, a number of Philadelphia ministers and elders wrote a circular letter to like-minded Presbyterians urging the claims of immediate action. The danger, in their minds, was that the institutions of the church would be “perverted from the intention of their orthodox founders,” and that the doctrines of the church’s confession would be overrun.³¹ If the American Home Mission Society began sending out heretics, the Presbyterian Church could not stop them. The AHMS was providing a significant amount of funding for the Plan of Union synods in New York and the Western Reserve of Ohio—as well as those further down the Ohio River in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and Illinois. If New England trained and funded ministers took over the west, then what would become of the Presbyterian Church?

And to make matters worse, the Plan of Union synods were already making it clear that they had no intention of following Presbyterian church order. Hundreds of “presbygational churches” followed congregational practices while retaining their membership in the Presbyterian church. In such churches lay committees took over the functions of ruling elders, allowing men who had never agreed to Presbyterian doctrine and church order to govern Presbyterian churches. In 1833 the General Assembly

³¹Circular Letter (July 31, 1831) in William Warren Sweet, ed., Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840: Vol II. The Presbyterians (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1936) 829. The signers were ministers Ashbel Green, former president of the College of New Jersey, and editor of the Christian Advocate, George C. Potts, Samuel G. Winchester, and William M. Engles, pastors of the Fourth, Sixth, and Seventh Presbyterian Churches of Philadelphia, respectively, and ruling elders Matthew L. Bevan, Solomon Allen, and Furman Leaming.

admonished the Western Reserve Synod for declaring that ruling elders were not essential to the existence of the Presbyterian Church.³²

One of the first projects of the Old School was to establish periodicals that would defend traditional orthodoxy against the tide of New England theology and practice.

³²Baird, A Collection, 40, citing Minutes (1833) 489.

Old School Periodicals				
<u>Founded</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Editor</u>	<u>Seminary</u>	<u>Birthplace</u>
Weekly				
1829	<u>Pittsburgh Christian Herald</u>	Rev. Thomas D. Baird	M Waddell 1812	Ireland
1831	<u>The Standard</u> (Cincinnati)	Rev. John Burt	PTS 1823	Scotland
1831	<u>Presbyterian</u> (Philadelphia)	Rev. William M. Engles	Covenanter 1818	PA
1835	<u>So. Christian Herald</u> (Cheraw, SC)	Rev. R. S. Gladney	private 1830s	SC
Monthly				
1835	<u>Baltimore Lit & Religious Magazine</u>	Rev. R. J. Breckinridge	PTS 1832	KY
1835	<u>Western Protestant</u> (Bardstown, KY)	Rev. Nathan L. Rice	PTS 1832	KY
New School Periodicals				
Weekly				
	<u>Cincinnati Journal</u>			
	<u>Ohio Observer</u> (Western Reserve)			
	<u>New York Evangelist</u>			
1825	<u>Philadelphian</u>	Rev. Ezra Styles Ely		
Neutral Periodicals				
Weekly				
1822	<u>Southern Religious Telegraph</u> (VA)	Rev. Amasa Converse	PTS 1826	
1823	<u>New York Observer</u>	Sidney E. Morse		
1827	<u>Charleston Observer</u> (SC)	Rev. Benj. Gildersleeve	PTS 1818	CT
1835	<u>American Pbn</u> (Nashville)	Rev. John T. Edgar	PTS 1816	DE
Quarterly				
1829	<u>Biblical Repertory & Princeton Review</u>	Rev. Charles Hodge	PTS 1819	PA

Figure 1.1. Presbyterian Periodicals in 1835

The New School and the moderates originally controlled most of the Presbyterian press. The Cincinnati Journal, the Ohio Observer and the Philadelphian, were overtly New School, while the New York Observer and the Southern Religious Telegraph professed to be neutral, but had plain New School sympathies. The Princeton Review was notoriously moderate in its tone, as Joshua L. Wilson of Cincinnati said derisively of Samuel Miller and the Princeton professors: “They are broken reeds which will pierce the hand that rests on them for support.”³³ So in 1831 Old School papers were started in Cincinnati and Philadelphia with the urging of Joshua L. Wilson and Ashbel Green, respectively. The Southern Christian Herald followed in the South Carolina backcountry in 1835, due to perceptions that the New England-born Benjamin Gildersleeve was too moderate in his Charleston Observer.³⁴ These three papers were fiercely partisan in their Old School rhetoric. In contrast the American Presbyterian of Nashville, Tennessee was also started

³³Wilson to R. J. Breckinridge (February 12, 1834) in William Warren Sweet, ed., Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840: Vol II. The Presbyterians (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1936) 739.

³⁴Southern Christian Herald (SCH) 2.48 (February 17, 1836). The editor, R. S. Gladney, noted that Old School papers (the Standard, the Presbyterian, and the Pittsburg Herald) were “fewer in number and less extensive in circulation” than the New School papers (he included the Southern Religious Telegraph and the New York Observer as being generally sympathetic to the New School). See also Editorial, SCH 3.16 (July 15, 1836) 63. The irony was that just as the Southern Christian Herald began to publish, Gildersleeve was becoming convinced of the Old School arguments. By the end of 1835, the Charleston Observer was firmly supporting the Old School, though Gildersleeve continued to allow free debate in the paper. The Cheraw newspaper never was able to gain a sufficient subscription to maintain an editor and folded into the Watchman of the South in 1839. It did have the distinction of being the only Old School newspaper openly edited by a ruling elder (M. MacLean of Cheraw who took over in 1837 and edited the paper until its demise in 1839). MacLean’s unique status was an object of minor controversy when the Rev. Amasa Converse (editor of the Southern Religious Telegraph) took MacLean to task for rebuking ministers. MacLean replied: “We are surely rising in the world and our importance magnifying, ‘layman’ as we are. . . . The editor of the Telegraph is greatly shocked that a mere ‘layman’ like our humble self should presume to ‘turn out a Rebuker of’ ministers like him. . . . Let himself then, who is no layman turn Reformer and bring the mighty influence of his paper to bear on the church until he shall procure from it ‘A BULL’ to exclude from the hands of laymen the Bible, or at least all religious papers not authorized by the *sign manual* of Arch Bishop Peters at the North, or Dr. Beecher at the West, or his *Reverendship* of the Telegraph at the South.” SCH 4.2 (April 7, 1837) 7.

in 1835, but on a more irenic platform. Its editor, John T. Edgar, was firmly committed to Presbyterian orthodoxy, but hoped to accomplish Old School goals through more moderate means.³⁵

Under its founding editor, John Burt, the Presbyterian quickly established itself as the leading voice of the Old School. By March of 1832, it had started using the labels “Old School” and “New School” to describe the two groups in the church: “The Old School feel a cordial and firm attachment to the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Church, as exhibiting a correct and lucid view of the doctrines of the Scriptures,” and also defended Presbyterian government. “Whereas the New School think lightly, and sometimes speak lightly, of our Standards, and manifest a disposition to loose themselves from their obligation to teach and preach according to them.”³⁶

For just over a year (from November 28, 1832 to January 2, 1834) the paper came under the editorial control of James W. Alexander, son of Archibald Alexander of Princeton Seminary. During his tenure the paper moved in a somewhat more moderate direction, publishing Samuel Miller’s “Letters to Presbyterians, on the Present Crisis in

³⁵American Presbyterian 1.1 (January 8, 1835). The paper was founded “under the patronage and control of the Synod of West Tennessee,” and promised to deal with other denominations, with “the spirit of forbearance, charity and catholicism which the gospel enjoins.” Further, it would seek to heal the divisions in the church. The paper published essays from both Samuel Miller and Charles Finney and while Edgar thoroughly repudiated Finney’s Lectures on Revival, he added a postscript that his views were “not the expression of the sentiments of the entire Editorial corps.” editorial, American Presbyterian 1.21 (May 28, 1835) 83. The West Tennessee Synod would remain one of the centers of moderate opinion until 1837.

³⁶J. G., “A Query,” Presbyterian 2.7 (March 28, 1832) 26. This is the first reference to “Old School” and “New School” that I have found (while I have not conducted a thorough search—it is clear that in 1831 the terms are not used in editorials, whereas in 1832 they are used regularly).

the Presbyterian Church in the United States,” in an attempt to use the history of the Presbyterian church as an argument for peace and union, not division.³⁷

Upon Alexander’s departure, the Rev. William M. Engles embarked on his 33 year tenure as editor of the Old School’s flagship newspaper. Pronouncedly Old School in his views, he nonetheless rejected the division of the church as a goal. In reply to “A Layman of the New School” who suggested amicable division in 1835, Engles replied: “Our aim has been its reform, and return to the well established principles of Presbyterianism. If division should result, the fault will not rest with those, who have uniformly adhered to Presbyterian doctrine and government.” Recognizing that he might well end up in the minority, he concluded that “If we shall fail in our attempt, and as a reward be forcibly ejected, we trust we have so far counted the cost as to take ‘the spoiling of our goods joyfully,’ for Christ’s sake.”³⁸

But Engles was confident that if the whole church could only hear what the radical New Schoolers were saying, they would rally behind the Old School banner. Therefore he often published the most extreme articles from the New School papers, such as an article in the Ohio Observer, written by a New School Presbyterian from the Western Reserve Synod, which argued that the Presbyterian church should completely alter its confession. “The symbols of the Presbyterian Church have in effect been changed by the license which is now allowed in explaining their meaning. . . . But would it not be better

³⁷Samuel Miller “Letters to Presbyterians, on the Present Crisis in the Presbyterian Church in the United States,” Presbyterian 3.3 (January 16, 1833) - 3.19 (May 8, 1833).

³⁸A Layman of the New School, “Division of the Church,” Presbyterian 5.21 (May 21, 1835) 83.

that the Church should alter and expunge, until they have formed a creed in which all the followers of the Lord Jesus can unite.” While disagreeing with that desire, Engles could not but endorse the next sentence—which made his point better than he could say it himself: “There is danger moreover that those who are in the habit of straining and torturing language for the sake of expressing different sentiments by the same formula, will do the same with the Bible, and make it a nose of wax to be moulded into any shape which will suit the interpreter.”³⁹

But while the Old School sought to convince the moderates of the immediate dangers, they could not allow what they considered grave errors to continue unchecked. Since Old School Presbyterians were convinced that the New England doctrines departed significantly from the church’s Confession, they charged some of the New School leaders with heresy in the church courts.

Accused	Presbytery	Occasion for charge	Verdict of Highest Court
Albert Barnes	Phila., 1830	<u>The Way of Salvation</u>	“unguarded” not heretical (Gen. Assembly)
George Duffield	Carlisle, 1832	<u>Regeneration</u>	guilty--warned (Synod)
Edward Beecher	Illinois, 1833	President, Illinois College	not at variance with Confession (Synod)
J. M. Sturdevant	Illinois, 1833	Professor, Illinois College	not at variance with Confession (Synod)
William Kirby	Illinois, 1833	Professor, Illinois College	not at variance with Confession (Synod)
Lyman Beecher	Cincinnati, 1835	Professor, Lane Seminary	requested to publish explanations (Synod)
Albert Barnes	Phila. 2d, 1836	<u>Notes on Romans</u>	not guilty (General Assembly)

Figure 1.2. Heresy Trials of the 1830s

There was no attempt to go after every “heretic.” Instead Old School Presbyterians targeted the leaders. The idea was that those who were not influential were not seen as a threat. Here we see an assumption of the older idea of catholicity and conscience: if the church draws a clear boundary in the case of an influential heretic, those who may

³⁹Editorial, “The Secret Out,” Presbyterian 5.24 (June 11, 1835) 95.

sympathize with his views will feel constrained to bring their practice into line with the common conscience of the church. They saw no need to prosecute every one with erroneous doctrine. The issue was the general direction of the church—isolated exceptions were not a problem so long as they did not stir up controversy. Hence the targets of heresy charges were invariably either professors or pastors who published their views.⁴⁰

And even though the trials usually ended in acquittal, not all of the Old School was discouraged. The New School was being forced to think carefully about how it stated Christian doctrine. An article in R. J. Breckinridge's Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine hoped that the 1836 General Assembly would sustain the Synod of Philadelphia in its condemnation of Barnes, but did not insist that Barnes himself be censured, so long as the truth was clearly vindicated. "If the Assembly clearly and firmly denounces error, let us not care too much for personal results. If Mr. Barnes is content to *escape*; there is no very great importance in preventing it. It may be on the whole, the best thing that could happen--that error should become ridiculous [sic], instead of being seriously punished."⁴¹ Even after the Assembly cleared Barnes, Charles Hodge commented that the New School seemed more and more eager to prove their orthodoxy: "We think there is truth as well as humour in the remark attributed to good old Dr.

⁴⁰Of course, the problem was that these older notions of catholicity and conscience were dissipating in the nineteenth century, and ministers and laity increasingly found themselves bound by conscience to dissent from the decisions of the church—regardless of the consequences for the church or for themselves.

⁴¹"The Case of Rev. Albert Barnes, of the Philadelphia Synod," Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine (BLRM) 2.2 (February, 1836) 57.

Wilson of Cincinnati, that ‘if we have a few more prosecutions, the new-school men will become more orthodox than the strictest of us.’”⁴²

Nonetheless, the failure of the General Assembly to convict New School men of heresy frustrated the leaders of the Old School. They read the doctrines coming out of New England, and *knew* that these doctrines were heresy, but it was difficult to find an unequivocal statement of those views in the Presbyterian Church—and when they thought that Barnes or Beecher had crossed the line, the alleged heretic quickly disavowed any heretical intention and nimbly hopped back into the orthodox camp. Meanwhile, the practical effects of those doctrinal positions were gaining ground. The AMHS was still sending hundreds of ministers into the Presbyterian synods in the west, and the mixed presbygationalism of western New York and eastern Ohio suggested that if the orthodox were not careful, the whole Presbyterian Church could be overwhelmed by the New School. So far, even when the New School had a majority, they had politely voted Old School men to fill vacancies in the General Assembly’s Boards—but if they took control of the Board of Domestic Missions, they could effectively make it an auxiliary to the AHMS. And what of the seminaries at Princeton and Allegheny? If New School men controlled the home missions and ministerial training of the church, then it was only a matter of time, they feared, before the historic Presbyterian tradition would be swept away.

The third agent of Old School reform consisted of a joint declaration circulated throughout the churches. In 1834 a group of Old School ministers and elders, led by

⁴²[Charles Hodge], “The General Assembly of 1836,” BRPR 8.3 (July 1836) 464.

Robert J. Breckinridge, drew up the Act and Testimony, a declaration of principle that called the Presbyterian Church to renounce the encroaching errors of the New School and return to historic Presbyterian doctrine and practice. The document was published by William M. Engles, the editor of the Presbyterian, in early 1835, with the signatures of 359 ministers and 1,704 ruling elders, and the imprimatur of the synods of Philadelphia, Mississippi & South Alabama, South Carolina, Pittsburgh, and Kentucky, along with the presbyteries of Newton (NJ), Madison (IN), Indianapolis (IN), Oxford (OH), Bedford (NY), Lancaster (OH), Miami (OH), Concord (NC), Richland (OH), and Kaskaskia (IL)—along with several presbyteries within the bounds of the aforementioned synods. Some have argued that southern support for the Old School was late in coming, and that it was only the issue of slavery that swung them into the Old School camp.⁴³ This support for the narrowly doctrinal “Act and Testimony” demonstrates that even by 1834—before the main slavery agitation of 1835-1836—the Old School had broad support throughout the South.

⁴³David B. Chesebrough, Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996) 3-4; Donald G. Mathews, Religion in the Old South (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) 164.

<u>Synod</u>	<u>Ministerial Signers</u>	<u>% of Ministers</u>	<u>Elders</u>	<u>Licentiates</u>
Albany	1	1%	17	
Utica	0	0%	0	
Geneva	0	0%	1	
Genessee	2	1%	5	
New York	12	9%	39	
New Jersey	19	13%	77	1
Philadelphia	84	46%	403	5
Pittsburgh:	82	62%	449	
Western Reserve	0	0%	0	
Michigan	0	0%	1	
Ohio	10	14%	61	1
Cincinnati	23	28%	103	1
Indiana	15	27%	50	
Illinois	6	12%	34	
Missouri	1	4%	4	
Kentucky	16	23%	80	1
Virginia	5	5%	4	
North Carolina	20	31%	73	1
Tennessee	2	4%	10	
West Tennessee	4	8%	21	
South Carolina & Georgia	4	4%	18	
Mississippi & S Alabama	13	23%	11	
	<u>359</u>	<u>18%</u>	<u>1,704</u>	<u>12</u>
Source: <u>Act and Testimony</u> 13-28				

Figure 1.3. Signers of the Act and Testimony by Synod, 1835

While Philadelphia and Pittsburgh were the main repositories of Old School strength, the synods of Cincinnati, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina and Mississippi & Southern Alabama all had between 23-31% of their ministers sign the “Act and Testimony.”⁴⁴ Nonetheless, while some southern synods quickly signed on to the “Act

⁴⁴The list of signatures comes from The Act and Testimony of the Minority of the General Assembly (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1835) 13-28. Since there are no records of the number of ruling elders at the time, it is impossible to reconstruct the percentages of elders. Obviously the sample is weighted towards those presbyteries and synods that had formally acted upon it—others had to take the initiative to send their signature to Engles. Apparently the Synod of South Carolina & Georgia did not communicate which ministers and elders had voted for it, so the tally for that synod depended upon individual signatures.



Figure 1.4. Map of Synods supporting the “Act and Testimony,” 1835 (with significant minorities in the Synods of Indiana and Cincinnati)

and Testimony,” indicating their support for the Old School’s doctrinal stance, others were reluctant to support radical measures which might divide the church.⁴⁵

An even more important question for the Old School was not whether they could rely upon the South, but such borderline synods as New York, Albany, New Jersey, and Virginia. Princeton’s moderate position carried great weight in all these regions, since

⁴⁵Benjamin Gildersleeve, who edited the *Charleston Observer* in South Carolina during the Old School/New School controversy, claimed that initially the majority of the Deep South was opposed to the reforming measures of the Old School, but that his principle of encouraging free discussion had helped persuade the southern synods to support the Old School in the end. Gildersleeve, “The Banner’s Correspondent” *W&O* 10.37 (April 19, 1855) 140. Recall, of course, that Gildersleeve’s circle was in Charleston, South Carolina—not exactly a typical town in the south.

Virginia's ear was turned to Archibald Alexander, and the northeastern synods were the largest financial supporters of Princeton. If they could convince Princeton and the upper South of the need for immediate action, the Old School could gain the necessary majority.⁴⁶

The "Act and Testimony" insisted that since the General Assembly had refused to testify against the errors of the New School, the only remaining appeal was to Christ and to the ministers, elders and members of the church, in an attempt to convince the moderates to act. By adopting the "Act and Testimony" the signatories pledged themselves to "endeavour to exclude from her [the church's] communion those who disturb her peace, corrupt her testimony, and subvert her established forms."⁴⁷ This appeal from the Assembly to the whole church was an exercise in opposites: they were conscience-bound to try to exclude the New School, in order to further an Old School style of catholicity.

The authors of the "Act and Testimony" claimed that the New School sought to interpret "the doctrines of our standards in a sense different from the general sense of the Church for years past." The Old School insisted that this was dishonest, and averred that "they who adopt our standards, are bound by candour and the simplest integrity, to hold them in their obvious, accepted sense."⁴⁸ The Old School did not appeal to a supposed

⁴⁶As an indication of opinion in the deep south, the Presbytery of Georgia rejected a Rev. Magill from New Haven West Association for Taylorism in 1835 when he openly admitted that he did not agree with the Confession of Faith. See CO 9.19 (May 9, 1835). The SCH (September 1, 1837) 90, documents the progress of southern support for the Old School.

⁴⁷Act and Testimony, 6.

⁴⁸Act and Testimony, 6.

“original intent” of the Confession, but to the mind of the church—the “general sense of the Church for years past.” Many New England trained ministers seemed to be saying that they agreed with the Confession, but then taught things that to the Scottish-minded Old School sounded like a direct contradiction of what the church had understood the Confession to say.⁴⁹

Breckinridge was concerned to accurately depict the New England errors (especially since the General Assembly of 1834 had refused to condemn the list of errors presented by the Rev. Samuel C. Jennings of the Presbytery of Ohio—pastor of the Sharon and Mt. Pisgah churches near Pittsburgh), so he went to Princeton to confer with Charles Hodge, professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature at Princeton Seminary, and one of the leaders of the moderate party. Breckinridge hoped to persuade Hodge to sign the Act and Testimony, or at least help draw up the doctrinal errors that the General Assembly should condemn. Hodge believed that the Act and Testimony was the wrong approach, but agreed to help rewrite the specifications of error in order to reduce the misrepresentation which he believed had hampered the Old School cause. The resulting specification of errors consisted of a simple statement of seven errors:

1. “That we have no more to do with the first sin of Adam than with the sins of any other parent.”
2. “That there is no such thing as original sin: that infants come into the world as perfectly free from corruption of nature as Adam was when he was created: that by original sin nothing more is meant than the fact that

⁴⁹Of course, New School men replied by arguing that the Old School were too limited in their claim of what the “accepted sense” of the church had been. Charles Hodge would later set forth the common Old School understanding of the *animus imponentis* (the mind of the imposing body) with respect to the church’s ordination vows. Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” BRPR 30.4 (October 1858) 668-691.

all the posterity of Adam, though born entirely free from moral defilement, will always begin to sin when they begin to exercise moral agency, and that this fact is some how connected with the fall of Adam.”

3. “That the doctrine of imputed sin and imputed righteousness is a novelty, and is nonsense.”

4. “That the impenitent sinner is by nature, and independently of the aid of the Holy Spirit in full possession of all the powers necessary to a compliance with the commands of God: and that if he laboured under any kind of inability, natural or moral, which he could not remove himself, he would be excusable for not complying with God’s will.”

5. “That man’s regeneration is his own act; that it consists merely in the change of our governing purpose, which change we must ourselves produce.”

6. “That God cannot exert such an influence on the minds of men as shall make it certain that they will choose and act in a particular manner without destroying their moral agency; and that, in a moral system, God could not prevent the existence of sin, or the present amount of sin, however much he might desire it.”

7. “That Christ’s sufferings were not truly and properly vicarious.”⁵⁰

This list of errors quite closely parallels the battles that Princeton Seminary was fighting against the New England theology, and expresses the Princetonian perception of Nathaniel William Taylor and Charles Finney. It is not at all clear, however, that any Presbyterian had yet fully embraced these views. Barnes and Beecher had an affinity for some of these, but usually stopped short of outright affirmation of these tenets. The professors at Princeton, Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, and Charles Hodge, agreed with these specifications of errors, but refused to sign the Act and Testimony in 1835

⁵⁰ Act and Testimony, 7-8.

because they did not think that the problems in the church would be best solved by division.

The Old School, however, was getting tired of the New School's propensity for dancing on the edge, and believed that their "unguarded" statements revealed their true theology. The signers of the "Act and Testimony" were convinced that these doctrinal dalliances were agitating and dividing the church. Both discipline and church order were affected. "Mutual confidence is weakened; respect for the supreme judicatory of our church is impaired. . . [and] the ordinary course of discipline, arrested by compromises, in which the truth is always loser, and perverted by organized combinations [by which they especially meant the American Education Society and the American Home Missions Society], to personal, selfish and party ends, ceases altogether, and leaves every one to do what seems good in his own eyes."⁵¹ The effect upon church order was no less serious. While agreeing that the details of the constitution of the church were second-order matters, Breckinridge and his fellows argued that

not only for its own sake, do we love the constitution of our Church, as a model of all free institutions, and as a clear and noble exhibition of the soundest principles of civil and religious liberty; not only do we venerate its peculiarities, because they exhibit the rules by which God intends the affairs of His Church on earth to be conducted; but we cling to its venerable ramparts, because they afford a sure defence for those precious, though despised doctrines of grace, the pure transmission of which has been entrusted as a sacred duty to the church.⁵²

⁵¹Act and Testimony, 8-9.

⁵²Act and Testimony, 10.

It was not simply that Presbyterian church order was biblical; also important was its role in providing a model for civil and religious liberty.⁵³ The Act and Testimony concluded with a commitment to work within the church to eliminate these doctrinal heresies and their effects on the discipline and government of the church. “If the majority of our church are against us, they will, we suppose, in the end, either see the infatuation of their course, and retrace their steps, or they will, at last, attempt to cut us off.”⁵⁴ But until that day, they pledged to work towards the reformation of the church.

For those with hope for such reform, the General Assembly of 1836 was a devastating blow. The General Assembly of 1835 had agreed to transfer the Western Foreign Mission Society to the oversight of the General Assembly, which would create a Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. But the 1836 Assembly refused, by a vote of 106-110, to accept the transfer. Old School men objected that the ‘35 GA had already decided the question and set the terms for the transfer. The New School majority, led by Absalom Peters and Thomas Skinner, replied that the decision had been made by a rump of the 1835 GA, and that “we think it unreasonable for them to ask us to form. . . by a vote of the General Assembly, an organization, the principles of which we do not approve.”⁵⁵ If Old School men wished to continue synodical foreign missions, that was their prerogative, but the New School wanted no part of that for themselves. Fearing that

⁵³This claim will find echoes throughout the debates of the Old School. This twofold connection with civil order and with orthodoxy remains central for decades, and any attempt to weaken either one was resisted with gusto.

⁵⁴Act and Testimony, 12.

⁵⁵Minutes (1836) 292.

a denominational board would serve only Old School interests, they insisted that foreign missions (along with domestic missions and other benevolent action) was best conducted “by uniting with Christians of other denominations” as “the collective body of Christ’s disciples.”⁵⁶ A denominational board would be sectarian, and not truly catholic.⁵⁷ The Old School, in reply, insisted that there was no such thing as “generic Christianity,” and that true catholicity could only be found as each denomination remained true to its own principles.⁵⁸ Catholicity could no longer be conducted through united regional churches, so the Old School redefined it as fellowship between denominations, while the New School tried to maintain some semblance of regional unity—but only through individual Christians.

Also in 1836 the General Assembly overturned the verdict of the Synod of Philadelphia, which had found Albert Barnes guilty of heresy in his Notes on Romans. The GA voted 134-96 (with six abstentions) to clear Barnes’ Notes, and by an even more resounding vote of 145-78 (11 abstentions) lifted the suspension imposed by the Synod. After having voted with the majority to acquit Barnes, Samuel Miller moved that the Assembly state that Barnes had

published opinions, materially at variance with the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, and with the word of God; especially with regard to original sin, the relation of man to Adam, and justification by faith, in the atoning sacrifice and righteousness of the Redeemer. The Assembly consider the manner in which Mr. Barnes has controverted the language and doctrine of our public standards, as highly reprehensible, and as

⁵⁶Minutes (1836) 292.

⁵⁷“The General Assembly of 1836” BRPR 8.3 (July 1836) 420.

⁵⁸“The General Assembly of 1836” BRPR 8.3 (July 1836) 425-439.

adapted to pervert the minds of the rising generation from the simplicity and purity of the Gospel plan.⁵⁹

In other words, Miller did not wish to remove Barnes from the ministry, but hoped that a stern admonition would suffice. Therefore he urged that the Assembly exhort Barnes to further edit his work to bring it into conformity with the biblical and confessional teaching of the church. But having found Barnes to be innocent, the Assembly was not about to reverse its position. The motion was defeated 109-122 (three abstentions).⁶⁰ The New School majority was determined to vindicate Barnes, and refused to countenance even a slap on the wrist.

_____ *C. The Role of Slavery in 1836*

Most historians in the middle decades of the twentieth century sided with C. Bruce Staiger's claim that the division of the church was the result of a covert deal between the south and northern conservatives to get rid of the supposedly abolitionist

⁵⁹Minutes (1836) 268-270.

⁶⁰Minutes (1836) 268-270. Only Samuel Miller and a dozen moderates (the largest shifts being three each from New Jersey and Virginia) moved from the pro-Barnes to the anti-Barnes camp in this vote, which otherwise conformed to the previous ones.

New York synods.⁶¹ But George M. Marsden, John R. McKivigan, and James Moorhead have shown that slavery must be seen as more of a background issue.⁶²

Prior to the Barnes' trial the Assembly had debated whether or not to respond to a number of memorials on slavery. After some discussion, the matter was referred to a committee chaired by John McElhenny of Lexington Presbytery (pastor at Lewisburg, VA). Immediately after concluding the Barnes' trial, the Assembly returned to the discussion of slavery. McElhenny reported the committee's recommendation that

“Whereas the subject of Slavery is inseparably connected with the laws of many States of this Union, in which it exists under the sanction of said laws, and of the Constitution of the United States; and whereas Slavery is recognised in both the Old and New Testament as an existing relation, and is not condemned by the authority of God, therefore, Resolved, That the General Assembly have no authority to assume or exercise jurisdiction in regard to the existence of Slavery.”⁶³

⁶¹C. Bruce Staiger, “Abolitionism and the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-1838,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review 36 (December 1949) 391-414. This was the dominant view in the middle decades of the twentieth century, accepted by Louis Filler, The Crusade against Slavery, 1830-1860 (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) 185-186; Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1980/1957) 185-186; Donald G. Mathews, Religion in the Old South (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977) 163-164.

⁶²George M. Marsden, The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 59–87; James H. Moorhead, “The ‘Restless Spirit of Radicalism’: Old School Fears and the Schism of 1837,” JPH 78:1 (Spring 2000) 19-34. See also Earl A. Pope, New England Calvinism and the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church (New York: Garland, 1987), 5–30. Chris Padgett has shown that even the most liberal Synod—the Western Reserve Synod—was divided over abolition. Chris Padgett, “Evangelicals Divided: Abolition and the Plan of Union’s Demise in Ohio’s Western Reserve,” Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery, John R. McKivigan & Mitchell Snay, eds. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) 249-272. Also see Victor B. Howard, Conscience and Slavery: The Evangelistic Calvinist Domestic Mission, 1837-1861 (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1990) chapter 2.

⁶³Minutes, 1836, 271. The Charleston Observer reported that a small group of ministers had declared that they would withdraw from the Assembly rather than debate slavery [CO 10.18 (Ap 30, 1836)], but also noted that a larger group of commissioners determined simply to protest. [CO 10.24 (June 11, 1836).]

This did not sit well with those among the New School who were intent on moving the Presbyterian church toward an abolitionist position. But the conservatives (both north and south) won the day. The following day, the Rev. James Hoge of Columbus Presbytery (pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Columbus, OH)—who had left the South as a young man due to his opposition to slavery, recommended that since church judicatories do not have the right to bind consciences with pronouncements based on their own authority, and since time was growing short, the whole subject of slavery should be indefinitely postponed. The question of indefinite postponement passed 154-87. Unfortunately, no division was called for on the preamble—the question of binding consciences—but nine members of the Assembly protested against its adoption.

	Barnes' Appeal	Barnes' Restoration	Miller's Wrist-slap (to defeat)	Postpone Slavery
By synod:				
Missouri:	4-0	4-0	4-0	3-2
Kentucky:	2-7	2-6	1-8	6-3
Virginia	6-4	8-2	3-8	0-11
North Carolina	0-6	3-4	0-8	1-7
Tennessee	10-0	10-0	10-0	10-0
West Tennessee	5-3	5-2	5-3	4-4
South Carolina/Georgia	0-9	2-8	0-9	0-6
Mississippi/South Alabama	1-7	2-4	1-7	1-7
<u>Southern synods:</u>	<u>28-36</u>	<u>36-26</u>	<u>24-43</u>	<u>25-40</u>
<u>"Plan of Union" Synods</u>	<u>55-1</u>			<u>22-22</u>
<u>Other Northern</u>	<u>51-59</u>			<u>91-20</u>
<u>Synod of Philadelphia</u>	<u>(Not allowed to vote)</u>			<u>16-5</u>
<u>Overall vote:</u>	<u>134-96</u>	<u>145-78</u>	<u>122-109</u>	<u>154-87</u>

Figure 1.5. Southern Votes in the 1836 General Assembly

Figure 1.5 makes it clear that one cannot lump the whole south together. Outside of Missouri, Tennessee and Virginia (border states where the New School had some influence), only three out of thirty-one southerners voted to sustain Barnes' appeal. The

deep south was firmly in the Old School corner. But the whole south was divided as to whether they wanted the Assembly to speak on the slavery question. Nearly two-thirds (40-25) wanted resolution on the subject--and only those from the border states wanted to postpone discussion indefinitely. In 1836 it was the southern New School men who wanted to postpone discussion of slavery, and the southern Old School who wanted resolution. Therefore the indefinite postponement of the slavery question in 1836 must be seen as an attempt to hold the church together by northern conservatives *both* in the Old School and in the New School against the radicals on both sides: abolitionists (largely in the "Plan of Union" synods) and the advocates of slavery (both in the southern Old School and the southern New School).⁶⁴

While the correlation between slavery and the Barnes case is weak, the Barnes case and the foreign missions question are closely linked. Every single one of those who opposed Barnes voted to transfer the Western Foreign Missionary Society to the oversight of the General Assembly, and only eight of those who sustained Barnes' appeal switched ranks and voted for the transfer (including Samuel Miller and four others from New

⁶⁴Those who voted to deny Barnes' appeal voted 59-30 to indefinitely postpone the slavery question. Those who voted to sustain Barnes' appeal, voted 74-47 to indefinitely postpone the slavery question. This is partly due to the fact that the two groups that wanted resolution on the slavery question were the extremists on both sides. Of the 47 "New School" votes against postponement, 32 came from those presbyteries that were excised in 1837 (and another 10 came from parts of Missouri, Tennessee and Virginia that had a significant New School presence), while of the 30 "Old School" postponement votes, 23 came from the slaveholding states. In other words, of the 31 southerners who voted against Barnes, only eight voted for the indefinite postponement of the slavery question (another three from South Carolina--Rev. John LeRoy Davies, ruling elder Thomas L. Dunlap, M.D. [friend and correspondent of J. H. Thornwell], and Rev. Samuel S. Davis of Hopewell Presbytery--declined to vote on the grounds that the question itself was inappropriate for the church to consider). On the other hand, those northerners that voted for Barnes voted 58-37 to postpone the slavery question. The Old School northwest voted 26-8 to postpone, while the Old School northeast voted 19-1.

Jersey). In 1836 most Presbyterians saw the question of slavery as a separate issue from the questions of doctrine and church order.

But not all. Some in South Carolina urged a geographical division between North and South. Before the Assembly of 1836, R. S. Gladney, editor of the Southern Christian Herald stated that

There is nothing that we believe more firmly than that the subject of slavery will divide the General Assembly. Were we a member of that body, we would prefer secession to angry debate and unfeeling abuse. We should at once meet the Anti-Slavery resolution with a motion for division. . . . The only terms upon which we can live in peace, are that our Northern brethren withhold from all interference with our wives, our children, our men-servants, our maid-servants, or anything belonging to us.⁶⁵

Convinced that the New School was trying to use the slavery issue to obscure its doctrinal heterodoxy, he argued that “the same traits of mind that lead to error in religion, lead to fanaticism in other matters.” Only if the question of slavery was avoided could the church remain one.⁶⁶

His successor, ruling elder M. MacLean, agreed in principle, but took a more moderate tone. He published “Baxter’s” claim that the north and the south “are sufficiently alienated from each other already—more so I fear than Christians ought to be.” Baxter claimed that “so long as our orthodox brethren at the north let the subject of slavery alone, we have no right to separate from them.” Any division should occur due to serious

⁶⁵Editorial, “General Assembly,” SCH 2.46 (February 3, 1836).

⁶⁶Editorial, “Slavery,” SCH 2.52 (March 23, 1836). Twenty-five years later Gladney would author a forthright rejection of the natural rights language of the Declaration of Independence. See chapter ten.

doctrinal or polity errors.⁶⁷ MacLean concurred, pointing out that division “could do us at the South no possible good in any way. It would not in the least limit the operations or lessen the influence of the abolitionists, but would on the contrary weaken the hands of our friends at the North, and thus do these fanatics a favor.”⁶⁸ Most southern Presbyterians saw the theological deviations of the New School as the most important problem.

D. The General Assembly of 1837 and the Question of Division

The Old School response to the 1836 General Assembly was mixed. The Southern Christian Herald was upset at Samuel Miller for his support of Barnes. “If the Biblical Repertory will not raise its voice against *heretics*, as well as against *heresies*, it is surely time to establish *one* monthly or quarterly magazine in connection with the Presbyterian church that will.”⁶⁹ But editor MacLean was encouraged by the number of articles in even moderate papers that professed to see the danger of the New School now that Barnes had been acquitted. MacLean claimed that it was the New England men who acquitted Barnes, and that not a score of those who had been trained as Presbyterians voted for him.⁷⁰

William L. Breckinridge commented in an editorial written from the floor of the Assembly that the heat of previous years had cooled off—but not because of any growing unity: “But a little while ago, we would have heard of division with horror: now, it is the

⁶⁷Baxter, SCH 3.18 (July 29, 1836) 70.

⁶⁸Editorial, SCH 3.18 (July 29, 1836) 70.

⁶⁹Editorial [M. MacLean], SCH 3.13 (June 24, 1836) 51.

⁷⁰Editorial, SCH 3.15 (July 8, 1836) 59. MacLean distinguished between those, like ruling elders Nesbit of Georgia and Ewing of Ohio, who chose Presbyterianism out of principle, and those who were still Congregationalists at heart. See his editorial, SCH 3.14 (July 1, 1836) 55.

subject of common conversation, in almost every circle. One of the first steps towards a division, is, reconciling men's minds to the quiet contemplation of such an occurrence; and that stage has certainly been reached by the great mass of the members of this General Assembly." The Assembly was less excitable than in 1834, but that was because most had already made up their minds that division was inevitable.⁷¹

Some in the Old School party had begun to suggest that they should simply withdraw from the Presbyterian church. Hodge objected. Even if a majority of the church had become unsound, that did not warrant schism. "There may be instances in which the majority is so great, their conduct so oppressive, and the defection from the truth so serious as to render separation a duty. But these cases are exceptions, and are not, properly speaking, included in the simple principle under consideration."⁷² So long as the Presbyterian Confession of Faith remained the doctrinal standard of the church, Hodge argued, we should remain. Only when the majority defected from the gospel itself could schism be justified. We cannot hand over the "name, the character, the influence, the institutions, the various resources" of the church without violating our trust. Further, Hodge believed that the New School had over-stepped their bounds, and that the Old School was growing. "We cannot see, therefore, how any set of men can with a good conscience, desire to effect the division of the church until they are called upon to profess what they do not believe, or required to do what they cannot approve. This, as far as we

⁷¹W. L. Breckinridge, from the Western Presbyterian Herald, cited in M. MacLean's editorial, SCH 3.15 (July 8, 1836) 59.

⁷²"The General Assembly of 1836" BRPR 8.3 (July 1836) 473-4.

can see, is the only principle which can bear the test; which will acquit us in the sight of God and man, for tearing asunder that portion of the church of Christ committed to our care.”⁷³

Not all, however, agreed with Hodge. One contributor to the Presbyterian revealed that catholicity was a dead letter to many. “I never knew until recently, that Protestants considered a separation into different denominations, to be so daring a sin. We have among us, Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Covenanters, Moravians, Baptists, and others, all with their separate ecclesiastical organization, and as entirely independent of each other, as the two parties in our Church would be if they were divided into two distinct bodies.” If Protestants “have regarded Christ as the head of the Church and their different denominations as its branches. . . [w]here then can be the crime of making a subdivision of one of these branches?”⁷⁴

Having failed to secure the condemnation of Albert Barnes in 1836, the Old School leaders feared that they might be too late. The Assembly’s refusal to accept the transfer of the Western Foreign Missions Society indicated that the New School party held a small but significant majority. In order to accomplish an orderly division of the Presbyterian church, the Old School needed to gain another twenty votes. New Jersey, Virginia and Tennessee would be the main battlegrounds—the bastions of the moderates. A regular

⁷³Ibid., 476. Hodge noted that R. J. Breckinridge, one of the most outspoken leaders of the Old School party, agreed with this position. In 1836 Hodge and Princeton Seminary in general was perceived as moderate—so Hodge felt the importance of bringing the weight of Breckinridge’s name into his argument.

⁷⁴Plain Truth, “Schism,” Presbyterian 7.10 (March 11, 1837).

barrage of articles on the importance of immediate action and the danger of delay continued to appear in the newspapers.

Finally, in April of 1837, Princeton fell. Just over a month before the General Assembly, Samuel Miller published an open letter to Old School leader John McElhenney of Virginia reporting his change of heart. Miller insisted that his principles had not changed—he had always supported Old School doctrine and polity—but he had hoped to prevent strife and division. Now he saw that division was inevitable, and his stand would be with the Old School.⁷⁵ With Princeton finally on board, the Old School leaders called a pre-Assembly convention to plan their strategy for reform.

George Baxter, professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, was elected president of this convention. R. J. Breckinridge opened the discussion with a narrative of the rise of Pelagianism in the Presbyterian church. He pointed out that if the Assembly initiated a judicial inquiry into the organization of the Plan of Union synods, that those synods could not vote in their own cases, which might give the Old School a majority. Baxter agreed, pointing out that “the exclusion of the Synod of the Western Reserve would of itself secure to them that majority.” On the other hand, though, Baxter argued that if the New School had the majority, secession should happen by synods, not by individuals or conventions. Synodical secession was not necessarily schism. The corporate conscience of the synod ensured at least a measure of catholicity in the midst of division. Nonetheless, some urged more radical measures. George Junkin suggested that they refuse

⁷⁵“Letter from the Rev. Samuel Miller, D. D. of Princeton, to the Rev. John McElhenney, of Virginia,” Presbyterian 7.16 (April 22, 1837) 62. Reprinted in SCH 4.6 (May 5, 1837) 21. [and all other Old School papers].

to enter the Assembly “unless certain individuals should first have been excluded from it.” William Swan Plumer opposed this as it would “enlist public sentiment against them.”⁷⁶

Later, the convention dealt with the question of slavery. Breckinridge declared that he would oppose any attempt to bring slavery into the discussion. Thomas Smyth and William Swan Plumer replied that the South did not want to touch the issue of slavery. They had confidence in their northern Old School brethren and would not seek any further statement.⁷⁷ It was not the northern Old School, but the southern Old School that agreed to shut up.

At the General Assembly, which opened the following week, Dr. Baxter presented the memorial of the convention, which was referred, following normal Presbyterian procedure, to the Bills and Overtures Committee—a committee designed to review constitutional matters and suggest appropriate action to the Assembly. In this case, however, the moderator, David Elliott (professor of theology at Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny, Pennsylvania) had placed Baxter on this very committee, along with Archibald Alexander (professor of theology at Princeton Seminary), Ashbel Green (retired president of the College of New Jersey), William Swan Plumer (pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Richmond, Virginia), and ruling elders Walter Lowrie (former U. S. Senator from Pennsylvania and secretary of the Western Foreign Missionary Society) and

⁷⁶“The Convention,” CO 11.22 (June 3, 1837) 85.

⁷⁷“The Convention,” CO 11.22 (June 3, 1837) 85. Gildersleeve noted that while many had opposed the convention, most “express their gratification at the result.” Editorial, “The Convention,” 11.22 (June 3, 1837) 86.

James Lenox (one of the wealthiest men in New York City)—all of whom were known as staunch Old School Presbyterians.

Not surprisingly, this committee recommended a clear statement against New School doctrines, along with the abrogation of the Plan of Union on the grounds that the Plan of Union was unconstitutionally adopted because it was never approved by the presbyteries.⁷⁸ After a day and a half of debate, the Assembly voted 143-110 to terminate the Plan of Union. New School men pointed out that the present constitution had been adopted in 1821—twenty years after the Plan of Union had been formed—but that no one had suggested at that time that the Plan of Union was contrary to it. Ashbel Green and Archibald Alexander, who had helped frame the Plan of Union thirty-six years before, now argued that they had been wrong. And if the original Plan was unconstitutional (since it gave unordained committee men a vote in presbyteries—contrary to the explicit statement of the Presbyterian Form of Government), then it was null and void, and no matter how long it had been accepted, it still remained an illegal act, and therefore had to be revoked.⁷⁹ Presbyterian government and discipline had been compromised by the Plan of Union—which had resulted in the vitiation of Presbyterian doctrine as well. The solution was to go back to allowing only Presbyterians to sit in Presbyterian church courts.⁸⁰ In

⁷⁸“The General Assembly” BRPR 9.3 (July, 1837) 408-410. The reviewer, Charles Hodge, who found himself a reluctant convert to the Old School arguments, commented that it was generally not wise to call on General Assemblies to “affirm or deny doctrinal propositions,” since it has the tendency to add or subtract from the Confessional standards of the church.

⁷⁹The detailed arguments are summarized in the protest and answer of Minutes, 1837, 454-464.

⁸⁰Hodge pointed out that “The presbytery of Lorain, for example, contains twelve churches, of which only one is presbyterian. The presbytery of Trumbull has twelve ministers, and is said to contain but one presbyterian church. The synod of the Western Reserve has one hundred and eighteen ministers, and is said to have from twenty-five to thirty presbyterian churches. This statement was sustained on the floor of

other words, the watering down of Presbyterian standards did not result in true catholicity, because it ignored orthodoxy and substituted individual conscience for the common confession of the church. As Hodge concluded:

The grand evil, however, attending the plan is, that it breaks down the hedge around our portion of the garden of the Lord, and allows it to be trodden down and wasted. Our system of government, our confession of faith, our whole constitution, are. . . means to an end. We believe that truth is necessary to holiness, and that discipline is necessary to the preservation of truth.⁸¹

Having ended the Plan of Union, the Old School majority pushed for the discipline of those synods who had failed to enforce Presbyterian order. The initial proposal was to call several synods to the next General Assembly to answer accusations regarding alleged failures in doctrine and practice. After passing this measure by a narrow margin (129-122), many in the Assembly urged that the church seek an “amicable separation,” or, as Robert J. Breckinridge put it, a “voluntary division.”⁸² A committee of ten was formed, consisting of four ministers and one ruling elder from each side.⁸³ After three days of negotiation the

the Assembly by testimony of the members of the Western Reserve synod themselves.” Yet these presbyteries with only one presbyterian church were still represented at General Assembly in the same proportion as those whose churches were entirely presbyterian. “The General Assembly” BRPR 9.3 (July 1837) 428. James Wood conducted a meticulous survey of the excluded synods to ascertain the accuracy of these sorts of claims, published in the Watchman of the South starting in November of 1837. It was also published as Facts and Observations concerning the Organization and State of the Churches in the Three Synods of Western New-York and the Synod of Western Reserve (Saratoga Springs, NY: G. M. Davison, 1837).

⁸¹“The General Assembly” BRPR 9.3 (July 1837) 431.

⁸²Minutes (1837) 426.

⁸³The committee consisted of Old School ministers Robert J. Breckinridge of Baltimore, Archibald Alexander of Princeton, John Witherspoon of Camden, South Carolina, Cornelius Cuyler of Philadelphia and ruling elder Nathaniel Ewing of Redstone Presbytery (western Pennsylvania), along with New School ministers Thomas McAuley and Absalom Peters of New York City, Nathan Beman of Troy, Baxter Dickinson of Cincinnati, and ruling elder William Jessup of Montrose Presbytery (New Jersey).

committee reported that they could agree as to the wisdom of the separation, along with the division of funds and institutions, but they disagreed as to whether the General Assembly had the power to effect the division without consultation with the presbyteries. In an ironic twist the New School argued that whereas the General Assembly had the right to establish a Plan of Union with the Congregationalists without consulting the presbyteries, it could not authorize the division of the Presbyterian Church without such consultation. Reversing their position from the previous debates, now the New School argued that the powers of the General Assembly were strictly limited to those granted by the constitution. The Old School, on the other hand, had just won the constitutional point that the Plan of Union required ratification by the presbyteries—but now argued that the division of the church could be determined by the General Assembly alone. Claiming that no constitutional issue was at stake, the Old School insisted that reference to the presbyteries was unnecessary. Both sides were taking pragmatic grounds—since the New School knew that delay was the only way for them to regain the majority, and the Old School feared that same result. With no plan for amicable separation, the whole subject was laid on the table 139-107 (following party lines), on the motion of Robert J. Breckinridge.⁸⁴

The Old School convention had prepared for this outcome. They had hoped that the New School would agree to a voluntary separation, but they were determined to divide the Presbyterian Church at this General Assembly. Their commitment to the principle of a corporate conscience meant that they could not rest until those whom they perceived to be

⁸⁴Minutes (1837) 437; “The General Assembly” BRPR 9.3 (July 1837) 447.

of a different mind were out of the church. At this moment William Swan Plumer rose and presented the following resolution: “Resolved, That by the operation of the abrogation of the plan of union of 1801, the synod of the Western Reserve is, and is hereby declared to be, no longer a part of the Presbyterian church in the United States.”⁸⁵ While the debate continued for two days the outcome was never in doubt, and the Western Reserve Synod was excinded by a vote of 132-105.⁸⁶

That afternoon Robert J. Breckinridge brought a recommendation that the American Home Missionary Society and the American Education Society cease their operations within the bounds of the Presbyterian church. After a day of debate, this passed 124-86, on the grounds that the influence of these societies was too great for organizations that were not directly responsible to the church. Especially since the leaders of the AHMS and AES were zealous advocates of the New School, there was little desire among Old School presbyters to see their continued influence.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Minutes (1837) 440; “The General Assembly” BRPR 9.3 (July 1837) 447.

⁸⁶Minutes (1837) 440. “The General Assembly” BRPR 9.3 (July 1837) 452-464. The debate spent a good deal of time wrestling with the U. S. Supreme Court decision regarding Georgia’s treatment of the Cherokee Indians, and especially Chief Justice Marshall’s decision regarding the validity of actions performed under an unconstitutional law. The concluding speech, Thursday morning, by ruling elder Samuel C. Anderson of Virginia, is said to have been the most powerful speech of the Assembly. Hodge cited the New York Evangelist (June 24, 1837), which quoted from the Ohio Observer, a paper edited by the stated clerk of the Western Reserve synod, which urged the synod “to declare itself an independent body, changing its name, perhaps, for the Western Reserve General Consociation, and modifying its rules as circumstances shall seem to require. This done, then let the presbyteries resolve themselves into consociations, still maintaining the principles of government on which they ever acted, and abiding by the same rules, with such alterations as may be thought necessary.” Hodge commented that “The spirit of the whole article is such as becomes a Christian minister, and is, in this respect, a striking contrast with the humiliating tone and language of almost all the newschool papers in their notices of the proceedings of the General Assembly.” (464)

⁸⁷Minutes (1837) 442-443. “The General Assembly” BRPR 9.3 (July 1837) 466.

The following morning (Saturday, June 3), Robert J. Breckinridge tested the water to see how far the Old School would go. If the majority had been willing to declare that the Synod of the Western Reserve was not a part of the Presbyterian church by virtue of its unconstitutional formation, perhaps they would go for the same argument again. Presenting a resolution declaring the synods of Utica, Geneva and Genesee to be “out of the ecclesiastical connexion of the Presbyterian church,” Breckinridge argued that if the Western Reserve Synod was to be excluded, then the western New York synods should also be excised, because they were also formed on the basis of the Plan of Union. The New School objected that the majority of these churches were strictly presbyterian in structure, and claimed that any irregularities should be dealt with by calling the three synods to give an account of themselves to the next Assembly. The debate continued through Saturday and Monday, finally resulting in a 115-88 vote to exclude the three synods.⁸⁸ The Old School had held firm to its course, with very few defections from its ranks, and had accomplished the excision of four New School synods, and the disowning of the AHMS and the AES.

_____ *E. The Role of Slavery in the General Assembly of 1837*

When the roll was called, the Plan of Union was abrogated by a vote of 143-110. This is almost a mirror image of the 134-96 vote the previous year that acquitted Barnes (if the members of the Synod of Philadelphia had been able to vote on the Barnes case in

⁸⁸Minutes (1837) 443-445. “The General Assembly” BRPR 9.3 (July 1837) 469-474. Hodge was sympathetic to the minority on this point, but refrained from speaking out at the request of Alexander and Miller who wished Princeton to maintain a united stance with the Old School.

1836, the vote would likely have been 139-112). So with almost identical attendance, it appears that around thirty votes changed from siding with the New School on the Barnes appeal, to siding with the Old School on the abrogation of the Plan of Union. Which presbyteries switched sides?

By synod:	1836 vs. Barnes	1837 for Abrogation
Southern Synods		
Missouri:	0-4	1-3
Kentucky:	7-2	6-1
Virginia	4-6	12-1
North Carolina	6-0	6-0
Tennessee	0-10	2-4
West Tennessee	3-5	7-0
South Carolina/Georgia	9-0	8-1
Mississippi/South Alabama	7-1	8-0
<u>Total of all Southern synods:</u>	<u>36-28</u>	<u>50-10</u>
<u>"Plan of Union" Synods</u>	<u>1-55</u>	<u>1-51</u>
<u>New Jersey</u>	<u>7-12</u>	<u>14-6</u>
<u>Philadelphia</u>	<u>(Not allowed to vote)</u>	<u>19-9</u>
<u>Other Northern</u>	<u>52-39</u>	<u>59-34</u>
<u>Overall vote:</u>	<u>96-134</u>	<u>143-110</u>

Figure 1.6. Comparison of 1836 and 1837 General Assembly Voting Patterns

With a seven vote shift in New Jersey (the presbyteries of Elizabethtown and New Brunswick), an eight vote shift in Virginia (East and West Hanover presbyteries), and the effect of an eight vote shift in the Tennessee synods (two presbyteries switched to voting Old School, while New School presbyteries failed to send full delegations), Old School success was plainly due to their ability to persuade Princeton and the upper South—the two regions where the New Divinity had peacefully coexisted with traditional Presbyterian theology for decades.

This does not comport with the claim that slavery was the most significant reason for the southern support for the Old School. While the deep South—especially South Carolina—could at times sound paranoid about northern designs on slavery, those from the upper south prided themselves on their confidence in their northern brethren. In 1837, when members of the Charleston Union Presbytery in South Carolina urged the formation of a southern General Assembly, the Watchman of the South printed a letter from Judge Henry Potter of North Carolina (a ruling elder from Fayetteville Presbytery), who argued that a southern General Assembly was totally unnecessary. Plenty of orthodox men at the North objected to abolitionism, and a united Old School church would remain a strong bulwark against radicalism in church and state.⁸⁹

The reason for the late switch by Princeton and the upper South was simply that when forced to choose, they decided that they had more in common, both doctrinally and culturally with the Old School than with the New School. Indeed, many pastors and churches who went with the New School initially out of conviction that the Old School had acted unconstitutionally, returned to the Old School within a few years.⁹⁰

⁸⁹Watchman of the South (WS) 1.12 (November 16, 1837).

⁹⁰Among the dozens of examples, two will suffice. The Pearl Street Presbyterian Church in Buffalo had initially attempted to find a middle road between the Old School and the New School, but by 1842 they had become convinced that the errors condemned by the “*Act and Testimony*. . . have prevailed and are prevailing to an alarming extent, and we believe the integrity and purity of our beloved Zion will be best promoted by an adhering of all who love her doctrine and order, to the General Assembly.” Therefore they renamed the church “The First Presbyterian Church of Buffalo in connection with the General Assembly.” “The Presbyterian Church,” from the Buffalo Commercial Advertiser and Journal, reprinted in the Presbyterian 12.45 (November 5, 1842) 178. Also in western New York, Ontario and Rochester Presbyteries had refused to send commissioners to either General Assembly from 1839-1852 in an attempt to hold together both parties. But when they formally joined the New School in 1852, several congregations seceded to form the Genesee River Presbytery of the Old School. “A Statement of the Central Presbyterian Church in Geneseo, New York, in Reply to Charges made by Members of the Presbytery of Ontario,” Presbyterian 29.11 (March 12, 1859) 41.

The issue of slavery may have influenced some southerners to vote with the Old School, but it influenced others to side with the New School. Ten thousand southern Presbyterians sided with the New School in 1838, on the grounds that the Old School had acted unconstitutionally. Some southern New Schoolers (especially those in eastern Tennessee) had embraced the New Divinity, and agreed theologically with the New School, but others, such as William Hill and the New School party in Virginia, joined the New School out of protest against the excising acts. In the matter of slavery, several southern New School presbyteries passed resolutions instructing their commissioners to withdraw from the New School General Assembly if it should try to legislate against slavery.⁹¹ Indeed the Farmville Convention of 1838 (which formed the foundation for the southern New School movement) overtly declared that the 1818 General Assembly statement against slavery had been “an unwarranted assumption of power” and declared that the church had no business speaking on the subject of slavery.⁹² This was intended as a clear statement to northern New Schoolers that if they wanted a southern wing, they had to leave slavery alone.⁹³ In contrast Old School southerners initially refrained from comment on the 1818 deliverance, tending (at least at first) to be less radically pro-slavery than their New School southern brethren.

⁹¹Harold Parker, The United Synod of the South (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) 38.

⁹²Parker, The United Synod of the South, 41.

⁹³Their success is demonstrated in the fact that it was only twenty years later, in 1857, that the New School General Assembly finally made an explicitly abolitionist statement. The New School maintained a similar stance to the Old School (though increasingly leaning towards abolitionism); meanwhile southern New School develops in more radically proslavery direction (the United Synod of the South). From an Old School perspective, however, both sides appeared too radical. See chapter seven for more detail.

The Assembly of 1837, on the last day of its sessions, voted 93-28 to table any discussion of slavery. After three full weeks of debate, many commissioners had gone home and there was little interest in bringing up another controversial issue. Nonetheless, the vote divided strictly along party lines. Everyone who had voted for the abrogation of the Plan of Union voted to table the issue of slavery, except the Rev. Thomas Brown of Union Presbytery, Tennessee. Among those who had opposed abrogation, only the Rev. Elipha White of Charleston Union Presbytery, South Carolina, and ruling elder David Burnet of Newark Presbytery, New Jersey, voted to table the slavery question. The big change from 1836 was that the southern synods had voted 25-40 in 1836 on the question of indefinite postponement. Now they voted 40-2 (two Tennessee men—including Brown—being the only two southerners to oppose it) to table the question.⁹⁴

Many historians have appealed to the “gag order” agreed upon by the Old School convention of 1837 to make their claim that the South enforced silence upon the northern Old School in exchange for southern votes. What is frequently neglected is an analysis of who was being gagged. It was *not* the case that northern Old Schoolers wanted to make a statement, and that southerners objected. As the following table shows, it was the southerners who had wanted a clear resolution that the church had no authority to speak

⁹⁴Immediately after the Assembly, New School periodicals argued that the division was all about slavery. The SCH 4.16 (July 14, 1837) 63, claimed that all New School papers except the New York Observer and the Southern Religious Telegraph had asserted this, but replied that “No intelligent man can *honestly* allege that the votes of Northern Old School men, or indeed of any Old School man, in the Assembly were given with reference to the question of slavery.” Old School papers emphatically denied that slavery had been a significant issue. Eight years later, however, the New School papers were still making the claim. When Professor Calvin Stowe of Lane Seminary claimed in the Evangelical Observer that the Old School bought the south with the promise of getting rid of New England abolitionism, William Swan Plumer replied: “There never was any such bargain,” between the Old School and the South. WS 8.45 (June 26, 1845).

on the subject in 1836, but who agreed to shut up in 1837.⁹⁵ With the excision of the Plan of Union synods, Old School southerners were content to leave the slavery question unanswered.

James Moorhead has aptly noted that “it is probably misleading to pose the question in a manner that draws a sharp distinction between concern for proper doctrine and concern with social issues such as slavery.” Both were part of “an anxiety that

	Postpone (1836)	Table (1837)
Old School North	49-7	52-0
Old School South	9-23	34-1
<u>Old School Vote</u>	<u>58-30</u>	<u>86-1</u>
<u>All southerners:</u>	<u>25-40</u>	<u>40-2</u>
<u>Overall vote:</u>	<u>154-87</u>	<u>93-28</u>
The “Old School” vote is determined simply by those who had voted against Barnes in 1836 and those who had voted to revoke the Plan of Union in 1837.		

Figure 1.7. Old School Votes on the Slavery Question, 1836-1837

legitimate authority was under assault and was collapsing.”⁹⁶ Moorhead at least points towards the idea that for most Old School Presbyterians, the error of the abolitionists was a theological error. Proper order in society would be found only as the orthodox portion of each denomination triumphed. Sound theology would correct the extreme errors in society—therefore they believed that the best way to correct social problems was through

⁹⁵For the synodical discussions, see Ernst Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963) 1:385-391.

⁹⁶James H. Moorhead, “The ‘Restless Spirit of Radicalism’: Old School Fears and the Schism of 1837,” JPH 78:1 (Spring 2000) 29.

sound preaching. This was not merely a conversionist approach to social ills. Old School Presbyterians were convinced that while conversion was essential for eternal life, evangelical Christianity had a power to restrain evil in society that was rooted in its correspondence with the way God created the world. Therefore the inroads of Pelagianism in New School theology would invariably lead to the breakdown of society as well.

R. J. Breckinridge reflected on this after the 1837 Assembly. Tracing the decline of the church to the rise of Constantinian and papal “bondage,” Breckinridge argued that a new era of unbridled liberty was dawning. Not only in Europe, but also “in the United States, at this moment, we are passing through a signal and before unknown development. Religious fanaticism, united to civil licentiousness, is spreading over the land--and unless thoroughly arrested, must degrade religion and subvert society.”⁹⁷ The solution could only be found in evangelical religion. Breckinridge argued that every evangelical sect was under attack from a Pelagian (which he equated with “papal”) theology: Hicksism among the Friends, Campbellism among the Baptists, high churchism in the Episcopalians, Taylorism in the Congregationalists, and New Schoolism among the Presbyterians. These “do all, and all nearly equally, sap the foundations of the Christian's hope--take from the gospel its distinctive character--and threaten the total ruin of the church of God. It is a great defection from the bosom of protestantism--in which its erring children, have stepped back upon the fundamental principle of papal doctrine, and become unwitting

⁹⁷“Controversy in the Presbyterian Church--General Reflections” BLRM 3.7 (July, 1837) 304-307, quotation from 306.

instruments of the man of sin.”⁹⁸ Therefore, Breckinridge argued, our true allies are the orthodox in each denomination.

4. The Response to the 1837 General Assembly

But before the Old School could start working on the reform of the nation, they had to consolidate their gains. Old School leaders quickly moved to defend their actions in the periodical press. The success of their “reformation” would depend on whether the General Assembly of 1838 recognized its actions as legitimate—and that depended upon getting presbyteries to send commissioners who would support the excising acts. This would require further polemical work in the western and southern presbyteries—especially in Illinois, Indiana, Tennessee, and Virginia. This task was easily conducted in the west. The Western Presbyterian Herald of Louisville, Kentucky, edited by William L. Breckinridge (brother of Old School champion Robert J. Breckinridge) was the leading Old School paper in that region, with a subscription of around 2,000—half in Kentucky and a quarter in Ohio, along with another 20% from Indiana, Illinois and Missouri.⁹⁹ In Tennessee, John T. Edgar’s American Presbyterian was now defending the Old School more openly.¹⁰⁰ Edgar

⁹⁸“Controversy in the Presbyterian Church” 309. One example of Indiana Old School sentiment is found in Robert F. Lay, “New School Missionaries and Old School Presbyters on the Indiana Frontier: The Case of Samuel Newbury,” JPH 77:4 (Winter 1999) 225-236.

⁹⁹From receipts printed in the Western Presbyterian Herald, November 16, 1837-November 8, 1838. Also, in 1838, the Western Emigrant was started as a monthly Old School periodical in Booneville, Missouri, to try to rally support among Missouri Presbyterians.

¹⁰⁰Edgar had Old School sympathies from the start (See his editorial in American Presbyterian 1.41 (October 15, 1835)), which is revealed in his editorial selections. His doctrinal articles came from moderate Old School sources (especially Princeton), while he only reprinted devotional material from New School papers. Just before the Assembly of 1837, his junior editor (a Mr. Thompson) took advantage of Edgar’s absence to publish a piece of personal polemics:

“In the late absence of the Rev. Dr. Edgar, a short article found its way into this paper, from one

assured his readers that the Old School had not divided the Assembly. If the true Presbyterians in the excluded synods desired to enter the Presbyterian church properly, then the whole matter would be resolved without schism.¹⁰¹ Philip Lapsley urged Tennessee Presbyterians to avoid the divisions that other regions faced. Even if the Assembly of 1838 failed to support the actions of 1837, he urged the West Tennessee synod to remain united: “Let those who have no attachment to our excellent standards set up for themselves, or seek other connections: but as for us, *we must remain united. We are brethren and cannot divide.*”¹⁰²

New School ministers were not convinced. Southern New School writers such as Isaac Anderson compared the Old School actions of 1837 to the “Roman Catholic Inquisition,” declaring that the “measures of the last Assembly have not been surpassed in any Protestant church, since the Reformation, for injustice, oppression, and tyranny.”¹⁰³

who fills, according to his own language, ‘an humble place in the Church,’ (*we are not disposed from what has passed, to state whether through inadvertence or design on our part,*) in which he animadverts on the Philadelphia Presbyterian for being absorbed in controversy, and for proposing what the writer conceived to be a blameable policy touching the division of the General Assembly. The effect of this production has been greatly to irritate the Editor in question, whereupon he has roundly charged us with doing injustice to himself, and not contributing to maintain the purity of the church. Whilst we are far from conceding that he has sufficient ground to conclude we are ill-affected towards him, we would be pleased to know by what mode of reasoning he identifies himself or the suggestions of an individual on a matter of ecclesiastical policy, with the doctrines and welfare of the presbyterian church.”

Junior Editor, American Presbyterian 3.17 (May 4, 1837) 66. Not surprisingly, after his return from the Assembly Edgar announced that Mr. Thompson had resigned for reasons of his “health.”

¹⁰¹Editorial, “No Division Yet,” American Presbyterian 3.24 (June 23, 1837) 95.

¹⁰²American Presbyterian 4.16 (April 26, 1838) 62.

¹⁰³John J. Robinson, Memoir of Rev. Isaac Anderson (Knoxville: J. Addison Rayle, 1860) 135, 137, quoted in Harold Parker, The United Synod of the South (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) 35.

New School consciences were clear of offense because of the great tyranny of the Old School.

In order to maintain the majority, the Old School would need to hold such swing states as Virginia. The problem there was that the New England-born Amasa Converse edited the Southern Religious Telegraph along moderate lines—though after the Assembly of 1837, he declared his full support for the New School. So in September of 1837, William Swan Plumer, a native of western Pennsylvania (PTS 1827), and pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia, launched the Watchman of the South, a weekly Old School paper that would defend the Assembly's actions, and try to bring the whole southern Presbyterian church behind the excising acts.¹⁰⁴ Politically, as well as temperamentally, Plumer was a good choice as an editor. In the early 1830s he had been a zealous supporter of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and had developed a good reputation among southern moderates, while his role in the 1837 Assembly gave him credibility among the hardliners.¹⁰⁵ Claiming that neutrality was impossible, Plumer urged the church not to neglect the doctrine and discipline of the church, but to maintain and defend the distinguishing doctrines of the Presbyterian

¹⁰⁴One of Plumer's goals was to force Converse out of Richmond. He never mentions the Southern Religious Telegraph by name, and only once alludes to it in an article on the response of the southern Presbyterian press to the 1837 Assembly. He points out that all but one southern Presbyterian paper supported the excising acts (naming the Charleston Observer, the Southern Christian Herald of Cheraw, South Carolina, the New Orleans Observer, the American Presbyterian of Nashville, Tennessee, the Western Protestant of Bardstown, Kentucky, the Western Presbyterian Herald of Louisville, Kentucky, and the Western Emigrant of Booneville, Missouri), but neglects to name the one opposing paper! WS 1.30 (March 22, 1838).

¹⁰⁵Editorial, SCH 3.49 (March 3, 1837) 195. Plumer had been one of the leading voices that aligned the southern and central Presbyterian Foreign Missions Boards with the ABCFM. Cf. SCH (September 1, 1837) 90.

Church.¹⁰⁶ Opening his paper with communications from Samuel Miller and Archibald Alexander of Princeton Seminary, Plumer quickly gained Virginia's ear.¹⁰⁷ By January, 1838, the Watchman of the South had reached 2,000 subscribers, and topped 4,000 by the beginning of the third volume in 1839—by which time Amasa Converse had moved his paper to Philadelphia, where he hoped to provide a paper that would satisfy conservative New Schoolers both in the north and south.

Another concern was the seminaries. Princeton and Western were generally trusted, but Union and Columbia (the two southern seminaries) were suspect. The Southern Christian Herald suggested that since the two leading professors at Columbia Theological Seminary, Aaron Leland and George Howe, were New England born and trained, they might be tainted with New School theology. In July of 1837, John Witherspoon wrote to defend them. While admitting that Leland and Howe had been moderates, he pointed out that they now supported the actions of the Assembly.¹⁰⁸ Editor MacLean replied that their personal beliefs were not the only issue. Columbia Seminary graduates had not supported the Old School. "We, so far, know of only two that have been connected with this Seminary, who have interested themselves on behalf of the Herald."¹⁰⁹ They may be sound, but they did not support the Old School in the midst of the trial.

¹⁰⁶Plumer, "Presbyterian Papers" WS 1.7 (October 12, 1837) 27.

¹⁰⁷Archibald Alexander's Thoughts on Religious Experience (1839-1840) and other volumes (including "A Treatise on Justification" and "Letters to Christians"—both in 1837-1838) were first published in serial form in the Watchman of the South, adding to the attraction of the paper.

¹⁰⁸John Witherspoon, SCH 4.16 (July 14, 1837) 63.

¹⁰⁹He grudgingly admitted that a few others had taken the Presbyterian, the leading Old School weekly.

MacLean hinted that such fair weather friends might not be the sorts of men the church should have teaching in her seminaries.¹¹⁰ The following spring he reported that professors Hiram Goodrich and Stephen Taylor had resigned from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, due to their New School proclivities,¹¹¹ which some hoped would provoke Leland and Howe to do the same.

When some subscribers complained that MacLean was not recommending Columbia Seminary, he replied that the seminary will mold the church and the church must be convinced that it wants to go that direction. Since the professors have not been forthcoming in matters of controversy, MacLean would not support them.¹¹² MacLean explained that the New School men in Charleston had supported the election of Leland. Likewise, in 1836 Leland had been elected to the faculty of the Union Seminary in New York—an overtly New School seminary. “His declining the appointment may be an evidence that in this they judged wrong. But it seemed, and still seems to us that when the character of the errors taught by some of the New School and protected by the whole party, is considered, no orthodox teacher of candidates for the ministry ought to have left any room to doubt, for so long a time, on which side he was.”¹¹³ But South Carolina was

¹¹⁰Editorial comments on John Witherspoon, SCH 4.16 (July 14, 1837) 63.

¹¹¹SCH 5.4 (April 27, 1838) 19.

¹¹²“Columbia Theological Seminary,” SCH 5.29 (October 19, 1838) 115. Cf. A Friend, SCH 5.13 (June 22, 1838) 51. MacLean occasionally turned the paper over to “T” when he was especially busy. This may well be James Henley Thornwell, who was frequently referred to as a behind-the-scenes player in the controversy over Howe and Leland.

¹¹³“The Theological Seminary,” SCH 5.30 (October 26, 1838) 119. Maclean noted that recent graduates viewed the professors as sound, but they also think that the professors had New School sympathies. “Did they think the Old School right, and yet love the New School most? Did they believe their teachers were Old School men with New School predilections? [*Did they ever see a white man with a black*

making peace with the Columbia professors, and shortly thereafter the Southern Christian Herald folded into the Watchman of the South and the Columbia Seminary controversy faded out of public view.

5. The General Assembly of 1838

On May 17, 1838, the General Assembly met in the Seventh Presbyterian church in Philadelphia. When the clerks called the roll, they omitted the excised synods, which called forth a protest from the New School members of the Assembly, who knew that without those four synods, there was no chance of regaining control of the Assembly. But the Old School majority had no intention of reopening the question. When the Rev. Miles P. Squier, a minister in Geneva Presbytery, claimed a right to a seat in the Assembly, the moderator replied, “we do not know you, sir.” The excised synods were no longer a part of the Presbyterian church. At this, the Rev. John P. Cleaveland of Detroit began to read a paper declaring that the General Assembly had violated its own constitution, and calling for a constitutional organization of the Assembly. The moderator, the Rev. David Elliott, attempted repeatedly to call him to order, but since it was impossible to hear over Cleaveland’s loud voice, “business was suspended during the short but painful scene of confusion and disorder which ensued.”¹¹⁴ The New School men elected a moderator and clerks, and then adjourned to the First Presbyterian church in Philadelphia to continue their business. Both bodies “claimed to be the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church in

skin?]” Italics and brackets in the original.

¹¹⁴Charles Hodge, “The General Assembly of 1838,” BRPR 10.3 (July, 1838) 457.

the United States, and proceeded accordingly to exercise its functions.”¹¹⁵ Predictably, a series of long and fruitless lawsuits ensued in which the New School Assembly attempted to demonstrate that it was the true, constitutional General Assembly, and therefore deserved the name, the property, and the funds of the Presbyterian General Assembly.¹¹⁶

In the wake of the division, the Old School Assembly called upon all Presbyterians to unite “upon the basis of the Assemblies of 1837-and 1838, to adhere to the Presbyterian church in the United States.” Charles Hodge pointed out that while the language was regrettably ambiguous, this did not require presbyteries to approve of the acts of the Assemblies of 1837 and 1838, but merely required that presbyteries adhere to the same General Assembly that met in 1837 and 1838. “Is the part which remains the true church? That is the question. . . . It requires that those who wish to belong to the church as at present constituted, should regard it as the Presbyterian church of the United States, and not as a company of seceders.”¹¹⁷

The pastoral letter of 1839 set forth the Old School conviction that the division had been primarily about orthodoxy. Some bishops and elders who had professed to adopt the Confession of Faith “have been allowed publicly to avow opinions subversive of its distinguishing doctrines.” The Assembly declared that they protested

against the unfairness of those who adopt our standards in a sense different from their obvious import, contrary to the known and generally received interpretation, as a dishonesty and an injury against which the Presbyteries

¹¹⁵Hodge, “The General Assembly of 1838,” 458.

¹¹⁶The details of these suits can be found in Samuel Miller, Jr., Report of the Presbyterian Church Case (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1839).

¹¹⁷Hodge, “The General Assembly of 1838,” 502.

are bound to protect the churches, and against which the churches should both watch and pray. The Presbyteries should remember that they are not independent bodies, each acting for itself alone, and therefore at liberty to receive any candidate who, they may suppose, is qualified to do good. The Presbyteries are co-ordinate members of an extended communion, bound together by a written compact. When, therefore, they admit a member who has not the constitutional qualifications, they are guilty of a breach of faith.¹¹⁸

If the Presbyterian church was to retain a distinctive confessional identity, then the presbyteries would have to abide by a common standard of orthodoxy.

Conclusion

The Presbyterian division of 1837 was not about slavery. But with the Free Church disruption of 1843, the Methodist and Baptist divisions of 1844-1845, and the Anglican controversy over the Tractarians and the Gorham case, the British-American religious world was severely fractured. While the controversies focused on such diverse issues as patronage, slavery, and the sacraments, their coincidence suggests that the years 1835-1845 witnessed the breaking point of older ideals of catholicity and conscience. The same forces that divided churches over a range of issues in the 1830s and 1840s were also at work in society.

The Old School hardliners had succeeded at forcing the New School out. But their success was due to their alliance with the moderates—centered in Princeton and the upper south. Further, the Old School was the continuing church. Except in the excinded synods, churches that preferred not to make a fuss about the issue generally stayed in the Old

¹¹⁸Minutes (1839) 184. The adjective “distinguishing” is important. Old School Presbyterians allowed for minor confessional differences.

School. Over the next decade an Old School identity would be forged through a series of issues that percolated through the various regional synods, and finally came for decision to the Old School General Assembly. Most of these issues would be decided by overwhelming majorities. The 1840s demonstrate that a broad consensus was forming around a number of issues: church polity, moral discipline, catholicity, education, and even slavery. By 1848 Old School identity appeared to be well-constructed. Could the Old School maintain its distinctive confessional identity and its catholic sensibilities in an age of conscience?

TWO

FEMINIZATION, THE MARKET, AND PRESBYTERIAN ECCLESIOLOGY:

THE RULING ELDER

The success of the Old School in ridding itself of the New School in 1837-1838 forced it to address the identity of the continuing church. Most Old Schoolers assumed that their identity would remain unchanged—after all, they considered themselves the true heirs of historic Presbyterianism. But nothing remained unchanged in antebellum America. The defenders of historic Presbyterianism had created permanent boards to oversee a centralized program of ministerial training and foreign and domestic missions—something unheard of in traditional Presbyterian polity. Most Old School Presbyterians were attempting to retain an ecclesiastical version of Henry Clay’s American System. Perhaps national centralization was not desirable, but many Old Schoolers hoped that the church could provide a stable center to an increasing fragmented nation.¹

But most Old School Presbyterians were not used to thinking “denominationally.” The 1840 General Assembly encouraged Presbyterians to maintain good relations with other denominations, but also pointed out that these denominations (primarily the

¹The sheer size of the American continent played a significant role in the creation of the board system. Practically speaking, however, the boards were based on the standing Commission of the Scottish church which handled judicial and administrative matters in between assemblies (the difference being that the Old School divided the work of missions and education into distinct boards and had no judicial commission).

Methodists and Baptists) could offer Presbyterians a useful model for action. “For they are imbued with a denominational feeling of long standing and mighty energy; among us, this feeling is in its infancy.” The Assembly urged Presbyterians to “emulate the zeal of other churches” in order to preserve the Old School as a “bulwark against the spirit of discord.” In the wake of the severe economic depression that still held sway in the east, and the growing unrest of the abolitionists it reminded the church that “Commerce, politics, religion, every earthly, every sacred interest has been touched with this demoniac wand [the spirit of discord] and thrown into wild confusion.”² Having borne witness to the errors of the New School, the Assembly urged the churches to greater zeal and fidelity in their support for the distinctively denominational work of the Old School.

1. Background

A. The Feminization Thesis

Ann Douglas has argued that the nineteenth century saw the “feminization” of evangelical protestantism, and therefore of American culture. She states that the liberal Protestantism of 1875 bore little resemblance to the sturdy Calvinism of 1800, suggesting that ministers and women joined forces through the production and consumption of novels

²“Narrative of the State of Religion,” *Minutes* (1840) 311. The chairman of the committee that drafted the Narrative was Henry Boardman of Philadelphia, who later published a series of sermons to businessmen. His influence is seen in such phrases as “Let men of business guard against the insidious temptations to dishonesty, which, in these times financial distress, beset them in all the walks of trade.” (312). The other members of the committee were ministers Erasmus Darwin MacMaster and Joseph G. Monfort of Indiana, John Matthews of Virginia, and Joseph Moody, ruling elder from Ohio.

and polite literature in the creation of a sentimental culture, yet one which continued “male hegemony in different guises.”³

There is much in the Presbyterian newspapers to commend Douglas’s thesis. Old School editors noted that women made up a large proportion of their readership, and most newspapers contained a significant amount of material designed for both women and children.⁴ One Kentucky author pointed out that women were frequently between 60-80% of the communicant membership. He suggested that the reason was at least in part that “They have less to give up in making a profession of religion, and fewer temptations to resist in coming into the Church than the sterner sex.” Their main role, according to this author was to draw others (especially their men) into the church.⁵

When it came to women’s public roles, Old School Presbyterians appeared fairly unified. While Hannah More was often praised as an example of how a woman should comport herself in public, there was general contempt for those that formed “societies for the purpose of sitting in judgment and acting upon the affairs of church and state.”⁶

³Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) 10-13. Given the exclusive emphasis on New England, the book probably should be titled “The Feminization of New England Culture.” Not surprisingly, Old School Presbyterians would self-consciously resist the New England trend.

⁴See appendix 2 for a more thorough discussion of Old School periodicals and the changing demographics of readership.

⁵“Woman's Province in the Church,” PH (May 3, 1859).

⁶“Appropriate Sphere of Woman,” WS 1.4 (September 21, 1837).

Cortlandt Van Rensselaer spoke for most Old Schoolers when he professed to be horrified at the Woman's Rights Convention in 1852.⁷

But Presbyterian women were heavily involved in the domestic reform movements of the day: teaching Sunday schools, going "from house to house, in quest of those whom they may gather into these sacred nurseries--or to administer to the poor relief--to the ignorant, instruction; to the afflicted, in body or mind, the needed balm; and who are unwearied in their labors to reform the vicious, and send abroad the light and consolations of divine truth."⁸ One woman writer urged the church to use the gifts of women to even better advantage. "Mary" reminded her readers that both the Old and New Testaments promised that "your sons and daughters shall prophecy," though she agreed that women's teaching should consist simply of teaching other women.⁹ Another editor encouraged the

⁷"Woman's Rights Convention," Presbyterian Magazine (PM) 2.11 (Nov, 1852). By 1869, however, one Chicago author was willing to argue for woman's suffrage (and, more importantly, Joseph G. Monfort was willing to publish it). This writer declared that "the movement will succeed, for it is in the historical line of progress. It is too late to oppose it. . . . The fortress was surrendered when we allowed women to go to school. . . whenever woman is allowed to learn the same branches of knowledge as men, she proves herself his equal; nay, his superior. In our High School the girls have taken the honors three years in succession. Everybody sees the anomaly of allowing a negro, a drunken Irishman, or a Dutch saloon-keeper to vote, and of denying his mother or sister at least an equal voice in the government of a professedly Christian country." In conclusion RP asked "Would a female vice-president present herself drunk before the Senate and nation on her inauguration day? Let us at least give woman a trial. She can do no worse than fill the world with corruption, and drunkenness and blood, which is all that men have done." RP of Chicago, "Shall Women Vote?" Presbyter 29.21 (Feb 17, 1869). RP is probably Robert Patterson, a New School pastor who was active in the reunion efforts between Old and New Schools.

⁸Anna, "Help These Women which labored with me in the Gospel," W&O 7.4 (September 4, 1851).

⁹Presbyterian Advocate (PA) 2.52 (Sept 23, 1840).

church to utilize the widows of the church in the areas of mercy, visitation, and the distribution of tracts and religious literature.¹⁰

While women only wrote occasionally on theological and ecclesiastical issues,¹¹ most newspapers frequently published brief essays of a domestic character by women. These generally encouraged women to make their homes havens for their husbands, and exhorted them to teach their children and be active in their communities.¹²

But some recognized that the ideology of domesticity had created certain problems. Archibald Alexander expressed concern that female education was not preparing women for any “useful employment,” and urged parents and teachers to ensure that young ladies had sufficient practical skills to provide for themselves if the need arose.¹³ William Swan

¹⁰Editorial, “Deaconesses,” CP 5.5 (Feb 4, 1860) 26. William Swan Plumer reported in 1844 that 6,010 ladies of Cincinnati had sent a petition to the city council, “praying for the suppression of tippling houses. Well done, Ladies.” “Temperance,” WS 7.33 (April 4, 1844) 130.

¹¹Perhaps the best known work was the anonymous Why Am I a Presbyterian? By a Mother, published by William Martien in 1851. Benjamin Gildersleeve praised the work, saying “The lady author of these little books certainly wields a graceful and forcible pen.” W&O 6.31 (May 22, 1851) 162. From December of 1861 through March of 1862 “Abigail” authored a series of essays espousing a premillennial eschatology in the Kentucky Presbyterian Herald. When someone inquired if she were indeed a woman, Abigail replied that ever since Adam blamed Eve for eating the fruit, “she has thankfully accepted her lot as woman, on the principle that the oppressed is more worthy of commendation than the oppressor, in all cases.” Presbyterian Herald 31.37 (March 13, 1862). If other women wrote theological essays, they did not reveal their gender.

¹²Among the myriads of examples, see “The Wife at Home,” WS 7.7 (Sept 28, 1843) 48. Queen Victoria and her daughter were occasionally referred to as examples. Cf. “A Royal Princess,” PM 8.9 (Sept, 1858); “Queen Victoria, A Working Woman,” PM 9.10 (Oct, 1859). The vision of Old School womanhood generally fits the model of domesticity and republican motherhood described by Linda K. Kerber, Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980); Nancy F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

¹³AA, “Single Ladies Somewhat Advanced in Years,” WS 1.19 (January 4, 1838). This sentiment was frequently echoed in the following years.

Plumer, the editor of the Watchman of the South, understood the root of the problem. In a remarkable editorial, he called attention to

the price of labor, as now fixed in our country. . . . We instance nearly all kinds of work done by females. Really, we do wonder how starvation is kept out of the house of any female, who must rely, even for her own support on the avails of her own industry in the use of the needle. . . . How often do women work hard all day, at their own fireside, and not earn more than ten or fifteen cents. *Men* have taken from females nearly every profitable occupation, and left them scarcely any thing except the most unavailing pursuits. Can there be no change? Cannot some legislation tend to remedy this evil? . . . But he who shall point out an adequate remedy for the evils that now exist on this whole subject, will deserve a statue no less than he who storms the deadly breach or falls in the last trench.¹⁴

Plumer recognized that the economics of gender had changed since the eighteenth century, and that traditional employment opportunities for women had diminished. But while he recognized the problem, Plumer could articulate no solution.¹⁵

Nearly thirty years later the Missouri Presbyterian acknowledged that the situation had not improved: “The system at present in vogue of depreciating woman's labor, and paying her less than half price for the same amount of work when performed by a man. . . is at once the disgrace and the one tremendous crime of this age and people.”¹⁶

¹⁴Editorial, “Low Wages,” WS 3.1 (Aug 29, 1839). Italics original.

¹⁵The following spring he ran an advertisement, which read: “Clothing for Factory Hands, For sale, at the Depository of Work for Indigent Females, at very low prices. Persons in want of such articles are invited to call, and are assured that they will be supplied at prices which will barely cover the cost of the materials and prices paid for making them up.” WS 3.39 (May 14, 1840) 152. In 1853 William Engles could only suggest greater efforts at charity. “The wants of this needy class deserve far more consideration from the benevolent than they have heretofore received. We commend the object to the many excellent Christian ladies in our churches, who have hearts to feel for, and hands to help the poor of their sex.” Editorial, “Employment for Poor Women,” Presbyterian 23.7 (February 12, 1853) 26. The fact that this statement is made in the midst of the “New Themes” controversy is significant—see below.

¹⁶“Oppressing Women, from the Philadelphia *Saturday Night*,” Missouri Presbyterian (Sept 14, 1866).

A similar problem was noted in Pittsburgh in 1862, during the war. David McKinney (1795-1873) noted that in his boyhood in Kentucky “women were in many a harvest-field, and at other out-door work. All this they have long since abandoned. Then, carding, and spinning, and knitting, and sewing were the daily, and weekly, and almost the perpetual employment of women; now the two former are utterly abandoned, and the two latter are rapidly going into disuse.” As machinery relegated such work to a thing of the past, “The result is that our women have become immense consumers, and add but little to the productive capacity of the country.” Therefore McKinney urged women to seek employment in “in-door work which may be adapted to their muscular power. Women could do much more in factories than they now do. They could well occupy nearly all our stores and shops. They could also do much of the writing and accountants' work, which is now performed by men.” Of course, remember the context. Part of this was a temporary measure in order to “relieve tens of thousands of able-bodied men, and turn these out to the army,” but there was a basic principle involved as well. “This change in the work of females would be also a kindness to them, in the way of health, and of independent feeling. It would elevate them. And it would open up a greatly needed means of livelihood for women who are bereaved of husbands and fathers, by the calamities of war.”¹⁷ The assumption was that most women would be at home caring for their children, but at least

¹⁷Editorial, “Female Employment,” PB 10.45 (July 26, 1862).

some Presbyterian men recognized the problems that the economy of domesticity created.¹⁸

But while women were becoming more prominent in Presbyterian church life,¹⁹ it would be inaccurate to say that men were becoming less prominent. If anything the ruling elders (who were exclusively male) came to greater prominence in the nineteenth century than at any previous time in American history. The sorts of forces that Douglas perceives certainly existed in the nineteenth century, but Presbyterians were quite aware of them and sought to retain a strong masculine presence in the life of the church.

B. The “Tranquilizing the Laity” Thesis and the Declining Status of the Minister

In this light, it may be partly accurate to say that Old School Presbyterians were attempting to uphold the ministry by including the laity in the government of the church. Belden Lane has argued that Samuel Miller was trying to “tranquilize” the laity by giving

¹⁸One Pittsburgh author went so far as to encourage women to pursue medical training. Suggesting that men were “blunderers” in diagnosis, “C.” argued that “Woman, with her quick observation, her personal experience and ready tact, would have discovered the malady, and applying the proper remedy, would have removed the suffering instead of the sufferer.” Following from the ideology of domesticity “C.” pointed out that “if purity and kindness, and sympathy and tact, are essential qualifications in the medical practitioner, woman would seem entitled to at least a share of practice.” C., “The Medical Education of Women,” *PB* 3.52 (Sept 22, 1855). McKinney replied that he agreed that they should receive the education, but did not wish to see them become general practitioners. Eight years later he commented on the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania (established 1852/3) that he thought that giving women the M.D. was a bit much: “We are too *conservative* to advocate the innovation, and are unwilling to oppose a movement which some of our lady friends think belongs to their privileges and to the welfare of society.” Editorial, “Female Medical College of Pennsylvania,” *PB* (April 29, 1863).

¹⁹Page Putnam Miller, *A Claim to New Roles* (Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association and The Scarecrow Press, 1985). Miller has described “the professionalization of motherhood” through her study of how Presbyterian women became involved in social and moral reform, Sunday school teaching, and missionary societies—all activities which transformed domesticity into a public role for women. (79)

them a part in church government.²⁰ Put more positively, Presbyterians saw the role of the ruling elder as a vital element in church government. As the church's official "Form of Government" put it, "Ruling elders are representatives of the people, chosen by them for the purpose of exercising government and discipline, in conjunction with pastors or ministers."²¹ Ruling elders visited the families of the church (often in pairs) and together with the pastor formed the session—the governing body of the local church. Ruling elders also had an equal voice and vote with ministers in presbytery and synod (the regional governing bodies of the church) and the national General Assembly. Presbyterianism had always emphasized the rule of the elders, as opposed to the rule of the congregation. As Old School Presbyterians saw the encroachment of New England congregationalism into their church, they were determined to purify the polity of the church in order to maintain vital orthodoxy. Indeed, reformers such as Robert J. Breckinridge argued that corruption in church order in 1801 had led to defections in doctrine.

Both the feminization thesis and the tranquilization thesis assume that the status of the minister was declining. Old School Presbyterians certainly concurred with that. They remembered a time when ministers were the center of a community's life, and attempted to utilize that memory in order to retain as much respect for the ministry as they could.

²⁰Belden Curnow Lane, "Democracy and the Ruling Eldership: Samuel Miller's Response to Tensions between Clerical Power and Lay Activity in Early Nineteenth Century America," (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1976).

²¹Constitution (1840) 414. This was an alteration from the 1645 Scottish "Form of Presbyterial Church Government," which stated that "Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in his church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church." (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1997) 402.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the minister had an important place in society. Presbyterian churches traditionally had insisted upon a well-trained ministry that could take its place with the rest of genteel society. Therefore ministers tended to be well paid, and also tended to come from the middle and upper levels of society. As such, the Presbyterian minister in Scotland and Northern Ireland had a high social standing. But in antebellum America, the clergy sensed the decline of their position. Several historians have called attention to the anti-clericalism and democratization of religion in the wake of the American revolution.²² The rise of the influence of ruling elders needs to be seen in the light of declining ministerial status.

While Presbyterian ministers were better paid than their Methodist or Baptist counterparts, there is no dispute that ministers were rapidly falling behind their counterparts in law and medicine. Of course, there were regional differences in what Presbyterian congregations were able or willing to pay their ministers. Unfortunately, the numbers for congregational giving are not available for the earlier period, since they were only recorded after 1850. But in spite of the comparative prosperity of 1860, it still reveals the disparity between rich and poor within the Old School.²³

²²Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Lane, "Democracy and the Ruling Eldership."

²³The chart comes from the statistical reports of the 1860 Minutes. Congregational giving could include monies given for other purposes than paying the pastor, so if anything, this chart would overestimate pastors' salaries. Robert Doherty has argued that at least in Philadelphia the New School consisted largely of "new money" merchants, while the Old School had a larger population of artisans and mechanics, along with the "old money." See "Social Bases for the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-1838: The Philadelphia Case," Journal of Social History 2 (Fall, 1968) 69-79. This theory has been criticized by Ira R. Harkaby, "Reference Group Theory and Group Conflict and Cohesion in Advanced Capitalist Societies: Presbyterians, Workers and Jews in Philadelphia, 1790-1968," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1979) 271-281.

	# of churches	Northeast	Northwest	Southwest	South	Other
\$1,000+	600 (17%)	242 (31%)	134 (10%)	108 (15%)	109 (15%)	7
\$500-\$1,000	585 (16%)	167 (21%)	236 (18%)	78 (11%)	103 (15%)	1
\$0-\$500	779 (22%)	166 (21%)	332 (25%)	179 (24%)	100 (14%)	2
Joint pastorates*	705 (20%)	61 (8%)	310 (23%)	142 (19%)	181 (26%)	4
not reporting**	921 (26%)	148 (19%)	327 (24%)	225 (31%)	216 (30%)	13
Total	3590	784	1339	732	709	27

*Joint pastorates records the number of churches which combined with one or more churches to pay a pastor or stated supply. Joint pastorates are connected with a church in the first three rows (usually the \$500-\$1,000 range).

**The vast majority of non-reporting congregations were vacant and unable to support a pastor. Other consists of the Synods of the Pacific and Northern India

Figure 2.1. Giving for Congregational Purposes, 1860

This table suggests that only about one-third of Old School churches (one-half if joint pastorates are included) were able to pay a salary of \$500 or more. As might be expected, the northeastern churches were the wealthiest, with the other three regions more or less equal to each other. Urban churches generally paid from \$1,000-\$5,000, depending upon the size of the city (the cost of living was considerably higher in the larger cities), while rural and small town churches generally tried to come up with \$500-\$1,000 for their pastor, often combining with a neighboring church or two in order to share a minister.²⁴

The financial situation for Virginia's Presbyterians was one of the worst on the eastern seaboard. William S. White, pastor of the Lexington congregation, pointed out that only five or six of the thirty ministers in the two adjoining presbyteries of Lexington and West Hanover (covering the southern and western half of modern Virginia) were paid

²⁴E. Brooks Holifield has provided comparative numbers for Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians in the South, demonstrating that there was a wide disparity not merely between denominations, but within denominations. The Gentleman Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978) 28-30.

enough to provide for their families without requiring teaching or farming to supplement their income. This would not be very encouraging for a young man who was capable of making \$3-4,000 per year as a lawyer or businessman.²⁵

But it was not merely in Virginia that these problems were discussed. The Home and Foreign Record regularly spoke of the trials of domestic missionaries in the West, “dedicated men who live on next to nothing.” As one ruling elder from Western Pennsylvania wrote, after visiting Illinois and Iowa for six months in 1858, “Many in our old congregations have but a faint idea of the obstacles which our ministers encounter in the West., in building up feeble churches, gathering up scattered members, and organizing churches in destitute places.” One minister that he had met could not even afford a coat.²⁶ The Presbyterian reported that a brother in the West had written to say that his congregation could only pay him half of his \$125 salary, “and but about *fifteen* or *twenty* dollars of that in money—a small dependence for the support of a minister *with two little motherless boys*, where the time that can be spared from pastoral duties is devoted to *gratuitous* missionary labour, leaving me no leisure for sustaining myself by teaching

²⁵W. S. W., “Candidates for the Ministry” W&O 4.18 (Dec 12, 1848) 69. G. A. H., “Candidates for the Ministry” W&O 6. 21 (Jan 2, 1851) 81. A decade later, William S. White was one of the five highest paid pastors in Virginia with a salary of \$2,000. The Minutes suggest that only 14 of the 43 ministers in the two presbyteries of Lexington and West Hanover were paid more than \$500 by their churches. In the whole Synod of Virginia only 53 out of 119 ministers received more than \$500 from their churches. Another 10 ministers were professors, editors, or principals who received their salaries independent of congregational giving, which leaves 56 ministers attempting to subsist on less than \$500 per year. As White suggests, most of these were probably teaching and/or farming on the side. Minutes (1860) 213-219. (It should be noted, though, that many of these ministers likely received at least some of their pay in kind, rather than in cash). In contrast, the Synod of New York provides an example of the wealth of the Northeast. Ninety out of 122 ministers in pastoral charges received over \$500 per year, with 60 receiving more than \$1,000. Of course, the cost of living around New York City was considerably higher than rural Virginia, but the New York Observer contains no similar complaints about impoverished ministers.

²⁶“Valuable Testimony,” Home and Foreign Record 10.1 (January, 1859) 2.

school or farming.” But this minister could not bring himself to seek a more lucrative field: “I cannot abandon it; yea, I desire to be thankful to the Lord who has sent me here in the midst of these vast desolations.”²⁷ Such stories convinced some that the American system of ministerial support was lacking. William Engles pointed out that the Free Church of Scotland, which he deemed to be less wealthy than the Old School, was still able to guarantee all ministers at least \$650 per year plus a parsonage. He suggested that the problem was not a lack of resources, but an inadequate concern for the temporal needs of ministers.²⁸

Another change in ministerial practice was the length of tenure. Whereas the older practice of all Protestant churches had encouraged “life-settlement,” by the 1850s fewer and fewer ministers were remaining in the same congregation for an extended period of time. J. F. M. visited 143 churches in four synods in 1852 as a traveling agent. Of those 143 churches, only 40 had the same pastor six years later.²⁹ As ministers became increasingly mobile, the importance of the ruling elder grew. Ministers might come and go, but now the ruling elder would provide the continuity that the pastor had once given. Indeed, many were beginning to think that ruling elders could fill in for the lack of ministers. In 1842 one ruling elder suggested in the Philadelphia Presbyterian that pious elders should relocate to destitute neighborhoods and villages in order to organize

²⁷“Remembering the Brethren” Presbyterian 15.17 (April 26, 1845) 66.

²⁸Editorial, “Inadequate Support of Ministers,” Presbyterian 22.39 (September 25, 1852) 154; cf. W, Southern Presbyterian 5.31 (April 1, 1852) 117.

²⁹J. F. M., “The Pastoral Relation,” Presbyterian 29.5 (January 29, 1859) 18. Belden Lane has shown that the average tenure of pastorates dropped from 20-25 years in the mid-eighteenth century to 10-12 years in the 1840s. Lane, “Democracy and the Ruling Eldership,” chapter 5.

churches through establishing Sunday schools, bible classes and distributing Christian literature.³⁰ Likewise, the Rev. Benjamin Gildersleeve, editor of the Watchman and Observer, suggested that ruling elders could be appointed to supply destitute churches, or at least take over certain pastoral duties (such as visitation) to enable the pastors to do so.³¹

But a southwestern author in the True Witness pointed out that the same reasons for the lack of ministers also affected the ruling elders. He complained that many ruling elders “are too worldly-minded and grasping and seem to forget their high obligations to live for God.” While most elders were moral in their deportment, they seemed to lack a strong sense for “the spiritual interests of the church.”³² One elder declared that “There are church sessions composed of men, who are hosts in themselves, on the court green, in the counting-house or at the forum, some of whom are wholly unqualified for the high *spiritual* office of a ruling elder in the church of *Christ*.” Elders needed to care for the spiritual needs of the church, not merely provide money; but proper spiritual care requires men who were themselves spiritually qualified to lead.³³ Some suspected that the

³⁰H., “Piety and Activity in the Eldership,” Presbyterian 12.52 (December 24, 1842) 206.

³¹editorial, “The Buried Talent” W&O 6.32 (March 20, 1851) 126; cf. A Presbyterian of the Old School, “Letter to M. D. Hoge” W&O 8.22 (Jan 13, 1853) 90.

³²“We Need a Higher Standard of Piety,” True Witness 4.40 (Jan 23, 1858); J. F., “Save me from my Friends” W&O 8.25 (Feb 3, 1853) 102; “A Glance at the Present Position of the Eldership of the Presbyterian Church,” Presbyterial Critic 1:2 (February, 1855) 66-72.

³³An Elder, “The Waste Materials of the Church” W&O 9.32 (March 16, 1854) 124. “Iota” pointed out that ruling elders could be useful in providing books for people who lived far from a Presbyterian minister, calling attention to Gilbert Tennent Snowden of Richmond (and later Columbia, South Carolina) who was known for distributing good books and encouraging young men to become preachers. “Preaching by Proxy” CP 1.13 (March 29, 1856). Snowden (17??-1853?) was one of the leading ruling elders of the Old School, and served on several boards: Foreign Missions, 1841-1853, Domestic Missions 1836-1853, and Education 1840-1853. He served as a commissioner to General Assembly in 1836, 1843, 1844, and 1846-1849 (and probably several times before 1836).

underlying greed of the American economy was luring ruling elders from their devotion to Christ.³⁴

C. Presbyterians and the Market

With leading lawyers, businessmen, and politicians in their churches, Presbyterian ministers and elders continued the tradition of addressing the political, social, and economic issues of the day. The published works and public actions of these ruling elders suggest that many maintained a strong connection between their Presbyterian identity and their chosen field.³⁵ Nonetheless, this connection was being eroded by the acids of modernity. Curtis D. Johnson in his book, Islands of Holiness, argues that churches in the 1820s and 1830s were still disciplining businessmen for economic sins, but that by the 1850s and 1860s this had almost completely vanished. Old School Presbyterian newspapers reflect the same trend. As late as the early 1840s there are still notices of economic sins, but by the 1850s and 1860s there are fewer notices, and the sermons on

³⁴According to one correspondent, the same elders who could not provide more than \$50 per year for the pastor “do not hesitate when the summer comes to leave their cool and commodious country houses, and hie away to some fashionable watering place. . . at the tune of a hundred dollars a week.” Anonymous, “An Appeal to Presbyterians” W&O 6.22 (Jan 9, 1849) 86.

³⁵George Sharswood (1810-1883), a ruling elder at Tabernacle Church in Philadelphia and a member and eventually chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, published the American edition of Blackstone with his own annotations, which became the textbook for all law schools in the United States, as well as a volume on Professional Ethics (1854). Stephen Colwell, also a Philadelphia ruling elder, wrote New Themes for the Protestant Clergy (1851), Politics for American Christians (1852), and The Position of Christianity in the United States (1854) along with numerous economic treatises. Joseph A. Maybin (1795-1876), a prominent lawyer in New Orleans, and “the best elder” Benjamin M. Palmer ever knew, was well known for his scrupulous integrity in the legal community and regularly pressed the claims of the gospel upon his fellow lawyers. See appendix two for more information on the ruling elders.

economic matters start to become more generic.³⁶ Nonetheless, ministers regularly expressed concern over the trajectory of American society. This concern, as Kenneth M. Startup has pointed out, existed at least as strongly in the south as in the north. Americans were obsessed with accumulating wealth, and ministers feared that the spirit of speculation and enterprise was overwhelming even the most pious.³⁷

³⁶Curtis D. Johnson, Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790-1860 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); see also Mark Noll, "Protestant Reasoning about Money and the Economy, 1790-1860: A Preliminary Probe," God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 278; Christine Heyrman, Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997) 250; James Oscar Farmer, Jr., The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986) 169-170. Farmer provides a table of discipline cases for 61 southern Presbyterian churches which show that discipline reached a high point in the 1840s and 1850s (with over 25% of the cases dealing with intemperance, another 20% regarding sex and marriage, while the ones relating to business practices fell from over 6% before 1840 to less than 2% after 1860. See William D. Blanks, "Ideal and Practice: A Study of the Conception of the Christian Life Prevailing in the Presbyterian Churches of the Nineteenth Century," (Th. D. dissertation, Union Seminary in Virginia, 1960).

³⁷Kenneth Moore Startup, The Root of All Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1997). Startup admits that he had expected to find the clergy "far more at ease with its cultural milieu," but discovered that they had serious reservations about the economic world in which they lived. (6) Startup points out that the sermons of northern and southern ministers sound rather similar in their critique of greed and avarice. (127) "The clerical perspective does not reveal two fundamentally distinct regional mentalities, rather a shared ideology that celebrated aggressive personal economic advancement as the premier avocation. To ministers, the avaricious spirit or mind, whether it employed slaves or machines to accomplish its selfish purpose, was still the same misguided and sinful spirit." (135). Also see 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. Likewise, Richard W. Pointer has pointed out that Old School Presbyterians did not differ markedly from New Schoolers in their attitudes toward the market. While enthusiastic about the economic potential of America, they also were concerned that the pursuit of wealth—and especially the "spirit of speculation," could become a deterrent to vital piety. But both "operated out of a single set of intellectual assumptions concerning how to think about economic life." Richard W. Pointer, "Philadelphia Presbyterians, Capitalism, and the Morality of Economic Success," God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 171-191. The one difference that Pointer does see is that Old School Presbyterians tended to have a somewhat more hierarchical view of society and therefore promoted charity as a permanent part of the social order, while New Schoolers saw the "'lower stratum of society,' as an obstacle to revivals." (178)

Old School ministers frequently addressed sermons, essays and books to the new economic world that they and their parishioners inhabited.³⁸ Henry A. Boardman, pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, wrote The Bible in the Counting-House, warning against the temptations of the mercantile life.³⁹ In a review of Boardman's volume in the Princeton Review Lyman H. Atwater praised his careful treatment of the subject. Agreeing with Boardman that the advancement of civilization had resulted in the minute division of labor, Atwater pointed out that bankers were the true rulers. "The power of these huge corporations is immense and ubiquitous"—and also dangerous.⁴⁰ Without Christian principles of justice and mercy, capitalism's fierce competition could tend toward dishonesty and fraud. "Poverty and degradation grow apace with wealth, luxury, and refinement."⁴¹ But, he argued that socialistic remedies would only make things worse. The only true solution would be found in the preaching of the gospel, which could transform greedy businessmen into godly citizens.⁴²

³⁸Two southern examples include E. P. Rogers, "Mercantile Morals," SPR 6.4 (April 1853) 529-546; Robert L. Dabney, "Morality of the Legal Profession," SPR 11.4 (January 1859) 571-592. Rogers reminded his readers not to confuse legal with moral, and to avoid "supreme and criminal selfishness in their business transactions, but rather to consider the needs of others in conducting business. (536) Dabney urged lawyers not to separate their legal ethics from their personal ethics, and to refrain from arguing that a man was innocent when he was in fact guilty.

³⁹Henry A. Boardman, The Bible in the Counting-House: A Course of Lectures to Merchants (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1853).

⁴⁰"The Bible in the Counting-House" Princeton Review 25.3 (July, 1853) 394. Atwater was a Congregationalist pastor.

⁴¹"The Bible in the Counting-House," 398.

⁴²"The Bible in the Counting-House," 401.

Likewise, Old School Presbyterians were troubled about the effect of a free market on Sabbath observance. The Sabbath was the economic issue most frequently addressed by Presbyterians.⁴³ But the interest in Sabbath-keeping pushed Presbyterians to consider other economic issues as well. The New School minister John P. Cleaveland, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Detroit, Michigan, urged the 1836 General Assembly to condemn not only the transaction of secular business on Sundays, but also owning “stock in such establishments as stages, steam boats, rail roads and the like, which are employed in violation of that holy day.”⁴⁴ Cleaveland argued that if a man owned stock in a company, then he was a part-owner of that company, and therefore was morally liable if he was aware of any sinful actions that his company committed. This logic would severely hamstring the capitalist system—which rests upon the pillar of limited economic liability for stockholders—by adding a moral liability that would require greater oversight of corporations.⁴⁵

But the majority, led by Samuel Miller, disagreed with Cleaveland. Miller agreed that it was a bad idea to own stock in such a company, but Miller argued that stockholders were not owners—they were lenders. The stockholder loaned his money to the company in the hope of a good return on his investment. But while Miller may have had a better grasp

⁴³Among a myriad of examples: “A Case of Conscience,” Presbyterian Advocate (March 29, 1839); “Sabbath Mails,” Watchman of the South (August 12, 1841). The Watchman of the South reported on several synods and presbyteries that were urging greater attention to Sabbath observance (December 21, 1843), and praised the postmaster general for establishing a six day contract in New York state (March 20, 1845), but complained that Petersburg, Virginia, still operated Sunday markets (May 15, 1845).

⁴⁴“The General Assembly of 1836,” BRPR 3.3 (July, 1836) 443.

⁴⁵See the similar argument in “Sabbath Rail-way Trains,” Presbyterial Critic 1:3 (March, 1855) 134-140.

of the principles of capitalist investments, he was not unconcerned about the moral implications of such investments. The Assembly accepted his amendment to Cleaveland's report, and declared that "the owners of stock in the steam boats, canals, rail roads, &c. who are in the habit of violating the Sabbath, are lending their property and their influence to one of the most wide-spread, alarming, and deplorable systems of Sabbath desecration, which now grieve the hearts of the pious and disgrace the church of God."⁴⁶

The solution, for Miller and the majority of Presbyterians, was to focus on the Sabbath to the exclusion of making any statement about the general moral liability of stockholders. Instead they urged that "the friends of the Lord's day" should "establish such means of public conveyance as shall relieve the friends of the Sabbath from the necessity under which they now labour, of travelling at any time in vehicles which habitually violate that holy day; and thus prevent them from being partakers in other men's sins, in this respect."⁴⁷ Throughout the antebellum era, Old School newspapers regularly praised companies that shut down on Sundays, and urged their readers to patronize such businesses.⁴⁸

⁴⁶"The General Assembly of 1836," BRPR 3.3 (July, 1836) 443.

⁴⁷"The General Assembly of 1836," BRPR 3.3 (July, 1836) 443.

⁴⁸The Presbyterian Advocate (September 12, 1849) reported that Isaac Charles of Charles' Livery Stable was maintaining his business on Sabbath-keeping principles. Charles' advertisement included testimonials from one of Pittsburgh's leading ministers, David Elliott, three Methodist ministers, and six other churches (one Presbyterian, two Reformed Presbyterian, one Cumberland Presbyterian, and two German Reformed). By 1859 Pittsburgh had passed strict blue laws, which were then used against the very Presbyterians who had urged their passage. Two prominent Presbyterian laymen, Mr. Logan and Judge Lowrie, were fined in October for hiring men to drive their carriage to church on Sunday. David McKinney, editor of the Presbyterian Banner, protested that "they were men hired by the month." He argued that "the hired sexton, and hired ferryman, and hired cook, work, on the Sabbath, *work for hire*, but are not fined for their Sunday labor." He agreed that if the employer prevented his driver from going to church, that would be "an outrage," but he believed that Mayor Weaver was trying to use the Sabbath laws against the

While sidestepping the question of the stockholder's moral liability, the Old School did engage more directly the question of usury. The Reformed tradition had debated the question of usury for centuries,⁴⁹ and the Old School followed similar tracks, though occasionally with greater economic sophistication. In principle, all Presbyterians agreed that the Old Testament civil laws were no longer binding, but they differed as to how far its "equity" went in suggesting principles for modern lawmakers. The question arose in the Presbytery of Louisville whether the church should discipline a man for usury who charged more than six per cent interest (Kentucky law prohibited charging more than six per cent). Following the arguments of William L. Breckinridge, the presbytery determined that the usury condemned in the Bible refers to illegal interest, and therefore

Presbyterians. "Fines on the Mode of Going to Worship on the Sabbath--A Symptom of an Anti-Religious Inquisition," Presbyterian Banner (October 29, 1859). On December 3, he reported that the state supreme court had overturned Mayor Weaver's fines.

⁴⁹The Reformed tradition had debated the question of usury since the sixteenth century without coming to a unanimous consensus. Most of the sixteenth century Reformers approved of the practice of charging interest on business loans to the wealthy or middle classes, but condemned as usury all interest charged to the poor. The list includes Calvin, Martyr, Bucer, Bullinger, Ursinus, Perkins, and Ames. Wolfgang Musculus wrote the standard treatise on the subject which was translated into English in 1552. But after the middle of the seventeenth century, as merchant capitalism took root in England some reaction began to set in. Acknowledging that they were differing from the consensus of the sixteenth century, they pointed out that the Old Testament forbade Israelites from loaning money at interest to each other, and argued that these laws remained binding. See Richard Capel, Tentations; Their Nature, Danger, Cure . . . To which is added a Briefe Dispute, as touching Restitution in the Case of Usury (London: Printed by R. B., 1633) 293. Capel argued that charging interest is stealing on the following ground: if a man rents a house, then he pays for the value of the house. If a man rents money, then he pays for the value of the money, PLUS interest. The interest is above and beyond the value of the money, therefore it is theft. Robert Filmer (a layman) replied to these sorts of arguments, pointing out that Reformed ministers themselves were divided on the subject. Claiming that the Old Testament usury laws were judicial, he used the Westminster Confession's logic to argue that they are no longer binding upon modern nations. The Confession states that the judicial laws of Israel "expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require." 19.4. Everyone condemned usury, but they did not agree on the definition of usury. For more on the British debates see Norman Jones, God and the Moneylenders: Usury and Law in Early Modern England (Oxford, 1989) and Gordon Marshall, Presbyteries and Profits: Calvinism and the Development of Capitalism in Scotland, 1560-1707 (Edinburgh, 1992).

the church should discipline those who charged more than six per cent interest because it was a violation of Kentucky law.

Breckinridge, who summarized his arguments in “A Discourse on Usury” in 1843, argued that usury is not merely lending at interest, but that measure “of interest on money loaned, which tends to eat up the substance of the borrower.” Suggesting that ten per cent interest ordinarily “has a certain tendency to a devouring issue,” Breckinridge called such interest “extortion.”⁵⁰ But Breckinridge’s interest was not merely exegetical or ecclesiastical. He also had a political goal in view—namely the defense of clear usury laws for the United States.

Breckinridge insisted 1) that government has the “high moral obligation of regulating, in detail, certain questions for the peace and order of society.” 2) Among those obligations are regulation of currency—whether of coin or of paper. “The state assumes the entire and sovereign control of the subject, and reason and all experience show that this is not only *right*, but *necessary*.” Trade could not exist if everyone were allowed to coin money.⁵¹ Therefore 3) the government has the right to fix the rate of “compensation for the use of money”—namely, interest. Finally, this suggests that “human governments *are bound*, under the general principles of revealed religion, by the dictates of sound reason and the results of experience, to regulate by law the value of the use of money.” In other

⁵⁰William L. Breckinridge, “A Discourse on Usury,” *SXC* 2.2 (February, 1843) 100. Breckinridge had spent the first ten pages (89-99) exegeting Leviticus 25:35-37, Deuteronomy 23:19-20, and Nehemiah 5:7-10 in order to show the evils of usury. His formal definition of usury was “*the exacting of greater interest on money than the laws of the country allow.*”

⁵¹Breckinridge, “A Discourse on Usury,” 103.

words, Kentucky's six per cent restriction was just, and both the civil government and the church courts should enforce laws against usury.⁵²

When the Synod of Kentucky reviewed the case, the Rev. James K. Burch of Lexington argued that usury referred to "interest of every kind, and was invariably used, when condemned, in connexion with poverty and distress. He remarked that the Bible forbid the taking of *any per cent.* at all of those who were in distress." He objected to Breckinridge's effort to interpret the law of God by the civil law. "He did not go to the civil law to find out what God meant when he denounced usury as a sin. . . . He contended that money was property, and as such, was taxed, and should be left like other commodities to regulate itself."⁵³

The Rev. Dr. Robert Davidson of Lexington replied with a more sophisticated grasp of economic history. The Hebrew law was designed for an agricultural people who "never borrowed money except when compelled by urgent necessity," but could take interest from their neighbors (like the Phoenicians, who were traders). Since the modern economy was drastically different, the old Hebrew law did not apply any more. Tracing the history of usury through both civil and canon law, Davidson argued that since the Larger Catechism defined usury as sin, but does not define usury, it permits the view that simply oppressing the poor is condemned. For Davidson, Breckinridge's attempt to make the Old Testament law fit the modern economy was an exercise in futility. Noting that Great Britain had removed its usury laws forbidding interest above a certain per cent, Davidson

⁵²Breckinridge, "A Discourse on Usury," 104.

⁵³"Debate on Usury before the Synod" Protestant and Herald (P&H) 12.5 (November 3, 1842).

argued that the laws of the several United States (ranging from six to ten per cent) demonstrated that setting a just standard by law was no longer possible. Instead, he argued that the state should forbid extortion, but leave interest rates to equity—what is just and fair.⁵⁴ The Synod concurred and rejected the presbytery’s claim that charging more than six per cent interest could render a man subject to the discipline of the church.

But one other aspect of the debate is worthy of note. The Hon. James M. Preston (a ruling elder from Ebenezer Presbytery)⁵⁵ argued that “if a law be made by the proper law-making power in a State, and it be neither contrary to the constitution nor to the Bible, it is the embodiment in language of the *national conscience*, and every particular citizen, and much more every christian citizen ought certainly to obey it.”⁵⁶ Preston’s usage of the idea of a national conscience suggests that Old School Presbyterians still wanted to maintain a sense of corporate conscience, and that they wanted to maintain a place in defining what that corporate conscience said. As businessmen, bankers and lawyers became increasingly prominent in defining that corporate conscience, ruling elders would play a larger and larger role in expressing the vision of the church in American society.⁵⁷

⁵⁴“Debate on Usury before the Synod” P&H 12.5 (November 3, 1842).

⁵⁵Preston attended the 1845 General Assembly as a ruling elder commissioner from Ebenezer Presbytery in Kentucky.

⁵⁶“Debate on Usury before the Synod” P&H 12.5 (November 3, 1842). Cf. William Swan Plumer, “Usury,” WS 4.7 (October 8, 1840) 26.

⁵⁷Another interesting aspect of this debate is that none of these Kentucky ministers or elders seems to have suggested that this discussion was outside the competence of the church to discuss. The question of usury was plainly addressed in scripture and in their confession, so there was no suggestion that the spirituality of the church forbade such discussions. Such arguments would only come to prominence in the 1850s. A similar emphasis can be found in the anonymous articles on “Usury” PW (January 22, 29, February 5, 1852) 70, 74, 78, as well as “Usury,” St. Louis Presbyterian 11.31 (February 1, 1854). It was during this era that bankruptcy laws began to receive greater attention. The Presbyterian Advocate

D. Providentialism and Its Critics

Presbyterian economic discourse often focused on the providential aspect of economic activity. Presbyterians frequently noted the connection between financial crises and revivals. In 1840, the annual “Narrative of the State of Religion” commented that urban churches had increased significantly in numbers during the “financial downturn” since 1837.⁵⁸ Likewise in 1857, William Engles, the editor of the *Philadelphia Presbyterian* noted in the midst of the commercial panic, “Credit is gone, and confidence, that foundation-stone of commercial transactions, no longer exists.” Urging businessmen to remember the providence of God, he suggested that success is not always good for the soul: “Just such times as these are doubtless often needed to cure men of their madness, and bring them to their reason.”⁵⁹

published a skeptical review of New England bankruptcy laws, which granted that some honest debtors might truly benefit from bankruptcy, but argued that “the influence of this law will on the whole, be eminently disastrous to the morals of the country. It is, perhaps, nearly impossible to frame any system of bankruptcy, which will not present some motives to perjury and fraud; and which will not impair, to a considerable extent in society, the sense of moral obligation, and especially the moral obligation of contracts.” “Moral Influence of Bankrupt Laws, from the *Puritan*,” *PA* 5.47 (August 30, 1843). But most Old School Presbyterians agreed with Henry Boardman when he said that business failures were not necessarily moral failures, and that bankruptcy could be honorable, so long as the debtor still fully intended to repay all his debts. Boardman, *The Bible in the Counting-House* (1853) 185. It is interesting that Boardman’s lectures are almost entirely devoid of any substantive biblical teaching on economics. For instance, his treatment of bankruptcy contains no references to the Old Testament forgiveness of debts, even as a statement of principle. Instead he says, “We must do nothing to subvert the great moral principles which are the buttresses of all honourable commerce, and the decay of which is the sure precursor of embarrassment. Among these principles, are, the inviolability of contracts, the permanent obligation of debts, and the imperative duty of restricting one’s pecuniary engagements” within one’s means (203).

⁵⁸“Narrative of the State of Religion,” *Minutes* (1840) 310. This was drawn up by a committee chaired by Henry Boardman, pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.

⁵⁹editorial, “The Commercial Panic,” *Presbyterian* 27.39 (September 26, 1857) 154. The best treatment of the revival itself is Kathryn Teresa Long, *The Revival of 1857-58: Interpreting an American Religious Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). For commentary on the economic aspect of the revival, see Long’s, “‘Turning. . . Piety into Hard Cash’: The Marketing of Nineteenth-century Revivalism,” *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford

But a few Presbyterians believed such pious comments fell far short of the needs of the poor. In 1851 an anonymous layman exploded a bomb in the evangelical urban community. New Themes for the Protestant Clergy claimed that while “Protestantism has gone before the world in liberality, it is almost a stranger to that charity which the Author of our faith preached and exemplified.” Claiming that Protestants had elevated theology over charity, he inveighed against the lack of charity in Protestant theology,⁶⁰ and argued that Jesus’ teaching and example demanded that the church care for the poor.⁶¹ Initial speculation suggested that the author was probably a Unitarian or “Infidel” who delighted to attack Protestantism. But slowly the word spread that the author was an Old School

University Press, 2002) 236-263. In a similar context Charles Cashdollar has studied Presbyterian responses to the Panic of 1873 and has suggested that their providential view of history “limited the ways in which their concern could be expressed.” They were convinced that if godly business practices were enforced, then there would be no need for panic; people panicked because they were guilty. Cashdollar, “Ruin and Revival: The Attitude of the Presbyterian Churches Toward the Panic of 1873” JPH 50:3 (1972) 229-244, quote from 244.

⁶⁰[Stephen Colwell], New Themes for the Protestant Clergy (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1851) 29. His first foray into this field was “The Poor and the Poor Laws of Great Britain,” BRPR 13.1 (January, 1841) 99-131, a detailed study of the failure of British poor relief in the early nineteenth century, followed by “McCulloch’s British Empire,” BRPR 13.3 (July, 1841) 416-450.

⁶¹New Themes 32-33. The principles articulated by Colwell had been suggested by others, though with less force, such as John Hall’s “The Place of the Laity,” Princeton Review 3.2 (April 1836) 233-243. Hall had argued that “The neglected condition of our native and emigrant population; their scanty instruction; their irreligion and practical exclusion from the place of worship and social influence by the pretensions of *caste*,” were among the evils that preaching could not reach. Only the work of the laity among the poor could remove the dangers. Likewise, Thomas Smyth of Charleston, South Carolina, had argued in “The Office of Deacon,” SPR 2.3 (December, 1848) 341-361, that the failure of the church to care for the poor was devastating. He argued that every church should have 18-20 deacons to visit the poor and seek to minister to their needs. “Depend upon it, the severance of the poor from the bounty of the Church is a fatal policy, both for the Church and the community.” (355) The church’s failure in this respect could only exacerbate class tensions. Smyth suggested that “Deacons might, in a silent and indirect manner, contribute to the personal, social and business prosperity of those who are connected with the church; recommend them to those who might need their services or their goods; put those who wish employment in the way of finding it,” as well as promote the literature and educational institutions of the church. (357) Smyth was self-consciously drawing on Thomas Chalmers diaconal experiments in Glasgow. See Stewart J. Brown, Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland (Oxford, 1982).

Presbyterian ruling elder from Philadelphia (who was eventually revealed as Stephen Colwell). In 1853 he published again, this time under the pseudonym of “A Protestant Clergyman,” Charity and the Clergy to defend what he had written. Since the religious newspapers had replied with such hostility, he now ventured to prophesy regarding the future of Protestantism:

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.⁶²

Colwell insisted that Calvinist theology was not incorrect, but incomplete.⁶³ “*Why has Christianity so little attractive power in the community?*”⁶⁴ Colwell suggested that it was because the churches were “all indeed scrambling upward, but yet lying like the horizontal strata in a conical mountain.” There was “so much provision for the rich and so little for the poor; in plain terms, so much that is proud, and ambitious, and commercial, and vain.”⁶⁵

⁶²A Protestant Clergyman [Stephen Colwell], Charity and the Clergy (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1853) xi-xii. For a brief account of Colwell see Nancy J. Duff, “New Themes for the Protestant Clergy,” American Presbyterians 66:4 (Winter, 1988) 254-259.

⁶³Charity and the Clergy, 19.

⁶⁴Charity and the Clergy, 43.

⁶⁵Charity and the Clergy, 45-46.

Colwell suggested that the desire to attract the rich and powerful was affecting orthodox preaching as well, and he argued that a desire to preach to the poor would further the proclamation of the whole counsel of God. He pointed to the notices of Sunday sermons in the Saturday papers,

regularly inserted alongside of notices of quack medicines and theatrical exhibitions, announcing clerical performances of various kinds; yet you search in vain for discussions of atonement, sin, regeneration—whilst you find an abundance of sermons on ‘Moral Beauty,’ ‘Heavenly Recognition,’ ‘Temptation;’ and any number on Kossuth, Hungary, Intervention, Union, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, Maine Liquor Law, France, Cuba, Presidential election, and all the other exciting topics of the day. And should some faithful old Calvinist advertise a discourse on ‘Predestination,’ some of his own congregation would stay at home, and others would fear the old man was getting a little unbalanced in his old age.⁶⁶

Colwell was not simply a precursor to the social gospel of the late nineteenth century, as some have portrayed him.⁶⁷ He believed that care for the poor was essential to maintain orthodoxy. He feared that a church devoted to the rich would produce an “easy indifferentism which is without faith, which prefers the stagnation of the pool rather than have their indolence stirred by a ripple.” Such charity, to his mind, was a vice.⁶⁸

The only solution was to pursue “a course of justice and kindness to those who naturally feel themselves to be oppressed, and who will not bear a long-protracted exasperation.”⁶⁹ Knowing that he would be accused of socialism, he insisted that

⁶⁶Charity and the Clergy, 78.

⁶⁷Duff, “New Themes,” 254-259; Hugh T. Kerr, ed., Sons of the Prophets: Leaders in Protestantism from Princeton Seminary (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

⁶⁸Charity and the Clergy, 91.

⁶⁹Charity and the Clergy, 130.

“‘Socialism’ has gotten to be one of the hobgoblin terms to frighten grown-up children with, as if Christianity does not teach socialism from beginning to end.” Colwell believed that the church was at fault for allowing “a set of Christ-hating philanthropists to filch and appropriate our great Christian idea, and because they contort it, we have been denying Christ.”⁷⁰ While he rejected the “infidel” perversions of Fourierism or Abolitionism, he pled with the church not to “disown great Christian ideas because fools and knaves turn them into their shuttlecocks.”⁷¹

Finally, Colwell suggested some practical suggestions for how to accomplish what he desired. Rejecting the present system of relief societies as a halfway measure, and suggesting that state relief merely fostered “idleness and improvidence,”⁷² he argued that it was only through the church “that Christ is still on the earth instrumentally ‘going about doing good!’”⁷³ Therefore the churches in a given city should divide up the whole field between them and care for the poor in that city.

They should be addressed to providing roomy dwellings, finding employment for all able to work, providing nurses and medical attendants, to reforming the vicious, educating the young, instructing all in the duties of morals and religion; exhorting and praying with families, giving Bible and other suitable books to such as can read; gathering several families together for worship and instruction, providing plain houses of worship in

⁷⁰Charity and the Clergy, 131.

⁷¹Charity and the Clergy, 131.

⁷²Charity and the Clergy, 148.

⁷³Charity and the Clergy, 135.

their neighborhood—in short, simultaneously carrying on every department of effort for the general elevation of each district.⁷⁴

The deacons might coordinate the work, but Colwell insisted that there was no substitute for the members of the church actually conducting the work themselves. Charity must be individual and personal, even as it functioned in a corporate context.

The response to Colwell was generally hostile. William Engles, editor of the Presbyterian, was unwilling to concede that charity had been ignored by the churches. He claimed that all the charitable institutions in the country (except Girard College) originated from or were promoted by the clergy. But Engles insisted that spiritual poverty afflicted both poor and rich, and the wealthy could not be ignored either. Engles seemed to suggest that congregations should be gathered according to class.⁷⁵ Stuart Robinson, a young Baltimore pastor, recognized that Engles had missed the point. He asked Engles whether the Presbyterian church was gaining or losing its hold on the masses? Were Presbyterian charities “impressing the poor with the great idea that it is our religion and our love of Christ that leads to assist and care for them; and thereby drawing them toward our church and our gospel?” Because of the church’s failure to care for the poor, the poor were finding it in socialism, unions, economics, and masonry, not to mention “Popery.”⁷⁶ He admitted that he had initially disapproved of the tone of the New Themes books, but after

⁷⁴Charity and the Clergy, 145. There are clear connections to Thomas Chalmers’ system of poor relief in Glasgow. See S. J. Brown, Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland (Oxford, 1982). The chief difference is that Chalmers was dealing with an established church (and even after 1843 Scotland had minimal denominational diversity). Colwell suggested that the work could be accomplished by a practical union of evangelical Christian denominations—a union of work.

⁷⁵Editorial, “New Themes versus Christian Charity” Presbyterian 23.7 (February 12, 1853) 26.

⁷⁶Stuart Robinson, “New Themes and Kindred Topics,” Presbyterian 23.8 (February 19, 1853) 30.

reading the responses from the clergy, “I see more the necessity of this bold and warlike tone, in order to get even a hearing, and secure public attention.” However wrong they might be, the New Themes authors raised a worthy point: whereas the Protestant churches had developed unparalleled means for distributing gospel truth, there was a disturbing trend towards ministering solely to the wealthy. Very little was being done “for the relief of the physical wants of the poor and of labour for the moral and spiritual amelioration of the most ignorant and wretched members of society.” Robinson was becoming increasingly convinced that Colwell was right. The quest for “personal, family, and social ambition” was producing a “desire for show and parade in religion. The growing trend towards expensive and even luxurious church buildings signaled to Robinson that the church was no longer concerned for the poor. And why should they come once “there is no longer any gospel in ‘demonstration of the Spirit and in power’ to attract them.”⁷⁷

But Engles still did not see any significant problems. Still upset by Colwell’s tone, Engles complained that the New Themes books “stigmatized the Church as obstinately blind and recreant to its duty. . . not so much [in] the evangelizing of the multitude as the cure of their temporal wretchedness.” He did not think that magnificent church buildings were likely to do much mischief. “Besides, it should be recollected that even by these means a large class of society may be brought under the immediate influence of the means of grace, which would otherwise stand aloof.”⁷⁸ Convinced that the church was headed in

⁷⁷Stuart Robinson, “New Themes and Kindred Topics,” Presbyterian 23.12 (March 19, 1853) 45.

⁷⁸Editorial, “Our Correspondent on ‘New Themes’,” Presbyterian 23.12 (March 19, 1853) 46. Other editors commented on the “New Themes” controversy, but added little to the debate.

the right direction, Old School Presbyterians would ignore Colwell's pleas and the New Themes controversy passed away and was forgotten.⁷⁹

Indeed, Engles attitude was much more common in the newspapers. In 1857 a New Orleans writer went so far as to suggest that business could be a means of grace. He suggested that the one who followed the first answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism and saw that his chief end was to glorify God and enjoy him forever, "is never more happy than when full of business. Let him connect his business with God. . . and he will find that his business, instead of being a hindrance, will be a help--a real means of grace to him. Instead of letting his business swallow up his religion, his religion will swallow up his business."⁸⁰ Such statements lend credence to the theory that Calvinism and capitalism advanced hand in hand, in spite of the fact that many Calvinists had serious questions about capitalist values. And with the transformation of business and law during the market revolution, it was not surprising that these changes brought new questions to theology and ecclesiastical practice as well.

⁷⁹Charles Hodge, however, commented in 1866 that Presbyterians had continued to neglect the poor, and argued that unless the Presbyterian church established some sort of sustentation fund (analogous to that of the Scottish churches) poorer churches would continue to languish and Presbyterianism would become focused solely on the rich. Hodge, "Sustentation," BRPR 38.1 (January 1866) 1-24. Hodge objected that under the present system of requiring each congregation to contribute the entirety of a pastor's salary, "A poor man who desires the preaching of the gospel for himself and family, is obliged to pay a larger portion-out of his daily earnings than the wealthy members of our flourishing churches." (3) The result was that "It is the crying sin and reproach of the Presbyterian Church that it does not preach the gospel to the poor." Therefore Hodge argued (as he had since 1847) that the church should erect a sustentation fund that would provide a base salary for every pastor. See also Hodge, "Support of the Clergy," BRPR (July, 1847) 359-377, which consisted of a review of Thomas Chalmers, D.D. An Earnest Appeal to the Free Church of Scotland, on the subject of Economics (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847).

⁸⁰"Business a Means of Grace" True Witness 4.31 (November 21, 1857).

2. The Rejection of Reaction: R. J. Breckinridge and the Elder Question

On May 19, 1831, the newly-ordained ruling elder, Robert Jefferson Breckinridge, took his seat in the General Assembly at Philadelphia as a commissioner from Kentucky.⁸¹ As the members of the Assembly took their seats, the clerks reported “a commission from Grand River [Presbytery] for a member of a Standing Committee, instead of a Ruling Elder.” Presbyterian church order only permitted ministers and ruling elders to sit in the church courts—not unordained committee members. But after considerable discussion, “it was resolved that the member be received, and enrolled among the list of members.” The Assembly proceeded to elect the Rev. Nathan S. S. Beman as moderator—the only New School moderator ever elected. A dozen years later, now a minister, Breckinridge commented, “This was the culminating point of New School influence in the Presbyterian church. . . and his elevation followed instantaneously the formal abrogation of one of the most important elemental principles of our polity.” This moment would live long in Breckinridge’s memory: “never shall I forget the impression then made upon me. From that hour, the total ruin or the thorough reformation of the church seemed to me altogether inevitable.”⁸² In 1831 the Assembly settled on a compromise measure declaring the seating of committee men to be of questionable constitutionality, which Breckinridge declared in

⁸¹Each presbytery was entitled to send one minister and one ruling elder to the General Assembly; larger presbyteries consisting of 24 or more ministers could send two ministers and two ruling elders.

⁸²Robert J. Breckinridge, “Fifth Letter to the Ruling Elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States,” *SXC* 2.5 (May, 1843) 271. Breckinridge authored a lengthy protest at the 1831 Assembly, which was signed by sixty-seven members of the Assembly. The following year, Breckinridge himself was the object of controversy when he engaged in the debates prior to his being recognized as a commissioner. “General Assembly,” *Presbyterian* 2.15 (May 23, 1832) 59. In light of his future role in the Assembly, it is noteworthy that he was one of the first objects of debate at his second General Assembly.

1843 to reflect the nature of the Old School—a compromise between the hardliners (like himself) and the moderates. Breckinridge did not like moderates very much, and left no room for doubt what he thought of them. In the debates over the status of ruling elders, the venerable Samuel Miller (writing under the name of “Calvin”) was one of his leading opponents,⁸³ and Breckinridge asked “just what part he took in the troubles and trials” of the New School controversy. Speaking to the ruling elders of the church, Breckinridge ridiculed his nemesis, “What was that good Mr. ‘*Calvin*’ doing during. . . [while] the Assembly had virtually *put down* your office”?⁸⁴

The irony was that Samuel Miller had been the first to ordain ruling elders by the laying on of hands at Powles Hook, New Jersey, in 1809. Miller was widely known as a champion of the rights of ruling elders, and had already written two books on the subject. But in the light of radical trends toward leveling the status of the minister with the laity, Miller wished to strengthen the uniqueness of the minister without denigrating the importance of the eldership.⁸⁵

⁸³Since Calvin claimed to be the first to ordain elders by the laying on of hands, it is certain that he is Samuel Miller of Princeton Seminary. Breckinridge also notes that the author of the Princeton Review essay in April, 1843, may well be Calvin. SXC 2.5 (May, 1843) 316. The ridicule demonstrates Breckinridge’s ability to treat even the most venerated of ministers with equal scorn and fury (Miller was John Breckinridge’s father-in-law), but since Miller had voted to sustain Albert Barnes’ appeal and had been the leader of the moderates in 1835-1836, Breckinridge would be no respecter of persons.

⁸⁴Robert J. Breckinridge, “Fifth Letter to the Ruling Elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States,” SXC 2.5 (May, 1843) 316.

⁸⁵Lane puts it well when he says that “Miller was a creature always sensitive to consequences, less willing to burn down the barn in order to rid it of mice.” Lane, Belden Curnow, “Democracy and the Ruling Eldership: Samuel Miller’s Response to Tensions between Clerical Power and Lay Activity in Early Nineteenth Century America,” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1976, 357.

But even as Miller retreated from the democratizing trends he had once advocated, Breckinridge took the lead as the one who would continue the reformation that the Old School had started in 1837. And the first practice to be reformed was the standing of the ruling elder. Convinced that Miller was correct that ruling elders were New Testament presbyters, Breckinridge argued that ruling elders should participate in the laying on of hands at the ordination of ministers, and that no presbytery should be allowed to conduct business without at least one ruling elder present. In many respects these may sound like trivial questions. But situated in the midst of the Jacksonian era and Presbyterian ambivalence toward the process of democratization, these seemingly trivial questions begin to take on more significance. What exactly was the relationship between the minister and the ruling elder? At least four lines of argument were utilized by both sides of the debate: 1) the scriptural teaching on the eldership, 2) church history (especially Scottish practices), 3) church polity (the PCUSA's Form of Government and its historic interpretation), and 4) American civics and the connection between Presbyterianism and republicanism.

Breckinridge argued that his reforms merely continued the "final deliverance of our church from the corruptions of Pelagianism and the errors of Congregationalism in 1837 and 1838." The principle that led to the casting out of the New School would also lead to ruling elders laying hands on ministers: namely, "a strict adherence to the Word of God and the Constitution of the church." The son of one of Thomas Jefferson's leading

advisors now argued that “simple adherence to the plain and obvious sense of our fundamental bonds” was at stake in this matter.⁸⁶

But to the minds of most in the Old School, Breckinridge’s reformation sounded like a revolution. In 1839/40 his practice was challenged at the Synod of Philadelphia as an innovation without warrant in scripture or Presbyterian polity and history. Breckinridge replied that ruling elders had laid on hands in ordinations in Kentucky and other places in the church for more than eight years (a pedigree that was not likely to impress Philadelphians),⁸⁷ but while lacking significant precedents, he defended it vigorously from the logic of presbyterian polity. If a session is a presbytery, and a ruling elder may act in the ordination of ruling elders on the session, then the same should be true at the presbyterial level as well. If the ruling elder is lawfully a member of the presbytery, then he must take part in all that the presbytery does. There is no superiority of the preacher to the elder, “for Elder is Presbyter; and if Bishop, or Minister, or any thing else, be above

⁸⁶Breckinridge, “Fifth Letter,” 269. Just two months earlier Breckinridge had published some letters of Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, and his father, John Breckinridge to call attention to his father’s role in the Louisiana Purchase. He had commented that “few men have ever received a smaller portion of the fame they earned,” which may cast some light on his own love of the limelight. “Original Letters of Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe to John Breckinridge (the Elder). . . in regard to the Treaty for the Purchase of Louisiana,” SXC 2.3 (March, 1843) 181. It is worth pointing out that Breckinridge despised Calhoun and the Democratic party. He was an “Old Court” Whig in the Kentucky Legislature in the 1820s and later became a leader of the Know-Nothings and Republicans in Kentucky.

⁸⁷In 1844 Breckinridge suggested that he had been one of the leaders in convincing the Synod of Kentucky to require the presence of a ruling elder for establishing the quorum of presbytery in 1832. RJB, “The Quorum Question,” Presbyterian 13.15 (April 13, 1844) 57. “What part was allotted to me, in divine providence, as an Elder of Mount Horeb church, and as a member of the Presbytery of West Lexington and of the Synod of Kentucky, in the proceedings which thus resulted—I will for the sake of the good Doctor’s nerves, blow no trumpet about just now.”

Presbyter--good night to Presbytery.”⁸⁸ Some had claimed that the ruling elder did not have the authority to lay hands on a minister, because the elder does not have the power to convey an office that he himself does not hold. In reply Breckinridge offered a lesson in American civics: the “Governor appoints a Judge, a Senate confirms him, and a Notary Public swears him in: yet of all these, not one is a Judge, or can judge any body. . . The fallacy lies in supposing that the *Ruling* Elders in ordination, act *privately*--they act as elemental parts of Presbytery.”⁸⁹ It is ironic, Breckinridge thought, that by their votes, elders may hinder or force an ordination, but they cannot partake of the mere form.

What is *ordination*? What is putting on of hands? It is the mere public, formal, and official designation of a person to an office, and the assumption of it by him. It is, so to speak, only swearing in the officer. . . . All the election is gone through by the people and by the Presbytery; the *Ruling* Elders, taking their part in all. But, lo! when they come to *make a public admission that they have in fact done all this*, they are to be stopped; and that for reasons that reach even to the rank of their office, and their official standing!⁹⁰

This sounded dangerously prelatical to Breckinridge. Two years later he admitted that he feared that the Presbyterian church was being overrun by “high-churchism” and independency, both of which tended to make ministers “semi-prelates” and degraded the office of ruling elder. He marveled that ruling elders seemed unable to “see the absolute

⁸⁸Robert J. Breckinridge, “The Right of Ruling Elders in the Presbyterian Church to Lay on Hands, in All Presbyterial Ordinations” reprinted from the Presbyterian, BLRM 6:4 (April 1840) 171.

⁸⁹Breckinridge, “The Right of Ruling Elders,” 171.

⁹⁰Breckinridge, “The Right of Ruling Elders,” 171.

ruin that impends over their office.”⁹¹ Although the newspapers rang with objections and complaints against Breckinridge’s views, he rather enjoyed the role of the embattled champion.⁹² Breckinridge’s tendency towards grandstanding was only magnified by his sense of leading the minority (as he had during the Old School/New School conflict). In his open letter to the ruling elders of the Presbyterian Church, he gloried in the fact that both he and his brother were the only two ministers he knew who had once served as ruling elders, implying that those ministers who opposed his views were simply ignorant of the importance of the office of ruling elder.⁹³

Breckinridge warned that there was “a systematic plan in operation, to have it settled as the law and practice of the church, that you are not to be henceforth ordained as other Presbyters are ordained, and as all Presbyters were ordained in apostolic and primitive times; and to deprive you of all direct part in all Presbyterial ordinations,

⁹¹Robert J. Breckinridge, “Are Ruling Elders Presbyters or Not? If they are Presbyters, how should they be ordained? And what part should they take in Presbyterial ordinations?” SXC 1.7 (July 1842) 318-319.

⁹²Breckinridge, “Are Ruling Elders Presbyters or Not?” 318. This was in reply to J. S. G. (John S. Galloway of Miami Presbytery) who had written in the Presbyterian of the West.

⁹³Robert J. Breckinridge, “A Letter to the Ruling Elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States,” P&H 11.39 (Sept 1, 1842). Originally published in the SXC 1.8 (August 1842) 376-379. Context is everything. Breckinridge’s readers in the Protestant and Herald could hardly escape noticing that the editor (William W. Hill) had placed Breckinridge’s letter after an essay by Archibald Alexander on “Humility a Christian Characteristic.” The difference in style and tone between the two articles could not be sharper. And, contrary to Breckinridge’s claim, I have found dozens of Presbyterian ministers who had served as ruling elders prior to their ordination as pastors. As early as 1839 Breckinridge had been dubbed, “the Robespierre of the Presbyterian Church,” by Mr. Waller, the editor of Louisville’s Baptist Banner and Pioneer. See “An Humble Defence for Speaking Truth and Doing Good,” BLRM 5.8 (August, 1839) 358. Ever ready to defend his own honor, Breckinridge objected to this as “slander,” rebutting his Baptist interlocutor by suggesting that “a sprinkled heretic could hardly do worse.” Later, Stuart Robinson said that his nickname in Baltimore was “hyena Bob,” and that during the Civil War some Kentucky politicians had taken to calling him “the Reverend Maligner.” Robinson, “The Danville “Stump” theology and financial ethics,” True Presbyterian 2.5 (Oct 27, 1864).

Breckinridge declared that “the next step after this will be the practical abolition of your office, which Christ has established.”⁹⁴

A. The Response to Breckinridge

Every Presbyterian newspaper printed sustained debates over the elder question from 1841-44. In most regions Breckinridge found little support. Only in the synods of Kentucky, Virginia, South Carolina and Philadelphia (in the latter it was mostly in his own Baltimore Presbytery) did he find significant support.⁹⁵ In fact, the Synod of Kentucky was the only synod to pass a resolution allowing elders to participate in laying on hands at the ordination of ministers (1842).⁹⁶

The Presbyterian published a response to Breckinridge by “M” (apparently President John Maclean of the College of New Jersey), who became Breckinridge’s leading opponent in the Synod of Philadelphia. Maclean was appalled at the leveling of the offices of minister and ruling elder. “The office of a ruling elder is not the same with that of a Minister of the Gospel. It is an *inferior* office. . . . When therefore, a Ruling Elder lays his hands on the head of a candidate for the Gospel ministry for effecting his ordination, he

⁹⁴Robert J. Breckinridge, “A Letter to the Ruling Elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States,” SXC 1.8 (August 1842) 378.

⁹⁵From 1841-1843 the Virginia paper, the Watchman and Observer, reprinted articles on both sides of the debate from other papers. Only in 1844 did a spirited debate arise from within the Synod of Virginia. The support in South Carolina was largely due to James Henley Thornwell, who championed Breckinridge’s views. It is less a “southern” phenomenon, and more of a matter of personal friendships and networks of communication. Kentucky, at this time, was not viewed as a “southern” state, but as a part of the West.

⁹⁶P&H 12.15 (Jan 12, 1843). The vote was 35-20 (with 12 *non liquet*). The ministers voted 17-14-9, while the ruling elders voted 18-6-3. The minority, including Nathan L. Rice, E. P. Humphrey, and ruling elder Owen Glass, issued a strong protest.

affords an example of 'the less blessing the better,' which the Apostle represents as unnatural and improper.” Worse, in Maclean’s view, this “new measure adopted in the West, is a departure from the invariable practice of all the Presbyterian Churches on earth since the Reformation.” Insinuating that Breckinridge’s innovations were comparable to Charles Finney’s new measures of revivalism, Maclean voiced a common eastern fear that the “west” was too far removed from traditional European forms of Christianity and could revolutionize the church.⁹⁷ Tradition was strong in Philadelphia, and Breckinridge’s motion failed 19-42.

Ministers:	Birth	Seminary	Church	Presbytery
Griffith Owen (1810-1871)	Wales	PTS 1840	Cohocksink, PA	Philadelphia
Silas M. Andrews (1805-1881)	NC	PTS 1831	Doylestown, PA	Philadelphia
Robert D. Morris (1814-1882)	KY	PTS 1838	Newtown, PA	Phila 2 nd
Alexander G. Morrison (1798-1870)	PA	PTS 1826	Coatesville, PA	New Castle
John Wallace (1791-1866)	PA	Private 1829	Pequa, PA	New Castle
Robert P. DuBois (1805-1883)	PA	PTS 1835	New London, PA	New Castle
Robert W. Dunlap (1815-1856)	SC	PTS 1837	Columbia, PA	New Castle
John Pym Carter (????-????)	?	Private 1838	Taneytown, MD	Baltimore
Reese Happersett (1810-1866)	PA	PTS 1839	Havre de Grace, MD	Baltimore
Robert T. Berry (1812-1877)	VA	PTS 1838	Georgetown, DC	Baltimore
Robert J. Breckinridge (1800-1877)	KY	PTS 1832	2 nd Baltimore, MD	Baltimore
John B. Spottswood (1808-1885)	VA	UTS/PTS 1833	Mt. Paran, MD	Baltimore
Andrew B. Cross (1810-1889)	MD	PTS 1834	Bethel, MD	Baltimore
James C. Watson (1805-1880)	PA	PTS 1830	Gettysburg, PA	Carlisle
Also ruling elders George Gillis, J. Sanford, A. Thompson, Stewart and Brown				

Figure 2.2. Breckinridge’s Supporters in the Synod of Philadelphia, 1842

The Synod of Philadelphia contained many of the Old School’s leading ministers, both young and old. None, however, were willing to follow Breckinridge. Only two of

⁹⁷M, “Ordination of Elders (from the Presbyterian)” WS 4.21 (January 14, 1841) 84.

Breckinridge's supporters were over the age of forty. Half had entered the ministry in the past five years.

Applauding the synod's decision, Samuel Miller's articles under the name of "Calvin" set forth the traditional understanding of the "Rights of Ruling Elders." Miller feared that Breckinridge was inciting elders against ministers through his insinuations that a conspiracy existed.⁹⁸ Miller recognized the radical implications of Breckinridge's views. While the matter of laying on hands was a small matter, the underlying principle was dangerous: "Only introduce the principle that the office of the Pastor and the Ruling Elder is *the same*; that every Ruling Elder in the land, who has been regularly introduced into his office, has received an ordination which clothes him with the highest ministerial power; and that in virtue of it, he has a right, whenever he pleases, to assume the functions of preaching and administering the sacraments," and you will either "annihilate the office of the Ruling Elder in our Church" or "degrade the ministerial character." Miller argued that "Many a pious, judicious layman, may be acceptably and eminently useful to the Church, in the office of the Ruling Elder, according to the prevailing and ordinary views of the nature and functions of the office, who could never occupy a useful place as a public instructor." While Breckinridge's exegesis might be plausible, Miller insisted that the history of the early church demonstrated that the ruling elder had a different origin than the minister. Echoing traditional Presbyterian arguments, he cited Ambrose of Milan as referring to a class of elders in the synagogue and church "without whose counsel nothing

⁹⁸Calvin, "Rights of Ruling Elders," Presbyterian 12.48 (November 26, 1842) 190.

was done,” but which grew into disuse after the fourth century.⁹⁹ Miller was troubled by the strict biblicism reflected in Breckinridge’s argument that failed to take such historical arguments seriously.

Turning to the historic Presbyterian practice, Miller pointed out that while the Scottish Second Book of Discipline (1582) had spoken of ordination by “the hands of the eldership,” the Scottish practice had invariably been to allow only ministers to lay on hands at ordination. While Miller had been willing to ordain ruling elders by the laying on of hands, he rejected the further innovations that Breckinridge desired.¹⁰⁰

Miller concluded his response with an address to the ruling elders of the church. Suggesting a parallel with the case of a legislator who may vote to appoint a judge, but may not inaugurate him, Miller urged ruling elders to refrain from pressing the point. If it was merely a minor privilege being sought, then what was the point of the debate? But “if on the other hand, the ultimate object of the friends of this scheme be, as I fear, to obliterate all official distinction between teaching and Ruling Elders, and, as a native consequence, to give to every *Church Session* the power of ordaining ministers of the Gospel, and of course, deposing them at pleasure; then, indeed, a solemn struggle to resist it will be demanded. Then indeed, the innovation, if successful, will mark a fatal approach

⁹⁹Calvin, “Rights of Ruling Elders—No. II,” Presbyterian 12.49 (December 3, 1842) 194-195.

¹⁰⁰Calvin, “Rights of Ruling Elders—No. IV” Presbyterian 12.51 (December 17, 1842) 202. Later William M. Hall demonstrated that the Reformed and Presbyterian churches of France, Geneva, Scotland and America were united in their doctrine and practice on the point. Only ministers laid hands on ordinands. Ruling elders might give the right hand of fellowship after the ordination, as a sign of their approval, but Breckinridge’s view was a complete innovation. W. M. H., “The Elder Question, no. 7,” PA 6.15 (January 10, 1844).

to *Independency*.”¹⁰¹ Miller saw no logical stopping point between the classic three-office view and the new two-office view.¹⁰² If the office of the ruling elder was identical to the minister, then historic Presbyterian polity was fundamentally flawed.

In reply, “Presbyter” argued that there was indeed a middle ground between the three-office view and the two-office view. He claimed that both ministers and ruling elders belonged to the order of presbyter, “and only differ as to their functions; they constitute simply different *classes* of the same *order*, and of course hold the same official presbyterial rank. . . and that as such the same rights and duties pertain to both; *except in so far as they are otherwise defined and limited in the Word of God and the Constitution of our Church*. This it seems to me is the fundamental principle of Presbytery, in opposition to prelacy and primacy in all their forms.” Indeed, Presbyter argued that there was no other way to sustain presbyterianism from scripture.¹⁰³ This “two order/three office” view did not overturn the distinction between the ruling elder and the minister, because the ruling elder had never been licensed to preach.¹⁰⁴ Presbyter pointed out that Miller himself had insisted that the clergy/laity distinction, “ought not to be made the point of distinction between these two *classes of elders*, and that when we speak of the one as

¹⁰¹Calvin, “Rights of Ruling Elders—No. V,” Presbyterian 12.52 (December 24, 1842) 206.

¹⁰²The three offices were minister, elder and deacon. The two-office view attempted to collapse the offices of minister and elder into one office.

¹⁰³Presbyter, “Ruling Elders,” Presbyterian 13.2 (January 14, 1843) 6.

¹⁰⁴Presbyter, “Ruling Elders—No. II,” Presbyterian 13.3 (January 21, 1843) 10.

clergymen, and the other as laymen, we are apt to convey an idea *altogether erroneous*, if not seriously *mischievous*.”¹⁰⁵

Further, Presbyter argued that since ordination is an act of government, ruling elders should join in it. Setting aside historical and traditional arguments as irrelevant, Presbyter insisted that the church must follow scripture alone.¹⁰⁶ If the ruling elder was a scriptural presbyter, as Miller himself had acknowledged, then he should be ordained in the same manner. Pointing to the example of Timothy, in 1 Timothy 4:14, he argued that if Timothy was ordained by the hands of the presbytery, and ruling elders were part of the presbytery, then ruling elders laid hands on Timothy.¹⁰⁷

James Henley Thornwell insisted that contrary to Miller’s claims, the apostolic and primitive church supported Breckinridge’s position. Starting from the synagogue, he argued that all rulers were called “elders,” and that the function of preaching was entirely separate. Citing 1 Timothy 5:17, along with Ambrose of Milan, he suggested that in the early church, all elders ruled, but that some also preached.¹⁰⁸ Suggesting that there was but one order of “presbyter,” he claimed that teaching was an entirely separate function, “and it is not in consequence of his *Presbyterial authority* that an *Elder preaches*.” Bishop, pastor, and elder all referred to the ruling office in scripture, but very quickly the term

¹⁰⁵Presbyter, “Ruling Elders—No. III,” Presbyterian 13.5 (February 4, 1843) 18. Quoting Miller on the Ruling Elder page 202.

¹⁰⁶Presbyter, “Ruling Elders—No. IV,” Presbyterian 13.6 (February 11, 1843) 23.

¹⁰⁷Presbyter, “Ruling Elders—No. V,” Presbyterian 13.7 (February 18, 1843) 26.

¹⁰⁸[Thornwell], “The Rights of Ruling Elders in the Primitive Church,” SXC 2.12 (December, 1843) 623.

bishop was applied only to the preaching elder (who, he suggests, invariably served as the permanent president, or moderator, of the eldership. Suggesting that Ignatius of Antioch taught clear presbyterian polity, he pointed to the patristic requirement that only the bishop—or one authorized by him—should baptize or celebrate the eucharist.¹⁰⁹ Presbyter and preacher plainly could not be identified. But if presbyters were originally ruling elders, then the fact that Timothy was ordained by the hands of the presbytery meant that ruling elders were involved in his ordination.¹¹⁰ Presbyterians frequently approached church history anachronistically, reading modern polity debates back into ancient texts. But the authority of history did figure as an important factor in their understanding of their identity.

James Stonestreet, a ruling elder from West Lexington Presbytery in Kentucky, argued that the history of the church's constitution allowed ruling elders to lay hands on ministers. In the Scottish First Book of Discipline (1560), the laying on of hands had been omitted as unnecessary, but in the Second Book of Discipline (1582), it had been restored, as the "imposition of the hands of the *Eldership*," which Stonestreet argued, included both Pastors and elders. The Westminster Assembly had altered this, under Episcopal influence,

¹⁰⁹He also cited the councils of Laodicea, Arles and Toledo, along with Tertullian, Jerome and Ambrose. Ibid., 624-625.

¹¹⁰The author then seeks to account for how this original right was displaced by the rise of a hierarchical order of bishops in the fourth and fifth centuries. The paucity of patristic materials made it possible to create any number of likely scenarios all flowing from an "assured" interpretation of scripture. Ibid., 630-631. There is an interesting connection between these Kentucky debates over the "primitive church" and the primitivist movement of the Campbellites. Both attempted to utilize alleged practices of the primitive church to overthrow established traditional practices. Given their proximity to the Campbellites in Kentucky, it is probably not accidental that Kentucky Presbyterians were the most sympathetic (although proximity does not explain why South Carolinians followed suit a decade later). For more on primitivism in the Reformed tradition, see Theodore Dwight Bozeman, To Live Ancient Lives: the Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

he claimed, to allow only “*Preaching Presbyters*” to lay hands at ordination. But the American Form of Government had altered Westminster’s language, by stating that ordination should be by the “laying on of hands of the Presbytery.”¹¹¹ Since ordination was an act of government (not of preaching), it was proper for all members of the presbytery to lay hands on ministers.¹¹² If the presbytery consists of ministers and elders, then, Stonestreet concluded, the constitution plainly allows ruling elders to participate in the laying on of hands. While admitting that the common practice of the church was against them, Breckinridge and his colleagues argued that the practice of the church was inconsistent with its theory.

This argument was persuasive in Kentucky, and the Synod adopted a resolution affirming the right of ruling elders to participate in the laying on of hands at the ordination of ministers 35-20 (with ten abstaining). The Kentucky vote is quite interesting.

¹¹¹Report to the Synod of Kentucky quoted in R. J. Breckinridge, “Fourth Letter to the Ruling Elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States” SXC 2.3 (March, 1843) 170. Stonestreet cites the 1836 Presbyterian “Form of Government” 15.12. This argument first appeared in the newspapers in A Member of the Synod of Kentucky, “The Right and Duty of Elders to Assist in Ordinations. No. 1,” P&H 11.2 (Dec 30, 1841). He and “Hospes” maintained a running debate over these issues for nearly eight months, from December of 1841 to July of 1842.

¹¹²[James Stonestreet], “Ought Ruling Elders to Unite with Ministers in Laying on Hands in the Ordination of Ministers?” SXC 1.9 (September 1842) 406. Breckinridge added a postscript suggesting that those who opposed his position were the “moderates” in the New School controversy, and therefore could not be trusted as “true” Presbyterians.

YEAS	Birth	Seminary	Church	Presbytery
John C. Young (1803-1857)	PA	PTS 1828	president, Centre College	Transylvania
Aaron A. Hogue (1811-1886)	KY	PTS 1840	Lebanon	Transylvania
John D. Paxton (17??-1868)	VA	UTS 1812	Mulberry	Louisville
David C. Proctor (1792-1865)	NH	AndTS 1821	teacher, Louisville	Louisville
William L. Breckinridge (1803-1876)	KY	Private 1831	1 st Church Louisville	Louisville
William W. Hill (1815-1878)	KY	PTS 1838	Shelbyville (editor <u>P&H</u>)	Louisville
David T. Stuart (1812-1868)	KY	PTS 1836	Shiloh & Olivet	Louisville
Sidney S. McRoberts (1807-1890)	KY	PTS 1831	Bardstown	Louisville
Nathan H. Hall (1783-1858)	VA	Private 1805	1 st Church Lexington	W. Lexington
J. G. Simrall (????-1870)	?	Private 1828	Mt Horeb	W. Lexington
W. H. Forsythe (????-1867?)	?	Private 1828	Beard	W. Lexington
J. F. Price (????-)	?	Private 1833	Pisgah	W. Lexington
James H. Logan (1799-1856)	KY	PTS 1826	Bethel	W. Lexington
G. B. Armstrong (1810-1865)	KY	NATS 1841	Lebanon	Ebenezer
Samuel Lynn (????-????)	?	?	Richwood	Ebenezer
William D. Jones (1808-1860)	VA	Private 1834	Hopkinsville	Ebenezer
William G. Allen (1813-1867)	KY	PTS 1839	Henderson	Ebenezer
Also 17 Ruling Elders				
NAYS				
George W. Coons (1808-1891)	KY	NATS/PTS 1838	Springfield	Transylvania
Sylvester Scovel (1796-1849)	MA	PTS 1825	agent, Board of Missions	Louisville
Edward P. Humphrey (1809-1887)	CT	AndTS 1833	2 nd Church, Louisville	Louisville
John Kennedy (????-????)	?	?	Middletown	Louisville
Henry H. Hopkins (1804-1877)	PA	PTS 1832	Big Spring & Taylorsville	Louisville
David S. Tod (????-????)	?	?	3 rd Church, Louisville	Louisville
James K. Burch (1785-1858)	VA	Private 1805	without call, Lexington	W. Lexington
Charles Stewart (????-????)	?	?	Clear Creek	W. Lexington
Nathan L. Rice (1807-1877)	KY	PTS 1832	Paris	Ebenezer
John T. Hendrick (1815-1898)	KY	Private 1835	Flemingsburgh	Ebenezer
J. H. Conditt (1806-1869)	NJ	PTS 1835	Washington	Ebenezer
John S. Watt (1802-1879)	VA	UTS 1829	Augusta	Ebenezer
R. F. Caldwell (????-????)	?	?	Springfield	Ebenezer
Abel A. Case (1812-1851)	OH	AndTS 1840	Bethesda & Greenup Union	Ebenezer
Also 6 Ruling Elders				

Figure 2.3. The Kentucky Vote on the Elder Question, 1842

Unlike the Synod of Philadelphia, Kentucky's leading ministers were divided. John C. Young (president of the synod's Centre College in Danville), William L. Breckinridge (pastor of Louisville's First Presbyterian Church), William W. Hill (editor of the Protestant and Herald), and Nathan H. Hall (pastor of Lexington's First Presbyterian Church) supported the ruling elders' right to lay hands on ministers, but were opposed by Sylvester Scovel (former president of Hanover College in Indiana), Edward P. Humphrey (pastor of Louisville's Second Presbyterian Church), and Nathan L. Rice (pastor at Paris, and former editor of the Protestant and Herald).

Nathan Rice authored a protest against the decision of the synod as violating "the plain meaning of our Book of Discipline." Rice distinguished between the vote to ordain, and the rite of ordination. The former, as an act of government, is properly the prerogative of the whole presbytery—including ruling elders. But the rite of ordination, while not a sacrament, is a rite of induction analogous to baptism—which could only be performed by ministers. Rice pointed out that the ordination rite also included a statement where those who laid hands on the ordinand would say, "we give you the right hand of fellowship, to take part of this *ministry* with us." Pointing out that "ministry" was used in Presbyterian church order to refer solely to the preaching presbyters, Rice argued that the Form of Government could not be interpreted to mean that ruling elders partook of the same ministry as pastors. Further, he pointed out that the very men who amended the church order from "preaching presbyters" to "presbytery" themselves did not allow ruling elders

to lay hands at the ordination of ministers. “Did those wise men understand their own meaning?”¹¹³

The synod appointed John C. Young, William L. Breckinridge and ruling elder James Stonestreet to reply to Rice’s protest. They insisted that whatever the practice of those who altered the wording, their intention must have been to remove any barrier from elders participating in the laying on of hands. For the majority, the language of the constitution was clear. The members of presbytery were to lay hands on ordinands—and the presbytery included ruling elders. Claiming that the traditional practice relegated ruling elders to “cyphers” who were irrelevant to the work of presbyteries and synods, the majority pointed out that until the recent past no ruling elder was ever “appointed on a committee” of synods or General Assemblies.¹¹⁴ The traditional practice was stifling the usefulness of ruling elders.

After reviewing these synodical actions, Robert J. Breckinridge pointed out that the ruling elders in these two synods had voted 2-1 in favor of his reforms. It was the ministers who had carried the day in Philadelphia because they outnumbered ruling elders 6-1, while in Kentucky the numbers were more even—and Breckinridge’s reforms had passed. He warned Old School ruling elders that if they did not come in full force to synod and General Assembly, “no man can tell to what extent rash men, who have never examined

¹¹³Rice’s protest was signed by all twenty dissenting voters and is quoted in, Breckinridge, “Fourth Letter to the Ruling Elders,” 172.

¹¹⁴Quoted in Breckinridge, “Fourth Letter to the Ruling Elders,” 174-176.

this question, who do not understand it, who are filled with prejudices in regard to it, and who fancy their ecclesiastical dignity is implicated by it, may carry measures.”¹¹⁵

B. The General Assembly of 1843

In the spring of 1843 the Presbytery of West Lexington (Kentucky) sent an overture asking the General Assembly to determine that according to the constitution of the church, “ruling elders have the right to unite with preaching elders in laying on hands in the ordination of ministers.” Speaking for the presbytery, William L. Breckinridge defended the overture, along with David Cummings of the Western District Presbytery in Tennessee. Breckinridge claimed that on the precise issue before the Assembly, all scriptural, historical, and practical arguments were beside the point: “The literal sense of the constitution, is the only point bearing directly on the question.” Since the constitution declared that ministers were to be ordained by the laying on “of the hands of the presbytery” and the presbytery was defined as including both elders and ministers, he argued that the literal meaning of the constitution left no room for argument.¹¹⁶

Such a strict construction of the constitution, however, was not persuasive to 90% of the Assembly. For most Presbyterians, the teaching of scripture, the historical doctrine and practice, as well as the current usage of the church were all relevant to understanding

¹¹⁵Breckinridge, “Fourth Letter to the Ruling Elders,” 177. Breckinridge here uses his characteristic pathos to try to persuade his audience.

¹¹⁶ Breckinridge sought to distance himself from his brother’s *jure divino* approach by insisting that he merely believed that the general principles of ecclesiastical government could be found in scripture—but not such details as a clear warrant for the distinctive office of ruling elder. Charles Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR (July, 1843) 433-434.

the church's constitution.¹¹⁷ James C. Baker, a ruling elder from Winchester Presbytery in Virginia, argued that since he had not received the same ordination as a minister, he had "no right or power to ordain him." He feared that any blurring of the distinction between elder and minister would result in all elders becoming clergy. In a similar vein, the Rev. George Junkin claimed that ministers are the representatives of the Head of the Church, while elders are the representatives of the body. Therefore, since the people may elect a minister, but they may not induct the elected into office, so also a ruling elder, as a representative of the people, should not participate in the service of ordination. Admitting that a strict constructionist approach "would give the elders the right in question," Mr. Smith nonetheless insisted that the framers had no intention to do so.¹¹⁸

After all the debate, the vote was anticlimactic. The Assembly overwhelmingly rejected Breckinridge's arguments 138-9. Five of the negative votes came from the Synod of Kentucky (three Kentuckians sided with the majority), while two of the other negative votes came from ministers—David H. Cummings of Western District Presbytery in Tennessee and Donald J. Auld of Harmony Presbytery in South Carolina—and two from

¹¹⁷An overture came to this same Assembly from Miami Presbytery, asking whether ministers should have their names on the rolls of particular churches. The leading voice in the debate was the Rev. Dr. James Hoge of Columbus, Ohio, who "observed that questions of this kind were rather speculative than practical. According to the practice hitherto, a minister has been considered a member of the Presbyterian Church, but not of a particular church. He had seen cases of suspension or deposition, and in all of them, Presbytery decided that a minister is, *de facto*, a member of the particular church, within the bounds of which he resides. . . . What is the effect of a man's becoming a member of a particular church? First to entitle him to a participation in its privileges; and secondly, to subject him to its jurisdiction. Privilege and jurisdiction are inseparably connected with this membership." Not all were convinced, but this remained the standard practice of the church. "Debates in the General Assembly," Presbyterian 13.21 (May 27, 1843) 83.

¹¹⁸"Continuation of the Debate on the Rights of Ruling Elder's" P&H 12.37 (June 15, 1843).

ruling elders—Samuel Lowry of Peoria Presbytery in Illinois, and William E. James of Harmony Presbytery in South Carolina.

Charles Hodge summarized the arguments of the majority as relying upon the original intent of the authors of the constitution. Breckinridge's arguments sounded plausible, but since the practice of the authors of the constitution was utterly inconsistent with his arguments, therefore his interpretation could not possibly be correct.¹¹⁹ Hodge argued that a presbytery "in the sense of our Book, is a body of ministers regularly convened, in which ruling elders have a right to deliberate and vote as members; that the ministers are the standing, constituent members, the elders, members only as delegated, for a particular meeting, and for the special purpose of deliberating and voting." The Breckinridges, in his opinion, were redefining the nature and office of ruling elder, and then complaining that the church did not agree with them!¹²⁰

William M. Hall, pastor at Bedford, Pennsylvania, rejected the idea that the literal sense of the constitution was necessarily binding. A former law student himself, he cited Blackstone on the importance of original intent, and pointed out that "where words bear either none, or a very absurd signification, if *literally* understood, we must a little deviate from the received sense of them." Past usage, he argued, is also a useful device in constitutional interpretation. "The doctrine of *literalism*," he argued, "is not a sound one in this extent in application to any law, divine or human."¹²¹ The same sort of Reformed

¹¹⁹Hodge, "General Assembly" BRPR (July, 1843) 436.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 437.

¹²¹W. M. H., "The Synod of Philadelphia—No. III," Presbyterian 13.47 (November 25, 1843) 187. Citing Blackstone's Commentaries, p 59 (the edition is not stated).

literal hermeneutic that led W. L. Breckinridge to argue that charging more than six per cent interest was sinful also led him to argue that ruling elders should be allowed to lay hands on ministers at ordination. But few were persuaded by the strict constructionist or literalist approach.

Chancellor Kensey Johns of Delaware, a ruling elder from New Castle Presbytery, argued persuasively at the Assembly that “the constitution of our church confers upon its officers three kinds of power: legislative, judicial and ministerial. The ruling elders are clothed by the constitution with the first two, legislative and judicial.” Therefore ruling elders could participate in drawing up the rules for ordination and in determining who would be ordained. But ordination itself was an executive or ministerial act, and therefore “must be performed by those possessing ministerial or executive authority.”¹²² When William Swan Plumer voiced support for Johns’ view, K. N. expressed his disagreement. He argued that if ordination is a purely ministerial act, then this would lead to some sort of doctrine of “apostolic succession.”¹²³ Of course, most Presbyterians had historically agreed that their presbyterian ordinations could in fact be traced back through the Roman Catholic church to the apostles.¹²⁴

¹²²Hodge, “General Assembly” BRPR (July, 1843) 439. Breckinridge was quick to reply that the confession says that all church power is ministerial, but this missed Johns’ point. The Confession’s use of “ministerial” was different from the modern differentiation of legislative, judicial, and executive powers. Church courts do in fact exercise legislative power, e.g., when they draw up the rules that govern the process of ordination.

¹²³K. N., “Elders,” WS 7. 22 (January 18, 1844) 86.

¹²⁴Thomas Smyth, “On the Ordination of Calvin,” WS 7.9 (October 19, 1843). Editorial, “Romish Baptism,” WS 8.51 (August 7, 1845) 202. On a more practical note, William Engles voiced the fears of many that the result of Breckinridge’s “reforms” would be a focus on numerical equality in the work of the church, rather than a focus on who would do the best job on a committee. He believed that Breckinridge was moving toward a rejection of the distinction between minister and elder. Editorial, “The Elder

C. The Quorum Question

The second part of the debate focused on the question of whether ruling elders were necessary for a quorum of presbytery. The Presbyterian Form of Government stated that a quorum consisted of “any three ministers, and as many elders as may be present belonging to the presbytery.”¹²⁵ The principles involved were identical to the “elder question,” but the constitutional decision was more difficult, because there was difference of opinion as to whether “as many elders as may be present” required the presence of at least one.

Predictably, Breckinridge argued that ruling elders were essential to the proper function of a church court, and therefore at least one ruling elder was necessary for a quorum. The historical evidence, however was unequivocal—and it did not favor Breckinridge. William M. Hall demonstrated that the colonial Presbytery of Philadelphia held two meetings without ruling elders present.¹²⁶ P. J. Sparrow showed that both Hanover and West Hanover Presbytery had held numerous meetings without any elders, and the Presbyterian of the West gave numerous examples from western presbyteries

Question,” Presbyterian 14.1 (January 6, 1844) 2. For similar arguments see Geneva, “The Elder Question,” PA 6.33 (May 15, 1844). William Annan sought to encourage readers by claiming that this article emanated from “one of the most gifted minds in the Presbyterian Church,” though not a resident of the three synods of Pittsburgh, Wheeling, or Ohio, who had “facility of access to important documents, has profound research and accurate discriminating views of various subjects.” This may suggest either Charles Hodge or one of the younger Alexanders, James W. Alexander or Joseph Addison Alexander. The argument certainly sounds like Hodge. Another author pointed out that nobody had ever objected to the practice of the church, and indeed, no one ever suggested that its practice was contrary to the constitution until the last few years. “Elder Question. No. IV” WS 7. 43 (June 13, 1844) 170.

¹²⁵“Form of Government” 10.7.

¹²⁶W. M. H., “The Elder Question, no. 3,” PA 6.6 (December 6, 1843). Hall ran an extended series against Breckinridge’s reforms which were reprinted from the Presbyterian.

where the same had been true.¹²⁷ As L. D. pointed out, Breckinridge had been unable to find any instance where an elder was required for a quorum.¹²⁸ Certainly it was the duty of ruling elders to attend presbytery, but their absence would not render the presbytery unable to conduct business.

While Breckinridge was able to gain more support for his view of the quorum question, the General Assembly upheld the traditional practice of requiring only the presence of three ministers by a vote of 83-35.¹²⁹ Charles Hodge applauded the decision of the Assembly, suggesting that Breckinridge's arguments misconstrued the nature of the Presbyterian constitution. The powers of the presbytery are not derived from the constitution but from Christ by virtue of their ordination as ministers of the gospel.¹³⁰ Hodge understood the history of church polity well enough to know that if ruling elders were necessary for a presbytery to function then "we must deny the validity of the orders,

¹²⁷WS 7.17 (December 14, 1843), and "Quorum of Presbytery and the Rights of Elders from the Presbyterian of the West," WS 7.19 (December 28, 1843).

¹²⁸L. D., "The Elder Troubles," PA 6.24 (March 13, 1844). Pittsburgh remained generally unfriendly to Breckinridge's reforms. It is worth noting, however, that while Breckinridge was thoroughly thrashed in the Pittsburgh newspaper, his reputation was sufficiently high to be called as president of Jefferson College in 1845. His rancorous style did not endear him to western Pennsylvanians, and two years later he returned to his native Kentucky.

¹²⁹Minutes (1843) 196. The dissenting vote included five from the synod of New Jersey (including the four commissioners from Newton Presbytery), two from Philadelphia, three from Pittsburgh, three from Wheeling, one from Ohio, five from Cincinnati, one from Indiana, one from Illinois, five from Kentucky, three from Virginia, two from West Tennessee, three from South Carolina and one from Alabama. The only synods that had narrow majorities supporting Breckinridge were Cincinnati, Kentucky, and West Tennessee.

¹³⁰Hodge, "General Assembly," BRPR (July, 1843) 444.

or at least of the early ordinations of all Protestant churches, for it is certain that their ministers were not ordained by presbyteries of which ruling elders were members.”¹³¹

Hodge denied that the General Assembly’s decision violated the supposed republican principle of Presbyterianism, namely “that God's people should govern themselves, and manage their own ecclesiastical affairs, in accordance with his word and by their own chosen and ordained representatives.” After all, Hodge pointed out that ministers “are just as much the representatives of the people as elders are.” But Hodge objected to the very principle of ecclesiastical republicanism. “It is no part of our presbyterianism that God's people govern themselves, any more than that a family governs itself.” Christ is the source of ecclesiastical and familial power, and he has “committed the power to teach and rule to certain officers; and directed them to communicate the same authority to others.” The congregation may select who will exercise Christ’s authority, but they may not govern themselves.¹³²

Finally, Hodge objected to the claim that the Assembly’s decision demeaned the office of ruling elder. Pointing to the eloquent speech of Chancellor Kensey Johns, along with other leading elders, Hodge thought that “the protestants must have observed that there were elders on the floor of the last Assembly, who were listened to with a deference manifested towards few ministers, and whose judgments had a weight of which few clerical members of the house could boast.” In Hodge’s view, ruling elders had an

¹³¹Hodge, “General Assembly,” 445.

¹³²Hodge, “General Assembly,” 447. Thornwell (and historians partial to his interpretation of Hodge) have conveniently ignored such statements in their claim that Hodge didn’t understand Presbyterian polity. See chapter ten

important role to play in the courts of the church, but he was convinced that moral suasion, not legislation, would be more effective in drawing ruling elders to their high calling.¹³³

R. J. Breckinridge, naturally, was not so sanguine about the 1843 General Assembly: “no Assembly, claiming to be orthodox, has ever done more that was repugnant to the previously established principles and practices of the church.” The majority, he fumed, was under the thumb of the “old moderate party” and had elected leading moderates as moderator (Gardiner Spring of Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City) and clerk (Nicholas Murray of First Presbyterian Church in Elizabethtown, New Jersey). In a masterful rhetorical flourish, Breckinridge addressed the ruling elders of the Presbyterian church, “you eight or ten thousand nondescripts—now decide, we pray you, this grave and deeply momentous question; which will you be, a parenthesis or a figure of speech? . . . What else you can be under our new law, made by the last Assembly, the committee, including the four doctors, and the 83 to 35, by yeas and nays, passes our skill to guess.”¹³⁴

In the midst of his fury, Breckinridge did not lose his wits. He astutely noted that Princeton and Columbia were heading in opposite directions. Miller and Hodge of Princeton were arguing that “every Presbyter has scriptural authority to ordain other Presbyters,” while Aaron Leland of Columbia Theological Seminary argued that no presbyter has a right to ordain, “except only as they are *Presbyterially* organized.” Yet

¹³³Hodge, “General Assembly,” 448.

¹³⁴Robert J. Breckinridge, “A Few Observations on Several Parts of the Revolution in the Polity of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Commenced in the General Assembly of 1843,” *SXC* 2.10 (October, 1843) 533, 537. The whole essay is a stinging tirade against every commissioner to the Assembly who spoke against Breckinridge’s reforms.

both excluded ruling elders: “for Princeton seems to teach that while Presbyterian ordination means that God confers on every Presbyterian the right to ordain other Presbyters—yet this is to be so understood as to exclude those Presbyters whom we call elders. . . while Columbia seems to teach that while Presbyterian ordination is strictly and purely that by an organized Presbytery, yet it is so, as that one class of the members thereof, to wit, those called elders, are incompetent!” Breckinridge could not help but laugh with scorn: “Well, well; *some of us* are on the way of digging out *new doctrines*; and, before the thing is finished, the church is likely to have a great store.”¹³⁵ Breckinridge had become convinced that his views actually expressed the historic doctrine and practice of the Presbyterian church, and that his reforms were simply an attempt to restore a lost orthodoxy. All others were concocting new doctrines and practices in order to fit the moment.¹³⁶

One of the few arguments that he considered “lucid and compact” belonged to ruling elder Kensey Johns, Jr., the Chancellor of Delaware. Johns had argued that ruling elders only held legislative and judicial power, and not ministerial or executive power. Since ordination was an act of ministerial power, ruling elders could not participate. Breckinridge appreciated the logic, but believed that the premises were wrong, since the church did not have any legislative power. All church power, according to the Form of

¹³⁵Breckinridge, “A Few Observations on Several Parts of the Revolution in the Polity of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Commenced in the General Assembly of 1843,” SXC 2.10 (October, 1843) 544.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 553-556. Breckinridge appealed regularly to Samuel Miller’s An Essay on the Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Ruling Elder (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1832), Breckinridge insisted that the old Miller was more reliable than the new Miller, though Miller had always publicly opposed the practice of ruling elders laying hands on ministers (307).

Government, was “only ministerial and declarative.” Therefore ruling elders did in fact exercise ministerial power.¹³⁷

While Breckinridge’s efforts had little effect in most places, some ruling elders in the Synod of Philadelphia seem to have been persuaded. While the 1843 Synod defeated Breckinridge’s overture to overturn the 1843 General Assembly decision 32-52, the ruling elders voted 15-10 in favor of Breckinridge.¹³⁸ Breckinridge warned that “a war of caste” was being waged by those who desired an “official, clerical domination,” but he claimed not to fear the result. Pastors, he warned, come and go, but “the permanent and abiding control is with the body of Ruling Elders.” Calling the “irresponsible government by ministers” one of the “most dangerous forms of despotism,” Breckinridge confidently prophesied the day when ruling elders would take their place as the controlling power in the Presbyterian church.¹³⁹ Convinced that the South and West were already coming alongside his beleaguered Baltimore Presbytery, Breckinridge promised to defend the Old

¹³⁷Ibid., 556.

¹³⁸Recall that the previous year the vote had been 19-42, with the elders dividing evenly 5-5.

¹³⁹“Conclusions of the late Synod of Philadelphia about Ruling Elders,” SXC 2.11 (November, 1843) 614-615. At the conclusion of the meeting of synod, a younger minister offered a motion to censure Breckinridge for insulting an older minister. The synod refused to consider the motion, and Breckinridge commented that he was unaware of any such insult, concluding: “as to the young person, who felt called on to offer a deliberate, unprovoked, and if he could have succeeded, irreparable injury, to a man who was old enough perhaps to be his father [Breckinridge was 43], who has borne incessant toils, and reproach for the Lord—whom the church has made respectable, even if he had not been so before [a reference to his service in the Kentucky state legislature], by the honours she has conferred upon him and the trust she has reposed in him [he was moderator of the 1842 General Assembly];—we pity and forgive him. Let him beware however—how he insults, traduces, and endeavours to injure those who are trying faithfully to serve the Lord; for the Lord loves his servants, and well do we know, he is able to protect, and when need requires to avenge them.” (620)

School as a “free Christian commonwealth” against the “semi-prelatic, aristocratic hierarchy” of the northeast.¹⁴⁰

In response, John Maclean provided a detailed study of Scottish doctrine and practice to demonstrate that the Church of Scotland never required the presence of ruling elders for a quorum. All of Breckinridge’s evidence consisted of statements of the composition of presbytery—not what was necessary for a quorum.¹⁴¹ Cornelius C. Cuyler, who had come to the Presbyterian church from the Dutch Reformed tradition, admitted that he had initially favored Breckinridge’s position on the quorum, until he read Chancellor Kensey Johns’ article which pointed out that ministers are permanent members of the presbytery, whereas ruling elders are permanent members of the session. Ruling elders, therefore, are contingent members of the presbytery, “whose right of membership depends upon their being delegated to represent the congregation to which they belong.”¹⁴² William M. Hall showed up Breckinridge’s inconsistency for contending that it was “aristocratic hierarchy” to allow a presbytery to meet without a ruling elder, but not complaining about the Form of Government’s “congregationalism” in allowing a session

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 619. The phrase “free Christian commonwealth” would become the title of a Kentucky newspaper in the 1860s operated by the friends of Stuart Robinson—a minister who took Breckinridge’s principles a step further than Breckinridge approved. See chapter eleven.

¹⁴¹John Maclean, “The Elder Question, from the Presbyterian,” PW 3.13 (March 21, 1844).

¹⁴²Cornelius C. Cuyler, “The Quorum Question from the Presbyterian,” PW 3.15 (April 4, 1844) 53. Johns’ article, “Quorum of Presbytery,” a detailed legal analysis of the Presbyterian constitution with copious historical examples, was published in the Presbyterian on January 6, 1844, and was reprinted in part in the PW 3.15 (April 18, 1844).

to meet without a minister. He claimed that Breckinridge's reforms were neither consistent with Presbyterian church order nor internally coherent.¹⁴³

But Breckinridge had no greater enemy than himself. By January of 1844 increasing references testified to the frustration that many had with R. J. Breckinridge's persistent cries of conspiracy.¹⁴⁴ One ruling elder publicly rebuked Breckinridge for his pugnacity. His claim that northeastern ministers were intent on "clerical domination" was particularly distasteful. "In the language of right reason, is the man capable of feeling the force of truth, who can thus characterize the conduct of his fellow Presbyters and co-labourers in the vineyard of the Lord--and for no other reason that they would agree with the General Assembly and not with Dr B in constructing a section of our church constitution." He concluded by inquiring Breckinridge's behavior ill fitted a "minister of the gospel--aye--even of a common electioneering stumper?"¹⁴⁵

Even Breckinridge's allies fretted over the effect of his tactics. Another elder from the south deplored the "Growing alienations between ministers and elders in their congregations, and this too where until of late all has been friendship and confidence," along with the "determination. . . on the part of some, never to rest until the decisions of

¹⁴³William M. Hall, "The Synod of Philadelphia--No. II" Presbyterian 13.46 (November 18, 1843) 183. (His series continued through January 20, 1844). He cited Form of Government 9.3-4.

¹⁴⁴Editorial, "The Elder Question," Presbyterian 14.1 (January 6, 1844) 2. Others who expressed concern regarding Breckinridge's conduct included Kensey Johns, Jr., "Quorum of Presbytery" Presbyterian 14.1 (January 6, 1844) 2-3. As a compromise measure, one prominent ruling elder suggested that a practical solution would be for only the presiding officer to impose hands, as the instrument of the presbytery. Nathaniel Ewing, "Another View of the Elder Question," from the Presbyterian Advocate, reprinted in the Presbyterian 14.20 (May 18, 1844) 79.

¹⁴⁵A Layman, "Modesty," PA (December 27, 1843). The author is described as "one of the most intelligent laymen in the Presbyterian Church; and though his style may appear a little too severe, it is pleasing to receive such testimony against the innovations of Dr Breckinridge and his followers."

the last Assembly are reversed, and a no less fixed determination on the part of others never to submit to such a reversal.” Such a course, left unchecked, could result in another division of the church.¹⁴⁶

Kensey Johns explicitly connected the divisive strategies of Breckinridge with the political crises of the era, and argued that the opposite approach was needed. He suggested that “the time may not be distant when Protestant Churches as well as Republican States, will understand that in union is strength and safety, especially when that union is strengthened, as I pray it ever may be, by the blessing of the Great Head of the Church.”¹⁴⁷

Another elder saw no reason to fear the division of the church, but expressed horror at the “*Ecclesiastical Demagogueism*” by which Breckinridge tried to set elders against clergy. He denied that Breckinridge and his supporters were “peculiar friends and champions of the Eldership.”¹⁴⁸ Likewise, a Virginia elder noted that the vast majority of ruling elders opposed the innovations. He pointed out that he could not in good conscience participate in an ordination of a minister, because “I do not share in that office.” Urging his fellow elders to peace and harmony, he called upon ruling elders to “faithfully, and in the fear of the Lord, discharge our duty in an appropriate sphere--that of *aiding--not making--our minister*.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶“The Elder Question,” WS 7.24 (January 25, 1844) 90.

¹⁴⁷Kensey Johns, Jr., “Quorum of Presbytery” Presbyterian 14.1 (January 6, 1844) 2-3.

¹⁴⁸An Elder, “Mr. Editor,” WS 7.32 (March 28, 1844) 127.

¹⁴⁹An Elder of the Valley, “Religious Abstractionists--The Elder Question,” WS 7.26 (February 8, 1844) 98.

D. Thornwell Picks Up the Gauntlet

Just before the General Assembly of 1844, James Henley Thornwell joined the fray. In a series on the “Rights of Elders” in the Watchman of the South, the young professor and chaplain at South Carolina College sided with Breckinridge in claiming that the General Assembly of 1843 had unintentionally started a “revolution” in Presbyterian polity, “that elders are not elders.”¹⁵⁰

Thornwell’s basic premise was that the “*session* is evidently the radical court in the Presbyterian system, and from the elements which enter into *it*, every other is or ought to be constructed. Now ministers and Elders are unquestionably members of Session according to exactly the same law, the *election of the people*.” For Thornwell, it is only “*as chosen representatives of the people that both are entitled to their seats in the Session*.” As several congregations are joined in a presbytery, “they are regarded as *one* great congregation--their individual character is merged in the union the *Presbytery* is to the *whole* what the Session is to *each*.” Therefore, the same officers who compose the session compose the presbytery, synod, and General Assembly. Anyone who was not presently serving on a session should not be allowed to sit in presbyteries, synods, or General Assemblies.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰A South Carolinian [James Henley Thornwell], “Rights of Elders,” WS 7.36 (April 25, 1844) 142. Thornwell had the same disdain for the “moderates” of Princeton as Breckinridge. He wrote to Breckinridge in 1846, “Princeton must be checked. . . . And as I believed that Princeton had pursued a disastrous course on the Elder question, on the Romish question, and in regard to national Societies, and ought to be checked, I could devise, at present, no better plan of curtailing her influence than that of strengthening the hands of other Seminaries.” Thornwell admitted that he did not like seminaries much, “but as the Church is wedded to them, I am willing, as the next best thing that can be done, to make them checks upon each other.” Thornwell to Breckinridge, March 24, 1846, in Benjamin Morgan Palmer, The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell (New York: Arno Press, 1969/1875) 290.

¹⁵¹[Thornwell], “Rights of Elders,” 142.

Correlative with this was Thornwell's conviction that "Ruling elders and ministers stand precisely on one footing, as to every thing that relates either to the power of Elders or the exercise of that power. 1 Tim. v, 17. Every attempt to distinguish the nature and grounds and extent of their ruling powers is an unhallowed effort to undermine the Presbyterian Constitution."¹⁵²

This session-based model could be traced back to the Secession church (the Associate Presbyterians) in Scotland, which had determined in 1768 that because "Elders who move to another congregation have no seat in the Session thereof, till they be called to the exercise of their office by that congregation," therefore ministers likewise could not sit in Synod without a call.¹⁵³ Eschewing the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, Thornwell chose to hold up the Seceders as the purest branch of Presbyterianism, suggesting that all the other Presbyterian churches had degenerated from the Reformation's purity.

Thornwell appealed to his readers' love of republicanism, arguing that if ministers were allowed to sit in presbytery without being a member of a session, then "our system of government would not be purely representative, but mixed--partly popular and partly aristocratic."¹⁵⁴ Indeed, he went so far as to claim that preachers without charge, "are not

¹⁵²[Thornwell], "Rights of Elders," 142.

¹⁵³[Thornwell], "Rights of Elders," 142.

¹⁵⁴[Thornwell], "Rights of Elders," 142.

entitled by the laws of God or the constitution of the Church, to impose their hands in any ordination.”¹⁵⁵

Thornwell recognized that his views would be condemned as coinciding with those of the Independents. Therefore he attempted to distance himself from congregationalism by pointing out that “the system which I have defended. . . contemplates the Church as *one great whole*, and, accordingly, provides for the union of all its congregations under a common government.” Insisting that a single congregation could not be considered a complete church, Thornwell argued that he was trying to extend the Independent plan (as articulated by John Owen and others) to a fully presbyterian polity.¹⁵⁶

In reply Samuel L. Graham pointed to the novelty of Thornwell’s views. The traditional Presbyterian view fit the interpretation of scripture approved by the whole church with only a few exceptions. Presbyterians had operated by this traditional view for more than three hundred years, and no one had ever objected that it was hierarchical..¹⁵⁷ After explaining the traditional Reformed understanding of why ministers alone should ordain,¹⁵⁸ Graham turned to Thornwell’s view. He pointed out that Thornwell simply assumed the republican understanding of church power being “with the people.” This was not true—church power came from Christ. Further, while Thornwell claimed to be articulating a “constitutional” view, his arguments were flatly contrary to the Presbyterian

¹⁵⁵[Thornwell], “Rights of Elders,” 142. The article was followed a few columns later by a request from H to Samuel L. Graham to write a rebuttal.

¹⁵⁶[James Henley Thornwell], “Letter from A South Carolinian,” WS 7.39 (May 16, 1844) 154-5.

¹⁵⁷S. L. G. [Samuel L. Graham], “The Elder Question” WS 7.40 (May 23, 1844) 158.

¹⁵⁸S. L. G. [Samuel L. Graham], “The Elder Question No. II,” WS 7.41 (May 30, 1844) 161.

constitution, which defined the presbytery as including “all the ministers” (including those without charge) within a given region, and one ruling elder from each congregation.

Graham objected that Thornwell’s model tended toward Congregationalism, both in its emphasis on the session as the radical court, and in its insistence that elders derive their right to rule from the choice of the people (which suggested to him that the people were Thornwell’s final authority).¹⁵⁹ Finally, Thornwell’s view leveled the distinction between ministers and ruling elders. “Just because they are both called elders does not give them the same office any more than a judge of a common and statute law court holds the same office as a judge of an equity court.” If Thornwell’s view was followed consistently, then ruling elders would soon be allowed to preach and administer the sacraments.¹⁶⁰

Daniel Baker argued against Thornwell that all ministers received their ministerial authority from the presbytery: “If presbytery has the power to *episcopise*, or take oversight of the flock, may not its members be called *episcopoi*, or bishops?” Therefore all ministers are bishops, regardless of whether they exercise care over one single flock, or jointly with the whole presbytery. “Ruling elders, when members of presbytery, share in this care or oversight.” Therefore in their presbyterial functions, they are entitled to be called bishops as well. Nonetheless, he rejected the notion that bishops are the representatives of the people. “Ministers do not derive their authority from the people--they are elected as pastors, but not as Presbyters. . . . Presbyters derive their authority from a source higher

¹⁵⁹In fairness, Graham misunderstood Thornwell on this point—but the misunderstanding was easy to make based on Thornwell’s loose parallel with American republicanism. Again the comparison with the 1860 debate between Hodge and Thornwell is interesting.

¹⁶⁰S. L. G. [Samuel L. Graham], “The Elder Question No. III,” WS 7.42 (June 6, 1844) 168.

than the Church. . . . Their episcopal power was not conferred by their flock, nor can it be withdrawn by the flock.” Instead ruling elders are the representatives of the people. “Their power to sit in Presbytery depends upon an election for that very purpose.”¹⁶¹

Whereas Thornwell claimed that “in the times of the apostles, the parochial Presbytery was the proper ordaining body,” W. L. McCalla pointed out that this was plainly contrary to the doctrine of Presbyterianism, which states that the classical presbytery was the ordaining body. “Is it Presbyterianism or Congregationalism that advocates ordination by a parochial presbytery?”¹⁶² In the eyes of many, Thornwell was merely taking Breckinridge to his logical conclusion, which would lead the church to congregationalism and independency.

Not surprisingly, the 1844 General Assembly voted 153-25 that ordination to the ministry is not “an act of government,” but a “declaratory, ministerial act,” and therefore appropriate only for ministers (elders 59-13; ministers 94-12).¹⁶³ Ruling elder James Stonestreet of Kentucky protested that the Assembly seemed to be denying that ruling elders are scriptural presbyters. The Assembly agreed, denying that ruling elders are bishops, pastors, ministers, or even presbyters in the same sense as ministers.¹⁶⁴ Likewise on the quorum question, the Assembly declared that ministers are “also Ruling Elders in

¹⁶¹S. H. [probably Daniel Baker] of Holly Springs, “Clerical Titles,” WS 5.24 (February 3, 1842) 94-5. The authorship of Baker is suggested by some of the references to home missions ideas which Baker, as one of the leading evangelists in the south, encouraged.

¹⁶²W. L. McCalla, “The Litigated Point,” Presbyterian 14.16 (April 20, 1844) 61.

¹⁶³“Editors Correspondence” WS 7. 43 (June 13, 1844) 169.

¹⁶⁴WS 7. 50 (August 1, 1844) 197

the very nature of their office,” and that therefore ruling elders were not necessary to form a quorum, voting 133-45 (elders 47-24; ministers 86-21). Both sides agreed that the overwhelming majority of the Old School implacably opposed Breckinridge’s reforms, and that continued agitation would be counterproductive.¹⁶⁵

Thornwell’s support had been of some help. Two Alabama presbyteries and one each from Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina, joined Baltimore, the three Kentucky presbyteries and one each from Tennessee, Illinois and Indiana which had championed Breckinridge’s reforms. But Thornwell was still a minority voice in the south. Outside of his own Charleston Presbytery, even his own synod inclined to the more traditional Presbyterian line. Even after the Assembly’s decision, a few presbyteries rejected its authority. The Fayetteville Presbytery declared “That this Presbytery claim the right of interpreting *our book* for themselves; and that, notwithstanding the action of the Assembly in the premises, they still adhere to their former resolution, on this subject; viz: that the presence of one or more Ruling Elders is necessary to constitute a quorum.”¹⁶⁶ The Assembly generally left the dissenters in peace, content with its decisive majority.

Overwhelming defeat in the church courts convinced Breckinridge, Thornwell and their supporters to refrain from further ecclesiastical action. But they continued to defend the unity of the office of minister and elder. The first issue of the Southern Presbyterian Review included a review of David King’s The Ruling Eldership of the Christian Church,

¹⁶⁵“Decision of the Elder Question from the Presbyterian Advocate,” WS 7.45 (June 27, 1844) 180.

¹⁶⁶“Presbytery of Fayetteville,” W&O 1.27 (February 19, 1846) 105.

which agreed with King that “while all these office-bearers ruled, only some of them taught, so that a distinction subsisted among them of teaching and ruling elders.”¹⁶⁷ Six months later, the SPR published a lengthy and laudatory review of Breckinridge’s The Christian Pastor.¹⁶⁸ Objecting to the practice of allowing ministers to be ordained and to sit in the church courts without a call from a specific congregation, the reviewer agreed with Breckinridge that those who remained without a call should not remain as ministers: “he who can edify no congregation, can, under no circumstances, become a shepherd of the Lord’s flock.” Pointing to the United Secession Church in Scotland, which refused to allow a minister without a charge to sit in Synod, they encouraged American Presbyterians to consider similar reforms.¹⁶⁹

Insisting that the General Assembly’s decisions had established a clerical hierarchy, Breckinridge and Thornwell argued that true Presbyterian polity was instead a “divine commonwealth,” where authority is located in the hand of a “Christian people to be exercised through officers regularly connected with them.”¹⁷⁰ Arguing from the history

¹⁶⁷SPR 1.1 (June, 1847) 161-162. King was a minister in the United Secession church—which Thornwell often cites as the best Presbyterian church in Britain.

¹⁶⁸“The Christian Pastor,” SPR 1.3 (December, 1847) 127-151. Review of The Christian Pastor, one of the Ascension Gifts of Christ by Robert J. Breckinridge (Baltimore, 1845).

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁷⁰“The Elder Question,” SPR 2.1 (June, 1848) 1-67. This essay is a continuation of the review of The Christian Pastor. The quote is from page 6. The review cites Breckinridge in top form: “Let the General Assembly of the church, if such be the will of God, angry at us for our sins, adjudge for a hierarchy and against a commonwealth; and while I must respect even the errors of that venerable court, I will set my poor name against its adjudication, and let posterity decide betwixt us. Let the Ruling Elders themselves, overborne by the clamor or seduced by the caresses of the ministers, prove insensible to their calling and negligent of the sacred trust reposed in them by God and God’s blood-bought people; and even this fearful apostacy shall not shake my immoveable purpose, to defend the spiritual freedom of the church, while there remains one inch of ground on which I can plant myself. . . sooner or later the church must return to her ancient landmarks.” p8.

of the Church of Scotland, Breckinridge claimed that the nineteenth century was witnessing a counter-revolution against the republican principles of presbyterianism.¹⁷¹ Defending the principles of representative government, Breckinridge rejected both hierarchy and democracy as falling short of wise government. Indeed, Breckinridge argued that the “Commonwealth in the State is an exact picture, in its essential features, of Presbyterian government in the church. . . . The ecclesiastical platform of the Scriptures embraced those very doctrines of political philosophy through which nations are now rising to greatness.”¹⁷² The first principle was that the government is held neither by the individual officers, nor by the people, “but in the hands of officers chosen by the people, judicially convened—in other words, the cardinal principle of our polity is the government of the church by free representative assemblies.” Further, presbyterianism maintained a balance of powers: “The Ministers are a check upon the Elders, and the Elders are a check upon the Ministers, and the higher are checks upon the lower courts.”¹⁷³ The General Assembly’s determination that ruling elders were not necessary for a quorum was a blow to the republican system of Presbyterian church government. “As well might a State-Legislature undertake to enact laws without the presence of one of the chambers.”¹⁷⁴ This

¹⁷¹Ibid., 14, citing page 11 of Breckinridge. Nearly a decade later, in his editorial, “Counter-Revolution” *W&O* 8.21 (January 6, 1853) 86, Benjamin Gildersleeve noted that neither he nor Nathan Rice of the *Presbyterian of the West* could see anything of the “great and disastrous Counter-Revolution” that Breckinridge had feared.

¹⁷²“The Elder Question,” 19.

¹⁷³“The Elder Question,” 21.

¹⁷⁴“The Elder Question,” 25.

was Breckinridge's swan song. Breckinridge recognized that the church was not interested in his reforms, so he set them aside and moved on to other things.¹⁷⁵

Thornwell insisted that Presbyterian ordination imparts nothing in itself. "It is neither a charm nor a commission—it is a simple acknowledgment of what God has done." As such, ordination is not a sacrament, or a mere rite, but a "judicial decision. . . . Imposition of hands is the formal rendering of the judgment--and as the judgment is the judgment of the whole Court, it must be rendered as the decision of the whole, though a particular individual may be selected as the organ."¹⁷⁶ In Thornwell's view, no transmission of authority, communication of power, or even delegation of office took place in ordination.

By the end of the 1850s there was a vocal minority in the church convinced of the Breckinridge/Thornwell position (especially in the south and southwest).¹⁷⁷ The General Assembly of 1856 permitted ruling elders (in the absence of the pastor) to read the scriptures "and *explain* them, and to endeavor to enforce the truth upon the conscience by suitable exhortation." Mitchell Peden (CTS 1838), pastor at Bethsalem, Mississippi objected that this was contrary to the church's constitution. If an elder was to be allowed to

¹⁷⁵He became in 1847 the first Superintendent of Public Education in Kentucky, and then in 1853 professor of theology at Danville Theological Seminary in Kentucky. The elder question, however, would continue to be debated in South Carolina, where James Henley Thornwell continued his attempts to revise the structure of presbyterian polity.

¹⁷⁶"The Elder Question," 49-50.

¹⁷⁷Stuart Robinson especially objected to the common practice of calling ruling elders "representatives of the people," insisting that both ministers and elders represented Christ. "The Church Question," Presbyterial Critic 1:6 (June, 1855) 246ff.

preach, he should first be licensed by the presbytery.¹⁷⁸ Strict constructionism could cut both ways. But others, such as Robert Baird, secretary of the Southern Aid Society, applauded the Assembly's decision, insisting that "*Ruling* Elders as well as *teaching* were ordained alike by one and the same ordination, *to be ministers of Christ*, each to do the work which the Church might assign to him."¹⁷⁹

At the same time that Breckinridge and Thornwell argued for the equality of ministers and elders, a counter-trend also appeared. Some Presbyterians suggested a plan of "term eldership" where a ruling elder would be elected to serve a limited term. When his term expired he would have to be re-elected before he could serve on the session again. The General Assembly had flatly rejected term eldership in 1835,¹⁸⁰ but ten years later Thomas Smyth of Charleston, South Carolina (Thornwell's chief opponent in South Carolina) began publishing a series of historical arguments for term eldership. Smyth argued that the synagogue had appointed its elders annually, and demonstrated conclusively that the sixteenth century Reformed churches had all practiced term eldership.¹⁸¹ Smyth suggested that a perpetual eldership was "inexpedient, and unscriptural in its character, and injurious in its results."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸M. Peden, "Elders and Deacons Explaining the Scriptures in Public Worship" True Witness 4.33 (Dec 5, 1857).

¹⁷⁹R Baird, "Reflections upon the Acts of the Late General Assembly," PH 27.1 (July 2, 1857).

¹⁸⁰Southern Religious Telegraph 14.24 (June 12, 1835)

¹⁸¹Thomas Smyth, "The Name, Nature, and Functions of Ruling Elders, Chapter III" CO 19.11 (March 15, 1845) 41; "Chapter V" CO 19.12 (March 22, 1844) 45; WS 3.28 (April 17, 1845).

¹⁸²Thomas Smyth, "The Name, Nature, and Functions of Ruling Elders, Chapter V" CO 19.12 (March 22, 1844) 45. The editor, Benjamin Gildersleeve disagreed that fundamental changes were needed.

Initially term eldership had been confined to New School churches,¹⁸³ but by the 1860s some Old School churches had begun to favor the practice.¹⁸⁴ One western Pennsylvanian session insisted that term eldership did not violate the church order, since not all elders had to exercise their office at all times. The session believed it proper for the congregation “to express their judgment of the acceptableness or non-acceptableness of the acting Eldership.” Since Presbyterians had prided themselves on the similarity between their polity and that of the United States, it should not have surprised them when people started remodeling Presbyterian polity according to the political world.¹⁸⁵

One of the most prominent arguments for term eldership came from the Northwestern Presbyterian in 1866: “the office of elder is a privilege. It enlarges Christian

¹⁸³“Elders Pro Tem,” PA 8.9 (Dec 24, 1845) cited a Brooklyn church which required one third of their elders to retire from office every two years, “to be replaced by new elections. The N. E. Puritan thinks this a very decided concession to Congregationalism. They might as well call them Committee men at once.” Likewise the W&O 7.14 (Nov 13, 1851) mocked the New School for allowing term eldership.

¹⁸⁴In 1835, 1857 and 1867 the General Assembly rejected proposals to permit term eldership. The 1852 New School Assembly discouraged the adoption of term eldership, but permitted it to continue where it had begun. The united Assembly of 1871 rejected an overture that would have made term eldership permissible, but when Alfred Nevins brought a complaint the following year against the Great Valley church in Chester Presbytery, near Philadelphia, for establishing term eldership, the Assembly denied the complaint 145-173, stating that while the office of elder was perpetual the time of exercise may vary from congregation to congregation.

¹⁸⁵H, “Periodical Election of Ruling Elders,” PB 14.48 (Aug 15, 1866). During the late 1850s a new phenomenon emerged: ruling elder conventions. Ruling elders, and sometimes deacons, would gather for a few days in regional conventions “for the purpose of prayer and conference, and to adopt such measures as will tend to increase their usefulness, and to promote the interests of the church.” “Convention of Ruling Elders,” True Witness 6.37 (Dec 3, 1859). This referred to a recent convention in Mobile, Alabama. Ten months later there was one in Yazoo City, Mississippi. True Witness 7.35 (Nov 10, 1860). The first one that I have found met in Ohio in the fall of 1858. Presbyterian 27.47 (November 20, 1858) 189. Earlier conventions in the north also included ministers as well. A convention in Cincinnati in January of 1858 gathered 145 ministers and 98 elders from Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana, to pray for the spread of revival throughout the churches. That convention was modeled on a recent convention in Pittsburgh of the synods of Ohio, Pittsburgh, Wheeling and Allegheny that had drawn 300 ministers and elders. Within weeks, the revival had spread all over the northwest. “Convention of Presbyterian Synods,” PW 17:22 (Feb 18, 1858). Monfort reported that 35 had come from the Synod of Kentucky, 145 from the Synod of Cincinnati, 49 from the Synod of Indiana, and 28 from the Synod Northern Indiana, along with eight others.

experience. It cultivates some of the Christian graces. . . . Why should not some of our younger men be put forward to enjoy and be blessed in such Christian experiences? . . . At least, why should not any Presbyterian church that may think it best for her own case, have the privilege of adopting, and practically testing the plan proposed?”¹⁸⁶ Since the eldership was good for developing Christian character, this author suggested that it was important to get the younger men involved. This was a far cry from the exalted vision of the eldership in the debates of the 1840s.¹⁸⁷

Conclusion

The debate over the ruling elder revealed a new emphasis on a strict constructionist approach to the Bible and the Presbyterian constitution, together with a popularized version of commonsense moral reasoning. Breckinridge and his colleagues were frequently impatient with sophisticated historical argumentation and focused on the “literal” sense of the words with a tendency to read texts in a “flat” manner.

It also showed that while Presbyterians historically rejected the idea of ordination as a sacrament, many nevertheless understood it to have sacramental qualities. Since Presbyterians believed that ministers were gifts from Christ to his church, they frequently

¹⁸⁶H, “Periodical Election of Ruling Elders,” Northwestern Presbyterian 1.51 (Nov 17, 1866).

¹⁸⁷Thornwell’s colleague, John Adger, stated well the consensus of the earlier generation in 1859 (with which both sides of the 1843 debate would have agreed) that “The ruling elder is not a mere assistant of the minister. He is a high spiritual officer in Christ’s house. He is a shepherd of the blood-bought flock. He rules in Emanuel’s kingdom. He is a judge in the courts of the Lord.” But, Adger pointed out, many elders were completely unacquainted with the doctrinal standards of the church. Many elders were respected as businessmen, but not as spiritual rulers. He reported that in Scotland and Ireland “the children look on the visit of the elder with the same reverential awe, and yet the same filial delight, as on the visit of the minister. . . . ‘In this country, sir,’ (said an old Scotch-Irish Presbyterian to me not long since) ‘there is no respect for the face of the elder.’” (178-79) John B. Adger, “Inaugural Discourse on Church History and Church Polity,” SPR 12.1 (April 1859) 178-179.

referred to the act of ordination as conferring official authority from Christ to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments.

It likewise displayed the increasingly individualistic mentality of the nineteenth century. One wise ruling elder from Virginia wrote a decade after the controversy that

Much has been said and written about the nature and duties of the office of ruling elder, but these utterances, for the most part, from Dr. Miller down to the present time, have tended rather, I think, to confuse and unsettle, than instruct and establish, plain men like myself in their work. Their radical error is, in dwelling upon the duties of elders in their individual, separate character, rather than in their collective capacity in organized session. It is manifest from the constitution, that it is in the latter capacity that the great burden of their duties lies. While the book is silent in regard to the duties of an elder in his isolated character, it is ample and specific in regard to the duties of the Session of which he is a member. . . . They must deliberate and act conjointly, and cannot exercise any function of office separately, without assuming an authority not imparted by the constitution.

The solution to the controversy was to change the terms of the discussion. Rather than focus on the individual rights and responsibilities of elders, this elder believed that the church should emphasize the collective work of the session.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸Another Layman, "The Eldership," CP 3.10 (March 6, 1858) 37.

THREE

ANTI-CATHOLICISM, BAPTISM AND THE LIMITS OF CATHOLICITY

If the first major debate in the Old School focused on its own polity, the second set of issues intersected with a broader set of concerns. The General Assembly of 1845 argued three significant questions in its two week sessions at Cincinnati (May 15-27, 1845). The most famous decision affected slavery (chapter six), but the debates on marriage (chapter four) and the validity of Roman Catholic baptism lasted much longer. These three issues drew the church to consider its relationship to the civil law and to other churches. All three questions had percolated in the church for several years, and had been the objects of previous General Assembly discussions, but the question of Roman Catholic baptism excited the widest discussion in the newspapers following the Assembly.

The Old School General Assembly voted 173-8 to declare Roman Catholic baptism invalid. Given the general anti-Catholic sentiment of the times, this may not sound surprising. But this decision is remarkable because the Old School prided itself on its conservatism, and yet this was the first time that *any* Reformed church had rejected the validity of Roman Catholic baptism.¹ Presbyterians in Scotland and Ireland had

¹But by the 1830s other Protestants were leading the way. In 1839 the Watchman of the South reported in an article from the Protestant Vindicator that every one of the 135 converts from Romanism through the American Reformation Society requested Christian baptism in a Protestant church. It appears that the American Reformation Society was convinced of the invalidity of Roman baptism. WS 3.5 (September 25, 1839).

historically followed the 1565 decision of the Scottish General Assembly accepting the validity of such baptisms.² While anti-Catholicism played a significant role (together with the traditional eschatological description of the pope as the “beast” or “antichrist”), that alone cannot explain why the Old School chose to reject the validity of Roman Catholic baptism. Changing conceptions of catholicity, along with the common sense moral reasoning associated with what Mark Noll has called a Reformed literal hermeneutic were also crucial in developing overwhelming support for such a radical innovation.³

In America, the question of Roman Catholic baptism was initially raised at the General Assembly in 1832. The moderator, the Rev. James Hoge, pastor at Columbus, Ohio, appointed a temporary committee, including Robert J. Breckinridge, at that time a

²The Assembly had been asked “If baptisme administrat be ane papist priest, or in the papistical manner shall it be reiterat?” They had answered:

When sic children come to years of understanding, they should be instructed in the doctrine of salvation, the corruption of the papistrie might be declared unto them, whilk they most publickly damne, before they be admitted to the Lord's table, whilks if they doe there needs not the external sign to be reiterat; for no papist ministers baptisme without water, and some forme of words, whilks are the principalls of the external signe; we ourselves were baptized be papists, whose corruptions and abuses now we damne, cleaving only to the simple ordinance of Jesus Christ, and to the veritie of the Holy Ghost, whilk makes baptisme to work in us be the proper effects thereof, without any declaration of the external signe. If sic children come never to the knowledge of trew doctrine, they are to be left to the judgment of God.

Samuel J. Baird, A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856) 80, quoting from the Booke of the Universal Kirk, 41. In 1856 Samuel J. Baird published his highly-acclaimed Assembly's Digest, which provided a topically arranged collection of all of the official acts of the highest court of the Presbyterian Church since 1706. In a couple of instances he also provided Scottish background for a decision, including the question of Roman Catholic baptism.

³Noll, America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 376-379.

young ruling elder. This committee urged the Assembly to deny its validity.⁴ But the committee's report collided with Samuel Miller's staunch defense of the historic Reformed position, so the Assembly referred the matter to a study committee of leading theology professors from around the country.⁵ Its geographical diffusion hamstrung this committee, so the following year the Assembly referred the matter to a committee of ministers and professors along the New York-Baltimore corridor.⁶

The two major Presbyterian decisions regarding Roman Catholicism occurred in 1835 and 1845, in the midst of one of the most rabidly anti-Catholic periods of American history.⁷ The first, instigated by Robert Breckinridge's brother John, determined that "the Roman Catholic Church has essentially apostatized from the religion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and therefore cannot be recognized as a Christian Church." John Breckinridge's Presbytery of Baltimore had introduced an overture on popery, and his proposed resolution declared that Rome was apostate,

cast off from the church of Christ; and therefore that her ordinances, acts,
and administrations are not to be recognized as valid, and that this is more

⁴The committee consisted of Dr. Samuel H. Cox (professor at Auburn Theological Seminary), Dr. Nathan S. S. Beman (pastor at First Presbyterian, Troy, NY), and Robert J. Breckinridge (at that time a ruling elder from Kentucky on his way to Princeton Theological Seminary) .

⁵Minutes (1832) 364, 373. "General Assembly," Presbyterian 2.18 (June 13, 1832) 71. This committee consisted of Dr. Archibald Alexander (professor at Princeton Theological Seminary), Dr. James Richards (professor at Auburn Theological Seminary), Dr. George Baxter (professor at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia), Beman, and Dr. Robert G. Wilson (president of the University of Ohio, Athens)

⁶Minutes (1833) 408. This committee was Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller (both professors at Princeton Theological Seminary), Ashbel Green (retired president of the College of New Jersey and editor of the Christian Advocate), Breckinridge (now pastor of 2nd Church, Baltimore, Maryland), Albert Barnes (pastor of 1st Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Gardiner Spring (pastor of Brick Church, New York City), Thomas McAuley (pastor of Murray Street Church, New York City), and Robert McCartee (pastor of Canal Street Church, New York City).

⁷The context will be discussed shortly.

especially true in regard to her professed sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist--inasmuch as by various profane exorcisms, idolatrous incantations and unauthorized additions, mutilations and ceremonies, these simple sacraments have wholly lost their original character and true design.⁸

Samuel Miller, John Breckinridge's father-in-law, could "not agree to all the report, especially to the calling in question the validity of Romish baptism." Miller urged the Assembly to remove the reference to the sacraments, since the Reformed churches had always acknowledged Roman Catholic baptism. In reply, Breckinridge argued that "the moment I admit the validity of Romish ordinances. . . I am beaten in my argument" against Rome. While he admitted that ecclesiastical statements would not accomplish much in debate with "papists," he claimed that since popery was becoming more and more powerful, it was time to act.⁹ In the end, the Assembly removed the reference to the sacraments, but retained the general statement that the Roman Catholic church was apostate and no longer a church of Jesus Christ.

The Assembly had refused to reject Roman Catholic baptism explicitly, but the Breckinridges hoped that this more general condemnation would pave the way for a later reconsideration of the baptism question. And they had succeeded in bringing the question of Roman Catholic expansion to the attention of the Presbyterian Church. In a unanimous decision, the General Assembly urged all Presbyterians to resist the extension of Romanism "by means of the pulpit and the press, and all other proper and Christian

⁸"General Assembly," Southern Religious Telegraph 14.26 (June 26, 1835) 103.

⁹"General Assembly" Southern Religious Telegraph 14.26 (June 26, 1835) 103. "Proceedings of the General Assembly," New York Observer 13.25 (June 20, 1835) 98.

means,” and declared that it was “utterly inconsistent with the strongest obligations of Christian parents to place their children for education in Roman Catholic Seminaries.”¹⁰

But while the church had not formally condemned Roman Catholic baptism, many pointed out that the declaration that Rome was no longer a Christian church had implications for its baptisms. As M. Maclean, editor of the Southern Christian Herald, replied to one inquirer, “the *inference* from this resolution of the Assembly seems to us to be adverse to the validity of Roman Catholic baptism. For an association which cannot be recognized as a Christian church surely can have no authority to administer ordinances which only the ministers of the church can administer.”¹¹

1. The Underlying Issue: Where Was the Church?

The question at stake was the matter of catholicity. Presbyterians generally recognized the validity of other branches of the Christian church, but for centuries that recognition was mostly focused on churches in other countries. The old confessional model of the Reformed church had insisted that the sacraments must be administered by a duly ordained minister. If the established Church of Scotland deposed a minister, then he

¹⁰Minutes of the General Assembly (1835) 33. The concern regarding education was echoed by later Assemblies in 1841 and 1849, the latter Assembly declaring that those who sent their children to Roman Catholic boarding schools, where they would be required to attend mass, were guilty of violating their vows to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but suggested admonition as the only discipline required in most cases. The concern appears to have been widespread, since many parts of the country lacked any decent educational system, and Roman Catholic schools were sometimes the only school in the neighborhood (see chapter five). From 1841-1852 the Assembly appointed one of its members to preach on the papal controversy during the Assembly (Minutes, 1841, 432). The 1852 Assembly discontinued the practice as not having any real practical benefit.

¹¹Southern Christian Herald 4.8 (May 19, 1837) 31. Later that year at least one presbytery would engage in a debate on the question of Roman baptism. “Presbytery of Bethel,” CO 11.51 (December 23, 1837) 201.

could no longer serve as a pastor, and therefore there was little danger of him attempting to continue baptizing and preaching without being labeled as a schismatic, detached from the church of Jesus Christ.

In America, the Presbyterian church was merely one church among many, yet it attempted to retain its catholic conception of the fellowship of the church.¹² If a Presbyterian minister became convinced of Baptist views, he might be deposed, but then he would merely turn to the Baptists. Likewise, if a Presbyterian minister became an Arminian, he could simply transfer to the Methodists. And since the Presbyterian church recognized these other denominations as Christian churches, how could it consistently depose a man from the ministry who merely taught the same things as others whom the church recognized as validly ordained ministers?¹³

¹²The Old School periodicals occasionally debated the question of how far to extend communion. The most common stance was stated by Nathan Rice “The Church of Christ is ONE; yet it exists in a number of different denominations differing in points of doctrine and polity more or less important, but agreeing in all that is essential to salvation and to the validity of the ordinances. . . . Every believer in Christ, who has been baptised in the name of the holy Trinity, and is in connection with an evangelical church, has complied with all the Scripture requisitions in order to an approach to the Lord's table; and we dare not keep him back. . . .” P&H (November 19, 1840). But others, such as David Monfort of Indiana, argued that such intercommunion allowed Methodists to come to the Presbyterian table on Sunday and then try to steal Presbyterian members away on Monday (he then added, “I should not allude to these things were they not common.”) He suggested that Presbyterian churches should require communicants to affirm all the distinguishing tenets of Calvinism. If the church could suspend disorderly members, could it also suspend disorderly branches of the church? “Catholic Communion,” P&H (April 29 & June 24, 1841). Monfort was one of the few ministers in the West who still used communion tokens, allowing those from other churches to partake of the Supper “who are willing to fellowship them in worship and duty, and to submit to the order of the Church.” P&H (October 21, 1841). His brother was a minister in the Associate Reformed church, a denomination that only permitted its own members to partake of the table. In reply, Nathan Rice emphasized the distinction between irregular and invalid. Other denominations might have irregular practices, but this did not render their ordinances invalid. “Catholic Communion Defended, No 1,” P&H (July 8, 1841).

¹³In 1790 the Assembly declared that they would recognize the ordinances of any other church that they recognized as Christian. In 1814 they unanimously rejected Unitarian baptism because they did not accept Unitarians as truly Christian. See Baird, 75.

Several case studies presented themselves. One of the first was the Cumberland Presbyterian schism of 1806-1810. The Cumberland ministers had been deposed in 1806, and had only started the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1810. Since deposition removed a man from the ordained ministry, technically his baptisms would be considered lay baptisms—a thing not recognized by the Presbyterian church. But the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, with its blend of Calvinism and Arminianism, was closer to the Presbyterian church than the Wesleyan Methodists. How could Presbyterians recognize Methodist baptism, while rejecting that of the Cumberland Presbyterians? In a move that attempted to preserve the integrity of Presbyterian discipline, while recognizing the validity of other denominations, the General Assembly of 1825 declared that Cumberland Presbyterian baptisms were invalid from 1806-1810, while the Cumberland ministers were under the discipline of the church, but were valid after 1810, once they had their own denominational structure.¹⁴

In a similar case in South Carolina in the 1830s, the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia declared that the Independent Presbyterian Church (a schism led by the Rev. William C. Davis in 1810) had no valid ordinations or baptisms, stating “That this Synod do not acknowledge as valid the ordinance of Baptism as administered by a deposed Minister, or by any one whom such deposed Minister may have ordained, or by a Layman.” One of its presbyteries disagreed. Following the Assembly’s decision regarding

¹⁴Baird, 76. The Assembly declared “That while those persons styling themselves the Cumberland Presbytery were under suspension, their administrations are to be considered invalid; but after the General Assembly have declared them to be no longer connected with our Church, their administrations are to be viewed in the same light with those of other denominations not connected with our body.” From Minutes (1825) 275.

the Cumberland Presbyterians, Bethel Presbytery argued that while the Independent Presbyterian ordinances had “a high degree of irregularity,” they were still valid. In an intriguing argument, one presbyter from Bethel argued that the censure of deposition did not remove Davis’ ministerial office; “the only effect of such a sentence is to declare him no longer a Minister in our connexion. Are we to set ourselves up as the standard, and say that as soon as a man ceases to hold our peculiar views of doctrine, he ceases to be a Minister?” If a Presbyterian minister left to become a Baptist or an Episcopalian, the church generally did not depose him—or if it did, that would not alter his ministerial character. Arguing that the Synod’s decision was bigoted, sectarian, and high-church, he urged the church to reconsider.¹⁵ This presbyter was attempting to articulate a way of maintaining discipline, while recognizing the catholicity of the visible church.¹⁶

Benjamin Gildersleeve, the editor of the Charleston Observer, replied that this argument undermined traditional Presbyterian discipline, and would require the church to accept lay baptisms and lay ordinations. Deposition was not merely a statement that a man ceased to be a minister “in our connexion.” It really removed him from the gospel ministry entirely. He was no longer a clergyman, but was a layman. Gildersleeve insisted that while Presbyterians may have recognized the existence of other denominations, they could not allow this to interfere with the proper exercise of discipline.¹⁷ Gildersleeve was technically

¹⁵Presbyter, CO 13.46 (November 16, 1839) 181-182.

¹⁶A similar position would be taken by James Hoge, James Culbertson, and William Wylie in their report to the Synod of Ohio urging the acceptance of Oberlin baptism. “Baptism by Oberlin Preachers” Presbyterian Advocate 5.4 (October 26, 1842).

¹⁷Presbyter, CO 13.46 (November 16, 1839) 182. In this particular case the Synod eventually relented and the matter never came to the General Assembly.

correct with respect to the language of the church order, but the church order was not designed for the denominational world.

By the 1840s questions were also being raised about the propriety of accepting Campbellite baptisms. The basic problem was that the Campbellites had no creed. How could the Presbyterian church determine whether the Campbellites were truly Christian if they did not say what they believed? Catholicity had its limits. One author wrote in 1849 that Old School Presbyterians did not generally accept Campbellite baptism: “Our uniform practice has been to receive persons coming from that communion, as coming from the world, unless they have been baptized by a regularly ordained minister of an evangelical church before becoming connected with that body.”¹⁸ Another writer alleged that many Campbellites denied the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁹ In 1858 the Presbytery of Transylvania (Kentucky) had declared that valid baptism required that the administration be by “a true Church of Christ, holding baptism to be a seal of the righteousness of faith and a sign of cleansing by the blood of Christ and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit; and to acknowledge also the person administering that baptism to be a minister of Christ lawfully called to administer ordinances.” The presbytery could not recognize the Campbellites as a “part of the true Church visible,” because they had no creed: “The vessel that sails the seas, refusing to show the flag, is presumed to be piratical.” Since the Campbellites refused to say what they believed, there was no way for other churches to maintain

¹⁸“Campbellite Baptism,” Presbyterian of the West (March 8, 1849).

¹⁹“Socinian Character of Campbellism,” Presbyterian Advocate (Jan 21, 1846)

fellowship with them.²⁰ Six years later the General Assembly declared Campbellite baptism to be invalid.²¹

The underlying question was how to practice the catholicity of the church in the midst of denominational chaos. The problem was how to maintain a semblance of discipline in the context of the pluriformity of the church. If discipline was going to mean anything, then the church could not recognize the baptisms performed by deposed ministers. But not all error was equally destructive. Those errorists who remained within the bounds of evangelical orthodoxy could still be recognized as ministers—but no longer as ministers in the Presbyterian church. On the other hand, those who departed from orthodoxy entirely could no longer be considered Christian churches.²²

2. Catholicity vs. Rome: the Re-emergence of Anti-Catholicism, 1835-1845

But when Presbyterians attempted to establish criteria for determining where to find the church, they usually found their benchmark in the classic controversy with Rome.

²⁰Transylvania Presbytery, “Report on the Validity of the Baptism administered in the Reform or Campbellite Body” *Presbyterian of the West* 27.46 (May 13, 1858).

²¹*Minutes* (1864) 316. There was not much significant debate on the point. In 1871 a committee of Robert L. Dabney, Thomas E. Peck, John B. Adger, and George Howe reported to the southern General Assembly that invalid baptism occurs when a church apostatizes, or by the utter change or corruption of the element and doctrine of the sacrament. On both scores, Rome has no baptism. The Campbellites were so varied in their beliefs that since some of her baptisms were invalid, and the church could not tell which were which, therefore the church should rebaptize all. (Alexander's Presbyterian Digest, 346). By 1882 the question of Campbellite baptism had been referred to the judgment of the session.

²²Another question arose in the newspapers with respect to whether Quakers could be admitted to the Lord's Table, since Quakers did not practice baptism at all. Nicholas Murray of Elizabethtown said that he would admit a Quaker to the Table who was evangelical in belief, but this was generally condemned. One response insisted that since baptism is the sacrament of admission into the visible Church, there could be no warrant for admitting an unbaptized person to the Table. “We think the principle stated by Dr M. is an unsound one, and one that tends to unscriptural latitudinarianism.” “Should Unbaptized Persons be Admitted to the Lord's Table,” *PH* 28.14 (Sept 30, 1858).

But the classic controversy was altered by the new denominational Protestant world. Never before had Presbyterians formally rejected the validity of Roman Catholic baptism, but they felt the relentless pressure of the renewed Protestant movement to deny that Rome was a true church—and if Rome was not a true church, then many could not see any alternative but to reject the validity of its baptism.

Linda Colley has argued that a Protestant national identity was formed in Great Britain primarily as a reaction to the French Roman Catholic “other,” during the colonial wars of the eighteenth century.²³ Colonial American anti-Catholic tendencies plainly drew on the same source.²⁴ Both the question of Roman Catholic baptism and the education debates reveal how Protestant nationality functioned in an American context.

Most historians recognize that the resurgence of anti-Catholicism was launched by fears over the increased Roman Catholic immigration in the 1820s and 1830s.²⁵ Ray Allen Billington’s 1938 The Protestant Crusade remains the most thorough study,²⁶ though it covers only the most virulent wing of the anti-Catholic movement, and focuses almost

²³Linda Colley, Britons, Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (London: Bath, 1992). Some of the recent literature on anti-Catholicism has been surveyed by Marjule Anne Drury, “Anti-Catholicism in Germany, Britain, and the United States: A Review and Critique of Recent Scholarship,” Church History 70:1 (March 2001) 98-131.

²⁴Thomas Saunders Kidd, “From Puritan to Evangelical: Changing Culture in New England, 1689-1740,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2001).

²⁵Tyler Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) chapter 1.

²⁶Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938). Jenny Franchot has produced a fine study of Protestant literary engagement with Roman Catholicism, especially in New England. Jenny Franchot, Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

solely on the political connection between anti-Catholicism and nativism. While the linkage of anti-Catholicism with nativism is plain, the two movements are not identical. Much of American anti-Catholicism was rooted primarily in Protestants' theological convictions regarding the nature of the Roman Catholic church, along with the political ramifications of those theological claims.²⁷ Anti-Catholics were not necessarily nativist, since many encouraged immigration from Protestant countries. As long as Roman Catholics remained a tiny minority, they could tolerate their presence; but as immigration swelled the ranks of the Roman Catholic church, Protestants became convinced that the religious and political power of Rome was a serious threat to American civil and religious liberties. The reason that historians have confused anti-Catholicism with nativism is due to the rhetorical pressures of American politics. Those who prized religious freedom could not consistently form an anti-Catholic political organization. They had to couch their political rhetoric in the language of nativism. This created a dual front for the anti-Catholic movement: 1) an overtly theological attack on their religious objections to Roman Catholicism (roughly parallel to their theological debates with other Protestants); and 2) a political argument that was rhetorically abstracted from the theological discussion in order to remain consistent with the ideals of religious freedom.²⁸

²⁷R. Bryan Bademan has emphasized the theological importance of anti-Catholicism. Bademan, "Contesting the Evangelical Age: Protestant Challenges to Religious Subjectivity in Antebellum America," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2003) chapter two. See also Leo P. Hirrel, Children of Wrath: New School Calvinism and Antebellum Reform (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1998) chapter six.

²⁸Articles in Protestant newspapers bear out this distinction. Theological and political articles run in almost equal numbers. Billington sees the roots of the "No-Popery" movement in the increasing Roman Catholic immigration in the 1820s, which resulted in the establishment of The Protestant, a weekly anti-Catholic newspaper in New York in 1830. The first two editors were the Rev. George Bourne, and the Rev. William Craig Brownlee, Billington, 53-55.

Not surprisingly, then, Old School Presbyterians waged a war on both fronts—the theological and the political. The Protestant movement of the 1830s and 1840s utilized three basic media: the lecture, the debate, and the periodical press (which also printed many of the lectures and commented on the debates). A fourth forum developed in the civil courts, through a few high profile slander trials when Presbyterian editors were accused of defaming the character of certain Roman Catholic priests.

A. The Pulpit and the Press

The 1835 General Assembly had called for the pulpit and the press to be more active in combating the “aggression” of Rome, but this was merely in confirmation of what Nathan Rice and R. J. Breckinridge had already begun earlier that year. Rice started the Western Protestant in Bardstown, Kentucky, while Breckinridge edited the Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine in Baltimore, Maryland, two of the first four Roman Catholic dioceses in America.

Breckinridge, three years into his first pastorate at the Second Presbyterian Church of Baltimore,²⁹ claimed that he came to Baltimore with no desire to engage in the papal controversy. But when he offered a series of lectures on Roman Catholicism to his own congregation, a Roman Catholic priest interrupted one of the lectures, causing great excitement, and drawing much larger crowds. The city press had made some unfavorable comments about Breckinridge’s lectures, but when local editors refused to publish his responses (which, knowing Breckinridge, were probably inflammatory), he had become

²⁹Robert had succeeded his brother John at Second Presbyterian, Baltimore, in 1832.

convinced that the Roman Catholics were trying to control the city press. The only way for a zealous Protestant to be heard in Baltimore was to start his own paper. “The Catholic population of Baltimore, with less than one-quarter of the aggregate wealth, enterprise, and intelligence of this good city, has for years exerted tenfold the influence over the press, that all the remaining three-quarters ever did. And, I for one, am ready to cooperate for the destruction of this hurtful and undue influence.”³⁰

The Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine was designed to include at least one article devoted to the “papal controversy” every month. For the first two years of its existence, the paper devoted around three-quarters of its pages to the controversy.³¹ Some of the literature was “anti-Catholic” (such as the “Trial of Antichrist,” which ran from February to December of 1836, a clever fictional trial of the papacy before the court of heaven), but a large portion consisted of historical documents, patristic, medieval and modern (to use the three-fold division of church history current at the time). Papal bulls, patristic and medieval essays on the way of salvation, and historic episodes in church-state relations were on display for Breckinridge’s readers to absorb. With the anti-Catholic articles interspersed between the historical material, the intended message was obvious:

³⁰“The Rejected Statement To the Public,” BLRM 1.2 (February 1835) 51. In fact, it appears that the Baltimore press was attempting to maintain a tolerant and moderate tone—the dominant position among Baltimore Protestants as well as Catholics for several generations. From their perspective, Breckinridge was as an outsider (from Kentucky) stirring up trouble where none needed to exist.

³¹In 1836, 90 out of the 110 articles in the BLRM were related to the papal controversy, and 84 out of 128 in 1837. But by the middle of 1837, the New School controversy was beginning to make a dent in the anti-Catholic literature. In 1838 only 45 of the 89 articles were on Romanism, while seventeen dealt with the New School controversy, and another nine covered the slavery question. This proportion remained the average for the rest of the papers existence (through 1841), with various Presbyterian debates replacing the New School Controversy by 1840. But this still meant that half the material in the paper was dealing with Rome.

the greatest threat to the religious and civil liberties of the nation was the papacy.

Breckinridge admitted that most American Catholics repudiated certain tenets of Rome (such as the doctrine that no Protestant could be saved)³², but argued that if they disagreed with the Pope on such matters, perhaps it would be best if they became Protestants themselves!

Breckinridge did not ignore contemporary issues, however. He published articles defending Texas against the Mexican government as early as 1836, arguing that the problems in Texas were rooted in Roman Catholic attempts to get rid of Protestants, along with “republican government and religious liberty.” He claimed that two Roman Catholic bishops were funding the war with \$1 million to drive all Americans out of Texas.³³ When the College of New Jersey (a Presbyterian college) gave William Gaston (the Roman Catholic chief justice of North Carolina) an honorary doctorate in 1835, Breckinridge exploded, suggesting that Gaston had received a dispensation from the Bishop of Baltimore in order to hold political office in North Carolina (until 1835, when it was altered for Gaston’s sake, North Carolina’s Constitution required an oath that the office holder affirmed the general truth of the Protestant religion).³⁴ In a similar vein, when it

³²“No Salvation for Protestants!!!” BLRM 1.2 (February 1835) 36.

³³“Texas, Her Wrongs, and Prospect” BLRM 2.1 (January, 1836) 20.

³⁴BLRM 2.3 (March 1836) 104. The following month Breckinridge published Gaston’s refutation of this accusation from the Lexington Gazette, where Gaston claimed that he had no problem affirming the general truth of the Protestant religion. Breckinridge tried to convince the Lexington Gazette to publish his reply to Gaston, insisting that Gaston was defining Protestantism quite differently from any historical definition, but Breckinridge’s letter was so incendiary that the editor replied that it was “of that character, which experience has convinced me cannot be usefully and safely admitted into the columns of a newspaper.” Therefore Breckinridge published the whole exchange in his own paper, concluding: Oh! how willingly, would I become their [papists] victim, if that might be the means of making my country feel, that every sentiment of patriotism, every emotion of philanthropy, and every principle

became known that Vice President Martin Van Buren had corresponded directly with the pope while secretary of state, and that now Roger B. Taney (a Roman Catholic) was a candidate for chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, Breckinridge was convinced that something was afoot:

we are no party politicians; we are no enemies of Mr. Van Buren; we have nothing to say against Mr. Taney. But we beseech the American people to ask themselves this plain question: *What has Mr. Taney done or shown himself capable of doing, to deserve the highest, most illustrious, most honoured office, in the gift of man?* Let the Roman Pontiff answer that question!”³⁵

As far as Breckinridge could see, the historical quest of the papacy for temporal power had not abated, and every advance made by Roman Catholic laymen was seen as being orchestrated by a secret papal conspiracy to overthrow American civil and religious liberty.³⁶

of true religion, equally impel us to suppress, by all lawful means, this unparalleled superstition, as the enemy alike of God and man.

See BLRM 2.4 (April, 1836) 140-148. Edmund Arthur Moore, “The Earlier Life of Robert J. Breckinridge, 1800-1845,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1932) 108.

³⁵“State of Papal Influence” BLRM 2.3 (March, 1836) 105.

³⁶A more moderate, but no less firm, approach was taken in the “Kirwan Letters” authored by Nicholas Murray in 1848. Murray had grown up Roman Catholic in Ireland, but had become a Presbyterian after immigrating to New York. Originally published in the New York Observer, the letters were immensely popular and sold over 100,000 copies in their first year (even being reprinted in England and Ireland and translated into German) and were published together as Letters to the Rt. Rev. John Hughes by “Kirwan” (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1851). These letters recount Murray’s own pilgrimage from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism and explain the many reasons why he cannot return. Billington associates this more moderate approach as related to the more genteel anti-Catholicism of the late 1840s. (Billington, 253-254)

B. The Debates

With such rhetoric coming from Breckinridge's monthly magazine (as well as other Protestant journals), perhaps it is not surprising that Roman Catholic priests tried to meet the paranoia by accepting some of the invitations to debate. In the mid-1830s several Protestant/Catholic debates occurred throughout the country.³⁷ Perhaps the most famous took place in Baltimore in the winter of 1835/36 between the Reverend John Breckinridge (Robert's brother, and the former pastor of Second Presbyterian Church in Baltimore), and Father John Hughes (later archbishop of New York), on the question of whether either the Roman Catholic or the Presbyterian religion was "inimical to civil or religious liberty."³⁸ The topic had been chosen by the Union Literary and Debating Institute of Baltimore (consisting of both Roman Catholics and Protestants). The definitions agreed upon by both parties were that religious liberty consisted of the right of each individual to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, without injuring or invading the rights of others; while civil liberty consisted of the absolute rights of an individual restrained only for the preservation of order in society. Both sides agreed to limit themselves only to the

³⁷The first debate was a written exchange between Breckinridge and Hughes in 1833, which Billington calls "the first important discussion" between representatives of the Protestant and Catholic churches. Other debates include, A Debate on the Roman Catholic Religion. . . between Alexander Campbell of Bethany, Virginia, and the Rt. Rev. John B. Purcell, Bishop of Cincinnati. . . (Cincinnati: J. A. James & Co., 1837); Discussion Held in Lebanon, Pa. . . between N. Steinbacher of the Roman Catholic, and J. F. Berg of the Reformed Church (Philadelphia, 1842). Billington, 62. Billington suggests that by 1840 anti-Catholics were convinced that these debates were doing their cause little good (66), but it also appears that Roman Catholics were equally desirous of avoiding the debate forum, because Breckinridge and Rice continued to challenge them to debates.

³⁸John Hughes and John Breckinridge, A Discussion: Is the Roman Catholic Religion Inimical to Civil or Religious Liberty? Is the Presbyterian Religion Inimical to Civil or Religious Liberty? (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970/1836). This exchange was reviewed by Joel Jones, a ruling elder from Philadelphia, in "Romanism and Civil and Religious Liberty," BRPR 9 (1837) 238-66, 326-49, 487-509.

official doctrine of the two churches, as exemplified in their confessions and official doctrinal decisions. Needless to say, neither party followed this rule, but regularly appealed to the most intolerant acts of the other church (and in some cases made egregious errors of fact in relying upon the false accusations of others). But their main arguments—and their perpetual accusations of dishonesty against each other—revealed the impassable gulf between them.

Hughes presented himself, and the Roman Catholic church, as the champion of civil and religious liberty. Claiming that Presbyterians were trying to “destroy the civil and religious reputation of Catholics,” the Ulster-born Hughes told his hearers: “I was born under the scourge of Protestant persecution, of which my fathers, in common with their Catholic countrymen, had been the victims for ages. Hence I know the *value* of that civil and religious liberty which our happy government secures to all.”³⁹

Breckinridge replied that the very fact that Rome encourages religious establishments demonstrates that it is against religious liberty. Claiming that “conscientious papists” rejected the United States Constitution’s emphasis on the rights of conscience, he claimed that Roman Catholics “ascribe to the *Pope* the *right and the power to dictate their creed*, and *to enforce obedience to it*; and they are *voluntary slaves* by giving up their rights of conscience; and in all Catholic countries, they concur by civil and if necessary by military force, to compel submission in others. Hence no good Catholic can be a consistent American.”⁴⁰ He suggested that if Hughes actually believed in the

³⁹Hughes and Breckinridge, A Discussion, 20.

⁴⁰Hughes and Breckinridge, A Discussion, 62.

importance of civil and religious liberty, he should insist upon the rights of Protestants in Roman Catholic countries—such as Italy—to worship freely.

Hughes declared in turn that he rejected the idea that human authority could interfere with the rights of conscience. The Pope, he said, may not dictate our creed and force us to obey it: “the Pope has no such right, and the proposition *would be condemned by the Pope himself, and the whole Catholic Church, as HERETICAL.*”⁴¹ He pointed to France and Poland as examples of Roman Catholic countries that maintained liberty of worship for Protestants and all others. When Breckinridge pointed out that the pope had regularly objected to this religious liberty in these countries, Hughes replied that this was the present pope’s position, but it had never been formally made a part of the church’s official doctrine.

Hughes then turned his guns on the Presbyterians (by which he meant the whole Reformed tradition). He suggested that attempts to pass sabbath legislation and the growing number of anti-Catholic periodicals and pamphlets were part of a conspiracy to make Presbyterianism the dominant religion in America. This, he insisted, broke from their Ulster heritage, since the Scots-Irish in Ulster would never have allowed such mistreatment of Irish Catholics as regularly occurred in America. Hughes had to admit that the Presbyterians had changed their creed to reject their former approval of established churches, but he argued that the Presbyterians ability to change their creed to fit political circumstances was dangerous because they could resume their intolerance as soon as it was convenient.

⁴¹Hughes and Breckinridge, A Discussion, 81.

Breckinridge replied by pointing out that the Presbyterian Confession protects all Christians—including Roman Catholics.⁴² Pointing to the involvement of John Witherspoon and other Presbyterians in the Revolutionary cause, he argued that the American Constitution was the result of Presbyterian convictions—not the cause. We are no longer Scots, he argued, but Americans. When Hughes pointed to the statement in the Larger Catechism that Presbyterians are bound to seek to “remove idolatry” (and Presbyterians considered Roman Catholic worship to be idolatrous), and argued that the attack on the Boston convent was simply the outworking of Presbyterian principles, Breckinridge replied that the proper way to remove idolatry was through persuasion—not through violence or political power. He admitted that Roman Catholics had every right to proselytize in this country, but Presbyterians had every right to try to stop them through free inquiry and debate. He agreed that all religions had a right to the protection of the magistrate, but that protection extended to the freedom to condemn the religious principles of other religions.⁴³ Predictably, both sides claimed the victory in the debate, but little was accomplished by either side.

⁴²Of course, Breckinridge had argued just that summer at the General Assembly that the Roman Catholic church was not a Christian church (see above), but he was willing to call them “Christian” in the generic sense (and like most Presbyterians, he believed that individual Roman Catholics could be true Christians).

⁴³Hughes and Breckinridge, A Discussion, part 2.

_____ *C. Milly McPherson and Mr. Maguire: the Trials of N. L. Rice and R. J.*

Breckinridge

The conviction amongst Protestant groups that a Roman Catholic conspiracy was afoot occasionally led to accusations of serious ethical deviations, or even crimes. While the case of Maria Monk was the most famous, there were others that also gained notoriety, especially outside of the Northeast. Indeed, while Old School Presbyterians tended to believe that Monk was telling the truth, they seem to have not paid a great deal of attention to her case. Breckinridge waited ten months before commenting on the case, because he was uncertain of its truth. Its plausibility, however, was obvious to him. Like most in the Protestant movement, it took very little to convince him that Roman Catholic priests were capable of the most outrageous crimes.⁴⁴ When Monk turned against her Protestant “benefactors” there seems to have been little interest in Old School papers, as some published Brownlee’s version of the story, and others ignored the case entirely.⁴⁵

Part of the reason for the relative indifference that Old School Presbyterians showed to Maria Monk may have been the fact that they had their own *cause celebre*, Milly McPherson. Nathan L. Rice was the pastor of the Presbyterian church in Bardstown, Kentucky from 1833-41. When he came to Bardstown, he was told of the mysterious disappearance of Milly McPherson, a Roman Catholic nun who had claimed to have been abused by a priest in 1831-32, and then fled, never to be heard from again. When Rice

⁴⁴“Maria Monk” BLRM 2.8 (September, 1836).

⁴⁵“What Has Become of Maria Monk? from the Protestant Vindicator,” Presbyterian Advocate 1.9 (November 28, 1838).

published the story in his Western Protestant in 1836, the priest sued him for libel. The trial was the sensation of the year in Kentucky. Two of Kentucky's leading politicians, United States Senator John J. Crittenden and Lieutenant Governor Charles A. Wickliffe, served as counsel for Rice, along with Nathaniel Wickliffe.⁴⁶ The priests did not deny that "the young woman had been in the nunnery; that she assigned, as a chief reason for leaving it, the licentious conduct of the priest; and that she had disappeared from the neighborhood," but claimed that she was insane and had falsely accused him.⁴⁷ Since the only witness was Milly McPherson, and all attempts to find her could only show that some woman by that name had briefly taught school in Indiana, the judge ordered that Rice had to be found guilty, since he could not substantiate his claims. The jury returned the verdict, but fined Rice only one cent, suggesting that they were not convinced of his guilt. For the next 25 years Rice used this story to suggest that McPherson had met some evil end. And for many years, when Old School Presbyterians (especially in the West) debated Roman Catholics, a common question was "what became of Milly McPherson?"⁴⁸

Not surprisingly, R. J. Breckinridge also was sued for libel. What is surprising is how long it took. After five years of his regular attacks on the Roman Catholic community in Baltimore (including a suggestion of foul play in May of 1835, when screams for help

⁴⁶Charles Anderson Wickliffe (1788-1869) was a member of Rice's Bardstown congregation. A native Kentuckian and a lifelong Democrat, Wickliffe served in the Kentucky house of representatives for seven years, in the U.S. House from 1823-1833 and from 1861-1863. He was Lieutenant Governor from 1836-39, when he took over as governor after the death of Governor Clark until 1840, and served as U. S. Postmaster General from 1841-1845. Dictionary of American Biography. On Crittenden see below.

⁴⁷"The Mysterious Disappearance" Presbyterian Expositor 1.6 (May 15, 1858) 312.

⁴⁸"Thirty-Four to One" True Catholic 1.5 (July 3, 1844); "The Case of Milly McPherson," True Catholic 1.6 (July 17, 1844); "The Cruelty of Popery," Western Protestant 1.1 (February 19, 1845) 6-7.

were heard from the Carmelite convent in Baltimore, and Breckinridge assumed that it was a sexual assault on a nun⁴⁹), he finally crossed the line when he accused the keeper of the city alms house, one Mr. James L. Maguire, of holding a man captive against his will at the order of Roman Catholic priests, when the man indicated that he wanted to learn about Protestantism.

When he learned of the lawsuit, Breckinridge was delighted. “Our purpose in the beginning was to expose the anti-christian, anti-social, anti-republican doctrines--and the corrupt and abominable practices of the papacy,” and now finally he would get his day in court.⁵⁰ His entire magazine for May and June of 1840 was devoted to an account of the trial. Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky (who had defended Rice four years earlier) now came to Baltimore to help his old friend,⁵¹ along with William Schley, a local Baltimore lawyer. Senator William C. Preston of South Carolina (Breckinridge’s brother-in-law) provided informal counsel as well.⁵² The trial was the sensation of 1840

⁴⁹BLRM 1.5 (May, 1835) 132.

⁵⁰“Our Course for Five Years--Suit of Mr. Maguire” BLRM 6.1 (January 1840). The original story was in the BLRM of November, 1839.

⁵¹Crittenden (1786-1863) was Henry Clay’s lieutenant, and has the distinction of being nominated to the United States Supreme Court by both John Quincy Adams and Abraham Lincoln. Albert D. Kirwan, John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962). Kirwan notes that Crittenden had forestalled a threatened duel between Breckinridge and his arch-nemesis Robert Wickliffe in 1823 (43).

⁵²“The State of Maryland against Robert J. Breckinridge” BLRM 6.5-6 (May & June, 1840)—a double issue. William C. Preston (1794-1860) was born in Philadelphia, graduated from South Carolina College in 1812, and settled in Columbia. He served in the South Carolina legislature (1829-1834), and the United States Senate (1836-1842), and served as president of South Carolina College (1845-1851). Breckinridge had married his sister, Ann Sophonisba Preston, in 1823. (James H. Thornwell was a professor at South Carolina College during Preston’s presidency, and was also his successor in the presidency).

throughout the country. A hung jury resulted in Breckinridge's acquittal, which prompted William C. Brownlee to congratulate him for dealing such a serious blow to "the Beast."⁵³

Not all Old School Presbyterians, however, appreciated Breckinridge's tactics. When Breckinridge visited New York City, William W. Phillips and Gardiner Spring (pastors of First and Brick Presbyterian churches, the two most prestigious Presbyterian congregations in the city) refused to let him preach from their pulpits, and James Lenox, ruling elder of First Church (and one of the leading contributors to Princeton Seminary), was said by Brownlee to "oppose our movements against Popery."⁵⁴

Even close to home, Breckinridge found opposition. Samuel Annan, a physician at the alms house, and an elder at the Third Presbyterian Church of Baltimore (he had left Second Church shortly after Breckinridge arrived), had testified in court that Breckinridge had misconstrued the whole affair. Breckinridge replied with a savage attack in his magazine. After dragging Annan's character through the mud in an open letter, Breckinridge concluded, "May the Lord Jehovah judge between us, even as he has judged between me and all who have heretofore hated and pursued me for his sake. Yours, in sincere pity, Robert J. Breckinridge."⁵⁵ When Annan defended his conduct in a pamphlet,

⁵³William C. Brownlee to Robert J. Breckinridge, April 4, 1842, cited in Edmund Arthur Moore, "The Earlier Life of Robert J. Breckinridge, 1800-1845" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1932) 114-118. Other congratulations came publicly from Benjamin Gildersleeve, editor of the Charleston Observer, who thought that the trial would do good to educate both Protestants and Roman Catholics regarding the tyrannical authority of the priesthood. "The Baltimore Trial," CO 14.8 (April 11, 1840) 30.

⁵⁴Brownlee to Breckinridge, April 4, 1842, cited in Moore, 114-118.

⁵⁵"Letter to Samuel Annan, M. D., One of the Physicians at the Alms House,--a Ruling Elder in the Third Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, &c." BLRM 6.8 (August, 1840). It is interesting, though hardly surprising in this case, that Breckinridge used the periodical press, rather than the church courts, to deal with Annan. Breckinridge was the most notorious exception to the Old School rule that idea--not persons--should be attacked. Breckinridge was known for his sharp-tongued attacks, at one point being

Breckinridge replied that it was astounding that “he is still a public officer of the Alms House, and as yet is allowed to degrade the name of Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian church.”⁵⁶

D. The Rise of the Protestant Associations

While Protestants in general, and Presbyterians in particular, had always opposed the spread of the doctrines and practices of Rome, the level of that opposition fluctuated in proportion to their sense of the immediacy of the “romish threat.” And in the late 1830s and early 1840s, Presbyterians were increasingly alarmed at the influx of Roman Catholics.⁵⁷ A Protestant Association was formed in Baltimore early in 1835 with Old School ministers R. J. Breckinridge and G. W. Musgrave, licentiate A. B. Cross (RJB’s co-editor), and ruling elders John N. Brown, and J. Harmon Brown among those calling the meeting. While Methodists were chosen as president and secretary of the first meeting; Breckinridge was selected as corresponding secretary, the only permanent officer of the Association.⁵⁸ After that group disbanded, Breckinridge helped found “The Society of the

called “the Robespierre of the Presbyterian Church,” which Breckinridge himself reported. Breckinridge, “An Humble Defence for Speaking Truth and Doing Good,” BLRM 5.8 (August, 1839) 358.

⁵⁶“Review of the Pamphlet of Samuel Annan,” BLRM 7.3 (March 1841) 126.

⁵⁷As early as 1834 the New York Observer was warning against the machinations of the Leopold Society, formed in 1829 to further the spread of Roman Catholicism in the United States. “Popery in the United States,” New York Observer 12.3 (January 18, 1834) 10.

⁵⁸BLRM 1.5 (May, 1835). It is worth noting that Breckinridge and Musgrave were pastors of the Second and Third Presbyterian Churches in Baltimore. John C. Backus, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church seems not to have been involved. New York had seen the emergence of several anti-Catholic societies in 1834-1836 (Billington, 95-97).

Friends of the Reformation” in 1843, together with the Evangelical Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians and German Reformed in Baltimore.

That same year saw the formation of the American Protestant Association in Philadelphia. Old School Presbyterians were at the fore: C. C. Cuyler was chairman of the initial meeting, while Henry A. Boardman served as corresponding secretary. Lay directors from the Old School included Samuel Agnew and Joseph A. Davidson. The initial statement of the association warned that the spread of Romanism in England, Scotland and America suggested that there was a conspiracy at work. Since most Roman Catholic clergy were foreigners, “bound by their *oath of office* to ‘defend and keep the Roman Papacy *and the royalties of St. Peter*, against all men,’” they could not be faithful American citizens. “We see them boasting that they hold the balance of political power. . . a party governed by a foreign head, guided by priests the greater part of whom are not naturalized citizens, and impelled by sympathies at war with our republican institutions.” With the Leopold Foundation in Austria, “under the patronage of Prince Metternich, a prime friend of despotism and Popery, for the purpose of propagating Romanism in this country,” and the well-publicized attempts to plant “large *colonies* of Papists in our Western States,” it seemed clear to them that Rome was trying to take over the Mississippi Valley, and eventually the United States.⁵⁹ In support of their claims that Roman Catholicism was a threat to American liberties, they quoted from the “Encyclical Letter of August 15th, 1832,” of Gregory XVI (the reigning pope) regarding republicanism:

⁵⁹Billington also mentions the “domineering” tone that Roman Catholic clergy sometimes adopted in America which alienated Protestants. (289-314)

From that polluted fountain of indifference flows that absurd and erroneous doctrine, or rather raving, in favour and in defence of '*liberty of conscience*,' for which *most pestilential error*, the course is opened by the entire and wild *liberty of opinion* which is every where attempting the overthrow of civil and religious institutions; and which the unblushing impudence of some, has held forth as an advantage of religion. . . . From hence arise these revolutions in the minds of men, hence this aggravated corruption of youth, hence this concept among the people of sacred things, and of the most holy institutions and laws; hence in one word, that *pest of all others most to be dreaded in a State, unbridled liberty of opinion*.

Since Gregory had also condemned "that worst and *never sufficiently to be execrated and detested liberty of the press*," and "the zeal of some to separate *the church from the state*, and to burst the bond which unties the priesthood to the Empire," the American Protestant Association believed that they had good reason to be concerned about the massive immigration that now threatened to change the shape of the United States. Therefore they promised that they would oppose Romanism by the dissemination of the truth. They insisted that they would not interfere with the religious aspects of Romanism, but would rather defend the civil and religious liberty of the United States.⁶⁰ While the American Protestant Association was a nativist organization in one sense, it was a theological brand of nativism that objected to Rome's particular definition of the church.

Most Old School newspapers hailed this organization as a timely step in combating Roman Catholic "aggression."⁶¹ Breckinridge, on the other hand, wondered why it took

⁶⁰"American Protestant Association," Presbyterian 13.2 (January 14, 1843) 5-6.

⁶¹William Engles commented that three years before, Philadelphians would have objected, but now "The sentiment is daily gaining ground among all classes, that *it is time for American Protestants to unite* for the purpose of repelling the aggressions of the Papal Hierarchy upon our civil and religious liberties." "Great Protestant Movement," Presbyterian 13.2 (January 14, 1843) 6; WS 6.28 (March 2, 1843). One article that attempted to document the Roman Catholic plans to take over portions of the United States was "Popish Colonization," Presbyterian 12.47 (Nov 19, 1842) 186.

them so long to see the danger and scorned their lack of battle “scars.” Still he rejoiced in this new interdenominational effort, proclaiming: “Look to your ways, ye vassals of Rome. Look to your ways, ye Jesuits; haters of liberty, of truth, and of righteousness. For verily, it is no longer a solitary man who stands forth to defy and to resist you.” Breckinridge believed that “the great revival of the spirit of the Reformation” throughout the world would be God’s instrument in bringing about the “predestinated ruin” of the Roman Catholic “Antichrist.”⁶²

_____ *E. The Explosion of Anti-Catholic Periodicals, 1844-45*

As Irish immigration increased dramatically in 1844-45, anti-catholic measures increased as well. In the fourteen months between January of 1844 and February of 1845, no less than five anti-catholic periodicals were started by Old School Presbyterians in the south and west—in some cases in conjunction with ministers from other denominations.⁶³

⁶²Robert J. Breckinridge, “Important Movement in the Evangelical Churches of the City of Baltimore,” Spirit of the XIXth Century 2.5 (May, 1843) 307-311. Quotations from pages 310-311. Also his short notice of the Address of the Board of Managers of the American Protestant Association 312-313.

⁶³Since most of these papers do not seem to have been preserved, either in whole or in part, I have drawn on the most successful paper, the True Catholic (preserved in its entirety at the Presbyterian Historical Society), along with the Western Protestant (located at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary). Billington also points to other anti-Catholic papers started between 1841-1845 in Baltimore (the Saturday Visitor), in Albany (The Reformation Defended Against the Errors of the Times), in Philadelphia (Protestant Banner) and in Cincinnati (The American Protestant)

Date	Title	Place	Old School Editors
1844	<u>Herald of Religious Liberty</u>	St. Louis, Missouri	Hiram Chamberlain
1844	<u>True Catholic</u>	Louisville, Kentucky	William L. Breckinridge & Edward P. Humphrey
1844	<u>New Orleans Protestant</u>	New Orleans, LA	J. B. Warren & Session, 1 st Pbn Ch New Orleans
1844	<u>Jackson Protestant</u>	Jackson, Tennessee	A. A. Campbell
1845	<u>Western Protestant</u>	Cincinnati, Ohio	Nathan Lewis Rice

Figure 3.1. Anti-Catholic Newspapers Started by Old School Editors in 1844-1845

Neither the Jackson Protestant nor the Western Protestant survived a year of publication, as Campbell's death ended his enterprise, and Rice merged his paper with the True Catholic after nine months, assuming a portion of the editorial responsibility for the joint paper. The other three originally attempted to engage some assistance from ministers of other denominations, but only the True Catholic (1844-1847) was able to sustain the effort as an interdenominational Protestant paper. The Herald of Religious Liberty and the New Orleans Protestant gradually became denominational papers, and were renamed the St. Louis Presbyterian (ca. 1849) and the New Orleans Presbyterian (1847) respectively.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ By the end of 1846, however, the market for anti-catholic newspapers was dwindling. While sporting a circulation of over 3,000, the True Catholic admitted that fewer than half had paid their subscriptions that year. The paper was "temporarily" suspended in February of 1847 to allow the new editor, the Rev. Archy B. Lawrence, to drum up further subscriptions, but it was never heard from again. True Catholic 3.17 (February 1, 1847). Lawrence was an Old School minister who seems to have been very interested in editing—given his association with numerous southwestern papers—but not very good at it. He was the final editor of the New Orleans Observer 1838-40, before it sold out to the Watchman of the South. He edited the Bible Witness in Nashville, Tennessee, for six months in 1845 before merging into the Presbyterian Herald in Louisville. He temporarily assisted William W. Hill with the Presbyterian Herald in 1845-46, before some unnamed disagreement between them led to his silent departure. He assumed the reins of the True Catholic in November of 1846. Its demise three months later seems to have been his last editorial failure. Part of the reason for the demise of the anti-catholic papers was the fact that the Old School weeklies regularly reprinted what they considered the best of the anti-catholic literature in their columns. The Presbyterian Advocate of Pittsburgh, for instance, continued regular weekly articles against Rome (versus the papacy, transubstantiation, the saints, the morals of the Jesuits, Bishop Hughes, worship of the Virgin Mary, etc.) throughout most of 1844-45. After 1846, however, the anti-catholic literature in the weeklies dropped off considerably.

The True Catholic was first issued at Louisville on May 1, 1844, as a bi-monthly “devoted to the exposure of popery, and the spread of religion, liberty and knowledge.”⁶⁵ Its editors, drawn from the Old School Presbyterian, Methodist Episcopal, and Baptist churches declared that “the West is to be the arena, where the great principles of civil and religious liberty are to be asserted, against their haughty and imperious foe.” Because they attribute salvation to “the grace of God, justifying the sinner through faith in His Son,” and accept “the rule of faith and life” as the scriptures alone, “the evangelical churches are, in truth, the exponents of the Catholic or universal faith. . . . He who maintains these principles as they are taught in the word of God, and whose heart and life are in conformity thereto, is a True Catholic.”

⁶⁵The masthead of the paper. The True Catholic initially drew most of its readership from Kentucky, with smaller circulation in Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, and Mississippi, but eventually developed a circulation fairly evenly distributed through those states as well as Georgia and North Carolina.

State	Receipts (1845)	(1846–Jan. through July)
KY	494	223
IN	56	122
TN	51	134
MS	33	73
OH	28	97
NC	19	60
VA	15	4
AL	11	24
MO	4	10
LA	2	14
SC		19
GA		152
Northeast	7	3
Other West	14	5
Total	734	940

Total subscription by the end of 1846 had reached 3,000, but since nearly half their readers did not pay on time, the paper was discontinued. (The one subscriber from New Jersey was Samuel Miller, professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, who praised the True Catholic for its fairness).

Figure 3.2. Receipts for the *True Catholic*, 1845-1846

The editors wanted to be fair to Rome. Therefore they decided to avoid reprinting much of the Protestant literature about Rome, but tried to rely on the official statements of the Roman Church. They hoped that by revealing the official teaching of Rome, they would demonstrate that they were not the enemies of Roman Catholics, but their best friends, revealing “the monstrous system by which they are enslaved.”⁶⁶ In doing so they sought to imitate, or even improve upon such periodicals as R. J. Breckinridge’s now defunct Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine (which, perhaps, is not surprising, since his younger brother, William, was one of the True Catholic’s editors).⁶⁷

Besides historical documents, the True Catholic regularly engaged in sparring with Roman Catholic periodicals in the region. When the Catholic Advocate and the Catholic Herald argued that the United States had no religion, and therefore “ought to have no religious functionaries,” such as chaplains, the True Catholic replied that the United States was in fact a Protestant country. The Continental Congress in 1774 had complained about Roman Catholic power in Canada, fearing that they “might become formidable to us, and on occasion, be fit instruments in the hands of power to reduce *these ancient, free*, PROTESTANT colonies to the same state of slavery with themselves.” Citing several other decisions of congress from the 1780s, the editors declared, “We are not a nation without a

⁶⁶“Introductory” True Catholic 1.1 (May 1, 1844).

⁶⁷See also N. L. Rice, “The Western Protestant,” Western Protestant 1.1 (February 19, 1845) 5, where Rice promises not to engage in denominational polemics between Protestants, but will focus his attention on the “Romish controversy.”

religion. . . . However hard it may be, Papists will have to learn that this is still a Protestant country.”⁶⁸

In January of 1845, the True Catholic reported the resolutions of the Maysville Protestant Association. The Reverend Robert C. Grundy (PTS 1835, Old School pastor at Maysville, and corresponding secretary of the society) had presented five resolutions declaring that the United States was a Protestant country, but that the same privileges should be extended to Roman Catholics“which are enjoyed by other citizens and are guaranteed to every religious sect and denomination by the American Constitution, so far as they are willing, in common with all Protestants, to renounce all allegiance to any foreign power and unite with us in promoting and perpetuating our free institutions.”⁶⁹

When the Catholic Advocate of March 1 objected to these resolutions (since they implied that if Roman Catholics did not renounce the pope, they should not be tolerated), appealing to the Constitutions of the United States and of Kentucky regarding religious liberty, Grundy replied by appealing to the papal encyclical of August 15, 1832, where the pope had spoken against those who wish “*to separate the Church from the State, and to burst the bond which unites the Priesthood to the Empire*. For it is clear that this union is dreaded by the profane lovers of liberty, only because it has never failed to confer prosperity on both.” Grundy wondered that any honest Roman Catholic could

consistently belong to a church the highest authority of which openly and unblushingly, in this day, advocates the union of Church and State, and at the same time profess to believe, approve and be governed by the

⁶⁸“Has This Nation Chosen a Religion?” True Catholic 1.3 (June 5, 1844).

⁶⁹True Catholic 1.18 (January 15, 1845).

constitution of the United States and of Kentucky upon this subject? Did the Editors of the Catholic Advocate, the Bishop and Priests of Kentucky and of the United States, repudiate the Encyclical letter of 1832, or will they do it now?

Grundy admitted that he had many Roman Catholic friends who would fight and die for their American liberties, but insisted that they did so contrary to the plain teaching of the Roman Church. Since Pope Gregory XVI had declared in his encyclical that liberty of conscience was an “absurd” and “raving” doctrine, Grundy professed to be utterly unable to understand how the Catholic Advocate could reconcile its loyalty to Rome with the United States Constitution.⁷⁰

F. Religious Riots and the Rise of the Know-Nothings

The constant fuel of anti-Catholic periodicals merely fed the fires of religious and ethnic mistrust which exploded in the mid-1840s in religious riots in Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and other cities.⁷¹ While political issues were plainly at work as well, contemporary accounts often emphasized the religious division of the rioters.⁷²

⁷⁰R. C. Grundy, “The Maysville Resolutions” True Catholic 1.23 (April 2, 1845). Grundy gave the quotation from Pope Gregory XVI in full, as it is cited above in the American Protestant Association’s statement. Roman Catholics were engaged in trying to answer this question in their own intramural discussions. See John T. McGreevy, Catholicism and American Freedom (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003).

⁷¹Cf. Billington, 193-234. Michael Feldberg reports at least thirty-five major riots in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston between 1830-1860, The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 5; Mary P. Ryan, Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City in the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁷²The American Republican party had remarkable success in New York and Philadelphia in the election of 1844. Billington calls the “continuation of the Bible as a schoolbook,” a minor reform in the American Republican platform, focusing on the twenty-one year residency requirement for naturalization, but that appears to be more due to his own prejudice than any suggestion on the part of the American Republicans themselves. (202-3)

On May 3, 1844, the Kensington district of Philadelphia erupted in violence. A meeting of the Native American party was assailed by a Roman Catholic mob, which resulted in a week of rioting, during which several people were killed. Tensions remained high in Philadelphia, and July 4th celebrations touched off another wave of riots.⁷³ The grand jury (which consisted largely of Protestants) determined that “the efforts of a portion of the community to exclude the Bible from our Public Schools” had given rise to a new party (the Native American, or Know-Nothing party) which held peaceful public meetings. They had been fired upon by “a band of lawless, irresponsible men, some of whom had resided in our country only for a short period,” which resulted in immediate retaliation, escalating into several weeks of mob rioting in the city.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, while asserting that the original fault lay with the Roman Catholics, the Presbyterian press quickly denounced Protestant rioting as well. The True Catholic insisted that no matter how offensive the discussion may be, “every true American” should defend the right of free deliberation. Reason, not force, is the power of the nation. Therefore, when it became clear that the Native Americans were continuing the rioting in Philadelphia, the editors soundly

⁷³The riot has been described by Vincent P. Lannie and Bernard C. Diethorn, “For the Honor and Glory of God: The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1840,” History of Education Quarterly 8.1 (Spring, 1968) 44-106, especially pages 73-87; Michael Feldberg, The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975) chapters 5-7. See also Billington, 220-234. Predictably Billington focuses more on the political aspect, though he does not neglect the religious entirely. He points out that the Philadelphia riots severely damaged the reputation of the American Party, whose political hopes would arise once again with the Know-Nothings a decade later. (234) Feldberg, in the wake of the ethnic conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s attempts to portray the 1840s riots as primarily ethnic.

⁷⁴Presbyterian newspaper accounts varied somewhat in their accuracy, and naturally sympathized with the Protestants: “Riots and Bloodshed in Philadelphia,” CO 18.20 (May 18, 1844) 78; “The Reign of Terror in Philadelphia,” CO 18.22 (June 1, 1844) 86; “The Philadelphia Riots,” CO 18.28 (July 13) 110; “Roman Catholic Murders in Philadelphia,” True Catholic 1.4 (June 19, 1844); True Catholic 1.5 (July 3, 1844).

condemned it, and urged the magistrates to deal swiftly with them.⁷⁵ The Presbyterian of the West described the continued rioting as a “disgrace to Protestantism.”⁷⁶

But when Bishop Hughes of New York claimed that it was his restraining influence in New York that prevented Irish Catholics from erupting like those in Philadelphia, the True Catholic responded with alarm: “A word from you, then, or even the withholding a word, might have wrapped our dwellings in flames, and deluged our streets with blood.” If Hughes had the power to restrain or command the thousands of Irish Catholics in New York, “then I say, sir, we have reason to be alarmed both at the increased power and numbers of romish foreigners, and the growing influence of Romish priests.”⁷⁷

Ten years later, after the First Plenary Council of American Catholic Bishops met in Baltimore in 1852, declaring the common schools “irreligious” and calling for a parochial school system, the fires of religious hatred were unleashed once again. When Roman Catholic bishops requested state funds for their schools, religious riots broke out in St. Louis and Newark in 1854, and in 1855 Louisville and Cincinnati were engulfed in

⁷⁵True Catholic 1.6 (July 17, 1844). This is in stark contrast to the editor of the Native American, who declared “We now call on our fellow-citizens, who regard free institutions, whether they be native or adopted, to arm. Our liberties are now to be fought for;—let us not be slack in our preparations.” (Quoted in Billington, 225). Old School Presbyterians had a far stronger sense of the rule of law and deplored all vigilante justice. (See chapter ten for William A. Scott’s encounter with vigilantes.)

⁷⁶“More Riots in Philadelphia” Presbyterian of the West 3.20 (July 11, 1844) 86. The occasion for the renewed violence was the claim “that arms and ammunition, to a considerable amount, had been found in a Catholic church (St Philip’s), which caused great excitement.” (According to the report there were 75 muskets, 1 keg powder, flasks, balls, slugs and shot; 10 pistols and 12 bayonets). After a disturbance on July 5th where Irish Catholics burned the American flag and destroyed some tents used by the Native American party in their July 4th celebration, the Native Americans launched an attack on St. Philip’s on July 6-7th, which was finally dispelled by the military (leaving 13 dead and 50 wounded).

⁷⁷“Bishop Hughes as a Peace Officer” True Catholic 1.5 (July 3, 1844). For a social history of Catholicism in New York City, see Jay P. Dolan, The Immigrant Church: New York’s Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

violence.⁷⁸ While historians initially attempted to downplay the religious aspect to these riots, Tyler Anbinder has acknowledged the place of religion in the formation of the Know-Nothings.⁷⁹ Contemporary observers, such as William Engles, suggested that religion and race were equally involved. Engles spoke from the perspective of an Old School Presbyterian church that was divided politically. If a group as large as the Roman Catholic population attempted to vote as a bloc, they could soon hold “the balance of power” in the United States. No matter how much he might deplore the violence, Engles was convinced that Protestants would not stand for this, but would “drive them from their usurped and arrogant position; nor need it be wondered at, that in the heat evolved from the combination of excitable political and religious elements, violence should sometimes ensue, however much to be deprecated.”⁸⁰ Nathan Rice, though, was concerned that “in a

⁷⁸St. Louis Presbyterian 11.3 (Sept 14, 1854), see also November 23, 1854 and August 5, 1855.

⁷⁹Tyler Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) x-xi; 24-32. John T. McGreevy, Catholicism and American Freedom (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003). McGreevy points to the back-to-back speaking tours of Louis Kossuth (a failed Hungarian revolutionary) and Alessandro Gavazzi (a nationalist supporter of Garibaldi’s 1848 revolution) around 1850, both of whom fueled anti-Catholic fervor (23-25). Especially infuriating to American Protestants was the arrival in 1852 of the papal nuncio Gaetano Bedini to settle trustee disputes—who was infamous in America as the ruthless military governor of the Papal States who had put down the revolutionaries of 1848. He was met with violence and riots in several cities, finally being chased from the country in 1854. Anbinder also emphasizes the failure of the Whig Party after the Compromise of 1850 and the widespread dissatisfaction with both the Whig and Democratic parties. Anti-Catholicism and anti-slavery briefly joined forces in the Know-Nothing party, but ultimately anti-slavery proved more powerful, resulting in the triumph of the Republican party. Also see John David Bladck, “America for Americans: The Southern Know-Nothing Party and the Politics of Nativism, 1854-1856,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1998).

⁸⁰Not surprisingly, he blamed Archbishop Hughes and his Freeman’s Journal as the chief culprit. He “has not been slow to perceive his power, and to take advantage of it.” Editorial, “Religio-Political Riots,” Presbyterian 24.34 (August 26, 1854) 134. William E. Gienapp cites the Methodist Governor of Indiana, Joseph A. Wright, as claiming that the state fusion convention (of Know-Nothings and Republicans) consisted of more than a hundred Methodist Preachers and at least 27 Presbyterians. Gienapp, The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). He also points out that Indiana Presbyterians switched from Democrat to Peoples (fusion) in 1854.

number of instances highly respectable Americans have countenanced or participated” in the riots.⁸¹ Protestant violence was inconsistent with his idealized vision of what Protestantism should be.

The Presbyterian Herald reported religious riots surrounding the election of 1855 in Louisville. William Hill reported that the riot between the Democrats and the Know-Nothings had resulted in the murder of 14-15 citizens, the wounding of 30 others and the destruction of 15-20 houses, “most of them of but little value, being generally Irish shanties.”⁸² But once again the riots followed on Protestant/Catholic lines. Indeed the Pittsburg Catholic accused various Protestant newspapers of fomenting the riots through their anti-Catholic articles: “the *sectarian press*. . . in the hands of *designing* parsons, who are bursting with rage at the diffusion of the Catholic faith, becomes specially virulent on the eve of any scene of excitement, political or religious.” William Hill replied that “The readers of Protestant religious papers are not generally found among mobs of riotous men.” Pointing to genuine “acts of kindness and love” by which Louisville Presbyterians had fed and clothed Roman Catholics devastated by the riots, Hill argued that his readership desired to convert Roman Catholics through persuasion and love, not violence.⁸³ When the Pittsburg Catholic claimed that the Presbyterian Herald was merely the tool of the Louisville Know-Nothings, Hill pointed out that the rhetoric went both ways. The editor of the Pittsburg Catholic had written that Protestants were “damnable

⁸¹Editorial, “Mobs,” St. Louis Presbyterian (May 3, 1855)

⁸²“Election Riots and Mob Law in Louisville,” PH (August 9, 1855).

⁸³“The Riots Accounted for at Last,” PH (August 23, 1855).

heretics” whose views led inexorably to “licentiousness in both church and state.” If that was true, Hill asked,

Does it follow, as a consequence, that he holds that Protestants ought to be shot down in the streets or roasted alive in their dwellings?. . . . It is certain that his church has held and taught that doctrine in past days, and her boast is that she never changes; but he must excuse us if we protest against any such inference being deduced from such premises by Protestants.

Hill reminded his Roman Catholic counterpart that he had taken no role at all in the political debates that led up to the riots, while the Roman Catholic papers had taken partisan stances.⁸⁴

Few Old School editors ever revealed their political affiliation, but their occasional comments on the Know-Nothings suggested that many were sympathetic to their concerns.⁸⁵ William Engles, in the wake of the Philadelphia riots, applauded the Native American’s push for a 21 year residency requirement before naturalization. He feared that

⁸⁴“The Pittsburg Catholic and the Louisville Riots,” *PH* (Sept 13, 1855). Of course, Protestants had plenty of political newspapers to advocate their views, while Roman Catholic newspapers often had to provide both political and religious commentary.

⁸⁵“The Know-Nothings,” *Southern Presbyterian* 8.4 (November 9, 1854). The author said that he did not belong to the party, but he agreed that all American citizens should have American interests. The most prominent Presbyterian Know-Nothing was R. J. Breckinridge (see Edgar C. Mayse, “Robert Jefferson Breckinridge: American Presbyterian Controversialist,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1974) 519-526. For the origin of the Know-Nothings, see William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Dale T. Knobel, *“America for Americans”: The Nativist Movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne, 1996). Billington argues that the Know-Nothings were successful in the south and border states because “it was a compromise party” between the Whigs and the Democrats on sectional grounds, “not because it promised to protect America from the Pope.” (394) Billington assumes that because the south did not have many Roman Catholics, that it must therefore be a non-issue to southerners. But given southerners concern about the moral and constitutional “decline” of the North—they had good reasons to vote for a party that might stem the tide of Roman Catholic and “infidel” influence in the North. See John David Bladdek, “America for Americans: The Southern Know-Nothing Party and the Politics of Nativism, 1854-1856,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1998).

Irish immigrants were trying to “take advantage of the present unwise naturalization laws,” in order to take control of the country.⁸⁶ Ten years later, in the wake of the 1854 riots, the True Witness exulted in Know-Nothing victories in the southwest. Blaming the riots on the Jesuits, the news editor declared that “The time has passed when Popery can impose on Americans as a mere harmless system of religion. It has revealed its cloven foot. It has shown its despotic spirit, and if it is resolved to make its public assaults on Protestantism, it must expect retaliation.”⁸⁷ Stuart Robinson’s Presbyterial Critic contained the most impassioned support for the “American Party,” insisting that the heart and soul of the American revolution was a threefold combination of “American nationality; Protestant civilization; National Union.”⁸⁸ Only the American Party sought to put an end to the assaults of “Papal and Infidel foreigners” upon the Protestant civilization of the American

⁸⁶“Roman Catholic Policy,” Presbyterian 14.31 (August 3, 1844) 122.

⁸⁷This came from the news summary in the True Witness (Oct 19, 1854). Richmond McInnis, the senior editor, backed away from this statement, insisting that it was the position of the paper that all political and religious organizations should be tolerated. But the news reports were not under his control (most Old School editors allowed their publishers to insert the news summaries). “Our Position--Religious Toleration,” True Witness (Oct 19, 1854). After moving to New Orleans, McInnis still reflected a moderate tone, calling for a treatise that would treat “the various errors of Romanism in a kind, conciliatory tone,” as the only sort of volume that could be persuasive to Roman Catholics themselves.

⁸⁸“The American Party. Its Cause, Progress, Objects and Result,” Presbyterial Critic 1:5 (May, 1855) 219. These southern advocates of the Know-Nothing cause vindicate John David Bladek’s revision of Tyler Anbinder’s thesis that the southern Know Nothings shared little with their northern counterparts. Bladek points out that while relatively few Roman Catholics immigrated to the South, many southerners “saw foreigners and Catholics in league with corrupt politicians as the primary danger to the American republic. (Bladek, 7-8). And southern cities did in fact see significant immigrant populations (15). Anti-Catholicism was a strong bond between north and south—one which the Know Nothings attempted to exploit in their attempt to create a national party, but failed due to the explosive issue of slavery. (56, 133-138)

Union. While such foreigners could come to America to enjoy civil and religious freedom, he insisted that they be prohibited from ruling. “*Americans must rule America.*”⁸⁹

3. The General Assembly Debate

It was at the height of the anti-catholic movement, in May of 1845, that the Old School General Assembly was called upon to render its verdict: was Roman Catholic baptism a valid administration of Christian baptism?⁹⁰ The Presbytery of Ohio (whose newest member was Robert J. Breckinridge) had asked the Assembly to determine whether the baptism of the Church of Rome was valid.⁹¹ Debate continued through portions of three days, before coming for a vote.

While many from the older generation had participated in this debate in the 1830s, such as Richards, Barnes, Alexander, Miller, Green, and Spring, the one name that stands out as the moving force in the debate was Robert J. Breckinridge. He had been one of the leading speakers in 1832, arguing against the validity of Roman baptism—but as a young

⁸⁹Ibid., 222. Another author wrote in reply “The American Party,” Presbyterial Critic 1:6 (June, 1855) 277-286. He insisted that not all foreigners should be lumped together (and he pointed out that the Mormons were Americans), and suggested that the secret meetings of the Know-Nothings were every bit as unAmerican as the machinations of the “papists.”

⁹⁰Besides Nathan L. Rice and James H. Thornwell, few of the leading pastors or professors were in attendance at this General Assembly. John C. Lord (pastor of First Church in Buffalo, NY), John M. Krebs (pastor of Rutgers Street Church in New York City), Alexander T. McGill (professor in Western Theological Seminary), George Junkin (president of Lafayette College), James Wood (professor in New Albany Theological Seminary), Drury Lacy (pastor at Raleigh, NC), William T. Hamilton (pastor at Government Street Church in Mobile, AL) and John T. Edgar (president of the University of Nashville) were the leading ministers of the 1845 General Assembly. The most notable ruling elders were Walter Lowrie of New York City (corresponding secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions), Judge Humphrey H. Leavitt of Steubenville, Judge Robert C. Grier of Pittsburgh (who would be appointed the following year to the United States Supreme Court), and Williamson Dunn of Indiana (one of the founders of Hanover College and New Albany Theological Seminary). Princeton Seminary was most notably absent.

⁹¹Minutes (1845) 15, says Ohio Presbytery (along with most papers), but Watchman of the South mistakenly says Columbus Presbytery—8.41 (May 29, 1845) 161.

ruling elder, his voice did not yet carry much weight. But by 1845 he was serving as president of Jefferson College, and had thirteen years of pastoral experience in Baltimore, the capital of Roman Catholic influence, and for nine of those years he had edited one of the leading anti-Catholic monthlies.⁹² While Breckinridge was not a commissioner at the 1845 Assembly, his influence was felt through his fellow Kentuckian, Nathan Lewis Rice (pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Bardstown, Kentucky—and editor of another leading anti-Catholic paper, the Western Protestant, 1835-1841).⁹³ With the older generation in retirement, Breckinridge and Rice now sought to curb what they saw as the disturbing rise of Roman Catholic influence in the United States.

A. Debate at the Assembly

Predictably, the first argument was rooted in the 1835 decision. Rev. Nathan H. Hall (pastor of 1st Presbyterian, Lexington, KY, and one of the leading revival preachers in the Old School) argued that since the 1835 Assembly had decided that the Church of Rome was not a Church of Christ, the answer was easy: Roman baptism is not Christian baptism. Dr. Nathan L. Rice (pastor of Central Presbyterian in Cincinnati) agreed. Lay baptism was not recognized by the Presbyterian church, but baptism by Roman Catholic priests was far worse. Rev. James M. Olmstead (pastor at Flemington, NJ) argued that Rome was a “Society, but of the most corrupt kind, and therefore has neither lawful

⁹²BLRM 1-7 (1835-1841); Spirit of the XIXth Century 1-2 (1842-1843).

⁹³The Western Protestant merged with the Western Presbyterian Herald in 1838 to form the Protestant and Herald with Rice and R. J. Breckinridge’s brother, William L. Breckinridge, as co-editors.

ministry, nor ordinances, and consequently her administration is not valid.”⁹⁴ Rev. Samuel J. Cassells of Norfolk, Virginia, argued that to be consistent with the Westminster Confession, the church had to reject Roman baptism. While we welcome “the children of oppression” to America, we must bear decisive testimony against the Romanist error that they bring. “The practice of the Reformed churches on this subject has been entirely *inconsistent* with their *creed*. They have renounced Rome as Anti-christ, but receive her baptism as if she were a church of Christ!”⁹⁵

Others were less confident of these arguments. Judge Robert C. Grier of Pittsburgh warned that the Assembly “ought not to decide this question hastily. . . . As there are other Churches who admit the validity of baptism by Roman Catholics we must give reasons to satisfy them, as well as our own people.” Dr. John C. Lord also had objections:

It was admitted by those who spoke in favor of the motion, that the baptism of Luther was valid, and he wished to be informed why that which was valid in the 12th or 16th century was not valid in the 19th. . . . We allow the validity of the administration of ordinances by those not regularly authorised when necessity of circumstances called for it. . . . Now we know that there are parts of the church of Rome which are less corrupt than others. . . . In all such cases, at least we, I think, are bound to admit the validity of their administration, and we cannot discriminate without great danger of running into difficulties.⁹⁶

Arguing from exceptions, however, was not very compelling.

Rice replied that the Westminster Confession taught that the validity of baptism does not depend upon the piety of the minister, but upon his authority to administer the

⁹⁴“Debate in Presbyterian General Assembly” WS 8.41 (May 29, 1845) 162.

⁹⁵“Speech of Rev. S. J. Cassells” WS 8. 44 (June 19, 1845) 176.

⁹⁶“Debate in Presbyterian General Assembly” WS 8.41 (May 29, 1845) 162.

sacraments. Comparing Rome to the Jewish institutions prior to the time of Christ, Rice argued that “the ordinances in [the Jewish] church were valid notwithstanding its corruption, and continued to be until the death of Christ, when all were commanded to come out. . . . The Jewish church was thereafter no church and had no ordinances, and consequently all their administrations were invalid.” After the Council of Trent, Roman ordinances were likewise invalid.

Still, Dr. Lord was not convinced. Those who authored the Westminster Confession accepted Roman baptism, even after the Council of Trent. Further, “Baptism was not the act of the Pope, but of a particular Priest or individual. Every case ought to be judged on its own merits.” In reply, Rice asked Lord whether he regarded the Church of Rome as a true church. The whole controversy depended on this question. And since the General Assembly had decided that the Church of Rome was not a true church, the question of their baptisms should be settled. He then gave a brief sketch “of the various doctrines of the Church of Rome, which obscured the doctrines of the cross. When all these doctrines were forced upon her members by the Council of Trent, then she ceased to be a true church.” A few others feebly attempted to reply,⁹⁷ but no one at the 1845 Assembly took the high ground that Samuel Miller had taken ten years before. Since they accepted the premise that the Roman Catholic church was not a church, they were forced to argue only that “some” Roman Catholic baptisms were valid—depending upon whether

⁹⁷Rev. Thomas Aitken (pastor of 1st Presbyterian Sparta, NY) replied that there were countries where good men and priests still served in the Roman church, who did not accept the decrees of Trent. Judge Robert Grier pointed out that there were already many in the Presbyterian church who had been baptized as Roman Catholics. Would they have to be rebaptized, after their session had formerly accepted their baptism? “Debate in Presbyterian General Assembly” WS 8.41 (May 29, 1845) 162.

the individual priest was sound. This was analogous to the Donatist position in the early church that had been repudiated as schismatic.

Having maintained silence since early in the debate, the Rev. James H. Thornwell of South Carolina heard his cue and rose in reply: the real question was “shall one body claiming to be the church of Christ recognise the ordinances of another body claiming to be the Church, which it does not acknowledge to be such.” And if this was the question, then the answer was obvious. “This question has been settled by at least five provincial councils, and always in the same way, viz: adverse to the recognition of such baptisms. We stand therefore upon the platform of the Ancient Church; and I hope this Assembly will come unanimously upon the same ground.”⁹⁸ Thornwell admitted that “it is historically certain that the warmest opposers of Rome did not, as our own Assembly has done, utterly repudiate her, as a dead branch, destitute of all living connexion with the vine.”⁹⁹ But, Thornwell argued, since the Old School Assembly of 1835 had unchurched Rome, there could be no question of the validity of Roman baptism. Thornwell defended the action of 1835 by arguing that Rome lacked the three marks of the Church of Christ. First, since the Council of Trent the Roman Church had openly repudiated the saving truths of the doctrines of grace. Indeed, Thornwell went so far as to argue that

the Trinity of Rome is officially a different Trinity from ours. She baptises into *one* gospel--we into another--she baptises into a system of will-worship--we into a system of grace--she into a system of frightful superstition and gross idolatries--we into a system in which God is

⁹⁸Thornwell appealed to the Councils of Carthage in 215, of Iconium in 235, and of Carthage in 256.

⁹⁹“Baptism by Papists” WS 8.46 (July 3, 1845) 181.

worshipped in spirit and truth Hence if a profession of the true faith is any part of the essence of baptism--is at all indispensable to its legality-- Rome's baptism is essentially defective and unlawful.¹⁰⁰

Second, Thornwell claimed that Rome lacked sacraments as well because of its “physical system of salvation. . . . There are no *sacraments*--no symbols conducting the mind to Christ.” Third, by transforming the sacraments into “a physical system of salvation, making the Eucharist into mystic sacrifice,” Rome has “thus transformed her ministry into a Pagan priesthood.” Therefore Rome is not a church, but anti-christ, a civil State, “drawing the resources of her government from Heaven, Earth and Hell.” And being a civil State, Rome has no more right to baptise than any other State whatever. Therefore Romish baptisms are invalid since they are “an act of enslavement; not a sacrament of the Church.”¹⁰¹

Replying to those who were concerned to maintain the validity of the Reformers’ baptisms, Thornwell argued that baptism wasn’t really that important:

Baptism is so far from constituting the ground of membership in the church that it can only be administered to those who are members already. . . . It, therefore, does not *make*, but *declare* membership, and he who has never been baptised may be truly and really, though not regularly, a member of the church of God.

Rejecting the doctrine of apostolic succession in every sense, Thornwell argued that the validity of any church or its ordinances does not depend upon “an unbroken succession of ministers reaching back to the age of the apostles,” because perpetual visibility is not a

¹⁰⁰“Baptism by Papists” WS 8.46 (July 3, 1845) 182. Hodge would later point out that “defective and unlawful” did not mean “invalid.”

¹⁰¹“Debate in Presbyterian General Assembly” WS 8.41 (May 29, 1845) 162.

mark of the true church. “The promises of permanent security and unfailing protection are made not to *the visible* but *the invisible* church of the Redeemer.” So even if the papacy had become a synagogue of Satan before the Reformation, and all her sacraments thereby invalidated, that would not be a matter of concern for us. The validity of the Reformed churches, therefore, depends not upon Rome, but Christ.¹⁰² Thornwell concluded his *tour de force* by claiming to have “no enmity to the Church of Rome, but I wish a complete separation from the mother of harlots and mistress of abominations.”¹⁰³

After this performance, the General Assembly was persuaded. While there had never been any doubt as to the outcome of the vote, now it was nearly unanimous. The initial count was 169-6 (with 4 non liquets).¹⁰⁴ Revs. William T. Hamilton, James H. Thornwell, and George Junkin were assigned to write the minute for the Assembly. They

¹⁰²“Baptism by Papists” WS 8.46 (July 3, 1845) 184.

¹⁰³“Debate in Presbyterian General Assembly” WS 8.41 (May 29, 1845) 162. Thornwell’s speech lasted for several hours, continuing from Saturday afternoon to the Monday morning session. “L” wrote to the Watchman of the South that “the eagerness to hear Professor Thornwell is evinced by the fact that the house was full even before the Assembly was organised. The expectations of the people were not disappointed. He spoke till half-past 11 o’clock, and a more brilliant effort I have never witnessed in any deliberative body. It was really a magnificent affair” (163). Thornwell’s speech was later printed in full, taking up eight columns (nearly a page and a half): “Baptism by Papists” WS 8.46 (July 3, 1845) 181-2, 184.

¹⁰⁴Minutes (1845) 34. After those who were absent were allowed to add their votes, it stood at 173-8 (with six non liquets). 173-8 (with six non liquet). The minority was centered in New York (five of the nineteen commissioners from New York state voted in the minority or *non liquet*). During the 1840s Presbyterian ministers were regularly titled “bishops.”

	<u>Nays</u>		<u>Non Liquet</u>	
Bishops	John C. Lord (Buffalo City)	NY	Thomas Aitkin (Steuben)	NY
	William Burton (Chillicothe)	OH	John Goldsmith (New York 1 st)	NY
	John Hendren (Lexington)	KY	Joseph T. Smith (Erie)	PA
	John Warnock (East Alabama)	AL		
	Henry McDonald (Tombeckbee)	MS		
Elders	George Davidson (Albany)	NY	George W. Burroughs (New Brunswick)	NJ
	James McNair (Steuben)	NY	Robert C. Grier (Ohio)	PA
	Samuel E. Hibben (Chillicothe)	OH	J. L. Jernegan (Lake)	IN

returned a week later with a summary of the leading arguments from the debate.¹⁰⁵

Predictably, the minority of eight responded with a dissent, arguing that some remnant of the church remained inside of Rome, and therefore that at least some of her baptisms were valid.¹⁰⁶

The initial response in the newspapers was quite positive. An author in the Presbyterian Advocate explored how this decision would affect those who had already been received on the basis of their Roman baptism. He suggested that “if the session and the convert are entirely clear in the conviction that the ordinance administered by the priest is real and true baptism, 'let not their heart be troubled.' If they are even mistaken, baptism is not regeneration, nor will such a mistake endanger the salvation of the soul.” Likewise, if a person wished to be rebaptized, “what is the harm?”¹⁰⁷

The only caution was expressed by William Swan Plumer in the Watchman of the South, who noted that “one side of the question was argued with spirit and power. The other was not. Wherever the truth may lie, discussion will do good. For many years our views have coincided with the decision of the Assembly, but we are ready to hear all that

¹⁰⁵Minutes (1845) 34-7.

¹⁰⁶Minutes (1845) 37. It is worth noting that immediately after the baptism debate came the decision on the slavery question, which was decided 168-13 (see chapter six). Only ruling elder Samuel Hibben of Chillicothe Presbytery voted in the minority on both questions. One southern observer commented that the debate on Roman Catholic baptism “did much good every way. It had a happy tendency to harmonize the Assembly, and to bring them to great unanimity on other points. The subject of slavery excited much interest. There are but five or six abolitionists in the Assembly. With some of these I have become acquainted. They deserve more our sympathy than our abuse. They seem to be honest, well meaning men; but evidently deluded on this one subject.” “Letters from GA” WS 8.42 (June 5, 1845) 167.

¹⁰⁷“Romish Baptism” Presbyterian Advocate 7.36 (July 2, 1845).

can be said on the subject. . . . If the Assembly has made a wrong decision, let it be made to appear.”¹⁰⁸

Naturally, Roman Catholics were none too pleased with the decision—and for more than strictly theological reasons. The Catholic Telegraph warned that if the Assembly had “power equal to their animosities, they would be dangerous enemies.” In an address to the “Catholic Fathers and Mothers of America,” the editor urged Roman Catholics to understand “what the Calvinistic preachers would have you believe, and what from the tenor of their speeches they appear most anxious to establish. They would consign your babes whom God has called away, to everlasting flames! Have you hearts? Can you feel? Can there be any communication between you and Calvinism?”¹⁰⁹

B. Hodge Versus the Assembly

The minority at the Assembly had argued their case based on the claim that a remnant remained within Rome. Since they conceded the claim that Rome, as a body, was not a church of Jesus Christ, Thornwell had destroyed them. Charles Hodge, professor of exegetical and dogmatic theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, would not make the same mistake.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸WS 8.45 (June 26, 1845) 178.

¹⁰⁹“Dangerous Opponents,” Western Protestant 1.8 (June 4, 1845) 62. Rice replied by pointing out that Presbyterians denied that an infant’s “salvation is effected by their baptism.” Since most Presbyterians believed that all who died in infancy were elect, he argued that this was merely scare-mongering.

¹¹⁰It has often been said that Hodge was not particularly strong in church government, especially by those who dislike his stance on the boards controversy around 1860 (see chapter ten). This was first claimed by several contemporaries: “The Church Question,” Presbyterial Critic 1.6 (June, 1855) 245, 249; The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974/1875) IV:243-244. A. Craig Troxel echoes the charge in, “Charles Hodge on Church Boards: A Case Study in Ecclesiology,” Westminster Theological Journal 58 (1996) 203-206. For the most thorough study of

In his annual review of the General Assembly, he launched a vigorous attack on the position that the Assembly had taken. Hodge admitted that “we feel almost overwhelmed by such a vote. Any decision of the General Assembly is entitled to great respect, but a decision sustained by such a majority, almost imposes silence on all dissentients.” Almost. Hodge agreed with Plumer that only one side of the debate had been heard. We “question the wisdom of giving an answer suddenly, in opposition to all previous practice, and to the principles of every other protestant church. The fact that the answer is new, creates a reason for being slow to pronounce it.”¹¹¹

Hodge started by reminding his readers that valid baptism is baptism with water in the name of the Trinity. Heretical baptism had always been accepted by the church, so long as it was Trinitarian baptism. Hodge cited the Council of Arles, from 314 A.D., which determined that “If any one return from his heresy to the church, let the Catholic priest question him about the creed; and if they perceive that he was baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, only the imposition of hands shall be given him, that he may receive the Holy Ghost. But if upon examination, he answers not the Trinity, (that is, that he was not baptized in the name of the Trinity,) let him be rebaptized.”¹¹²

Hodge’s ecclesiology, see Mark Alan Reynolds, “Charles Hodge’s Ecclesiastical Elenctics: His Response to Catholicizing Tendencies in the Churches, 1837-1860,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Saint Louis University, 2000).

¹¹¹“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 445.

¹¹²“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 446. Hodge also cited the canons of the Council of Nicea, along with those of Laodicea, Constantinople II, Arles II, and Trullo, appealing to Augustine, Jerome and other early Fathers, along with the Lutheran and Reformed churches—citing Gerhard and Turretin as examples. Hodge translated Turretin’s argument that “Some heretics corrupt the very substance of baptism, as the ancient Arians, modern Socinians, rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity, others, retaining the essentials of the ordinance and the true doctrine of the Trinity, err as to other doctrines, as formerly the Novatians and Donatists, and now the Papists and Arminians. The baptisms of the former class are to be rejected; those of the latter are retained, although they err as to many doctrines, and their baptisms,

Therefore, Hodge argued, the validity of baptism “depends upon the appointment of God, and not upon the character or faith of the administrator; and therefore, any baptism which is administered according to His appointment, the church has felt constrained to admit to be baptism.” The General Assembly, Hodge hinted, had unwittingly reduced baptism to a mere rite of the church—not a divine act. Quoting the Westminster Confession, Hodge argued that the “doctrine of our standards, therefore, is the precise doctrine of the ancient church, viz., that there are three things essential to baptism; the matter, form, and intention. The matter, is the washing with water; the form, washing in the name of the Trinity; the intention, not the popish notion of the secret purpose of the priest, but the professed, ostensible design of the act.”¹¹³ If this is the case, then there can be no question that Romish baptism is indeed Christian baptism. Rome washes with water, teaches the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, and intends it as a sensible sign of spiritual blessings. The fact that it adds numerous other rites and corrupting doctrines cannot eliminate the validity of its baptisms. According to both Romanists and Protestants “by baptism we are formally constituted members of the visible church, and partakers of its benefits. The great difference relates not to the design of the ordinance, but to the mode and certainty with which that design is accomplished, and the conditions attached to it.”¹¹⁴ If we require a proper doctrine of baptism in order to accept its validity, then we would have to reject Lutheran, Anglican and Orthodox baptisms as well, which would bring the

in circumstantials, are polluted by various ceremonies.” (447)

¹¹³“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 448.

¹¹⁴“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 449.

unthinkable result that “Presbyterians, instead of being the most catholic of churches, and admitting the being of a church, wherever we see the fruits of the Spirit, would become one of the narrowest and most bigoted of sects.” Returning one of the most stinging rebukes imaginable in the mid-19th century, Hodge claimed “Indeed we cannot but regard this sudden denunciation of Romish baptism, as a momentary outbreak of the spirit of Popery; a disposition to contract the limits of the church, and to make that essential to its being and sacraments, which God has never declared to be necessary.”¹¹⁵

Having demonstrated to his satisfaction that papal baptism was valid in its form, Hodge turned to the arguments against it. Hodge claimed that the arguments presented to the Assembly merely proved that Roman baptism was irregular—but that did not demonstrate invalidity. Hodge admitted that the Confession taught that baptism should be administered by one “lawfully ordained,” but pointed out that the Confession says the same regarding preaching.¹¹⁶ Lay preaching, as with lay baptism, is irregular and ought not happen. But that does not render such things invalid. “A thing is valid when it avails to its appropriate end. Thus a deed is valid, which avails to convey a title to property; a marriage is valid, which avails to constitute the conjugal relation.” Does Romish baptism “avail to make the recipient a professing Christian”? The Assembly’s position declares that “Though a sincere believer should be baptized by a Romanist, such baptism would not

¹¹⁵“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 452.

¹¹⁶Confession of Faith 27.4; Larger Catechism 168.

signify or seal to him the benefits of the new covenant, nor express his purpose to obey Christ.”¹¹⁷

Willing to grant, however, for the sake of argument, that valid baptism required an ordained minister, Hodge then turned to the question of the validity of Roman ordinations. While Presbyterians might consider Roman ordinations to be irregular, that does not destroy their validity. A lawfully ordained heretic is still recognized as a minister of Christ’s church until he is deposed. Rejecting Thornwell’s claim that the ministry is one of the marks of the church as “one of the Popish principles which have slid into the minds of some Protestants,” Hodge argued that “a church is a congregation of believers, or of those who profess to be believers. . . . The being of a church does not depend upon the ministry.”¹¹⁸ But if ordained ministers are simply men “appointed by public authority to teach the Christian religion, and to administer its ordinances,” in a body “professing to hold saving doctrine,” then the only way to deny Roman baptism is to deny that Romanists “do not in any sense profess the Christian religion any more than Jews or Pagans.”¹¹⁹

Finally, Hodge turned to what had been the strongest argument at the Assembly: that “The church of Rome is not a true church of Christ, and therefore its sacraments are not Christian ordinances.” He considered this to be “only another of the innumerable instances of fallacy and false reasoning founded upon the ambiguity of the word

¹¹⁷“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 453.

¹¹⁸“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 456.

¹¹⁹“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 457.

church.”¹²⁰ The question “What is a true church? resolves itself into this: How little truth may avail to salvation? This is a question we are hardly competent to answer, and there is no need of answering it. We can tell what is a pure church; and with that standard we can compare our own and all others, and regulate our intercourse with them accordingly.”

Unfortunately, Hodge pointed out, the Assembly gave a definition of a pure church, and then declared “that any community not embraced in that definition, to be no church. Thus it is said, a church is a congregation of believers in which the pure word of God is preached; the pure word of God is not preached in Rome, therefore Rome is not a church.” While the logic was impeccable, the premises were flawed. “Any body of men that professes truth enough to save men, cannot on the ground of heresy be denied the character of a church.”¹²¹ If Presbyterians really believed their confession that there is no ordinary possibility of salvation outside the visible church, then “any religious body in communion with which men may be saved, is a part of the visible church; otherwise men are saved out of that church. The visible church, therefore, according to our standards, consists of all those who profess saving truth.” Some at the Assembly, however, had argued that Rome did not retain enough truth to save the soul—yet admitted that there were true believers inside the Roman church. Such a claim, Hodge declared, was absurd.

They retain the doctrine of the Incarnation, which we know from the infallible word of God, is a life-giving doctrine. They retain the whole doctrine of the Trinity. They teach the doctrine of atonement far more fully and accurately than multitudes of professedly orthodox Protestants. They hold a much higher doctrine as to the necessity of divine influence, than

¹²⁰“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 459.

¹²¹“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 462.

prevails among many whom we recognise as Christians. They believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and in eternal life and judgment.¹²²

Indeed, Hodge suspected that Rome retained more of evangelical doctrine and true religion than most of the Protestant churches in Europe during the eighteenth century declension!¹²³

Therefore, while it could be denied that Rome was a church in one sense (she was not a pure church), it should be affirmed that Rome was a church in another (she was still a society that professed faith in Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God. Claiming that this was the stance of the Reformers, and of all the Protestant churches of Europe and America, Hodge agreed that Rome was “antichristian and apostate, the mystical Babylon, from which the people of God are commanded to withdraw.” And yet “viewed in a different light, the church of Rome is still a church, just as the apostate Israelites were still the covenant people of God.”¹²⁴ She is a corrupt and apostate church, but she is still a church. If Roman Catholics

are no part of the visible church, then the Romish hierarchy is not "the man of sin" spoken of by the apostle, for he was to rise and rule in the church. It is, therefore, one thing to denounce the Romish system, and another to say that Romanists are no part of the church catholic. And if they are in the church, their baptism being a washing with water in the name of the Trinity, is Christian baptism; just as the word of God, when read or preached by them, is still his word, and is to be received and obeyed as such.¹²⁵

¹²²“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 463.

¹²³“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 464.

¹²⁴“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 467.

¹²⁵“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 471.

Ironically, the designation of the pope as the antichrist resulted in the guarantee of the validity of Roman baptism.

Hodge could not bypass Thornwell's claim that Romish baptism constituted a child a papist. This, in Hodge's view, was an egregious misunderstanding of baptism, analogous to the Puseyite error. To be baptized by a Presbyterian did not constitute a child a Presbyterian, but a catholic Christian. "The church Catholic is not an organized society." As an act of God, baptism brings a person into the visible church—and only incidentally enrolls them in a particular society of Christians. Baptism is not "an ordinance of any particular church, but of the church catholic." Hodge was desperately trying to maintain a strong sense of catholicity—but he could only do so by blurring the distinction between the visible and the invisible church, distinguishing between the visible church and any particular organization.¹²⁶

Hodge recognized that in the current religious climate, he would be misunderstood. "We have heretofore had the misfortune to be held up as the friends of drunkenness, and the advocates of slavery, because we could not believe that alcohol is sin, and every slave-holder a thief and we fear that even good men may now regard us as the apologists of Popery, because we cannot think that a community who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who worship the Trinity, who hold that we are justified by the merits of Christ, and are sanctified by his Holy Spirit, are to be placed in the same category with Pagans and Mohammed ans." But he could not turn aside from the path of duty. "And we are constrained to say, that as the cause of temperance and the interests of the slave, suffer

¹²⁶"The General Assembly" BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 468.

greatly from the extravagance of their advocates, so we fear the cause of Protestantism suffers materially from the indiscriminating denunciations heaped upon the church of Rome, and from transferring the abhorrence due to her corruptions, to her whole complicated system of truth and error.”¹²⁷

_____ *C. The Response to Hodge*

The church was astonished. Letter after letter poured into the weeklies expressing disagreement or disgust with Hodge’s “brazen” attempt to overturn one of the most nearly unanimous decisions the General Assembly had ever made. “No Popery” wrote to the Presbyterian Herald that Princeton was arrogantly arraying itself against the Assembly, which was not fitting for a professor who held his position from the Assembly!¹²⁸ Thornwell’s logic overruled Hodge’s distinctions, as “No Popery” dismissed the distinction between regular and valid, and insisted that the servants of antichrist could not administer Christian baptism.¹²⁹

In Virginia, William Swan Plumer reprinted Hodge’s review of the Assembly’s decision in full, but commented that the editors of the weeklies were all siding with the General Assembly—except the New Orleans Protestant (the Presbyterian newspaper in New Orleans) which argued that the General Assembly decision was wrong:

1. Because it exalts a mere external ordinance to a degree of importance that we think does not belong to it. . . . 2. [it] places the essentials of a

¹²⁷“The General Assembly” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 464.

¹²⁸“Princeton and Rome vs. the General Assembly I, II” PH 3.46-47 (August 14, 21, 1845).

¹²⁹“Princeton and Rome vs. the General Assembly III, IV, V, VI” PH 3.49-52 (September 4, 11, 18, 25, 1845).

valid baptism upon a wrong basis. We suppose that the validity of baptism does not depend upon the moral character and intentions of the administrator, but upon the character of the recipient, and the using of water in the name of the Holy Trinity, by a regular ministry. If there is anything in succession necessary to valid baptism, we think the decision of the Assembly suicidal. . . . 3. We think there was no occasion for the action of the Assembly. . . . We do not see how it is to do any good to the Presbyterian Church, or the Protestant cause. Nor can we conceive how it will do our Romish neighbors any good. . . . We should be heartily engaged in laboring for the conversion of the world, rather than in legislating about the forms of the church.¹³⁰

This statement betrays a rather unsophisticated blend of low church evangelicalism oddly mixed with the traditional Presbyterian version of apostolic succession. Not surprisingly (as was often the fate of statements from New Orleans) it received no attention from any of the western or northern papers.

The Watchman and Observer (the merger of the Watchman of the South and the Charleston Observer in Richmond in 1845 under Benjamin Gildersleeve) immediately took a harder line than Plumer had taken in the Watchman of the South. Gildersleeve claimed that Hodge's article "has done more for Rome than a dozen from their very ablest open defenders."¹³¹ Gildersleeve kept a steady stream of different authors objecting to Hodge's position from September through November of 1845, culminating in Thornwell's refutation (see below) in the spring of 1846.¹³²

¹³⁰"Romish Baptism from the New Orleans Protestant" WS 8.51 (August 7, 1845) 202. This was also noted in the Presbyterian Advocate (August 13, 1845).

¹³¹Benjamin Gildersleeve, "Papal Baptism," Watchman and Observer 1.1 (August 21, 1845) 2.

¹³²"On Catholic Baptism," "Romish Baptism 2-3," Watchman and Observer 1.11-13 (October 30, November 6, 13, 1845) 42, 46, 50. At the same time, Gildersleeve noted that Baptists were wrestling with the question of whether baptism by unbaptized persons should be considered valid (though, of course, Baptists considered anyone baptized as an infant to be unbaptized). 1.8 (October 9, 1845) 29.

The Pittsburgh area was one of the few that resonated with Princeton to some extent. The Synod of Pittsburgh, meeting in October of 1845, considered the Assembly's decision too "hasty and inconsiderate" but neither adopted nor rejected its position. Nonetheless, the synod did declare that presbyteries were not obliged to implement the Assembly's position, which would confound "constitutional rules with occasional declarations," and called for more discussion on the topic.¹³³

Likewise the Pittsburgh paper, the Presbyterian Advocate found more voices friendly to Princeton than elsewhere in the South and West. While "An Old Presbyterian" objected to Princeton's views,¹³⁴ SR (possibly the retired minister, Dr. Samuel Ralston of Pittsburgh) defended Princeton, arguing that the church of God was designed to "embrace not only males and females, but sinners and saints, or true believers—sinners, that they might become saints by the blessing of God in his own ordinances." Certainly Rome is the harlot Babylon, but there "are some saints in her pale, and this is consonant to that view which we have given of the church of God." God has brought some of his people into Rome "by baptism, that they might be 'born of water and of the Spirit,' according to the promise of Christ." If the Jews remained the covenant people in the midst of their idolatry and wickedness in the days of the kings, then Rome could also be considered a part of the visible church. SR suggested that the tendency to limit the visible church to "visible saints alone, or to those who come to the Lord's table," was moving Presbyterians toward a more

¹³³Presbyterian of the West 1.4 (Oct 16, 1845). The synods of South Carolina, Georgia, and a couple of northwestern synods openly concurred with the Assembly, but Pittsburgh seems to have been the only one to refuse to acquiesce. Most accepted it silently.

¹³⁴An Old Presbyterian, "Popish Baptism and the Princeton Review," Presbyterian Advocate (August 13, 20, 1845).

Baptistic view of the church. SR was even willing to argue that “unregenerate, but awakened adults, like the Jews on the day of Pentecost, if of good moral character, ought to be brought into the visible church by baptism if they desire the privilege.” He recognized that his was a minority opinion, but feared that the majority was seeing the results of a faulty understanding of the church.¹³⁵

While the Presbyterian sided with Princeton on most matters, William Engles was horrified by Hodge’s attack on the Assembly. When Theophilus (George Junkin) began a series against Hodge, Engles was delighted. To say that Antichrist is a “church of Christ, and that the validity of its ordinances is to be recognized by the Protestant church, is to indulge charity at the expense of judgment.”¹³⁶

D. Thornwell’s Reply to Hodge

In March of 1846, after the initial furor had subsided, James Henley Thornwell launched a counterattack in reply to Hodge in the Watchman and Observer.¹³⁷ Thornwell proposed to show: 1) that the essential elements of baptism did not belong “to the Popish ordinance”; 2) that if Rome is not a church, then it has no valid sacraments; and 3) that the

¹³⁵SR, “Roman Baptism,” Presbyterian Advocate 7.48 (Sept 24, 1845). It seems to have been arguments such as this that kept the Synod of Pittsburgh from affirming the Assembly’s decision. (See chapter nine for more on the debates over the status of baptized children).

¹³⁶Theophilus [George Junkin], Presbyterian 16.1 (Jan 3, 1846) 2. Theophilus’ series ran from December 20, 1845 to April 4, 1846.

¹³⁷Thornwell’s review was first published in a series starting in March of 1846: Henley, “The Princeton Review and Popish Baptism” Watchman and Observer 1.29 (March 5, 1846) 113. It was later reprinted in the Southern Presbyterian Review (July, October, 1851, January 1852), and may be found in his Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell III. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986/1875) 283-413.

testimony of the Protestant world was really against Hodge's position.¹³⁸ In fact, Thornwell silently dropped his third point, never citing an advocate of rebaptizing Roman Catholics.

First, Thornwell argued that the Roman practice departed so far from Christ's command that there could be no true baptism in the Roman rite. He granted that water and the triune name were present, but he denied that there was a minister of the gospel present: "the water must be applied by one who is lawfully commissioned to dispense the mysteries of Christ." Following an Aristotelian causal argument, he claimed that "there must be an *instrumental*, as well as a *material* and formal, cause." Therefore, Thornwell asked, "Do [Romish] priests wash with *water* in the *name of the Trinity*, with the *professed design of complying with the command of Christ*, and are *they themselves* to be regarded as *lawful ministers of the Word*?"¹³⁹

Thornwell claimed that the Roman rite was erroneous in all four respects. The water that they used was mixed with oil, and Thornwell suggested "1. That the oil destroys the *fitness* of water for the purpose of ablution, and so affects the significance of the rite; and 2. That mixture is not used *as* water, but that peculiar stress is laid upon the foreign element."¹⁴⁰ Thornwell had the integrity to admit that Augustine demonstrated that this practice was of ancient origin, and hence was forced to suggest that the "*real* sacrament of

¹³⁸Thornwell, "Validity," 284. Anyone relying upon Thornwell's collected writings should keep in mind that the editor, John B. Adger, silently removed Thornwell's most vigorous language and softened his rhetoric. See 3:281.

¹³⁹Thornwell, "Validity," 286.

¹⁴⁰Thornwell, "Validity," 292.

baptism” may have been completely lost during the patristic period.¹⁴¹ This, however, did not trouble Thornwell in the least. “The unbroken transmission of a visible Church in any line of succession is a figment of Papists and Prelatists. . . and if our fathers were without the ordinances, and fed upon ashes for bread, let us only be the more thankful for the greater privileges vouchsafed to ourselves.”¹⁴²

Second, with respect to the form of baptism, Thornwell claimed that the invocation of the Trinity in baptism was only valid where a proper relation to the covenant of grace was involved: “To baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit is not to pronounce these words as an idle form or a mystical charm, but to acknowledge that solemn compact into which these glorious Agents entered, from eternity, for the redemption of the Church.”¹⁴³ Faith in the Trinity, rather than pronouncing the names of the Persons, is the central focus of baptism.

He, therefore, that would undertake to prove that the Romish ceremony possesses the *form* or the *essential elements* of Christian baptism must not content himself with showing that Rome baptizes in the name of the Trinity. He must prove, besides, that she inculcates just views concerning the *nature* of the relationship which the outward washing sustains to the covenant of grace; that her conceptions of the covenant itself, that to which the ablution has reference, are substantially correct; and that she employs the outward elements in conformity with the conditions prescribed by the Author of the sacrament. If she is fundamentally unsound upon any of these points, she abolishes the *essence* of the ordinance, she destroys its *form*.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹Thornwell, “Validity,” 294.

¹⁴²Thornwell, “Validity,” 295.

¹⁴³Thornwell, “Validity,” 295-96.

¹⁴⁴Thornwell, “Validity,” 296.

Appealing to Calvin, Owen, and others, Thornwell argued that “there can be no doubt that, whatever she have professed in words, she did in fact deny them to be *signs*, and consequently changed their relations to the covenant of grace, and made them *essentially* different things from what Christ had appointed.” The resultant mechanical theory of salvation is so far from the apostolic doctrine that Roman baptism cannot be regarded as a species of Christian baptism at all.¹⁴⁵ Hence Hodge errs to say that Rome agrees with us regarding the nature of the sacraments: “She teaches that they are *causes* of grace, and we that they are *signs*.”¹⁴⁶ Realizing that this position could be taken as condemning Lutherans and Episcopalians, Thornwell quickly backtracked and argued that the *ex opere operato* doctrine is what vitiates the Roman rite.

Further, Thornwell claimed that since baptism is a “badge of Christian profession” if Roman baptism is valid baptism, then Roman profession of faith must also be valid, since baptism signifies and seals the covenant of grace.¹⁴⁷ Since Rome denied the Gospel, its adherents should not be considered Christians (except in the same sense as Pelagians, Arians, Universalists, and Socinians). “If her Gospel is not the Gospel of Christ, her religion not the religion of the Son of God, her baptism cannot be that which He instituted.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵Thornwell, “Validity,” 305.

¹⁴⁶Thornwell, “Validity,” 322.

¹⁴⁷Thornwell, “Validity,” 329.

¹⁴⁸Thornwell, “Validity,” 331.

The question between Hodge and Thornwell, as Thornwell saw it, was whether “a man may. . . be a sincere Papist, and still be a spiritual child of God.”¹⁴⁹ Thornwell was convinced that “whatsoever of the Gospel she retains is employed simply as a mask to introduce her errors without suspicion.” Her creed (which he took to be that of Pius IV, including the decrees of Trent) is not a saving creed.¹⁵⁰ Whereas Hodge insisted that the Spirit could only work through the Church, Thornwell argued that the Spirit could also work “amid Hindoo temples and Indian pagodas, in the darkest chambers of imagery, as well as the congregation of Christian people. . . . He works as well *out* of the Church as *in* the Church.” And wherever he works, there “is a membership in the invisible Church; but it is an act of the believer, subsequent to his conversion, and founded upon it, to seek a corresponding membership in that visible congregation to which the ordinances are given.”¹⁵¹

After an exhaustive attempt to demonstrate that every last vestige of Augustinianism had been rooted out of the official teaching of the Roman church from the 16th-18th centuries, Thornwell concluded that “it is the prerogative of God alone to search the heart, and He may detect germs of grace in many a breast which have never ripened into the fruit of the lips. But I do confidently assert that no man who truly believes and

¹⁴⁹Thornwell, “Validity,” 337.

¹⁵⁰Thornwell, “Validity,” 338.

¹⁵¹Thornwell, “Validity,” 343. Thornwell plainly suggests that the Holy Spirit could use other religions to bring a person to a saving knowledge of Christ (a position he would have to affirm since he believed that Roman Catholicism was in fact an entirely different religion from Christianity), but then insisted that such a person must unite with a Christian (Protestant) church.

cordially embraces the Papal theory of salvation can, consistently with the Scriptures, be a child of God.”¹⁵²

_____ *E. Hodge’s Manifesto*

After reading the first few articles from Thornwell’s pen, Hodge issued his final statement. Since Roman baptism fell within the boundaries defined by the Westminster Standards, Hodge refused to budge.

He opened by connecting the same sorts of simplistic answers of his interlocutors with what he saw with abolitionists and “ultra temperance” men. Rather than allow for qualifications and distinctions, these extremists “deal in what is called plain common sense, repudiating all metaphysical niceties.”¹⁵³ In the same way, those denying that Rome is a part of the visible church simply point out that Rome is antichrist, the mystical Babylon, and the mother of harlots. Therefore Rome cannot be part of the visible church. But for Hodge, this was far too simplistic. If the church is defined as “a society in which the pure word of God is preached, the sacraments duly administered, and discipline properly exercised by legitimate officers. . . [then] we must exclude all but orthodox

¹⁵²Thornwell, “Validity,” 411. The reason why there is no third part of the argument (in spite of the numbering at the beginning of the section) is that while Thornwell had promised to show that the Reformed were against Hodge’s position, he never cites anyone who advocated the rebaptizing of Roman Catholics.

¹⁵³This was intended as a dig against the South Carolinian, Thornwell, who did not care to be associated with abolitionists. “Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?” *BRPR* 18.2 (April, 1846) 222. Hodge concluded with the same refrain: “When one says, we favor intemperance unless we say that the use of intoxicating liquors is sinful; another, that we favor slavery unless we say slaveholding is a sin; and a third, that we favor popery unless we say the church of Rome is no church, they all, as it seems to us, make the same mistake, and greatly injure the cause in which they are engaged.” (244) Unfortunately for Hodge, these sorts of distinctions were increasingly lost on a Presbyterian church that wanted everything in nice, neat categories.

Presbyterians from the pale of the church.”¹⁵⁴ Instead, Hodge pointed out that when Turretin and other Reformed authors refer to “a true church” they are referring to an orthodox or pure church. Hodge demonstrated that Turretin had affirmed that the Roman church was a Christian church--at least in external form--and had retained valid baptism. Therefore, if one meant by the “church of Rome” simply the papacy, then Rome is not a church, but apostate. But if one defined the “church of Rome” as the company of professing Christians adhering to Rome, then Rome is indeed a church.¹⁵⁵ Hodge rightly suspected that the New England Congregational definition of the church had crept into the Presbyterian church, resulting in a failure to understand the historic Presbyterian distinction between a true church and a pure church.

In conclusion, Hodge addressed the question of whether Rome taught enough of the gospel so that a person could be saved. While affirming the standard Protestant claim that Rome confused justification and sanctification, Hodge pointed out that we are not saved by our doctrinal formulations, but by the grace of God. Since Roman Catholics truly believe the Nicene Creed, they plainly believe the Christian faith.¹⁵⁶ Being riddled with heresy and idolatry did not erase Rome as a church. Hodge reminded his readers that the

¹⁵⁴“Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?” 224.

¹⁵⁵“Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?” 237.

¹⁵⁶“Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?” 242. In 1869, Pope Pius IX invited all Protestant churches to send observers to the Vatican Council. The Old School General Assembly appointed George W. Musgrave, John Hall and ruling elder Martin Ryerson to confer with a similar New School committee to reply to the invitation. A draft of the committee’s letter is found in Charles Hodge’s papers at Princeton Theological Seminary, in Hodge’s handwriting. It courteously declines the Pope’s invitation and firmly states that the Presbyterian church cannot return to Rome until the Council of Trent is overturned (among other concerns). Minutes (1869) 936.

Jewish church in the Old Testament was frequently overrun by errors, yet never ceased to be the people of God.

The same month that Hodge's essay appeared in the Princeton Review, the Presbyterian published a defense of Hodge by "Frederick" who replied to Theophilus, and perhaps Thornwell's early essays as well. He insisted that a valid baptism does not have to conform exactly to the New Testament.¹⁵⁷

In his first essay he printed the entire Roman Catholic baptismal rite in the Presbyterian and pointed out that all the extra ceremonies were designed to signify various spiritual truths, and were expressly declared by the catechism of the Council of Trent to be non-essential to the validity of a baptism. Further, if such emblems sufficed to invalidate Roman baptism, then Episcopal baptism must also be rejected because Episcopalians added ceremonies as well.¹⁵⁸

Second, however "ruinous" Roman Catholic doctrine might be, it built on an orthodox Trinitarian baptism. Urging Protestants to be fair to their opponents in debate, Frederick insisted that both Presbyterians and Roman Catholics agreed that baptism aims at "saving effects, remission of sins, and sanctifying grace. Again; they agree that these effects are conditional; and conditional not only on the due administration of the baptism, but, in case of adult baptism, on moral qualifications in the person to be baptized. Lastly, they agree that the original source of the effects is the atoning work of Christ, and their

¹⁵⁷Frederick, "'Is Baptism in the Church of Rome Valid?" Presbyterian 16.14 (April 4, 1846) 53.

¹⁵⁸Frederick, "Is Baptism in the Church of Rome Valid? No. II," Presbyterian 16.15 (April 11, 1846) 57.

primary cause, the influence of the Holy Ghost.” They disagreed, however, when Roman Catholics insisted that “baptism is the direct channel of grace.” But Frederick could not see how the church could rebaptize someone who had come to understand the true meaning of the baptism received while in the Roman church.¹⁵⁹

Frederick argued that Roman Catholic priests remained ministers of the gospel because ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament. While admitting that Rome embraced grave and dangerous errors, he concluded that rejecting Roman Catholic baptism logically required the rejection of Episcopal, Arminian and Baptist baptisms as well. He knew that many of his readers were asking: why take the time and energy to defend “against a Protestant decision, so vile a church as Rome?” He replied that the truth demanded it. If we bring false charges against others, they “will be confirmed in thinking all our charges equally untenable.”¹⁶⁰ Concerned that Protestants too often condemned before truly understanding their Roman Catholic neighbors, Frederick urged the church to be more careful in its polemics against Rome.

Conclusion

One of the main arguments used by those who opposed the General Assembly’s decision was the fact that no other Reformed church had rejected Roman Catholic baptism. In 1854 the Free Church of Scotland debated the question. While some prominent ministers agreed with the Old School, the Free Church followed the historical argument of

¹⁵⁹Frederick, “Is Baptism in the Church of Rome Valid? No. III,” Presbyterian 16.16 (April 18, 1846) 61.

¹⁶⁰Frederick, “Is Baptism in the Church of Rome Valid? No. IV,” Presbyterian 16.17 (April 25, 1846) 65.

Dr. William Cunningham who used arguments like Hodges to defend the Church of Rome as a church of Christ, even though headed by the Antichrist. The majority of the Old School was disappointed with this decision. One commentator declared that “Antichrist's body is not an 'erring sister' of the true Church,” and he denied that “the Man of Sin, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, can administer Christ's ordinances.”¹⁶¹ But Cunningham, in reviewing Hodge's arguments in the British and Foreign Evangelical Review declared Hodge's position simply obvious to British Protestants.¹⁶²

While the Old School as a whole remained unmoved by Hodge's arguments, they convinced most in the northeastern region. Samuel Irenaeus Prime commented after Hodge's death:

We recall a case in which the General Assembly, after one of the ablest debates ever held on its floor, came to a decision on an important ecclesiastical question (Romish Baptism) with almost entire unanimity. Dr. Hodge reviewed the decision in the '*Princeton Review*' with such masterly power, as to set back the opinions of the Church, and hold it on the other side to this day. And to us this power of his appears the more wonderful, as we believed then, and do now, that he was wrong, and the Assembly was right.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹“Is the Church of Rome a Church of Christ?” PH 23.24 (Feb 16, 1854).

¹⁶²Cunningham wrote in the British and Foreign Evangelical Review (July 1857) reviewing Hodge's Essays and Reviews, a selection of Hodge's ecclesiastical essays from the Princeton Review. Quoted in A. A. Hodge, The Life of Charles Hodge, 428-429.

¹⁶³New York Observer (June 27, 1878). Quoted in A. A. Hodge, The Life of Charles Hodge, 260.

Prime claims that Hodge convinced the “church,” but the western and southern conversations throughout the 1850s and 1860s do not support that claim.¹⁶⁴ Nonetheless,

¹⁶⁴One practical result of the debate was the fragmentation of the Portuguese Presbyterian churches in Illinois in 1858. These Presbyterians had been converted by Dr. Robert Reid Kalley of the Church of Scotland in 1838, but were driven off of Madeira Island in 1846 by Portuguese Roman Catholic persecution, and had settled in Jacksonville, Springfield and Waverly, Illinois, where the Free Portuguese Presbyterian Church was established in Jacksonville in 1850. In 1856 they transferred from the Free Church of Scotland to the Old School Presbytery of Sangamon. But unlike the Free Church, the Old School did not recognize the validity of their Roman Catholic baptisms. The ensuing conflict in the Portuguese community divided the church beyond repair. The Sangamon Presbytery determined not to require the rebaptism of those who believed their Roman Catholic baptism was adequate, but the Rev. Antonio De Mattos led a slight majority out of the Old School by a 105-101 vote, which subsequently joined the New School (which had determined to leave the question of Roman Catholic baptism to the local session). The ensuing court battle over the church property lasted for more than five years. See Dennis E. Suttles, “Schism on the Prairie: The Case of the Free Portuguese Church of Jacksonville, Illinois,” *JP* 75:4 (Winter 1997) 211-222.

A fascinating illustration of the Protestant quest for Roman Catholic converts is told by Caroline B. Brettell, “From Catholics to Presbyterians: French-Canadian Immigrants in Central Illinois,” *JP* 63:3 (Fall 1985) 285-298. The French Canadian Roman Catholic priest, Charles Chiniquy, became a charismatic temperance reformer in the 1840s, before settling down as a parish priest in Illinois, along the Kankakee River in 1851. He was suspended from the priesthood in 1856 for administering the mass in French, providing laymen with the Bible, along with “behavior unfitting a Catholic priest,” (probably sexual in nature). But his congregation at St. Anne supported him and when he was excommunicated in 1858 eighty per cent of the congregation followed him into independency. When major crop failures occurred in 1859-1860, Chiniquy appealed to the Protestant community for help. The *Presbyterian* became the clearinghouse for Protestant assistance for the allegedly starving Catholic converts. While Episcopalians and Baptists sent representatives to try to encourage Chiniquy to align with them, the Presbyterians objected to such sectarian strategies, and offered assistance without any strings attached. Largely due to this generosity, Chiniquy joined the Chicago Presbytery of the Old School Presbyterian church in 1860, telling his congregation that “if you are not satisfied” after a year, “we will join another” (292). But troubles in discipline led to the division of the St. Anne church, and a second Presbyterian church was formed in 1861 under the Rev. Theodore Monod, a French minister who had come in 1860 to assist Chiniquy (who was frequently engaged in lecture tours around the country). Charges against Chiniquy for mismanagement of funds eventually resulted in his suspension by the Chicago Presbytery in 1862, at which point the First Presbyterian Church of St. Anne applied for admission to the Canadian Presbyterian Church. Chiniquy remained a minister in the Canadian Presbyterian Church until his death in 1899. Both the Chicago Presbytery and the Canadian Synod suggested that Chiniquy should be given a certain moral leeway due to his past as a Roman Catholic priest—who were assumed to be notoriously immoral. There is an eerie similarity to the way in which Presbyterians handled the sexual dalliance of the West African minister, Edward W. Blyden. Roman Catholics and blacks were expected to have a lower morality, and so public behavior that would not have been tolerated in white Presbyterians was frequently winked at. See Moses N. Moore, Jr., “Edward Wilmot Blyden: From Old School Presbyterian Missionary to ‘Minister of Truth,’” *JP* 75:2 (Summer 1997) 103-118. For several months the *Presbyterian* reported on Chiniquy almost weekly. Among the more important articles: M. J. Paillard, “Father Chiniquy,” from the *New York Express*, reprinted in the *Presbyterian* 29.35 (September 3, 1859) 141; A Visitor, “A Visit to Ste. Ann,” *Presbyterian* (October 1, 1859) 158; the announcement of Chiniquy’s decision to become Old School is in *Presbyterian* (Jan 28, 1860); Charles A. Spring, a ruling elder, and brother of the Rev. Gardiner Spring of Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City, wrote of the desperate condition of the colonists in *Presbyterian* (May 19, 1860); cf. “The French Colony,” *Presbyterian* 30.39 (September 29, 1860) 158; “The Candian French Colony” *Presbyterian* (November 10, 1860) 182; A. H., “Letter from Illinois,” *Presbyterian* 31.17 (April 27, 1861) 66.

given Hodge's sway in the Philadelphia-New York corridor, Prime probably spoke accurately regarding the churches in his sphere of influence.¹⁶⁵

It is no accident that the leaders of the Old School's rejection of Roman Catholic baptism, R. J. Breckinridge, James H. Thornwell, and Nathan L. Rice, all played prominent roles in the Protestant movement that sought to define Roman Catholicism as a threat to American religious and political liberty. Protestant baptism symbolized entrance not only into the Christian church, but also into a Protestant political identity.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵The New School Assembly dealt with the same question in the 1850s. Henry Boynton Smith took Hodge's position and was able to prevent the New School from denying the validity of Roman baptism. Therefore after the reunion, in 1875, the reunited General Assembly left the matter to the discretion of the session. (Moore, Presbyterian Digest 514). Meanwhile the Southern General Assembly reiterated the condemnation of Roman baptism in 1871 and 1884. Another Old Schooler who came to favor Hodge's position was William A. Scott, a San Francisco pastor, "Validity of Roman Catholic Baptism," Presbyterian 30.36 (March 7, 1861).

¹⁶⁶Chapter five will explore the anti-catholic aspect of Breckinridge and Thornwell's educational theory.

FOUR

WINE, WOMEN AND THE LIMITS OF CONSCIENCE

Given how deeply Old Schoolers were embedded in antebellum culture, it is hardly surprising that they shared the same basic mores as their fellow evangelicals. But their confessional commitments led Old School Presbyterians to articulate these moral concerns in ways that often differed from their neighbors. While slavery was beyond question the most potent moral issue of the day, it is worth looking at other issues in order to understand the inner dynamics of Old School casuistry.

Two of the most significant debates on moral discipline arose in the same year. The General Assembly of 1843 wrestled with the questions of whether a church member could retail alcoholic beverages, and of whether a man could marry his deceased wife's sister. The juxtaposition of these two issues is quite useful, since the Old School's involvement with the temperance movement reveals how intimately it was connected to other evangelicals involved in antebellum reform, while the marriage question demonstrates how resolutely confessional the Old School remained in spite of these broader connections. But both debates show the willingness of Old School Presbyterians to place limits on liberty of individual conscience to preserve the integrity of their corporate conscience.

1. Temperance

The temperance movement began in the 1810s in response to a partial collapse of the social order.¹ Alcohol consumption had skyrocketed, and many feared that left unchecked it could undermine the integrity of the nation.² Many historians have seen the rise of the temperance movement as rooted in Federalist attempts to maintain social control. But it quickly moved beyond the intentions of its founders to become a radical reform movement, allied with abolition and anti-Catholicism in the 1840s.³ Pegram traces multiple origins of the temperance movement, especially the so-called market revolution, which encouraged “sobriety, order, and rationality.” He points out that temperance reform was weakest in places like the southern backcountry where the market revolution had not had as strong an effect.⁴ In 1826 the American Temperance Society was established, relying on moral suasion in order to convince people to reform their ways, but by the end

¹Most studies have focused on the “inevitable” result of prohibition. John A. Krout, The Origins of Prohibition (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1925); Joseph R. Gusfield, Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986/1963); John J. Rumbarger, Profits, Power, and Prohibition: Alcohol Reform and the Industrializing of America, 1800-1930 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Thomas R. Pegram, Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933 (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998); Ann-Marie E. Szymanski, Pathways to Prohibition: Radicals, Moderates, and Social Movement Outcomes (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). Gusfield complains about the incessant “moralistic condemnation of moralism” in the literature on temperance. (3)

²Pegram acknowledges the serious social and moral problems associated with the liquor industry in the antebellum era (Battling Demon Rum, xii). He points out that between 1800-1830, Americans drank “each year between 6.6 and 7.1 gallons of pure alcohol” compared to 2.8 today (7). The 1850 census reported that Americans had manufactured over 42 million gallons of whisky, six and half gallons of rum, and a little more than one million gallons of beer that year, which amounted to more than two gallons per man, woman and child in the United States. W&O 8.47 (July 1, 1853).

³Gusfield, 5-6.

⁴Pegram, 17. This fits well with the evidence of the southern Presbyterian newspapers, which were all produced in southern towns by ministers closely associated with the market.

of the 1820s there were growing calls for total abstinence from all alcohol. Other historians have connected this teetotal movement with the development of Finneyite perfectionism,⁵ or at least New School Calvinism.⁶

The problem with these accounts of the Temperance movement is that they cannot account for Old School Presbyterian involvement. If temperance was a pursuit of “individual perfectionism,” allied with the “revivalist waves of Methodism, Baptism, and the ‘new Presbyterianism,’”⁷ then theoretically Old School Presbyterians should have had a large population of anti-temperance writers. But in fact, virtually all supported temperance, and a growing majority at least personally supported total abstinence. John J. Rumbarger suggests the solution: while the rhetoric of the temperance movement was indeed influenced by the New School/perfectionist wing of the evangelical movement, the goal of the temperance reform was the establishment of a “rational social order,” and Old School Presbyterians were equally invested in the market economy of the antebellum era, and equally desired a “cooperative workforce.”⁸ While they might deplore the rhetoric of

⁵Pegram, 20. Robert Abzug, Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). While the early temperance movement had focused on distilled spirits, on the assumption that beer, cider and wine was not as dangerous, by the 1820s chemists had determined that fermentation produced the exact same alcohol as distillation. This prompted the more perfectionist reformers to eliminate the consumption of alcohol altogether. The radical total abstinence reform (often still referred to as “temperance”) divided the temperance movement, but quickly became the dominant voice. Pegram, 24-39; Rumbarger, chapter 2.

⁶Leo P. Hirrel, Children of Wrath: New School Calvinism and Antebellum Reform (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1998).

⁷Gusfield, 44-45.

⁸Rumbarger, xxii.

their New School colleagues, they joined the moderate wing of the movement—only to discover that the rhetoric was not an optional feature.⁹

A. Temperance and the Question of Wine in the Lord's Supper

In 1811 the Presbyterian General Assembly established a ten man committee (including Samuel Miller and Gardiner Spring) to suggest ways that the church could help prevent “some of the numerous and threatening mischiefs which are experienced throughout our country by the excessive and intemperate use of spirituous liquors.”¹⁰ The committee’s report condemned “intemperate drinking” urging Presbyterian ministers to preach against such sins, and calling on sessions to privately admonish, and if necessary, publicly discipline members who persisted in such intemperance. Further, they called on the officers and members of the church to take effectual political measures to reduce the number of taverns wherever intemperance was a problem.¹¹ At this stage, the focus fell on temperance. But by 1818 the pastoral letter from the Assembly to the churches recommended that officers and members “abstain even from the common use of ardent spirits” as the best way to prevent the ruin that came with habitual drunkenness,¹² and in 1829 the Assembly formally approved the formation of temperance societies “on the principle of entire abstinence from the use of ardent spirits” within Presbyterian

⁹On middle class leadership, see Stuart M. Blumin, The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁰Minutes (1811) 474 (in Baird, 794). The committee largely consisted of ministers and elders from New York City. The Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance (1813) is widely considered the origin of the formal temperance movement, so Presbyterian interest was quite early.

¹¹Minutes (1812) 511 (in Baird, 795).

¹²Minutes (1818) 689 (in Baird, 795).

congregations and unanimously declared that they themselves (the members of the Assembly) practiced abstinence themselves.¹³

Initially, the Assembly refused to condemn the manufacture and sale of ardent spirits (the question of beer and wine was not before them yet). As late as 1830 it expressed itself cautiously, hesitating to “encroach upon the rights of private judgment” and merely regretting that any member of “the Church of Christ, should at the present day, and under existing circumstances, feel themselves at liberty to manufacture, vend, or use ardent spirits.”¹⁴ But four years later, the Assembly declared “that the traffic in ardent spirits, to be used as a drink by any people, is, in our judgment, morally wrong, and ought to be viewed as such, by the Churches of Jesus Christ, universally.”¹⁵ The 1837 Assembly declared its dismay that members, and even some ruling elders “still manufacture and sell ardent spirits. . . . No Church can shine as a light in the world, while she openly sanctions and sustains any practices which are so evidently destructive of the best interests of society.”¹⁶

By the middle of the 1830s the logic of the temperance movement had convinced some that alcoholic wine should be removed from the Lord’s Supper. While some writers

¹³Minutes (1829) 375-6 (in Baird, 796).

¹⁴Minutes (1830) 24 (in Baird, 796). A brief repudiation of the attempt to make abstinence a term of communion in the church was published in the BRPR 2.2 (April, 1830) 242-249.

¹⁵Minutes (1834) 31 (in Baird, 796).

¹⁶Minutes (1837) 510 (in Baird, 796-7). One region that did not follow the Assembly was western Virginia. One writer declared the Presbyterians in that region to be a “whisky drinking” people. Southern Religious Telegraph 14.4 (January 23, 1835). Conditions reached the point that the Lexington Presbytery (which embraced a large portion of western Virginia) sent out a pastoral letter in the fall of 1835 warning all members that the presbytery viewed the sale and manufacture of ardent spirits as a sin. Southern Religious Telegraph 14.46 (Nov 13, 1835).

in the New School New York Evangelist advocated this position, the Southern Religious Telegraph (a moderate paper) defended the traditional practice in August of 1835.¹⁷ Over the next month, the Telegraph published the debate on “the Wine Question,” between Moses Stuart of Andover Seminary and William B. Sprague (pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Albany, New York). Stuart argued that any drink would be adequate for the Lord’s Supper, but suggested that watered down wine was the best compromise between traditionalists and advocates of abstinence. Sprague, in a sermon entitled “the Danger of Being Overwise,” replied that “the very same spirit which would banish wine from the Lord’s table, would. . . annihilate the ordinance itself” in order to further the temperance cause. Indeed, Sprague noted that many church members were refusing to partake of the cup at the Lord’s Supper, because they refused to drink any wine.¹⁸ Sprague argued that all wines known in the scriptures were fermented and therefore that fermented wine was the only proper substance for the cup. Sprague’s deepest concern, however, was that the radical temperance movement was starting from “a principle on which Infidelity cannot fail to thrive.” By arraying “certain *moral* facts or supposed facts against the Bible,” namely “that the least particle of alcohol--no matter in what form it exists--is injurious to the constitution of man” the radical temperance writers were implying that “God is either ignorant of the constitution of his own creature, the

¹⁷Southern Religious Telegraph 14.34 (August 21, 1835). Smith, a recent graduate of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia (1833), and pastor of the Guinea church in West Hanover Presbytery, argued that while one should abstain from ardent spirits, a moderate use of wine was acceptable.

¹⁸Southern Religious Telegraph 14.35 (August 28, 1835) 133. The debate was published in religious newspapers all over the country.

work of his own hands, or else that he has commanded the use of that which he foresaw must injure him.”¹⁹

In reply to the debate, the executive committee of the New York Temperance Society denied working to remove wine from communion, arguing that “the fruit of the vine” is essential to the Supper. They explicitly refused to define what form the “fruit of the vine” should take, leaving open the possibility that unfermented or diluted wine could replace real wine at the Lord’s Supper.²⁰

Samuel Miller, a member of that first temperance committee in 1811, remained convinced of the older model of temperance. He had given up wine around 1830, and claimed that his physical condition had improve. But he refused to affirm the abstinence pledge for three reasons: 1) drinking could not be said to be sinful in all cases; 2) while the original temperance pledge was acceptable, the total elimination of wine, beer and cider went too far; 3) the ultra pledge would logically remove wine from the Lord’s Supper. He illustrated his argument in the Southern Religious Telegraph with the example of tobacco: “In my opinion, tobacco is a detestable weed which has long been doing and is at this hour doing incalculable injury to the health and comfort of millions.” But while the use of tobacco might be a “hateful as well as mischievous practice,” Miller argued that persuasion would be a more effective tool than pledge campaigns.²¹ The editor, Amasa

¹⁹Southern Religious Telegraph 14.38 (September 18, 1835) 152. Sprague compared this to those who “twist” the supposed facts of geology in order to contradict Moses. Sprague voiced his complete conviction that in both cases the true result of scientific investigation would be the vindication of scriptural teaching.

²⁰Southern Religious Telegraph 14.42 (October 16, 1835).

²¹“Rev Dr Miller on the Wine Question” Southern Religious Telegraph 14.48 (Nov 27, 1835).

Converse, wished his readers to hear the other side as well. In the same issue “Abstinence” argued that Miller’s distinction between ardent spirits and wine was groundless. Both contained alcohol. Both could lead to drunkenness and all its attendant miseries. Total abstinence from all alcohol was the only true preventative measure.²²

While most of the radical temperance authors sided with the New School in 1837-38, the Old School remained equally committed to the temperance cause for reasons of expediency. While a number of New School congregations switched from wine to raisin water in the 1830s and 1840s, I have been unable to find any definite mention of an Old School congregation which eliminated the use of wine.²³ In 1841 the Old School church Ballston Spa, New York, tried this in 1841 by a majority vote of the congregation,²⁴ but

²²Abstinence, “The Use of Wine” Southern Religious Telegraph 14.48 (Nov 27, 1835). “Abstinence” and Miller exchanged articles on the new total abstinence pledge in January of 1836.

²³There is evidence of interest in the subject. R. J. Breckinridge noted in January of 1841 without comment that the Journal of the American Temperance Union had urged churches to stop using fermented wine for the Lord’s Supper. BLRM 7.1 (January 1841) 48. This may suggest that Breckinridge was sympathetic to the movement, since he rarely refrained from mocking movements that he opposed. Also the Charleston Observer ran an advertisement from Daniel Pomeroy of New York offering an unfermented grape syrup guaranteed to remain free of alcohol--CO (March 28, 1840) 23—which suggests that there may have been some interest in removing wine from the Supper in South Carolina. There is some evidence from Kentucky and Missouri that by the 1850s some Old Schoolers had become convinced that biblical wine was unfermented, but whether they had changed the practice of any congregation is unclear. “The Wine of the Bible, and the Bible Use of Wine” St. Louis Presbyterian 16.2 (July 7, 1859). While some congregations had already adopted the practice, the southern Presbyterian General Assembly formally permitted the use of grape juice in 1892 (though affirming that Jesus used fermented wine), with the result that most churches had switched by 1915. Part of the rationale used was that many temperance advocates were departing early on communion Sundays, or simply partaking of the bread. The church was trying to increase participation in the sacrament. Robert Milton Winter, Shadow of a Mighty Rock: A Social and Cultural History of Presbyterianism in Marshall County, Mississippi (Franklin, TN: Providence House, 1997) 268, 271. Ernest Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963) 2:347-49, 432. The northern Assembly declared in 1881 that “The General Assembly has always recognized the right of each church session to determine what is bread and what is wine.” Minutes (1881) 548.

²⁴This is the only attempt to move away from fermented wine to which I have found newspaper references. Their minister was the Rev. David Murdock who transferred to the New School in 1851. Their previous minister was the Rev. Erasmus Darwin MacMaster (private 1829—see chapter eight) who subsequently served as president of Hanover College, Madison University, and Miami University, as well as

the Presbytery of Albany overturned the decision, stating that “there is nothing in the use of *fermented* wine at the communion, that is inconsistent with an acceptable celebration of the ordinance, or that ought to embarrass a properly enlightened conscience.” Those opposing the use of wine claimed that their consciences would not allow them to drink wine. The presbytery replied that their consciences had been misled. Fearing that such the switch would “put in jeopardy” the peace and harmony of the church, the presbytery “deprecate[d] the forementioned innovation” as tending toward schism.²⁵ In the ensuing discussion, one author wrote that the session had tried “to banish one of the divinely appointed elements of the Lord’s Supper. . . . Why not take the ground of the papists at once, and deny the people the CUP altogether? It would not be a greater departure from divine instruction.” He suggested that ultra-temperance advocates were appealing to pagan authority to “prove that the Bible does not *mean* what it *says*.”²⁶ H. pointed to the spiritual significance of the elements themselves. “Bread is the staff of life--the support of the animal life of our bodies, to teach us that we receive our spiritual life from Him.” Likewise, wine was “the symbol of Christ’s blood [which] teaches us that in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.” H. was convinced that the attempt to banish wine was an impeachment of Christ himself. If the wine of the Supper encouraged drunkenness, as radical temperance authors claimed, then the church must “relinquish all our high veneration for him as the Son of God, as God manifest in the flesh,

professor of theology at New Albany Theological Seminary.

²⁵John Clancy (stated clerk of the Presbytery of Albany), “Wine at the Communion,” Presbyterian 11.9 (February 27, 1841) 34.

²⁶Lucius, “Ultraism” Presbyterian 11.14 (April 3, 1841) 53.

and with the Jew, the Socinian, and the infidel, consider him as only a fallible man like ourselves.”²⁷

The years between 1838 and 1843 were full of temperance debates, as Old School Presbyterians sought a way of affirming the temperance movement while avoiding its extremes. Most religious newspapers included semi-regular articles and tracts on temperance, often anecdotal or fictional, which chronicled the road to ruin that invariably resulted from drinking.²⁸

Many argued for total abstinence from alcohol as a beverage (allowing for medicinal and sacramental uses).²⁹ This naturally led to the condemnation of those who manufactured or sold beverage alcohol. Robert J. Breckinridge published (and probably wrote) “A Plea for Total Abstinence from Intoxicating Liquors” in 1840, opposing even temperate drinking on the grounds that total abstinence is the safest way to avoid drunkenness, and suggesting that every penny gained through the sale of alcohol is “the price of blood.”³⁰ William Swan Plumer, editor of the Watchman of the South, and pastor

²⁷H, “Shall Wine Be Dispensed with in the Celebration of the Lord's Supper?” Presbyterian 11.48 (November 27, 1841) 190.

²⁸As merely one of hundreds of examples, “The Road to Ruin,” Watchman of the South 5.10 (October 28, 1841) 38, tells of a St. Louis judge who sentenced a counterfeiter to the shortest sentence because of his tale of debauchery and drunkenness. The counterfeiter apparently wanted to show himself as an example to others--and was shown mercy.

²⁹P. L. McAboy, letter to the editor, Western Presbyterian Herald 8.3 (Dec 13, 1838).

³⁰“A Plea for Total Abstinence from Intoxicating Liquors,” BLRM 6.11 (June 1840) 510-7; quote from page 516. Breckinridge had caused no little controversy when he preached on total abstinence in Baltimore, in spite of the fact that one of the ruling elders in the Second Presbyterian Church was a wine merchant. When challenged, he offered his resignation with a show of indignation that presaged how he would respond in future conflicts. Edmund Arthur Moore, “The Earlier Life of Robert J. Breckinridge, 1800-1845” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1932) 35.

of the First Presbyterian Church of Richmond, Virginia, argued that while Christians technically have permission to drink, the course of prudence and safety is to abstain. Indeed, Plumer argued, given the present context of runaway drunkenness, it was imperative for Christians to abstain from alcohol. And “if it be wrong to use ardent spirit except for medicinal purpose, it is certainly wrong to make, or sell, or give it away for other than medicinal purposes. He that aids or abets in the commission of any crime is himself. . . a partaker in the crime,” and to furnish an intemperate man with liquor is to kill him by inches.³¹

On August 29, 1840 an extra edition of the New York Observer reprinted the Rev. B. Parsons’s essay “Ancient Wines,” under the pseudonym “Anti-Bacchus,” which argued that the ancient wines of the Hebrews were frequently unfermented.³² A few weeks later editor Sidney Morse commented that a Reformed Presbyterian congregation in Greenock, Scotland, under the Rev. Andrew Gilmour had unanimously removed alcoholic wine from the Supper and switched to “*the liquid fruit of the vine.*”³³ Following such arguments, one author, using the telling pen name of “Conscience” pled with the church to use both wine and the “pure fruit of the vine.” This would enable both sides to live together in peace.³⁴

³¹“Intemperance” Watchman of the South 4.26 (February 18, 1841), 4.27 (February 25, 1841), 4.28 (March 4, 1841), 4.29 (March 11, 1841).

³²New York Observer extra (August 29, 1840). This essay had earlier been praised by New York University professor George Bush in, “The Wine Question,” New York Observer (July 4, 1840) 106.

³³New York Observer (October 24, 1840) 170.

³⁴Conscience, “Wine at the Communion Table,” NYO 19.10 (March 6, 1841) 38. The NYO was the most open to the elimination of wine in communion. When Joseph McCarrell, an Associate Reformed minister who taught at the Associate Reformed seminary in Newburgh, New York openly attacked the total abstinence plan as unbiblical, a reviewer in the NYO responded in a multi-part review in September and October of 1841, concluding that McCarrell had become the “toast of drunkards,” and feared that mere

Throughout the early 1840s Old School newspapers engaged periodically with Edward C. Delavan's Enquirer, the leading organ of the temperance reformation. While some thought that Delavan merely opposed the mixed liquors that often passed themselves as wine, one author pointed out that Delavan had written: "I am opposed to fermented wine of the purest quality; because it contains alcohol, and because I look upon it as poison entirely unfit to be received into the system."³⁵ J. W. Alexander argued that "such exclusion, where the fermented juice of the grape can be obtained, is unscriptural, profane, and by implication injurious to the holy name of our Redeemer; and that it vitiates the ordinance." Alexander feared that the question had become a "fire-brand cast into our churches; and I am unable to see how it can fail to rend into two bodies every religious community which does not promptly extinguish it."³⁶

But while Old School Presbyterians were nearly unanimous in keeping wine in the Lord's Supper, their newspapers were equally committed to the total abstinence of beverage alcohol. "Jonadab" went so far as to argue that just as polygamy was once allowed, but was now forbidden, so also alcohol was moving from the realm of the

temperance would result in more drunkenness. (October 26, 1841) 175.

³⁵Totidem Verbis, "Sacramental Wine Question," Presbyterian (Feb 12, 1842) 26.

³⁶J. W. Alexander, "The Wine Question," CO 16.7 (February 12, 1842) 26 (reprinted from the New York Observer); Alexander was responding to Delavan's article on "Rev. Dr. Nott's Views," New York Observer (December 25, 1841) 207. Benjamin Gildersleeve was convinced by this. He insisted that "to propose a substitute for wine, is both *impious* and *abominable*—and shows the dangerous extreme to which a good cause may be perverted." Editorial, "Wine in the Communion," CO 16.29 (July 16, 1842) 114.

morally neutral to that of the morally evil.³⁷ Those few who attempted to defend the old temperance position found even fewer who were willing to listen.³⁸

“Eliab,” writing in the Charleston Observer, was one of the only authors in the Old School literature to take the remarkable step of openly declaring the moderate use of wine as a positive good. Declaring that wine was one of those “pleasures adapted to each of the senses with which God in his wisdom has endued us,” he insisted that any such pleasure could be properly used “within the bounds of moderation which God has prescribed.”³⁹ Benjamin Gildersleeve disagreed, insisting that the Bible did not encourage the use of wine as a regular beverage, but enjoined it for medicinal and sacramental purposes only. It permitted beverage use, but did not enjoin it.⁴⁰ In reply “Eliab” pointed out that the tithing of wine in the Old Testament indicated that it was a common beverage, and noted that the priests were given wine regularly and only forbidden to drink it when they were serving in the tabernacle.⁴¹ But few came to his defense.

But while most Old School Presbyterians zealously defended temperance (and even total abstinence) on pragmatic grounds, most were troubled by the attempt to declare alcoholic beverages evil in themselves—mainly due to their conviction that since Jesus used

³⁷Jonadab, “The Pledge of Total Abstinence, no. 3” CO 17.38 (September 23, 1843) 151.

³⁸“Aminadab” authored a defense of old temperance in December 1843-January 1844 in the Charleston Observer, but Gildersleeve considered the attempt a total failure (Jan 13, 1844).

³⁹Eliab, “No. 2” CO 18.5 (February 3, 1844) 18.

⁴⁰Eliab, “No. 2” CO 18.5 (February 3, 1844) 18.

⁴¹CO 18.6 (February 10, 1844). Three weeks later “Melanchthon” defended the two-wine theory, arguing that the primary sense of wine was the unfermented juice of the grape, since it was inconceivable that the same substance should be both a blessing and a curse. (March 2, 1844) 35. He had obviously never considered the role of water in the scriptures.

alcoholic wine in the Lord's Supper, it could not be evil in itself. In 1841 Rev. John Maclean (professor of ancient languages at the College of New Jersey) wrote a scathing review of two prize essays on temperance, declaring "that they are utterly untenable, being contrary to the word of God and the testimony of antiquity." While professing to embrace the goals of the temperance societies, Maclean regretted "that in the prosecution of an object so important, and so benevolent, the authors have not confined themselves to arguments which will stand the most rigid scrutiny."⁴² Maclean agreed that total abstinence from alcoholic beverages was a wise decision on the grounds of expedience,

But when they invade the sanctuary of God, and teach for doctrine the commandments of men; when they wrest the scriptures, and make them speak a language at variance with the truth; when they assume positions opposed to the precepts of Christ, and to the peace of his church; when, in reference to wine, which the Saviour made the symbol of his shed blood, in the most sacred rite of his holy religion, they assert that it is a thing condemned of God and injurious to men, and use the language of the Judaizing teachers in the ancient church, 'touch not, taste not, handle not,' when Christ has commanded all his disciples to drink of it in remembrance of him, we cannot consent to let such sentiments pass without somewhat of the rebuke which they so richly deserve.⁴³

Maclean then launched into an extensive review of antiquity, both biblical and secular, in order to demonstrate that the "two-wine" theory was a modern fabrication. Maclean objected that the radical temperance movement had determined in their own minds that alcohol was evil, and then tried to foist that opinion and practice upon Jesus and the apostles. In reply, he argued that such a position denied not only the authority of scripture,

⁴²"Bacchus and Anti-Bacchus," BRPR 13.2 (April 1841) 268.

⁴³"Bacchus and Anti-Bacchus," BRPR 13.2 (April 1841) 268-9. It is, perhaps, illustrative of how little care the radical temperance authors used in their study of the Bible, that they chose to use the phrase, "touch not, taste not, handle not" (from Colossians 2:21) approvingly—since the apostle Paul is condemning the phrase!

but the authority of Jesus: “We are not at liberty first to decide whether a thing is right or wrong, and then, in accordance with that decision, determine what Christ either did or did not do. And yet this mode of reasoning and judging, a mode to which all heretics invariably have recourse, is the very one employed by the writers of these Essays, and other distinguished advocates of the total abstinence scheme.”⁴⁴ Maclean cited a letter from Edward Delavan to the New York Observer, which illustrated his point. Delavan had written: “I found it impossible to bring my mind to think that he [Jesus] would make and use a beverage which, since its introduction, has spread such an amount of crime, poverty, and death, through this fair world. He came to save, not to destroy, and could I believe, with my views of alcoholic wine, that he would make or use it?”⁴⁵ Maclean pointed out that the radical temperance advocates were trying to force the scriptures to fit their own opinions. The two-wine theory was not merely wrong-headed, but was in danger of departing from Christian orthodoxy. Maclean cited the examples of the Universalists and Socinians, who utilized the same logic to eliminate eternal punishment and the atoning death of Christ, respectively. Human reason and conscience, Maclean argued, were not sufficient guides in matters of casuistry.

Maclean’s two essays⁴⁶ quickly became the standard for the Old School defense of using alcoholic wine in communion. But those Old Schoolers most zealous for the temperance cause complained that Maclean came down too hard on Delavan, and

⁴⁴“Bacchus and Anti-Bacchus,” BRPR 13.2 (April 1841) 269.

⁴⁵“Bacchus and Anti-Bacchus,” BRPR 13.2 (April 1841) 271.

⁴⁶The conclusion of “Bacchus and Anti-Bacchus” is found in BRPR 13.4 (October 1841) 471-523.

questioned Princeton's commitment to the temperance cause. In reply the college temperance society started a college pledge where students and faculty vowed term by term to abstain from intoxicating liquors.⁴⁷ Rev. James W. Alexander, professor of Rhetoric and Latin at the college, and son of Archibald Alexander, wrote to the Watchman of the South that he had signed the pledge with the explicit caveat that he did not agree with the new principles of the temperance movement. Echoing Samuel Miller's arguments, Alexander objected to the assumption that "all drinking of intoxicating beverages is sinful," the argument that "the wines of the Scripture were not intoxicating," and "the absurd attempt to withhold 'the cup of the eucharist' and to substitute for it a wretched treacle, or any the like ridiculous and profane imposture." Convinced that these principles opened the door "for rationalistic infidelity," Alexander warned that some had "even staked the Omniscience of our Lord and Master on the decision of this question about wines." Removing wine from the Supper would "empty 'the cup of blessing' to fill it with slops. . . . The stroke aimed at the Lord's sacrament, and at the Lord's followers, is implicitly aimed at the Lord himself. That stroke originates with the Lord's enemies." Any abstinence that included sacramental wine was a practical rejection of the gospel of Christ.⁴⁸

But anyone who sounded anything less than wholly committed to temperance could be assured of further inquiry. When Nathan L. Rice, editor of the Kentucky

⁴⁷P&H (October 14, 1841). All the professors signed the pledge except for Albert Dod and President James Carnahan, who were ill (and signed later).

⁴⁸James W. Alexander, "Temperance in the College of New Jersey" Watchman of the South 5.14 (November 25, 1841) 54. Similar views were dispensed by Anti-Lyaeus, "The Wine Question" Presbyterian 11.24 (June 12, 1841) 94.

Protestant and Herald, called on the church to “only let us avoid the two extremes of indifference and *teetotalism*, and the work [of temperance] will be done,”⁴⁹ readers called on him to explain himself. Rice argued that teetotalism was different from total abstinence. Teetotalism, in Rice’s view was

becoming *intemperately temperate*--more temperate than the Bible requires. This extreme is run into by those who make membership in a Temperance Society a prerequisite to membership in the church; by those who condemn the use of the pure juice of the grape; and by those who exclude wine from the Lord's Supper. We are opposed to the use of intoxicating liquors, whether in the form of ardent spirits, hard cider, or adulterated wines, such as those used in this country generally are.⁵⁰

Likewise when Rice’s colleague and successor, the Rev. S. S. McRoberts (PTS 1831 and stated supply at Bardstown), rejected Delavan’s arguments against using wine at communion, the Rev. R. C. Grundy (pastor at Maysville, and later editor of the *Rechabite*, a monthly temperance magazine) defended the temperance leader’s claim that many drunkards slipped back into their old habits through partaking of communion wine. Grundy argued that the only way to prevent such relapses is to use the pure “fruit of the vine,” and not the ordinary wines then in circulation. Grundy (and numerous other temperance advocates) claimed that most wines are so adulterated that many do “not contain one drop of the juice of the grape,” but rather contain “cider and logwood, and

⁴⁹“Temperance” P&H 9.52 (November 26, 1840).

⁵⁰P&H 10.2 (December 10, 1840). Rice expressed astonishment at the Catholic Temperance Association, because they allowed moderate drinking among those who have not been drunkards. P&H 10.14 (March 4, 1841).

other drugged and poisonous slops.”⁵¹ Grundy pleaded that “the hundreds and thousands of drunkards, now being reformed by the blessing of God, and multitudes of whom are being converted by his grace, demand this investigation. Their scruples and feelings on this subject, must be regarded, and nothing but the plain and simple truth will ever relieve their scruples and quiet their fears.” Echoing the very language that Maclean, Rice, and others feared so greatly, Grundy wondered “who can, for a moment, believe that whilst the benevolence of the gospel is accomplishing such a blessed work of moral reform, the great author of our Holy Religion could have only instituted an ordinance which, when celebrated according to the original institution of it, would tend to counteract and destroy his own work.”⁵² McRoberts agreed that pure wine should be used, but still objected to Delavan’s argument that wine “in ordinary use on communion seasons, has a direct tendency to create a thirst for strong drink.”

⁵¹P&H (Feb 10, 1842). Delavan was often cited as having proven the adulterated character of most American wines. E.g., Benjamin Gildersleeve, “Adulteration of Liquors,” W&O 6.24 (March 20, 1851) 126. Temperance writers frequently tried to frighten people away from drinking wine, though few went so far as “To Wine-Drinkers” in the W&O 2.2 (August 27, 1846) 5, which claimed—without citing any sources—that the French often bathed in wine that they later bottled and sold to the English and Americans. Even those who defended the moderate use of pure wines complained of “the vile stuff which we have been called upon to administer to communicants.” “Wine at the Communion Table,” PH 28.11 (September 9, 1858).

⁵²P&H (Feb 10, 1842). The phrase “pure fruit of the vine” is used both by those arguing for grape juice (Delavan), as well as by those arguing for pure fermented wines. It is not clear which side Grundy is taking—although the lack of outcry against him leads me to believe that he wished to use pure fermented wines. Other papers noted Delavan’s position, and sided with McRoberts. “Ultraism” Watchman of the South 5.27 (February 24, 1842). One month later the Watchman of the South gave notice of the Respondent, a paper issued from Albany, New York (home of William B. Sprague), devoted to defending the Lord’s Supper from Delavan’s attacks. 5.31 (March 24, 1842).

At least initially, the religious press was almost entirely against Delavan. To alter the elements of the Lord's Table is to impair "the sanctity of a divine ordinance."⁵³ "V." argued that a false principle had crept into the temperance movement—namely, that "alcohol. . . is a poison, and therefore all use of it is deleterious to the human system, and is a sin against God: 'malum in se.'" While Maclean may have cut the philological ground out from under the two-wine theory, that did not end the discussion.⁵⁴

A few Old School Presbyterians followed Delavan in rejecting the use of all fermented drink. One author in the Protestant and Herald tried to show that the Bible tolerates wine, "but not the use of intoxicating drinks," which must mean that the wines of the Bible were not fermented.⁵⁵ But the vast majority of Old Schoolers rejected the claim that alcohol was evil in itself, and argued for total abstinence (except for medicinal and sacramental purposes) on the grounds of expedience.⁵⁶

⁵³V. "Wine at Communion, from the Christian Intelligencer," Watchman of the South 5.32 (March 31, 1842) 125. See also PW 1.11 (January 19, 1842).

⁵⁴V. "Wine at Communion, from the Christian Intelligencer," Watchman of the South 5.33 (April 7, 1842) 129. Once again, the editor (in this case, William Swan Plumer) included articles on the formation of temperance and total abstinence societies in the same issue, thereby assuring readers that the paper was not challenging the temperance cause. See also "Wine at the Lord's Supper" Presbyterian 11.45 (November 6, 1841) 178, which was part of a running commentary against Delavan in the Presbyterian that fall.

⁵⁵H, "Temperance" P&H 10.4 (December 24, 1840), 10.5 (December 31, 1840).

⁵⁶The range of views within this "expedience" position varied considerably. On the one hand some argued for exacting a pledge on the grounds of expedience: R. C. Grundy, "Temperance" P&H 10.17 (March 25, 1841), and James, "The Wine Question" The PW 1.13 (March 16, 1842) 49, argued that total abstinence is a duty for every citizen--and especially every Christian, so long as it was done on right principles--namely, "the broad basis. . . of public welfare, and the good of my neighbor." Another author argued that the positive scriptural references to wine were all figurative, and that the sacramental use of wine favored the total abstinence position (though he did not explain why he did not advocate total abstinence from bread). Jonadab, "The Pledge of Total Abstinence from the Charleston Observer," Watchman of the South 7.7 (September 28, 1843). The Watchman of the South 5.39 (May 19, 1842) reported that the Presbytery of Winchester (in western Virginia) had endorsed a teetotal pledge on the grounds of expedience. But S. C. P., "Expediency," Watchman of the South 8.21 (January 9, 1845) 83, while approving the practice of total abstinence, argued from a thorough exegesis of 1 Corinthians 9 that

But if drinking alcoholic beverages was wrong on the grounds of expedience, could one be disciplined for manufacturing, selling, or drinking such beverages? Kentucky was a major battleground in the Old School debate on temperance. In 1841 the Synod of Kentucky voted to approve the formation of a Total Abstinence Society in Kentucky, and called for a “radical change in the existing License Laws” to eliminate tippling.⁵⁷

In the fall of 1842, William L. Breckinridge, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Louisville, set forth what he considered the “Bible Doctrine of Temperance,” in response to those who were arguing for total abstinence as a test of Christian character. Breckinridge denied that the church of Jesus Christ could forbid the use of beverage alcohol on the grounds that Christ never forbade it. He took it as proven by Maclean that the middle east never produced a non-alcoholic wine. Therefore in the language of the temperance advocates, the Savior was “either ignorant of, or rejected, the only safe and effectual way of arresting intemperance--from which I argue, either that we live in a *very* enlightened age, or that all this is profane and blasphemous irreverence towards the Son of God.” Breckinridge zeroed in on the central problem: “the irreverence of pleading conscience for avoiding, as a violation of moral obligation, an act in common life which he encouraged and approved.” If you rebuke those who will not sign the total abstinence

“the *proper* use of wine being right, is not necessarily to be abandoned, because by an *improper* use of it, it has been injurious to others.” Cf. Anti-Lyaeus, “The Wine Question III,” Presbyterian 11.26 (June 26, 1841) 102. Likewise SW argued that wines made from the pure juice of the grape were lawful, but claimed that since 95% of the wines in the United States were “filled with the most unhealthy ingredients,” this became another reason why it was expedient (though not required) to totally abstain even from wine. SW, “Genuine Wine,” Presbyterian Advocate 4.27 (March 30, 1842), 4.28 (April 6, 1842).

⁵⁷P&H 10.51 (November 18, 1841). Other papers applauded lay efforts, such as the memorial signed by more than 6,000 ladies of Cincinnati “praying for the suppression of tippling houses.” “Temperance,” Watchman of the South 7.33 (April 4, 1844).

pledge as encouraging drunkards, then “the Saviour stands among the drunkards.”⁵⁸

Breckinridge pointed out that a Roman Catholic priest had advocated total abstinence as a way of gaining eternal happiness (in an article published in the Kentucky Temperance Banner). This was not strange for a “popish priest,” but that “professedly sound and evangelical Christians should publish such doctrines without any comment. . . and should afterwards defend the expression of them. . . is to be accounted for by the fact, which I am trying to illustrate, that the influence and tendencies of total abstinence societies are adverse to the doctrines of the gospel.” How else, Breckinridge asked, could evangelical Christians defend the idea that taking and keeping the total abstinence pledge would “secure the favor of God and eternal happiness!”⁵⁹ Breckinridge concluded his series by pointing to the odd tendency to view drunks as “excellent men” other than this one “tragic failing.” The reformed drunkard has become a hero—“fastening then in the public mind that distinction between drunkenness and other vices, favorable to the former, which renders it less odious and revolting.” What had happened, Breckinridge wondered, to the traditional Calvinist understanding of sin?⁶⁰

The editor, S. S. McRoberts, had been willing to attack the extremism of Delavan, but he was by no means willing to let Breckinridge’s attack on total abstinence societies pass unchallenged. McRoberts expressed his disappointment that Breckinridge had sided with the drunkards (and was even more upset that he had tried to put the Savior there

⁵⁸William L. Breckinridge, “The New Test of Christian Character Tested, or, the Bible Doctrine of Temperance” P&H 12.1 (October 6, 1842).

⁵⁹Breckinridge, “The New Test of Christian Character Tested.”

⁶⁰Breckinridge, “The New Test of Christian Character Tested.”

too!). “We are pleased to learn that the communications of brother B. have met with such general disapprobation, and in some instances, strong indignation.” Convinced that he was speaking for the vast majority of Kentucky Presbyterians, McRoberts claimed that the total abstinence pledge was not a test of Christian character. Rather, he argued that since 1) drunkenness is a great sin; 2) it is a habit formed by moderate, social drinking; 3) after it is acquired, it cannot be extirpated by reversing the process, that is, by moderate drinking; 4) the utmost that can be said in favor of intoxicating drinks is that they are luxuries; 5) the Bible does not enjoin their use nor forbid their disuse; 6) total abstinence is the only sure cure and the only infallible preventive of intemperance; thus 7) it is the duty of every Christian and philanthropist to unite in this certain mode of rolling back a great tide of misery; and so therefore 8) no Christian or minister who habitually drinks alcoholic beverages is setting a good example.⁶¹ McRoberts argued that because the total abstinence movement had such tremendous success in reforming the nation, it could not possibly be considered evil. While admitting the lawfulness of wine, McRoberts nonetheless argued that “total abstinence does become a duty under certain circumstances.”⁶² The Christian, he argued, is bound to adopt the best plan to eliminate drunkenness. Nothing could be more revolting, he claimed, than Breckinridge’s portrayal of Jesus as a wine-bibber.⁶³ No

⁶¹S. S. McRoberts “A Review of WLB vs Total Abstinence No 1,” P&H 12.6 (November 10, 1842).

⁶²S. S. McRoberts “A Review of WLB vs Total Abstinence No 2,” P&H 12.7 (November 17, 1842).

⁶³S. S. McRoberts “A Review of WLB vs Total Abstinence No 3,” P&H 12.8 (November 24, 1842).

one is bound by conscience to drink alcohol. Since it is expedient to abstain, all Christians should take this path.⁶⁴

Before publishing Breckinridge's reply, the new editor, the Rev. William W. Hill (PTS 1838 and former pastor at Shelbyville), defended his decision to print the response, saying "we ought at least to hear before we condemn," and, revealing the strength of prejudice in the matter, affirmed that he himself was still a member of a temperance society.⁶⁵

Breckinridge likewise began by claiming that he himself practiced total abstinence. His objection to the total abstinence societies was that they claimed abstinence as a Christian duty. Pointing out that McRoberts had written in the Protestant and Herald on June 9, 1842, censuring those who would not take the total abstinence pledge, Breckinridge insisted that the moderate use of wine had the sanction of Christ, and so could be used without censure. He objected to McRobert's insinuation that "my position as to the pledge and these societies subjects me to *suspensions*."⁶⁶

B. The General Assembly of 1843

⁶⁴S. S. McRoberts "A Review of WLB vs Total Abstinence No 4," P&H 12.9 (December 1, 1842).

⁶⁵P&H 12.12 (December 22, 1842).

⁶⁶McRoberts had said that all others who had ever defended moderate drinking were themselves either drinkers or associated with alcoholic interests. WLB, "The Review Reviewed" P&H 12.12 (December 22, 1842). McRoberts replied briefly that "his last piece is made up of gross perversions," and declared that he had no wish to continue the discussion. P&H 12.14 (January 5, 1843). While Breckinridge's tone was a bit strident, it was no worse than McRoberts had been. The condemnation of drinking was such that when William T. Dickson spread rumors in Missouri that there were five Old School ruling elders in Butler County, Pennsylvania, who were drunkards, the Presbyterian Advocate launched an *ad hoc* investigation into the congregations named by Dickson, which resulted in the verdict that "no one of them is in the habit of drinking intoxicating liquor as a beverage." Presbyterian Advocate 7.48 (September 24, 1844).

In the middle of this debate, the Protestant and Herald published the decision of the Synod of Pittsburgh declaring that retailers of alcoholic drinks were guilty of tempting others to drunkenness and therefore should be excluded from the church. The synod refused to say that retailing alcohol was in itself a sin, but claimed that it was nonetheless an “offense.” “X” declared that this decision was entirely wrong-headed. Disclaiming any desire to get caught up in the Breckinridge/McRoberts debate, “X” declared that the question was simply whether the church could exclude someone from the church for something that is not itself sinful. Pleading Christian liberty of conscience, “X” rejected the synod’s decision and hoped that the General Assembly would overturn it.⁶⁷

The question before the Assembly was whether retailing alcoholic beverages was an offense (namely, “anything in the principles or practice of a church-member, which is 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”),⁶⁸ and if so, whether the offense was grave enough to warrant exclusion from the church. The Synod of Pittsburgh had declared that retailing alcoholic beverages was in fact sufficient ground for excommunication, since it destroyed the evidence of Christian character, arguing that “the man who, at the present time, is ignorant of the effect of the practice referred to, in tempting others to sin, and marring their spiritual edification, must be criminally regardless of what is going on

⁶⁷X, “Decision of the Synod of Pittsburg, on the Question of Continuing the Retailer of Alcoholic Drinks in Church Membership,” P&H 12.10 (December 8, 1842). Just three months later, the Kentucky paper announced the new temperance monthly, the Rechabite, edited by the Rev. Robert C. Grundy (PTS 1835, and pastor of the Maysville church).

⁶⁸“Book of Discipline” I.3 The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1839) 460.

around him,” which demonstrates that he cannot have been a subject of regenerating grace.⁶⁹ When the committee of the Assembly that reviewed the Synod’s minutes found this statement, they recommended that the Assembly take exception to it because it virtually made “the retailing of intoxicating drinks a test of piety and a term of membership in the Presbyterian church.”⁷⁰

This launched a lengthy debate on the floor of the Assembly, which was nearly evenly divided. A motion to affirm the Synod’s decision only failed by a 55-63 vote.⁷¹ The Rev. George Hill, pastor at Blairsville, Pennsylvania, and a member of the Synod of Pittsburgh, argued that it was not “the intention of Synod to cast members out of the church, who were already in it,” but to “provide against the reception of those, now out of the Church, who were engaged in this business.” The temperance cause, he insisted, depended upon such measures, and he hoped that the Assembly would uphold the Synod’s decision.⁷² The Rev. Isaac. W. Platt of Bath, New York, replied that “if then we proceed on the principle that every thing is a sin in us that another finds fault with, we shall find reason to exclude every body from communion, and make the Church a desolation.”⁷³

But Dr. John C. Lord, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church at Buffalo, thought that the committee was too hard on the Synod, and offered a substitute which would

⁶⁹Cited in “General Assembly,” BRPR 15.3 (July 1843) 461.

⁷⁰Cited in “General Assembly,” BRPR 15.3 (July 1843) 461.

⁷¹“Debates in the General Assembly,” Presbyterian 13.25 (June 24, 1843) 97.

⁷²“Debates in the General Assembly,” Presbyterian 13.25 (June 24, 1843) 97.

⁷³“Debates in the General Assembly,” Presbyterian 13.25 (June 24, 1843) 97.

condemn the use and sale of ardent spirits, but leave each particular case to the discretion of the church courts. Rev. William L. Breckinridge objected to the implication that retailing alcoholic beverages could be used as a new term of communion. He argued that the Assembly could rejoice in the success of the temperance reforms, but it “cannot sanction any new terms of communion.”⁷⁴ But in the end the Assembly adopted Lord’s substitute, which took exception to the Synod of Pittsburgh’s decision only “so far as they seem to establish a general rule in regard to the use and sale of ardent spirits, which use and sale are generally to be decidedly disapproved, but each case must be decided in view of all the attendant circumstances that go to modify and give character to the same.”⁷⁵ Lord argued that since “public opinion would not sustain the conduct of church members in retailing intoxicating liquor,” the church had to be clear in its condemnation of retailing alcohol.⁷⁶

Charles Hodge commented on this by suggesting that the differences in both church and society on temperance (as also on slavery) boiled down to “certain questions in morals, which are indeed of great practical importance.” Is a thing wrong in itself, “or for reasons extraneous to its own nature”?⁷⁷ Citing the resolutions of the National Temperance Convention in 1841, Hodge showed that the “temperance men” viewed the use and sale of

⁷⁴Cited in “General Assembly,” BRPR 15.3 (July 1843) 461. The Presbyterian report indicates that Dr. Maclean and the Rev. J. S. Watt spoke on behalf of Breckinridge’s substitute, while the Rev. D. X. Junkin argued that Lord’s substitute was wise. It appears that Breckinridge’s substitute was defeated 52-68.

⁷⁵Minutes (1843) 189. This will be the same sort of argument that many (especially northwesterners) would follow in their antislavery arguments. See chapter eight.

⁷⁶“Debates in the General Assembly,” Presbyterian 13.25 (June 24, 1843) 97.

⁷⁷“General Assembly,” BRPR 15.3 (July 1843) 462.

alcoholic beverages as “in itself an immorality.” This was no circumstantial argument—no appeal to expedience—but a declaration that alcohol was evil in itself. And since the scripture speaks of alcoholic beverages in a positive fashion, Hodge insisted that such doctrines were “infidel in its spirit and tendency.” As further proof, he reminded his readers that Dr. Maclean had been “constantly more or less defamed, because he refuses to submit his judgment and conscience to this new and self-created tribunal of moral principle and conduct.”⁷⁸ While no one in the whole Assembly had taken the “ultra” position openly, Hodge argued that the “ultra” position was the only one that could make retailing alcoholic beverages an offense worthy of discipline. If one took the ground of expedience (which all Old Schoolers claimed to do), then the question of the use or sale of alcohol was an indifferent matter—and no indifferent matter could be considered a case for discipline. “It follows, therefore, that any rule of duty founded on expediency must be variable. . . . If the obligation arises from circumstances, it must vary with circumstances.”⁷⁹ Indeed, Hodge argued, in some contexts abstinence from alcohol could “countenance false doctrines, or false principles of morals, or sanction infidel sentiments, or add weight to infidel measures,” in which case drinking alcohol could be most expedient. If the matter is to be decided by expedience, then the question must be left to the individual conscience.⁸⁰

⁷⁸“General Assembly,” BRPR 15.3 (July 1843) 464.

⁷⁹“General Assembly,” BRPR 15.3 (July 1843) 465.

⁸⁰“General Assembly,” BRPR 15.3 (July 1843) 466.

Hodge therefore argued that the action of the Assembly had in effect created a new term of communion. If Jesus created no such terms, then we may not either. Hodge feared that in her haste to avoid the sin of intemperance, the church was falling into the opposite extreme.⁸¹

So while making it clear that the Old School would proceed on the basis of expedience, the Assembly of 1843 did not provide any closure to the temperance issue. In 1848 the Synod of Cincinnati determined that “in the present state of society, to manufacture or sell ardent spirits (except for mechanical or medicinal purposes) is in the judgment of this Synod an offence of such a character, as justly to debar persons so engaged from the communion of the church.”⁸² The year before, “Philos” had urged this action, claiming that “it is a great sin for a Christian to pursue a calling which results in no good, but in great evil to his neighbor. . . . We therefore come to this conclusion, that no person can pursue a calling that necessarily results in great evil to society, without sinning grievously against God.”⁸³

⁸¹“General Assembly,” BRPR 15.3 (July 1843) 467.

⁸²L., “New Term of Communion in the Presbyterian Church,” PW 4.10 (November 30, 1848) 38. In the same issue, it was reported that the Synod of New York refused to make temperance a test of church membership. The Synod of Pittsburgh went unchallenged in 1855 when it declared that “members of the Church engaged in the traffic of intoxicating drinks as a beverage are liable to discipline when they sell contrary to the law of the land, or the laws of God.” PM 5.12 (December 1855) 562. Indeed, the 1848 “Narrative of the State of Religion,” adopted by the General Assembly, for the first time urged all Presbyterians to “have nothing to do with the traffic in intoxicating liquors, and discountenance in every proper way the drinking usages of society.” Minutes (1848) 168. The committee consisted of ministers Dr. Samuel McFarren, pastor of Congruity, PA, Dr. William Smith, editor of the Presbyterian of the West, Lancelot G. Bell, pastor of Fairfield, IA, and Melancthon W. Jacobus, professor at Western Theological Seminary, along with elders S. Millspaugh of Hudson Presbytery (NY), Alexander Cromartie of Florida Presbytery (FL), and C. S. Carrington of West Hanover Presbytery (VA). The fact that the three leading ministers on the committee were members of synods that had taken similar actions suggests that the moderator, Alexander T. McGill of Western Theological Seminary, may have desired some such statement.

⁸³Philos, “No 1--Church Membership” PW (November 18, 1847) 234.

“L” replied to the synod’s action by wondering why they still used wine for the Lord’s Supper. “Why not go as far as others have gone before them, and substitute molasses and water, or some such miserable *invention*, instead of wine?” If Jesus was known as a wine-bibber, why was the church so afraid of alcohol? He complained that the synod had devised a new term of communion unknown to Christ.⁸⁴

“Kappa” argued in return that the moral principle was clear. Claiming that he was not trying to establish a new term of communion, he argued that simply moral reasoning vindicated the synod:

the thief is morally guilty, because his practices, if universal, would take away all security from property. . . . adultery discourages marriage. . . . By parity of reasoning, the liquor manufacturer, or seller, takes the property of men without an equivalent; ministers to a depraved appetite, which, in most cases, ends in his ruin--breaks the heat of his wife, and causes neglect of the proper education of his children.⁸⁵

Therefore the church should not allow a man who sells or manufactures liquor to the ruin of countless thousands to remain a member of the church of Jesus Christ.⁸⁶

Subtly, the practice of the church was beginning to alter her theology. While the formal doctrine taught in the seminaries and from the pulpits of the church remained orthodox Calvinism, the theology reflected in the total abstinence writings suggests that a different theology was at work. In “The Tippling Elder,” W. S. bemoaned the thought that

⁸⁴L., “New Term of Communion in the Presbyterian Church,” PW 4.10 (November 30, 1848) 38.

⁸⁵Kappa, “Tests of Communion,” PW 4.11 (December 7, 1848).

⁸⁶“Alcohol a Poison--Can the Traffic in it be Right?” W&O 1.51 (August 6, 1846) 204. This article pointed to scientific studies that showed that alcohol actually killed a great proportion of those who drink it. One Dublin physician (Dr. Cheyne) claimed that two ounces of alcohol per day could reduce life by 10 years. The same author argued that “alcohol *naturally* tends to destroy life,” so those who sell alcohol are guilty of supplying the weapons for murder. “Alcohol vs. the Bible,” W&O 2.2 (August 27, 1846).

“such an appellation should ever be applied to one bearing rule in the house of God!” The elder who merely takes an occasional dram sets a bad example to the church. When he comes to prayer meeting with “that peculiar odor on his *breath*. . . no one cares to hear him pray, or feels much confidence that his prayers will avail with God.” Indeed, he remarked, this “*grieves the church*, especially the more spiritual members.” The suggestions that an occasional dram of whisky could affect one’s standing with God, or that the “spiritual members” of the church would be the ones most offended by this action, do not seem to mesh with the formal theology of the Presbyterian church.⁸⁷

_____C. *The Political Turn*

But with a new practical understanding of the theology of sin came a new focus on how to solve the problem of drunkenness. While occasional legal and political action was urged in the earlier phase of the temperance movement, only in the 1840s did liquor license laws become a center-piece of the reform, as it connected with anti-Catholic fears to establish the Know-Nothing Party.⁸⁸

In the early 1850s, Old School newspapers constantly debated the propriety and wisdom of the “Maine Laws.”⁸⁹ The temperance societies had accomplished a great deal,

⁸⁷W. S. “The Tippling Elder,” *PW* 16.22 (February 19, 1857). If W. S. are the author’s initials, then he might possibly be Dr. William M. Scott, pastor of Seventh Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, Dr. J. W. Scott, president of Oxford Female College, or Rev. W. S. Rogers, professor in Oxford Female College. The former is the most likely case, given his proximity to the newspaper.

⁸⁸Pegram notes that 728 out of 856 New York towns went dry between 1846-1848. (38)

⁸⁹Tyler Anbinder has connected the success of the Maine Laws with the rise of the Know Nothings. Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 142; also Pegram, 40-42.

reducing the per capita consumption considerably. But the goal of the temperance reformation—the complete reformation of the country—was still unfulfilled, and the recent immigrants from Ireland and Germany seemed impervious to traditional moral reform.

Edward C. Delavan had argued that it is the duty of the state to protect its citizens, which should result in laws prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages. Indeed, Delavan argued that such laws were of God.⁹⁰ The Old School was divided in its response. While most Old School Presbyterians found Delavan too extreme for their tastes, some tended to agree that prohibitory laws would have a salutary benefit for society—as well as for the church.

Some feared that legal action against alcoholic beverages might have undesirable implications. The Rev. Samuel Beach Jones (PTS 1836 and pastor of Bridgeton, NJ) thought that civil action could be useful, but argued that “all natural rights, the exercise of which does not interfere with the obvious rights of others, or with the necessary power of the State, should be left to the individual.” Claiming that atheism, communism and Mormonism, if “extensively adopted and acted upon. . . would curse society worse than drunkenness,” Jones reminded his hearers that “unless the abettors of these sentiments so reduce their theories to practice as to threaten social order and civil interests, it is best, on the whole, to tolerate their doctrines.”⁹¹ Since the state of New Jersey had determined that “the general use of intoxicating drinks is a habit dangerous to society,” it was appropriate

⁹⁰“Letter of Mr Delavan to the Editor of the State Register, New York” W&O 8.52 (August 4, 1853).

⁹¹Samuel Beach Jones, “Temperance, The Civil Law, and the Gospel” PM 2.9 (September, 1852) 387. This was given as a lecture at a Temperance Mass Meeting in Bridgeton NJ.

to penalize those who became drunk, as well as those who helped them become drunk.

Nonetheless, Jones argued that Christians should not put their hope in legislation. The only way to eradicate evil was through the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁹²

In 1853, the Rev. Robert P. Dubois (PTS 1836 and pastor at New London, PA) revealed the way in which the revision of the doctrine of sin affected political theory. Arguing that moral suasion had failed, Dubois suggested that attempts at regulation through liquor licenses were “radically wrong,” because they merely tried to regulate sin. The only way to succeed against intemperance is through absolute prohibition. “After long dealing with persuasive *words*, and still longer with inefficient *regulations*, the time has come *to act*.” Vending intoxicating drinks should be considered a crime. The confiscation and destruction of all alcoholic beverages was the only way to end the curse once and for all. The time for moderation, Dubois argued, was past.⁹³

The earliest references come from the mid-1840s, when Allegheny city voted against allowing liquor licenses, leading William Annan, editor of the Presbyterian Advocate to rejoice that alcohol distribution had been declared “an unmitigated nuisance and curse to all the best interests of society.”⁹⁴ While the historical literature has focused

⁹²Samuel Beach Jones, “Temperance, The Civil Law, and the Gospel” PM 2.9 (September, 1852) 385-395.

⁹³“Robert P. Dubois, “The Three Ways of Dealing with Intemperance,” PM 3.9 (September 1853) 402.

⁹⁴Presbyterian Advocate 9.13 (January 20, 1847). The Presbyterian Advocate probably discussed the Maine Law more than any other Presbyterian paper in 1851.

on the north, the Watchman and Observer noted that such laws were prevailing in a number of southern communities by 1852.⁹⁵

In 1854 Ohio passed a regulatory law prohibiting the sale of alcohol for consumption in the same location (along with forbidding the sale of alcohol to those who were intoxicated, or to minors without parental consent).⁹⁶ Writers in the Presbyterian Herald of Louisville and the Presbyterian of the West of Cincinnati urged the prohibition of liquor licenses for the sake of the temperance cause.⁹⁷ The Rev. Joseph G. Monfort, pastor at Greensburg, Indiana, published an influential sermon in both papers, entitled “The Maine Law God’s Law.” The sermon’s text was Exodus 21:28-30, which says that if an ox is known to be dangerous, and the owner does not keep it controlled, then if the ox kills someone, the owner is guilty of murder and should be put to death. Using a traditional Presbyterian argument from the equity of the Old Testament civil law, Monfort applied the same principle to alcohol. Property that is known to cause harm to others should be destroyed. Monfort argued that while the death penalty for such crimes was no longer applicable, the principle that a person should be held responsible for his property remained in force.⁹⁸

⁹⁵W&O 7.44 (June 24, 1852). Indeed Virginians Presbyterians could applaud the abolitionist Wendell Phillips as late as 1859 for publicly rebuking Lemuel Shaw, chief justice of Massachusetts, and James Walker, president of Harvard, for defending the consumption of alcohol. As the editors noted, “his rabid ultraism on one topic does not disqualify him for administering reproof to those whose example may lead many astray.” CP 4.39 (Sept 24, 1859) 156.

⁹⁶PW (May 11, 1854). The law also forbade the sale of alcohol on Sundays.

⁹⁷“A Just Ground for Alarm” PH 23.46-49 (July 13, 20, 27, August 3, 1854).

⁹⁸J. G. Monfort, “The Maine Law God's Law” PH 24.6 (October 12, 1854), reprinted in the PW 14.13 (December 14, 1854). It is noteworthy that an Indianan published first in the Kentucky paper. The editor of the Presbyterian of the West, John D. Thorpe (a ruling elder and friend of the former editor,

But would legislation work? Initially, the reports from Maine sounded quite positive. Six months after the law went into effect, Neal Dow, the Mayor of Portland, Maine, claimed that the house of correction for drunkards was empty, and he expected that steady enforcement would eliminate “a large proportion of the poverty, pauperism, crime, and suffering with which we have been afflicted.”⁹⁹ Four months later, Maine claimed that the drunkenness rate had dropped fifty to seventy-five per cent.¹⁰⁰ After three years, however, Presbyterian editors had to acknowledge that the Maine laws hadn’t worked out very well in Maine.¹⁰¹ In 1855 the Presbyterian Magazine published a list of states that had attempted to enact some sort of Maine Law. Eleven states had prohibited the sale of intoxicating drinks (in varying degrees), but in four of these states, the statutes had been struck down.

Nathan L. Rice), was opposed to the social agenda of the Monforts. In December, however, Monfort arranged to take over the Presbyterian of the West as of January 1, 1855. His sermon, therefore, heralded the change in perspective that would turn the Cincinnati paper into the most radical Old School periodical.

⁹⁹“Maine Liquor Law” PW 7.22 (February 19, 1852) 85.

¹⁰⁰PW 7.35 (May 20, 1852).

¹⁰¹W&O 10.36 (April 4, 1855).

State	Law Passed	Struck Down	By
Maine	1851		
Minnesota	1852	1853	State Supreme Court
Rhode Island	1852	1853	US Supreme Court
	1853		
Massachusetts	1852		
Vermont	1852		
Michigan	1853	1854	State Supreme Court
Ohio	1854	1854	State Supreme Court
New York	1854	1854	Governor (vetoed)
Pennsylvania	1854		(different bills passed both houses)
Connecticut	1854		
Wisconsin	1854		
Maryland	1854		(only passed by one house)
Source: "The Maine Law" <u>PM</u> 5.2 (February, 1855) 88			

Figure 4.1. The Failure of the Maine Laws, 1851-1854

While recognizing the legal challenges of such laws, the author suggested that it was encouraging to note that legislatures passed the laws fairly easily, and the people ratified constitutional amendments willingly. The main problem was in the courts.¹⁰²

By the 1860s two camps had emerged: those who advocated immediate political action, and those who argued that the church must rely upon moral suasion, though allowing that the state could "prohibit by law the manufacture and sale of intoxicating drinks as an article of common beverage."¹⁰³

Alfred Nevin, editor of the Presbyterian Standard in Philadelphia, objected to those who argued that the simple preaching of the gospel would bring moral reform. "The men

¹⁰²"The Maine Law" PM 5.2 (February, 1855) 88.

¹⁰³Northwestern Presbyterian 1.10 (Feb 10, 1865). The Presbyter took the more radical temperance ground. An article in the Northwest Presbyterian argued in 1866 for the complete eradication of temperance societies. Such societies are worthless, because "the State is Gods institution for the repressing of depravity in its more immediately destructive manifestations. . . let her lay a hand of iron upon saloons, those slaughter houses of our young men, those 'breathing holes of hell,'" and then true reformation will come. But far from advocating teetotaling, this author suggested that if pure fermented wines would replace the drugged slops of the day, then a true temperance would result. "A Subscriber" to the Presbyter replied with horror that this sort of argument would promote moderate drinking. "Temperance and the Church, from the Northwest Presbyterian" Presbyter (January 31, 1866).

to whom the Gospel is preached, and who profess to have given it the throne of their hearts, must let its elevating, purifying and sanctifying influence exert itself *through them* upon the corrupt and putrid mass of society.” Every Christian must “realize his personal responsibility in the great business of the world's regeneration. . . . He must not only wish that God's kingdom might come, and wait for it, but work for this grand issue with all his might.”¹⁰⁴

The rhetoric of the temperance movement had overpowered the pragmatic reasons why Old School Presbyterians had entered the movement. While some historians have tried to make direct connections between abolitionism and teetotalism, as far as the Old School is concerned the similarity is theological and ideological rather than individual. The Kentucky debates reveal that the Breckinridge brothers themselves were divided over the temperance issue.¹⁰⁵ But subtly the church was beginning to allow matters of individual conscience to become matters for the corporate conscience.

¹⁰⁴Editorial, “Let the Gospel Do It,” Presbyterian Standard 4.3 (April 14, 1864).

¹⁰⁵The authors in this chapter who argued that total abstinence was a Christian duty include Robert J. Breckinridge, William Swan Plumer, John C. Lord, Robert C. Grundy, S. S. McRoberts, Robert P. Dubois, William Annan, Joseph G. Monfort, and Alfred Nevin. Monfort and Nevin would be zealous leaders of the antislavery cause in the late 1850s, while Lord and Plumer were prominent conservatives.

2. A Brief Excursus on Tobacco

While tobacco did not excite nearly the level of discussion that alcohol did, there was still a fair amount of debate. Elijah Slack argued that tobacco squanders money, destroys health (his claim was that it required an “unnatural draw upon the salivary glands”), and created an artificial excitement inconsistent with Christian character.¹⁰⁶ Other writers identified the use of tobacco with that of alcohol as inherently intemperate, “and viewing the habit in this light, it is a *sin* which ought to be repented of and put away, or forsaken.”¹⁰⁷ Still others pointed to the addictive properties of tobacco and connected it in that respect to alcohol.¹⁰⁸ But others defended the moderate use of tobacco, arguing that no

This Indian weed, now wither'd quite,
Though green at noon, cut down at night,
Shows thy decay,
All flesh is hay,
Thus think, and smoke tobacco.

The pipe, so city-like and weak,
Does thus thy mortal state bespeak,
Thou art ev'n such,
Gone with a touch,
Thus think and smoke tobacco

And when the smoke ascends on high,
Then thou behold'st the vanity
Of worldly stuff,
Gone with a puff,
Thus think, and smoke tobacco.

And when the pipe grows foul within,
Think on thy soul, defil'd with sin;
For then the fire
It does require.
Thus think, and smoke tobacco, &c, &c.

Source: St Louis Presbyterian (October 28, 1858).

Figure 4.2. “Smoking Spiritualized” by Ralph Erskine

¹⁰⁶Elijah Slack, “Physical Excitement. Tobacco--Its Moral Character,” PW 6.29 (April 10, 1851).

¹⁰⁷L. A. S., “Tobacco” PW 6.45 (July 31, 1851), 6.46 (August 7, 1851). “Luke,” in the W&O 6.21 (February 27, 1851), attacks tobacco usage by Ministers and professors as a disgusting and filthy habit, unbecoming a minister of Christ. The latest scientific analysis was published in “Tobacco and Snuff” PM 5.9 (September, 1855) 417, which suggested that twenty thousand Americans were dying every year due to tobacco related diseases: “They say that the article exhausts and deranges the nervous powers, and produces a long train of nervous diseases to which the stomach is liable, and especially those forms that go under the name of dyspepsia. It also exerts a disastrous influence upon the mind.”

¹⁰⁸Aliquis, “The Confession of a Tobacco Chewer,” CO 16.30 (July 23, 1842) 119. Gildersleeve replies by insisting that it is possible to break the habit, just like alcohol.

moral or religious principle was compromised. “Erskine” even republished a poem by the famous eighteenth-century Scottish minister, Ralph Erskine, as a semi-humorous means of defense.¹⁰⁹

3. The Marriage Question

The second case regarding moral discipline at the 1843 General Assembly was the judicial appeal of the Rev. Archibald McQueen. On January 5, 1842, McQueen was suspended from the gospel ministry and from “church ordinances” by the Presbytery of Fayetteville (North Carolina) for the sin of incest, having recently married the sister of his deceased wife.¹¹⁰

In one respect the case was rather simple. The church’s Confession of Faith declared that “the man may not marry any of his wife’s kindred, nearer in blood than he may of his own: nor the woman of her husband’s kindred, nearer in blood than of her own.”¹¹¹ Since it was manifestly forbidden to marry one’s own sister, marrying one’s deceased wife’s sister was equally incestuous in the eyes of the church.

¹⁰⁹Erskine, “Is the Use of Tobacco Sinful?” St Louis Presbyterian 14.18 (October 28, 1858) 70.

¹¹⁰McQueen had been privately trained in the 1820s in North Carolina and until his suspension was pastor at Laurel Hill, NC. After his suspension he remained in regular attendance at the Laurel Hill church in quiet submission to the decision of the presbytery. A second case of suspension at around the same time was the case of the Rev. Joseph Huber, who had married his deceased wife’s sister in 1835, and was merely rebuked by the synod; but then married the niece of his two deceased wives in 1840, which resulted in the Louisville Presbytery suspending him from office and excommunicating him from the church due to his contumacy in repeating an offense for which he had been previously rebuked. One author praised the Presbytery of Louisville for bearing “decisive and effectual testimony against this insidious enormity which faithfulness to the Lord Jesus peremptorily demands.” JHR, “Action of the Presbytery of Louisville, in the Case of Rev’d Mr. Huber,” BLRM 7.5 (May, 1841) 210; cf. “Presbytery of Louisville,” Watchman of the South 4.21 (Jan 14, 1841) which consisted of a letter from the stated clerk, William L. Breckinridge.

¹¹¹“The Confession of Faith” 24.4, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1839) 136.

A. The General Assembly of 1842

But McQueen argued that the Confession was wrong, and appealed to the Bible. The General Assembly of 1842 agreed that this was a proper appeal (since the Confession was not considered infallible) and engaged in a long debate on the “marriage question.” In McQueen’s absence, the Rev. John Krebs, the pastor of Rutgers Street Church in New York City, was appointed to speak on his behalf.¹¹² In his annual review of the Assembly, Charles Hodge complained that this resulted in a confused defense, since Krebs had not come to the Assembly prepared for such a case. McQueen’s close friend, the Rev. Colin McIver, pastor of the Galatia and Barbacue churches in North Carolina, who under any other circumstances would have been the counsel for the defense, now stood on the opposite side as the prosecutor.

The issue before the church was the question of conscience. If the Word of God did not forbid the marriage of Archibald McQueen to his deceased wife’s sister, then the church had no business forbidding it. As the same Confession declared, “God alone is the Lord of the conscience; and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship.”¹¹³ What happened when an individual conscience could not concur with the corporate conscience of the church, as expressed in the Confession?

¹¹²A difficult task, since he had never spoken with McQueen. “The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 498.

¹¹³“The Confession of Faith” 20.2, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1839) 113. While this was a major concern in the marriage question, it is interesting that few appealed to it in the temperance debates.

The Rev. Benjamin F. Stanton, an older pastor in Hanover, Virginia, argued that the church must distinguish between “what is fundamental in the confession and what is of minor importance.”¹¹⁴ The Confession forbade people from marrying infidels or papists, but he had never heard of anyone being subjected to censure for such marriages. Stanton argued that the question could not be decided by an appeal to the authority of the Westminster Divines, or what the Reformers thought. “Nor is this question to be decided by expediency.” The question is simple. “If you cannot show a Thus saith the Lord; if you cannot produce an express command of God prohibiting the marriage in question, the appellant cannot be condemned.”¹¹⁵

The question revolved around the interpretation of the one passage of scripture that spoke directly to the subject: “Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her lifetime” (Leviticus 18:18).¹¹⁶ Stanton argued that these laws did not refer to marriage, but to “certain aggravated forms of fornication and adultery.” Therefore the Confession was wrong, and the matter should be left, “as the Bible leaves civil and ecclesiastical governments, to be decided by the views and exigencies of society.”¹¹⁷ But, even if they did relate to marriage, they would have no authority over us, being a part of the “Levitical law which Christ has abrogated.” Stanton

¹¹⁴Stanton had graduated in the first full class from Princeton Seminary in 1815. “The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 499. Hodge states that most of his report comes from the New York Observer, but since he was a commissioner to the Assembly, he seems to have supplemented that report with his own recollections.

¹¹⁵“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 500.

¹¹⁶I quote the King James Version, which was the version used by all Protestants at the time. Other verses from Leviticus and Deuteronomy were also involved in the discussion.

¹¹⁷“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 501.

claimed that “it is altogether arbitrary and unauthorized for any man, or set of men, to take a code of laws and retain what they please and throw out what they please, and then expect their expurgated code to be received as of divine authority. If this law is binding, it is binding in all its parts; we must not wear linsey-woolsey garments, nor sow diverse seed in the same field.”¹¹⁸ And finally, even if they could be shown to be binding, “we have still the stronger ground that the marriage of a man with the sister of his deceased wife, is nowhere forbidden in the Levitical law.”¹¹⁹ The phrase, “in her lifetime” makes it clear that once she is dead, a man is free to marry her sister. Pointing to the Hebrew institution of Levirate marriage, where a man was required to marry his deceased brother’s wife, he argued that such marriages could not be considered sinful. Stanton warned in conclusion that the Assembly should not seek to go against “public sentiment” in the matter, since the largest portion of the Christian world approved of such marriages.

In reply, the Presbytery of Fayetteville (represented by the Rev. Colin McIver) argued that if indeed, Stanton was correct regarding the “great mass of Christian men in all ages,” then he would have created a presumption in favor of McQueen. But they claimed antiquity was on their side, arguing that the language of the Confession was a simple rendition of the old canon law, which they traced back to the Apostolic Constitutions in the third century. “As this law was of authority in all the western churches before the reformation, so the various Protestant communions adhered to its provisions as far as our

¹¹⁸“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 501.

¹¹⁹“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 502.

Confession retains them.”¹²⁰ It had also been uniformly enforced by the Presbyterian Church in America, both during the colonial era and as recently as 1827 (a situation also stemming from a case in the Presbytery of Fayetteville).¹²¹

Having established the pedigree of his argument, McIver turned to the reason why such a marriage should be considered incestuous. The relations between a sister and her brother are incompatible with the relations between a woman and her husband. “Habitual, familiar, confidential intercourse, such as must and should exist among members of the same family, between young persons of different sexes,” cannot be allowed among those who are allowed to intermarry. The sister-in-law, he claimed, was in the same relation to a man as his own sister. “He is her brother-in-law, that is in the sight of the law of God and man.”¹²² As such, it is “in the highest degree dangerous” to allow the possibility that she might one day marry him. “She will shrink from him as from every other man. She will become a stranger in her sister's house, and to her sister's children,” because she is forced

¹²⁰“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 504. McIver then traced the history from the Reformation through the colonial Presbyterian church, citing numerous cases where the old Synod had regularly decided against such marriages. In 1762 the Synod declared: “That as the Levitical law, enforced by the law of the land, is the only rule whereby we are to judge of marriages, whosoever marry within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden therein act unlawfully, and have no right to the distinguishing privileges of the church. . . while they continue in this relation.” 506. McIver admitted that in 1782 the Synod had restored a couple after a three year suspension, but they had plainly affirmed that the marriage had been unlawful.

¹²¹The 1827 General Assembly had declared that the only way to change the practice of the church was to alter the Confession, and had asked the presbyteries to report if they wanted this change. Only eighteen of the ninety presbyteries had replied in the affirmative. “The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 508. McIver would publish An Essay concerning the Unlawfulness of a Man's Marrying with his Sister by Affinity (Philadelphia: H. Hooker, 1842), which was favorably reviewed in R. J. Breckinridge's Spirit of the XIXth Century 2.3 (March, 1843) 151-157.

¹²²“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 510.

to look upon her brother-in-law no longer as a protector, but a stranger.¹²³ This, then was the reason why God forbade such marriages in Leviticus 18. “It has its foundation in the essential principles of our nature; and in the constitution of society. Men may legalize such marriages, but they never can cease to be violations of the law of nature.”¹²⁴

Turning then to the scriptures, McIver confessed that he was horrified to hear Stanton’s claim that the Scripture had no law against incest. McIver argued that those laws are binding which “express the will of God in reference to those duties which arise out of our permanent relations to him and to our fellow men.”¹²⁵ He claimed that Levirate marriage was an exception to the general rule. “It is a sin for a brother to marry his sister, but if required by a divine command, it is a sin no longer. Thus, also, if any one can produce a divine command to marry his sister-in-law, the lawfulness of the marriage will be readily admitted.”¹²⁶ McIver tried to escape the force of the phrase “in her lifetime” by pointing out that Stanton’s reading (that a man was forbidden to take a woman’s sister as a second wife) would mean that God was approving of polygamy. Since this could not be the case, McIver argued that the verse was actually a prohibition of polygamy, rendering “sister” in a figurative sense: “Thou shalt not take one wife to another, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, besides the other in her life time.”¹²⁷ Utilizing the same approach

¹²³“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 511.

¹²⁴“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 512. That this argument should have occupied such a central place in McIver’s speech is helpful for understanding why he could not possibly accept Stanton’s argument (or that of his close friend, Archibald McQueen).

¹²⁵“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 515.

¹²⁶“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 517.

¹²⁷“The General Assembly,” BRPR 14.3 (July 1842) 519.

to scripture found by the radical temperance movement, McIver could not accept the thought that God might have at one time tolerated something now judged “evil,” and therefore rejected the literal meaning of the text.

The vote, which was concluded on June 3rd (the fifteenth, and next to the last day of the Assembly) was overwhelmingly against McQueen’s appeal, 11-68, with eight voting to sustain in part (which usually meant that they agreed with the verdict, but thought that the sentence was too extreme).¹²⁸ Of the nineteen who voted to sustain at least in part, nine were from the northeast, and three were from the southwest, and only two southwesterners voted against McQueen.

This prompted considerable discussion of the marriage question throughout the church, resulting in several overtures from two synods and four presbyteries requesting the 1843 General Assembly to begin the process of amending the Confession to eliminate the prohibition. The geographical location of these overtures is intriguing. They came from the synods of New Jersey and Alabama, along with the presbyteries of Troy (upstate New York), New York (New York City), West Lexington (central Kentucky) and the Western District (western Tennessee). The northeast and the southwest led the movement to change the Confession.¹²⁹

¹²⁸Minutes (1842) 44. Since the Assembly had originally consisted of over 150 members, this means that nearly half of the Assembly had left before the McQueen case was concluded.

¹²⁹The Synod of New Jersey had voted 57-24 for the overture, convinced by the arguments of Dr. Maclean, the vice-president of the College of New Jersey, and Dr. Yeomans, the president of Lafayette College. Albert Dod of the College of New Jersey and Charles Hodge of Princeton Seminary had defended the confessional position. “The Synod of New Jersey” Presbyterian 12.44 (October 29, 1842) 174. The Synod of Alabama later concurred. “Synod of Alabama,” Presbyterian 13.13 (April 1, 1843) 50. The 1826 General Assembly had sent the same overture down, but fewer than a quarter of the presbyteries had supported it. “Marriage Question,” Watchman of the South 8.42 (June 5, 1845) 165.

B. The General Assembly of 1843

At the 1843 Assembly, the committee of Bills and Overtures recommended that the Assembly approve the amendment to the Confession, and send it to the presbyteries for consideration.¹³⁰ The minority of the committee, Dr. John C. Lord of Buffalo, and the Rev. Hiram Chamberlain of St. Louis dissented, insisting that the present wording of the Confession was entirely adequate.

In the debate, Dr. Maclean of the College of New Jersey argued that the Confession of the Presbyterian Church should only contain those things that the church agreed upon. Since “hundreds of our ministers and thousands of our church-members, with whom the speaker fully sympathized,” believed that the confession was erroneous on this point, and since “the other churches by which we are surrounded, the laws of the land, and the general sentiment of the country were in favour of the lawfulness of marriages which our book condemns,” it would be expedient to revise the Confession.¹³¹

Dr. James Hoge suggested that the whole matter should be referred to a committee which could give the church better direction on the matter. While he agreed wholeheartedly with the Confession, he thought that in fairness to those who desired the

¹³⁰The amendment process required the Assembly to send any proposal for constitutional change to the presbyteries. Then if a majority of the presbyteries approved, the Assembly could enact it. Form of Government (1834)12.6 (p431).

¹³¹One western author surveyed state marriage laws, pointed out that only in Virginia was it illegal to marry one's deceased wife's sister. Connecticut and Kentucky had revoked those laws in 1793 and 1798 respectively. In Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin, the only requirement was that the male must be 18 and the female must be 14 (unless they were nearer than cousins). South Carolina permitted any to marry “except when forbidden by the law of God.” Indiana was similar, except it added the 18 and 14 year old restrictions. Z, “Controverted Marriages--No. 5,” P&H 12.22 (March 2, 1843).

change, more work needed to be done. The Assembly accepted William L. Breckinridge's suggestion of a committee of James Hoge, Gardiner Spring, Aaron Leland, Charles Hodge and Nathan L. Rice.¹³²

But no sooner had the committee been created than Maclean proposed that the Fayetteville Presbytery be directed to restore Archibald McQueen "to the communion of the church and the exercise of the ministry," both because the church was divided on the question, and because it was unfair to leave this one man under censure, while several other men who were in similar marriages were permitted to remain in the ministry.¹³³

Several men opposed this motion, but it was the speech of Chancellor Kensey Johns of Delaware that killed it. Johns pointed out that the motion had the effect of reversing a disciplinary case by an administrative act. "To take up such a case when the parties are out of court, the record gone, and all the pleadings out of view would be an unheard of proceeding." The General Assembly was indeed the highest court, and therefore should not prejudice the case by expressing an opinion before an appeal had been made. "Let Mr. McQueen, if he is so disposed, apply to his presbytery, and if they refuse to entertain his application or to do him justice in the premises, let him complain or appeal

¹³²Hodge, "The General Assembly," BRPR 15.3 (July 1843) 450; cf. "Debates in the General Assembly: The Marriage Question" Presbyterian 13.24 (June 17, 1843) 93. The geographical spread of the committee reflected the church well: Hoge was pastor in Columbus, Ohio, Spring was pastor of the Brick Church in New York City, Leland was professor at Columbia Theological Seminary in South Carolina, Hodge was professor at Princeton Seminary, and Rice was a pastor in Paris, Kentucky.

¹³³Hodge, 456. There was considerable debate whether this motion was in order, since the case had been resolved the previous year. But the Assembly agreed with the moderator that since the General Assembly was the highest court of the church, it was competent to review its own actions from previous years.

to the Synod or General Assembly.”¹³⁴ This argument sealed the fate of Maclean’s motion, and the Assembly overwhelmingly defeated it. But the twin issues of confessional revision and the restoration of Archibald McQueen would occupy considerable time in the church courts and space in the newspapers over the next two years.

Having been appointed to the committee charged with studying the question, Charles Hodge surveyed the question for the church: there were three different questions involved in the debate: “1. Is the doctrine now taught on this point in our Confession in accordance with the word of God? 2. If so, ought the article in question, to be made a term of Christian and ministerial communion? 3. If not, is the striking out the clause proposed to be erased, the right remedy for the difficulty?”¹³⁵

Hodge admitted that while some were arguing that all the disputed marriages were unlawful and incestuous, the majority in the church was satisfied with the Confession, but

¹³⁴Hodge, 457. Other speakers included Breckinridge, Junkin and ruling elder Isaac Platt. Hodge, in his review, pointed out that the Scottish General Assemblies had always retained the right of original jurisdiction, and while he doubted that Maclean’s motion would have been a wise exercise of the Assembly’s authority, he insisted that the Assembly had the right to do what Maclean desired. “It is certain that the Assembly of the Church of Scotland has ever claimed and exercised original jurisdiction, acting, as the presbytery of the whole church. It is certain that similar ecclesiastical councils, have in all ages of the church, acted on the same principle. And our own Assembly, in some few cases has done the same. It has taken up a foreign minister whom one of our presbyteries refused to receive, examined him touching his qualifications, and passed a vote of approbation, and authorized any presbytery to whom he should apply to receive him as a member.” Hodge argued that the Assembly could “remit even the most justly inflicted sentence, if the occasion called for the exercise of this executive grace.” (458) Nonetheless, he agreed that the Assembly was wise to reject Maclean’s motion, since there was no necessity of immediate action, and it would have had the effect of requiring the Fayetteville Presbytery of accepting into their number a man whom they had judged to be unworthy of the office of minister. Hodge pointed out that presbyteries “have a right to refuse to receive any man as a member whom they judge for any reason to be unsuitable.” As an example, Hodge asked “Could the Assembly force an abolitionist on a southern presbytery?” The absurdity of the question demanded a negative answer.

¹³⁵Hodge, “The General Assembly,” 450. Hodge thought that the northeastern portion of the church was the most desirous of change, but that the west and south was content with the confession as it was. (452)

“are disposed to leave the parties already living in such connexions, unmolested in the enjoyment of their church privileges. But this they could not do, if they believed their marriages to be invalid.” Hodge explained that this view operated on the principle that while it “may be wrong to enter into certain engagements, yet the engagement when formed is binding.”¹³⁶ In this respect, Hodge argued that McQueen’s marriage was unlawful, but not invalid.¹³⁷

On the second point, Hodge agreed with Maclean that “we are not at liberty to make every truth contained in the word of God, a term of communion,”¹³⁸ and he recognized that there was strong difference of opinion, much of which depended upon what part of the country one was in. But Hodge was not convinced that the solution was to amend the Confession. The present practice of leaving the matter practically in the hands of the sessions and presbyteries was probably the best course. “If a man is a member of a session or presbytery who are known to believe the word of God condemns such marriages, he acts with his eyes open when he contracts them. He has no right to force his brethren to tolerate what they think wrong; or to insist upon being a member of a body against the judgment and conscience of all his fellow members.”¹³⁹ While Hodge admitted that it was not an ideal situation to have “one presbytery suspending from his office a minister for an act, which another presbytery passes without censure,” but as far as Hodge

¹³⁶Hodge, 451.

¹³⁷Recall that Hodge used this same distinction in his argument for the validity of Roman Catholic baptism.

¹³⁸Hodge, 452.

¹³⁹Hodge, 454.

could see, “You must either allow this diversity of opinion and practice, or you must split the church.”¹⁴⁰ And as his opposition to Breckinridge’s tactics in 1834-1837 demonstrated, dividing the church was not an acceptable option for Hodge.

The committee of Hoge, Spring, Hodge, Leland and Rice, reported back to the 1844 Assembly that confessional amendment was not necessary in this case. Echoing Hodge’s language from the previous summer, the report stated that while the confession condemned incestuous marriages, it did not necessarily support the excommunication of the parties to such marriages because “1. . . . it does not declare that conjugal cohabitation is so incestuous that the parties must separate. 2. It is a general rule of interpreting law, especially criminal law, that the meaning must be taken from the express terms used, or necessary implication showing certain intention; or in other words, that it is understood favourably to the party accused.” They also appealed to the historic practice of the church which had tended to be more lenient than the 1842 McQueen case.¹⁴¹ Finally they suggested that since the Levitical law distinguished between those marriages that should result in death and those that would simply result in being childless, the Church should make a similar distinction and simply rebuke or admonish those who marry the deceased wife’s sister.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰Hodge, 455. The one remedy that appealed to Hodge was one that he understood to be proposed by James Hoge, namely amending the Confession to make it clear that not all the forbidden marriages were therefore invalid.

¹⁴¹Minutes (1844) 424. One author had shown that a case in 1761 was the last case in which a man was suspended for marrying his deceased wife’s sister. From 1772-1821 there had been seven cases which were all decided as inadvisable but not to be annulled. Z, “Controverted Marriages--No. 3,” P&H 12.20 (Feb 16, 1843).

¹⁴²Minutes (1844) 425.

But others desired a stricter approach. Indeed a small minority, led by William L. Breckinridge argued that presbyteries should not ordain men who disagreed with the Confession's stance on prohibited marriages. When Hugh S. Dickson, a licentiate from the Presbytery of New York was ordained by the Louisville Presbytery even after he openly disagreed with the Confession's statement on prohibited marriages, William L. Breckinridge authored a protest stating that "No discretion is allowed to the Presbytery to dispense with the adoption of any part of the confession." The protest went on to insist that no reservations or exceptions to the Confession were permissible. In reply the presbytery pointed out that Dickson had received the rest of the Confession, and had promised to abide by the practice of the church. The presbytery was convinced that Dickson's willingness to practice the confessional position was sufficient: "we cannot, therefore, regard our proceedings, in this case, as sanctioning the practice of candidates taking exceptions to our Confession of Faith."¹⁴³ This waffling, however, troubled a few hardliners. They insisted that no one should take ordination vows "unless they 'do *sincerely* receive and adopt the Confession of Faith.' . . . none, (of our office bearers especially), have a *right*, none are at *liberty*, to 'differ from the Confession of Faith,' unless they have a right, and are at liberty, to 'lie, not (only) unto man, but unto God.'"

One author went so far as to argue that this called for another division of the church.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³P&H (April 20, 1843).

¹⁴⁴Cogitatus, "The Three Opinions Respecting Prohibited Marriages," W&O 1:8 (October 16, 1845) 29.

But a well-known layman took the opposite approach and argued that the Confession was simply wrong. He pointed out that the reason why English law had forbidden marriage to a deceased sibling's spouse was because Henry VIII had found recourse to Leviticus 18:18 in order to get rid of Catherine of Aragon. Requiring a law formed under such "circumstances strongly tending to error and prejudice," this legal scholar did not think that the church should hold so tightly to this particular application "of Jewish municipal law."¹⁴⁵ Further, a deceased wife's sister is not among the forbidden relations. If God omitted it, he argued, then it cannot be an accident. Leviticus 18.18 expressly forbids such marriages while the wife is alive, but not after she is dead. Quite remarkably, this layman was the only writer in the debate who understood the cultural background to Leviticus 18:

under polygamy a very different estimate is made of man and woman. A man has two wives as a lawful thing: for a woman to have two husbands would be an abomination. For two brothers to have in succession the same wife, might be gross impurity in common estimation: while no feeling of delicacy would be wounded by a man's marrying two sisters.¹⁴⁶

Reminding his readers that the ancient Hebrews had different moral sensibilities from modern Americans, he asked "Can we understand habits of thinking and states of morals under a system in which Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham, Rachel and Leah gave their

¹⁴⁵A Layman, "McQueen's Case—Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister," BLRM (August, 1842) 361 ff. The editor, Robert J. Breckinridge, said that if the author was known it would give great force to his argument. There were several Old School ruling elders who had the requisite theological, historical and legal background to write this essay, but it is probably Joel Jones of Philadelphia. Jones (1795-1860) served as president of Girard College and Mayor of Philadelphia. He retired to study and to devote himself to the church. An expert in theology and law, he was well-versed in oriental, classical and modern languages, and was called the "most learned layman" in the church, even developing a European reputation for his rabbinical and millennial studies.

¹⁴⁶A Layman, "McQueen's Case," 372.

servant maids to Jacob, the nation of Israel was involved in war through a Levite's concubine, and woman was in the degradation of polygamy, concubinage, and capricious divorce?" Concerned by the simplistic approach that most Presbyterians had embraced, he asked "Can we enter into the principles of laws made in such a state of society, and take upon ourselves to correct the Legislator, our Maker, in supplying his defects?"¹⁴⁷ Returning to the present, he pointed out that after the Declaration of Independence, every state removed the restriction. The levitical laws were not intended for the nations, but for Israel. Therefore he insisted that "their obligation by Divine Authority ceased, expired, and died at the death of Christ."¹⁴⁸ This approach blended the traditional Reformed understanding of the continuing validity only of the general equity of the Mosaic law with a new historicist concern for understanding the customs of ancient cultures in their original contexts. But this sort of interpretation clashed with the common sense literalism employed by most of those engaged in the debates.

C. The General Assembly of 1845

The marriage question came back before the 1845 General Assembly, with continued agitation for confessional revision. In reply Nathan Rice urged a resolution condemning such marriages and enjoining presbyteries and sessions to enforce discipline against such marriages. His motion failed narrowly by a vote of 80-84.¹⁴⁹ But the

¹⁴⁷A Layman, "McQueen's Case," 373. He also pointed out that Paul did not appeal to Moses in the incest case in 1 Corinthians 5, but appealed to "the law of nature—immoral indecency—not so much as named among the Gentiles." (376).

¹⁴⁸A Layman, "McQueen's Case," 376.

¹⁴⁹"Marriage Question," Watchman of the South 8.42 (June 5, 1845) 165.

Assembly was still unwilling to encourage confessional revision, and the motion to send the overture to the presbyteries failed 76-98.

Rice had been appointed by his presbytery to speak on this issue. Revealing how emotional the issue had become, Rice declared “I cannot admire the piety of any man who will sacrifice the peace of the church and his own usefulness, merely to gratify feelings which should never have been for one moment cherished.” The practice of marrying a deceased wife’s sister interfered with the purity of the domestic circle, “the first organization of human society, and the foundation of all others. . . . If confusion and corruption commence there, what will become of the purity of the church? What will become of civilized society?” This sort of statement reveals the fact that those who defended the traditional position had very little interest in considering the original situation of the Mosaic text. They read the Old Testament law as though it had been written for a nineteenth-century audience. Some of the legal minds in the Assembly were more astute on this point. Judge Robert Grier (who was appointed to the United States Supreme Court the following year) argued that the biblical prohibition against taking a wife’s sister “to vex her” was in the context of polygamy. But Rice could not accept this: God never “approved the practice of polygamy, but only regulated an existing evil.” Likewise, Rice pointed out that Leviticus 18 forbade a man to marry his brother’s wife. “I should be glad to see some of the brethren take measure, and inform us how much nearer of kin we are to one sister-in-law than to another. . . . Both are *sisters* by affinity.”¹⁵⁰ This sort of argument

¹⁵⁰“The Marriage Question,” by N. L. Rice (speech at GA) PH 8.45 (June 26, 1845) 177.

failed to recognize the distinct cultural differences between the ancient near east and the modern west.

J. L. Jernegan, a ruling elder from northern Indiana, replied to Rice that Leviticus 18 was a part of the civil code of Israel, and therefore no longer directly binding on the church. A straightforward read of Leviticus 18:18, however, contained “an express permission and authority to marry the wife’s sister after the death of the wife.” Jernegan was more concerned, though, with Rice’s appeal to the “preservation of domestic purity. This is a grave consideration, and appeals to the most powerful motions of the human heart. . . And yet this appeal is rather to our feelings than our judgment. . . . If God has not deemed this prohibition necessary to domestic purity, be assured that the wisdom of man will err in adding to the Word of God.”¹⁵¹

The McQueen case also came back before the Assembly, after the Presbytery of Fayetteville denied Archibald McQueen’s request to be restored to the ministry. Dr. William T. Hamilton, pastor of Government Street church in Mobile, Alabama, urged the Assembly to “recommend to the Presbytery of Fayetteville to reconsider their action in the case of Archibald McQueen, and if in their judgment it should appear conducive to the peace of the church, and to the promotion of religion in the region around them, to restore Mr. McQueen to the communion of the church, and to the exercise of the functions of the gospel ministry, on the ground that in his case, the ends of discipline are attained by the

¹⁵¹“Argument of J. L. Jernegan, Ruling Elder from No Indiana on the Marriage Question,” PW 4.21 (July 3, 1845) 81.

operation of the sentence under which McQueen has been lying for a period of three years.”¹⁵² The resolution was adopted, 96-62.

Charles Hodge commented that a sizeable majority of the church had come to the view that while the marriage in question was not lawful, it was still valid. While both extremes continued to flourish in the church, Hodge argued that division was not necessary on this issue, since the church had differed on this point for more than one hundred years, but he warned both sides that if either party sought to make their view a term of communion for the church, “then the church must divide.”¹⁵³

D. The General Assembly of 1847

The action of the Assembly, however, in recommending the restoration of Mr. McQueen, created problems for the Fayetteville Presbytery. Since the Assembly had declared that the purpose of discipline had been met, many members of the Fayetteville Presbytery believed that their hands were tied. Therefore they restored McQueen, at which point Colin McIver, his erstwhile best friend, appealed the decision first to the Synod of North Carolina, and then to the Assembly. The appeal asked the Assembly to revoke McQueen’s restoration.

Charles Hodge took the lead in arguing that the Assembly could not reopen a judicial case. Since the Assembly of 1845 had decided that “the ends of discipline in his case were answered,” and now that McQueen had been restored, it was not possible for a

¹⁵²Hodge, “General Assembly,” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 443.

¹⁵³Hodge, “General Assembly,” BRPR 17.3 (July, 1845) 445.

subsequent Assembly to reverse that decision (otherwise any case could be reopened at will and no sentence would be final). But, Hodge made it clear that this did not have the effect of reversing the 1842 verdict against McQueen. The 1845 Assembly had agreed that the 1842 verdict was correct, but that the suspension of McQueen had sufficiently demonstrated the heinousness of his sin, and that now he should be restored.¹⁵⁴ “The point really decided by the Assembly was that temporary suspension is an adequate punishment for the offence for which Mr. McQueen had been condemned.”¹⁵⁵

McIver argued on the floor of the Assembly that the decision was unconstitutional, since “the marriage of a man with his deceased wife's sister, is incestuous, and therefore null and void in the sight of God and the church, and consequently that the parties to such a marriage cannot be admitted or restored to the privileges of the church, unless the marriage relation between them be dissolved.”¹⁵⁶ But Hodge replied that not all incest is of the same kind. Did McIver really believe that marriage to the sister of a deceased wife was equally heinous with marrying one's mother? But if there are degrees of incest, then there were also degrees of punishment (which were expressed in Leviticus itself). Hodge pointed out that the church had “always recognised the obvious distinction between what is unlawful and what is invalid, any thing contrary to the rule of duty laid down in the scriptures, is unlawful; but many engagements and contracts which men ought not to form, are, when formed, nevertheless binding.” This time the Assembly declared by a 95-53 vote

¹⁵⁴Hodge, “General Assembly,” BRPR 19.3 (July, 1847) 413.

¹⁵⁵Hodge, 414.

¹⁵⁶Hodge, 415.

that since the 1845 Assembly had decided the case judicially, it was not possible to appeal. Nonetheless, the Assembly made it clear that it was not approving his marriage.¹⁵⁷

Sixteen members of the Assembly filed a protest, objecting to the dismissal of McIver's complaint, insisting that if the Assembly had acted judicially in 1845, then its action was null and void because the Confession of Faith plainly forbade McQueen's marriage, and if "no law of man or consent of parties" could make his marriage valid, then the Assembly had acted unconstitutionally in restoring him. The protestants' regional background fit the distribution of the fifty-three votes supporting McIver's complaint. Only one came from the northeast (Robert T. Berry of Baltimore), nine came from the northwest (all but one from the Pittsburgh-Cincinnati corridor), and six came from the southeast.¹⁵⁸ The protestants followed a strict construction of the Confession, and could not understand how the Assembly could ignore McIver's protest.

In contrast, the Assembly denied that such a construction was necessary. In their answer to the protest, the Assembly declared that "the constitution. . . is to be interpreted by the Word of God, which, we apprehend, does not sustain the interpretation of the Protestants in that sense of it which they make the basis of their protest."¹⁵⁹ Neither

¹⁵⁷Minutes (1847) 395-396. Again the Assembly voted whether to "overture the Presbyteries" in order to strike out the section that declared that incestuous marriages could never be made lawful. And once again, the Assembly defeated the motion 57-89.

¹⁵⁸Of the fifty-three negative votes, only four came from the northeast, two from the far northwest and only one from the southwest.

¹⁵⁹Minutes (1847) 404. The committee that drew up the answer to the protest was chaired by Dr. James Hoge, pastor at Columbus, Ohio, along with Dr. Nathan Hoyt, pastor at Athens, Georgia, and ruling elder Francis H. Simril of South Carolina. The New Hampshire born Hoyt (1793-1866) was one of the older transplants to the South who did not embrace the strict constructionism that was growing especially in the deep south.

original intent nor strict construction was accepted by the Old School General Assembly. They insisted that the Confession could only mean what the Word of God declared.¹⁶⁰

McIver, however, could not allow Hodge's view to stand unchallenged. The Presbytery of Fayetteville had explicitly suspended McQueen "*until he give satisfactory evidence of repentance and reformation.*" The 1842 General Assembly had upheld this, thereby affirming that "Mr MQ's marriage was such an incestuous marriage as never could be made lawful by any law of man or consent of parties, so as to admit of their living together as man and wife." In this light, the action of the 1845 Assembly was absurd. If one of the stated goals of discipline was repentance, then the claim that the "ends of discipline are attained," was simply false. McIver reluctantly admitted that when the Assembly of 1842 sanctioned the presbytery's judgment, it did not necessarily affirm the presbytery's reasoning, but he felt betrayed.¹⁶¹

Another author raised the underlying constitutional question. Asserting that the General Assembly derived its authority from the Constitution, he argued that the Assembly could not require a lower judicatory to take an action without an express or implied warrant from the Constitution. He insisted that the Assembly always had the authority to

¹⁶⁰This would lead the Presbyterian Church eventually to eliminate the section under consideration in 1887 by a vote of 156 presbyteries to eleven (four took no action and thirty-one made no report). Minutes (1887) 97-98.

¹⁶¹Colin McIver, "The Biblical Repertory's Review of the M'Queen Case," PW 3.2 (Oct 7, 1847) 209. Others who found Hodge's arguments less than persuasive included William Hill of the PH (June 17, 1847), who said that while Hodge's theology was sound, his legal arguments were not so impressive. Cf. Knox, "The Biblical Repertory's Review of the McQueen Case," W&O 3.3 (Sept 2, 1847) 9.

correct unconstitutional decisions of inferior judicatories, regardless of what previous Assemblies have determined.¹⁶²

Conclusion

Constitutional authority and the rights of conscience would remain at the center of both ecclesiastical and civil politics during the antebellum era. How could the corporate conscience be expressed in a manner that respected the rights of minorities who conscientiously disagreed with the majority? The sorts of answers given in the debates over alcohol and marriage reveal some of the polarities that would reappear in different forms in the debates over education and slavery.

¹⁶²Respondent, "The Questions for the Consideration of Church Judicatories Answered," W&O 3.8 (October 7, 1847) 31. In the same issue the editor noted that the Synod of Pittsburgh had overtured the Assembly to either enforce the Confession or amend it. The following year a member of another North Carolina church was suspended for marrying his deceased wife's sister. He lost his appeal at the Assembly 26-55. Minutes (1848) 57. The Assembly also indefinitely postponed a resolution from the Synod of Pittsburgh requiring all presbyteries and sessions to "inflict the censures of the Church" upon all who contract such marriages. And then it also indefinitely postponed a resolution endorsing presbyterial differences due to the "conscientious difference of opinion" that existed. (57-8).

FIVE

PAROCHIAL OR SECTARIAN?

THE OLD SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE TO SECULARIZED EDUCATION

The antebellum common school movement began with attention to the problem of undereducated children. Virginia's Watchman of the South estimated that there were 3.5-4 million school age children, and that somewhere between 600,000 to one million were not receiving a basic education.¹ As William Swan Plumer, editor of the Watchman and pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Richmond, argued, "if we wish to transmit our republican government to posterity, we must extend the opportunities of intellectual and moral instruction. Intelligence and Virtue are the only safe-guards of our free institutions."² The American experiment depended upon education, for the character of the nation would determine its future.

The contours of the development of the common schools are well-known. From their roots in New England in the 1820s, the common schools spread throughout the north and west during the antebellum era. With wide-ranging support from businessmen, labor organizations, commercial farmers, religious leaders, and politicians—each for their own

¹Watchman of the South 1.39 (May 24, 1838) 155; 3.6 (October 3, 1839) 23.

²Watchman of the South 1.39 (May 24, 1838) 155.

reasons—the common school was an engine of market values and national identity.³ In an era of heated political contests and ethnic riots,⁴ many of which had a strong religious component, the common school was also designed to provide a common Protestant moral tone to the nation. If the goal had merely been the economic benefit of a well-educated public, or the altruistic vision of elevating the lower classes, then a variety of educational systems could have fit the bill; but the vision for the common school was to provide a common moral vision. As immigration brought an increasing number of German and Irish Roman Catholics, Protestants hoped to acculturate them to republican values through the generic Protestant education offered in the common schools.

Old School Presbyterians demonstrated the same concern over these matters as others. Presbyterian newspapers regularly published educational statistics both local and national. The 1840 census, for instance, suggested that only one-fifth of school-age children in Kentucky were actually in school,⁵ and that those states that had developed common schools had the best literacy rates in the country.⁶ The South and the West (except for Michigan) could not compete with New England.

³The standard history of education is Lawrence A. Cremin's multi-volume study, American Education. On the antebellum era see Cremin, American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876 (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Frederick M. Binder, The Age of the Common School, 1830-1865 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1974); Michael Katz, Class, Bureaucracy and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America (New York: Praeger, 1975); Donald H. Parkerson and Jo Ann Parkerson, The Emergence of the Common School in the U. S. Countryside (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998).

⁴Mary P. Ryan, Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City in the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁵"Common Schools (from the *Commonwealth*)" Protestant and Herald 10.7 (January 21, 1841).

⁶Figure 5.1 comes from P&H 12.1 (October 6, 1842). The W&O 1.8 (October 9, 1845) gave similar numbers from Professor Tucker's Progress of the United States in Population and Wealth.

<u>New England</u>	<u>Mid-Atlantic</u>	<u>Northwest</u>	<u>Southwest</u>	<u>Southeast</u>
CT 1 to 568	NJ 1 to 58	MI 1 to 97	LA 1 to 38	SC 1 to 17
VT 1 to 473	NY 1 to 56	OH 1 to 43	MS 1 to 20	AL 1 to 15
NH 1 to 310	PA 1 to 50	IN 1 to 18	MO 1 to 16	GA 1 to 13
MA 1 to 166	MD 1 to 27	IL 1 to 17	KY 1 to 13	VA 1 to 12
ME 1 to 108	DE 1 to 18		AR 1 to 11	NC 1 to 7
RI 1 to 67			TN 1 to 11	

Source: P&H 12.1 (October 6, 1842)

Figure 5.1. Ratio of whites over age 20 that could not read or write, 1840

The solution, for most Protestants was to establish common schools that would provide a public Protestant education for all children. Presbyterians were frequently involved in early discussions of how to conduct common schools, especially since Presbyterian ministers often conducted schools of their own.

But some Presbyterians expressed ambivalence about the common schools. The Old School Presbyterians had forced a division of the Presbyterian church in 1837, at least in part over the importance of the church's control over missions and ministerial education. The New School preferred to see individual Christians work together across denominational lines, but the Old School insisted that the institutional church was the proper agent for both missionary activity and the training of ministers. Indeed Howard Miller has argued that this denominational shift signaled the end of Presbyterian interest in public life, and an increasingly narrow focus on its own denominational interests.⁷ But this

⁷Howard Miller has demonstrated the centrality of Presbyterians in American higher education in the colonial era and the early republic. The Revolutionary College: American Presbyterian Higher Education, 1707-1837 (New York: New York University Press, 1976). Presbyterian ministers frequently operated grammar schools or academies as well.

is not borne out by the arguments that Old Schoolers used to support their more ecclesiastical vision.

Presbyterians had expressed concerns about the religious content of public education as early as 1812.⁸ Sporadic discussion of parochial education seems to have occurred over the next couple of decades, but it was only during the national educational debates of the 1830s and 1840s that the Old School developed its own position. True to the New School concept of catholicity (individual Christians working together across denominational lines), few New School Presbyterians liked the concept of parochial schools. In the Old School General Assembly of 1839, John Breckinridge (PTS 1822), secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions (and former secretary of the Board of Education, 1831-36), recommended the creation of a committee of Samuel Miller (his father-in-law), Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, Joseph Addison Alexander (the faculty of Princeton Seminary), and Samuel Carnahan (president of the College of New Jersey) to study proposals for Christian education. That committee returned in 1840 suggesting that every congregation should have a school for ages 6-10, and every presbytery should have at least one Grammar School or Academy. Weekly catechizing in the church should be overseen by the session, and Sunday schools should be placed under sessional oversight. The report was accepted by GA in 1840 and adopted in 1841. The report suggested that a better educational system would produce greater attachment to the

⁸Lewis Joseph Sherrill, Presbyterian Parochial Schools, 1846-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932) 2. Sherrill, the definitive study of the Presbyterian parochial school movement, reports that a committee report in 1812 argued that satisfactory discipline was impossible in the current school system, and that since it is the legitimate job of the church to educate (and not the state) a Presbyterian system of schools would be desirable. The General Assembly did not adopt the report, but the first indication of dissatisfaction with the low state of religion in American schools was recorded.

Presbyterian doctrine, and hopefully would increase the number of ministerial candidates. Most telling, however, was their conviction that the secularization of public education resulted in the removal of religious content and church control.⁹

1. Background

A. The Role of Rome

But the immediate occasion for the development of parochial schools was identical to the rationale for repudiating Roman Catholic baptism: the influx and growing power of Roman Catholics. “Papists” and “infidels” were the chief targets of Old School educational rhetoric (and in that order). Presbyterian newspapers responded with alarm when Bishop Hughes of New York claimed public funds for Roman Catholic schools in New York City. Arguing that the public schools lacked adequate religious teaching for Roman Catholics, Hughes claimed that since the State of New York gave money to schools that taught the Protestant bible, Roman Catholics schools should also receive a portion of common school funds.¹⁰

Early in 1840 New York Catholics had failed to “secure a portion of the Common School fund for the support of their separate and exclusively Roman Catholic schools.” Sidney E. Morse, editor of the New York Observer granted that Roman Catholics had the right to train their children in their own ways, but questioned “the right of this State to

⁹Sherrill, 8-11. There is a connection between this sort of plan (which would later include a college in each synod) and the secular proposals of Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson forty years before. They have a common source in the educational system of Scotland where each parish had a school, and each presbytery an academy.

¹⁰“Roman Catholic Claim (from the *New York Observer*)” Protestant and Herald 10.1 (December 3, 1840).

grant the public money to aid Roman Catholics or Presbyterians, or Episcopalians, or any other denomination, in the support of sectarian schools.” Initially Morse’s response was conciliatory, suggesting that any offensive books be removed from the curriculum.

Nonetheless he was repulsed by Hughes’ suggestion that the entire Roman Catholic vote in New York City might be given to a political party simply because they would give them money for their schools.¹¹

In an attempt to resolve the tensions, the trustees of the Public School Society suggested that the city could follow the Irish practice of having a committee of Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Presbyterian clergy approve of all religious teaching, but Hughes refused.¹² At a Common Council meeting in the fall of 1840, Hughes claimed to represent one-fifth of the New York population “whose rights of conscience contended were crushed by the present school system.” Arguing that the common schools led to both infidelity and Protestantism (which in his mind were virtually interchangeable), he insisted that the Council remove the Protestant Bible from the schools, along with any books that were offensive to Roman Catholics.¹³

¹¹Editorial, “Movements of the Catholics,” NYO 18.31 (August 1, 1840) 122. Morse was a New School Presbyterian, though his paper maintained a large Old School readership. The following week Morse explained the history of New York City’s Common School Fund, established in 1812. “It was then declared that every religious society in this city that had then established, or should afterwards establish common schools, should be entitled to receive a portion of this fund.” But in 1824 one of those religious societies used school funds for “other purposes than those of education,” which resulted in the withdrawal of school funds from all “sectarian” schools. Editorial, “Designs of the Catholics,” NYO 18.32 (August 8, 1840) 126.

¹²“Light on the Catholic Question,” NYO 18.39 (September 26, 1840) 154.

¹³Editorial, “Roman Catholic Claim,” NYO (November 7, 1840) 178.

The Trustees of the Public School Society declared that they had removed all offensive literature from the schools, but they would not remove the Bible. Theodore Sedgwick insisted that Catholics were not discriminated against any more than any other denomination.¹⁴ Hiram Ketcham argued that the Bible could not be removed from the schools. He pointed out that the trustees had sought to find an approved list of passages, but Hughes had refused to consent because the Pope had not yet ruled. Given the Pope's status as the political ruler of Italy, Ketcham used this for all it was worth. Would a foreign ruler determine what may be taught in American schools?¹⁵

As the Council deliberated during the fall and winter of 1840, Morse gave them something to think about. In a rare threat of civil unrest, he warned that if Protestants were to be taxed to support Roman Catholic schools, "let them rest assured, that the fires of Smithfield will be rekindled in front of the City Hall, before this monstrous proposition will be submitted to the free people of this country."¹⁶ Did the Common Council wish to provoke riots in the streets of New York? If not, then they had better decide against Hughes' petition. Three weeks later the Council voted 15-1 against the petition.¹⁷

¹⁴Editorial, "Roman Catholic Claim," NYO (November 7, 1840) 178.

¹⁵Editorial, "Roman Catholic Claim," NYO (November 7, 1840) 178.

¹⁶Editorial, "Roman Catholic Equity," NYO 18.51 (December 19, 1840) 202. The reference to Smithfield, of course, was the famous burning of the Massachusetts convent.

¹⁷Editorial, "The School Fund Question," NYO 19.3 (January 16, 1841) 10.

When Hughes took his case to the state legislature the following month, supported by Governor William H. Seward,¹⁸ Morse warned his readers that he was also “sustained in his plans by the contributions of societies in Italy and Austria that hate Republicanism and defend despotism with their best blood.” They want sectarian schools to be supported by public money. In reply Morse declared that New York must see “liberty of conscience preserved.”¹⁹ For Morse, liberty of conscience did not refer to each individual doing as he or she pleased. Rather, liberty of conscience was a corporate concept that required protection from all despotic and anarchic threats. When the New York legislature permitted any group to organize a school, Morse howled in anger. This would allow not just sectarian schools, but would permit any social or political group to organize a school. Morse trembled at the thought of Fanny Wright schools, or even schools opposed to republican government. “Papists will teach Popery, and Presbyterians will teach Calvinism, and Infidels will teach infidelity. And we submit it to the good sense of the *republicans* of this city and state and Union (for the question will soon be general), whether it is consistent with the genius of our government to allow such schools to derive their support from the common treasury.”²⁰

¹⁸Frederick M. Binder, The Age of the Common School, 1830-1865 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1974) 64. Cf. Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938) 145-158.

¹⁹Editorial, “The ‘Church and State’ Party,” NYO 19.8 (February 20, 1841) 30.

²⁰Editorial, “Another Feature in the School Bill,” NYO 19.28 (July 10, 1841) 110. The bill withheld state funds from sectarian schools, but New York City funds were not affected by that provision.

The end result in New York City was the removal of the Bible from the city's common schools. Philadelphia followed in 1843.²¹ In seeming confirmation of Protestant fears that Roman Catholics were seeking to control American education, the Baltimore Provincial Council of 1843 called upon Roman Catholics to endeavor to make all public education conformable to Catholic views.²² Presbyterians all over the United States joined their fellow Protestants in objecting to these developments and solidifying their commitment to a common school system that would maintain the basics of a generic Protestant moral teaching.²³

Robert J. Breckinridge spoke for many when he expressed his fears that Roman Catholics would use tax money to create a system of schools that would work to subvert not only Protestant religion, but also republican institutions.²⁴ The pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Baltimore, and editor of the anti-Catholic Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine, spoke at the American Bible Society in New York City in 1839 in support of his resolution to encourage the use of the bible in schools throughout the country. Breckinridge argued that religious training was essential to moral formation, and that Roman Catholic schools could not adequately train the moral faculties because they

²¹“The Public Schools of Philadelphia,” Presbyterian 13.3 (January 21, 1843) 10. The Philadelphia riots of 1844, referred to in the previous chapter were connected to these developments. The riots have been described by Vincent P. Lannie and Bernard C. Diethorn, “For the Honor and Glory of God: The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1840,” History of Education Quarterly 8.1 (Spring, 1968) 44-106. Binder points out that the grand jury which investigated the riots reported that blame was largely due to “the effort of a portion of the community to exclude the Bible from our Public Schools.” (Binder, 69)

²²Editorial, “The Baltimore Provincial Counsel,” CO 17.24 (June 17, 1843) 94.

²³The New York situation was reviewed, and the secularizing tendency condemned in Frederick A. Packard, “Religious Instruction in Common Schools,” BRPR 13.3 (July, 1841) 315-368.

²⁴“Papal Interference with Public Schools” BLRM 6.12 (December, 1840) 535-536.

inculcated error.²⁵ Breckinridge championed public schools with a distinctively Protestant flavor as the best way to combat Rome.

Concern over Roman Catholic influence in education was not merely an eastern phenomenon. James Wood, professor at New Albany Theological Seminary, wrote to the Foreign Missionary Chronicle in 1843 that the West would soon “*hold the balance of power in the government of the United States*; and if religion does not exert a controlling influence here, what will become of the liberties of our country?” The Pope, he claimed, was trying to take over the west—especially through education. He pled with the east to “furnish us with the means necessary to carry on a successful warfare against Despotism and Infidelity--against Popery and Sin; and to fortify and adorn every state and country, every village and neighborhood, with schools and churches--with Bibles and ministers.”²⁶ The five western Old School anti-Catholic papers started in 1844-45 all devoted significant energy to promoting the general Protestant character of the common schools.²⁷

But not all Old School Presbyterians approved of the common school system. Indeed many centered around Princeton Theological Seminary thought that Hughes’ claim to a portion of the educational funds was just. They argued that if the state would support all schools, regardless of their religious teaching, the end result would be a better system

²⁵“A Plea for the Restoration of the Scriptures to the Schools” BLRM 5.7 (July, 1839) 294.

²⁶James Wood, “Letter to Board of Missions” Foreign Missionary Chronicle 11.11 (November 1843) 346.

²⁷The Western Protestant (Cincinnati, Ohio), the True Catholic (Louisville, Kentucky), the Jackson Protestant (Jackson, Tennessee), the Herald of Religious Liberty (St. Louis, Missouri), and the New Orleans Protestant (New Orleans, Louisiana) all began in 1844, with Old School Presbyterians either as sole editor or in cooperation with other Protestant ministers. The latter two papers went on to become weekly Old School Presbyterian newspapers, while only the True Catholic maintained its distinctively pan-Protestant character for more than two years.

of education for all concerned.²⁸ Their zeal for a system of Presbyterian parochial schools led to one of the most ambitious educational programs of the antebellum era.

Cortlandt Van Rensselaer was one of a few Old School Presbyterians who agreed with Hughes. Reviewing Horace Bushnell's Common Schools in 1853, he disagreed that the common schools were the only defense of morality and civil order. Indeed, he agreed with the Roman Catholic claim that parochial schools should receive a portion of state funding. It was simply a matter of justice. No religious group should be taxed for the support of any other group—therefore each taxpayer should be allowed to select which schools (parochial or secular) his tax money should support.²⁹ When the New York Independent claimed that Presbyterians and Papists were joining forces against the common schools, William Engles of the Presbyterian replied that no Old School Presbyterian wished to see the common school system abolished unless a better system was substituted.³⁰

But Van Rensselaer spoke for a minority in the Old School. When, also in 1853, Bishop O'Connor (of Pittsburgh) argued that Roman Catholic schools should be supported by tax money with the common schools, Melancthon W. Jacobus (professor of oriental and biblical literature at Western Theological Seminary) replied by claiming that this

²⁸The Society of Inquiry on Missions and the General State of Religion at Princeton Seminary wrote to the Presbyterian to encourage a system of parochial schools in 1845, claiming that the common schools were becoming "strongholds of the superstition and infidelity of a small minority," due to the machinations of Rome. "Church Schools," Presbyterian 15.9 (March 1, 1845) 33.

²⁹"Review of Horace Bushnell's *Common Schools*" Presbyterian Magazine 3.9 (September 1853) 436. Of course Old Schoolers were aware that Scotland itself was engaged in contemporary discussions of common schools. See James W. Alexander, "Necessity of Popular Education," BRPR 7.1 (January 1835) 40-55; John Hall, "Report on Education in Europe," BRPR 12.2 (April 1840) 244-267.

³⁰Editorial, "The Independent and Ourselves," Presbyterian 22.40 (October 2, 1852) 158.

would require Protestants to subsidize Roman Catholic schools. In a two-part letter that took up six columns in the Presbyterian Advocate, Jacobus argued that “our public school system, which is the pride, not of Pennsylvania alone, but of our whole land, is truly an AMERICAN system. It is framed for the masses. Its kind and wise object is to amalgamate from such various elements, all national interests, and to run into the new mould of our Institutions the children of all others *with our own*.” It was crucial that all children be educated in that system. While Roman Catholics argued that everyone setting up a school should be allowed to draw from the state treasury, Jacobus warned that this would result in swarms of Jesuits establishing dozens of schools where there should be one. The end result would be the destruction of the public school.³¹ Jacobus wrote a letter to the editor (William Annan) a month later suggesting that the timing of Bishop O’Connor’s proposal, just after returning from Rome, was ominous. Jacobus declared that O’Connor was “a sworn official of that political power which rules at Rome,” and was “duty bound. . . [to] do battle, after his measure, against our republican institutions and our popular liberties.”³²

This is plainly a far cry from Van Rensselaer’s argument that the Roman Catholics were correct to seek public funding. Old School Presbyterians were divided. Was it best to work together in education with other Protestants? Or would parochial schools prove more effective?³³

³¹Melanchthon W. Jacobus, “Letter to Governor Bigler” Presbyterian Advocate (February 9, 1853).

³²Jacobus, “Letter to the Editor” Presbyterian Advocate (March 9, 1853).

³³Or, as Clement Vaughan, Robert L. Dabney, and a tiny minority would argue, should the whole matter of education be left to private sources? See chapter 8.

B. The Example of Scotland

As often was the case, when a crisis developed in the Old School, one of the first thoughts was to inquire what the Mother Kirk in Scotland had done. At the end of 1837, as the education debates were heating up in New York, the New York Observer published a study of “Education in Scotland,” which was reprinted in the Presbyterian, praising the Scottish system of parochial schools. The author pointed out that ever since the First Book of Discipline, the Reformed Church of Scotland had urged every kirk to have a school, and every leading town to have a college.³⁴ William Swan Plumer added his praise in the Watchman of the South, arguing that the parochial school was the instrument for Scotland’s “extraordinary degree of mental culture, for its uniform and wide diffusion, and for the tenacity with which it has maintained Calvinistic soundness, while other churches of the same confession have lapsed into error and heresy.” The public schools in America cannot maintain the high level of religious teaching that the Scots maintained. Therefore, if “we would secure the complete religious education of the children of the church, *we must have schools under the patronage of our Church sessions.*”³⁵

Samuel Miller’s 1841 report to the Old School General Assembly gave the details. From 1560 the Church of Scotland had urged every parish to have a church school with an orthodox and qualified teacher. The General Assembly of 1642 had ordered the erection of grammar schools in every presbytery, and in 1706 the Kirk required presbyteries to visit

³⁴“Education in Scotland from the *New York Observer*” Presbyterian 8.1 (January 6, 1838).

³⁵“Paragraphs—Religious and Literary” Watchman of the South 4.14 (November 18, 1840) 50.

the grammar schools within their bounds twice a year. As recently as 1838 the Scottish Assembly had ratified these acts, urging the church to pay careful attention to the education of the youth of the church.³⁶ Could the American Presbyterian church modify this system to fit the new world?

While discussions continued throughout the first half of the 1840s, Old School Presbyterians do not seem to have been convinced that parochial schools were practicable on a large scale until the development of the Free Church of Scotland's school system. The Free Church established 513 schools in the five years after the Disruption of 1843, in spite of the fact that they had lost their buildings and their ministerial stipends by leaving the established church. They required all teachers to be examined by presbytery, in order to ensure the quality and orthodoxy of the religious education, and had established two normal schools in order to train teachers. Cortlandt Van Rensselaer and other Presbyterian editors regularly kept the American church informed of the progress of the Scottish educational system in order to prompt Old School Presbyterians to their own endeavors. One result, as Van Rensselaer pointed out, was that while American Presbyterians had nearly two churches per minister, the Scottish churches had more ministers than parishes.³⁷

³⁶“The Education of the Youth of the Presbyterian Church,” CO 15.7 (February 13, 1841) 25.

³⁷Of course, the geographically compact Scotland generally had smaller parishes with larger congregations. “Education Operations of the Free Church of Scotland” Presbyterian Treasury 1.7 (July 1848) 104. William Swan Plumer also praised the Free Church's endeavors. “The Educational Scheme of the Free Church of Scotland,” W&O 2.12 (November 5, 1846) 45. Van Rensselaer pointed to the example of the Continental Reformed churches as well. In 1853 he gave the resolutions of the Synod of Dordt (1618) which requested the state to appoint and pay Reformed schoolmasters in every town and village. Ministers and elders were appointed as the visitation committee to ensure that religious education was conducted according to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession. “Catechetical Instruction,” Home and Foreign Record 4.6 (June, 1853) 171-3.

Benjamin Gildersleeve published an article in 1845 expressing concern that “education has of recent years been lamentably divorced from the church, her only safe and legitimate foster mother.” Reminding the church of the days when ministers ran all the schools in the South, and appealing to the example of the Free Church, he suggested that “the great secret of the Scotch character. . . [is] *that the church assumes and controls the education of her children from infancy to manhood*. And I may say this principle is potent for evil as well as for good. The power of the Papal church is the result of her system of education.” But the lesson was clear: the future of Presbyterianism depended upon what she did for her children.³⁸

In western Pennsylvania the Presbyterian Advocate echoed the call to learn from Scotland. Indeed, JWF went so far as to suggest that “The result of this plan of education in Scotland, would almost reconcile me, American as I am, for two and three generations, to the State establishment of the church.” Whereas many Americans were arguing for the separation of education from the church, he suggested that an Americanized version of the Scottish model might require the separation of education from the state, putting schools under the oversight of the church.³⁹

C. Regional Discussions before 1846

One of the first extended arguments for denominational education was printed in the Protestant and Herald by David Monfort, pastor at Franklin, Indiana. Echoing the 1840

³⁸“Duty of the Presbyterian Church to Her Children” W&O 1.7 (October 2, 1845) 25.

³⁹JWF “Parochial Schools. No. 1.” Presbyterian Advocate 9.19 (March 8, 1848) 75.

Assembly report, Monfort argued that every congregation should operate a grammar school under the supervision of the session. While acknowledging that western churches were generally poor, he argued that this matter was too important to allow money to get in the way. He admitted that Presbyterians might be called illiberal by their neighbors, but he insisted that “a desire to please the world, which is enmity to God, is like a pernicious leaven corrupting the whole mass. If it continues, (mark what I say) it will, *before long, bring on a universal reign of infidelity and terror in Church and State.*”⁴⁰ Parochial education was not a way of withdrawing from society, as Howard Miller has claimed,⁴¹ but a way of preserving society from its self-destructive tendencies. Monfort called for a reform of the curriculum that would orient classical studies towards the scriptures, the fathers, and the Reformers—and away from the Greek poets, whom Monfort considered peripheral at best to a solid moral and literary education.⁴²

In the South, commonly considered the bastion of private education, Benjamin Gildersleeve, editor of the Charleston Observer, noted that Charleston’s Episcopalians had established a primary school in 1841, and chastised Presbyterians for falling behind in

⁴⁰D[avid] M[onfort], “To the Ministers, Elders and Members of the Presbyterian Church: The duty of the church to educate her own youth, and especially to train up men for the work of the holy ministry: Letter IV” Protestant and Herald 14.63 (December 14, 1843). The identity of the author is revealed by his self-identification as a Presbyterian pastor in Franklin, Indiana.

⁴¹Howard Miller, The Revolutionary College: American Presbyterian Higher Education, 1707-1837 (New York: New York University Press, 1976) 285.

⁴²D. M., Letters V and VI Protestant and Herald 14.64-65 (December 21-28, 1843). Monfort’s suggestions seem to have had some currency as some Presbyterian colleges began to offer Hebrew and other more pre-ministerial courses.

education.⁴³ “Melville” commented three years later that as other denominations had founded schools, some Presbyterian children had ended up joining those denominations through the school’s influence. Presbyterians, he argued, should show more denominational spirit and establish their own system of schools.⁴⁴

James L. Pettigree spoke to the literary societies of the Presbyterian Oglethorpe University that fall. Gildersleeve commented that the “Legislature of Georgia, then in Session, adjourned to attend upon the exercises.” Arguing from the disestablishment of the church, Pettigree claimed that “Experience has shown that religion can not only dispense with the patronage of State, but that it is better without it. And may we not hope that education also will feel the same heathy influence, and rejoice in the soil of freedom.”⁴⁵

Thomas Smyth, the Ulster born and trained pastor of Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina, added his voice to the chorus of calls for denominational education. Like Monfort his first concern was collegiate education (his address was also given at Oglethorpe University), but his argument drew upon his wide-ranging study of patristic, medieval, and Reformed history to argue for the necessity of church oversight of education. He argued that the church had always operated schools, and claimed that denominational education “is as practicable as it is essential to the purity and permanence of our free institutions.” Indeed, Smyth agreed with Van Rensselaer that the state should support denominational schools, since there is no such thing as nonsectarian education.

⁴³Editorial, “Denominational Education,” CO 15.11 (March 13, 1841) 42; CO 15.18 (May 1, 1841) 70.

⁴⁴Melville, “Presbyterian Education,” CO 18.9 (March 2, 1844) 33.

⁴⁵“Can Education Dispense with the Patronage of the State,” CO 16.1 (January 1, 1842) 2.

“Bigotry and Sectarianism are the invariable results of an ill-informed, ignorant, and mere nominal christianity; while liberality, charity, and mutual forbearance, are as surely the fruits of a deep, sincere, and thoroughly instructed piety.” An education that is thoroughly grounded in religion is the “true foe to intolerance, persecution, and illiberality towards a difference of opinion.” In other words, for Smyth, a truly catholic education provided the context for liberty of conscience. He insisted that Presbyterian education “is not *sectarian* education.” A Presbyterian college should not focus on all the minutiae of Presbyterian doctrine and polity, but should build on “that truly Catholic foundation,--THE BIBLE, THE WHOLE BIBLE,--including which we have all religion, and excluding which we have none.” But since the Bible is construed in so many different ways, “it must be exhibited thro' the interpretation of some one denomination” in order to provide coherence in education. While Presbyterians were often accused of being narrow and bigoted, Smyth replied that “she is in reality most Catholic and liberal, and eminently adapted to be the guardian and patron of a religious education,” because Presbyterian distinctives are not required for membership, but only for the eldership. “Since, therefore, our only terms of communion are the fundamental truths of the gospel and the evidences of personal piety, our basis for a denominational education is as broad, as free, and as catholic, as that of God's own blessed word.” The Shorter Catechism, he claimed, did not inculcate any uniquely Presbyterian doctrines, but Augustinian views affirmed by “the most learned, and the most pious party

in the Romish Church,” all the Reformed churches--including the Church of England and the orthodox parties of Congregationalists and Baptists.⁴⁶

2. The General Assembly of 1846

The General Assembly of 1845 had appointed a committee, chaired by James W. Alexander, pastor of Duane Street Presbyterian Church in New York City (and son of Archibald Alexander), to report on the subject of parochial schools. Its report to the Assembly of 1846 (moderated by Charles Hodge, one of the authors of the 1840 report) concluded with a series of resolutions calling for a system of education that would seek to mingle “the doctrines of our church with the daily teachings of the school” as closely as “may comport with the circumstances of this country,” and recommended that the whole church consider founding new parochial schools. John C. Young, president of Centre College in Kentucky, added a resolution from the floor, referring the matter to the Board of Education, “that they may, from time to time, report to the General Assembly any further action that may be needed for extending through our churches a system of Parochial Schools,” in order to provide a mechanism for maintaining further discussion at the General Assembly level.⁴⁷

This called forth some opposition from Robert J. Breckinridge, president of Jefferson College in Pennsylvania, who argued briefly against parochial schools, urging the duty of every evangelical denomination to influence the public schools. He claimed

⁴⁶Thomas Smyth, “Denominational Education, Its Necessity and Practicability, especially as it regards Colleges,” W&O 1.25 (February 5, 1846) 97.

⁴⁷“General Assembly” BRPR (July 1846) 430.

that since Presbyterians had an influence in education disproportionate to the church's numbers, it should be the last to withdraw from this general partnership. If the Presbyterian church "would prosper they must enter heart and hand in the common enterprises of the country, in which they have an interest, and not attempt to set up for themselves." Two Presbyterian college presidents from the south immediately replied. Samuel K. Talmage, president of Oglethorpe University in Georgia, defended the principle of parochial education, as did Dr. John C. Young, president of Centre College, Danville, Kentucky).⁴⁸ Young argued that natural religion was insufficient for the education of children. If Presbyterian children were not receiving adequate religious training, then it was the church's fault. Presbyterians could not expect the state to teach the knowledge of God properly to their children. Both in Protestant and Papal countries in Europe the church was in charge of overseeing the religious education of the schools. The error of Rome was not in "incorporating religion with early education, but in teaching a false system of religion." Indeed, he suggested that the states should permit any religious group to draw money from the public fund for their schools.⁴⁹ But if the state would not allow Presbyterians a portion of the common funds, then they must go our own path: "The Free

⁴⁸Both had been trained in New Jersey in the 1820s. Other defenders of parochial education on the floor of the General Assembly included Dr. Philip Lindsley (private 1810, president of the University of Nashville), Dr. William S. Reid (who had studied privately with Moses Hoge before 1806, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Lynchburg, Virginia), and the Rev. William S. Mebane (PTS 1837, pastor in Spring Garden, North Carolina), a strong showing of southern support for parochial schools. Ibid., 431. As chapter ten shows, however, these were older southerners—more in line with traditional Presbyterian models. Younger southerners, such as James H. Thornwell, Robert L. Dabney, and Benjamin M. Palmer, would be vigorously opposed to the parochial plan.

⁴⁹"General Assembly" BRPR (July 1846) 431-8. At some point the argument ceases to be a report of Young, and becomes Hodge's own argument. Hodge's own views will be examined in his sermon at the following General Assembly.

Church of Scotland has taught us that it is not only in established churches that the system of parochial schools is feasible.” Hodge’s hope was that “if the several denominations adopt the plan of parochial schools, the state will soon be forced to the obviously just method of a proportionate distribution of the public funds, whether derived from taxation or lands or a capital stock.”⁵⁰

Without much more debate, the Assembly passed the resolutions almost unanimously, pledging to develop a system of Presbyterian parochial schools. After such sweeping resolutions, the church newspapers were busy for much of the following year discussing education.⁵¹ Not surprisingly, the New School Presbyterians thought that this was simply more evidence of Old School bigotry and sectarianism. The Christian Journal, the New School paper in Columbus, Ohio, suggested that parochial schools were contrary to American republican institutions. This called forth a response from Nathan L. Rice, editor of the Presbyterian of the West, who argued that republican institutions “secure to every man and to every denomination, the right to educate their children in their own way.” The common schools offered an insufficiently religious education. But most objectionable to Rice was the Journal’s argument that Protestantism leaves “it to every mind to come to its own conclusions on the teachings of the Bible, without attempting to bias it early in favor of any particular creed.” Rice objected that this was not Protestant but

⁵⁰“General Assembly” BRPR (July 1846) 439.

⁵¹E.g, the Watchman and Observer was almost entirely focused on education matters in the fall of 1846.

infidel! Parents were not to leave their children free from “bias,” but were to catechize their children.⁵²

3. From Theory to Practice: Hodge’s Sermon on Education

As the outgoing moderator in 1847, Charles Hodge used his retiring sermon to endorse the principle of parochial education, and several reviewers hailed it as winning the hearts of the church to the idea.⁵³ Hodge grounded the need for religious education in human depravity. “It is precisely because the mind is by nature dark, that it needs illumination from without; it is because the conscience is callous and perverse, that it needs to be roused and guided; it is because evil propensities are so strong, that they must be counteracted. To leave a fallen human being, therefore, to grow up without religious instruction, is to render its perdition certain.”⁵⁴

The responsibility for this education devolved first upon the parents. “But while it is universally conceded that the obligation to provide for the religious instruction of the young, rests primarily on parents, it is almost as generally acknowledged that the responsibility does not rest on them alone.” If parents cannot feed their children, then others must do it; likewise with education. Some parents are either unable or unwilling to

⁵²“The *Christian Journal* and Presbyterian Schools” PW 5.11 (December 23, 1846) 254.

⁵³“The General Assembly” SPR 1.2 (September 1847) 97. The reviewer, James Henley Thornwell, commented that if the State schools excluded “the distinctive principles of Christianity,” then “the church will be driven to establish institutions of her own.” (98) Thornwell would later repudiate this statement, but it may suggest how powerful Hodge’s sermon was. Others who agreed that Hodge’s sermon had been instrumental included, Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, Presbyterian Treasury (January 1850) 5, and Stuart Robinson, “The General Assembly of 1854,” SPR 8 (January, 1855) 426.

⁵⁴Charles Hodge, “An Address on Parochial Schools” (Delivered before the GA in May, 1847) Presbyterian Treasury 1.1 (January 1848) 6.

provide a religious education for their children. Some parents “need themselves to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God.” Others from poverty do not have the time to teach their children. “If, therefore, the work must be done; if the best interests of society, the prosperity of the church, the salvation of souls, demand that the young should be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, others, besides parents must undertake the work.”⁵⁵

But who? For Hodge, as for other Presbyterians, there were only two other communities to consider—the state and the church. Hodge reviewed several different conceptions of how the state and the church should relate in education:

1. The Church and State Plan—which Hodge identified as “the common doctrine of Christians, under all forms of government.” For Hodge, the fact that it was the common doctrine of the Reformed churches in all of Europe carried much weight. “The State just so far as it discharges its recognized duty, provides and establishes schools, prescribes the course of instruction, requires that the doctrines of the Church should be taught, and taught in the form and from the books, and by the agents determined or appointed by the Church.” This system requires a pure and faithful church, a religious state, and that the state and the church are essentially coterminous. However desirable it might be, Hodge concluded that such a plan was not possible in America.⁵⁶

2. Independent Plan of Church and State—in which the state sees that schools are established, that competent teachers are hired and paid, but leaves religion up to the school

⁵⁵Hodge, “An Address,” 6.

⁵⁶Hodge, “An Address,” 6-7.

district (the early New England system). Hodge suggested that the disadvantages were the tendency toward centralization, and the increasing lack of agreement on the local level. “Since the great increase of the population, its division into sects, and the prevalence of indifference and error, it has been found impracticable to secure a general and efficient religious education of the young, by means of schools whose character was determined by the mixed community in which they are placed. The impossibility of pleasing all, has led to the general determination to do nothing—to banish religion almost entirely from the public schools.”⁵⁷

3. The Compromise Plan—in which the State permits the teaching of those doctrines on which all denominations agree (as in England and Ireland). The problem is that in our country the sects are so divided that there is very little upon which they agree. “Besides this, it is obvious that the inculcation of religion in the general but not under any definite form, is not mere neutrality. From the nature of the case it is a rejection of positive doctrines.”⁵⁸

4. The Secular Plan—which was the result of the rejection of the first three. “It proposes to confine the instruction given in schools supported by the State to the secular branches of education; and to leave the religious instruction to parents and churches.” Hodge admitted that almost all political leaders supported this approach, and most denominations (except Roman Catholics). But, Hodge argued that

⁵⁷Hodge, “An Address,” 7.

⁵⁸Hodge, “An Address,” 7.

Religion is so important, it is so pervading, it is so connected with morality, and social and civil polity, it is so diffused through the literature of our language, that it cannot be banished from our schools. Any system of education which proposes to banish religion becomes, from the necessity of the case, irreligious. . . . All that the most ardent infidel need desire, in order to propagate infidelity through the community, would be that nothing should be said about religion. . . and the training of the young be conducted, just as it would be were there no God, no redemption, no future state. . . . The whole tendency of the instruction conducted on the is plan is not neutral, but positively anti-religious.⁵⁹

Second, Hodge claimed that the education of the public schools is often the only education that a child will get, so it leaves thousands of children without any religious education whatsoever. Third, he argued that irreligious education was a dangerous risk. “The experiment which we are making is a novel one in the history of the world, and one of fearful risk. We can hardly venture to hope, contrary to all experience, that Christianity can ever take firm hold of the public mind, or form the public character, unless it is taught in the public schools.” Fourth, he added, it is unscriptural. “God has required his people to teach their children his word. . . . We therefore go counter to his commands, when we resign our children to the operation of a system which necessarily makes religion altogether subordinate; which banishes it from the place of education.” Fifth, the state has no authority to forbid the teaching of religion. “This is saying to the people, you must either consent to have your children brought up irreligiously, as far as the school is concerned in their education, or you shall be disinherited, cut off from all participation of the public property. If Presbyterians conscientiously believe they are bound to mingle religion in the secular education of their children, are they to be refused any portion of the

⁵⁹Hodge, “An Address,” 7.

school fund, and taxed to sustain it; forced to support schools to which they cannot send their children, and whose influence they regard as directly opposed to all religion? This is obviously unjust. The Romanists in New York, have forced the authorities to this admission. Believing the public schools system to be anti-Christian, they refused to send their children to the public institutions and having established schools of their own, they demanded their portion of the educational funds.”⁶⁰

5. The Church Plan—since neither parents nor the state can be relied upon to provide the proper sort of education, only the church remains. “Her very vocation is to lead men to the knowledge of the truth. For this purpose she is bound to use all appropriate agencies. . . . Her work is to teach, and the school is, therefore, her peculiar and appropriate province.” The gifts of teaching are not given to the State, but to the Church. In establishment countries, the State taught because the church was coterminous with it. “By a strange perversion, after long enlisting the State in this service as her agent, she has come in a measure to think that education was the work of the State, and to forget her own immediate obligations on this subject.” The great irony, for Hodge, was that Rome “set us the example of declaring off from the control of the State, and of asserting the right of children to be taught religion. This they have done, at the risk of losing all assistance from the public funds. And this we must do, let the State take what course it may.” Hodge called for a system of Presbyterian schools with “one or more schools in every parish, a classical academy in every Presbytery, and a college in every Synod.”⁶¹

⁶⁰Hodge, “An Address,” 7-8.

⁶¹Hodge, “An Address,” 8.

While the debate at the Assembly of 1846 was not extensive, many in the church were ready for action, and in such places the initial response was enthusiastic. Within a year of Hodge's Assembly sermon, thirty-nine schools had begun. Newspaper articles and presbytery and synod reports generally encouraged the founding of parochial schools and presbyterial academies, especially as fears of "infidel and papist" power continued to rise.⁶² Georgia's Southern Presbyterian voiced the general sentiment of North and South alike in declaring that the church could not "*put out her children. . . to the world, to receive from it their religious training.*"⁶³ The parochial school plan would save the church "from the sin of sending her offspring to the world for their training."⁶⁴

Indeed Thomas Smyth claimed that to reject parochial education was to repudiate "the honoured name of Old School. . . at least in its educational principles."⁶⁵ Since baptized children belong to God, they must be trained under the oversight of the church. "*As Parents*, we must see to it that our children are 'trained up' under the supervision, direction and control of the church, through the whole course of their education, until they

⁶²"Cincinnati Presbytery" Presbyterian of the West 5.34 (May 25, 1847) 342; Quisquis "Parochial Schools" Presbyterian of the West (December 14, 1847); "Report of Marion Presbytery" Presbyterian Treasury 1.2 (February, 1848) 23; "Denominational Education (from the New England Puritan)" W&O 2.47 (July 8, 1847) 187, with commentary from editor Benjamin Gildersleeve on the situation in Virginia. That fall, the synods of Virginia and North Carolina approved the system of parochial schools: "Report of the Committee on Denominational Schools to the Synod of Virginia" W&O 3.12 (November 4, 1847) 44; "Synod of North Carolina" W&O 3.14 (November 18, 1847) 52. This is only a tiny fraction of the literature in the periodicals supporting parochial education. See appendix 4.

⁶³Editorial, "Parochial Schools," Southern Presbyterian 1.5 (September 22, 1847) 19.

⁶⁴A., Southern Presbyterian 1.8 (October 13, 1847) 31. See also Richard B. Cater, Southern Presbyterian 1.52 (August 16, 1848) 206.

⁶⁵"Parochial Schools" SPR 2.4 (March 1849) 520. The author sounds like Thomas Smyth, especially in his citations of patristic, medieval, and reformation sources, as well as his emphasis on the Free Church of Scotland.

grow 'old' and are fitted for their calling in life.” Recognizing that some considered parochial schools to be “unrepublican,” he argued that parochial schools left the matter to the dictates of the parents’ conscience and, if the state would appropriate a proportionate amount of funds for such schools, would not result in double taxation.⁶⁶

In 1848 the Indianapolis Presbytery responded to the movement in Indiana to establish free schools without religious teaching. Declaring that “God has committed the education and training of children to the parent, they feel assured that no earthly power has the just right to interpose between the parent and that education he believes it his duty to give to his child, unless it is manifestly injurious to the public welfare.” Further, they argued that “every parent who is taxed to support the schools has a just right to send to the school of his choice, and have the portion of the fund so raised, to which his children would be entitled, applied to its support.” Therefore they “recommend to all their congregations to petition the Legislature that, if a system of free schools be established, any persons who may associate to establish a school shall be entitled to a portion of the public funds in proportion to the number of their children.”⁶⁷

4. The Rise of Opposition to Parochial Schools

While the initial response to the project of parochial education was positive, by 1850, the chorus of approval faced increasing opposition. The Board of Education had

⁶⁶“Parochial Schools” SPR 2.4 (March 1849) 520-549.

⁶⁷“Decision and Moderation” Presbyterian Treasury 1.11 (November, 1848) 169. The report was written by David Monfort (author of an 1843 call for denominational education), P. D. Gurley and D. V. Smock. In 1831, the Synod of Indiana had called for Presbyterian schools for both boys and girls in the wake of Roman Catholic efforts to establish academies female seminaries throughout the state. See L. C. Rudolph, Hoosier Zion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963) 158.

been given the task of organizing support for parochial schools, so long as funds were given especially for that purpose, and Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, the secretary of the Board, energetically devoted himself to the support of Presbyterian schools.⁶⁸ But many objected that this took too much time and energy away from ministerial education—the Board’s first priority. Others objected that it was not the church’s job to operate schools. But few objected so long as the parochial school movement was viewed as supplementary and merely of local interest. Presbyterians had long held that in matters of liberty of conscience, one did not impose one’s personal views on the whole church.

But long before parochial schools developed, many Old School Presbyterians were thoroughly committed to the public school system. Support for parochial schools could coincide with efforts for public education as well. William Swan Plumer, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia, and editor of the Watchman of the South, was on the Virginia committee to draft resolutions encouraging a system of popular education, even while supporting parochial schools in his newspaper.⁶⁹ In North Carolina

⁶⁸Besides writing the annual report for the Board of Education, Van Rensselaer edited and regularly contributed to the Board of Education’s section in the denominational monthly, the Home and Foreign Record (1850-1860), along with his own monthly magazines, the Presbyterian Treasury (1848-1849) and the Presbyterian Magazine (1851-1860), and an annual repository of educational essays, Home, the School and the Church (1851-1860). While the other magazines were generally exponents of his views, this latter volume provided a sampling of the best educational writings of the year from every viewpoint within the church.

⁶⁹“Education Meeting in Richmond” W&O 1.1 (August 21, 1845) 11. Old School ministers Henry Ruffner (president of Washington College in Lexington, and Benjamin Mosby Smith (pastor of Tinkling Spring Presbyterian Church in Waynesboro) vigorously promoted common schools in Virginia from the late 1830s. See Thomas C. Hunt, “Henry Ruffner and the Struggle for Public Schools in Antebellum Virginia,” American Presbyterians 64:1 (Spring 1986) 18-26. His son, William Henry Ruffner, also an Old School minister, became the first Superintendent of Public Education in Virginia in 1870. Thomas C. Hunt and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr., “Race, Religion, and Redemption: William Henry Ruffner and the Moral Foundations of Education in Virginia,” American Presbyterians 66:1 (Spring, 1988) 1-9. The younger Ruffner organized the first Sunday school for blacks in Lexington, Virginia, in the 1840s, where deacon Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson taught. (2)

and Virginia, Old School Presbyterians zealously supported common schools. The Watchman and Observer reported on the progress of common schools in North Carolina, encouraging Virginia to consider similar measures,⁷⁰ and numerous Old School ministers served as superintendents of public education in the west and south, as well as in Pennsylvania.⁷¹

⁷⁰“Common Schools in North Carolina (from the North Carolina Star)” W&O 9.38 (April 27, 1854) 152.

⁷¹While Figure 5.2 is not complete, it is instructive to see that only two of the seven state superintendents and only four of the twenty-seven county superintendents had entered the ministry before 1840. The first generation of Old School ministers had a stronger connection to the parochial system, while the second generation was firmly connected to the rising common school system.

Name	Dates	Birth	College	Sem.	Pastorate	State
State Superintendents						
Joseph Bardwell (1828-1893)		NC	CNJ 50	CTS 54	Meridian	Mississippi 1876-77
William Bishop (1823-1900)		Scot	Illinois C 47	PTS 50		Kansas 1870-74, 1878-82
Robert J. Breckinridge (1800-71)		KY	Union C 19	PTS 32		Kentucky 1847-53
Jonathan C. Gibbs (1831-1874)		PA	Dartmouth C 52	PTS 54		Florida 1872-74
John D. Matthews (1809-1884)		VA	Jefferson C 27	PTS 31		Kentucky 1853-59
William H. Ruffner (1824-1908)		VA	WashC VA 42	PTS 47		Virginia 1870-82
Calvin H. Wiley (1819-18??)		NC	UNC 40 priv 55			North Carolina 1852-68
County Superintendents						
Southeastern						County
Alexander L. Hogshead (1816-80)		VA	WashC VA	UTS 46	Green Spring	Wash Co VA 70-9
Benjamin M. Smith (1811-1893)		VA	HSC 29	UTS 33	Prof, UTS Prince Edw. Co	VA 71-82
James Kelly (1832-1906)		NC	UNC 60	priv	Elizabethtown	Blado Co NC 80-9
William H. Crane (1818-1894)		NJ		PTS 44	miss	Gadsden Co FL, 69-70
Southwestern						
Thomas Morrow (1805-1885)		SC	Centre C 28	UTS 33	miss	Morgan Co AL 60-1, 67-74
Benjamin F. Peters (1818-1903)		SC	U Virginia 39	UTSNY 47		Fayette Co AL 72-9
James H. Alexander (1826-1906)		TN	Oglethorpe U 49	CTS 52	Kosciusko	Attala Co. MS ca. 70
Stevenson Archer (1838-1916)		MS	Oakland C	DTS 60	Greenville	Wash. Co. MS 75-96
John C. Graham (1826-1901)		PA	Centre C 50	PTS 54		Pike Co MS 60s
Michael H. Bittinger (1826-1913)		DC	CNJ 49	PTS 52	Centreville	Monroe Co. WV 74-5
Julius Spencer (1831-1903)		MO	Amherst C 53	PTS 58	Irondale	Wabash Co MO 73-5
David A. Wilson (1821-1912)		PA	Marshall C 45	PTS 51	Ironton	Iron Co MO 68-9
Northeastern						
Hallock Armstrong (1823-1904)		NY	Lafayette C 48	PTS 51		Sullivan Co. PA 59-62
Charles J. Collins (1825-1906)		PA	Williams C 45	PTS 54		Wilkes-Barre PA 66-74
Cornelius R. Lane (1820-1894)		NJ	Lafayette C 43	PTS 48	Tunkhannock	Wyoming Co PA 54-6
Robert W. Orr (1808-1857)		PA	Jefferson C 33	PTS 37	Mt Tabor	Clarion Co PA 54-7
Benjamin F. Patterson (1835-1906)		PA	Lafayette C 60	PTS 63		Pottsville PA 67-1906
James Williamson (1795-1865)		PA	WashC PA 17	PTS 20	Little Valley	Mifflin Co PA 60s
Garret Van Artsdalen (1816-1881)		PA	CNJ 39	PTS 42	German Valley	Morris Co NJ 53-4
John Squier (1823-1892)		Scot	Lafayette C 48	PTS 50	Smyrna	Port Deposit MD 68-92
Northwestern						
Thomas A. Grove (1823-1896)		PA	MuskingumC 48	WTS53	Woodsfield	Woodsfield OH 63-7,70-3
Alexander S. Milholland (1834-1906)		OH	MuskingumC 60	WTS63	Millersburg	Holmes Co OH 67-70
Mordecai M. Travis (1827-1901)		OH	Jefferson C 56	WTS59	Hibbardville	Athens OH 59-63
Travis					Brownsville	Newark OH 63-8
William A. Starrett (1834-1887)		PA	Jefferson C 58	PTS 62	Lawrence	Douglas Co KS 69-71
Richard H. Jackson (1829-1907)		PA	Jefferson C 55	WTS60		Atchison KS 70-6
John M. McElroy (1830-1908)		OH	Jefferson C 51	PTS 55	Ottumwa	Wapello Co IA 64-5
Western						
Henry R. Avery (1828-1901)		NY	CNJ 53	PTS 56	miss	Contra Costa Co. CA 63-7

Figure 5.2. Old School Ministers who served as Superintendents of Public Education

In the deep South, Presbyterians also took the lead. The Georgia state education convention appointed the Rev. Alonzo Church (president of the University of Georgia) to a committee of three to encourage the development of common schools in the state.⁷² The Southern Presbyterian Review ran an article encouraging a common school system for South Carolina in July of 1850.⁷³ South Carolina's history of "poor schools" resulted in poor education as well. The leading editors of the Review, Thornwell and Adger, were becoming increasingly convinced that only full Presbyterian participation in public education could preserve the Christian character of the state.

Likewise in the North, opposition to Roman Catholicism led to strong support for the public schools. In Ohio, when Archbishop Purcell tried to convince Cincinnati to reject the common school system as a godless approach to education, the Presbyterian of the West championed common schools in a steady stream of articles emphasizing the common Protestant heritage that could be taught in the public schools. After the election of 1853 returned supporters of the common schools to the city councils, the editor rejoiced that "Hereafter, he [Purcell] will be a much smaller man in this city than he has been."⁷⁴

The first major article opposing parochial schools came from the pen of Robert J. Breckinridge in the Southern Presbyterian Review.⁷⁵ He began by affirming the traditional

⁷²Southern Presbyterian 4.7 (October 16, 1851) 25-26. David A. Reese, and George F. Pierce were the other two.

⁷³"Educational Policy of South Carolina" SPR 4.1 (July, 1850) 84.

⁷⁴Presbyterian of the West (April 7, 1853). See also "Godless Schools" Presbyterian of the West (March 31, 1853) and several other articles in February and March.

⁷⁵Robert J. Breckinridge, "Denominational Education" SPR 3.1 (June, 1849) 1-19.

triad of “God-ordained” powers: the family, the state and the church. These three institutions “exhaust completely, the susceptibilities and powers of man, when united with his fellows, and to comprehend absolutely, all his duties and obligations, that are not purely individual.”⁷⁶ Breckinridge read the reports of the Board of Education, which affirmed that the church should supervise “the whole of education,” claiming that the historic practice of the church “in its pure days” (i.e., the patristic and reformation periods) should be followed by churches in the United States.⁷⁷ To Breckinridge, this was tantamount to saying that education belonged to the church, “to the total exclusion of the civil power.” As Superintendent of Public Education for the State of Kentucky (1847-1853),⁷⁸ Breckinridge was convinced that common schools were necessary. The

⁷⁶Robert J. Breckinridge, “Denominational Education” *SPR* 3.1 (June, 1849) 2-3. This emphasis on the family, the state and the church as the only three “combinations of the force of individuals, recognized by God in this world—the only aggregate powers he has ordained” was never challenged by Old School Presbyterians. While all acknowledged the existence of corporations, it does not appear that many Presbyterians (or other antebellum Americans) tried to explain how these “combinations of the force of individuals” related to these “God-ordained” powers.

⁷⁷For example, see the “Abstract of the Annual Report for 1848” in *Minutes* (1848) 206-7. But the Board tried to assure critics that it was not trying to take over all American education, pointing out in the 1849 abstract that it was not trying to prescribe a “universal formula of action,” but was emphasizing the principle, that “no imaginable circumstances can justify the Church in standing aloof from the cause of general education. . . She is bound to exercise a watchful supervision of the work of public education.” *Minutes* (1849) 421.

⁷⁸As the first Superintendent of Public Education in Kentucky, Breckinridge faced the gargantuan task of creating a system of public schools, with little more than moral suasion and public funding to accomplish the task (the school term was mandated by the legislature as three months in duration). He acknowledged that people were afraid of “a purely State system of education as infidel in its tendencies,” which was why the state had appointed one of its leading clergymen as the first superintendent. In 1851, after four years of organizing schools, Breckinridge called for an Education Convention to discuss common standards and curriculum. The convention of educators (a large proportion of which were ministers) rejected Breckinridge’s call for the Bible to be used “as a reading book in all schools” (though Breckinridge’s plan allowed for conscientious objectors), compromising on wording that the Bible should be “introduced and used” in the schools—which permitted a school to simply have a short Bible reading at the beginning of the class, rather than actually using the Bible as a reading text. “The Educational Convention (from the *Frankfort Yeoman*)” *Presbyterian Herald* 21.10 (November 20, 1851).

Breckinridge became increasingly frustrated with the state legislature, accusing it of sabotaging his

government could leave certain things to individual initiative, but “can any community, as such, safely, justifiably, omit to provide for the universal education of the people?”⁷⁹

Indeed Breckinridge denied the fundamental premise of the Board of Education by arguing that “education is an affair purely civil, purely temporal.” No church supervision was needed--any more than church supervision over any other sort of work is needed. If we must have church oversight over the selection of teachers (due to concern over moral influence), then church oversight over the election of magistrates should follow.

Breckinridge reminded his readers that the Scottish example cut both ways. The rise of moderatism in the eighteenth-century Church of Scotland was largely due to the college professors who were under church oversight!⁸⁰

Having banished the church from any active oversight, Breckinridge argued that Christian involvement in the public schools was essential. In most places, concerted Christian effort could bring about Bible reading and prayer in the public schools, and he insisted that the church should be “content to allow God to speak for himself in our schools, to the hearts and minds of our children--reserving for the fireside, the Sabbath

efforts, but still poured himself into the schools. By 1853, when he accepted a call as professor of theology at Danville Theological Seminary in Kentucky, he had transformed education in Kentucky. In 1845 there were virtually no public schools in Kentucky, but by 1851 every county had reported some established. In 1847 there were 20,000 children in public schools; in 1852 there were 194,963. Presbyterian Herald 22.42 (June 30, 1853). It helped that his old friend John J. Crittenden had been elected governor in 1848 and vigorously supported his policies, but Crittenden was appointed as Millard Fillmore’s attorney general in 1850. Albert D. Kirwan, John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962) 243, 265. Breckinridge’s successor was the Rev. John Matthews (PTS 1831)—another Old School Presbyterian minister.

⁷⁹Robert J. Breckinridge, “Denominational Education” SPR 3.1 (June, 1849) 4.

⁸⁰See R. B. Sher, Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh (Edinburgh, 1985).

schools, the pulpit and the press, comment, elucidation, and thorough systematic instruction.”⁸¹

Breckinridge concluded by asserting the catholicity of his views, and the sectarian character of his opponents. Presbyterians could not be so narrow as to withdraw from the national schools. Calling his readers to remember the Presbyterian involvement in the American Revolution, he gloried in his vision of Presbyterian catholicity: “Narrow views may be put forth in her name; they are not hers. . . . Weak, timid or selfish counsels may appear for a time to gain her consent, but the calm, final, settled purpose, the true, earnest, cordial action she will take at last, will be in full accord with the spirit of the age.” While Breckinridge had been a champion of the Old School against the New School, his view of education shared the New School emphasis on individual cooperation. With a parting thrust, he decried denominational education as sectarian and bigoted, sacrificing “all hope of the general education of mankind.”⁸² For some, catholicity was developing into a particular form of American nationalism.⁸³

⁸¹Robert J. Breckinridge, “Denominational Education” SPR 3.1 (June, 1849) 9.

⁸²Robert J. Breckinridge, “Denominational Education” SPR 3.1 (June, 1849) 18-19.

⁸³This article called forth a controversy over the editorial policy of the SPR. Thomas Smyth complained that the SPR had refused to accept a rebuttal to Breckinridge’s views written by a leading Georgian presbyter. Smyth insisted that if a Presbyterian review would not accept articles defending “the sentiments of the Presbyterian Church. . . then, for consistency’s sake, change the *name* of the thing.” Smyth astutely feared that James Henley Thornwell was attempting to use the SPR to challenge the present order of the Old School, and hoped that the weekly Southern Presbyterian would be sufficient to combat this educational heresy. Chrysostom, “The Southern Presbyterian Review,” Southern Presbyterian 3.13 (November 23, 1849) 51. Another writer pointed out that Smyth had already published one essay defending parochial education in the SPR, and that the editors simply did not wish to engage the controversy any longer. “Men who ride hobbies often forget that other people can be tired and satisfied with one thing after a while.” He objected to “Chrysostom’s” [Smyth’s] over-zealous attack on the editors. Signum, “The Southern Presbyterian Review—Again,” Southern Presbyterian 3.17 (December 21, 1849) 66. Smyth defended his conduct against the “violent” language of Signum. “I am sorry that the brother in his zeal should have marred his articles with these ‘dead flies in the apothecary’s ointment,’ which very seriously

The following year, at the General Assembly of 1850, Breckinridge fired a warning shot across the bow of the Board of Education, warning that parochial education would detract from the testimony of the Presbyterian Church by withdrawing her resources into a corner.⁸⁴ For the next four years, the education question would be one of the most fiercely contested issues in the church.⁸⁵

A second front in the educational war was developing in Virginia. In August of 1851, the Watchman and Observer ran a series on education from the youthful Robert L. Dabney (UTSVA 1846), pastor of Tinkling Spring Presbyterian Church in Fishersville, Virginia, opposing the plans of the Board of Education. Writing under the pseudonym “Chorepiscopus,” Dabney argued that the Board of Education should stick to ministerial education, and leave general education alone.⁸⁶ He said that he was no enemy to parochial schools, but emphasized his concern that the Board’s claim to direct “all education, in things sacred and secular” was nothing more than a “monstrous, revolutionizing and

modify its fragrance.” Chrysostom, “‘Signum’ and the Southern Presbyterian Review,” Southern Presbyterian 3.18 (December 28, 1849) 71-72. This bitter exchange reflects both the intensity of conviction regarding education, but also the growing animosity between the growing camp of Thornwellians and the older southern Presbyterian establishment, led by Smyth.

⁸⁴“The General Assembly” BRPR 22.3 (July 1850) 459. At the same Assembly (held in Cincinnati, Ohio, in May of 1850), Breckinridge urged the church to present a memorial to Congress on the importance of maintaining the Federal Union. His emphasis on maintaining Presbyterian involvement in the public schools was intimately connected with his hope that the Presbyterian Church could help avert the “calamity” of national disunion.

⁸⁵At the Synod of Kentucky in the fall of 1850, the synod seemed inclined to encourage every congregation to start a parochial school. Breckinridge objected. He argued that the common schools of Kentucky were in their infancy, and needed Presbyterian support. Dr. W. C. Matthews and Dr. John C. Young defended the parochial plan, but out of deference to Breckinridge, the synod laid the report on the table. “Synod of Kentucky (from the Presbyterian Herald) W&O 6.12 (October 31, 1850) 45. Laying a report on the table was a mechanism used in order to avoid making any statement—either positive or negative. It was often used to avoid unnecessary controversy on debated topics.

⁸⁶Chorepiscopus “The Last General Assembly” W&O 6.52 (August 7, 1851) 205.

Popish principle.” The church had no authority, as the church, to conduct secular training. Claiming the authority of the fathers of Virginia Presbyterianism, Moses Hoge, John Holt Rice, and Drury Lacy, Dabney claimed that “they taught that the education of the youth in secular learning was a high and all-important duty, the duty of the individual christian parent, the individual patriot citizen; but not of the church as a church. Her grand function is to teach *the Bible*, nothing but the Bible.” Their schools, he argued, were supported by the church, but not under ecclesiastical oversight. The plan of the Board, Dabney argued, was an innovation.⁸⁷

“A Presbyterian” replied that Dabney should have checked the minutes of the old Hanover Presbytery before asserting that the Virginia fathers did not allow for ecclesiastical oversight of schools. The Hanover Presbytery established schools, examined scholars, and commissioned the purchase of school books, all in its corporate capacity as a presbytery. Appealing to the long tradition of church oversight of education, “A Presbyterian” reminded his readers of Calvin’s academy in Geneva, and the parochial system of Scottish education “which Knox, Melville and sundry others of those glorious days industriously prosecuted in the Fatherland.” He suggested that Dabney had fallen into New School ways of thinking, by considering the presbytery to be a voluntary society in the matter of education. The true innovator, he argued, was Dabney.⁸⁸

⁸⁷Chorepiscopus “The Last General Assembly” W&O 7.1 (August 14, 1851) 1.

⁸⁸A Presbyterian “Chorepiscopus No. 3” W&O 7.5 (September 11, 1851) 17. It is worth pointing out that Dabney remained quiet for a year after this drubbing, and next appeared in print with a lengthy letter defending Union Theological Seminary in Virginia (a popular cause), and warning Virginia against “importing Northerners.” W&O 7.49 (July 15, 1852) 193.

The editor, Benjamin Gildersleeve, commented that he concurred with some of Dabney's fears, but he still supported parochial education. The following year he reprinted an article from the Free Church Record arguing that "a religious education, in all ordinary circumstances, implies, or presupposes, a church connexion. We are not aware, indeed, of any examples in which, on an extensive scale, a religious education has been attempted or successfully carried out apart from the watchful superintendence and fostering care of the church." For those, like Gildersleeve, who were uneasy about separating Presbyterians from the general education of the country, this was precisely the issue. Could general education be separated from church oversight without resulting in infidelity?⁸⁹

This, then, was the challenge that supporters of state education had to meet. How could religion be maintained in a secular state? James Henley Thornwell, president of the College of South Carolina, attempted to meet the challenge in a letter to Governor Manning, which was reprinted throughout North and South alike. Like almost all in the Old School, Thornwell argued that religion was essential to education. While the State "knows nothing of sects, but to protect them, but it does not follow that the State must be necessarily godless." While public schools should not be denominational, neither should they be atheistic or unchristian. "What is wanted is the pervading influence of religion as a life; the habitual sense of responsibility to God and of the true worth and destiny of the

⁸⁹"The Church and the School (from the Free Church Record)" W&O 8.8 (September 30, 1852) 29. The basis for this sort of education in Scotland was simple: "In a country such as ours, in which the children of church members are, by profession, Christians, and receive in baptism the seal of that profession, it appears both natural and dutiful that the Church should exercise a watchful superintendence over their education, and, so far as she can, provide that it be such as is fitted to form, not only intelligent citizens, but intelligent and consistent church members." Presbyterians in America faced a more difficult challenge in articulating the rationale for religious education.

soul, which shall give tone to the character, and regulate all the pursuits of the place.”

Having attended the College of South Carolina during the presidency of the “infidel” Thomas Cooper, Thornwell argued that the college should set a Christian example through the life and character of the professors and through requiring (except in the case of conscientious scruple) religious observance. A state school cannot teach religion as a science, or discipline, but “Let it come in the character of the Professors, let it come in the stated worship of the Sanctuary, and let it come in the vindication of those immortal records which constitute the basis of our faith. Leave creeds and confessions to the fireside and Church, the home and the pulpit. Have godly teachers, and you will have comparatively a godly College.” But, Thornwell warned, the only way to maintain the religious character of the teachers is through “the security of public opinion, which, in proportion as its various religious denominations do their duty in their own spheres, will become absolutely irresistible.” Thus the state college can become “religious without being sectarian.” Grant the church control over education, Thornwell argued, and you wind up with a church that intrudes into every aspect of life. “The church is a distinct corporation--with distinct rights and authority. She has direct control over nothing that is not spiritual in its matter and connected with our relations to Jesus Christ. . . and if education in its secular aspects, is not a function of grace, but of nature, if it belongs to man, not as a christian, but simply as a man, then it no more falls within the jurisdiction of the church, than any other secular work.” Due to the fragmentation of the church catholic, it is likely that denominational colleges will be small, unable to provide large endowments, and far more numerous than necessary. Therefore state education is essential

for a well educated public.⁹⁰ Thornwell's doctrine of the spirituality of the church should not be seen exclusively in the light of his desire to avoid the church's involvement in slavery. It also was connected to his desire to avoid the church's involvement in education.

William Engles, editor of the Presbyterian (and one of the leading champions of Van Rensselaer's parochial plan), admitted that Thornwell's letter had attracted the attention of political as well as religious journals. But Presbyterians had always maintained their own educational institutions, and with the separation of religion from education, Engles insisted that the church was being forced to be even more reliant upon its own resources. "We admit that there is force in the suggestion that we may lose our influence in the State, by severing ourselves from it and rallying around sectarian standards; but these evils are to some extent exaggerated, and even in their largest extent, are not to be compared with the greater evils of leaving the youth of our congregations to the influences of a godless education." Engles agreed that common schools were necessary, but urged the church to supplement the common schools with Presbyterian schools.⁹¹

Perhaps the most extensive review of Thornwell's argument for public education came from "Theophilus" (Rev. George Junkin, president of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia). Junkin rejected Thornwell's argument, claiming that "civil government has no authority to interpose between parent and child. God has put the child under parental tuition, and until the parent delegates his authority to teach and train up his

⁹⁰James Henley Thornwell, "Does Education belong to the Church or State?" W&O 9.20 (December 22, 1853) 76. Thornwell cites Breckinridge's 1849 article in the SPR quite favorably.

⁹¹Editorial, "Dr. Thornwell on Education," Presbyterian 24.3 (January 21, 1854) 10.

child, no teacher has any right and power over it.” Rejecting compulsory attendance of children in school as tyrannical and despotic, Junkin defended parental rights against state interference. Junkin went further even than Van Rensselaer and Engles in openly denying the state’s right to operate schools. Education, Junkin argued, belonged to the church. Arguing that Reformed covenant theology formed the foundation of American republicanism, Junkin argued that “every element of the Common Law that is based on moral law and also with very many of its positive enactments; they are copies from the positive statutes of the Mosaic code.”⁹² Only a religious education could provide the moral foundation for civil government.

David McKinney, editor of the Presbyterian Banner, pointed out that this sounded very much like Van Rensselaer. He quoted the report of the Board of Education for 1852 as saying that “the present State system is an inferior and temporary dispensation, which, like some things under the law of Moses, may be tolerated as antecedent to the introduction of a more perfect system.”⁹³ Such statements provoked even those congenial to parochial schools to react negatively, pointing out that many Presbyterians operated schools and colleges that were not directly under church authority. Van Rensselaer replied to his critics by pointing out that he had always considered private colleges such as Princeton, Jefferson, and Hampden-Sydney to be “included in the denominational resources.”⁹⁴ Nonetheless, Van Rensselaer gave critics fodder for their suspicions when the

⁹²Theophilus (George Junkin) “Further Remarks on Dr. Thornwell's Letter,” W&O 9.22 (January 5, 1854) 86.

⁹³Old Paths, “The Record and Princeton College” Presbyterian Banner 2.30 (April 22, 1854).

⁹⁴“Denominational and Other Colleges” Home and Foreign Record 4.3 (March, 1853) 77.

following month he declared that corporations were a poor substitute for church oversight. Pointing to Andover Theological Seminary, Van Rensselaer noted that while the charter required all professors to subscribe to the Shorter Catechism, the Trustees had released the majority of the professors from this obligation, going “the way of Harvard,” which he could not help but note, was also run by a corporation. “The Church, and not politically chartered corporations, is ‘the pillar and ground of the truth.’”⁹⁵ It sounded to many as if Van Rensselaer was systematically denying that any organization outside the church had the right to operate schools. “Old Paths” replied in the Banner that if Van Rensselaer and his supporters did not moderate their tone, they would lose support for their parochial schools.⁹⁶

A. The Education Debate of 1854

The opening salvo of the education debate at the 1854 General Assembly was fired, predictably, by the Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge (now professor of theology at Danville Theological Seminary). He argued that “the great mass of our people could not be brought to separate the Presbyterian Church from the great educational movements of the age.”⁹⁷ In his opinion, such a separation would be disastrous and ought not to take place. He thought that such “collateral” work distracted from the church’s main task of preaching the gospel. Nevertheless, he was willing to have the Church conduct institutions of her

⁹⁵“Andover Theological Seminary” Home and Foreign Record 4.4 (April, 1853) 109. This is one of the few references to the practice of having corporations operate schools, but while suggesting the dangers of the practice, it does not examine the theory.

⁹⁶Old Paths, “The Record and Princeton College” Presbyterian Banner 2.30 (April 22, 1854).

⁹⁷“Board of Education--State Schools and Church Schools” W&O 9.44 (June 8, 1854) 173.

own, provided it would not be considered disloyal to her authority for those who entertained different opinions, “to continue to act in favour of the state system.”⁹⁸

Two ruling elders were the first to respond. Judge John Fine, from Ogdensburg, New York, argued that the requirements of an educated ministry forced the church to start its work long before seminary. “The Church did not want superficial men. She wanted men learned in the Scriptures and acquainted with human nature; and amidst all other attainments, a knowledge of the ancient languages and of philosophy was pre-eminent.” Using a scientific metaphor, Fine insisted that “We must look to the under strata and not confine ourselves merely to the upper rocks. A true view of education, as of geology, includes a survey of the whole field.”⁹⁹ Silas Holmes, a ruling elder from New York City, and the leading contributor to the Board’s parochial school fund, insisted that the early education of children was pre-eminently the church’s task. “The case of Samuel was full of instruction. Our candidates for the ministry would not be so few, if the church had mothers like Hannah. The time of beginning education was in infancy; and mothers were the first and best instructors of children. . . . Schools were necessary to carry on and complete the work of mothers at home; and these schools should be religious schools.” Colleges were necessary too, but “Let us have religious schools for the young, at any rate—parochial schools, where the Church could see that religion was properly taught.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 233.

⁹⁹“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 233.

¹⁰⁰“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 233. For Holmes’ investment in the Board of Education’s parochial schools see Sherrill, 55-56. Holmes contributed at least \$15,000 for parochial schools between 1853-1856.

A couple of ministers chimed in. Rev. W. J. Frazier of Palmyra Presbytery in Missouri pointed out that many parents were not training their children adequately in religion, admitting that his own early education was deficient. “If parents fail to teach religion to their children, where must we look for the supply of the deficiency? To the State? No. But to the Church of Christ. The Church has no higher duty than to take care of the young. . . . Neglected children are a woeful inheritance to society, and as probationers for eternity, how awful is their condition! We need the organized instrumentality of the Church.”¹⁰¹ Rev. D. V. McLean (president of Lafayette College) argued that the church needs to do more “collateral” work (using Breckinridge’s term) before the supply of ministers will increase significantly. “We take up young men too late. Dr. Alexander used to say that we had to educate a great many young men in order to get a few good ones. That is true. We begin too late; and besides that, the Church has too little oversight of the work.” Parochial schools are beginning to change that, but they are still few in number. We do not oppose the state schools, but they are generally inadequate in religion. “What had made Scotland such a glorious country but the early care of her children? Her parochial schools had been her strength. If our Church were to abandon her position on education, we should be going a century backwards.”¹⁰² At this, R. J. Breckinridge broke in with his warning that the church should not separate herself from the great educational

¹⁰¹“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 233-234.

¹⁰²“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 234.

movements of the age, to which McLean fired back, “It will be a dark hour for us when we give up the control of our youth to the secular powers.”¹⁰³

Charles Hodge (professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary) restated the theory that the Board of Education had settled upon: “When the Church finds that the family and the State fail to provide the requisite kind or amount of education, then the Church may intervene and provide institutions under her own care. . . . Our Church schools owe their origin to the exclusion of religion from the public schools.” We do not wish to cut ourselves off from the public schools, but where those schools are inadequate, we must have good schools.¹⁰⁴

This chorus of support for the Board was too much for Stuart Robinson (pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in Baltimore). He denied the church’s right to establish schools. “The Church was no party to education outside of the ordinances of the house of God. The Church educates by preaching the Gospel, and by making parents assume vows in the baptism of their children.” At this point Hodge asked if Robinson’s views forbade schools in the foreign missionary context, but Robinson ignored the question and continued: “Christians may exercise a good influence over the schools of their neighborhood, but to have control as a part of a Church session, was another thing; and if in this sense the Church was claimed as a party in education, he denied the position.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³“Board of Education--State Schools and Church Schools” W&O 9.44 (June 8, 1854) 173.

¹⁰⁴“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 234-235.

¹⁰⁵“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 235.

Realizing that he could not win on grounds of principle, Breckinridge turned to practical arguments. He feared that the energies of the Board would be consumed by its responsibilities in overseeing all education. As the former Superintendent of Education for the State of Kentucky, he knew how much time and energy could be consumed in such a role.¹⁰⁶ But he was gratified to hear that the Board was softening its rhetoric against the public schools.

But the advocates of parochial schools were unwilling to let Breckinridge move away from matters of principle. Gardiner Spring (pastor of Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City) declared that “The State was formerly sanctified by the Church, and the public schools taught religion, as in Scotland.” Indeed, Spring believed that “The question was fast coming to this—whether the Church, or an infidel world, was to educate our youth.” Spring recognized that while General Assemblies might continue to support parochial schools with resolutions, the fact was that the schools were closing. “I regret the spirit of indifference to our new educational operations, or rather to the old operations of the Church in a new form.”¹⁰⁷ While northern Presbyterians generally agreed that parochial education was acceptable, by the mid-1850s indifference was indeed paralyzing the movement.

Formal opposition to church oversight of education came largely from the South. John B. Adger (a South Carolinian former missionary to Turkey with the American Board

¹⁰⁶“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 235.

¹⁰⁷“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 235-236.

of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) “did not agree that secular education formed a part of the business of the Church court. He did not deny that religion was an important part of education; but the question was whether the Church courts had the right to engage in secular education.” And even if the right existed, the sessions and presbyteries simply did not have enough time to do the job properly.¹⁰⁸ More concerned with practical matters, Professor Joseph Ruggles Wilson of Hampden-Sydney College feared that colleges which were not under church oversight would be excluded from Presbyterian support.¹⁰⁹

But Southerners could be found on both sides of the question. In reply to Wilson, Rev. Robert H. Chapman of Talladega Presbytery (Alabama) suggested that the Board’s policy would encourage institutions like Hampden-Sydney. “As to the right of the Church to take part in education, he believed it with all his heart, and the time may come when the Church will be required to do a great deal more than she is now doing.”¹¹⁰

Paul T. Jones, Esq., a ruling elder from Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia brought his experience as a director of the Philadelphia public schools to bear on the debate. Out of some 1500 graduates of the Philadelphia High School only around a dozen had become ministers. “I . . . can speak with confidence of their admirable management, as secular institutions. But religion is scarcely leavening the schools. A portion of the Bible is indeed read by the teacher, but what is reading a few verses as a part of religious education?” He would continue to support public education as a necessity, although “the

¹⁰⁸“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 236.

¹⁰⁹“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 237.

¹¹⁰“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 237.

absence of religion is a sore evil,” but he had greater respect for the parochial school that his church operated.¹¹¹

The final speech came from Dr. John C. Young, president of Centre College in Kentucky, and a long-time supporter of parochial schools. He did not agree with Van Rensselaer and the Board of Education on all points, but he had seen progress as the church had debated the question over the years. He was convinced that the Board was on the right track, and urged the church to continue to work towards further harmony.¹¹²

The vote on the resolutions endorsing the Board’s plan of education was nearly unanimous. No doubt Adger, Robinson and a few others voted against it, but even in the South the majority overwhelmingly supported denominational education in principle. The strongest vocal support came from the New York/Philadelphia corridor, but was echoed by others from Alabama, Missouri, Kentucky and Wisconsin.

B. Educational Debates in the mid-1850s

After the Assembly’s debate, several newspapers conducted lengthy debates on educational questions. Throughout the 1850s, presbyteries and synods continued to affirm the importance of denominational education. Samuel K. Talmage, president of Oglethorpe University in Georgia, wrote to the Southern Presbyterian that “one of the most alarming features of the age, seems to be the comparative fewness of young men who are turning their attention to the work of the ministry. Is it not a special judgment of Heaven upon the

¹¹¹“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 237.

¹¹²“Education Debate in the General Assembly” Home and Foreign Record (August 1854) 238.

Church for her worldly-mindedness and other sins?” While other denominations were having the same trouble, it encouraged Talmage that “God . . . has inclined our Church with almost unbroken unanimity, from the General Assembly to the lowest ecclesiastical judicatures, to commit themselves fully, and in earnest, to the great and momentous work of denominational and religious education.”¹¹³ Van Rensselaer, hoping to conciliate those that had opposed the Board of Education at the Assembly, re-affirmed his stance that the church does not claim an exclusive right to educate. “All that the General Assembly has ever claimed, is the right to educate, as *one* of the parties in the great work--not the only party, and the exclusive party--but simply *a* party, and a true party.”¹¹⁴

The Southern Presbyterian had hoped that church education would win the day, but now not only Thornwell and Breckinridge, but even Matthew B. Hope, an Old School professor at the College of New Jersey had turned against parochial schools. J. L. Kirkpatrick, the new editor, commented that even Scotland was considering transferring education from the “church to the crown,” in view of the division of the Scottish Church.¹¹⁵ Kirkpatrick pointed out that while a large majority still supported denominational education with their votes, fewer had supported it with their money and patronage.¹¹⁶

¹¹³Samuel K. Talmage, “From the Southern Presbyterian” Home and Foreign Record 5.10 (October 1854) 298.

¹¹⁴Cortland Van Rensselaer, “Right of the Church to Educate” Home and Foreign Record 5.11 (November 1854) 333.

¹¹⁵“Education: Shall It Be by the Church or the State?” Southern Presbyterian 7.30 (May 11, 1854) 118.

¹¹⁶Editorial, “Prof. Smith’s Defence of Denominational Education,” Southern Presbyterian 8.11 (December 28, 1854) 42.

Whereas in the late 1840s presbyterial and synodical schools were established with minimal opposition, by 1854 the debates were more significant. Even the Synod of New Jersey, the place of origin of the parochial school movement, debated the education question in the fall of 1854. All agreed that parents have the most basic right and responsibility to educate their children. They disagreed, however, on the question of whether the church courts should organize schools, or whether the matter should be left to groups of Christians. The advocates of parochial schools pointed out that at least in the matter of colleges, the latter approach was nearly impossible. Private Christian associations lacked the necessary resources—which was why nearly all the Presbyterian colleges founded after 1830 were denominational enterprises. And if it appropriate for the church to organize colleges, then why not other schools as well?¹¹⁷

Four years later the Synod of New York discussed whether it should encourage all Presbyterians to abandon the public schools. Their concluding resolution stated, “that the education of children in the schools of the State requires the most vigilant attention of the Church, lest, by neglect of the Bible, and those Christian principles which inculcate obedience to government and respect for law, the Public School should lose all moral power, and become subservient to infidelity, Romanism, licentiousness, and anarchy.” Protesting against the complete removal of the Bible and prayer from some of the state’s public schools, the synod appointed a committee of five to consider the expediency of

¹¹⁷R, “Synod of New Jersey (from the Presbyterian)” Home and Foreign Record 5.12 (December 1854) 363.

“abandoning the present system of education by the State, leaving education, with religion, to be supported by the voluntary action of the people.”¹¹⁸

The following year, in November of 1859, the committee reported that the common school movement was too popular and successful to consider withdrawing from it. New York Presbyterians would have to accept it and entrust the religious education of their children to “parents, ministers, ruling elders, parochial and Sunday-schools, &c., where our rights and duties are unembarrassed by any public or exterior control.” Indeed, since the New York legislature had ruled that the schools were under the “rule of the people,” through the Board of Education, they hoped that religious influence could increase. Nonetheless, they added, “It is the policy of our people and of our nation, to promote the commingling of our youth and of all our citizens, so as to coalesce as one united homogeneous population.” To withdraw from the common schools would leave them to godless influence. Its resolution was adopted unanimously:

1. Resolved, That the Synod reiterates its strong and solemn conviction that the public schools should enjoy the influence of the daily reading of the Holy Scriptures; and that while the present system is continued,, it is not expedient to abandon the policy of State education, so as to leave it to be supported exclusively by private or ecclesiastical effort.¹¹⁹

As in other states, local communities still controlled the religious content of their schools, so many Old School Presbyterians hoped that they could influence the direction of the common schools.

¹¹⁸“Synod of New York” Presbyterian Magazine 8.12 (December, 1858) 566-567. The committee consisted of John Krebs, Samuel Irenaeus Prime, William Bannard, A. M. Lyon, and Aaron B. Belknap, leaving out some of the most prominent supporters of parochial schools.

¹¹⁹“The Synod of New York on Common Schools,” Presbyterian 29.48 (November 26, 1859) 189.

While church newspapers usually emphasized synodical and presbyterial actions, and published debates between ministers and elders, occasionally other voices were heard as well. In May of 1855 a poor widow from the West with six small children wrote to the Home and Foreign Record:

I am often ready to sink in sorrow, as it respects the education of my children. I stand alone in my views of educating children in the district. My views are as you have them in the *Record*--a religious education. It has often been said to me, 'Your children are no better than other children.' By nature they are not, and I have feared that if sent to the schools that we have here, they will be no better by practice.¹²⁰

Few women's voices were recorded in the newspapers, but their silence should not be taken as lack of interest. Editorial comments and subscription records indicate that women formed a substantial portion of the readership of the newspapers, and their efforts were often enlisted in educational endeavors.¹²¹

C. Virginia Again

While every Old School newspaper published debates between advocates of state and church oversight, the most thorough debate ran in the Watchman and Observer, published in Richmond, Virginia. Rev. Clement Read Vaughan (UTSVA 1847, and pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Lynchburg, Virginia) launched a lengthy attack on the

¹²⁰Home and Foreign Record 6.5 (May 1855) 129.

¹²¹See Appendix one on periodicals, as well as the significant number of female teachers in Appendix four on education. Also see Page Putnam Miller, A Claim to New Roles (Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association and The Scarecrow Press, 1985).

educational policy of the Board of Education in the Watchman and Observer.¹²² The ensuing debate lasted from June 22-August 10, 1854, and then after a brief respite, continued from October 26, 1854-May 31, 1855.

Vaughan opened his argument by claiming that the Board was hiding its true principles. When Van Rensselaer and Hodge claimed to support public schools, it was merely a ploy to gain the church's consent for their conspiracy to take over the management of the whole of general education, "invested with absolute control over the whole secular and religious education of the children of the church, holding the destiny of a thousand schools at its breath." Either the church should approve this tyranny or repudiate it outright. But, Vaughan argued, "it is a breach of the apostolic commission for the church to pass her strictly spiritual bounds and claim an unlimited jurisdiction over the whole system of secular education." Arguing for the exclusively spiritual jurisdiction of the church, he urged the church to "interfere and prevent the officers of that Board from turning their whole machinery into implements of evil." Calling every true Christian to "come out of these schools" and "cleanse his hands from all contact with a system built upon the prostrate charter of the church of God," Vaughan suggested that ecclesiastical oversight of education was not just a bad idea—it was evidence of apostasy.¹²³

¹²²Vaughan had replaced the Rev. William S. Reid at Lynchburg, who had been one of the foremost proponents of denominational education. First Presbyterian Lynchburg was one of the leading churches in Roanoke Presbytery, which (as far as my research has uncovered) became the first presbytery to formally reject denominational education in 1859. "Pastoral Letter of the Presbytery of Roanoke" CP 4.29 (July 16, 1859) 114.

¹²³Theta (Clement Read Vaughan), "The Board of Education" W&O 9.46 (June 22, 1854) 184. (The six-part series was initially signed "Theta," but it was later published as a pamphlet with Vaughan's name). "A Review of the Doctrines of the Board of Education of the Presbyterian Church, upon the relation of the church to the general interests of education; by C. R. Vaughan, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Lynchburg, VA" W&O 10.12 (October 26, 1854) 45. A similar argument was made against state sponsored

Vaughan pointed out that two camps opposed the Board's plan. The first supported private education run by parents, and the second contended for public education run by the state. Both agreed that the church does not have authority from God to operate schools. The supporters of parochial education could not prove from scripture that God commanded the church, either directly or indirectly, to conduct general education, therefore Vaughan insisted that such schools violated the church's divine charter.¹²⁴ The power to "teach the nations" does not include anything besides the gospel. Hodge and Smyth, he claimed, tried to make gospel ministers into teachers of science as well as preachers of the cross. If this was true, then "the *obligation* is the same for both, and by divine command he is *ex officio* a pedagogue not less than a pastor, and both offices equally authoritative and equally divine."¹²⁵ They try to claim that these are "incidental powers," not of equal weight with the authority to preach the gospel, but if the church has the authority to teach anything incidental to biblical truth, then the church would have the authority to train blacksmiths and hatters. In reply Vaughan insisted that the educational endeavors of the church should be restricted to training ministers only.¹²⁶

education in 1855 as "State Education Radically Wrong," Presbyterial Critic 1:8 (August, 1855) 370-373. This author also implied that ecclesiastical education was just as mistaken because both took the educating authority away from parents.

¹²⁴Theta (Clement Read Vaughan), "The Board of Education, No II" W&O 9.47 (June 29, 1854) 185.

¹²⁵Theta (Clement Read Vaughan), "The Board of Education, No III" W&O 9.48 (July 6, 1854) 189.

¹²⁶Theta (Clement Read Vaughan), "The Board of Education, No IV" W&O 9.49 (July 13, 1854) 193.

Vaughan was concerned that the boundaries between family, church and state were becoming blurred. It was obvious to all that an elder who was a magistrate may not try an ecclesiastical offense in his civil court. And if the state should prove faithless in its administration of justice, that would not permit the church to “usurp its functions on pretense of its interest in the right administration of civil government.” Likewise, “if the parent neglects his duty to his children, neither church nor State have the right to compel him to do it, except in a limited and specific sense. . . [when] the violation of his duty as a parent becomes a public offence against the civil law in the one case, or incompatible with Christian character in the other.” The State cannot provide an education that will satisfy the parents, because parents have different religious standards for education. “Let parents. . . unite if it be best on any principle, civil, scientific or religious which may be supposed to be expedient; and let them seek within the shadow of the great social body, distinct from church and State, on the great principle of supply and demand, for the agents and instruments to accomplish it.” The church’s role is simply to instruct the parents in their duty, while the State may simply grant charters and other appropriate encouragement, whether financial or otherwise. But the schools themselves must be under parental control.¹²⁷

Benjamin Gildersleeve had intended to allow Vaughan to finish his series before allowing responses in the Watchman and Observer, but by now the clamor to engage with

¹²⁷Theta (Clement Read Vaughan), “The Board of Education, No V” W&O 9.50 (July 20, 1854) 197. Vaughan also allowed the state to operate schools for those who were too poor to run them, thereby agreeing with Dabney and the old Virginia system of private education, with state schools for the poor. Theta (Clement Read Vaughan), “The Board of Education, No VIII” W&O 10.1 (August 10, 1854) 1.

this young radical had grown too great. Far South replied that if the State and individuals failed to provide good schools, “the church is bound to resume the work herself, and set aside all such corrupt coadjutors.” Relying on one of the favorite arguments of denominational education, he warned that if the church followed Theta’s argument, “then the church can never go ahead of civilization in giving the gospel to the heathen. She must wait until States or individuals teach the heathen letters and give them such secular education as is necessary to comprehend the great or the simple truths of religion.” The work of foreign missions depends upon education, and mission schools have proven to be the most effective means of evangelizing the heathen. Confident that the vast majority of the church, both North and South, affirmed the teachings of Dr. Hodge on education, Far South warned that “great will be the loss” if these doctrines are “repudiated by the church, or by a majority of either section.”¹²⁸

Theta (Vaughan) replied that the church indeed has the “right to do what may be absolutely an indispensable condition to the successful preaching of the gospel. . . . It may be that the education of the heathen in secular schools may be necessary to the understanding of the gospel and there being no other agency in the land to give this education, it might be admitted fully that it was competent to the church to establish such a school.” But in America Vaughan saw no such necessity. Parents were fully capable of establishing good schools. But Vaughan immediately felt the weight of his concession. If the church has discretionary power to create schools in foreign missions, why not at home? Vaughan argued that the parochial school was different in character from the mission

¹²⁸Far South, “Theta and the Board” W&O 9.51 (July 27, 1854) 201.

school. “We affirm the one to be a *secular* school and the other to be a *religious* school, the one identical with ordinary schools for secular instruction, the other analogous, though not absolutely identical with the Sabbath school organization.” The mission school, then is a place to preach the gospel, while the parochial school is a place to impart secular instruction.¹²⁹

Theophilus (George Junkin, president of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia) challenged Vaughan’s divorce between sacred and secular. Learning to read, he claimed, was not a secular act. If mathematics, natural philosophy, and philology were secular matters, then he pointed out that the church must depend on the world for the training of her ministers. “Most assuredly she not only *may*, but she *must teach any branch*, necessary to the understanding of the Bible, or she is false to her Master's cause. . . . In every Sabbath School children are taught to read. . . . a purely *secular* affair, is taught by the church and on the Sabbath day.” The fundamental fallacy of Theta is that he defines education as secular—“relating to things not immediately or primarily respecting the soul, but the body; worldly, temporal.” Theophilus replied that “I deny that letters and reading, any more than speech are in this sense *secular*.” Art and science are “of the soul and not of the body.” You cannot divide man into two parts—“one sacred and the other secular. . . . We repudiate wholly the supposed divorce between things that God has joined together.”¹³⁰

¹²⁹Theta (Clement Read Vaughan), “The Board of Education, No VII” W&O 9.52 (August 3, 1854) 205. This is an interesting example of how Foreign Missions became the sacred cow in Old School Presbyterianism. If foreign missionaries did it, it could not be questioned. Every other institution, whether board, school, or periodical, could be challenged, but not foreign missions.

¹³⁰Theophilus (George Junkin), “Ye are the Light of the World” W&O 9.51 (July 27, 1854) 204.

No sooner did Vaughan's series end, than David McKinney, the editor of the Philadelphia Presbyterian Banner, started a series of articles similar to Vaughan, though since he lived in a state with an extensive public school system, he urged greater involvement in the public schools.¹³¹ Like all Presbyterians, he affirmed that parents are "a party—yea, *the party* in the whole of education." Others may assist them, but the parents are the ones who are obligated to provide for the education of their children. McKinney's approval of state education was due to his different definition of the state. The state is not equal to the government. The state "embraces all who dwell in a community." And because conduct is rooted in moral principles, the state has "as deep an interest in that training which will produce the best moral principles, as it has in that which will result in the fullest intellectual development." Therefore, McKinney argued, general Protestant teaching should be included in the schools without favoring one denomination over others. If the whole community was of one mind, then that teaching should be taught in the schools, because "*the whole of education belongs to the parent, it does not belong to the State.*" The state has an interest in education, and may encourage it, but it cannot overrule the parental interest.¹³²

Likewise, McKinney viewed the church as the people of God, not simply the church courts. But he considered even the church courts as "still parents and men," and therefore he claimed that it is "perfectly competent for members of a Session, a Presbytery,

¹³¹The Banner began as the "opposition" paper in Philadelphia in 1852, since the Presbyterian was edited by William Engles, a former member of the Board of Education, and a staunch supporter of all the Boards. It moved to Pittsburgh in 1855. See appendix one.

¹³²David McKinney, "The Education Question—The State a Party" Presbyterian Banner (August 12, 1854).

Synod or General Assembly, to confer with each other on the education of their offspring and of the young of the land, to devise a system of education, or to give efficiency to a plan already existing.” Church schools would only become a problem if they were made mandatory. “Let all be voluntary, and it may then be, within judicious limits, a safe as well as convenient manner of carrying out the common will.”¹³³ But, McKinney viewed the parochial school movement of the Board of Education as unnecessary. He argued that if the public schools were inadequate, then all evangelical Christians should band together—not just Old School Presbyterians.¹³⁴ But in most places, in order to halt the advance of infidelity and Roman Catholicism, all Protestants should join forces in the public schools.¹³⁵ Unlike Vaughan in his radical critique, McKinney did not think that the parochial school system was wrong in principle, but that it was inexpedient in ceding evangelical influence in society.

Benjamin Gildersleeve, editor of the Watchman and Observer, commented that Vaughan and McKinney had convinced him that the parochial schools were flawed. The erstwhile supporter of parochial schools now feared that separation from other Christian brethren would only weaken the Protestant effort against Rome. The challenge was how to

¹³³David McKinney, “The Education Question—The Church a Party” Presbyterian Banner (August 19, 1854).

¹³⁴McKinney, “The Education Question--Parochial Schools” Presbyterian Banner (August 26, 1854).

¹³⁵McKinney, “The Education Question—the Public Schools a field for Christian Usefulness” Presbyterian Banner (September 23, 1854).

find a way to work together to form evangelical Christian schools—not parochial Presbyterian schools.¹³⁶

Junkin, however, did not wish to lose Virginia to the radicals. He launched a series of articles entitled “Lux Mundi” in the Watchman and Observer in order to defend the principle of church schools. He argued that general education is necessary in order to understand the Bible correctly. Philology, natural philosophy, indeed, every branch of knowledge is ancillary to comprehending the Word of God. All knowledge has a spiritual purpose. Therefore, if ministers are to teach the Word of God to the nations, they must teach everything.¹³⁷ Certainly unbelievers could master all these branches of learning, but all “learning, all art, all science may be and ought to be made subservient to the Master’s glory.” When “secular” learning was cut loose from the religion of the cross, Junkin believed that the “most brutal barbarism” would be unleashed. “Naples and Rome are more savage than the Choctaws and the Omahas. . . . Timbuctoo will be christianized before Paris.”¹³⁸ The distinction between sacred and secular will not hold. The church is “God’s great education society, ordained of him to educate man for earth and for heaven, for time and for eternity.”¹³⁹ Arguing that the church had operated schools at least since the second and third centuries, Junkin argued that the magistrate had no authority to teach.

¹³⁶W&O 10.5 (September 7, 1854) 20.

¹³⁷Theophilus (George Junkin), “Lux Mundi, No 4” W&O 10.18 (December 7, 1854) 69.

¹³⁸Recall that this is 1854 after the Revolution of 1848 has established the secular Roman Republic.

¹³⁹Theophilus (George Junkin), “Lux Mundi, No 5” W&O 10.19 (December 14, 1854) 73.

That is the distinctive function of the church.¹⁴⁰ For Junkin it did not matter whether parents formed the school under the general oversight of the church, or whether the session assumed direct control. Either way, the school must be “in a degree under the inspection of the officers of their church.”¹⁴¹

Beta (identity unknown—but sounds like Theta/Vaughan) caught this distinction, and replied to Theophilus that the duty of a church court to conduct education “must be specified from the word of God.” And this he has not done. It is not enough to say that the church should do it, because Theta (Vaughan) is willing to allow church members to start schools under the general oversight of the church. But in order to defend the Board’s system, Junkin must first prove that the elders are required by the word of God to establish and operate schools.¹⁴² Junkin replied in the same issue that he considered the whole church—not just the eldership—to be the divinely constituted education society.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰Theophilus (George Junkin), “Lux Mundi, No 6” W&O 10.20 (December 21, 1854) 77; “Lux Mundi, No 7” W&O 10.21 (December 28, 1854) 81. He flatly rejected the Princeton Review’s argument that the state does have a legitimate role in operating schools. “Lux Mundi, No 8” W&O 10.22 (January 4, 1855) 85; “Lux Mundi, No 9” W&O 10.23 (January 11, 1855) 89.

¹⁴¹Theophilus (George Junkin), “Lux Mundi, No 11” W&O 10.25 (January 25, 1855) 97; “Lux Mundi, No 12” W&O 10.26 (February 1, 1855) 101.

¹⁴²Beta, “Remarks on the Education Question, Chiefly in Reply to Theophilus No. 1” W&O 10.28 (February 15, 1855) 107. Beta here begins to reveal Theophilus’s identity. He believes Theophilus to be one who played a most “noble part at the most critical period through which the Presbyterian Church in this country has ever been called to pass--a man whose reputation for learning and talent, for piety and usefulness, is as just as it is high, and far too high to be either elevated by our praises or depressed by our censures.” Few ministers or elders in Virginia in 1854 would meet these criteria. Beta later revealed that Theophilus was a graduate of Jefferson College, and Theophilus himself revealed that he was a native of Pennsylvania who had been involved in the Sunday School at Murray Street Presbyterian Church in New York City. The only man who fits all these items is George Junkin.

¹⁴³Theophilus (George Junkin), “Lux Mundi, No 14” W&O 10.28 (February 15, 1855) 111.

This called forth a reply from “Fair Fight” who pointed out that under Theophilus’s (Junkin’s) definition, “if a public school is taught by a Christian it is under *ecclesiastical* control.” But Theophilus has not answered the question whether “the Presbyterian church *as an organized* body. . . have the power to supervise and control as well as originally create” schools.¹⁴⁴

Gildersleeve entered the fray to quote the Papal instruction of 1854 to form Catholic schools under every bishop. He insisted that the Board was not trying to imitate Rome, because the Board did not insist that every member send their children to these parochial schools. In the end, after some hesitation, Gildersleeve was concluding (with the majority of Old School Presbyterians) that while parents have control over their children’s education, state, church or private schools could all co-exist peacefully.¹⁴⁵

Theophilus (Junkin) concluded his lengthy series by examining the principles on which these schools should operate. He argued that the church should welcome all students into her schools whose parents are willing to help support the school and submit their children to its discipline. So long as the school is under church oversight, there is no need to require all parents to be Christian. If a community is sparsely populated, then the several denominations should work together until they can start their own schools.¹⁴⁶ For Junkin, the best way to administer such schools is through a board of trustees. The

¹⁴⁴Fair Fight, “The Education Question” W&O 10.29 (February 22, 1855) 117. What becomes clear is that Junkin was not particularly interested in the distinction between members founding schools and sessions founding schools, so long as the school was under the oversight of the church.

¹⁴⁵“The Board of Education” W&O 10.29 (February 22, 1855) 118.

¹⁴⁶Theophilus (George Junkin), “Lex Mundi--No. 13” W&O 10.29 (February 22, 1855) 119.

property should be held by a closed corporation and the teachers appointed by the session or presbytery who would give general supervision to the school.¹⁴⁷

What particularly alarmed Junkin, however, was the compromise that many Presbyterians (such as Breckinridge and Thornwell) were promoting that made the civil government the “financier of schools.” “It nearly approaches the idea of church schools; for it leaves the entire business of education to the voice of the people.” Where the majority is religious, this is a popular approach. “In *fact*, it will be under church supervision from first to last,” since ministers and elders are so often chosen as public school superintendents. But as attractive as this sounds, there is a danger of the state suppression of religion. “Let the civil government arrogate the function of teaching—let it assume the control of general education and such results not only may, but must occur.”¹⁴⁸

Beta, on the other hand, was incensed by Theophilus’s continued blurring of the distinction between the church and the church courts. While Theophilus (Junkin) had made it clear that he had no quarrel with either private or parochial schools, Beta (Vaughan?) wanted someone to show that the scripture required the church courts to operate schools.¹⁴⁹ Beta at least appreciated the fact that Theophilus was consistent in

¹⁴⁷Theophilus (George Junkin), “Lex Mundi--No. 17” W&O 10.32 (March 15, 1855) 131. Junkin also reveals his connection to collegiate education here by complaining about the practice of trustees awarding honorary degrees. The doctor of divinity, in particular, Junkin argued, should only be awarded by faculties of theology—who are the only ones in a position to judge rightly.

¹⁴⁸Theophilus (George Junkin), “Lex Mundi--No. 15” W&O 10.30 (March 1, 1855) 121.

¹⁴⁹Beta, “Remarks on the Education Question, Chiefly in Reply to Theophilus. No. VI” W&O 10.33 (March 22, 1855) 131.

denying the state's right to educate, a point on which he lambasted the Board of Education:

*we charge her [the Board] with inconsistency in advocating Church Education, and at the same time recognizing the right of the State to educate. . . . We acknowledge that the charge of inconsistency does not apply, if the Board concedes to the State nothing more than the right to educate those who cannot be educated without her interference. We understand her as conceding a great deal more.*¹⁵⁰

Beta rejected any sense of discretionary power. When it comes to the church, there are no grey areas. Everything is strictly black or white. He insisted that without scriptural support, the argument from history is papist and high-church, not Presbyterian.¹⁵¹ Admitting that he could not overthrow the historical argument for parochial schools, Beta simply dismissed history with an appeal to scripture. As such, Beta and Theta (who are probably the same person—Clement Read Vaughan) reflects a sort of biblicism that was becoming increasingly characteristic in the second generation of southern Old School Presbyterianism.¹⁵²

The final major series on education in the Watchman and Observer came from the pen of Thomas V. Moore (PTS 1842), pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of

¹⁵⁰Beta, "Remarks on the Education Question, Chiefly in Reply to Theophilus. No. VIII" W&O 10.35 (April 4, 1855) 139. This was a reply to Van Rensselaer's article in the Home and Foreign Record (November 1854) on "The Right of the Church to Educate." (The attentive reader may notice that the page numbering in volume 10 of the W&O is inconsistent).

¹⁵¹Beta, "Remarks on the Education Question, Chiefly in Reply to Theophilus. No. X" W&O 10.37 (April 19, 1855) 139.

¹⁵²While only tangential to his main argument, it is interesting to note that Beta argued that if sessions have control over teachers through parents, then the consequence would be that they would also have control over servants through masters, suggesting that this is so obviously distasteful to his readers that it will overthrow Theophilus's argument. Beta, "Remarks on the Education Question, Chiefly in Reply to Theophilus. No. XI" W&O 10.38 (April 26, 1855) 153.

Richmond, Virginia. Moore, in reply to Junkin's claim that the church was the divinely ordained education society, argued that the family should be considered "God's University." Arguing that the family was the original government, school and church, Moore set forth a guide for parents in considering how to train their children to be productive members of both the church and the state.¹⁵³

In spite of the fact that several leading ministers in Virginia were opposed to parochial schools, the synod continued to endorse the project as late as the fall of 1855. While insisting that the primary purpose of the Board of Education should remain ministerial training, the synod affirmed that parochial education "may also be commended, as worthy of the enlightened liberality of those whom God has enabled and disposed to contribute to this special purpose." Maintaining that church oversight was not necessary, the synod promised to support all schools that gave sound religious instruction, and concluded "that whatever diversity of opinion may exist in regard to certain of the views and arguments advanced in former publications of the Board, yet in the educational policy of the church as defined in the resolutions of the General Assembly and explained in the last report of the Board, we find no grounds for suspicion of the Board, or further controversy in the church."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³Rev. T. V. Moore, "God's University; Or the Family considered as a Government, a School, and a Church, the Divinely Appointed Institute for Training the Young for the Life that now is, and for that which is to come" W&O 10.41 (May 17, 1855) 165. The series extended to several parts, but was reprinted in the Home, the School, and the Church for 1855 by Cortland Van Rensselaer. Moore articulated a traditional view of male headship, though he noted that since the wife was one flesh with her husband, she therefore should be seen as a part of the head of the family.

¹⁵⁴"The Late Action of the Synod of Virginia on the Subject of Education" CP 1.2 (January 12, 1856) 5.

Predictably, this was not sufficient for Clement Vaughan. He authored a protest against the idea that the church “acting in its high official and governmental capacity, is possessed of the right to control secular education,” interfering with the rights of parents. Joining him were Edward Martin, his younger brother, licentiate Alexander Martin,¹⁵⁵ and ruling elders A. D. Dickinson, William P. Dickinson, and James Calhoun. The principled opposition to the Board of Education in Virginia, in 1855, consisted of two young ministers, a licentiate, and three ruling elders.

The synod replied graciously that the protest had missed the point. The synod did not claim the right to “control secular education”—nor did the General Assembly. Rather, “it claims the right of the church to provide the means of a Christian education to her own children and youth whenever those means are not otherwise provided.” No interference with any other party is intended. It is not surprising that the protestants were all recent Union Seminary alumni, while the ones defending parochial education were Princeton graduates from the very period when the Princeton faculty first began to promote parochial education.¹⁵⁶

Likewise, in South Carolina, while Thornwell’s influence was considerable, it could not make a serious dent in the support for parochial education. In 1858 the Synod of

¹⁵⁵Edward Martin had studied privately and at Union Seminary, and was pastor at Nottoway, Virginia; Alexander Martin was a licentiate of East Hanover Presbytery, and possibly a ruling elder—otherwise his vote becomes inexplicable, since licentiates were not permitted to vote. He graduated from Union Seminary in 1855.

¹⁵⁶“The Late Action of the Synod of Virginia on the Subject of Education” CP 1.2 (January 12, 1856) 5. The authors of the synod’s reply were Abraham B. Van Zandt (Union College and PTS 1842, pastor at Tabb Street Church in Petersburg, Virginia) and Samuel Davies Stuart (Centre College and PTS 1838, pastor at Briery, Virginia).

South Carolina stated that “in most of our Presbyteries provision has been made, or is making, for the education of our sons and daughters under the supervision of our Ecclesiastical courts.” Divine approval was seen in the large number of professions of faith that were coming out of these denominational schools.¹⁵⁷

Since even Virginia and South Carolina, where the debate had been the hottest, supported of the Board’s moderated policy of establishing ecclesiastical schools only where adequate schools were unavailable, the General Assembly of 1855 saw a much briefer debate. Both Dabney and Thornwell were commissioners, but Dabney’s speech on the Board of Education was focused on the need to improve ministerial training, and while Thornwell expressed his objection to the Board’s involvement in general education—and especially to the idea that education belongs exclusively to the church—he did not press the matter. He concluded his remarks by saying that “as the Scotch Presbyterians say in their Presbyteries, he had exonerated his conscience, and would stop there.” While both Dabney and Thornwell objected to the Board’s operations they recognized that they were in a small minority and did not wish to disrupt the church. At least in this matter catholicity provided a way to maintain a clear conscience even with serious opposition to the church’s policy.¹⁵⁸

Thornwell and Vaughan continued to argue against the idea that the church had an exclusive right to educate, but it is hard to find anyone who actually argued for that position. But both Thornwell and Vaughan remained convinced that the Board was simply covering its true agenda with the rhetoric of compromise. It is difficult not to draw

¹⁵⁷Home and Foreign Record 9.2 (February 1858) 74.

¹⁵⁸“General Assembly” CP 1.22 (May 31, 1855) 85.

comparisons with the increasing southern paranoia about the secret abolitionist agenda of all northerners, or the protestant paranoia about the secret agenda of Roman Catholics. What was lacking was a genuine trust in one another—something that was increasingly difficult to obtain given the growing isolation between various regions.¹⁵⁹

D. The California Radical

In 1859 a new voice began arguing a most shocking proposition: William A. Scott, editor of the Pacific Expositor, and pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, California, suggested that compulsory Bible reading in the common schools was contrary to American Republicanism. The proposition itself was not shocking—infidels and papists had been making the claim for decades—but the fact that it was uttered by a leading Old School minister, the moderator of the 1858 General Assembly. Indeed, what was most disturbing to editors throughout the country was the fact that Scott had persuaded the Synod of the Pacific to protest against the compulsory introduction of the Bible.¹⁶⁰ Scott, who had been ordained in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and had been the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans for twelve years before

¹⁵⁹Cortlandt Van Rensselaer's visit to the Synod of Virginia in 1853 had cooled the fevered pitch of the rhetoric. Over and over again, rumors and uninformed discussions created unfounded fears, which formal public discussion was able to resolve. But a few radicals remained unconvinced. The problem of "confidence in the brethren" would continue to plague the church and the nation.

¹⁶⁰Scott noted that the Congregationalists and New School Presbyterians had urged the compulsory introduction of the Bible in California public schools, but the Old School protested against it. Pacific Expositor 1.5 (November, 1859) 230-231.

moving to San Francisco in 1855, was convinced by James Henley Thornwell and Stuart Robinson of the complete spirituality of the church, and took the next logical step.¹⁶¹

Scott supported the use of the Bible in public schools, but not “its *compulsory use, by law*, in such schools.”¹⁶² Arguing that public schools were necessary for universal education, Scott nonetheless urged the formation of denominational schools, because of his conviction that no “religion or sect or denomination, should be supported in any way by law.”¹⁶³ Scott especially deplored any attempt to gain state money for religious schools. We must “resist the invasion of the State treasury for the promotion of anything distinctively religious.”¹⁶⁴

The Presbyterian and other newspapers howled in protest that Scott was denying the Protestant character of the United States. Scott replied that the United States was not Protestant. He supported bible reading in the public schools, but not when teachers or parents were “conscientiously opposed to it. . . let there be no legislation to compel any one to read the Bible, recite the Creed, or go to Church.”¹⁶⁵ Defending himself against his critics, Scott argued that Christians were called to suffer—not to impose hardships on others: “Nor has the time past when they that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer

¹⁶¹Scott supported Thornwell’s argument on the church’s mission at the 1859 General Assembly, Pacific Expositor 1.5 (November, 1859), and reprinted Stuart Robinson’s article “State and Church,” Pacific Expositor 1.12 (June, 1860), from the Scottish Presbyterian. Robinson’s views are expressed in “The Issues Stated,” Presbyterial Critic 1:2 (February, 1855) 78–83.

¹⁶²“Synod of the Pacific” Pacific Expositor 1.1 (July, 1859) 190. On this point Scott disagreed with Thornwell, who wished to see Protestantism maintained in the public schools.

¹⁶³“The Synod and Its School” Pacific Expositor 1.5 (November, 1859) 234-235.

¹⁶⁴“Church Schools and State Schools” Pacific Expositor 2.7 (January, 1861) 282.

¹⁶⁵“Religious Laws and Objectionable Views” Pacific Expositor 1.9 (March, 1860) 404.

persecution.”¹⁶⁶ To a certain extent, William A. Scott was an anomaly in the Old School, but he signaled the direction in which American culture was heading, and the ironic way in which a Thornwellian version of the spirituality of the church could lead Presbyterians to a comfortable truce with the dominant culture of the future.

Conclusion

In the late 1840s the Old School committed itself on paper to an extensive project of parochial education. If the newspapers and courts of the church reflect church opinion, a large proportion of the church hoped that a Presbyterian school system could stem the tide of irreligion and secular education. But even those committed to Presbyterian schools generally supported the rising common school system—a system whose principles were formed in direct opposition to the parochial system. Old School choices reveal much about how catholicity was becoming a national, rather than religious, principle.

While the only church court to specifically deny the church’s right to establish parochial schools (as far as my research shows) was Vaughan’s Roanoke Presbytery in 1859, which argued his position that parents are the educators of their children, and that the church only offers religious teaching,¹⁶⁷ by the end of the 1850s, parochial schools were fading out. The St. Louis Presbyterian discussed the education question in 1858. The Common School Report for 1854 had shown that of the 203,658 children from ages 5-20 in Missouri, only around 35% were in the common schools, while an equal number were

¹⁶⁶“Sunday Laws” Pacific Expositor 1.11 (May, 1860) 482.

¹⁶⁷“Pastoral Letter of the Presbytery of Roanoke” CP 4.29 (July 16, 1859) 114.

privately educated, leaving an estimated 30% who did not attend any school at all.¹⁶⁸ Some still defended Presbyterian schools, but even they admitted that public opposition was too strong: “Ministers who could not feed and clothe their families a year, upon what is often expended upon one party of pleasure, have been reproached for teaching pious youth of the church who could find no other than Romish schools.”¹⁶⁹ Another writer confessed that he loved the public schools, but regretted that “in deference to infidel prejudice, the reading of the Scriptures and prayer had to be excluded, for, without religion to sanctify it, education can raise us to nothing better nor higher than the heathen civilization of Athens and Rome.” And to make matters worse, the St. Louis schools had chosen the Unitarian hymnal, which altered hymns to delete any references to the divinity of Christ. Will St. Louis Christians be content, he asked, to “be taxed to propagate Unitarianism?” This, he claimed, was a sectarianism just as much as if the papists demanded the public schools to say the Hail Mary.¹⁷⁰

By 1870 parochial schools were almost completely abandoned by the Presbyterian church. A column in the Home and Foreign Record set forth the official position of the post-Van Rensselaer Board of Education. A truly American system of education must be universal, equal and supported at the public expense. The author suggested that “if ‘all men are created equal’ and ‘endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights’ . . . so also it is self-evident that the nature, exercise and limits of these rights must be taught in

¹⁶⁸“Common School Report” St. Louis Presbyterian 11.33 (Feb 15, 1855).

¹⁶⁹S, “Presbyterial Schools and Colleges” St. Louis Presbyterian 15.14 (September 23, 1858) 50.

¹⁷⁰“Sectarianism in the Public Schools” St. Louis Presbyterian 15.19 (October 28, 1858) 70.

the appropriate period of youth, to each generation. Thus the ends of government are accomplished in the most cheap, effectual, and wholesome way.” Further, he argued that while no creed could be taught, “the Bible should be read as an authority, and for its information upon matters of infinite value to the soul of man; a brief prayer, in some simple form if preferred should be offered,” juvenile hymns should be sung and a “spirit of reverence towards God and respect for his truth should pervade the literature and tuition of the school room.” This Protestant vision for the common schools, he insisted that “every pastor of a church should feel. . . [that] he is called, by his vows to God, by his professional duty, by his interest in the future of the youth, and by his patriotism to diligently cultivate.”¹⁷¹ Catholicity had become a particular version of American Protestant nationalism.

¹⁷¹“American System of Education,” Home and Foreign Record 21 (1870) 221-222. Southern Presbyterians, led by Thornwell’s friend, Benjamin M. Palmer, would ironically turn to parochial schools in order to avoid the integration orders of Reconstruction. See David B. Chesebrough, God Ordained this War: Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991) 198.