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One body and one spirit: Presbyterians, interdenominationalism, and the American Revolution

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Comments

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“ONE BODY AND ONE SPIRIT”: PRESBYTERIANS, INTERDENOMINATIONALISM, AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

By

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AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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This dissertation examines the interdenominational pursuits of the American Presbyterian Church from 1758 to 1801 in order to demonstrate how the Church helped to foster both national and sectional spirit. I have utilized a variety of sources including: the published and unpublished work of both the Synod of New York and Philadelphia and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, as well as published and unpublished Presbyterian sermons, lectures, hymnals, poetry and letters. With these sources I argue that a self-imposed interdenominational transformation began in the American Presbyterian Church upon its reunion in 1758 and that this process was altered by the Church's experience

during the American Revolution. The resulting interdenominational goals had both spiritual and national objectives. As the leaders in the Presbyterian Church strove for unity in Christ and Country, I contend that they created fissures in the Church that would one day divide it as well as further the sectional rift that would lead to the Civil War.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my patient wife Denise.

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patience and proofreading, both of which I tested regularly during this process. Finally, I would like to give thanks to God for his unfailing love and unlimited grace without which I could not have finished.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I will argue that a self-imposed interdenominational transformation began in the American Presbyterian Church upon its reunion in 1758 and that this process was altered by the Church's experience during the American Revolution. The resulting interdenominational goals had both spiritual and national objectives. As the leaders in the Presbyterian Church strove for unity in Christ and Country, I contend that they created fissures in the Church that would one day divide it as well as further the sectional rift that would lead to the Civil War. The late colonial and early republican Presbyterian Church warrants study not only because of the prestigious positions Presbyterians held in academia, society, and government, but also because the Church is one of best representations of a colony/nation-wide denomination.[1] In

[1]During the second half of eighteenth-century the Presbyterian Church was the second largest denomination in America, and unlike the Congregational or Anglican

this position the Church was able to offer its services, largely through the printed word, as a vehicle in which Americans could address the religious and civil tumults of the late eighteenth-century. A study of the Church reveals Presbyterians more than mirroring and accommodating the concerns, beliefs and desires of Americans, it also illustrates that they were integral in fostering what captivated the American mind: Christendom, nationalism and sectionalism.

The history of religion during the last half of the eighteenth-century is, fortunately, a well-developed and researched field. Despite the strides taken, however, there has been little written on denominational attempts at Christian unity or how churches during this period interacted with or affected nationalism or sectionalism. Religious histories written about the late colonial period tend to focus on the great multitude contests, religious, social, and national, that mark the period and how they led to or influenced the American Revolution. Historians, such as Carl Bridenbaugh and Arthur Cross, have argued about the central significance of the Anglican/Dissenter conflict over the establishment of a colonial bishopric to the

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Churches, the Presbyterian Church was not largely confined to one section of the country.

American Revolution.[2] However, by focusing only on the bishopric crisis, these historians are only able to present a narrow history of the late colonial period.

While still focusing on conflicts, other historians have attempted to broaden the understanding of religion's influence on the American Revolution. Both Alan Heimert and Patricia Bonomi stressed the importance of the Great Awakening to the origins of the American Revolution, though Heimart emphasized New/Old Light differences and Bonomi stressed the common heritage of challenging authority.[3] Historians such as Nathan Hatch and Ruth Bloch focused on the millennial beliefs of American churchgoers, sparked by the conflicts between Catholic France and Protestant Britain, as motivation for the American Revolution and the foundation of the republic.[4] For Jonathan Clark, the

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[2]Arthur Cross, *The Anglican Episcopate and the American Colonies* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902); and Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689-1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[3]Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the American Revolution (*Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); and Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America*(New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[4]Nathan Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Ruth Bloch,

origins of the revolution lay in the religious traditions of the seventeenth-century rather than the eighteenth. This last war of religion, as he defined the American Revolution, was fueled by the anxiety of colonial Dissenters, who were ideologically stuck in the seventeenth-century, concerning the heterodox and hegemonic eighteenth-century Anglican Church.[5] Although each of these historians provides indispensable insight into the influence of religion in late colonial and revolutionary periods, their work, which largely focuses on conflict, overlooks processes of unity such as the interdenominational journey begun by the Presbyterian Church at this time, as well as its eventual significance.

Much of the religious history focused on the late eighteenth-century forward can be divided into two schools of thought that center on the "social control" hypothesis. Those who support the argument, such as Fred Hood and Jon Butler, argue that this period is marked predominantly by the clergymen trying to retain their control over the

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Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[5]J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832; Political discourse and social dynamics in the Anglo-American world* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

common person.[6] Although the "social control" thesis was *the* historical interpretation for a number of years, recent historians, such as Nathan Hatch, have attempted to counter it by rewriting the history of the Second Great Awakening. As a result, churches during this period fall into one of two categories: the "religious newcomers"-the Methodists, Baptists, Mormons, African American Christians and the Christian Churches-and the "Standing Order"-the Congregationalists, Presbyterians or Anglicans. For these historians the "religious newcomers," inspired by the democratic impulses of American Revolution, were the true catalysts for the Second Great Awakening as their egalitarian principles sparked the Christianization of Americans, the Democratization of American Christianity, and the Democratization of America in general.[7]

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[6]Fred Hood, *Reformed America: The Middle and Southern States, 1783-1837*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith; Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[7]Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); and A. Gregory Schneider, "From Democratization to Domestication: The Transitional Orality of the American Methodists Circuit Rider" in Leonard I. Sweet, ed. *Communication and Change in American Religious History* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993).

Although this dissertation greatly benefited from Hatch and others, these historians have overlooked the American Presbyterian Church. As the "religious newcomers" receive fresh examinations which illuminate their significance in the early republic, the Presbyterians have been left as part of a reactionary movement, but the story is more complex.[8] It is true that the Presbyterians were not enticed by experimentations with egalitarianism. However, neither did they desperately struggle to hold onto a glorious past through "social control" as a reactionary force. The Presbyterians had a goal of transforming the divided and bickering newly made states into a United States. They desired a unified Christian America that would be a benefit not only for future Americans, but also for the world. The travails of the American Revolution, which Hatch and others claim sparked democratization in the

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[8]My work is indebted to research of Jonathan Sassi and Robert Abzug. Focusing primarily on New England and the Congregationalist churches, Sassi and Abzug have attempted to counteract the reactionary and static view of the "Standing Order" churches. In *A Republic of Righteousness,* Sassi contends that after 1800 and the renowned elections of that year, the Congregationalist churches, made earnest strides, through genuine interdenominational activities, to Christianize America. In *Cosmos Crumbling*, Abzug reveals how the "Standing Order" churches in the North, moved by legalized religious pluralism, led the reform and religious voluntary movements of the nineteenth century.

"religious newcomers," also served to transform the interdenominational goals of the Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian case illustrates how this process inadvertently promoted sectionalism, as the efforts of this denomination to create one Christian nation led it to create at least two.

As my dissertation examines the American Revolution as the transformative event for the interdenominational pursuit of the Presbyterians it, again, is indebted to other historians. In *The Long Argument,* Stephen Foster addresses how Puritanism in England and America came to an end. Foster argues that in both cases the catalyst was a seemingly beneficial external force that eventually spawned internal division; for the English it was the Long Parliament and for the Americans it was the Great Awakening.[9] Using Foster's work as inspiration this dissertation will contend that the American Revolution proved a similar catalyst for the Presbyterians as the Long Parliament and the Great Awakening were for the Puritans.

My interpretation of how the American Revolution affected the interdenominational spirit of the Presbyterian

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[9]Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

Church relies heavily on Keith L. Griffin's *Revolution and Religion.* Although his conclusions are not as sweeping as Jonathan Clark's, he also finds the inspiration for the rebelling Reformed clergy in their distant religious past and not in the Real Whig ideology of the eighteenth-century. For Griffin, however, that religious heritage extended as far back as the Protestant Reformation, where he claimed the Protestants initially justified armed resistance to religious tyranny. Griffin maintains that this tradition of resistance was passed down, largely unaltered, to the Middle Colony Reformed Churches, including the Presbyterians, of the eighteenth-century. The only change he discovered was the adoption by the Reformed clergy of Puritan New England's belief that they were God's chosen people. By applying this notion to the various Protestant Churches in the colonies the Reformed clergy, Griffin argues, generated support for an armed resistance against Great Britain and helped to establish the belief that America had been chosen by God as an example to the world.[10] In this way Griffin's work serves as a foundation for my contention that the result of the

[10]Keith Griffin, *Revolution and Religion: American Revolutionary War and the Reformed Clergy* (New York: Paragon House, 1994).

Presbyterian Church's experience during the American Revolution was that their post-war goals had both spiritual and national objectives.

Recent historians have, for the most part, come to the conclusion that religion played only a small role in the creation of nationalism in the United States. What credit religion is given has been presented by historians, such as Nathan Hatch and Ruth Bloch, who contend that the millennial beliefs of Americans allowed them to accept the momentous political events of the late eighteenth-century, including the ratification of the Constitution, as part of God's unfolding providential plan. After redefining their "religious priorities in republican terms," Hatch wrote, and after "following the logic of their own eschatology, clergymen placed the American nation at the center of redemptive history."[11] This perspective effectively limited the role of religion during the late eighteenth-century to that of an obsequious observer and grants greater responsibility to secular politics. Other historians of nationalism, such as David Waldstreicher, Simon Newman, and Benedict Anderson, have recently demonstrated the importance of the printed word in the creation of American

[11]Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 160 and 156.

nationalism. According to these historians it was through newspapers, magazines, and other published works that national communities were created among both the elite and common people. Yet these communities were political not religious.[12] Again, in overlooking the Presbyterian Church, historians have unfairly limited the role religion played in fostering nationalism. The Presbyterian leadership made use of the printed word to disseminate a consistent interdenominational message in order to create a community of Christian Americans.

Most histories dealing with the origins of sectionalism either point to the institution of slavery or to the economic and political issues of the nineteenth-century.[13] Those who focus on religion, such as Donald

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[12]David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991); and Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

[13]See: David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 1976); Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1983); William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume I: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); William J. Cooper, Jr, *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983); J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in*

Mathews and Mitchell Snay,[14] argue that after the evangelical Protestant denominations—Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists—successfully overthrew the Anglican establishment, they attempted to alter the South, but in the end it was the South that would alter the churches. When in the nineteenth-century the South came under persistent attack for slavery, these historians contend that the southern evangelical churches came to its defense. The transformation was complete and eventually the evangelical bodies severed ties with their northern brethren. Similar to the position taken by Nathan Hatch and Ruth Bloch concerning the role of religion during the last half of the eighteenth-century, this perspective effectively removes religion as a contributing factor in the shaping of the country. The churches are left waiting to support the great work of others.

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a Slave State: Alabama, 1800-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); and James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press Paperback, 2003).

[14]Donald Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Although they do not emphasize the importance of religion to sectionalism, there are other historians, such as Joyce Appleby, David Waldstreicher, and Peter Knupfer, who believe that the origins of sectionalism were closely tied to those of nationalism. For Appleby, sectionalism stemmed from the ways in which the first generation of Americans in the North and South embraced the democratic impulses loosed by the American Revolution. Diverging paths emerged as southerners increasingly relied on slavery to sustain their economic and political opportunities and northerners did not.[15] Waldstreicher emphasizes how the use of the printed word not only allowed Americans from across the country to celebrate the nation in harmony, it also afforded the opportunity for these diverse Americans to celebrate their specific understandings and hopes for the nation. In this way Americans, elite and non-elite, could "practice nationalism and local politics simultaneously."[16] Working toward a similar conclusion, Peter Knupfer discusses what he terms constitutional unionism. He argues that the Federalist creation of the Constitution was itself

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[15]Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[16]Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 13.

a compromise and that it was to serve as an example of proper national spirit, that of compromise.[17] These historians reveal that eventually the rhetoric of national unity would wear thin, revealing the sectionalism that had grown in the safe soil of compromise. Following in the footsteps of Waldstreicher, Knupfer, and Appleby, this dissertation will reveal how the leadership of the Presbyterian Church fostered sectionalism by disseminating vague definitions of interdenominational nationalism in order to encourage Church-wide acceptance. Also, this study seeks to enrich the current understanding of the origins of sectionalism by showing how the message of compromise the Presbyterian leaders spread to keep peace in their ranks led to the distrust and eventual separation of many members from the national denomination.

In order to discuss any plan or goal of the Presbyterian Church, it is vital to determine who or what directed the course of the denomination. The colonial Presbyterian Church government was made up of three tiers. At its base was the individual church session, which consisted of the minister and popularly-elected elders.

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[17]Peter B. Knupfer, *The Union As It Is: Constitutional Unionism and Sectional Compromise, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

Every session sent representatives both to their local Presbytery (the second tier) and to the overarching Synod of New York and Philadelphia (the third tier). It was the responsibility of the Synod to lead the Church as a whole and since the Synod was made up of representatives (generally the minister) from every session within its bounds, every church could contribute. The structure of the government changed slightly in 1789 after the Synod realized that it could not effectively govern its rapidly expanding boundaries. To remedy the problem, the Presbyterians reorganized with a four tier government placing a General Assembly above four Synods and sixteen Presbyteries. Although representation from every church was not required in the General Assembly, it was still charged with the overall direction of the Church. So in order to discuss any aims, goals or visions of the Presbyterian Church it is imperative to base that discussion firmly in the records, letters, and minutes of the Presbyterian governing bodies, as those entities, by the agreement of the individual churches, spoke for the denomination as a whole. To satisfy this requirement I have founded my argument that there was an interdenominational vision crafted and pursued by the

Presbyterian governing bodies on the published and unpublished works of both the Synod of New York and Philadelphia and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

In addition to the writings of the ruling bodies, I have also heavily relied on the published documents of prominent Presbyterians. Among these sources are sermons, lectures, hymnals, poetry and letters. In and of themselves, these sources prove little other than the thoughts and actions of individual Presbyterians. However, when used in conjunction with the works of the Presbyterian ruling bodies, these documents provided a clearer picture of how individuals in the church, both clergy and lay, publicly responded to the ruling body's vision. For the same purpose, I also utilized the private correspondence of leading Presbyterians. However, as the emphasis of the dissertation rests on how the Church interacted and hoped to interact with their fellow Americans, I have focused my attention largely on the documents which allowed the Presbyterians to most directly address the American people, their published work.

This dissertation is divided into five body chapters that cover the period from 1758 to 1801. Chapter II, the

first substantial chapter, discusses the foundations of interdenominationalism. In 1758 the colonial Presbyterian Church reunited, ending a nearly twenty-year schism. As a part of the reunion process, the Synod of New York and Philadelphia called for Presbyterians to work more closely with other Christians in the hope that their efforts would heal divisions and generally strengthen the body of Christ; in short, they were to strive for interdenominationalism. The chapter traces the interdenominational efforts of the Presbyterians from their reunion until 1765, revealing that the Presbyterians in general failed to make much progress toward their stated goals. The problem rested in the fact that most Presbyterians allowed themselves to be sidetracked by old political and religious animosities and that the Synod of New York and Philadelphia did little to resolve the issues. The ruling body was instead focused on maintaining peace and unity in the Church.

The third chapter continues the examination of the Presbyterian Church's interdenominational struggles from 1765 to 1775. Although the denomination's internal conflict persisted, the biggest obstacle to interdenominationalism was the Constitutional Crisis that developed between the colonies and Great Britain. The

crisis allowed the denomination to work closely with other churches and even though they worked to secure their religious and civil liberties as their Protestant heritage allowed, the unions formed were seen as temporary. Interdenominational cooperation as envisioned in 1758 was largely overlooked during this period. There were a few instances among Presbyterians where the original vision of the ruling body was preserved, but for most within the Church, securing their religious and civil rights was the first priority.

Chapter IV follows interdenominationalism in the Presbyterian Church from the Declaration of Independence to the Treaty of Paris of 1783. For much of the period, the Church was primarily preoccupied with supporting the war effort. In order to achieve victory as well as the glory for which God had chosen the country, the Presbyterian ruling body urged its members to put aside old religious and political animosities and cooperate with other denominations. The peace and cooperation achieved among the American churches, however, was only temporary and not intended to fully address the many divisions within Christendom. Due to the devastating toll the war took on the Presbyterian Church, a few Presbyterians, as the

conflict neared its end, called for a return to interdenominationalism. Though their religious motivation for the war was sound, they believed that many in their Church and in the country had begun to place political concerns above the welfare of Christendom. Their actions revitalized the Presbyterian ruling body's interdenominational spirit, and as peace was achieved in Paris, the Presbyterian Synod prepared to embark on a new era of interdenominationalism.

Chapter V explores the revival and transformation of the ruling body's interdenominational vision as well as its success within the Presbyterian churches in the North from 1783 to 1801. When the Presbyterian Synod renewed its emphasis on interdenominationalism in the postwar period, it did not advise its members to abandon their national concerns and motivations; however, the ruling body did intend those issues to be of secondary importance to the welfare of Christendom. During the crisis with Great Britain, the Presbyterians had adopted the New England "elect nation" ideology and had applied it to America as a whole. United, America possessed tremendous potential regarding the expansion of Christendom. The result was that the Synod encouraged its members to pursue an

interdenominational spirit for the welfare of the country and Christendom; in short, their goal was interdenominational nationalism. Having revised their tactics, the ruling body believed their renewed cooperative attempts would meet with divine approval and more success. In general the ruling body was pleased with the interdenominational nationalism displayed in the North. There was support enough for the new Constitution, the lines of communication were opened with the Dutch Reformed and Associate Reformed Churches, and an intimate relationship with the Connecticut Congregationalists was formed. The Presbyterian Church's fellowship with the Congregationalists was the interdenominational showpiece for the ruling body and the eventual Plan of Union between the Churches in 1801 represented the ideal cooperative relationship. The Churches planned to work hand-in-hand for Christ and Country.

The final chapter examines the course of the governing bodies' interdenominationally nationalist vision in the southern states and territories from 1783 to 1801. In the North, where the denomination was strongest, the ruling body was pleased with the interdenominational nationalism displayed, especially the intimate relationship with the

Congregationalists. In the South, however, where the denomination was weakest, the Presbyterian governing body met with difficulties. The root of the ruling body's problem in the southern states and territories in the post-war period was that there just were not enough of these Presbyterian ministers to meet the needs of the congregations. In this situation, the various southern Synods and Presbyteries were at a disadvantage trying to implement and sustain the vision of the Church created by the General Assembly. Coupled with a lack of regular Presbyterian leadership, the priorities of localities, such as emancipation, universal salvation, or egalitarian religion, took precedence over the priorities of the General Assembly for many southern Presbyterians. The Church's leadership had a problem in the South, but not of the South. When the Presbyterian ruling body failed to rein in their wayward members, their inability awoke a latent distrust within the Presbyterian ruling body concerning complete intimacy with other denominations. However, these attempts by the ruling body also convinced many Presbyterians that their local interests were not those of the national organization. The result was that many in the Church began contemplating separation. These

doubts and insecurities were only magnified by the Cane Ridge revivals. The beginning of the nineteenth-century was a watershed for the Presbyterian Church in that the attempts of the General Assembly to maintain peace with their open definition of interdenominational nationalism led to the secession of many members who would form the Disciples of Christ and the Cumberland Presbyterians, and even though it had met with limited success, the Presbyterian ruling body established its approach to interdenominational nationalism for the oncoming century. While cooperation for Christ and Country remained—which only aided the growth of sectional nationalism—there was also a destructive distrust present when interdenominational relationships became too intimate.

CHAPTER II

FOUNDATIONS OF INTERDENOMINATIONALISM, 1758-1765

According to the Biblical book of Matthew, on a mountain near Galilee following his Resurrection, Jesus Christ met his remaining disciples and gave them their final instructions. Christ told them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."[1] As Christianity spread and endured, each generation was responsible for this "Great Commission." The eighteenth-century American Presbyterians were no exceptions. In 1758, in the midst of the French and Indian War, the Presbyterians humbled themselves before a God they believed to be disciplining them for their sin.[2] Their sin, they

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[1]Matthew 28:18-20 (New International Version).

[2]On behalf of the Synod of New York, Robert Treat wrote, "We have been warned and chastised, first more gently, then more terribly; but not returning to him that

knew, was the recent schism in their church. This division hindered the progress of Christianity. The universal church was unable to properly attend to Christ's last command. To make amends, the denomination reunited and publicly repented in 1758. The reunion meant more than this, however, as the Presbyterians revealed that their renewed efforts toward the "Great Commission," would be interdenominational in nature.[3] Unfortunately, however, the following years provided various internal and external distractions that kept the church from fully attending to their cooperative goals. Despite these setbacks, the ideals set forth in 1758 lay the foundation for the interdenominational quest that brought the Church both blessings and strife for the rest of the century.

This period in the Church's history is generally characterized by the religious and political conflict that plagued the Presbyterians. Following the lead of Leonard

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smites us, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. Judgment yet proceeds, the prospect becomes darker and darker, and all things respecting us are loudly alarming." Presbyterian General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1706-1788* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1904), 276.

[3]Synod of New York and Philadelphia, "The plan of union between the Synods of New-York and Philadelphia. Agreed upon May 29th, 1758" (Philadelphia: W. Dunlap, 1758).

Trinterud's *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism*, historians have concluded that these experiences helped to shape the Church into an American denomination.[4] Despite this excellent scholarship, there is more to the Presbyterian story. In the midst of this Americanization process the Presbyterians crafted a plan and started a journey to strengthen Christendom that would also one day help define what it meant to be an American. Interdenominationalism served as the foundation for this plan and though the Presbyterians embroiled themselves in religious and political controversies that diverted their attention, the goal was established and never completely forgotten.

The schism that troubled the Presbyterians in 1758 began in 1741 in the midst of the Great Awakening. By this time the Presbyterian Church was governed by a three tiered hierarchy. At the top of the hierarchy was the annual Synod

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[4]The most recent Presbyterian history follows largely in the footsteps of Trinterud. This includes works such as Randall Balmer and John Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994); James Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1996); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

of Philadelphia, comprised of representatives from every church under its care. Directly below the Synod were the Presbyteries, which also consisted of representatives from all the member churches. Finally there was the individual church, overseen by the minister and congregationally elected elders. It was during, and because of, the Great Awakening that a debate rose concerning the requirement that ministerial candidates show evidence of experimental religion—what the Apostle Paul described as working "out your own salvation with fear and trembling"[5] before being ordained. As the ordination of ministers fell under the jurisdiction of the Presbyteries and these were largely controlled by Old Lights who disapproved of such ordination requirements and favored instead a strong academic grounding, the New Light ministers—those favoring evidence of experimental religion and the revivals—petitioned the Synod to form a new presbytery. In 1738 this was granted and the newly formed New Brunswick Presbytery immediately made experimental religion mandatory for future ministers within its bounds. At this point the Old Light dominated Synod attempted to stamp out this New Light initiative by demanding the Synod have final say in the ordination of all

[5]Philippians 2:12 (New International Version).

ministers. The New Brunswick Presbytery protested this encroachment on its authority and continued to ordain its own ministers in spite of the ruling body. Rankled by the lack of deference, the Synod passed the *Protestation*, which declared that through its insubordination the New Brunswick Presbytery "forfeited their membership in synod by asserting their power of ordination."[6] Soon the ousted Presbytery was joined by other New Light churches, primarily from the New York Presbytery, and together they formed the Synod of New York.[7]

Despite being expelled from the Old Light Synod and flourishing while it diminished, the New Lights initiated the attempts to reunite the denomination. In the 1750s the Old Lights finally agreed to meet. Negotiations began and in 1758 the two Synods agreed to meet in Philadelphia where they would adopt a new plan of union. Mere days before their efforts came to fruition that May, two ministers, representing the conciliatory groups within the Old Light and New Light camps spoke to the two ruling bodies

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[6]Balmer and Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians*, 30.

[7]Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, 48-49; and Balmer and Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians*, 27-32.

assembled together in New York.[8] The orations of Francis Alison and David Bostwick reveal more than the desire of the Synods to renew the bonds of fellowship; they also illustrate the hopes many Presbyterians had for this reunion in terms of aiding the Universal Church.

Speaking before the joint meeting of the Synods on May 24, Francis Alison recommended "Peace and union." However, the peace and unity Alison proposed was not to be limited to his fellow Presbyterians. Summarizing Alison's work, the anonymous author to the preface of the published account wrote that Alison "uses no endeavours to promote favorite systems, and gain proselytes to party-tenets: He has sublimer things in view! namely, to enforce those opinions that tend to render GOD more beloved and feared, and mankind more in peace and charity."[9] The author also added "that if all mankind were actuated by the same

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[8]Balmer and Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians*, 31-32; and Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, 54-56.

[9]"Peace and union recommended" in "Peace and union recommended; and Self disclaim'd, and Christ exalted: in two sermons, preached at Philadelphia, before the Reverend Synods of New-York and Philadelphia: the first, on the 24th of May, 1758, by Francis Alison, D.D. vice-provost of the college, and rector of the academy, in Philadelphia. And, the second, May 25, 1758, by David Bostwick, A.M. Minister of the Presbyterian-Church, in New-York. Both publish'd at the joint request of the Reverend synods" (Philadelphia, 1758), vi.

liberal and christian spirit that appears in this discourse, not only the members of the particular church to which the author belongs, but even ALL who name the NAME OF CHRIST, would unite in the most essential parts of their holy profession."[10] Alison's scriptural basis for his sermon, Ephesians 4: 1-7, attests to the truth of the preface's assertion. Utilizing the apostle Paul's encouragement to early Christians "to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace," Alison offered his vision for interdenominational activity within the reunited Church.[11]

"GOD, is the God of PEACE" Alison stated, "Christ Jesus is the prince of PEACE . . . and to follow PEACE, and to love one another, is the distinguishing characteristic of his disciples." Hitherto, Alison lamented, Christians had "so notoriously failed in this main point."[12] He called his fellow Presbyterians to remedy the situation. "We have all one father," he said, we are of "the same family" and "to bite and devour one another, is indecent and unbecoming." The Christian union Alison promoted was not to be used to stifle the liberty of their brethren. There

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[10]"Peace and union recommended," vii.

[11]Francis Alison, "Peace and union recommended," 11.

[12]Ibid.

was to be freedom in "the lesser matters of religion" so that their agreement on the fundamental principles and the subsequent cooperation would "promote the honor of God; the good of mankind, and the pure and holy religion of our lord and master."[13] Alison concluded his address by reminding his audience, "THERE IS ONE BODY AND ONE SPIRIT . . . christians are represented as one august body, whereof CHRIST is the HEAD. And this consideration must be a powerful motive to union, love and concord."[14]

Following Alison's lead, David Bostwick's sermon the following day also promoted a Christian union based on the fundamental principles. Bostwick believed that the primary stumbling block was mankind's innate love of "SELF" and that was what "men live for."[15] As Christians they were to renounce their "Self," but Bostwick assured his listeners

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[13]Alison, "Peace and union recommended," 12 and 17.

[14]Alison, "Peace and union recommended," 39.

[15]David Bostwick, "Self disclaim'd, and Christ exalted" in "Peace and union recommended; and Self disclaim'd, and Christ exalted: in two sermons, preached at Philadelphia, before the Reverend Synods of New-York and Philadelphia: the first, on the 24th of May, 1758, by Francis Alison, D.D. vice-provost of the college, and rector of the academy, in Philadelphia. And, the second, May 25, 1758, by David Bostwick, A.M. Minister of the Presbyterian-Church, in New-York. Both publish'd at the joint request of the Reverend synods" (Philadelphia, 1758), 15.

that did "not imply a total disregard to our reputation and character among men, for on this, the success of our ministry, and consequently the advancement of the REDEEMER's kingdom, may, in some measure, depend." A proper Christian made "JESUS CHRIST . . . the SUBJECT MATTER" of his life, and it was this fundamental principle that any union needed.[16] "Let us ever remember," Bostwick concluded, "'we are not our own,' and therefore have no business to live to ourselves, or regard our interest or reputation, any further than the honor of CHRIST, and the interest of religion is concerned."[17]

Four days after Alison and Bostwick addressed the ruling bodies with their hopes for the proposed reunion, the Old Lights and New Lights put aside their differences and reunited the church on May 29, 1758. The government established by the reunion mirrored that of the pre-schism Church. The Synod, literally representing every Presbyterian congregation, was to control the overall direction of the denomination and decide ecclesiastical matters brought before it by individual presbyteries.

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[16]Bostwick, "Self disclaim'd, and Christ exalted," 18 and 31.

[17]Bostwick, "Self disclaim'd, and Christ exalted," 43.

Presbyteries were more directly responsible for the governance of the churches under their care, including the ordination of ministers and disciplinary concerns brought by individual congregations. And as before, the local churches were individually governed and disciplined by the minister and elected elders.[18]

Possibly hoping that the end of their sinful schism would somewhat appease an angry God who had visited them with the French and Indian War, and also bolster the spirits of their fellow colonists, the newly formed Synod of New York and Philadelphia published an account of their reunion.[19] Given the stature of Dr. Alison and Reverend Bostwick, the resulting document largely reflected their sentiments and those of the conciliatory parties from both camps. This account was, in a fitting manner, penned by Alexander McDowell, a minister who had taken part in the

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[18]Balmer and Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians,* 15-16.

[19]Presbyterian General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1706-1788* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1904), 276; and Synod of New York and Philadelphia, "The plan of union between the Synods of New-York and Philadelphia," 3.

separation and who was, therefore, fully aware of the damage done to Christendom.[20]

Through McDowell's hand, the Synod explained that it had been convicted of its sin against God and his Church by "the present divided State of the *Presbyterian Church* in this Land." The ruling body realized "that the Division of the Church tends to weaken it's Interests, to dishonour Religion, and consequently it's glorious Author," and so they pledged "to endeavor the Healing of that Breach . . . so it's hurtful Consequences may not extend to Posterity."[21] As their sin had such an impact on the Universal Church, the Presbyterians made their apology a public one. Conscious of how the Church was perceived and how that perception affected Christianity, the Synod recognized a publicized reunion as necessary to counteract the dishonor it had already caused their "glorious Author." In this penitent act the Presbyterians were motivated by the welfare of all Christians, living and unborn; it was the

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[20]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 288.

[21]Synod of New York and Philadelphia, "The plan of union between the Synods of New-York and Philadelphia," 3 and 4.

"Establishment and Edification of his [God's] People" that compelled them.[22]

This reunion account, however, was more than an act of contrition. The Presbyterian Synod also outlined how it intended to "carry on the great Designs of Religion" through "the Advancement of the Mediator's Kingdom."[23] To this end the ruling body made four promises: to "*study the Things that make for Peace;*" to "*take heed to ourselves*, that our Hearts be upright, our Discourse edifying, and our Lives exemplary;" to "take heed *to our Doctrine*, that it be not only orthodox, but evangelical and spiritual, tending to awaken the Secure to a suitable Concern for their Salvation and to instruct and encourage sincere Christians;" and finally to commend "*ourselves to every Man's Conscience in the Sight of God*."[24] It is true that these measures were first to be employed to heal the Old Light/New Light wounds, but this fact should not overshadow the denomination's intentions toward the rest of

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[22]Synod of New York and Philadelphia, "The plan of union between the Synods of New-York and Philadelphia," 4.

[23]Synod of New York and Philadelphia, "The plan of union between the Synods of New-York and Philadelphia," 4 and 12.

[24]Synod of New York and Philadelphia, "The plan of union between the Synods of New-York and Philadelphia," 4, 12 and 13.

Christendom. The Synod had made it clear that the ultimate "Design of our Union is the Advancement of the Mediator's Kingdom." As the Presbyterians promised to "cultivate Peace and Harmony among ourselves" they also vowed to consider themselves and their actions as a part of the body of Christ, as Dr. Alison had reminded them.[25] The Presbyterians were submitting themselves to their fellow believers; as Christians they were equals and dependent on one another for success. This fresh start for the penitent Presbyterians in 1758 set the stage for their interdenominational journey.

As formal cooperation with other Churches was largely unexplored territory for the Presbyterians, the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, shortly after its inception in 1758, created a Committee of Correspondence to guide their efforts. Taking this aspect of the reunion seriously, the ruling body charged the Committee with the task of opening the lines of communication with like-minded churches "in Britain and Ireland, and in these colonies and elsewhere."[26] Although the scope of the Committee's interdenominational

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[25]Synod of New York and Philadelphia, "The plan of union between the Synods of New-York and Philadelphia," 13.

[26]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 290.

efforts appears to have been initially limited to Reformed Churches, it was a step toward more inclusive cooperation.[27] Another indication of the importance of interdenominationalism to the Presbyterians were the men called to serve on this Committee. Gilbert Tennent, Robert Cross, Richard Treat, and Dr. Francis Alison, among the best and brightest the Church had to offer, took the helm of the Committee and did their part to guide the Church in these uncharted waters.[28] By earnestly approaching the

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[27]By Reformed Churches I mean churches that stemmed from John Calvin and his interpretation of Christianity. Although they were not specific the Synod probably meant the Dutch Reformed Church, English Congregationalists, Scottish Presbyterians, Irish Presbyterians and their colonial counterparts.

[28]For more on these men see: Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 111; Milton J. Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent, Son of Thunder: A Case Study of Continental Pietism's Impact on the First Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1986); *Whitfield Jenks Bell, Patriot-improvers: Biographical Sketches of Members of the American Philosophical Society* (Darby, PA: Diane Publishing, 1997), 149-158; Elizabeth I. Nybakken, *The Centinel, Warnings of a Revolution: Warnings of a Revolution* (University of Delaware Press, 1979), 19-23; Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776 (*Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 201; Edward D. Neill, "Matthew Wilson, D. D., of Lewes, Delaware" in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Volume 8 (1884), 45. Treat and Cross are overshadowed by the scholarship on Tennent and Alison but their importance to the church is seen through their activities within the Synod.

interdenominational aspect of the reunion, the Presbyterians were off to a promising start.

The cooperative hopes represented in the reunion accentuated a growing desire within the Presbyterian leadership to Christianize the Indians. In part this was an attempt to extend the Redeemer's kingdom, but it was also seen as a way to foster cooperation among different denominations. Early Presbyterian missionary efforts were confined to the North and consisted solely of David Brainerd who was educated at Yale but ordained by the New Light Presbyterian Synod in the 1740s. Upon Brainerd's death soon thereafter, his brother John took up the cause. The work of the Brainerd brothers, though formally a Presbyterian venture, was really a cooperative effort with the Congregationalists.[29] It was also the only Presbyterian attempt at Native American mission work until the late 1750s when Samuel Davies, the popular Virginian minister, led a movement to create the Society for Managing the Mission and School Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Representing a fresh spirit of Christian outreach and desire to strengthen the Redeemer's kingdom within the denomination, the society fittingly dispatched its first

[29]Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, 50-51.

missionary shortly after the reunion of 1758. Trained and handpicked by Davies, the recently ordained John Martin set out to what would become Tennessee as a missionary to the Cherokee. Tremendously disliked by the Cherokee, Martin was soon replaced by another of Davies' students, William Richardson, whose efforts among the Cherokee were short-lived, as that nation grew increasingly hostile toward the colonial encroachers. Although these efforts were largely unsuccessful, the Presbyterians were striving for the welfare of Christendom as they had promised in 1758.[30]

Undaunted by their lack of success, many in the Presbyterian Church hoped that their missionary attempts would bear the first fruits of their reunion efforts. On August 29, 1759, this wish came true when, as a result of Presbyterian and Congregationalist cooperation, the Mohegan Samson Occom, was ordained as a Presbyterian minister.[31] Occom's Christianity was the result of the invigorated

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[30]Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South, Volume One: 1607-1861* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), 189-191; Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, 51.

[31]I have chosen the spelling "Occom" instead of "Occum" or "Occam," as it is sometimes written, as that is the preference of recent historians, see Joanna Brooks, editor. *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan: Leadership and Literature in Eighteenth-Century Native America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Congregationalist preaching of the Great Awakening. Following his conversion, Occom wasted little time becoming the protégé of Eleazar Wheelock at his school for Indians. Realizing Occom's potential, Wheelock and other Congregationalists trained him for the ministry. The Mohegan, however, was not destined for a Congregationalist pulpit. Samuel Davies, who had himself made impressive inroads among Virginian freeman and slaves, invited Occom to serve as a missionary to the Cherokee for the recently created Presbyterian mission society. Where John Martin had failed, Davies hoped Occom would succeed.[32] Occom and his Congregationalist teachers agreed, paving the way for his examination by the Long Island Presbytery in 1759. After passing the rigorous trials placed before all Presbyterian ministerial candidates, the Mohegan was ordained as the first Native American Presbyterian minister.[33] Historian, William Deloss Love wrote that the

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[32]Ready to depart for the Cherokee Occom would be thwarted by the same hostilities that prevented William Richardson from making inroads. Occom was instead sent to the Mohawk.

[33]Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, 50-51; and Joanna Brooks, editor, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan: Leadership and Literature in Eighteenth-Century Native America* (New York: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2006), xxi.

ministers who attended the ordination "looked upon it as a new departure in the history of Indian missions."[34] This was another step for the Presbyterian Church as its leadership pursued cooperation in Christ.[35]

In 1761, Samuel Buell, the Presbyterian minister who delivered Samson Occom's ordination sermon, published the address to excite interest and perhaps funding for the Onieda mission to which Occom had recently been assigned. In his account Buell not only embraced Occom as a worthy and talented minister, he also stated that Occom would be helpful in the Church's interdenominational mission. Confident in Occom's success, Buell believed that the Indian converts from his ministry would bolster Christ's kingdom numerically and serve to entice other churches to join the Presbyterians in this venture. Buell wrote: "We can but hope . . . that we shall see Christians, though in some lesser Matters of differing Opinions, agreeing harmoniously in this truly generous, interesting and

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[34]William DeLoss Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1899), 52.

[35]Interestingly Occum was ordained in 1759 but John Chavis, the first black minister, was not ordained until 1800. The considerable gap suggests much concerning the colonists' perceptions of the Native Americans and Africans in their midst.

important Work, contributing liberally toward promoting the Propagation of the glad Tidings of Salvation among the *Heathen*."[36] In his excitement over the cooperative and missionary possibilities the reverend ended his letter with a song:

> King Jesus reigns, and spreads his glorious Fame,
> The savage Nations know, and trust his Name;
> Triumph ye Saints! Ye Angels strike the Lyre!
> In everlasting Praise, let all conspire![37]

Buell quickly apologized, "Dear Sir, I forget myself, the pleasing Theme has transported me beyond the Limits I had prescribed to my Mind," but the joy that this Presbyterian felt was obvious.[38] The work of men such as Samuel Davis, John Martin, Samson Occom, Samuel Buell, and the Brainerd brothers illustrates that there was a growing desire among

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[36]Samuel Buell, "The excellence and importance of the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel-preacher, plainly and seriously represented and enforced: and Christ preached to the gentiles in obedience to the call of God. A sermon, preached at East-Hampton, August 29, 1759; at the ordination of Mr. Samson Occum [i.e., Occom], a missionary among the Indians. By Samuel Buell, M.A. Pastor of the Church of Christ, at East-Hampton, Long-Island. To which is prefixed, a letter to the Rev. Mr. David Bostwick, Minister of the Presbyterian Church, in New-York, giving some account of Mr. Occum's [sic] education, character, &c" (New York: James Parker and Company, 1761) xiv-xv.

[37]Buell, "The excellence and importance of the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ," xv.

[38]Ibid.

Presbyterians to bring Christianity to the Indians.[39] Although they hoped to extend the boundaries of Christendom they also desired to unite with other denominations in this common cause for Christ.[40]

Further progress by the Presbyterian Synod toward its cooperative goals was hindered by the Church's relationships with other Christians, in particular the Anglicans. Throughout its history the Presbyterian Church had endured a tortured relationship with the Anglican Church. As the established church of the English state, the Anglican Church strove to assert and maintain an ecclesiastical hegemony throughout the realm. Those who dissented were persecuted and because the American

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[39]For more on the ethnocentric views, whether based on doubt or fear, of Presbyterians and Congregationalists see: Francis Whiting Halsey, *The Old New York Frontier: Its Wars with Indians and Tories; Its Missionary Schools, Pioneers and Land Titles, 1614-1800* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1901), 71; Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, 50-51 and 66; and Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 113 and 189-203.

[40]Another brief example of this cooperative missionary spirit among the Presbyterians can be seen when Charles Jeffry Smith consulted his Congregationalist friend Ezra Stiles concerning his upcoming mission trip to the Mohawks. Knowing "of none more likely to answer these Querys," Smith asked Stiles' advice on "Indian Affairs, and the great design of diffusing the light of the glorious Gospel among them." Charles Jeffry Smith to Ezra Stiles, April 9, 1763, in Harold Seleksy, ed, *Ezra Stiles Papers, Correspondence, Reel 1* (New Haven: Yale University, 1976).

Presbyterian Church was a composite of English Puritans, Scottish Presbyterians and Irish Presbyterians, its heritage was filled with accounts of Anglican persecution. The Puritans suffered from laws, such as the 1581 Act that levied a 20-pound fine against those who refused to attend the Church of England. This was coupled with other laws that enforced far worse penalties including exile and execution.[41] Feeling the wrath of the Anglican establishment the Irish Presbyterians endured many injustices including the Clarendon Code and the Test Act of 1704.[42] The Scottish Presbyterians suffered as well, primarily through the patronage system, which allowed English patrons of the Anglican Church to choose and

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[41]John Brown, *The Pilgrim Fathers of New England and their Puritan Successors* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970), 30-34, and 96-97.

[42]Collectively the Clarendon Code and the Test Act of 1704 barred the Irish Presbyterians from holding civil or military office and from allowing their minister to serve basic functions for their congregations; Elizabeth I. Nybakken, ANew Light on the Old Side: Irish Influences on Colonial Presbyterianism,@ in *The Journal of American History*, 68:4 (March 1982): 817-18; and Kerby A. Miller, ed, *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan; Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 518; and William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840* (New York: Charles Scribner=s Sons, 1952), 9.

dismiss Presbyterian ministers, effectively stripping the Presbyterians of much of their ecclesiastical authority.[43]

For the American Presbyterians, Anglican persecution was not only part of the past, but also part of the present. They experienced first-hand the Anglican Church's attempts to maintain its ecclesiastical hegemony in the colonies, including the imprisoning of Francis Makemie, the "Father of American Presbyterianism," and the seizure of several church properties.[44] Kindly put, Presbyterian relations with the Anglican Church were an obstacle for the Presbyterians on their interdenominational trek. Nevertheless, there were some Presbyterians who had hopes of building a better relationship with the Anglicans.

On May 24, 1760, eighteen New Light Presbyterian ministers, in Philadelphia for the annual Synod, sent a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury. They included the renowned Tennents: Gilbert, William, and Charles, as well as Samuel Davies, who was at this time President of the College of New Jersey. They wrote to Archbishop Secker,

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[43]Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture*, 10; and Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, 58.

[44]Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 228.

who was also the President of The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and respectfully petitioned to have one Reverend William McClennachan settled in Philadelphia as an Episcopal minister. McClennachan had served as the assistant to Dr. Jenny in the city and the Presbyterians thought highly of his doctrinal leanings and wished him to stay. They wrote, "It is our humble Opinion, that his continuing to officiate in Philadelphia, will greatly tend to advance our common Christianity: And therefore, we most earnestly PRAY your Grace would use your utmost Influence to have him INDUCTED and settled in said City."[45] These Presbyterian ministers, although not acting in an official capacity for the Synod, demonstrated the earnest motivations of many in the Church to work with other denominations, even the Anglicans. However, the events that followed did not introduce a period of cooperation; instead they served as the catalyst

[45]The original letter was not published by the Presbyterians and so the emphasis of certain words is not their doing, but that of their critic "An old covenanting and true Presbyterian layman." Unknown, "A True copy of a genuine letter, sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury, by eighteen Presbyterian ministers, in America: with some remarks thereon; in another letter to the congregations of the said ministers. By an old covenanting, and true Presbyterian layman" (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1761), 2-3.

for increased uneasiness between the denominations. The controversy that the petition triggered reveals the external interdenominational hurdles the Presbyterians faced as well as the rifts still present in their own ranks.

Immediately after the letter had been sent, the Anglicans of Philadelphia took offense to the Presbyterian petition on behalf of William McClennachan. As the Synod convened in 1760, "an address from the clergy of the Church of England belonging to this city was brought in and read; wherein they complain that some members of this Synod have intermeddled in their church affairs to their disliking, and query, whether the paper which they say was signed by the moderator and some other members, was signed as a synodical act."[46] The Synod responded quickly to "assure these Reverend Gentlemen that they never signed it as a synodical body, nor heard the paper read in Synod, nor was it as much as made known to many of the members of this body." Treading carefully, the ruling body also stated, "We desire to intermeddle with no affairs that do not belong to us, but as a body can neither prevent the private correspondence of our members, nor oblige them to produce

[46]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 306.

their letters." However, they quickly added, trying not to sound too dismissive, "we heartily desire that the same good understanding which has hitherto happily subsisted between us and the Reverend Gentlemen of the Church of England, may still continue."[47] This tense exchange in the summer of 1760 did not conclude the conversation as the Presbyterians had hoped. To their chagrin, the controversy escalated and the Anglicans sent another, more blunt, letter to the Synod "complaining of a number of our body for interfering the settlement of Mr. McClenaghan in the city of Philadelphia, together with a letter wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury on this subject."[48] With this increased pressure, the ruling body replied that the ministers in question "acted without due consideration and improperly in that affair,"[49] adding slightly more contrition than they had the year before. Eventually the Presbyterians were able to restore their "good

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[47]Ibid. It seems plausible that the Synod was sincere in its statement of general ignorance concerning the petition as only eighteen of the one hundred and six ministers on record are shown to have any knowledge of it.

[48]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 311.

[49]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 312.

understanding" with the Anglicans. However, much can be gleaned from this renewed bout of ill-will between the churches; and the answer lies, in part, in the works of a Layman, an Elder, and a Mechanick.[50]

Sometime between May 1760 and May 1761 the ill-fated petition fell into the hands of "an Old covenanting and true Presbyterian layman," who was very displeased with what he read. Agitated and motivated, he published both the original letter and a biting commentary. Within his observations the Old Covenanter quickly revealed the source of his source discomfort, the treacherous intent of eighteen New Light ministers. He wrote, "Certainly nothing less than the Cause of the Lord, which I think is basely betrayed, by these men, in signing a Letter, so repugnant to Presbyterianism . . . would have induced me to attempt opening the Eyes of my dear Fellow-Christians; more especially those Presbyterians who have the Misfortune to

[50]Additionally there was the perpetual fear among the Presbyterians and Congregationalists that the colonial Anglican Church would try to claim for itself power equal to that of its English counterpart. This aspect will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. For more information see: Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689-1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

live under the Ministration of these Men."[51] To the author this letter suggested that the ministers in question were closet churchmen rather than pious Presbyterians. Among other charges, the eighteen were accused of allowing an Archbishop "Grace," stating that the Anglican Church was a Christian church, and praying to the Archbishop to forcefully "induct" a minister in Philadelphia. The Old Layman lambasted the ministers for sixteen pages and all the while he pleaded with his audience, "Does not this prove them our secret Enemies?"[52] Yet in the end the author called for more than mere acknowledgment, he challenged "honest and worthy Presbyterians, to shut your Meeting-houses upon them."[53] The Old Covenanter saw a complete removal of these offending New Light ministers as the only remedy for this grand betrayal of Presbyterianism and Christianity. As the Old Covenanter illustrates, there were some in the Church who were not pleased with the recent reunion with the New Lights or the new direction of

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[51]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 4.

[52]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 6.

[53]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 15.

the Church that aimed to make friends from long-standing Anglican enemies.

It was not long before the eighteen ministers found friends who publicly defended their actions with an intensity matching that of the Old Covenanter. The first, known as "an elder of the Presbyterian Church," quickly came to the conclusion that the author "cannot be a Presbyterian at all" because of "his gross abusive Misrepresentations of the known Sentiments of the whole Body of Presbyterians."[54] Having no doubts as to the identity of the author, the Elder stated that he had to be an Anglican as "his primary Design is to pour Contempt on the whole Body of Presbyterians . . . as an *ignorant, narrow, schismatical* Sect."[55] The Elder claimed that this was more than possible because Anglican ministers had kept the letter controversy alive and well. "Scarce has there any Thing, said to be wrote by a *Presbyterian*, been so countenanced and propagated by Church of *England* Clergy-men," the Elder commented. He continued, stating that

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[54]"The conduct of the Presbyterian-ministers, who sent the letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the year 1760, considered, and set in true light: in answer to some remarks thereon. In a letter to a friend. By an elder of the Presbyterian Church. [Three lines from Isaiah]," (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1761), 4.

[55]"The conduct of the Presbyterian-ministers," 7.

"these were the Gentlemen who shewed the greatest Warmth about the LETTER, first and last."[56]

Still there was more in jeopardy than a slighted reputation. The Anglicans were up to their old tricks trying to divide the Presbyterians, hoping to weaken their influence so they might have an easier time claiming ecclesiastical dominion in the colonies. The Anglican plan in the actions of the Old Covenanter "revives old Slanders, unworthy of Notice, and rakes up old Differences, that if by any Means, however low and despicable," they might the Elder warned, "prevent the good Effects of our late Union." For, he continued, "It is a well-known Maxim with Enemies, *Divide, and then destroy*."[57] The tactics of the Anglicans should not come as a surprise, the author stated; "Remember, our pious Ancestors have suffered These in *Scotland* and *England* in Years past, from the Predecessors of these Men in Spirit and Principle." He continued "The Men I speak of, are such as are for reviving the persecuting Spirit of their infamous A---h-b---p *Sharp*, and others, in *Scotland*; and their bloody Judge Jefferies, in

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[56]"The conduct of the Presbyterian-ministers," 5.

[57]"The conduct of the Presbyterian-ministers," 17.

England."[58] The Anglicans hoped to establish themselves in the colonies as they had in England, the elder warned, which meant that the religious liberties of the Presbyterians and all Dissenters were in danger from the "restless, ambitious Clergymen."[59]

Echoing the themes found in the Elder's work, a second defender, known as "Mechanick," came to the defense of the eighteen New Light ministers. As thoroughly convinced of the Christian character of the ministers in question as the Elder, the Mechanick was perhaps less determined that the Old Covenanter was an Anglican acting alone. He offered the suggestion that perhaps "you are a Presbyterian by Profession . . . and perhaps some Episcopal is joined with you in the Affair."[60] Though varying slightly in theory, both defenders were convinced that in the end it was preposterous that the blame should be placed on a *true* Presbyterian. Their agreement in this regard revealed a fear of denominational instability that might rend the

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[58]"The conduct of the Presbyterian-ministers," 18.

[59]"The conduct of the Presbyterian-ministers," 19.

[60]Mechanick, "The mechanick's address to the farmer: being a short reply to some of the layman's Remarks on the eighteen Presbyterian ministers letter to the arch-bishop," (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1761), 12.

church anew. If the threat were internal, the denomination could easily collapse, but if an external source could be found, then the Church could actually unite against the threat. To this end the Presbyterians took advantage of their long-time grievances with the Anglicans, and, for the time being, interdenominationalism was sacrificed for the sake of continued unity in the Presbyterian Church. This episode reveals two of the hurdles standing before the Church on its journey: the first was that despite the hopes of some, the Presbyterians were still contending with the Anglican; and the second was that three years after the reunion the denomination was still worried about possible internal divisions. The Presbyterian Church was allowing its past to dictate its present state and progress toward future goals.

The hopes of many in the Presbyterian Church that the reunion of 1758 would finally end the Old Light/New Light conflict that had doomed the Church in 1741 were disappointed. As if to mock this longing, the meeting of the Synod in 1762 was fraught with schismatical opportunity. The Synod dealt with two issues of delicate importance: the necessity of experimental religion and the untamable theology of Samuel Harker. The Synod first dealt

with the question of experimental religion in 1761, but as Francis Alison mentioned to the Congregationalist Ezra Stiles, "Our Synod are like to be divided" concerning a ministerial candidate's "experimental acquaintance of Religion."[61] Seeing the danger, the Synod postponed a final decision on the sensitive subject until the next year. That time was to be spent trying to answer one of the key issues that had led to the dissolution of the original Synod twenty years before. The New Lights had been adamant that their ministers demonstrate their "own personal exercises and experiences in religion" during their examinations, whereas the Old Lights placed more emphasis on education, believing that such requirements were unbiblical.[62] Tensions were high as the ruling body convened in May 1762 at the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. For five days "the overture respecting the examining of candidates about their religious experiences," was debated.[63] Finally a vote was taken on May 27 where the

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[61]Francis Alison to Ezra Stiles, June 2, 1761, Harold Seleksy, ed, *Ezra Stiles Papers, Correspondence, Reel 1* (New Haven: Yale University, 1976).

[62]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 319.

[63]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 317.

overture proposing experimental religion "was carried in the affirmative."[64] The New Lights had won the day, but it was unclear whether it would be a lasting victory.

Contesting this decision, the Old Light remnant submitted their protests, which led many in the Synod "fearing a breach . . . on this question, . . . to be absent."[65] Those remaining created "a committee to attempt an amicable accommodation of the affair."[66] The issue was now in the capable hands of men, such as Francis Alison, Samuel Finley, and Richard Treat.[67] These men had helped to bridge the original divide, and it was hoped they could successfully avoid a similar calamity. Working quickly to defuse the situation, the committee reached a conclusion on

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[64]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 319.

[65]Ibid.

[66]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 320.

[67]Of the committee members at least one had prepared for such a situation. A year earlier, Alison had consulted his friend Ezra Stiles because his "Churches have long been in this practice of demanding some satisfaction by a Declaration of experiences," and he continued, "you would greatly oblige me by giving me [your] sentiments on this subject." Francis Alision to Ezra Stiles, June 2, 1761, Harold Seleksy, ed, *Ezra Stiles Papers, Correspondence, Reel 1* (New Haven: Yale University, 1976).

behalf of the Synod by the 3:00 p.m. session the following day. Their decision was as follows:

> The Synod earnestly desiring that all due liberty of conscience be preserved inviolate, and that peace and harmony be maintained and promoted, do agree that, when any person shall offer himself as a candidate for the ministry to any of our Presbyteries, every member of the Presbytery may use that way which he in conscience look upon proper, to obtain a competent satisfaction of the person's experimental acquaintance with religion.[68]

The committee had ingeniously kept the expectation of proof of experimental religion to satisfy most New Lights while also inserting the right of each member of the Presbytery to decide for themselves how this would be accomplished, which pleased the Old Lights. Although this decision upset a few members, the danger of division had been avoided. However, the Synod had not yet dealt with the divisive Samuel Harker.

The troublesome theology of Mr. Harker was the second powder-keg the Synod had to disarm in 1762. Concerns surrounding the New Jersey minister found their way into the records of the ruling body as early as 1758 when he was brought up on charges of erroneous doctrine by the

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[68]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 321.

Presbytery of New Brunswick.[69] Seemingly oblivious to the objections of the Presbytery and the Synod, the wayward Harker decided to write a book clarifying his beliefs. Harker made no secret of his work and he was again reprimanded by the Synod in 1760, which stated it was "sorry to find, that . . . Mr. Harker appears really to have fallen into an error, particularly holding, that . . . God has bound himself, by promise, to bestow saving blessings upon the faith and endeavours of unregenerate men; and that God has predestinated persons to salvation, upon a foresight of their faith and good works."[70] Yet what the Synod found most disturbing was despite these warnings Mr. Harker published his work, *Predestination consistent with general liberty: or The scheme of the covenant of grace*, the following year. Concerned for the doctrinal integrity of their Church and the blatant disregard for their authority, the Synod determined to resolve the matter during its 1762 meeting. However, the ruling body was prevented from deciding Harker's fate due to the time spent

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[69]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 283-84.

[70]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 301.

settling the question of experimental religion, and so his case was postponed to 1763.[71]

Having narrowly avoided one schism in 1762, the Synod was undoubtedly nervous about facing another such prospect the following year. Fully aware of the dangers of two rival factions within the church body, the Synod wished to avoid the establishment of a third party by mishandling the Harker situation. When the committee created to examine his book brought its findings before the Synod, they revealed the same issues that had been noted in 1760. Harker's principles, it was decided "are of a hurtful and a dangerous tendency." Still the ruling body decided to give Harker a chance to defend himself or recant the following day.

The next morning came and Harker would not admit error and so the Synod passed its judgment:

> The Synod considering that Mr. Harker has for several years been dealt with in the tenderest manner, and much pains taken by his brethren in private, and in the Presbytery to which he belongs, and by committees which the Synod appointed to confer with him, in order to reclaim him from his erroneous notions; but that instead of succeeding in these attempts, he appeared to be rather confirmed and resolute in propagating his opinions among the people, by a variety of methods to the great scandal of the church, seducing and

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[71]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 315.

> perplexing the unwary and unstable: and as he has departed from the truth, and opposed this church in some important articles, and misrepresented the Church of Scotland, his doctrine and practice have a schismatical tendency. On the whole, though the exclusion of a member be grievous, yet we judge that the said Mr. Samuel Harker cannot consistently be continued a member of this body, and accordingly declare him disqualified for preaching or exercising his ministry in any congregation or vacancy under our care.[72]

With this decision the Presbyterians deftly maneuvered through another dangerous impasse. Had they simply declared him excommunicated then they might have aided him in his "schismatical" tendencies, but their documented accounts of their many attempts to reclaim a loved brother, would prove much more difficult for Harker to use against them.[73] Both the Harker and experimental religion episodes

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[72]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 329-30.

[73]In 1763 Harker published his final defense where he presented his version of the entire story "to the Christian world." Hoping to remain relevant and to be readmitted on his own terms, Harker threatened to reveal dark secrets concerning the Synod: "I know your *Faults* will greatly disserve the Cause of our Religion, and God forbid I should expose them farther than you oblige me to do it, in my own Defence." Yet just as he never brought to light any sins of the Church, Harker never rejoined his old faith either. See Samuel Harker, "An appeal from the Synod of New-York and Philadelphia, to the Christian world, relating to the censure and sentence of the said Synod, in their last session at Philadelphia, against the Rev. Mr. Samuel Harker, Pastor of the church at Black-River, in East-Jersey. Written by himself," (Philadelphia: William Dunlap, 1763), 15.

show the delicate and "schismatical" issues that Presbyterians faced in the early 1760s. However, the longer the Synod was unable, or unwilling, to shift the denomination's focus from internal issues the harder it was for them to see the rest of Christ's Kingdom so they might strengthen it.

In 1763 the British and the French agreed to peace and lifted the darkness that had engulfed the colonies. Elated, the Synod stated that a day of celebration should be set aside "for the blessings of . . . peace."[74] Yet as quickly as the colonists embraced this hope, it was stripped from them as the frontier was clouded by Pontiac's Rebellion. Inspired by the revivalist prophet Neolin's message of resistance, this Pan-Indian movement wrestled from the British most of their forts near the Great Lakes and in the Ohio Valley.[75] By the summer of 1763, the Indians were attacking and killing from Pennsylvania to Virginia and the casualty toll neared two thousand

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[74]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 324.

[75]For more information regarding the importance of religion to the Pan-Indian Alliance see: Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992).

colonists. Fear had reclaimed its place amidst the colonists and antagonized the already sensitive racial tensions.

In the darkness of the early morning hours on December 14, a group of fifty Irish Presbyterians from the town of Paxton attacked and burned an Indian village at Conestoga. Completely overwhelmed with a desire to destroy all of the Conestoga Indians, the Paxton Boys forced their way into the Lancaster jail and slaughtered the fourteen surviving villagers. Yet the vigilantes were still not satisfied; in early 1764 the group, now numbering five hundred, marched on Philadelphia to kill the one hundred and forty Indian refugees there. At Philadelphia, instead of sleeping Indians, the Paxton Boys encountered royal forces who stopped their bloody spree.[76] Although the physical violence of the Paxton Boys had been thwarted, their troublesome influence would linger a while longer in the political and religious affairs of the colony. The Paxton

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[76]Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 435-36; Melvin H. Baxbaum, *Benjamin Franklin and the Zealous Presbyterians* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 185-193; John R. Dunbar, "Introduction" in John R. Dunbar, editor, *The Paxton Papers* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957), 3; and Thomas Fleming, editor, *Benjamin Franklin: A Biography in His Own Words*, Volume I (New York: Newsweek, 1972), 181.

Boys introduced the Presbyterians to another unseen obstacle on their interdenominational journey, the ability of local colonial politics to undermine their plans.

The Pennsylvania Assembly elections of 1764 reflected the hostile nature of the preceding months as the Proprietary Party and the Quakers struggled for control. In this contest, the Presbyterians would play a crucial role. Convinced that the Quaker leadership had thus far intentionally refused to aid frontier settlers, who were mostly Presbyterians, against Indian attacks, the Presbyterians sought change and political recognition by siding with the Proprietary Party. As the tension between the parties mounted, a pamphlet war started that only intensified the situation. The Paxton Boys' actions were among the central issues of this debate, and it soon became clear that they stirred both political and religious animosity between Presbyterians and Quakers.[77]

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[77]James H. Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics 1746-1770: The Movement for Royal Government and Its Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 84-180; Dietmar Rothermund, *The Layman's Progress: Religious and Political Experience in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1740-1770* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 82; Baxbaum, *Benjamin Franklin and the Zealous Presbyterians,* 194-219; and Dunbar, "Introduction," 50-51.

The Quaker Party struck at the Presbyterians when they published a "dialogue" between "Mr. Positive" and "Mr. Zealot" concerning "the late declaration and remonstrance, of the back-inhabitants of the province of Pennsylvania."[78] As the two men talked about the recent uprising, Mr. Positive stated, "Oh Zealot! tell me not of Cassius, Brutus, Ceasar, Pompey, or even Alexander the Great! We! we Paxton Boys have done more than all, or any of them! We have, and it gives me Pleasure to think on't, Slaughter'd, kill'd and cut off a whole Tribe! a Nation at once!"[79] The conversation was soon interrupted by one "Mr. Lovell" who chastised the men for their support of the Paxton Boys. Lovell stated that the Presbyterians were "Party men; warm Bigots . . . an aspiring People, who, when they have attain'd their Aim, or gotten the Reins of Government in their Fists, have grasp'd it hard, and . . . like that conceited giddy-headed Fellow who thought himself

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[78]"A Dialogue, containing some reflections on the late declaration and remonstrance, of the back-inhabitants of the province of Pennsylvania. With a serious and short address, to those Presbyterians, who (to their dishonor) have too much abetted, and conniv'd at the late insurrection. By a member of that community" (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1764), 1.

[79]"A Dialogue," 4.

sufficient to guide the Chariot of the Sun . . . set the World on Fire."[80]

Attached to this "dialogue," to worsen the blow, was a letter written by a Presbyterian admonishing his Church. In defense of the Quaker position, the author wrote, "Why are the Quakers, your good Neighbours, so falsely and slanderously abus'd by you?"[81] He then chided the denomination for its support of the Paxton Boys and concluded his correspondence with a scriptural warning: "*Be careful lest you be found Fighters against GOD, calling Light Darkness and Darkness Light, putting Good for Evil and Evil for Good.*"[82] Not only were the political leanings of the Presbyterians being criticized externally and internally, but also their Christian spirit was called into question.[83]

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[80]"A Dialogue," 11-12.

[81]"A Dialogue," 14.

[82]"A Dialogue," 16.

[83]Another good example of Quaker writers attacking Presbyterian churchmen is the satire, "The Substance, of a council held at Lancaster August the 28th 1764. By a committee of Presbyterian ministers and elders deputed from all parts of Pennsylvania, in order to settle the ensuing election of members for the Assembly" (Philadelphia: Anthony Armbruster, 1764).

The pamphlet war continued, mostly through the work of David James Dove and those of the Quaker Party who accepted his lyrical challenges. Although Presbyterians were lambasted in these exchanges, they too were guilty of combative publications.[84] On March 30, 1764 Gilbert Tennent, Francis Alison and John Ewing—representing a New Light/Old Light cooperative effort—published a circular letter protesting the unjust treatment of their Church in

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[84]David James Dove escalated the war with his "The Quaker unmask'd; or, Plain truth: humbly address'd to the consideration of all the freemen of Pennsylvania" (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1764); "A Conference between the D---l and Doctor D--e. Together with the doctor's epitaph on himself" (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1764); "The addition to the epitaph, without the copper-plate" (Philadelphia: Anthony Armbruster, 1764); and "The counter-medly, being a proper answer to all the dunces of the medly and their abettors" (Philadelphia: Anthony Armbruster, 1764). Not to be outdone, his opponents countered: Thomas Wigwagg, "The author of Quaker unmask'd strip'd start [sic] naked, or The delineated Presbyterian play'd hob with" (Philadelphia: Anthony Armbruster, 1764); Philalethes, "The Quaker vindicated; or, Observations on a late pamphlet, entituled, The Quaker unmask'd, or, Plain truth" (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1764). Interestingly the Presbyterian Isaac Hunt did his best to denounce and decry the Paxton Boys and their supporters with, "A looking-glass for Presbyterians. Or A brief examination of their loyalty, merit, and other qualifications for government. With some animadversions on the Quaker unmask'd. Humbly addres'd to the consideration of the loyal freemen of Pennsylvania (Anthony Armbruster, 1764); and Isaac Hunt, "A humble attempt at scurrility: in imitation of those great masters of the art, the Rev. Dr. S--th; the Rev. Dr. Al----n; the Rev. Mr. Ew-n; the irreverend D.J. D-ve, and the heroic J--n D-------n, Esq; being a full answer to the observations on Mr. H----s's advertisement" (Anthony Armbruster, 1765).

the Paxton affair and warning against the Quaker proposal to place Pennsylvania under royal governance. For Tennent, Alison and Ewing, the two were intimately connected. They reasoned that because "the Presbyterians here" were not inclined to support the recent Quaker party proposition, believing it "not *safe* to do Things of such Importance rashly," their characters and Church were being assaulted in print.[85] "This Affair," the trio wrote, "is in all Probability, a *Trap* laid to ensnare the unwary, and then to cast an Odium on the *Presbyterians* for ruining or attempting to ruin the Province." The three ministers believed that the Quakers intended to paint all Presbyterians as villains in order to taint them publicly and distract attention from the Quakers' controversial proposition. Tennent, Alison and Ewing called upon all Pennsylvanians "whether of our Denomination or others" to be wary of the conniving Quakers and "lose no Time in advising all under your Influence . . . from signing any such Petition."[86] Regardless whether or not such measures

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[85]Gilbert Tennent, Francis Alison and John Ewing, "Circular Letter" (Philadelphia, 30 March 1764) in John R. Dunbar, editor, *The Paxton Papers* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957), 311.

[86]Tennent, Alison and Ewing, "Circular Letter," 312.

were justified, politics and not Christendom had become the focal point for many Pennsylvanian Presbyterians. Engaging in this civic debate stirred religious and political animosities and effectively muffled the call for Christian unity that had rung clearly in the Church in 1758.

Finally the election came and the results were bittersweet for the Proprietary Party as their biggest opponents, Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Galloway, were defeated, but the Quakers maintained their majority in the Assembly. Further to their chagrin, the Quaker Assembly sent Franklin to England to secure their hope that the colony would come under the control of the crown. The election did not provide a solution for the political turmoil in Pennsylvania; instead, it appears to have intensified it.[87] The string of events from the Peace of 1763 to the Election of 1764 resulted in a Pennsylvanian quagmire that seriously damaged the reunion goal of the Presbyterians to strengthen Christendom as their fragile relations with the Quakers quickly deteriorated. However,

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[87]Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics 1746-1770,* 84-180; Rothermund, *The Layman's Progress*, 82; Baxbaum, *Benjamin Franklin and the Zealous Presbyterians,* 211; and Dunbar, "Introduction," 50-51.

despite these ideological falterings, a glimmer of hope remained for the goals of 1758 and it came from the South.

Virginia Presbyterians stood in contrast to their distracted northern brethren. In Virginia, the mid-eighteenth century Presbyterians secured an interdenominational victory for the Church through the leadership of men such as Samuel Davies and "One-Eyed" William Robinson. These men worked with the Anglican establishment making themselves an unofficial necessity for the colony. Historian Robert M. Calhoon writes that for the Anglicans the "Presbyterians . . . functioned as an interface between dissent and orthodoxy." The Virginia officials relied on them in this manner to emphasize to the increasingly diverse Dissenters "the importance of maintaining order."[88] All the while the Presbyterians served this function, they pressed the establishment for the recognition of Dissenters as valid churches in the colony. It was largely through the relentless efforts of

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[88]Robert M. Calhoon, *Evangelicals and Conservatives in the Early South, 1740-1861* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 62. See also Thomas E. Buckley, *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia, 1776-1787* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1977), 13-14; and Philip N. Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35-36.

Samuel Davies, arguing that the Act of Toleration passed by Parliament in 1689 extended to the colonies, that finally "the Presbyterians . . . won toleration for themselves, and for other denominations willing to secure a license for their ministers and meetinghouses."[89] Exemplifying an interdenominational spirit, the Presbyterians did not hoard the fruit of their labors; instead they fought to secure tolerance for all dissenters in Virginia.

In 1765, a collection of the recently deceased Samuel Davies' sermons was published, and it appeared that even from the grave the minister called upon the Presbyterian Church to reclaim its reunion promises. In life, Davies had always been a proponent of Christian unity, but it was not until after his death that most of his work was published as *Sermons on important subjects*.[90] In this collection, which spanned three volumes and over a thousand pages, there was a persistent theme of "catholic" Christianity. The theme was clearest in Davies' sermon

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[89]Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South,* 59. See also Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 17-18.

[90]James Smylie, "Samuel Davies: Preacher, Teacher, and Pastor" in Donald Fortson III, ed, *Colonial Presbyterianism: Old Faith in a New Land* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 190-91.

"The Sacred Import of the Christian Name." Here he stated, "To lay more stress upon the name of a presbyterian or a church-man than on the sacred name of christian . . . to make it the object of my zeal to gain proselytes to some other than the christian name . . . these are the things which deserve universal condemnation from God and man."[91] Lamenting the rise of "bigotry and faction" in Christ's kingdom, Davies commented that they were "directly opposite to the generous catholic spirit of christianity, and subversive of it." With a caution he continued, "My brethren, I would now warn you against this wretched mischievous spirit of party . . . Let this congregation be that of a christian society, and I little care what other name it wears. Let it be a little Antioch, where the followers of Christ shall be distinguished by their old catholic name, Christians."[92] Once more, and from beyond the grave, Davies pushed for a united Christendom and it came at a time when Presbyterians needed reminding of their public promises.

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[91]Samuel Davies, *Sermons on important subjects, by the late Reverend and pious Samuel Davies, sometime president of the college in New-Jersey. In three volumes* (New York: n.p., 1792), 317.

[92]Davies, *Sermons on important subjects,"* 318-19.

The same year, Charles Jeffrey Smith attempted to maintain the toleration won by Davies in Virginia. On the 25th of July, Smith wrote to the Williamsburg Anglicans pleading that the cooperative efforts between Anglicans and Dissenters continue for the benefit of Christendom. In particular, he hoped to secure approval for a license for a new Presbyterian Church. Playing by the rules written by earlier generations of Virginia Presbyterians, Smith attempted to influence the Anglicans by reminding them of their past in relation to his Church. "You are our witnesses," Smith stated, "that we have used no private or publick artifice, to expose the liturgy, or disparage the members of the church of England. Ye can attest, that we have not designedly disseminated the seeds of schism, or blown the coals of discord, and unchristian separation." He continued, "Our aim has not been to make proselytes to this or that denomination, but *real converts* to *Jesus Christ*."[93]

Smith reminded the Anglicans that the Presbyterians were not threats to their establishment; they did not wish

[93]Charles Jeffrey Smith, "The nature and necessity of regeneration, considered in a discourse delivered at Williamsburg, in Virginia: with a dedication to the Episcopal Church in that city: containing, an apology for Presbyterians" (Woodbridge, NJ: Samuel Parker, 1765), vi.

to steal members and they did not want to engage in doctrinal disputes. The Presbyterians, he stated, "have no other design but to promote *virtue* and *religion*: In which important cause, let every christian denomination cheerfully unite, and vigorously engage, but especially *presbyterians* and *churchmen*; for their essential doctrines are materially the same."[94] Smith ended his petition to the Williamsburg Anglicans by emphasizing the idea that denominations needed to focus on their common Christian bonds and not their differences, especially in public. He wrote, "How much more generous, noble, and christian like is it, to see the *faithful ministers* of *Jesus*, in *every denomination*, overlooking the diversity of sentiment, in smaller matters, and cultivating mutual love and brotherly kindness, cherishing a good harmony and correspondence; jointly endeavouring to promote the great end of their mission, the *glory of God, and good of mankind*."[95] Charles Jeffrey Smith represented a continuation of the interdenominational work started by Virginian Presbyterians such as Samuel Davies, despite the lack of effective leadership in the Synod. In addition, Smith revealed that

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[94]Smith, "The nature and necessity," viii.

[95]Smith, "The nature and necessity," xv.

even though many Presbyterians had been unable to rise above local religious and political animosities to realize the Church's reunion promise of cooperation, there were some within the denomination who were still attempting to achieve those goals.

When the Presbyterians reunited in 1758 they declared to the world that they would strive to promote Christian unity both internally and externally. Although they initially made some progress, further success was thwarted by threats of internal instability and potential schisms as well as continued poor relations with Anglicans and Quakers. The result was that by 1765 the Presbyterians were really no closer to Christian cooperation than they had been in 1758. However, as the constitutional crisis between Great Britain and her North American colonies began, the denomination found it easier to unite internally and work more closely with other Churches. The resulting inter-church cooperation, however, was not what they had originally envisioned.

CHAPTER III

THREATS INSIDE AND OUT: 1765-1775

If there was hope in 1765 that the Presbyterians would make further progress on their interdenominational journey, it was soon overwhelmed. On February 6, 1765, George Grenville introduced the Stamp Act resolutions, helping to spark the American Revolution.[1] The subsequent constitutional debates concerning the civil and religious liberties of the colonists largely preoccupied the energies of the Presbyterians. Leaders within the Church established the denomination as a vessel for the colonists to better understand and address the imperial conflict. Even though, during these years, Presbyterians proposed both denominational and colonial unity, these suggestions were generally for the protection of American liberties,

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[1]Peter D.G. Thomas, "The Stamp Act crisis and its repercussions, including the Quartering Act controversy," in Jack P. Greene and J.R. Pole, editor, *A Companion to the American Revolution* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 124. See also: Edmund S. Morgan and H. M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (New York: Collier Books, 1963).

not attempts to heal the divisions in Christ's kingdom. Still, these unions had religious objectives, and they were firmly rooted in ecclesiastical traditions of resistance that dated back to the Protestant Reformation.[2] Although the interdenominational goals of 1758 were overshadowed by these temporary unions and the continued intermittent Old/New Light conflicts, they were not forgotten. Some Presbyterians continued to push for true eternal cooperation among churches, but their efforts met with limited success due to the role the Church played in the contest with Britain.

When the Synod gathered in New York on May 21, 1766, the delicate peace between the Old Lights and the New Lights was tested, again. The first trial came in the form of the two Presbyteries of Philadelphia. When the Old Light ministers, such as Francis Alison and John Ewing, realized they had lost control of the one-time Old Light stronghold, Philadelphia, a second Presbytery of Philadelphia was created. This move allowed them to stave off irrelevance in a New Light-dominated Presbytery and continue pursuing the ministry without experimental

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[2]Keith Griffin, *Revolution and Religion: American Revolutionary War and the Reformed Clergy* (New York: Paragon House, 1994).

religion.[3] There were some ministers, such as William Tennent and John Blair, who wished the two Presbyteries to be reunited, but their proposal was voted down in the Synod. The ministers then submitted their "disapprobation of the Reverend Synod's determination." Fearful of the precedent the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia was setting, they wrote: "It carries in it the obvious appearance of disunion, and seems to indicate a temper of a schismatical tendency, however, it may be suppressed for the present. It will also be likely to perpetuate party distinctions in reference to candidates licensed by the respective Presbyteries."[4] Noting that the discontented were not so opposed as to leave the Synod, they did not make a motion in the Synod to revisit the question, and it appeared as if the fragile peace would continue. However, the meeting had just started, and the Synod had no way of knowing the dangers that lay ahead.

At nine in the morning on May 28, the Synod met and considered a petition, by John Beard and Joseph Tate, that

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[3]Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 158.

[4]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 355.

the members of the Donegal Presbytery, who had been forced to merge with the Presbytery of Carlisle the year before, be reconstituted as the Donegal Presbytery. Beard and Tate were hoping to capitalize on the Synod's decision concerning the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia by proposing their own Old Light haven separate from the New Light Carlisle Presbytery. Despite the recent precedent, the Synod voted down the Old Light proposal. Not willing to quit just yet, Tate and Beard proposed that the old Presbytery of Donegal be merged with the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia. Again, the Synod voted against them. Old Light leaders Francis Alison, John Ewing, Patrick Allison, and Mathew Wilson opposed the Synod's decision, but the ruling body held firm to its decision. Thinking that they had once again thwarted a potential schism, the ruling body was no doubt caught off guard when Tate and Beard, on behalf of the one-time Presbytery of Donegal, resigned from the Church.[5] They wrote that even though they "much desire to be in union and friendship with this reverend body," the recent decision of the Synod had made that impossible. In what was possibly a final effort to sway their brethren, they stated that they "would not knowingly be the real

[5]Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition,* 165.

authors of any discord in the church of Christ"[6] using the same reasoning the Synod had employed many times before when accommodating factions in their midst. Whether or not it was a ploy, the decision of the ruling body stood, at least for the moment, and the dreaded splintering of the Church had finally occurred.[7]

Trouble arose outside of the Synod when tragedy struck the College of New Jersey. In July of 1766, Samuel Finley died, leaving vacant the presidency of *the* Presbyterian College in North America.[8] Although the school had always been led by a New Light Board of Trustees and President, the Old Lights nevertheless wished to take control of the College. The possibility of attaining the presidency of *the* Presbyterian college in the colonies meant a possible revival of their thinning ranks. One of the Trustees, Dr. John Rodgers, described the position in this way:

> The President of the College of New Jersey will not only have it in his Power to serve the Interests of Christ in the most enlarged & effectual Manner by

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[6]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 358.

[7]There were seven Old Lights forming the proposed Donegal Presbytery who seceded from the Synod and renounced the Reunion of 1758: John Steel, Joseph Tate, Samuel Thomson, Sampson Smith, Robert McMordie, John Elder and John Beard.

[8]Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 216.

> training up Youth for the Gospel Ministry in this wide extended Country; but He will sit revered at the Head of the Presbyterian Interest already great & dayly growing in these Middle Colonies. And no Man can have it more in his Power to advance the Cause of Xtian Liberty by forming the Minds of Youth to proper Sentiment on this most interesting Subject.[9]

No doubt the Old Lights were excited by this opportunity to take control of "the only true intercolonial educational institution."[10] With its widespread distribution of ministers throughout the colonies, it would not take long before the College would have made the Old Light dream of revival a reality.

Making the Old Light position even more desperate, and therefore making the situation potentially more divisive, was their belief that they were losing control and influence over the College of Philadelphia, which had long been their source for ministers, despite the Anglican origins of the school. For years, the Old Light

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[9]John Rodgers to Witherspoon, December 24, 1766 in Butterfield, ed, *John Witherspoon Comes to America: A Documentary Account Based Largely on New Materials* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 22.

[10]William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840, Volume II: The Presbyterians, A Collection of Source Materials* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1964), 7. See also Mark Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 16-17.

Presbyterians had dominated the faculty, led by Vice Provost Francis Alison. The Old Light situation had improved when the Anglican Provost, William Smith, spent most of the 1760s in England trying, in vain, to recruit Anglicans to teach at the school. In his absence an interim provost, John Ewing, who was a pupil of Francis Alison, was chosen. However, despite this initial good fortune, the Old Lights found it increasingly difficult to attract candidates for the Presbyterian ministry. The primary obstacles were the wary Anglican Board of Trustees and the comparable cushy openings among Anglican pulpits. By 1766 the Old Lights were especially forlorn.[11] In an October 1766 letter to his Congregationalist confidant, Ezra Stiles, Francis Alison revealed this despair:

> I am ready to resign my place in the College, and retire to the country merely thro chagrine. The College is artfully got into ye hands of Episcopal Trustees. Young men educated here get a taste for high life and many of them do not like to bear ye poverty and dependence of our ministers. Those that pass Tryals for ye ministry meet with hard Treatment from ye Brethren yt favor Jersey College, and can hardly find settlements, and under that discouragement they are flattrd and enticed by their Episcopal

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[11]Butterfield, ed, *John Witherspoon Comes to America*, 3; and Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 213-16.

> acquaintances to leave such bigots and to go to London for orders.[12]

By 1766 the Old Light Presbyterians were driven by more than want of the College of New Jersey; they were driven by need.

According to College of New Jersey's charter, the Trustees had to wait for four months before they could choose another President. Thus a decision could not be made until November of 1766 at the earliest, and both Old and New Lights eagerly awaited the approaching day. During these four months the Old Lights developed a scheme they hoped would garner control of the College. A letter from one of Alison's well-connected members, Samuel Purviance, Jr., to Erza Stiles provided an outline of the plan. Purviance stated that the Old Lights were going to send a committee to meet with the Trustees of New Jersey College when they met in November in order to choose the next President. The committee would propose "to have the Institution put on a new Plan, to have 4 able Professors appointed and Dr. Alison at their Head, and even to offer . . . to give up Mr. Ewing if judg'd necessary for ye publick Good." Knowing that the College was perpetually under-

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[12]Cited in Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 216.

funded, the committee was to sweeten the proposition and "offer to make up by an Annual Subscription whatever their Funds fall short of supporting the proposed number of Professors, and to join all our Influence in Raising Funds sufficient to support the College and in general to throw our whole force into that one Channell."[13] As Purviance notes, the Old Lights needed for this to work so more still was planned. There was also to be a show of support from various leading citizens, some of whom attended with speeches in hand and others through letters. However, Purviance warned this would only work if the New Lights remained unaware of the scheme, so he begged Stiles to be discrete. He wrote, "So sensible are we of the narrow Biggotry of our Brethren ye New Lights, that we dare not disclose these our benevolent and generous Views for fear of defeating our Intentions; by apprising them beforehand we know Schemes wd. Be laid to oppose us . . . we hope to take our Friends off their Guard."[14] The Old Lights were right to worry about the success of their plans.

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[13]Samuel Purviance, Jr. to Ezra Stiles, November 1, 1766 in Butterfield, ed, *John Witherspoon Comes to America*, 4.

[14]Samuel Purviance, Jr. to Ezra Stiles, November 1, 1766 in Butterfield, ed, *John Witherspoon Comes to America*, 4-5.

Despite their best efforts to conceal their scheming, the Board of Trustees discovered the Old Light intentions and struck first. The trustees met a day before the scheduled meeting and decided to offer the presidency to the Scot, Jonathan Witherspoon. To the chagrin of the Old Lights, when the committee arrived, they were met with the news. Shocked, they protested but the board held to their decision.[15] In the aftermath, Alison took up his pen again and wrote to Stiles, lamenting the lost opportunity. Still, Alison was not without hope. He wrote that the trustees had elected Witherspoon "a keen satirical writer, but they know nothing of his academic abilities, nor whether he will accept their offer."[16] Even if he did accept and therefore thwart a renewed attempt by the Old Lights, Alison was optimistic, writing, "Should he accept their invitation & undertake this Province, this would be a likely way to unite us, but in the mean time the College is

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[15]Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 218-220.

[16]Alison was right to be concerned about Witherspoon accepting the position. The first offer was rejected because Witherspoon's wife did not want to leave Scotland, however after persistent negotiations, primarily by Benjamin Rush, reverend Witherspoon accepted the offer in 1767.

sinking in its reputation for want of a head."[17] Alison wished for Presbyterians to work together, even if he wished for a greater influence for the Old Lights. As he concluded his letter, Alison revealed the reason he strove for unity—"our enemies gain ground by our foolish animosities."[18]

However, as Alison worried, Witherspoon was not a sure thing, and he refused their first offer in 1766 because his wife did not wish to leave Scotland. This turn of events rekindled hope among the Old Lights, and once again in 1767, when the Trustees met to decide on a President, the Old Light committee brought their proposal. After some negotiation the Old Light plan was accepted; however, there was a caveat. The positions suggested by the committee were to be filled by the Trustees on the basis of merit. In order to retain some peace, the Old Lights were not forsaken when the decisions were made. John Blair, Hugh Williamson, and Jonathan Edwards the Younger were chosen to fill the professorships, and Samuel Blair, who was only twenty-six at the time, was chosen for the presidency.

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[17]Francis Alison to Ezra Stiles, December 4, 1766 in Butterfield, ed, *John Witherspoon Comes to America,* 14.

[18]Francis Alison to Ezra Stiles, December 4, 1766 in Butterfield, ed, *John Witherspoon Comes to America,* 15.

Both of the Blair men and Edwards were firm New Lights, leaving the young Williamson as the only Old Light hired. To be sure, this rankled with the committee and the other Old Light schemers. Not only had the professorships been filled mostly by "narrow bigots," but both the revered Alison and Ewing had been rejected in favor of the youthful Samuel Blair.[19]

By most accounts Samuel Blair was an ersatz president, meant to keep Alison or Ewing out of the presidency while the trustees continued to negotiate with Witherspoon. Benjamin Rush, a College of New Jersey graduate who was attending medical school in Edinburgh, became the primary negotiator and convinced the Witherspoons to move to America.[20] In one of his last letters to the Scotsman, before he ultimately accepted the position, Rush painted a picture of the principal college in North America in a desperate situation: "how thick & fast its enemies increase, and how much the hearts of its pious founders are trembling for fear the united forces of civil & religious combination will end in the ruin of the College." Rush

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[19]Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 220.

[20]Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 221-22.

then asked why Witherspoon, who alone could save the school, would not be "head of an Institution on which the spreading of the Gospel thro' wide extended continent of America now entirely depends?"[21] Witherspoon soon after accepted the presidency, and Samuel Blair willingly stepped down. For the Old Lights some consolation came from the eventual acceptance of Witherspoon, even though he was not their first choice.[22] As Francis Alison had written the year before, Witherspoon was "a likely way to unite us."[23]

The resolution of the College of New Jersey crisis did little to redirect the Church to its interdenominational duties. Divisions within the Church remained and in particular the wound caused by the secession of the Donegal

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[21]Rush to Witherspoon, October 23, 1767, in Butterfield, ed, *John Witherspoon Comes to America*, 58.

[22]Gordon L. Tait, "John Witherspoon's Prescription for a Nation Strong, Free, and Virtuous", in Donald Fortson III, editor, *Colonial Presbyterianism: Old Faith in a New Land* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 203; and Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 221-22.

[23]For additional information on the importance of the College of New Jersey to the New Lights/Old Lights also see: Howard Miller, *The Revolutionary College: American Presbyterian Higher Education 1707-1837* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 75-79; J. David Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 117-127; and John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 29.

Presbytery still festered. Trying to convince them to rejoin the Church, the Synod pursued the wayward ministers from 1766 to 1768. In 1768, the Old Light ministers, through Joseph Tate, resubmitted their request to form their own Presbytery and once again the Synod declined. However, the Synod also wrote that they were "still willing to . . . attend to all proposals that may be made to heal differences and promote the Mediator's kingdom."[24] Tate, upon hearing the news of the latest defeat, told the Synod that he and the other ministers would be willing to rejoin the denomination if they were able individually to join other Presbyteries to their liking. The Synod responded that "although they highly disapprove of the conduct of these brethren since their departure from the Synod, yet for the sake of peace they authorize the above mentioned Presbyteries to receive them."[25] The ministers chose to align with Old Light Presbyteries even if their churches fell well outside of the Presbytery's geographical bounds.[26]

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[24]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 383.

[25]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 384.

[26]For instance, if one of the Old Light churches in question was located in New York City but it did not wish to belong to the local New Light Presbytery, it could join

In allowing this concession the Synod demonstrated again just how far it was willing to bend to maintain unity. Some members, such as George Duffield and John Strain, documented their disapproval. They argued the Synod's decision established the dangerous precedent whereby fear of schism allowed the corrupted few to rule the many.[27] Still, the Synod held to its decision, and some measure of Church unity was once again restored.

As the colonists' civil and religious liberties fell under further attack, Church leaders from both the Old and New Light camps hoped that the threat would spark more cooperation within the denomination. Again, healing internal divisions and not those of the Universal Church was the priority for the Presbyterian leadership. For the most part the conciliatory hopes of the Presbyterian Synod were realized. However, a series of events beginning in 1771 threatened to tear at the Synod's patchwork unity. As the city of Philadelphia and the number of Scots-Irish immigrants continued to grow in the 1760s and 1770s, the

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the Old Light Presbytery of Philadelphia even though it was not in that Presbytery's jurisdiction.

[27]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 384-386; and Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 165.

Presbyterian churches in the city could no longer meet the needs of the laity. In response, the Third Presbyterian Church under the care of the second Presbytery of Philadelphia was formed and called as their minister, Samuel Eakin.[28] However, Eakin was soon brought before the Synod on charges of "antenuptial fornication; lying with respect to [his] marriage; suborning witnesses; and deserting the work of the ministry, in direct violation of [his] ordination vows."[29] After repenting before the Synod, Eakin was removed from the pulpit and suspended from the ministry.

The Third Church then called George Duffield, a rising New Light minister, to fill their pulpit. Although Francis Alison and John Ewing were typically able to restrain their dislike of the New Lights, this encroachment into their city and their Presbytery was too much. Philadelphia was the last major stronghold of Old Lights in the colonies; the other major pulpits, such as those in New York and New

[28]Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 222-23.

[29]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 414.

Jersey, had already fallen to the New Lights.[30] The second Presbytery of Philadelphia blocked the appointment of Duffield. In 1772, the church appealed to the Synod where the Presbytery's decision was overturned "by a large majority."[31]

The Old Lights fumed at being overruled and having the New Lights creep into their territory. Anxious, the Synod wrote a pastoral letter beseeching their churches to "cultivate that spirit of love and Christian union among one another which is so frequently enjoined by the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it may appear to the world that you are not only one body, but of one mind."[32] The next year the defeated Old Lights changed their tactics and sent a committee, led by George Bryan to the Synod to charge "Mr. Duffield with sundry high crimes and misdemeanors" with the hope "he might be removed from the

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[30]Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 222-23.

[31]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 431.

[32]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 430.

pulpit and church in Pine street."[33] Not only was Duffield cleared of the charges, but the Synod also approved his church's request to be placed under the care of the first Presbytery of Philadelphia. The string of defeats left the Old Lights bitter, and tensions renewed within the Synod. Alison and Ewing, who still worked at the College, continued their fight in the Synod and even took the matter to civil court. However, in the end, all their attempts failed, and by 1776, George Duffield had become *the* Presbyterian leader in Pennsylvania.[34]

Between 1765 and 1775, the Presbyterian Church made significant strides toward putting an end to their internal strife. However, their efforts were not wholly successful, and although there was more peace than in previous years, tensions remained and hampered the denomination's ability to make true interdenominational headway. As late as the early 1770s, there were rumors and attempts to divide the Church. Writing to Francis Alison, Old Lighter Joseph Rhea pleaded that "you . . . Sir, who was so Instrumental &

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[33]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 449. Pine Street Church was another name for the Third Presbyterian Church Philadelphia.

[34]Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 222-223; and General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 448-49.

active in making this ill concerted and ill patched union, to be as active & Instrumental in making this Separation which so many people in the Country are heartily praying to god for."[35] In addition to such continued internal distractions, the years 1765-1775 provided overwhelming external diversions in the form of threatened liberties.

Although prominent Old Light ministers often disagreed with the practices of their New Light brethren, they did not wish to tear the Church apart. In fact, if it were not for the actions of men such as Francis Alison, the reunion of 1758 might never have come to fruition. After the Donegal separation, the Old Lights offered the next opportunity both to unite the Church and address a troubling external issue.

New and Old Light leaders alike recognized the Stamp Act as an alarming threat to the colonists' liberties requiring a united effort to resist successfully. As of May 1766, however, the Synod had taken no position and the potential for bonding lay dormant. A plan by Francis Alison eventually allowed the Synod to state its position and finally utilize its healing possibilities. Alison

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[35]Joseph Rhea to Francis Alison, in Joseph Rhea's papers, box 1 folder 1, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

suggested an address, which the Synod quickly approved, "to our Sovereign, on the joyful occasion of the repeal of the Stamp Act, and thereby a confirmation of our liberties."[36] On the surface it was a simple measure, but there was underlying potential that could unite the Presbyterians and protect their English liberties.

Reiterating these principles, the ruling body wrote a letter to their member congregations as well. Even though, the Synod wrote that God had blessed them by ending the French and Indian War, "we rendered not to God according to the multitude of his tender mercies, for no sooner was the rod removed, and the blessings of peace restored, but we became more vain and dissolute than before." This was the reason, the ruling body said, for the "long suspense, whether we should be deprived of, or restored to the . . .privilege of English liberty" that had "filled every breast with the most painful anxiety."[37] For the Synod, it was only God's mercy that had prevented an escalation of the tension through the repeal of the Stamp Act. They concluded that God "has given us to experience the paternal

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[36]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788,* 360.

[37]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 362.

tenderness of the best of kings, and the moderation of the British Parliament. . . . may his unmerited goodness lead us to repentance."[38]

Despite having written two letters establishing the official position of the Presbyterian Church, the Synod had not quite finished. On the afternoon of May 30, the Overtures Committee proposed "to obtain some correspondence between this Synod and the consociated churches in Connecticut."[39] The overture was quickly passed and a delegation led by Francis Alison was formed to meet with the Congregationalists. Although the overture itself has not survived, the reason for this cooperative gesture was the fresh rumor that colonial Anglicans were calling for their own Bishop. The threat of a colonial bishopric had waxed and waned for a century and both the Presbyterians and Congregationalists had, individually, worked to neutralize it.[40] The recent murmurs that coincided with the

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[38]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 363.

[39]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 364.

[40]For more information on the intermittent conflict over a Colonial Bishopric see: Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689-1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962) and Stephen Taylor, "Whigs, Bishops and America: The

abrasive and encroaching Stamp Act led the wary Americans to conclude that it was no coincidence.

Along with the delegation, the Synod sent a letter, which shed more light on the intentions and hopes of the Presbyterians. In it they invited their Connecticut brethren "to a general consultation about such things as may have a hopeful tendency to promote and defend the common cause of religion against the attacks of its various enemies." The task before them was not to be attempted alone. The Synod wrote, "we are all brethren, embarked in the same interest, perfectly agreed in doctrine and worship, substantially pursuing the same method of discipline and church government, and we trust all animated with the same laudable zeal to advance the kingdom of our common Lord, we cannot but hope for your ready concurrence with our invitation."[41] Stressing to the Congregationalists that the union between the churches was necessary to combat the threats against their liberties, the Synod was also

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Politics of Church Reform in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England," in *The Historical Journal* 36:2 (June 1993), 331-356.

[41]*Minutes of the Convention of Delegates from the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, and from the Association of Connecticut; held annually from 1766 to 1775, Inclusive* (Hartford: E. Gleason, 1843), 6.

emphasizing the point for its own benefit. A common enemy and a noble cause could strengthen more than the bonds between Presbyterians and other denominations; they could also bridge the Old Light/New Light divide.

Fortunately, the Presbyterians would not have to wait long for an answer. On June 17, 1766, the moderator of the Congregationalist General Association, Thomas Ruggles, officially accepted the Presbyterian invitation. Ruggles stated that he, and the other ministers, were excited that the churches were working together and that he hoped "the glorious and blessed time approach when love and union may prevail among all denominations of Christians through the world."[42] In the official response, the Congregationalists agreed to cooperate but on the condition that:

> the great and general interests of the Redeemer's kingdom would be happily promoted, the common cause of religion and virtue strengthened and defended, whilst mutual benevolence and brotherly love would be cultivated, by a general union, agreement, and correspondence with us, so far, and in such manner as is consistent and in no degree interfering with their and our respective internal state and order of government and discipline.[43]

In other words, the Congregationalists were willing to meet as long as it was understood that this was a temporary

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[42]*Minutes of the Convention, 1766 to 1775,* 8.

[43]*Minutes of the Convention, 1766 to 1775*, 7.

union. Finding no problems with the terms, the Presbyterians arranged the first meeting of the convention for November 1766 in New York.

After the failed coup at the College of New Jersey that November, Francis Alison no doubt found some comfort when the Presbyterian-Congregationalist convention finally met to discuss the Anglican menace.[44] Meeting in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, because of the small pox outbreak in New York, the convention quickly agreed on their plan of union. Representatives from both the Presbyterians and Congregationalists maintained that while neither Church would relinquish its autonomy they did wish to unite temporarily. Before they closed the first meeting, the delegates agreed that a letter of invitation should be written to the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Dutch Reformed churches in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. They also wrote and distributed sample

[44]Complimenting the efforts of the Synod, Francis Alison pleaded with Ezra Stiles in August 1766 to promote the convention among his friends in various denominations. He wrote, "I think ye union of all, or most of the antiprelatical churches necessary to prevent such encroachments on our liberty, & promote the Kingdom of Christ both in our churches, & among the Indians. All may be admitted as members of this Assembly, who belong to ye Congregational; Consociated; or Presbyterian Churches." Francis Alison to Ezra Stiles, August 20, 1766, in Harold Seleksy, ed, *Ezra Stiles Papers, Correspondence, Reel 2* (New Haven: Yale University, 1976).

letters that could be used as templates by churches or individuals to protest the establishment of bishops in the colonies.[45] Basing the letters on a history of intolerance by the Anglican Church but also loyalty to King and Constitution, the churches offered themselves to the many colonists who made up their congregations as a way to understand the ongoing crisis. Though the letters were a small way in which to shape colonial perceptions, the churches, especially the Presbyterians, would increase their efforts during the 1760s and 1770s. As the Presbyterians concluded the convention, they brought to an end a watershed year. The issues that came to the forefront that year would preoccupy the Presbyterians for years to come.

In 1767, the year of the Townshend Acts, Thomas Bradbury Chandler published *An Appeal to the Public in Behalf of the Church of England in America*. This was an attempt to persuade the colonists of the neutral and unobtrusive nature of the proposed bishops. In this vein, Chandler promised that if bishops were to come to the colonies they would only hold "*Spiritual and Ecclesiastical*" power. These prelates were to have no

[45]*Minutes of the Convention, 1766 to 1775*, 10-14.

civil power, and what religious dominion they had "*shall operate only upon the Clergy of the Church, and not upon the Laiety nor Dissenters of any Denomination.*"[46] Although Chandler's intention was to calm colonial fears, his effort was unsuccessful. Shortly after publication of *An Appeal*, leading Presbyterians, both Old and New Light, took up their pens to preserve their liberties from Chandler, Townshend, Parliament, and whoever else might threaten them.[47] In doing so, these Church leaders broadened their range of influence by stepping beyond their congregations. In addition, they publicly connected the civil and religious threats and offered all colonists "a constitutional blueprint of the empire which they could defend."[48]

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[46]Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 291.

[47]For a good discussion of the Bishopric Crisis in Newspapers see: Arthur Lyon Cross, *The Anglican Episcopate and the American Colonies* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902), 195-214.

[48]Elizabeth Nybakken, ed, *The Centinel: Warnings of a Revolution* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980), 71-72. This chapter owes a great debt to Nybakken's argument that the "Centinel" afforded Presbyterians the ability to help colonists understand the Constitutional crisis. I augment Nybakken's argument that the "Centinel's" audience was composed of three groups—King/Parliament, Pennsylvanians, and Southern Anglicans—by tying the "Centinel" into a greater Presbyterian plan

The first challenge came from the "American Whig," which first appeared in the *New York Gazette* and subsequently in the *Boston Gazette* and the *Pennsylvania Journal*. Although William Livingston is thought to be the principal author, he was certainly helped by his *Reflector* friends and fellow Presbyterians John Morin Scott and William Smith, Jr. It is possible that Livingston's list of contributors included other prominent Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Baptist leaders, such as Noah Welles, Charles Chauncey, John Rodgers, Joseph Treat, Archibald Laidlie, and Alexander MacDougall.[49]

Like the Presbyterian and Congregationalist annual convention, the "American Whig" was a cooperative venture among various dissenter churches in order to thwart an Anglican bishopric in the colonies. And like that convention, this project was initiated by Presbyterians. Published on March 14, 1768, the first issue set the tone for the series. Livingston *et. al* systematically deconstructed Chandler's *Appeal*, "to shew as well the

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(which included the "American Whig") to use print to reach most colonists and not just a select few.

[49]Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 298; and Cross, *The Anglican Episcopate*, 195-200.

falsity of the facts, as the futility of the reasoning, by which *the appeal* may impose on the weak and credulous." Additionally, the "American Whig" linked the scheming Dr. Chandler with Parliament's attempt to strangle colonial liberties:

> Considering the encroachments that have lately been made on our civil liberties; and that we can scarcely obtain redress against one injurious project, but another is forming against us . . . and how peculiarly necessary it is, in these times of common calamity, to be united amongst ourselves; one could scarcely have imagined, that the most ambitious ecclesiastic should be so indifferent about the true interest of his native country, as to sow . . . the seeds of universal discord; and besides the deprivation of our civil liberties, lend his helping hand to involve us in ecclesiastical bondage into the bargain.[50]

The writers proposed that colonists should not think of the proposed bishop and the Stamp Act as separate dangers to unconnected freedoms. Together, civil and religious liberty served as "the foundation of public happiness, and the common birth-right of mankind." Therefore, they argued, "it is the duty and interest of every individual, to keep a watchful eye over, and to cherish it with the

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[50]"American Whig [No. I]" in *A Collection of tracts from the late news papers, &c. Containing particularly The American Whig, A whip for the American Whig, with some other pieces, on the subject of the residence of Protestant bishops in the American colonies, and in answer to the writers who opposed it, &c.*, (New York: John Holt, 1768), 4-5.

utmost care and tenderness."[51] Week after week, the authors of the "American Whig" worked to establish themselves as bulwarks for colonial liberties and examples for the colonists.

Ten days after the first issue of the "American Whig," the "Centinel" was published in Philadelphia. Francis Alison, George Bryan, and Jonathan Dickinson authored the articles, with Alison taking the lead. Again, like the Convention and the "American Whig," the authors represented at least two sects, the Presbyterians and the Quakers.[52] Additionally, as with the New York triumverate, the "Centinel" not only attacked Chandler, but it also connected the civil and religious when demonstrating the threats to colonial liberties.[53] In short the "Centinel" argued that:

> It is readily granted that the Colonies are dependent States, united under one Head; and with the other

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[51]"American Whig [No. II]"in *A Collection of tracts,* 6.

[52]Francis Alison represented the Old Light, George Bryan represented the New Light, and Jonathan Dickinson represented the Quakers.

[53]"Centinel [V]," April 21, 1768 in Nybakken, ed, *The Centinel,* 113. In this edition, the "Centinel" poses the blunt question "Did not almost all the Bishops in Parliament Vote against the Repeal of the Stamp-Act and use their Influence to rivet the Shackles on the Colonies which our Enemies had formed."

> British Dominions, form one entire Empire. It is also admitted, that the Parliament of Great-Britain, as the supreme legislative Power, has a superintending Authority to regulate and preserve the Connection between the several parts and Members of the Empire. But this does not imply, either a Power for disposing of the Property of the Subjects in the several inferior legislative Jurisdictions; nor of making Laws, for their internal Government. Both of these, by the constitution and Charters of the several Colonies, are lodged, where Nature and Reason and Justice point out that they ought to be lodged; with the Representatives of the People.[54]

However, the recent encroachments on both colonial religious and civil liberties were enacted by a Parliament, which possessed no American representatives, and were therefore unconstitutional.

Although the path to preserved constitutional rights was clear, the *Centinels* indicated their enemies were not as obvious. They stated that the Episcopal plot was not the work of all Anglicans; it was not even the work of most.[55] Many colonial Churchmen were "the Friends of the Colonies," they declared, and they wished to persuade them to overtly oppose a colonial bishopric, "which is in itself an open acknowledgement of the Claims which the Enemies of

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[54]"Centinel [VI]," April 28, 1768 in Nybakken, ed, *The Centinel,* 118 .

[55]For more information on the various colonial Anglican positions on the proposed bishop see: John Frederick Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984) 231-232.

America have lately set up, and which are totally subversive of our Rights and Liberties."[56] After all, the "Centinel" claimed, Dr. Chandler only spoke for "a few Missionaries . . . of New-York and New-Jersey." "The People were never consulted on the Measure, nor were they ever heard to complain," the Centinels wrote. Yet, more than this, the authors argued, such usurping actions by the Northern "missionaries" were as unconstitutional as they were indicative of future decision made by the proposed bishop. The Centinels stated that in the British Constitution, the "Care of Religion" in "his Majesty's extensive Dominions" was given "to the Genius and Persuasion of the People."[57] In the end, the authors argued that the liberties of colonial Anglicans, like the Dissenters, would suffer from the establishment of a colonial bishopric.

Intentionally, both the "American Whig" and the "Centinel" lasted less than a year in order to avoid alienating friendly Anglicans by constantly assaulting their church. In October 1768, the next stage of

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[56]"Centinel [VIII]," May 12, 1768 in Nybakken, ed, *The Centinel,* 127.

[57]"Centinel [XIII]," June 16, 1768 in Nybakken, ed, *The Centinel,* 154.

opposition began when the Presbyterians and Congregationalists met in their annual convention. On October 5, the delegates decided that it was in their best interest to look outside of the colonies and ask the London Committee of Dissenters for help. As they wrote, they stressed that it was their loyalty to George III and the Constitution that drove them to oppose bishops as "nothing seems to have such a direct tendency to weaken the dependence of the Colonies upon Great Britain and to separate them from her; an event which would be ruinous and destructive to both, and which we, therefore, pray God long to avert."[58] It was important that the Convention ally with the London Dissenters, who held some influence with the government, to avert accusations of having colonial sentiments. Fortunately for the Americans, the London Committee was willing to help.[59] This alliance proved essential to the opposition, as Carl Bridenbaugh notes, "In the case of the American episcopate, there is every reason to conclude that it was the London Dissenters acting individually and through their organization who prevented any prelatical, ministerial, or parliamentary action from

[58]*Minutes of the Convention, 1766 to 1775,* 23.

[59]*Minutes of the Convention, 1766 to 1775,* 68.

taking place, action which we have seen was seriously considered."[60]

Securing the invaluable aid of the London Dissenters, the Presbyterians and their allies were able to focus again on awaking their colonial brethren to the various dangers that beset them. In February 1769, in New York City, Livingston and Scott once again took the lead, persuading other denominations to create with them their own "Society of Dissenters."[61] Although the society continued to oppose the colonial bishop, the catalyst for the group was the repeated opposition in the Council to grant church charters to dissenters. The Presbyterians had been rejected the most, but they were not the only church denied.[62] The preamble to the society's articles of agreement and the articles themselves are quite revealing. It was imperative that dissenters "unite together for the preservation of

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[60]Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 287.

[61]The founders of the Society of Dissenters: Peter Van Brugh Livingstone, Henry Williams, Samuel Broome, Thomas Smith, Alexander McDougall, Samuel Loudon, William Goforth, Joseph Hallett, John Morin Scott, William Livingston, William McKinley, Robert Boyd, Francis Van Dycke, Samuel Edmonds, Jonathan Blake, William Neilson, John Broome and John McKesson.

[62]Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 278; and Herbert L. Osgood, "Preface" in "The Society of Dissenters founded at New York in 1769" in *The American Historical Review* 6:3 (April 1901), 498-99.

their common and respective civil and religious Rights and Privileges, against all Oppressions and Encroachments by those of any Denomination whatsoever."[63] Continuing, they clarified the present danger, "it is thought proper . . . to form a Society for taking Care of the said common and respective, Civil and Religious Rights and Privileges, of those of their Brethren in the Colony of New York, and the Neighboring Colonies, who do not profess to . . . be in Communion with the Church of England."[64] The articles also reveal that this union shared the convention's desire to be overtly temporary, as the members agreed "that no Matters of Doctrine, Church Discipline, or Worship shall ever be the subject either of the Acts or Conversation of the said Society."[65] Although this was to be a temporary fixture, it was hoped that the New York society would soon become the head of a federation of societies throughout the colonies.

The society agreed to establish a Committee of Correspondence to encourage their colonial brethren to join

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[63]Herbert L. Osgood, ed, "The Society of Dissenters founded at New York in 1769" in The American Historical Review 6:3 (April 1901), 499.

[64]Osgood, ed, "The Society of Dissenters," 500.

[65]Osgood, ed, "The Society of Dissenters," 501.

their federation. It is no coincidence that both William Livingston and John Morin Scott were chosen to serve on this committee.[66] The letter the committee crafted, that would later be published in the *New York Gazette*, emphasized, like the other Presbyterian unions, a historical precedent of religious and civil persecution by the Church of England that found no basis in the British Constitution. Like diplomats on the outset of a war, the committee made it clear that they were not the aggressors in this conflict: "We do by no means propose to Act Offensively against the Episcopalians, but barely to Counteract them, as far as we shall discover them pursuing designs unfriendly to our General interest." The dissenters only wanted peace "to enjoy and to transmit to our posterity the right of private Judgment; and of Worshipping God according to the dictates of our own Consciences." [67] This, they claimed, is what drove them "to Write to all our brethren on the Continent, to exhort them to form themselves into such Societies, to Correspond with each other on these Interesting concerns; and thereby endeavor the preservation of our Common Liberty." The

[66]Osgood, ed, "The Society of Dissenters," 503.

[67]Osgood, ed, "The Society of Dissenters," 505.

committee also wrote that they were seeking help from "our Brethren in Scotland and Ireland, and with the Standing Committee of Dissenters in England, to engage them to favour the design."[68] As with the Convention, the society wished to validate their protest by enlisting the aid of non-colonial Britons.

Unlike the Convention, there is no evidence that the New York Society of Dissenters survived more than one month. The last recorded meeting took place on March 21, 1769, at the home of David Phillips who lived in the North Ward. Although the minutes stop in March, various selections from the group's records, including the letter were published as late as September 25, 1769, allowing the beliefs of the group, whether or not it was disbanded, to further permeate colonial society.[69] The Society of Dissenters was in essence the same as all other Presbyterian unions at this time, in that it wished "notwithstanding our peculiar religious distinctions," to "heartily unite for our common Safety."[70] Although they were cooperative ventures between Churches, the primarily

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[68]Osgood, ed, "The Society of Dissenters," 506.

[69]Osgood, ed, "The Society of Dissenters," 498-99.

[70]Osgood, ed, "The Society of Dissenters," 506.

goal of the unions was the protection of liberties and not the healing of divisions within Christendom. As such, they were partly obstacles to the Presbyterian ruling body's interdenominational vision.

The Bishop crisis peaked in 1770, but nevertheless the Presbyterians and their friends remained wary.[71] The occasional Anglican outburst in favor of a colonial bishop in the following years seemed to justify their continued vigilance in the form of the annual convention, but on the whole the Church had shifted its focus.[72] Like a general reinforcing his troops where the danger is greatest, the Presbyterian leadership in the years leading up to the war emphasized intangible unions that would protect their religious liberties, in order to afford more effort to the worsening constitutional crisis.[73]

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[71]The annual convention of the Presbyterians and Congregationalists last met in 1775. They planned to meet in 1776, but the Declaration of Independence cancelled any threat an Anglican bishop could pose, and so their convention came to an end.

[72]Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 312.

[73]Dr. John Rodger's *The Case of the Scotch Presbyterians, of the city of New-York*, published in 1773, alongside the work of the annual Convention of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, serve as a lone reminders to the colonists of the constitutional threat posed by an Anglican bishop in the colonies. Interestingly, Rodger's work was probably the result of the

In 1774, *Considerations on the nature and the extent of the legislative authority of the British Parliament* was published by either John Witherspoon or James Wilson. Although the authorship remains in doubt, the fact that both men were Presbyterians and that the work revealed the changing position of the Church was clear. The author quickly established that this work was primarily political. He opened by stating that "no question can be more important to Great-Britain and to the Colonies, than this—*Does the legislative authority of the British Parliament extend over them?*"[74] Pursuing his answer, the author stated that the argument in favor of Parliament's authority was that the "supreme power, is, by the Constitution of Great-Britain, vested in the King, Lords, and Commons" and that any act from them was "a binding Force on the American Colonies, they composing a part of the British Empire."[75] However, according to the author, one natural law could not

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Convention's (of which he was a member) attempt to write a history of religious freedom and persecution throughout the colonies. For more information see: *Minutes of the Convention, 1766 to 1775,* 31-32, 37-38, 40-41, and 44-48.

[74]*Considerations on the nature and the extent of the legislative authority of the British Parliament* (Philadelphia: William and Thomas Bradford, at the London Coffee-House, 1774), 1.

[75]*Considerations*, 2.

be forgotten and that was that "all men are, by nature, equal and free: No one has a right to any authority over another without his consent. . . . This rule is founded on the law of nature: It must control every political maxim: it must regulate the Legislature itself."[76] The next question, the author commented, was whether the colonists had representatives "elected by the people . . . and . . . bound, by the ties of gratitude for the honour and confidence conferred upon them, to consult the interest of their constituents."[77] As the colonists had no such representation, the author asked how Parliament claimed to have control over them. In the end, the author offered his audience a blunt answer to his original question, "The American Colonies are not bound by the Acts of the British Parliament, because they are not represented in it."[78]

Following the infamous events of April 19, 1775, a new focus for the Presbyterians emerged. Meeting in May, the Presbyterian Synod encountered the issues that had risen in the wake of Lexington and Concord with determined resolve. As the conflict continued, the Synod issued a pastoral

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[76]*Considerations*, 3.

[77]*Considerations*, 5.

[78]*Considerations*, 24.

letter addressing the unfortunate series of events and outlining a proposed course of action.[79] Like so many times before, the letter began with an exhortation to repent in order to avoid the wrath God had laid aside for them. The Synod wrote, "Affliction springeth not out of the dust." They called their congregations to "remember and confess not only your sins in general, but those prevalent national offences." [80] The ruling body then affirmed that if "the British ministry shall continue to enforce their claims by violence," then Presbyterians would fight, alongside the rest of the colonies, to protect their liberties.[81] However, the Synod clarified that this was not a rejection of Great Britain. They retained a hope for reconciliation and that George III would realize the malicious intentions of his advisors. The Synod advised, "let it appear, that you only desire the preservation and security of those

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[79]Jonathan Witherspoon is given credit for penning this letter by Dr. John Rodgers in *The works of the Rev. John Witherspoon, D.D. L.L.D. late president of the college, at Princeton New-Jersey. To which is prefixed an account of the author's life, in a sermon occasioned by his death, by the Rev. Dr. John Rodgers, of New York. In three volumes. Vol. III* (Philadelphia: Woodward, 1800), 599-605.

[80]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 466.

[81]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 467.

rights which belong to you as freemen and Britons, and that reconciliation upon these terms is your most ardent desire." The Synod also told its members to maintain the colonial unity they had developed because "nothing can be more manifest than that the success of every measure depends on its being inviolably preserved." For clarity's sake, the ruling body wrote that it expected Presbyterians to support the Continental Congress and "that a spirit of candour, charity, and mutual esteem, be preserved and promoted towards those of different religious denominations."[82] The Synod finished the letter by addressing as many potential problems as they could, in an attempt to have at least offered some advice if further conflict made it impossible for the ruling body to meet. The Synod's letter made it clear that Presbyterians were to focus their energies and their prayers on the conflict at hand.

On Sunday, June 4, 1775, the Reverend John Carmichael encountered a larger audience than usual at his worship services. The additional numbers included a company of colonial militia, under the command of a Captain Ross, who

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[82]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 468.

had come to hear Carmichael before they were mobilized. The minister informed the militia and the congregation that after the recent events in Massachusetts "all the other colonies in North-America, like true children of *a free-born family*, are roused to some just resentment of such insults, on their natural and legal rights."[83] The "common cause" that Massachusetts had suffered for, stated Carmichael, was a holy cause, and the resistance by the colonists was biblically justified. He warned that there would be other sincere Christians, such as the Quakers, who might not help in the colonial cause, but he pleaded "for God and conscience sake, to let them alone, if they will not in these terrible times, draw sword *for* Liberty and their country, surely they will not *against* Liberty and their country; and if we can do with them, we can without them."[84] Colonial unity in civil and religious matters was necessary; he called his audience to "work in love with other denominations and to heartily accord with whatever may be the final determination of all America agreed to in

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[83]John Carmichael, *A self-defensive war lawful, proved in a sermon, preached at Lancaster, before Captain Ross's company of militia, in the Presbyterian Church on Sabbath morning, June 4th, 1775* (Lancaster, PA: Francis Bailey, 1775), 5.

[84]Carmichael, *A self-defensive war,* 16.

the CONTINENTAL CONGRESS."[85] Carmichael, like the Synod, made clear his ultimate desire that "God, will save this country, and . . . the British empire from apparent ruin."[86] Likewise he told his audience, "You must still continue to revere royalty, and observe your allegiance to the King, on the true principles of the constitution."[87] War was a last resort, but there was to be no doubt that it was a valid resort. He ended his message on a rousing note: "Courage then! Courage my brave American soldiers, *if God be for, who can be against you*? . . . Thus go forth in the name of the Lord of hosts; and may he protect you, bless you, and succeed your very laudable and grand undertaking."[88] Carmichael's sermon closely mirrored and ultimately supported the general consensus in the Synod concerning the growing crisis.[89]

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[85]Carmichael, *A self-defensive war*, 22.

[86]Carmichael, *A self-defensive war*, 18.

[87]Carmichael, *A self-defensive war*, 22.

[88]Carmichael, *A self-defensive war*, 25.

[89]Further evidence of this unified Presbyterian approach see: Francis Alison, James Sproat, George Duffield and Robert Davidson, *An Address of the Presbyterian ministers, of the city of Philadelphia, to the ministers and Presbyterian congregations, in the county of [blank] in North-Carolina* (Philadelphia, 1775).

For the Presbyterians the years between 1765 and 1775 were filled with numerous unions. Yet the primary motivation for each of these ventures was to protect their liberties and not establish permanent unity in the body of Christ. In one of his many letters to Ezra Stiles concerning the Presbyterian-Congregationalist convention, Francis Alison confirmed this when he wrote, "I would rejoice to see such a union as would be permanent & cordial among all." For Alison this ideal union would demonstrate and "love christian liberty and purity of life."[90] However, no such union existed, and as of June, 1775, every cooperative endeavor of the Presbyterians had been formed to ensure the religious and civil rights the colonists claimed as Englishmen. The unions never pushed for new rights or liberties, just those they once possessed. It should come as no surprise that the Church so perfectly mirrored the colonial society in this regard, as the Presbyterians had spent so much of the past decade providing colonists a framework with which they could understand their rights and their place within the empire. And while these abilities might prove useful in the future,

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[90]Francis Alison to Ezra Stiles, June 19, 1767, in Harold Seleksy, ed, *Ezra Stiles Papers, Correspondence, Reel 2* (New Haven: Yale University, 1976).

the Presbyterians had made little headway toward their reunion goals of 1758.

During this hectic decade, the Presbyterians only engaged in true interdenominational discourse on a handful of occasions. Fewer still were the moments when they put that spirit into practice. On October 14, 1770, the Reverend James Sproat addressed the Second Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia concerning the recent death of George Whitefield. For Sproat, Whitefield was a "good" man, "that . . . is to be understood an holy man; a man, who is conformed to God in heart and life, by the power of divine Grace."[91] By this goodness such men were worthy of imitation. In life Whitefield had been a member of the universal church, relishing the common bond of Christianity that he shared with all denominations. Sproat told his audience, "Some, there may be, who measure their success according to the number of proselytes they gain to this, that, or the other party, or particular denomination of Christians: But, sure I am, that the success of every true

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[91]James Sproat, *A discourse, occasioned by the death of the Reverend George Whitefield, A.M. late chaplain to the Right Honourable the countess of Huntingdon; delivered October 14, 1770, in the Second Presbyterian Church, in the city of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: W. and T. Bradford at the London Coffee-House, 1771), 4-5.

minister of Christ will be measured according to the number of souls that are *added to the Lord*."[92] Whitefield pursued "these principles of catholicism, he was determined not to know any thing among the people, but *Jesus Christ* and him crucified." In this vein, Sproat commented that Whitefield preached "to Jews, infidels, freethinkers, as well as to all denominations of christians without exception."[93] Lamenting the fact Christendom had just lost such an excellent emissary, Sproat cried out, "Let *England, Scotland*, and *Ireland* mourn! Let all the *American* colonies join the lamentation. . . .Who that has any regard for the prosperity of poor *Zion*, can refrain from tears, when we repeat the doleful sound, *Whitefield* is dead?"[94] Finishing his sermon, the minister challenged the congregation, "let us improve to the valuable purposes of religion, the pious exhortations he hath so frequently pressed upon us; and carefully imitate the holy example, which he hath

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[92]Sproat, *A discourse,* 15.

[93]Sproat, *A discourse*, 18.

[94]Sproat, *A discourse,* 22.

exhibited; so that our last end may be like his, which, we trust, is peace."[95]

1774 was an exceptional year for interdenominational action within the Presbyterian Church. When the Synod met in May, the Presbyterians were presented with an opportunity to reach well beyond their bounds and strengthen Christendom. A delegation of two prominent Congregationalist ministers, Ezra Stiles and Samuel Hopkins, proposed that the two denominations work together to provide missionaries for Africa.[96] Their plan consisted of sending two native Africans to the College of New Jersey where they would be prepared for mission work. Upon completion of their training the churches would send them to Africa to propagate the gospel. The Presbyterians quickly agreed, expressing, "their readiness to concur with and assist in a mission to the African tribes," which they saw in light of "so many circumstances" as "the will of God." They concluded by assuring Stiles and Hopkins that

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[95]Sproat, *A discourse,* 23. Also published in 1771, was another posthumous work of Samuel Davies, *A touch stone for the clergy. To which is added, a poem, wrote by a clergyman in Virginia, in a storm of wind and rain*, where the Virginian promoted interdenominationalism.

[96]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 456; and Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 208.

"we are ready to do all that is proper for us in our station for their encouragement and assistance."[97] In this one decision, for the first time in several years, the Presbyterians moved beyond the occasional call for interdenominationalism and took action. This step was joined the same year by Samson Occom's *A Choice collection of hymns and spiritual songs; intended for the edification of sincere Christians, of all denominations*. In the preface, Occom explained his motivation, "I have taken no small Pains to collect a Number of choice Hymns, Psalms, and spiritual Songs, from a Number of Authors of different Denominations of Christians, that every Christian may be suited." Occom, who had witnessed the dearth of action in the Church since his ordination, emphasized his purpose to "present you, O Christians, of what Denomination soever, with cordial Hymns, to comfort you in your weary Pilgrimage."[98]

The following year, another Presbyterian missionary composed a work to benefit all Christians on their "weary

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[97]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 458-59.

[98]Samson Occom, *A Choice collection of hymns and spiritual songs; intended for the edification of sincere Christians, of all denominations* (n.p. 1774), 4.

Pilgrimage." In *The moral and religious miscellany; or, Sixty-one aphoretical essays, on some of the most important Christian doctrines and virtues*, Hugh Knox explored the complexity of Christian life. Styled similarly to a devotional, the author broke "the most important Christian doctrines and virtues" into small segments to better meet the needs of society. He wrote, "Five or six pages of a religious book is as much as we can, in conscience expect, that a modern fine Gentleman or Lady should read at one sitting. The taste of the time is, therefore, purposely consulted in the shortness of these Essays."[99] More than a sermon, Knox's book presented people with a tool they could use on a daily basis. The central theme was Christian life and Knox spent much of the book emphasizing the necessity of a unity among all Christians. In his essay, "Adoption into the Family of God," he wrote, "If we are indeed GOD's children by adoption, and do supremely love him that begat, we shall also love all them that are begotten of him. We shall love the whole *Christian brotherhood*, so far as they bear the image of their heavenly Father, by whatever names

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[99]Hugh Knox, *The moral and religious miscellany; or, Sixty-one aphoretical essays, on some of the most important Christian doctrines and virtues* (New-York: Printed by Hodge and Shober, 1775), v.

known, into whatever sects or parties split and divided."[100] His thirty-eighth essay, "*The best* Method *of maintaining* Peace, Love, and Unity *among* Christian Brethren," was devoted to an interdenominational spirit. Here, Knox told his readers to "consider the damage done to Christianity by the schism and divisions among Christian brethren; the pleasure it gives to the devil; the tendency it has to prevent other from uniting themselves to those communities, from which deserters have carried off an evil report."[101] Throughout his work his message was clear, Christian life demanded Christian unity, and everyone was subject to this mandate.

As Knox had hoped, the interdenominational message spread beyond a Presbyterian audience. One of his greatest admirers was the father of the Methodist Church in America, Francis Asbury. In his journal, a decade after *The moral and religious miscellany* was first published, Asbury came across the work and wrote:

> I have read two volumes of Sermons written by Mr. Knox, of the West Indies. I am much pleased with his defence of revealed religion; and, indeed, through the whole work there is something sublime and spiritual; so catholic too, and free from peculiar doctrines: I

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[100]Knox, *The moral and religious miscellany*, 84.

[101]Knox, *The moral and religious miscellany*, 189.

> esteem him as one of the best writers amongst the Presbyterians I have yet met with.[102]

Even if the internal and external troubles of the Church left it unable to fully pursue interdenominationalism, other churches were beginning to notice the occasional efforts of the Presbyterians. Thus the Presbyterian Church came to the cusp of war thoroughly embedded in the tumult of the time, but still, through the efforts of men like Knox, there remained within the Church the spirit that inspired the interdenominational journey begun in 1758.

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[102]Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton, eds, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury,* Volume I (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN. 1958), 455.

CHAPTER IV

GROANING "UNDER THE AFFLICTING HAND OF GOD," 1776-1783.

As had happened during the French and Indian war, the War for American Independence served as the catalyst for interdenominational change. In 1763, the year of the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the American colonists were proud to be English. By July 1776, however, the colonists declared their intent to be independent. The Presbyterians' role in unifying the colonists aided this transformation, and the denomination continued in this task as the war continued. As demonstrated by historians such as Jonathan Clark and Keith Griffin, the Presbyterians' involvement was not due to a wholesale acceptance of Whig ideology. The Presbyterians relied upon ancient Protestant traditions of resistance to justify their involvement in this conflict with Great Britain.[1] Their cause—the

[1]J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832; Political discourse and social dynamics in the Anglo-American world* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Keith Griffin, *Revolution and Religion: American Revolutionary War and the Reformed Clergy* (New York:

protection of their natural rights and liberties—was righteous and their success depended on their ability to be worthy of such divine blessings. Still, the war took a dreadful toll on the church and, as many colonists reacted, the Presbyterians believed the cause was hindered by unrepentant national sin. It was only through repentance of this sin that Americans could remove the "afflicting hand of God" and secure their liberties. As the war progressed, a growing number of Presbyterian leaders, reminiscent of the French and Indian War, began to suspect that the true source of their hardships was their dwindling concern for Christendom: they were overlooking their interdenominational responsibilities. As the war concluded the Presbyterians were, of course, elated with the success of the American cause, but while they rejoiced they reminded themselves that Christ's kingdom came first. And so it was, with Independence secure, the Presbyterians

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Paragon House, 1994). There are historians who argue that American Churches wholly adopted the Commonwealthman/Whig ideology. For more information see: Nathan Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1990), 34-36.

revisited their cooperation goals with a revitalized energy.

During the Constitutional Crisis that preceded the war, the Presbyterians assumed a share of the colonial leadership and they continued in this capacity throughout the war. They stressed that their constitutional rights had to be respected and that all colonists, including churches, had to unite in order to secure those rights. The Declaration of Independence signaled a transition in the colonial cause, and most Presbyterians supported this change. Before July of 1776, the denomination was fully confident and supportive of the Continental Congress but still they hoped for reconciliation with Great Britain. After the Declaration of Independence, however, the Presbyterian Synod recommended that they support the Continental Congress, and most followed suit.[2]

The denomination's attitude was exemplified by James Caldwell, the "Fighting Parson" of Elizabethtown, New Jersey.[3] When Caldwell and his regiment received news of

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[2]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 467-468.

[3]For more information on the general support of Presbyterians for American Independence see: James Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1996), 59-61; and Randall Balmer and John R.

the Declaration and heard it read aloud, he toasted, "Harmony, honour, and all prosperity to the Free and Independent United States of America: wise legislators, brave and victorious armies, both by sea and land, to the United States of America."[4] Witnessing the widespread support among Presbyterians, Dr. Charles Inglis, Anglican loyalist and rector of Trinity Church in New York City, commented to a friend, "I do not know one of them, nor have I been able, after strict inquiry, to hear of any, who did not, by preaching and every effort in their power, promote all the measures of the Congress, however extravagant."[5]

Having gained the allegiance of the Presbyterian Synod, Congress' Declaration of Independence was promoted by more than the "Fighting Parson." Indicative of this point is Jacob Green and his pamphlet entitled *Observations: on the reconciliation of Great-Britain and the colonies.*[6] Noting uncertainty among Americans

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Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 34-37.

[4]James Smylie, ed, "Presbyterians and the American Revolution: A Documentary Account" in *Journal of Presbyterian History* 52:4 (Winter 1974), 400.

[5]William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1939), 258-259; and Balmer and Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians*, 37.

concerning independence, Green published an address to answer the question of "whether it is best there should be a reconciliation, or a proper separation, and we in America be independent."[7] As many Presbyterians had done during the constitutional crisis, Green offered his abilities for what he believed to be the public's benefit. Green intentionally avoided a one-sided argument. He presented both sides of the discussion so his readers could see the validity of his eventual conclusions.

Green began by investigating "Britain's right to American government and dependence." He stated that when the mother country acted "the part of an enemy" by refusing the colonies "the privileges which are ours by constitution, seize our properties, and deprive us of our mutual rights. . . . Every rational person would say, that Britain had forfeited her right to American dependence."[8]

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[6]Not only was Jacob Green influential in New Jersey Presbyterian circles he was also important politically; he was integral in the construction of the state constitution. See Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 253.

[7]Jacob Green, *Observations: on the reconciliation of Great-Britain and the colonies. By a friend of American liberty* (New York: John Holt, in Water Street, near the Coffee-House, 1776), 3.

[8]Green, *Observations*, 6 and 7.

Green continued by systematically debunking reasons why independence would prove detrimental to Americans. The author claimed that the colonial cause had God's favor, whereas the British had not. If it was true, as Green noted, that others argued that the independence of the colonies meant the ruin of Great Britain, then "'tis by her own misconduct, and we cannot help it.—If she is ruined, 'tis because she is ripe for ruin, and God's judgments must come upon her." If this proved to be the situation, the author wrote that it was imperative that Americans remain far removed from this calamity and create their own government that would please God and have his blessing. According to Green, this would be "a government most favourable to religion as well as liberty, and the natural rights of mankind." If Americans continued on their course, the author wrote, "God will smile upon and bless us; . . . and prevent the evils that earth or hell may devise against us."[9]

The last half of Green's work focused on arguments for and against Independence. The author, whose preference for independence was clear by this point, demonstrated the many

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[9]Green, *Observations*, 9 and 10.

benefits separation could bring. Among other boons, Green stated that there would be fewer wars once the tie to a European power was severed, there would be less corruption because elections would replace hereditary authority, and there would be more money in American pockets as they would be freed from imperial taxes and the yoke of a lavish court. Most importantly, however, Green remarked, "If we are independent, this land of liberty will be glorious on many accounts: Population will abundantly increase, agriculture will be promoted, trade will flourish, religion unrestrained by human laws, will have free course to run and prevail, and America be an asylum for all noble spirits and sons of liberty from all parts of the world."[10] As Green's comments indicate, by 1776 the Presbyterians had adopted the "elect nation" ideology from New England and were applying it to America as a whole.[11] In this way the Presbyterians were helping to shape an independent America worth fighting for, one that, as Green hoped, would take up the fallen mantle of civil and ecclesiastical liberty that Great Britain had let slip.

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[10]Green, *Observations*, 15.

[11]Griffin, *Revolution and Religion,* 76-85.

These themes were echoed on October 20, 1776, by William McKay Tennent, a Presbyterian chaplain from Connecticut, who, while waiting for an expected British attack on Mount Independence, gave the troops a final sermon.[12] Using Nehemiah 4:14 as his text, Tennent attempted to allay the fear of the men gathered before him. God was on their side, Tennent reminded his audience, so "be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses."[13] The soldier, Tennent explained, had to conquer his fears to do the noble deed before him. There was more still at stake than the protection of families, and so again the chaplain exclaimed, "'Be not ye afraid of them' is the voice of Heaven, the voice of the Church, and the voice of all who are dear to you—with respect to the approaching foe." The worthiness of their cause was clear, and the minister stated that "the hour is expected when, with the blessing

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[12]For more information on Mount Independence, Ticonderoga, and Saratoga see: Richard M. Ketchum, *Saratoga: Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War* (New York: Macmillan, 1999.)

[13]Joel Tyler Headley, *The Forgotten Heroes of Liberty: Chaplains and Clergy of the American Revolution* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), 366-67.

of Heaven, you will have it in your power to do the most signal, important, and lasting services to your native land." This service, the Presbyterian minister made clear, was the preservation "of our liberty and property" for the enemy hoped "to reduce us to the most abject slavery." Americans had to resist their fears and fight against the British for, as Tennent stated, "they fight in an unrighteous cause."[14] As the Presbyterians had shown during the Constitutional Crisis, both civil and religious liberties were at stake. The protection of these natural rights was a mandate from heaven whereas their endangerment was "an unrighteous cause." The sides were clearly drawn, and Presbyterians, such as William McKay Tennent, urged their listeners to heed Heaven's call and fight for righteousness.

Alongside their fellow revolutionaries, the Presbyterians wished it understood that the civil and religious liberties they enjoyed as Americans were their greatest achievements. But more than this, those rights were also some of the greatest sources of potential the struggling people possessed. Emphasizing this point, on

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[14]Headley, *The Forgotten Heroes of Liberty*, 377 and 378.

August 9, 1776, the Continental Congress created a three-man committee "to devise a plan for encouraging the Hessians, and other foreigners, employed by the King of Great Britain, and sent to America for the purpose of subjugating these states, to quit that iniquitous service."[15] Of the three members, two were Presbyterians, Richard Stockton and James Wilson, the third was Thomas Jefferson. Submitting its report to the Congress five days later, the committee recommended that any attempt to sway the foreign mercenaries should be based on the lure of American liberties. The committee wrote:

> Whereas it has been the wise policy of these states to extend the protection of their laws to all those who should settle among them, of whatever nation or religion they might be, and to admit them to a participation of the benefits of civil and religious freedom; and, the benevolence of this practice, as well as its salutary effects, have rendered it worthy of being continued in future times.

The three men believed "that such foreigners, if apprised of the practice of these states, would chuse to accept of lands, liberty, safety and a communion of good laws, and mild government, in a country where many of their friends and relations are already happily settled." Not only did

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[15]W.C. Ford, ed, *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, Volume V, 1776, June 5—October 8 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 640.

the committee believe they would wish to live in the United States, it also thought that the foreign soldiers would cease fighting "when they reflect, that after they shall have violated every Christian and moral precept, by invading, and attempting to destroy, those who have never injured them or their country."[16] With this recommendation Presbyterians, alongside the likes of Thomas Jefferson, perpetuated the ideal of an American nation that was both a beacon for civil and religious liberties and the key to the future prosperity of the country.

Despite the holiness of their cause, the Presbyterians suffered significant loss and destruction of property during the war. Many Presbyterians believed the British were singling them out for special punishment; however, many Americans suffered devastating losses. Writing to his friend, Richard Henry Lee, in January 1777, the renowned Presbyterian physician Benjamin Rush described the destruction of one of the most important Presbyterian assets and a bastion of revolutionary sentiment, the College of New Jersey. Rush wrote, "Princeton is indeed a deserted village. You would think it had been desolated

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[16]Ford, ed, *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, V: 653 and 654.

with the plague and an earthquake as well as with the calamities of war. The College and church are heaps of ruin. All the inhabitants have been plundered."[17] Additional stories circulated concerning the destruction of Presbyterian property. Following the battle of Long Island, the minister of the Presbyterian Church there, Ebenezer Prime, fled for safety. Although Prime escaped capture, his church did not. Much was destroyed, including the minister's library and the building itself was remade into a depot and barracks. The church cemetery was leveled for use as a common and the gravestones were used to construct the troops' ovens.[18] Still more destruction awaited the denomination. In August 1779 the *New Hampshire Gazette* published a report that seemed to validate the suspicion by many within the church of the Presbyterian-centered aggression of the British forces. They wrote, "They manifest peculiar malice against the Presbyterian churches, having, during this month, burnt three in New York State, and two in Connecticut. What, Britons! Because

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[17]Benjamin Rush to Richard Henry Lee, January 1777, in L. H. Butterfield, ed, *Letters of Benjamin Rush,* Volume I: 1761-1792, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 126.

[18]Headley, *Forgotten Heroes of Liberty*, 108-109.

we won't worship your idol King, will you prevent us from worshipping the 'King of kings' Heaven forbid!"[19] The more their churches and homes were destroyed, the more the Presbyterians convinced themselves something was amiss.

Although the destruction of property incensed the Presbyterians, what was more upsetting were the reports of attacks on Presbyterian ministers and their families. At the meeting of the 1777 Synod, the New Brunswick Presbytery told how "the Rev. Mr. John Rosborough was barbarously murdered by the enemy at Trenton on January second."[20] According to the story, Rosborough was captured by Hessians while he was looking for his horse. Once it was discovered that he was a Presbyterian minister, he was stabbed repeatedly and left to die.[21] However, the Presbyterians were to suffer worse before the end of the war. Another Presbyterian minister, James Caldwell, was singled out for particular punishment by the British. In January 1780, Caldwell's church in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, was burned by the British. However, when this attempt to intimidate

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[19]Smylie, ed, "Presbyterians and the American Revolution," 412.

[20]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 477.

[21]Headley, *Forgotten Heroes of Liberty*, 158-162.

the "Fighting Parson" failed a new plan was crafted. On June 24, 1780, while the Reverend Caldwell was away from home, his wife was shot dead while praying with her children. The British troops then razed Caldwell's home to the ground. Distraught, James Caldwell continued to support independence and was not silenced until he was assassinated in November the following year while he was under a flag of truce.[22]

However righteous the colonial cause was, it did not prevent setbacks from crippling their war effort or acts of terror from plaguing their communities. Their torments, the Presbyterians persuaded themselves, like those of their revolutionary brethren, were the result of unrepented sin. In this spirit, the Synod pleaded with their "congregations, to spend the last Thursday of every month . . . in fervent prayer to God, that he would be pleased to pour out his Spirit on the inhabitants of our land, and prepare us for deliverance from the chastenings he hath

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[22]Headley, *Forgotten Heroes of Liberty*, 224-230; Smylie, ed, "Presbyterians and the American Revolution," 408; Maude Glascow, *The Scotch-Irish in Northern Ireland and in the American Colonies* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1936), 274; and J. J. Boudinot, ed, *The Life, Public Services, Addresses, and Letters of Elias Boudinot*, Volume 1 (Capo Press, New York, 1971), 188.

righteously inflicted upon us for our sins."[23] The only solution, the ruling body knew, was a deep introspection to root out the offending transgressions to be followed by general atonement. Repentance and devotion to the law of God were the only safeguards for the proposed nation that the Presbyterians had helped imagine.

The October 5, 1777, sermon of Abraham Keteltas is indicative of this mandated introspection. Keteltas was still very much convinced of the holiness of the colonial cause, and he reassured his audience by drawing comparisons between the Americans and the Israelites. The colonists, the Presbyterian minister noted, like the Israelites, were to rely solely on God 'for refuge in time of trouble."[24] Keteltas was quick to note that God always defended his cause, which was "the cause of truth, the cause of religion, the cause of righteousness, the cause of his church and people," "I think we have reason to conclude," Keteltas stated, "that the cause of this American

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[23]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 478.

[24]Abraham Keteltas, "God arising and pleading his people's cause; or The American war in favor of liberty, against the measures and arms of Great Britain, shewn to be the cause of God: in a sermon preached October 5th, 1777 at an evening lecture, in the Presbyterian church in Newbury-Port" (Newbury, MA: John Mycall, 1777), 3.

Continent, against the measures of a cruel, bloody, and vindictive ministry, is the cause of God. We are contending for the rights of mankind, for the welfare of millions now living, and for the happiness of millions yet unborn." The Presbyterian noted that this responsibility had once belonged to Great Britain, a nation blessed by God. However, the British had turned away and now God moved against them by means of this costly civil war.[25] The example of Great Britain illustrated both the potential benefits and dangers that lay in wait for God's people.

Keteltas reminded his audience that, like the British example, unrepented national sins could lead to further hardships. "Go to Charlestown," Keteltas challenged, "go to Norfolk, go to New York, go to Danbury . . . let the smoking ruins of well finished and valuable houses, by their speechless, but flaming oratory, melt you into tears, over your country's ruin." Keteltas continued, "Behold your ministers mocked, insulted, buffeted, mark'd out for destruction, for their attachment to religion and liberty, and their zeal against illegal and oppressive measures."[26]

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[25]Keteltas, "God arising," 9, 19, and 21-22.

[26]Keteltas, "God arising," 26.

The only way to avoid these continued difficulties, Keteltas stated, was to "cast all your burdens and cares upon the Lord, and he will sustain you—he will never suffer the righteous to be moved." This pursuit of godliness through "continual prayer and supplication" and "repentance and reformation," Keteltas maintained, would render complete the ideal "that America will be a glorious land of freedom, knowledge and religion,--an asylum for distressed, oppressed, and persecuted virtue."[27] America still possessed a bright and promising future as liberty's safeguard—a position once held by England—but only if its citizens were deemed worthy by God. For that, contrition was in order.

When the Synod convened in 1778 in Bedminster, New Jersey, they renewed their call for a monthly day of prayer by the churches under their care. As before, the ruling body wrote that this time was to be used, "in fervent prayer to God," pleading that he would spare their torment.[28] When the Synod mentioned the sins they believed were provoking the wrath of God, this was not a blanket

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[27]Keteltas, "God arising," 31 and 32.

[28]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 481.

admonishment to promote repentance and general spiritual well-being. Rather, when the Presbyterians mentioned these sins, they had particular transgressions in mind, and slavery was near the top of the list. The practice had received attention before the war—Benjamin Rush was known for his relentless opposition to slavery—but it was during the conflict, when calamities plagued the young country and God appeared especially displeased, that this fault drew serious attention within the denomination.[29]

On July 25, 1778, the Presbyterian governor of New York, William Livingston, wrote to his Quaker friend, Samuel Allinson, concerning the issue of slavery in New York. Confiding in his friend his past failed attempts to persuade the New York Assembly to abolish slavery, Livingston told Allinson of his most recent venture. He wrote, "I sent a Message to the Assembly the very last Sessions, to lay the foundation for their Manumission." However, Livingston met a cautious Assembly that thought the timing was bad considering the present hostilities and they "desired me in a private way to withdraw the Message."

[29]Other notable Presbyterians, including George Bryan, Elias Boudinot, David Rice, Ebenezer Hazard, and Daniel Roberdeau, who were influential in both Church and society opposed the "sin" of slavery in addition to men discussed in this chapter. For more information see Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition,* 272-74.

Yet the governor was determined to use his influence and "push the matter till it is effected: being convinced that the practice is utterly inconsistent, both with the principles of Christianity & Humanity; & in Americans who have almost idolized liberty, peculiarly odious & disgraceful." For Livingston there was no doubt as to the spiritual nature of slavery. It was a sin, and one detrimental to "the principles of Christianity & Humanity."[30]

The evil of slavery was also on the mind of Jacob Green, who had earlier called Americans to consider the vast potential of independence. Green originally preached his sermon condemning slavery on April 22, 1778, but it was received with such enthusiasm that it was later published, which considerably expanded its sphere of influence. Marveling at American audacity, Green stated, "Though our contention with Great Britain is so glorious, yet we have reason to be humbled and abased before God. . . . for the many sins, the many vices that prevail among us." Of the many sins that warranted immediate attention, Green

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[30]William Livingston to Samuel Allinson July 25, 1778 in Carl E. Prince and Dennis P. Ryan, eds, *The Papers of William Livingston*, Volume II, (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1980), 403.

believed that "supporting and encouraging slavery" was one of the most pressing. The minister was frustrated that the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation did not end slavery. He chastised, "Can it be believed that a people contending for liberty should, at the same time, be promoting and supporting slavery? . . . I cannot but think, and must declare my sentiments, that the encouraging and supporting of negro slavery is a crying sin in our land."[31] The minister stated he agreed with the Apostle Paul who declared that "*men stealers* (which is the sin we are guilty of by the negro slavery)" were as vile as the "*murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, whore-mongers, defilers of themselves with mankind, liars, perjured persons, &c.*" Green called those in his audience and all Americans who owned slaves to preempt the manumission by state legislators and voluntarily free their slaves. He proposed that "if those masters had a true spirit of freedom; if they abhored the very nature of slavery, they would soon free themselves from such a blot in the character of freemen."[32] If such persons would not

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[31]Smylie, ed, "Presbyterians and the American Revolution," 451.

[32]Smylie, ed, "Presbyterians and the American Revolution," 452 and 453.

act for their own benefit, Green stated, they should do so for the welfare of all Americans, because the minister was "persuaded these united American States must, and will groan under the afflicting hand of God, till we reform in this matter." Still, Green had "reason to hope this matter will be considered and remedied and that God will turn to us in mercy and prosper us. We should not be discouraged, but repent and exert ourselves in the cause of liberty, both against Britain and among ourselves."[33]

Similar sentiments were expressed by John Murray. On November 4, 1779, Murray also lamented America's fumbling of its righteous potential with a sermon entitled "Nehemiah, Or the Struggle for Liberty never in vain, when managed with Virtue and Perseverance." Murray began by stating that Americans, like Nehemiah and the Israelites, had experienced, "The struggles of an oppressed people . . . recovering the civil and religious privileges by which God had distinguished them from all the rest of the world."[34] Like the Old Testament prophets, the minister

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[33]Smylie, ed, "Presbyterians and the American Revolution," 453 and 454.

[34]John Murray, "Nehemiah, or The struggle for liberty never in vain, when managed with virtue and perseverance. A discourse delivered at the Presbyterian Church in Newbury-

assured his audience that the nations and people who strove to please God would find their liberties protected against all who threatened them. Murray stated that "the cause of liberty is the cause of God" and that "the cause he has been wont to plead he will never desert, he will work for it."[35] Still, Murray commented, Americans needed to please God to attain his protection and in this they struggled. This failure had resulted in various trials and tribulations, including the persecution of ardent ministers promoting "the public cause" by the British, who "were not insensible that their faithful testimony put rise in the measures used in its support—and therefore their persons—their names—and religion—and the sacred places where God's worship was fixed—became the principal butt" of their malice.[36]

Murray, like Green and Livingston, believed that slavery's persistence in America was one of the primary sins endangering "the cause of liberty." Bluntly, the

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Port, Nov. 4th, 1779. Being the day appointed by government to be observed as a day of solemn fasting and prayer throughout the state of Massachusetts-Bay. Published in compliance with the request of some hearers" (Newbury: John Mycall, 1779), 5.

[35]Murray, "Nehemiah," 17-18.

[36]Murray, "Nehemiah," 49.

minister told his audience that "the nations therefore that support or connive at the practice of enslaving the human species, as an article of commerce, ought to be considered in a state of war against all mankind; since none can be thought willing to wear that public brand of the antichristian beast." Murray hoped that "due attention will . . . be paid by all these rising States: for should a toleration of the slave trade be now mingled with our new Constitutions, that leaven will soon corrupt the whole lump."[37] The minister declared that if Americans continued in "the practice of making or retaining slaves" it would certainly "entail the curse of heaven on all our struggles" since "*the honor of divine Government is concerned that national sins meet national punishments.*"[38] Like Green, Murray ended his sermon with the optimistic hope that his audience would repent their sins and reclaim "the cause of God" so that "America will be IMMANUEL'S land—the seat of his kingdom till the sun shall fade."[39]

The clamor against slavery did not go unnoticed in the Presbyterian Synod. When the ruling body met in 1780 it

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[37]Murray, "Nehemiah," 9.

[38]Murray, "Nehemiah," 9 and 11.

[39]Murray, "Nehemiah," 56.

decided to consider an official position on the controversial topic. After some discussion it was remembered that the question of slavery had been raised when the Synod met in 1774, but that the decision had been postponed and then forgotten. In what some historians have labeled as a move to avoid ostracizing a large section of the denomination, the ruling body concluded that a decision should again be postponed.[40] Considering the measures the Synod had previously taken to ensure the continued unity of the Church, this assumption seems valid. The state of spiritual anxiety that drove many Presbyterians to reconsider the unspoken acceptance of slavery in the church was in the end, it seems, overwhelmed by the desire not to further fray the bonds that connected Americans during the trials of war.

The inaction of the Synod, however, did not quiet the individual calls for repentance. For example, in September 1782 Benjamin Rush wrote to Nathanial Greene concerning his move to the South, pleading: "For God's sake, do not exhibit a new spectacle to the world, of men just emerging

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[40]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 487. For more information on the Presbyterian Church and slavery during the late colonial and early national periods see: W. Harrison Daniel, "Southern Presbyterians and the Negro in the Early National Period," in *The Journal of Negro History*, 58:3 (July 1973), 291-312.

from a war in favor of liberty, with their clothes not yet washed from the blood which was shed in copious and willing streams in its defense, fitting out vessels to import their fellow creatures from Africa to reduce them afterwards to slavery."[41] Despite the disgust of many Presbyterians over both the practice of slavery and the inability of the Synod to condemn it, the ever-present fear of a division prevailed. As the question of slavery led to controversy, the issue for the moment seemed irresolvable and so it was avoided.

Before even the first shot was fired, the Presbyterians had been determined to maintain colonial unity throughout the difficulties with Britain. The Synod which met in 1775, reiterated its belief that the success of the American venture largely rested on cooperation among the colonists. As the war waned, however, scattered calls were heard from within the Church for a return to the interdenominational goals of 1758. Although the Presbyterians had been working closely with other denominations for a righteous cause since the Constitutional Crisis, it was increasingly believed that

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[41]Benjamin Rush to Nathanial Greene, September 1782 in Butterfield, ed, *Letters of Benjamin Rush,* I, 286.

these unions were becoming too preoccupied with political rights. The Church had not been doing enough to bridge the schisms in Christ's kingdom, and despite the importance of securing their liberties through independence, Christendom was supposed to be their primary concern. Even though these calls for reclaiming interdenominationalism preceded the actions of the Presbyterian Synod in 1783-84, they nevertheless illustrate a growing desire within the Church. As had happened during the French and Indian War, the War for American Independence served as the catalyst for interdenominational change.

Samuel Stanhope Smith—protégé and son-in-law of Jonathan Witherspoon—founded the College of Hampden-Sidney based Witherspoon's model at the College of New Jersey. In March 1779, he wrote to Thomas Jefferson concerning the latter's plan for education in Virginia. After applauding the effort, Smith addressed what he believed to be the biggest hindrance to the proposal: "I foresee that the chief obstacle to its execution will arise from the variety of religious sentiments that exist in the state."[42] For

[42]Samuel Stanhope Smith to Thomas Jefferson, March 1779 in Julian P. Boyd, ed, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Volume 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 247.

Smith, the various churches of Virginia were primarily concerned with securing political power, and not with education or even Christendom. For factious Virginians, Smith observed, the state's institutions of higher learning were of great importance, and "whatever party enjoys the preeminence in these will insensibly gain upon the others, and soon acquire the government of the state." He even conceded the regrettable role that his denomination would play when he wrote that "This contest will chiefly lie betwixt the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians." Smith lamented the fact that the various Churches would rather struggle for positions of power within the state's infrastructure than work together. This frustrating Old World approach that Virginians, including his fellow Presbyterians, were taking on this issue would not work with Jefferson's plan. "The partialities of sects," Smith wrote, "ought to have no place in a system of liberal education. They are the disgrace of science and would to Heaven it were possible utterly to banish them from the society of men." The minister continued, "Good God! What suspicions, what animosities divide the principles of a religion whose ruling maxim is charity and love! It is time to heal these divisions, as well for the honour of

religion, as in order to promote the noblest literary design to which this or any other country has given birth."[43]

For Smith, interdenominationalism was more than the answer to Virginia's educational problems. Wishfully, he wrote that only "if they were united under one denomination their efforts, instead of being divided and opposed, would concentrate on one object, and concur in advancing the same important enterprise." In this effort, Smith believed Virginians were poised to realize at least some of the potential an independent America promised, but their success rested on their ability to embrace interdenominationalism and reject their old world schismatic traditions. Having offered warning, advice, and reason to hope, Smith concluded his letter to Jefferson by emphasizing the hope: "My extreme love of peace, of that benevolence which my religion recommends, and of enlarged and liberal inquiry in matters of science, makes me wish for a union, at least of the two capital sects of christians [in] this state."[44] As illustrated in this

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[43]Ibid.

[44]Samuel Stanhope Smith to Thomas Jefferson, March 1779, in Boyd, ed, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson,* 248.

letter, some Presbyterian leaders were beginning again to focus on Christendom and rely on God to prosper the country as a result.

This renewed interest in interedenominationalism was also found among the Presbyterians in the North. Writing to Samuel Allinson in March 1780, William Livingston voiced his support for a more cooperative Christian fellowship. He told Allinson that his decision was based on his observation that "It is the lot of humanity to entertain various opinions. And the Almighty has not thought it proper to delegate to frail & erring Mortals his Prerogative of being the Lord of Conscience." Livingston reasoned that since Christians of various denominations were not the lords of conscience, he was able to take comfort in a general Christianity. "Fully persuaded of this important Truth," he wrote to Allinson, "I know not that I have any personal Attachment to, or prejudice against, any denomination of Christians, but trust that I can embrace any man who appears to be a conscientious Christian . . . with cordial affection."[45] Despite what

[45]William Livingston to Samuel Allinson, March 1780 in Carl E. Prince, Mary Lou Lustig, Brenda Parnes, and Dennis Ryan, ed., *The Papers of William Livingston, Volume III* (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1979), 339.

Livingston wrote or said, his embrace of interdenominationalism was best demonstrated by the fact that Mr. Allinson was a Quaker and an intimate friend. In a July letter, he wrote to Allinson expressing his "hope I shall always follow your generous & christian Example of not limiting my friendship to persons of my own way of thinking."[46] Both William Livingston and Samuel Stanhope Smith reveal, as influential figures in Presbyterian circles, the growing concern within the Church that Christians should cooperate and work together toward their common goal of edifying Christendom.

In a similar spirit, the Reverend John Ewing of Philadelphia—protégé and close friend of Dr. Francis Alison—preached one of his staple sermons, the "State of Spiritual Liberty," on June 17, 1780.[47] He began his sermon by reiterating the well-known Presbyterian support for the cause of liberty. "A well regulated Zeal for civil Liberty is a noble & generous Passion" Ewing told his audience, and "endeavours to promote & establish civil and religious Liberty are very commendable." The minister also noted,

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[46]William Livingston to Samuel Allinson, July 1780, in Prince, et al, eds, *The Papers of William Livingston,* 409.

[47]Ewing was so fond of this sermon that he had already presented it five times before June 1780 and he would go on to give it five times after.

"it is to be hoped, that ye Spirit of Freedom, which now prevails under our Constitution will never be suffered to decay." However, Ewing added, "amidst all ye vigorous Efforts for Liberty in ye World . . . how negligent and careless are Men in securing spiritual Liberty." The most important liberty, the minister commented, was the most overlooked, and in this state "man, let his Civil Liberty be what it will, can [n]ever be accounted free."[48] Noting the political preoccupations of Presbyterians, and Americans in general, Ewing was determined to call attention to the welfare of Christianity, which he believed to be of more importance. While American Christians busied themselves securing their worldly rights, Christendom suffered from neglect because souls were not being won. All Christians, "as Heirs of God & joint-Heirs with Christ"[49] were called to safeguard Christ's Kingdom in this way. Ewing's sermon helps illustrate that while the denomination maintained its support for the securing of civil and religious freedom, there were a few Presbyterians

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[48]Smylie, ed, "Presbyterians and the American Revolution," 478.

[49]Smylie, ed, "Presbyterians and the American Revolution," 479.

calling for a renewed emphasis on strengthening the body of Christ.

Following in the footsteps of John Ewing, John Murray penned "Bath-Kol. A voice from the wilderness." In this work Murray placed the blame for the trials of the war squarely on the shoulders of sinful Americans. Murray wrote, "It has pleased the Holy Sovereign of the Universe, for eight long years to continue on AMERICA the awful judgment of a bloody and destructive war. In this, as in all his other dealings, it cannot be denied that righteousness belongeth to him; and sinful mortals should take all the blame."[50] Like Ewing before him, Murray was frustrated that Americans "contented ourselves with investigating the natural or political springs of our troubles; while the chief, that is, the moral causes have been too frequently quite overlooked."[51] Murray reminded his audience that "the Church of Christ in all its branches

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[50]John Murray, "Bath-Kol. A voice from the wilderness. Being an humble attempt to support the sinking truths of God, against some of the principal errors, raging at this time. Or, a joint testimony to some of the grand articles of the Christian religion, judicially delivered to the churches under their care. By the first presbytery of the eastward" (Boston: N. Coverly: Between the Sign of the Lamb and the White Horse. 1783), 5.

[51]Murray, "Bath-Kol," 6.

is erected, as a city set on a hill, on purpose to repell the attacks of infidelity and vice; and by opening and supporting the whole system of revealed truth, to defend the citizens of Zion."[52] According to the author, American Christians had too long neglected their duty to Zion, and as a result "infidelity and vice" had begun to decay Christendom from within. As Christians, Murray stated, not only were they called to do their part, but they were to embrace the challenge as one body. United, Christians could better achieve their ultimate end "the glory of God, and the salvation of the souls of men."[53]

Heeding the calls for repentance and renewal within the church, the Synod met in 1783 and formally addressed the situation. With peace finally within reach, the ruling body took the opportunity not only to encourage repentance, but also thanksgiving among the churches and members under their care. There was much to be thankful for, as many members of the Synod had made known. In his address shortly after the British surrender at Yorktown, Robert Smith declared, "Let every individual, let every family, let every congregation, let every town, let every state,

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[52]Murray, "Bath-Kol," 14.

[53]Murray, "Bath-Kol," 19.

let all our confederate states unite in praising our God, as with one heart and one voice."[54] In 1783, George Duffield called his congregation to be thankful for "here has our God erected a banner of civil and religious liberty: And prepared an asylum for the poor and oppressed from every part of the earth. . . . Here shall the religion of Jesus; not that, falsely so called, which consists in empty modes and forms; and spends it's unhallowed zeal in party names and distinctions, and traducting and reviling each other; but the pure and undefiled religion of our blessed Redeemer: here shall it reign in triumph, over all opposition."[55] It was in this spirit of repentance, renewal, and celebration that the Synod reclaimed the interdenominational goals of 1758. The ruling body began by making public its position on religious freedom, which was meant to dispel rumors that the denomination intended, as the Anglican Church lay in shambles, to make an Old World power play for a privileged position within the new governments. It wrote, "that they ever have, and still do

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[54]Robert Smith, "The Obligations of the Confederate States of North America to Praise God" (Baltimore: John Hayes, 1783), 1-2.

[55]Smylie, ed, "Presbyterians and the American Revolution," 458-459.

renounce and abhor the principles of intolerance; and . . . believe that every peaceable member of civil society ought to be protected in the full and free exercise of their religion."[56] With this the Synod laid the foundation for the interdenominational campaign that would take place in the post-war period.

By the end of the conflict with Great Britain there were calls within the Presbyterian Church to reclaim the interdenominational goals of 1758. Although these pleas made the body of Christ once more the priority for the Church, they were not tantamount to political abstinence. By the war's end, the groundwork for a transformed interdenominational vision had been prepared; it consisted of Christendom and the new nation. Standing at the threshold of a new world—the image of which it had helped to shape—the Presbyterian Church hoped, as Benjamin Rush wrote to John King, that "among the many advantages which the Revolution will produce . . . the union of the friends to truth and simplicity in worship and church government in

[56]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 499.

every quarter of the world into a great Christian republic will not be the least."[57]

[57]Benjamin Rush to John King, April 2, 1783, in Butterfield, ed, *Letters of Benjamin Rush,* Volume I, 300.

CHAPTER V

FOR CHRIST AND COUNTRY: INTERDENOMINATIONALISM IN THE NORTH, 1784-1801.

The post-war years finished the transformation process for the Church's interdenominational vision. Following the official cessation of hostilities after the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the Presbyterians saw themselves standing on the threshold of a new world, facing a new opportunity to realize their interdenominational goals. Prompted as they had been during the French and Indian War, the Presbyterians were determined to address their shortcomings and embrace Christian unity. Many in the Church believed that if they prioritized this responsibility, God would relieve their war-related sufferings. In this spirit, the Presbyterians began negotiating terms of union with like-minded denominations, such as the Dutch Reformed Church, the Associate Reformed Church and the New England Congregationalists. The Presbyterians also believed that if they resumed their duties diligently, then God would

fulfill America's potential. With this revised plan in mind, the Presbyterian ruling body encouraged its members to pursue an interdenominational spirit for the welfare of the country and Christendom. With their tactics modified the Presbyterian leadership believed its renewed cooperative attempts would meet with more success. These hopes were largely fulfilled by the Church's activities in the northern states where the ruling body met with its idyllic interdenominational relationship in the Plan of Union of 1801.[1]

When the Synod of New York and Philadelphia met in 1784, it moved closer toward its interdenominational goals by opening the lines of communication with the Low Dutch

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[1]This thesis is greatly indebted to that of Stephen Foster in his work, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). In his work, Foster argues that the internal divisions initiated by promising external forces—the Long Parliament during the English Civil War and the Great Awakening in colonial America—led to the demise of Puritanism. The American Revolution—or individually, the Constitutional Crisis, the War for Independence, and the government of the Articles of Confederation—served a similar function for the Presbyterian Church; it afforded the Church the opportunity to better realize long held interdenominational goals. However, where Puritanism was done in by internal divisions, the Presbyterian ruling bodies' interdenominationalism was thwarted by fears of divisions and the precautions taken to avoid them, which eventually resulted in schisms.

Reformed Synod of New York and New Jersey. Although the two denominations had some past disagreements, especially regarding the Charter of King's College in New York, the persistent cordial ecclesiastical relationship, fostered by men from both churches, such as William Livingston and Theodore Jacobus Frelinghuysen, had laid the foundation for the cooperative venture proposed in 1784.[2] The Presbyterian Correspondence Committee, which had been created in 1758 to interact with the like-minded churches in America and across the Atlantic, was given the task of securing this union by the Presbyterian Synod. This was the Committee's first assignment since the Anti-Bishop union with the Congregationalists that had ended in 1775. This new

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[2]Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 200-202; and Randall Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 152. De Jong states that the problems between the Presbyterians and the Dutch were partly due to the division of the Dutch Church into Old Light and New Light factions known as the Conferentie and the Coetus. The conservative Conferentie supported the Anglican institution with the hope of securing a Dutch Professor of Theology in the school and the evangelical Coetus supported the Anti-Anglican group which consisted largely of Presbyterians. The subsequent hostilities saw the division of the Dutch Church, but by the time Independence had been secured the Dutch had reunited with the New Lights in charge. Both De Jong and Balmer state that the union talks in 1784 were the culmination of the long-standing New Light hopes within each Church for unity.

Committee, led by Dr. John Rodgers and Alexander McWhorter, was to meet with the Dutch in order "to determine a line for their future conduct with regard to each other, and to enter into an amicable correspondence with the Dutch Committee upon subjects of general utility and friendship between the churches."[3]

The following year the committee reported that they had met with more success than anticipated. Not only did they have an amicable meeting with the Dutch Synod, but they also met with the newly-formed Associate Reformed Synod.[4] Both ruling bodies, the committee stated, desired "some kind of union . . . whereby they might be enabled to unite their interests, and combine their efforts, for promoting the great cause of truth and vital religion." The Presbyterian Synod responded that they "were happy in finding such a disposition in the brethren of the above Synods, and cheerfully concur with them in thinking that

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[3]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 505. The Committee members were: Dr. Rodgers, McWhorter, Spencer, and Smith with Alexander Miller, J. Woodhull, and Israel Reed.

[4]The Associate Reformed Synod was the result of the union in 1782 between the Scottish-based Reformed Presbytery and Associate Presbyteries. See: James Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1996), 62.

such a measure is both desirable and practicable, and therefore appoint . . . a committee to meet with such committees as may be appointed by the Low Dutch Synod . . . and by the Associate Synod." [5]

On October 5, 1785, the three churches met to craft a plan of cooperation. After the core beliefs of each denomination were presented, reviewed, and found satisfactory, the churches began discussing what form their cooperation would take. Although the Presbyterians suggested a biennial meeting, an annual convention was agreed upon that was intended to:

> strengthen each other's hands in the great work of the gospel ministry; to give, and to receive, mutual information of the state of religion within their respective churches; to consider of, and adopt, the most prudent means to prevent or remedy any causes of dissension that may happen to arise between our respective congregations . . . and to concert measures for uniting our efforts to defend and promote the principles of the gospel, and oppose the progress of infidelity and error; and to adopt plans for effectually assisting the exercise of discipline in our churches, and encouraging each other in its execution.[6]

Despite the promise of this initial meeting, the relationship cooled as both the Dutch Reformed Church and

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[5]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 508.

[6]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 520.

Associate Reformed Synod experienced internal problems that stole their attention.[7] As the new decade dawned the interdenominational hopes that had been stirred were left unfulfilled.

Although the Presbyterians' plans with the Dutch were indefinitely postponed, they were not dissuaded from their course. In 1785, the Church began discussing ways in which they could reorganize themselves so they could be a more effective instrument for Christendom.[8] Though the Synod was in agreement concerning the need for a restructuring it was divided on how to do so. There were some, such as Samuel Stanhope Smith, who favored a strong centralized government along the lines of the Scottish establishment and others, such as Mathew Wilson, who favored a decentralized government where the power resided at the local level. In

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[7]The reunited Dutch Church still suffered internal divisions and these were roused by the possible union with the Presbyterians. The conservatives believed the Presbyterians were too relaxed in their doctrine and that this would in turn effect their churches. The very existence of Associate Reformed Synod was, by 1787, being challenged by the Supreme Judicatory of the Scottish Reformed Presbytery. See: Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition,* 277.

[8]Mark Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 89.

the end, the Synod came to a compromise that gave greater authority to the local presbyteries while preserving the central ruling body's (after 1788 known as the General Assembly) responsibility for the direction and leadership of the denomination as a whole.[9] Even though, by 1786, a general agreement had been reached concerning the layout of the new government, a formal vote to finalize the plans was postponed for two years due to slacking attendance. After essentially begging its members to participate in such an important event, the Presbyterian Synod passed the proposed changes and made them effective the following year.[10]

This reorganization seems to have fostered, or at least coincided with, a strong desire among the

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[9]At the base of this new system were the 419 local churches which were led by their elected sessions. Each session sent delegates to the 16 local presbyteries. According to the proposed plan the presbyteries then sent representatives to the 4 regional synods, which were responsible for overseeing the actions of the presbyteries. Those presbyteries also sent delegates to the General Assembly itself, but instead of representatives from each church there was one minister and elder sent for every six congregations. This was a considerable change from the previous system that required every church to send delegates to the annual Synod.

[10]General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1706-1788*, 522-24; Balmer and Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians*, 38; and Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 298-302.

Presbyterian leadership for a new and stronger federal government to better meet the needs of the American people and fulfill the goals of the Revolution. This process began during the conflict with Britain when the Presbyterian Church gained an appreciation for the vast potential of their new country. Generally, Presbyterians were Americanists, but this did not necessarily mean they were wholly or even initially in favor of a strong central government.[11] James Smylie writes that "a few Presbyterians opposed the Constitution . . . as anti-Federalists," but there were others who "voted for it and served under it."[12]

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[11]Jonathan Witherspoon and his College of New Jersey was particularly important for the Church's appreciation for America's potential. Not only did Reverend Witherspoon train students from across the country with his Americanist curriculum, but many of his students also founded schools of their own based on his model. For more information see: Robert M. Calhoon, "The religious consequences of the Revolution," in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds, *A Companion to the American Revolution* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 581; Howard Miller, *The Revolutionary College: American Presbyterian Higher Education 1707-1837* (New York: New York University Press, 1976); Jeffry H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); David. W. Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution, 1750-1800* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985); and James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander, D. D. First Professor in the Theological Seminary, at Princeton, New Jersey* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1991), 15-16.

[12]Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians,* 61. Concerning those Presbyterians who supported the

As individuals, Presbyterians were some of the most adamant Anti-Federalists and Federalists, but upon the ratification of the new Constitution the Church's ruling body fully welcomed and supported the new government.[13] Not only would the General Assembly support the Federal government, but the ruling body also came to see its success as integral to the success of their mission to strengthen the kingdom of Christ. In this way, the Presbyterian Church helped form the vanguard of the nationalist movement while continuing their renewed interdenominational efforts.

Among these interdenominationally driven nationalists was Robert Davidson, Presbyterian minister and professor of History and *Belle Lettres* at Dickinson College. Called to speak at Carlisle, Pennsylvania's Fourth of July celebration in 1787, Davidson took the opportunity to give

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Constitution, Smylie pays particular attention to the ten or eleven Presbyterians who helped shape "the document at the Constitutional Convention."(ibid.)

[13]Prominent Federalists include: Benjamin Rush, James Wilson, Jonathan Witherspoon, Samuel Stanhope Smith, and David Ramsay. Prominent Anti-Federalists: Presbyterians were George Bryan, Robert Whitehill and William Findley. For more information on religious divisions over the Constitution see: Owen S. Ireland, *Religion, Ethnicity, and Politics: Ratifying the Constitution in Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvanian State University Press, 1995); and Stephen A. Marini, "Religion, Politics, and Ratification" in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds, *Religion in a Revolutionary Age* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 184-217.

his support for a strong national government. Davidson began by reminding his audience of the many blessings, including that of independence, which God had already bestowed upon America. "It is our duty," Davidson said, "to improve the blessings of Heaven," so as to ensure "our stability, happiness, and glory, as a nation."[14] "My fellow-citizens," he pleaded, "Let us not leave the great work, which we have begun, unfinished." According to Davidson, what had been left incomplete was the protection of "the many civil and religious privileges that we enjoy." He called "every true patriot" to embrace "a spirit of union, confidence, and brotherly love," because "our character and consequence, as a people, depend on the firm union of these States, now called United."[15] Davidson assured his audience that "the bonds our union . . . must be drawn much closer; and the machine in a greater measure wound up anew, in order that it may perform its operations with new vigour. And now is the important moment come, for

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[14]Robert Davidson, "An oration, on the independence of the United States of America. Delivered on the 4th of July, 1787. By the Rev. Robert Davidson, D.D. Pastor of the Presbyterian congregation in Carlisle, and professor of history and belles lettres, in Dickinson College" (Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1787), 5.

[15]Davidson, "An oration," 14.

this great work."[16] Whether America fulfilled its obligation to improve the blessings of God depended on "the most enlightened patriots from every state" who had convened "to deliberate on these weighty matters." The stakes were high and these great men needed prayer and support to do God's will, Davidson concluded. As he ended his speech, Davidson reiterated what the country needed to succeed: "faith, piety, and union."[17]

Benjamin Rush was also among these nationalists. He expressed his hopes in an open letter "To the Ministers of the Gospel of All Denominations," written on June 21, 1788. Rush's particular interpretation of this Presbyterian goal involved a "general convention of Christians, whose business shall be to unite in promoting the general objects of Christianity." In this proposed annual convention, denominational differences were to be left at the door. This Christian body would then be able to "possess an influence over the laws of the United States." However, Rush noted, "This influence will differ from that of most of the ecclesiastical associations that have existed in the world. It will be the influence of reason over the

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[16]Davidson, "An oration," 15.

[17]Ibid.

passions of men." It was Rush's belief that Christianity was to serve such a role for society, and so the goals of his proposed convention "will be morals, not principles, and the design will be, not to make men zealous members of any one church, but to make them good neighbors, good husbands, good fathers, good masters, good servants, and of course good rulers and good citizens."[18] It was only after Christians laid a solid foundation for the nation, Rush contended, that the United States could strengthen Christendom. At that point in the nation's development, it could "teach mankind that it is possible for Christians of different denominations to love each other and to unite in the advancement of their common interests." In the end Rush argued, "By the gradual operation of such natural means, the kingdoms of this world are probably to become the kingdoms of the Prince of Righteousness and Peace."[19] In this way both Christ and country would be served.

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[18]Benjamin Rush to the Ministers of the Gospel of All Denominations, June 21, 1788, in L. H. Butterfield, ed, *Letters of Benjamin Rush,* Volume I: 1761-1792 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 466.

[19]Rush to the Ministers of the Gospel of All Denominations, June 21, 1788, in Butterfield, ed, *Letters of Benjamin Rush,* 467.

Once the Constitution was ratified, many Presbyterians joined their fellow Americans in celebration. On July 9, 1788, Benjamin Rush described in great detail to Elias Boudinot the festivities celebrating the Constitution that he witnessed. Forming "a very agreeable part of the procession" was a group of ministers who "marched arm in arm with each other to exemplify the Union." Not only did the clergy manifest "the connection between religion and good government," they also, according to Rush, showed "the influence of a free government in promoting Christian charity" as "pains were taken to connect ministers of the most dissimilar religious principles."[20] For Rush, though, the entire event oozed unity. In particular there was a cotton manufacturing display that "was viewed with astonishment and delight by every spectator." Rush wrote that "on that stage were carried the emblems of the future wealth and independence of our country. . . . Hence will arise a bond of union to the states more powerful than any article of the new Constitution." Despite his lack of clairvoyance, Rush illustrates well the prevalent Presbyterian belief that the Constitution was "as much the

[20]Benjamin Rush to Elias Boudinot, July 9, 1788, in Butterfield, ed, *Letters of Benjamin Rush,* 474.

work of a Divine Providence as any of the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament."[21] Mirroring Rush's sentiments, James Wilson gave a speech at the same event Rush described so diligently to Boudinot. Wilson believed the new Constitution would usher in a new world where "peace walks serene and unalarmed over all the unmolested regions—while liberty, virtue, and religion go hand in hand, harmoniously, protecting, enlivening, and exalting all!" "Happy country!," Wilson exclaimed, "May thy happiness be perpetual!"[22] Presbyterians hoped, alongside their countrymen, that the new government would aid in their particular pursuits of happiness.

When the first General Assembly convened in 1789, it issued a pastoral letter addressing "the present state of religion, the new arrangements in church government and discipline, and the state of civil government."[23] In this

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[21]Rush to Boudinot, July 9, 1788, in Butterfield, ed, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 473 and 475.

[22]James Wilson, "Oration Delivered on the Fourth of July 1788, at the Procession formed at Philadelphia: To Celebrate the Adoption of the Constitution of the United States" in Robert Green McCloskey, ed, *The Works of James Wilson Volume II* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1967), 780.

[23]Presbyterian General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from its Organization, A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820*

new era the ruling body stressed unity as the best method to secure "the great ends of religion." Of particular importance was the unity among Presbyterians. The General Assembly wrote, "we ought not to forget how necessary it is, for that great purpose, to preserve our character as a body." "Without . . . concert in our measures," the governing body warned, "our respectability will be diminished; and our efforts for the public good, and for the promotion of religion, will be weakened." Again emphasizing this theme of unity the General Assembly concluded this pastoral letter, "praying that you may enjoy all peace, union, and prosperity in the Lord, we are, dear brethren, your affectionate fellow labourers in his common vineyard."[24]

That same year the General Assembly also wrote to the recently elected President of the United States, George Washington. In addition to illustrating the support within the Presbyterian Church for interdenominationally driven nationalism, the General Assembly's correspondence shows the ideal qualities of the citizens they hoped would

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Inclusive (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.), 6.

[24]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 10.

populate the nation. For the ruling body, Washington was the quintessential American, which was why they embraced "the earliest opportunity in the power, to testify the lively and unfeigned pleasure which they, with the rest of their fellow-citizens feel, on your appointment to the first office in the nation." Though the pleasure was felt by most, there were Americans, the Anti-Federalists, who portrayed Washington and the Presidency as nothing more than a new face for an old threat, monarchy. Even among those who fully supported Washington, there was no agreement on what he represented any more than there was agreement on what the nation represented. For the Presbyterian General Assembly the President was a divine blessing. The ruling body wrote that they "adore Almighty God, the author of every perfect gift, who hath endued you with such a rare and happy assemblage of talents, as hath rendered you necessary to your country in war and in peace." In part the ruling body was enamored with Washington's self-sacrifice for his country. After all the general had given, "we are happy that God has inclined your heart to give yourself once more to the public." However, the Presbyterians also valued that Washington was "a steady, uniform, avowed friend of the Christian religion;

who has commenced his administration in rational and exalted sentiments of piety; and who, in his private conduct, adorns the doctrines of the gospel of Christ; and . . . devoutly acknowledges the government of Divine Providence."[25] In choosing George Washington as their ideal American, the Presbyterians provided the core definition for their idea of nationalism. There were only two necessary qualities, that the welfare of the nation supersede that of individuals or groups and that the only worthy foundation was Christianity.

In the last section of the letter, the Presbyterians pledged their efforts to help realize this dream of a Christian nation. To the imitable character of Washington, the Assembly wrote, "we will endeavour to add the wholesome instructions of religion." The ultimate goal of the Church was no secret, "we shall consider ourselves doing an acceptable service to God. . . when we contribute to render men sober, honest, and industrious citizens, and the obedient subjects of a lawful government." The ruling body continued, "In these pious labours, we hope to imitate the most worthy of our brethren of other Christian denominations, and to be imitated by them; assured that if

[25]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 12.

we can, by mutual and generous emulation, promote truth and virtue, we shall render a great and important service to the republic; . . . and, above all, meet the approbation of our Divine Master."[26] There was to be no mistaking their motivation. The Presbyterians' nationalist spirit was driven by the welfare of Christendom.

With the new government secured in the seemingly ordained hands of "our WASHINGTON," as the Presbyterian John Woodhull stated in a Thanksgiving sermon in 1789, the Presbyterian Church looked for new opportunities to strengthen the body of Christ.[27] When, in 1788, a new plan of union was suggested by the Fairfield County Association of churches and approved by the General Association of Connecticut, the Presbyterian leadership embraced the chance to renew the bonds of fellowship between their churches and those of the Congregationalists. A committee led by Timothy Dwight was chosen to present the idea to the

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[26]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 12.

[27]John Woodhull, "A sermon, for the day of publick thanksgiving, appointed by the president, on account of the establishment of the new Constitution, &c. November 26, 1789. By the Rev. John Woodhull, A.M. Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Freehold" (Trenton, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1790), 7.

Presbyterian General Assembly. That Dwight was chosen to spearhead this effort revealed its significance to the Congregationalists. Fortunately, this committee was met by an enthusiastic General Assembly. They wrote that they were "peculiarly desirous to renew and strengthen every bond of union between brethren so nearly agreed in doctrine and forms of worship as the members of the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches."[28] With this warm reception, the first steps were taken toward the eventual merging of the churches. In 1792, on behalf of the General Assembly, John Black and Drury Lacey wrote of "the importance of union and harmony in the Christian church, and the duty incumbent on all its pastors and members to assist each other in promoting . . . the general interest of the Redeemer's kingdom."[29] From 1790 to 1792 committees from both ruling bodies were sent to determine the exact terms for the union. In 1793, the churches began to send delegates to the meetings of their respective ruling bodies. In 1794

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[28]Samuel J. Baird, *A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church, From its Origins in America to the Present Time. With Notes and Documents Explanatory and Historical: Constituting a Complete Illustration of Her Polity, Faith, and History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 497.

[29]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 52.

these delegates were given the power to vote in both the General Assembly and in the General Association.[30] For the next seven years the bond between the two churches grew stronger and the churches increasingly became a part of one another's functioning. This aspect of the union is important because it had hitherto been absent from the Presbyterians' cooperative ventures.

Although friendly interaction between the laity, clergy, and ruling bodies of different denominations was vital to the success of the Presbyterian Church's interdenominationally national hopes, after the war individual ministers and lay Presbyterians also increasingly relied on the printed word to disseminate the vision. This medium allowed ministers from both Churches the opportunity both to strengthen the fellowship between Presbyterians and Congregationalists and also promote cooperation among all Christians. Taking up this banner, in 1792, Samuel Langdon, a Congregationalist minister, published a lecture he had given twice in the past two

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[30]It was also in 1794 that the Presbyterian General Assembly and the Massachusetts Congregationalists begin discussing a plan of cooperation similar to that the Presbyterians had with the Connecticut Congregationalists. See General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 91-92.

years entitled "A Discourse on the Unity of the Church as a Monumental Pillar of the Truth." During his talks, Langdon took the opportunity to admonish his audiences that "so long as the grand doctrine of salvation only by JESUS CHRIST is continued . . . all the different parties and denominations of christians constitute but one church of the living GOD."[31] Langdon's plea for Christian unity would not be the last.

In 1791, the Presbyterian, David Austin, published a project, which he hoped would have a great impact on the unity of Christians. Entitled *The American preacher*, Austin's work was a compilation of great sermons by eminent ministers "of different denominations in the Christian Church."[32] Included in this four volume series were sermons from Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire Congregationalists, and

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[31]Samuel Langdon, "A Discourse on the Unity of the Church as a Monumental Pillar of the Truth; Designed to Reconcile Christians of all Parties and Denominations in Charity and Fellowship, as One Body in Christ." (Exeter: Henry Ranlet, 1792), 12-13.

[32]David Austin, ed, *The American preacher; or, A collection of sermons from some of the most eminent preachers, now living, in the United States, of different denominations in the Christian Church. Never before published. Volume I[-IV*] (Elizabeth-town, NJ Shepard Kollock, 1791).

Episcopalians. His intent was "to direct the present prevailing disposition to liberality in matters of religion, into a proper channel; and open the door for Christian communion, upon principles ACKNOWLEDGED and UNDERSTOOD." "To lay a foundation for the universal agreement of the Christian Church" would more than benefit Christendom as "such religious union, and influence as this work labors to accomplish, will add no small DIGNITY and SUPPORT to the POLTICAL INTERESTS of our country."[33] Like the General Assembly two years earlier, Austin clarified that his national interests were driven by his religious goals. Continuing his pursuit of Christian unity, Austin's next venture joined him with two Congregationalist ministers.

When David Austin, Jonathan Edwards the younger, and Walter King met in 1794, they decided to reclaim the fallen project of the elder Jonathan Edwards to start an "explicit Agreement and visible Union of God's People, in Extraordinary Prayer, for the revival of Religion and advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth." For, and here they agreed with the senior Edwards, "how beautiful, and of

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[33]Austin, *The American Preacher*, vi.

good tendency, would it be, for multitudes of Christians in various parts of the world, by explicit agreement, to unite in such prayer." They proposed that "on every first Tuesday of the four quarters of the year," a day of common prayer be set aside by churches willing to participate. They would begin, they hoped, at two o'clock in the afternoon on the first Tuesday of January 1795.[34] Realizing the enormity of their plans, the three ministers called on their friends to help spread their message. The Presbyterians of Philadelphia and New York were particularly helpful.[35] Ashbel Green of Philadelphia replied, "The plan for a Concert has my most cordial approbation; and I shall endeavour, by all means in my power, to carry it into effect." Volunteering to distribute copies of the call to

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[34]David Austin, Jonathan Edwards, II, and Walter King, "Circular Letters, Containing, An Invitation to the Ministers and Churches of Every Christian Denomination in the United States, to Unite in Their Endeavours to carry into Execution the "Humble Attempt" of President Edwards, To promote explicit Agreement and visible Union of God's People, in Extraordinary Prayer, for the revival of Religion and advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth" (Concord: Geo. Hough, 1798), 3, 5, and 6.

[35]Although the published history of this call to prayer only included the responses of Northern Presbyterians, there were several prominent southerners who also gave their support, including the Reverend William Graham of Lexington, Virginia, and Reverend Thomas Reese of Salem, South Carolina.

prayer, Green also promised, "if my life and health are spared, to lay it before" his local Presbytery. Both the Presbytery of New York and the Synod of New York and New Jersey recommended to the churches under their care that they should embrace this universal call to "prayer, for the general revival of religion, and the advancement of the Redeemer's Kingdom in the world."[36]

In addition to the Congregationalists and other Reformed Churches, the Presbyterians made a more deliberate effort to interact, albeit outside the bounds of formal unions, with other denominations such as the Baptists and Methodists. Again, the medium of print served an important purpose for the Presbyterians.[37] As early as April 1789 the Presbyterians began participating in non-denominational

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[36]Austin, "Circular Letters," 12 and 16.

[37]There are several instances of strictly Congregationalist-Presbyterian print culture ventures found within the records of both ruling bodies. Two examples would be the "religiously improved" history of the Revolutionary War and the rewriting of Isaac Watt's Psalms. For more information see: General Association, *The Records of the General Association of Ye Colony of Connecticut, Begun June 20th, 1738, Ending June 19th, 1799* (Hartford, CT: Press of The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1888), 118, 147, and 172.

Christian magazines.[38] Individual ministers submitted articles, and the ruling bodies often supplied minutes and pastoral letters from their last session to magazines, such as *The Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine* (1789-1790), *The Theological Magazine* (1796-1799), *The United States Christian Magazine* (1796), *The Religious Monitor* (1798) and the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* (1799-1807).[39] Aside from regularly contributing to the various Christian journals, the Presbyterians would eventually pursue their own in 1804.[40] Although their measures were more restrained, the Presbyterians were extending their interdenominational pursuits to include churches such as the Baptist and Methodist.

Excited by these cooperative successes, there were some in the Presbyterian Church who wanted to extend the

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[38]For examples of 18th century communication networks see Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism; A History, 1690-1960* (New York: MacMillan, 1962), 111-64.

[39]*The Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1979) APS I, Microfilm Reel 10; *The Theological Magazine* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1979) APS I, Microfilm Reel 28; *The United States Christian Magazine* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1979) APS I, Microfilm Reel 30; *The Religious Monitor* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1979) APS I, Microfilm Reel 26; and *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1979) APS II, Microfilm Reel 14.

[40]Baird, *A Collection*, 301.

range of interdenominational activity even further. In 1797, the Synod of New York and New Jersey, in tandem with the Synod of Philadelphia, wrote to the General Assembly proposing that the Church broaden its range to include Christians on the other side of the Atlantic. Specifically, the Synods wished to establish relationships with "all the Protestant churches in our own country, those in different countries in Europe, and if it be deemed practicable, even with the Greek Church of Russia, or others that you may judge proper in various regions of the globe."[41] Concerned that the breadth of their cooperative spirit might spark opposition in the General Assembly, the Synods stated their purpose was not to cause division or hinder "the servants of Christ," but rather it was meant to "increase the union and harmony of his body; . . . and to promote their vigour and co-operation in advancing the glory of God, and the highest interest of the human race." Responding, the General Assembly wrote, through a committee led by Patrick Allison and Samuel Porter, that they agreed with the Synods' sentiments. However, the ruling body added that "the disorders and convulsions of the European

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[41]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 124.

world . . . afford little ground to expect a calm, deliberate attention to any new proposal from a distant region," and so the proposal, at least the European aspect, would have to wait.[42]

The "disorders and convulsions" that hindered the Synods' interdenominational plans stemmed from the French Revolution. Although the French Revolution initially had widespread support in the United States, its increasingly volatile and violent nature eroded American support with each passing day.[43] When the French abolished Christianity and established in its place the Cult of the Supreme Being, the Presbyterian Church condemned the Revolution. Through their work, the Presbyterians revealed more than disgust with atheism and infidelity; they also showed that they took the time to reinforce their nationalist message.

From 1797 to 1800 Nathan Strong published three Thanksgiving Day sermons, which focused on the threatening darkness of the French Revolution. Strong argued

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[42]Ibid.

[43]For more information on the support of the American clergy, including Presbyterian, for the French Revolution see Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 150-186; and Miller, *The Revolutionary College*, 198.

consistently that Americans should show their appreciation for God's numerous blessings by not emulating the French infidels. Among the many recently bestowed divine graces, Strong encouraged his audiences to "praise God for a good civil constitution—a government of our own choice and administered by men of our own choice—a government which freely indulges all personal, social and religious rights." As such, the Constitution was invaluable. It "is the banner of civil and religious liberty, and those who attempt to injure it are bringing misery on millions."[44] Americans should also be grateful that "God hath given us the means of supporting our national and christian independence," which Strong maintained was only possible because American leaders had employed "the word of God and ordinances of religion."[45] Here the minister emphasized the importance of Christianity for the foundation of the United States. However, as Strong reminded his audience, God's actions were always primarily intended to edify Christendom. He stated, "The whole divine government of

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[44]Nathan Strong, "A Sermon, Preached at the Annual Thanksgiving, November 16th, 1797" (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1797), 10.

[45]Nathan Strong, "A Thanksgiving Sermon, Delivered November 27th, 1800" (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1800), 24.

men is with reference to his church—to the interests of his kingdom, and the accomplishment of the purposes of his grace."[46] If Americans were able to focus on the welfare of their Redeemer's kingdom then they "may stand and look joyfully upon a heritage both temporal and eternal."[47]

Strong noted that a proper regard for the Christian Church would lead Americans away from the godless lures of the French Revolution. When the rebellious French gained power they only seemed interested in leveling society, including the Christian Church, and "if a man, who is a christian indeed, in heart as well as in profession, hath any discretionary powers in his hands, he will use them for the good of society and individuals."[48] This civically active Christian "will pity the calamities of all nations—he will seek to be good and be just to all—he will pray for all, and not make himself the instrument of any."[49] But if, Strong warned, Americans chose to proceed in the footsteps

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[46]Nathan Strong, "Political Instruction from the Prophecies of God's Word. A Sermon Preached on the State Thanksgiving, November 29, 1799" (New York: G. Forman, 1799), 3.

[47]Strong, "A Thanksgiving Sermon, 1800," 11.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Strong, "A Sermon, 1797," 15.

of the French atheist and infidel, "if we break up our old institutions of religion, order, and government, the Lord will cause our sorrows to be multiplied, in ways more fearful, more rapid, and more desolating, than we are able to foresee." The patriotic Christian American should only look to the French Revolution in order to better appreciate their country's blessings of "a firm government, civil and religious liberty, and the christian religion." As he concluded his various addresses, Strong stressed his underlying message, "I shall wish you that hear me to be of the same character in all essential things, and that the world may be filled with such as love and serve God on Christian principles. Then infidelity would tremble, and those, who are corrupting the morality and faith of the world would fly to their secret places."[50]

In the same spirit as Nathan Strong, Jonathan Freeman also published his thoughts on the French Revolution. For Freeman, the recent murmurings that Christian ministers should refrain from addressing national concerns, such as France's influence, were not only unfounded but dangerous because they stripped ministers of their rights. "Is this liberty? Is it republicanism? Are ministers not equally

[50]Strong, "A Thanksgiving Sermon, 1800," 17 and 18.

involved with other citizens in the prosperity or calamities of the nation?" Freeman conceded, in adherence to the interdenominational spirit within the Church, that ministers should not focus primarily on politics from the pulpit. However there were issues, such as the spread of infidelity from revolutionary France, that warranted a minister's address. Freeman stated, "I cannot reconcile it with religion, republicanism, nor patriotism to be entirely silent at such a solemn crisis. I always have been a true friend to my country; and I am independent in spirit."[51] If the United States wished to avoid the calamities that devastated Europe then, Freeman suggested, Americans had to "be more zealous for the glory of God and advancement of the redeemer's kingdom." [52] If the charitable message of Christ was the rule by which Americans lived, then both Christendom and the nation would benefit. Freeman challenged his audience to "be as charitable in politics as we ought to be in religion." As Christians, Americans

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[51]Jonathan Freeman, "A Sermon Delivered at New-Windsor and Bethlehem. August 30 1798. Being the Day Appointed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: To be Observed as a Day of Solemn Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer, in all the Churches under their Care" (New Windsor: Jacob Schultz, 1799), 12.

[52]Freeman, "A Sermon Delivered at New-Windsor and Bethlehem," 49.

should "bear with one another in your different sentiments on political subjects." In the end, though, it was important for Americans to remember "that you must depend on the merits of Christ alone to give success to your prayers, to all your means for reformation, and for averting the curse which threatens to devour us."[53]

These public sentiments of both Nathan Strong and Jonathan Freeman were reflected in the work of other Presbyterian ministers, including those assembled together as the ruling body of the Church. In 1798, the General Assembly issued a pastoral letter addressing the "formidable innovations and convulsions in Europe" that threatened to destroy religion. Although the ruling body wished to focus primarily on ecclesiastical concerns, they knew that "when scenes of devastation and bloodshed, unexampled in the history of modern nations, have convulsed the world, and when our own country is threatened with similar calamities, insensibility in us would be stupidity; silence would be criminal." As ministers of Christ and as "watchmen on Zion's walls," they were called to direct their churches' "attention towards that bursting storm,

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[53]Freeman, "A Sermon Delivered at New-Windsor and Bethlehem," 49 and 50.

which threatens to sweep before it the religious principles, institutions and morals of our people."[54] Both Christ and country were threatened by the rising influence of infidelity in the United States. As Strong noted, such occurrences bespoke a lack of appreciation for divine blessings. The Assembly wrote, "Our ingratitude to God enhances our dreadful guilt. . . . We have abused his favours, and turned them into engines of opposition against himself." They exhorted their members to cling to their interdenominational goals for hope. They wrote, "Let Christians unite more cordially and openly, in adhering to their Master's cause, and opposing infidelity in all its forms." Continuing, they encouraged, "Let us prostrate ourselves before him! Let the deepest humiliation and the sincerest repentance mark our sense of national sins."[55] Perhaps then, the ruling body noted, "God, for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, would . . . revive his work, not only amongst our churches, but amongst all denominations of Christians, until the blessed promises and predictions,

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[54]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820,* 152.

[55]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820,* 153.

with regard to the extent of the Redeemer's kingdom, be completely fulfilled."[56] The Presbyterians responded to this exhortation by energetically pursuing unions with other churches that would finally allow them to transcend denominational lines and truly work as the body of Christ.

In 1797, the Presbyterians and their interdenominational goals met unexpected success, when the Low Dutch and Associate Reformed Churches called for a meeting. Attempting to put their internal struggles behind them the Dutch Reformed were anxious to "revive the friendly correspondence" among the Associate Reformed and Presbyterian Churches. Matching the enthusiasm of the Dutch, three denominations began to shape a "plan for correspondence and friendly intercourse."[57] By May 1800 the

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[56]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820,* 153-54.

[57]Presbyterian General Assembly, "The Plan for correspondence and friendly intercourse proposed by a convention of delegates appointed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, the General Synod of the Reformed Dutch Church, and the Synod of the Associate Reformed Church, when met in New York, on the 3d Tuesday of June, 1798, and agreed to be reported to these respective judicatories; which plan has been unanimously approved by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, in May 1799; has been adopted in part, by the Associate Reformed Synod, at their last meeting; and is to come under the consideration of the General Synod of the Reformed Dutch Church, at their next meeting at Albany, on the first Tuesday of June, 1800"(New York: 1800), 4 and 1.

Presbyterian General Assembly had approved the matter with the other Churches following shortly thereafter. The plan extended the interdenominational success of the Presbyterian Church and served as a forerunner for the more intimate union that the denomination would experience the following year with the Congregationalists. The plan's simple title belied the concessions each church made for the edification of Christ's kingdom. Alongside the self-evident agreement to maintain lines of communication between the three ruling bodies, the plan allowed for the laity of each church to receive communion in whichever church they chose, and it opened each governing body to visiting delegations from the other churches. As significant as these concessions were, the most important was the agreement of the denominations to allow any congregation the freedom to choose which denominational ruling body would serve as its parent organization.[58] Much as they had with the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians were actively pursuing a more intimate, denomination transcending union with the Dutch and Associate Reformed churches of New York and New Jersey. Still, the

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[58]General Assembly, "The Plan for correspondence," 1-4.

Connecticut Congregationalists remained the crown jewel of the Presbyterian cooperative efforts.

With the dawn of nineteenth century, the Presbyterian ruling body began discussing the possibility of furthering their ties to the Connecticut Congregationalists. Church historian Williston Walker, wrote that "there is every reason to believe that the originator of the discussion was the younger Jonathan Edwards."[59] By 1800, Edwards, once a Congregationalist minister, was the President of Union College, as well as a delegate from the Presbyterian General Assembly to the General Association. Returning from his trip to the General Association in 1800, Edwards and his fellow delegates brought before the Presbyterian ruling body a new plan of union. After careful deliberation the Presbyterians wholeheartedly agreed to it in June, 1801.[60] The plan called for the union of the denominations throughout the United States and into its

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[59]Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 529.

[60]Robert L. Ferm, *A Colonial Pastor: Jonathan Edwards the Younger: 1745-1801* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 167-69; and William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1939), 307.

territories allowing for a more efficient mode of Christianizing the nation.

The liberties bestowed upon the individual churches by the Plan of Union 1801 demonstrated that the cooperative spirit of this new union was greater than anything the two churches had yet experienced. According to the plan, any church, despite any previous connections, could choose between either the Congregationalist or Presbyterian church government.[61] Additionally, each church was given the right either to make disciplinary decisions on its own or to send the case before whichever ruling body they chose, regardless of the church government that had previously been chosen. By granting these liberties, which further made the churches interchangeable, the ruling bodies of the churches demonstrated their willingness to sacrifice "the particular tenets" of their churches for the expansion of Christianity. Similar to the Christian's journey of sanctification, the Presbyterian journey to become more interdenominational meant they had to place the welfare of catholic Christianity before the welfare of their particular denomination. Through the Plan of Union, the Presbyterian Church had made considerable progress toward

[61]Ibid.

this end, and as the new century dawned, it was poised ready to take larger interdenominational strides for Christ and country.

The Presbyterian Church entered the post-war period eager to resume its interdenominational pursuits. The Presbyterian ruling body hoped that the denomination's dedication to these responsibilities would see God bless them through the lifting of their hardships and the realization of America's potential. As the decade progressed, the governing body came to see their attempts to heal the Universal Church and their hopes for their country as related issues. They saw in the new United States the best possibility for aiding Christendom and that the country's potential could be increased with a united populace. Hoping to benefit Christ's kingdom the Presbyterian Church supported the creation and maintenance of a truly unified nation. As the General Assembly wrote to George Washington in 1789, "In these pious labours . . . we shall render a great and important service to the republic; . . . and, above all, meet the approbation of our Divine Master.[62] This approach of interdenominationally

[62]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820,* 12.

inspired nationalism led to two distinct results. The first was that the Presbyterians were able to finally achieve what they thought to be the ideal interdenominational union with the like-minded Connecticut Congregationalists, bringing to fruition nearly a half century of work. Second, the Presbyterians helped develop an understanding of nationalism that allowed the many divisions of Americans to participate on the condition that the welfare of the nation came first. Viewed alone, the fruit of the Presbyterian labor in the North indicates the realization of the Church's cooperative dreams. However, when considered beside the myriad of southern Presbyterian interpretations, the same success seems jeopardized.

CHAPTER VI

SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIANS AND INTERDENOMINATIONAL NATIONALISM, 1784-1801

As the General Assembly encouraged its ministers and congregations to be more cooperative for the sake of Christ and Country, the responses from their constituents varied. In the northern states, where the denomination was strongest, the ruling body was pleased with the interdenominational nationalism displayed, especially the intimate relationship with the Congregationalists. In the southern states and territories where the denomination was weakest, however, the General Assembly met with a troubling inconsistency that derived largely from the Church's inability to provide a consistent leadership. Although there were Presbyterians in the South whose interdenominational nationalism met the approval of the General Assembly, there were also other Presbyterians whose varied local attempts proved irksome to the ruling body. The Church's weakness in the South also meant that the

General Assembly was seriously disadvantaged when attempting to address this multitude of local concerns. Still, these were difficulties in the South rather than of the South, meaning that for the most part the southern Presbyteries and Synods reflected the desires of the General Assembly, even if there were churches and ministers who did not. When the ruling bodies failed to rein in their wayward members, doubts arose concerning the intimate relationships they were striving to achieve with other churches, including the Congregationalists. More than this, however, the Presbyterian leadership also fostered sectional sentiments through its unlimited willingness to compromise for the sake of unity. This encouraged the growth of sectional priorities—as long as they did not threaten the union—and increased the separation of members who lost their faith that the Church, as a national entity, represented their interests.

An examination of the published work of several prominent southern Presbyterian leaders will demonstrate the desire to promote interdenominational nationalism throughout the country in accordance with the vision of the General Assembly. Exemplary of this spirit was the Reverend George Buist of South Carolina. Buist was the

minister of the largest Presbyterian Church in Charleston, an important representative in the General Assembly, and the eventual president of the College of Charleston.[1] He was also the chaplain to the South Carolina Grand Lodge of Masons and his message to that body on December 27, 1793, illustrates how he maintained the vision of the General Assembly.[2] Buist stated, "The royal law of love, which forms the basis of the Christian character, comprehends two great branches, love to God, and love to man."[3] Commenting on the surprising lack of obedience among Christians to the "royal law of love," Buist challenged the Masons to promote the cause. He said that the Christians' love for all mankind, "is not . . . a useless and inactive principle; on the contrary, it is the foundation of a virtuous character,

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[1]William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit: Or, Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of Various Denominations: from the Early Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-five: with Historical Introductions* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1858), 71-74.

[2]George Buist, "A sermon, preached in the Presbyterian Church, of Charleston; before the incorporated Grand Lodge of South-Carolina, Ancient York Masons. And the brethren of that fraternity assembled in general communication, on the festival of Saint John the Evangelist, December 27, 1793," (Charleston: Harrison and Bowen, 1794), 1.

[3]Buist, "A sermon," 5.

and is, in truth, the fulfilling of the law."[4] Christians were also called to work with one another in this labor of love for the benefit of society; "for all who bear the name of Christ have the same common faith."[5] According to Buist, "man cannot exist but in society; and society cannot exist without love."[6] The Masons, he applauded, already showed signs of working toward this end. Their secret, he claimed, "as far as the world is concerned . . . is- Love:- Love, the cement of society and the balm of life."[7] The charge Buist laid before the Masons was clear; they were to continue their obedience to the "royal law of love" while at the same time encouraging others to do so. If they faltered, Buist concluded, Americans would divide, society would crumble, and so, too, would Christ's Kingdom.

In October 1795, George Buist called for interdenominationalism at an event for the Charleston orphanage. Buist was the sixth person to speak at the annual anniversary celebration, and each of the previous orators had come from various denominations affiliated with

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[4]Buist, "A sermon," 10.

[5]Buist, "A sermon," 13.

[6]Buist, "A sermon," 17.

[7]Buist, "A sermon," 26-27.

the institution. This speaking engagement, like the orphanage itself, had become, in a sense, a non-denominational, though thoroughly religious, venue. Here, as with the Presbyterian contributions to *The Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine*, *The Theological Magazine*, and *The Religious Monitor* mentioned in the last chapter, the Presbyterians joined their Christian brethren in an attempt to show the bonds of fellowship within Christendom.[8] Buist opened his comments with praises for the work of the administrators, workers, and donors to the orphanage. He urged them to continue their good work. Their efforts had made them "charitable men, enlightened patriots and good Christians," and had afforded the children in their care that same opportunity.[9] Buist hinted at the pride that would be felt "when you . . . behold those whom you now protect . . . filling useful stations in society; adorning and improving their country by their ingenuity and industry, or defending it by their valour; becoming . . .

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[8]This refers to the Presbyterian contribution to Christian journals noted in the last chapter.

[9]George Buist, "Oration delivered at the Orphan-House of Charleston, South Carolina, October 18th,1795, Being the Sixth Anniversary of the Institution," (Charleston: Markland & M'Iver, 1795), 13.

the fathers and mothers of families, and transmitting to their children's children, a portion of that happiness which they have derived from this institution."[10] Buist's efforts at the orphanage connected him with a broader Presbyterian mission focused on providing a Christian and national education for Americans.[11] He illustrated this important aspect of the Presbyterian Church's social interaction by emphasizing the necessity of a Christian upbringing and education to the very foundations of the republic. Buist stated that the orphans would be "the surest foundation of national prosperity."[12] This was a reference to the quality education the children received, but more importantly, it referred to the fact that they were reared as Christian nationalists. At no point in this speech does Buist mention any particular denomination's brand of education; he always refers to a "Christian" education and family. As he had with the Masons, the Presbyterian minister put forth the idea that cooperative Christianty, which the annual address and orphanage

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[10]Buist, "Oration delivered at the Orphan-House," 13.

[11]This position is similar to those of Jonathan Witherspoon, Samuel Stanhope Smith, and Benjamin Rush mentioned in Chapters IV and V.

[12]Buist, "Oration delivered at the Orphan-House," 10.

exemplified, was necessary for "national prosperity" and that the resulting interdenominational nationalism edified the Kingdom of Christ. As Buist said, "It is comely for brethren to dwell together in unity."[13]

Like his sermon to the Masons, Buist's address at the Orphanage reveals how some Presbyterians used public venues to champion their interdenominationally nationalist goals. These men targeted public audiences and events because their mission of interdenominationalism was the advancement of Christendom and America. The public sphere, accessed through publications and public speaking, provided diverse audiences of citizens ideally suited to this purpose.[14] Making use of such an opportunity, Buist presented the characteristics that the Presbyterian General Assembly hoped to instill among Presbyterians and their neighbors. The Americans who possessed these characteristics were charitable, educated, and unity-driven Christians; they were also fierce patriots with a strong love for their

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[13]Buist, "Oration delivered at the Orphan-House," 21.

[14]Fore more information on orations and print culture in the public sphere see: David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 217-221 and David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 159-162.

country's republican government. A country consisting of such citizens would have little to fear, Buist commented, because "in short, by this public mode of education, you form a host of patriots and warriors, who know no parent but their country . . ."[15] It was preferable, the minister maintained, that citizens imitate "the patriotic republicans of antiquity", who "displayed their splendor and magnificence in public works." It was because of Americans like those who devoted their energies to the orphans' education, Buist contended, that the nation had already experienced the first fruits of their labors in the "the inestimable blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy." Buist concluded his message with a prayer calling on his audience to sustain their efforts for the continued "peace, happiness, and prosperity" of the United States government.[16] Again, Buist maintained the vision of interdenominational nationalism put forward by the General Assembly when he prescribed charity and forbearance among Christian Americans for the continued unity and well-being of the country and Christendom.

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[15]Buist, "Oration delivered at the Orphan-House," 10.

[16]Buist, "Oration delivered at the Orphan-House," 24.

The publications of Reverend Samuel Porter also illustrate the ideals proposed by the ruling bodies of the Church. The bulk of Porter's published writings focused on the religious rift that had occurred within the Redstone Presbytery of the Synod of Virginia. This was not an internal dispute, but one between the local Presbyterians and an unspecified denomination. The main culprit, according to Porter, was the mystery denomination's minister, John Jamison. As many of the dates involved in the beginning of the story are not provided, it is difficult to state for certain when the troubles began. According to Porter, he and Jamison had been the epitome of interdenominational cooperation. They were intimate friends and, despite the differences in their specific religious beliefs, they had worked with one another and their respective congregations for Christendom's benefit. Porter noted this in a letter, which was included in the published account he had written to Jamison. Porter wrote that on more than one occasion "I have invited your Ministers to preach in my pulpit, I have left my congregation, that my people might have an opportunity of attending on your Sacramental occasions."[17] However, despite

[17]Samuel Porter, "An Address to the Rev. John Jamison,

their relationship and that of their congregations, the Reverend Jamison took it upon himself, with "no ungenerous, unmanly or unchristian treatment, from any . . ." Presbyterians, to attack that Church and its ministers as worse than "Antinomians, Deists, . . . Papists, Arminians and Socians."[18] For Porter, more than local bonds were threatened by these assaults. The author was convinced that Jamison's actions were inconsistent with Christianity. If characteristics, such as those possessed by Jamison, were rampant in the young republic, the nation would fall to ruin. These unprovoked, vicious attacks on Christian unity by Reverend Jamison were not, in Porter's opinion, the actions of a Christian American.

Whether or not the accusations were true, Porter presented himself as a model of appropriate behavior. He wrote to Jamison, "I . . . looked upon you as my real personal friend, and must say . . . that I discredited many of the reports which were brought to me, concerning your treatment of our Church."[19] Porter here illustrated the

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by Samuel Porter, V.D.M.," (Hagerstown: Stewart Herbert, 1794), 17.

[18]Porter, "An Address to the Rev. John Jamison," 17, and 16.

[19]Porter, "An Address to the Rev. John Jamison," 3-4.

hopes of the General Assembly that their ministers would look beyond particular tenets or beliefs of other Christians in an attempt to unify the body of Christ. In this spirit Porter claimed to have approached Jamison and wrote, "I not only forgave you all, but discredited the reports I heard."[20] However, according to the author, Jamison was relentless in his attacks. As a result of the continued assaults, Porter felt forced publicly to defend his Church and salvage the perception of Christendom. The reverend wrote, "When those who profess, to be the Ministers of the Gospel of the Prince of Peace, not only disagree, but bring up their quarrels on the public Stage, the Consequence is disagreeable, and the Cause of Christ is thereby exposed to reproach."[21] As Porter further reveals, there was high regard for the significance of the "public Stage" within the Presbyterian Church. A proper realization of this medium was, in part, the basis of their relationship with their communities and the nation as a whole. Christian ministers took great care to portray a unified body of Christ, not only to deter their detractors, but also to Christianize by example. According to Porter,

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[20]Porter, "An Address to the Rev. John Jamison," 4.

[21]Porter, "An Address to the Rev. John Jamison," 2.

Jamison did damage to this perception of Christendom by publicizing and focusing on denominational differences. Porter, wishing to portray Christian charity, defended his actions in this controversy and his denomination's devotion to Christendom. In line with the General Assembly's wishes, Reverend Porter wanted his audience to believe that the Presbyterians would do everything shy of hindering the "Cause of Christ" to work with their Christian brethren. Forbearance was of the utmost importance for both Christ and country.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to regularly scheduled sermons, Presbyterian ministers often spoke on election days, days of thanksgiving, executions, and funerals. These activities represented more opportunities for the unity minded Christian nationalists to reach large diverse crowds consisting of many who might not otherwise hear them. In 1793 in Bladenburgh, South Carolina, Dr. James Muir addressed a gathering at a funeral service. Doing his best to console those grieving, Muir reminded his audience that "from the grain which dieth in the ground a new crop ariseth: From the old stem new branches shoot forth."[22] Illustrating the importance of youth education to

the interdenominational vision of Presbyterian ruling bodies, Muir emphasized that the youth should follow the Godly examples of their elders so that one day they could take their place. This was an important point to stress as a Godly younger generation was integral to the prosperity of the United States and Christendom. In addition, Muir's metaphor revealed the desire that successive generations remain doctrinally pure by not forsaking "the old stem." Still, despite this pursuit of doctrinal integrity Muir emphasized the necessity for cooperation among Christian Americans. Muir commented that the deceased were "lovers of religion" who had "an happy effect upon . . .[their] domestic circle for many years."[23] Furthermore, they had not been "intoxicated with religious pride; nor soured with prejudice." Instead, Muir happily noted, they had considered themselves "as a branch of the human family; and wherever [they] found mankind, [they] found . . . brethren."[24] By stressing both Christian unity and doctrinal purity, Dr. Muir's funeral sermon reveals the General Assembly's hope that their members would preserve

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[22]James Muir, "A Funeral Sermon." (Alexandria, Virginia: Hanson and Bond, 1793), 6.

[23]Muir, "A Funeral Sermon," 11.

[24]Ibid.

the doctrinal heritage of the church while at the same time strive to build fruitful relationships with other denominations that would benefit Christ and country.

It is no coincidence that those southern Presbyterians who best illustrated the General Assembly's cooperative hopes were active in the Presbyterian ruling body.[25] The root of the ruling body's problem in the southern states and territories in the post-war period was that there just were not enough Presbyterian ministers to meet the needs of the congregations. When the denomination was reorganized in 1789, the territory compromised of Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia was placed under the watch of the Synods of Virginia and Carolina.[26] They were responsible for a far greater realm than the Synods of New York and New Jersey or Philadelphia. Additionally, according to the General Assembly's records, the two southern Synods generally had the fewest ministers settled and the most vacant churches.[27]

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[25]Presbyterian General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from its Organization, A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820 Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.).

[26]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 14-21.

These factors prevented the various southern ruling bodies from effectively implementing and sustaining the interdenominationally nationalist vision of the General Assembly. The lack of consistent leadership coupled with the open-ended definition of interdenominational nationalism resulted in, not surprisingly, various interpretations of this vision. The seriousness of this predicament for the Presbyterian ruling body was magnified by the fact that the South was not an homogenous entity; there were pockets of different religious, political, and social beliefs.[28] In this atmosphere, for many southern Presbyterians, the priorities of localities, such as emancipation, universal salvation, or egalitarian religion, took precedence over the priorities of the General Assembly. The Church's leadership had a problem in the South, but not of the South.

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[27]For yearly accounts through 1802 see: General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 21, 47-48, 63, 77, 93, 106, 117, 132, 159, 186, 210, 234, 262.

[28]Forrest McDonald wrote that "the safest generalization about the South was one that nobody ever made: that each state in it differed more from the others than did states elsewhere differ from their neighbors." Found in McDonald, *E Pluribus Unum: The Formation of the American Republic, 1776-1790* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1979), 117.

An important part of the General Assembly's interdenominational nationalism was that the welfare of the nation should supersede that of individuals or groups. For the ruling body, this meant that local or sectional convictions were to be tolerated, but not forced upon other Americans.[29] The General Assembly was particularly desirous to defuse the controversy over slavery with this spirit of forbearance. While some Presbyterians, in both the North and South, contended that the cooperative spirit should be extended in equal measure to people of all races, others, while accepting black Christians, felt pre-existing social boundaries needed to be maintained. This split resulted in ambiguous efforts by the General Assembly to be more racially inclusive through the 1780s and 1790s. For example, while the Church supported gradual abolition, the potential for violent upheaval led them to oppose immediate emancipation.[30] In 1787, the Presbyterian ruling body

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[29]For more on this view of nationalism to which the Presbyterian Church contributed see: Walter A. McDougall, *Throes of Democracy; The American Civil War Era 1829-1877* (New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2008), 40; and David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 100-106.

[30]W. Harrison Daniel, "Southern Presbyterians and the Negro in the Early National Period," in *The Journal of*

seemed poised to condemn slavery, but restrained itself at the last minute to prevent unnecessary internal conflict for the Church or the nation.[31] For the sake of peace, the official position of the denomination was that it was the right of slave owners to decide if and when emancipation would occur.

This official position of the Church would eventually be challenged, interestingly enough by a group of southern Presbyterians. At the 1795 meeting of the General Assembly, the Presbytery of Transylvania questioned whether they should allow those who "hold slaves, and tolerate the practice in others" to be members in their churches.[32] The Presbytery, led by David Rice, made it clear that they wished to expel such members.[33] Attempting to maintain national peace, the General Assembly remained neutral. It

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Negro History, 58:3 (July 1973), 291-312.

[31]Presbyterian General Assembly, *Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1706-1788* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1904), 539.

[32]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 103.

[33]For more on David Rice and his crusade for emancipation see Louis B. Weeks, *Kentucky Presbyterians* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 14-20; and Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 201.

assured the Transylvanians that "The General Assembly have taken every step which they deemed expedient or wise, to encourage emancipation, and to render the state of those who are in slavery as mild and tolerable as possible." To avoid "divisions which may have the most ruinous tendency," however, the Assembly concluded, it would continue to allow slaveholder communion.[34] They also reminded the Presbytery that "forbearance and peace are frequently inculcated in the New Testament" and that accordingly Christians should do nothing "to hazard *the peace and union of the Church*."[35] Concluding this letter to the southerners who challenged the interdenominational vision of the General Assembly, the committee simply quoted Christ, "Blessed are the peace-makers."[36]

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[34]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 104.

[35]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 104 and 105. Good examples of individual Presbyterian efforts to stress charity concerning stances on slavery are Henry Patillo, *The plain planter's family assistant* (Wilmington, NC: James Adams, 1787); and Elias Boudinot, "An oration, delivered at Elizabeth-Town, New-Jersey, agreeable to a resolution of the state Society of Cincinnati, on the Fourth of July, M.DCC.XCIII. Being the seventeenth anniversary of the independence of America" (Elizabeth-Town: Shepard Kollock, 1793).

[36]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 105.

Still, the Church was generally in favor of emancipation even if the ruling body preached national tranquility first. The extent of this cooperative spirit can be seen in the ordination of the denomination's first black minister, John Chavis. In 1800 the General Assembly wrote that "in order to attain one important object . . .(the instruction of the blacks) Mr. John Chavis, a black man of prudence and piety, who has been educated and licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Lexington, in Virginia" was to be "employed as a Missionary among people of his own colour."[37] With strong southern backing, Chavis received full ordination and became an invaluable part of the Church's slave and freedmen missions. He also ministered to predominantly white congregations, including the General Assembly. Chavis's ordination remained firmly within the Assembly's larger views on slavery. He was ordained to help with "the instruction of the blacks" not to gain their equality. In keeping with their response to

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[37]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 229; Baird, *A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of . . .the Presbyterian Church*, 816; and Helen Chavis Othow, *John Chavis: African American Patriot, Preacher, Teacher, and Mentor, 1763-1838* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2001), 53-54; and Daniel, "Southern Presbyterians and the Negro," 309-310.

the Presbytery of Transylvania, the General Assembly did as much as they dared to benefit the slaves without encroaching on the rights of the slave owners. At the end of the day, national and ecclesiastical unity was still the priority for the General Assembly. In this way, the Presbyterian Church aided the growth of nationalism and sectionalism by sustaining the ideals and beliefs of Americans as long as they were not forced upon others, thereby threatening the peace.

In addition to the question of slavery, the General Assembly was also increasingly concerned with the close relationship many southern Presbyterians were forging with democratically oriented Methodists and Baptists. Intimacy with the Congregationalists was welcomed because of the Churches' shared doctrinal heritage; however, the Methodists and Baptists did not necessarily share these beliefs, making these relationships problematic. The Hampden-Sydney revivals from 1787 to 1789 illustrate the Presbyterian ruling bodies' concerns. Hampden-Sydney College was founded by the Presbytery of Hanover during the Revolutionary War and it received its official charter in 1783. Committed to the interdenominational spirit, the Presbytery established Hampden-Sydney "on the most catholic

plan." Each student of "every denomination, shall full enjoy his own religious sentiments, and be at liberty to attend that mode of publick worship, that either custom or conscience makes most agreeable to them." Despite the efforts of the ruling body, the school experienced a dearth of religious vitality in the post-war period. This abruptly ended with the first revivals that began on campus in 1787.[38]

The revivals began with a group of students who met to read the Bible and sing hymns. One of the students, William Hill, who would later become a Presbyterian minister, wrote that the first meetings were unpopular with many of the students. He recalled that once "a noisy mob was raised, which collected in the passage before our door, and begun to thump at the door, and whoop, and swear, and threaten vengeance, if we did not forbear and cease all such exercises in the College for the future." This protest continued until the president of the college, John Blair Smith, intervened. The mob told the President that Hill and his friends were "singing and praying and carrying on like the Methodists and they were determined to break it

[38]William Henry Foote, ed, *Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966), 396.

up." Struck by this outpouring of religion the President cried, "Is it possible! Some of my students are under religious impressions!–and determined to serve their Saviour!" Not only did Smith then give the revivalists his blessing, but he also offered his guidance at their future meetings.[39] Under the president's leadership the revival spread into the surrounding communities.

Smith operated the revivals carefully under the philosophy that "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace in all his churches." When the president led the services, William Hill recollected, he was able to keep his congregations from making "noise or disorder or crying out in the worship of God." However, Smith did not always lead the services at his school as he was also responsible for other neighboring congregations. In his absence, the revivals were led by itinerant Methodist preachers or the young Presbyterian minister, Mr. Drury Lacey. In both cases, the crowds were allowed to indulge their emotional whims; the Methodists provided encouragement while Mr. Lacey was simply unable to retain order. What began as a controlled Presbyterian exercise slowly transformed into an interdenominational revival largely influenced by the

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[39]Foote, ed, *Sketches of Virginia*, 417 and 418.

Methodists. Although the effects of the revivals were welcomed by many Presbyterians, including John Blair Smith, the recently founded Synod of Virginia, which oversaw the affairs of the school, kept its distance.[40] The Synod, it seems, agreed with the student mob that had threatened William Hill and his friends; the Presbyterians at Hampden-Sydney were "carrying on like the Methodists."

Several years later, the unpredictable cooperative zeal within some southern churches again garnered criticism from the General Assembly. During the 1792 meeting of the General Assembly, the Presbytery of Orange, of the Synod of Carolina, asked whether or not "they who publicly profess a belief in the doctrine of the universal and actual salvation of the whole human race, or of the fallen angels, or both, through the mediation of Christ, to be admitted to the sealing ordinances of the gospel?" The General Assembly responded "that such persons should not be admitted."[41] Disappointed but persistent, the Presbytery, led by Dr. Samuel McCorkle, wrote a letter to the General Assembly in 1794, asking the ruling body to reconsider its

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[40]Foote, ed, *Sketches of Virginia*, 424.

[41]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 60.

previous stance. Upon this request the ruling body deliberated about "the admission of members into the communion of the church" who believed in "universal redemption," but they reached the same conclusions they had two years earlier. Not only did the General Assembly clearly reject this petition, but it also referred Dr. McCorkle "to their Confession of Faith, and form of Government and Discipline, for a solution of any difficulties which may occur to his mind on the subject of Christian communion."[42]

The ruling body had not heard the last clamor for universal salvation from among the southern churches. This time, however, the story centered on the minister Hezekiah Balch. In 1794, the 53-year-old Balch had no idea that he was on the threshold of a venture that would forever change his life. He waited, unsure of the outcome, for the decision by the Tennessee territory legislature concerning his application for a college charter. That day, the news was good for Reverend Balch. His application was approved and he was granted a charter to found the first college west of the Allegehny Mountains-Greeneville College. With

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[42]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 86 and 87.

this bit of news, Balch and the Presbyterian Church were in an excellent position to shape the westward expanding United States and strengthen the universal church. However, unbeknownst to Balch or the Presbyterian General Assembly, their relationship was about to sour.

As the president of Greeneville College, a position he kept until his death in 1810, Balch soon realized that more than a charter was needed to keep the institution open; it also needed money. To solve this problem, Balch journeyed to New England to raise money for his fledgling school.[43] On his trip he encountered and was swayed by the controversial Congregationalist doctrine known as Hopkinsianism, or New Divinity, which challenged traditional Presbyterian beliefs by stating that Christ's atonement was for all mankind and not the "elect;" in essence, they advocated universal salvation.[44] Upon his

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[43]Herman A. Norton, *Religion in Tennessee 1777-1945* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 8; and Stephen Haynes and Franklin H. Littell, *Holocaust Education and the Church-Related College: Restoring Ruptured Traditions* (West Port, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), xx.

[44]The New Divinity or Hopkinsianism movement consisted of friends and followers of Jonathan Edwards, the elder, who decided to make their Calvinist theology more compatible with Enlightenment ideology. For further information see: William Breitenbach, "The Consistent

return to Tennessee, Balch not only preached his new doctrine, but he also published his beliefs in the *Knoxville Gazette*. Many of Balch's neighbors were unhappy with his new theology, and in 1797 the Presbytery of Abingdon split. The dissenters formed the Independent Abingdon Presbytery. This splinter group made it clear that they would not consider reunion until Reverend Balch had been disciplined and his "theology" denounced.[45] When the situation spun out of the control of the local Presbytery and Synod, it reached the attention of the General Assembly, which then took action on the matter. In 1798, Balch was called to stand before the ruling body to receive its decision concerning his controversial and divisive actions. Confronted with the General Assembly's condemnation of his "preaching false doctrine," Balch

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Calvinism of the New Divinity Movement," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser, 41 (1984): 241-64; 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, MI: Christian University Press, 1981); 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).

[45]Samuel J. Baird, *A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of . . .the Presbyterian Church*, 614-615.

repented and renounced his Hopkinsian creed.[46] Once he convinced the governing body of his regret, he was forgiven and "considered in good standing with the Church."[47] However, after Balch returned from his trial and was largely out of the reach of the General Assembly, he continued to promote New Divinity. He was quoted as saying that "he was fifty thousand times stronger in his belief . . . than he was before he went away."[48] His renewed efforts were rewarded with a popular following, and before long he established the largest Presbyterian Church in the Southwest. As the new century dawned, he was brought to trial again and suspended, but eventually, and again demonstrating the willingness of the ruling body to avoid internal contention, he was restored as minister. He continued to be a proponent of the New Divinity Movement.[49]

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[46]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 155.

[47]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 158.

[48]Samuel J. Baird, *A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of . . .the Presbyterian Church,* 618.

[49]Norton, *Religion in Tennessee 1777-1945*, 8; Baird, *A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of . . .the Presbyterian Church*, 618; Haynes and Littell, *Holocaust Education and the Church-Related College:*

Considered alongside the stories of the Presbytery of Transylvania, the Presbytery of Orange and the Hampden-Sydney revivals, Balch's tale demonstrates the diverse southern response to the General Assembly's call for interdenominational nationalism. As the Presbyterian leadership was unable to provide their southern members with a consistent influence, many southerners were willing to openly embrace the doctrines, beliefs, and methodologies they encountered in their local communities, which led to various understandings of nationalism and interdenominationalism. Determined to regain control, the Presbyterian ruling bodies began issuing pastoral letters to hopefully rein in the churches under their care.

Examples of such exhortations can be found in the pastoral letters and other publications in late 1790s by the Presbytery of Charleston and Lexington as well as from the General Assembly. In 1797, the General Assembly wrote,

> We perceive with pain, that novel opinions, or at least opinions presented in a novel dress and appearance, have been openly and extensively circulated amongst you, and have excited unusual alarm; whilst at the same time they have given rise to much contention. We are also apprehensive, that in

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Restoring Ruptured Traditions, xx; and James H. Moorehead, "The 'Restless Spirit of Radicalism': Old School Fears and the Schism of 1837," in *Journal of Presbyterian History* 78:1 (Spring 2000), 23.

> opposing what is thought to be a departure from the plainness and simplicity of our received doctrines, some of our brethren have been precipitate in their conduct.[50]

The Presbytery of Lexington, in a similar vein, wrote that the Churches under their care would fail as stewards of Christendom "unless proper care be taken to secure our churches from the seductions of erroneous and disorderly teachers." Upholding the General Assembly's vision of interdenominationalism, the Presbytery made it clear, however, that they did not forbid their congregations from attending other churches' services when they were "preached in purity and faithfulness, by any regular minister of any regular christian church."[51]

In a unique attempt both to exhort and edify their members, the Presbytery of Charleston compiled and published hymns for their "public and private worship."[52] Through this work the Presbytery was able to reaffirm the

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[50]General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church, 1789 to 1820*, 129.

[51]Presbytery of Lexington, "A pastoral letter, from the Presbytery of Lexington, to the people under their care" (Lexington, VA: Presbyterian Church in the USA, 179(?)),1 and 6.

[52]Presbytery of Charleston, *A Collection of hymns for public and private worship, approved of by the Presbytery of Charleston* (Charleston: J. M'Iver, 1796), 1.

necessity of key doctrines and beliefs without the appearance of a reprimand. Among the hundreds of songs were titles such as: "The Unity of God," "The Immutability of God," "The Divinity of the Son," "The Trinity," "Acceptable Worship," "Christ's Intercession," "The Natural Depravity of Man," "The Necessity of a Saviour," "No Justification by the Law," "The Influences of the Spirit Experienced," and "Submission to Fatherly Chastisements." Among the group of hymns devoted to love, Hymn 151 or "Christian Unity" is revealing.

> 1. Let party names no more
> The Christian world o'erspread;
> Gentile and Jew, and bond and free,
> Are one in Christ their head.
>
> 2. Among the saints on earth
> Let mutual love be found;
> Heirs of the same inheritance,
> With mutual blessings crown'd.
>
> 3. Let envy, child of hell,
> Be banish'd far away;
> Those should in strictest friendship dwell,
> Who the same Lord obey.
>
> 4. Thus will the church below
> Resemble that above;
> Where streams of pleasure ever flow,
> And ev'ry heart is love.[53]

While the Presbytery wished to remind its members of the important doctrines and beliefs of the denomination, it was

[53]Presbytery of Charleston, *A Collection of hymns*, 123.

also determined to sustain the General Assembly's interdenominational vision.

Unfortunately for the Presbytery of Charleston, the subtle approach was not as successful as they hoped, and so in 1799, it published a letter of warning to its members. The Presbytery still stressed the "high importance of our common Christianity" with other churches because "Religion is the cement of society," the ruling body wrote, and, therefore, good relationships with Christians of other denominations needed to be maintained. The Presbytery, like Buist and Muir, emphasized the vital importance of this social cement to "national prosperity" and to Christianity. A weak United States, to the ruling body, meant a weaker Christendom. Still, the Presbytery warned, interdenominational nationalism was not to be pursued without caution because "Christianity has too many false friends, and too many open enemies, to permit any of its real friends being absent from their post."[54] Despite their efforts, the continued weakness of the Presbyterian ruling bodies in the southern states and territories meant that

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[54]Presbytery of Charleston, "Pastoral letter, of the Presbytery of Charleston, to the churches of the Presbyterian denomination, within their bounds" (Charleston: Benjamin Timothy, 1799), 1, 7, 3 and 10.

the General Assembly was largely unsuccessful in controlling the varied and inconsistent responses by southern Presbyterians. This failure of the ruling bodies further stirred doubts within the Church concerning intimate cooperation with other denominations. Furthermore, the actions of the Presbyterian leadership awoke doubts among many Presbyterians about whether the national organization could really represent their interests.

These doubts and concerns were magnified with the arrival of the Cane Ridge revivals. The Cane Ridge revivals, much like the Plan of Union 1801, represented the realization of Presbyterian interdenominational goals, but they had a decidedly different impact on the denomination than the union of the Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Starting in early 1797, the charismatic James McGready held Scottish-influenced "communions" in his three Kentucky churches on the Red, Muddy, and Gasper rivers. Characterized as being inspired by and having the style of the Methodists by modern historians, the Logan County Revivals were the catalyst for widespread revivals that followed in its wake, including those at Cane Ridge.[55] The

Reverend Barton W. Stone, a fellow Presbyterian, had attended McGready's revivals and returned to his Cane Ridge church determined to start his own. The Cane Ridge revivals grew quickly in popularity and ultimately thousands joined the experience. Within this great host were Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and black Christians.[56]

Like the Logan County and Hampden-Sydney revivals, those at Cane Ridge, though Presbyterian in origin, were very much influenced by democratically-oriented Christianity. Traditional Calvinism was checked at the door and in its place rose a "badly compromised . . . Calvinism" that "made fairly peaceful accommodation with the ascendancy of Methodist Arminianism. The doctrine consisted of the preaching of potential universal redemption, free and full salvation, justification by faith, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the joy of a

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[55]Paul Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 60; Philip N. Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 125; Weeks, *Kentucky Presbyterians,* 35; and Norton, *Religion in Tennessee 1777-1945,* 22-25.

[56]John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 63-64.

living religion." [57] With this hybrid theology that resembled very little of the traditional Presbyterian beliefs, southern Presbyterians again broke away from the General Assembly's interdenominational vision. Yet more was still to come, as those who participated in the interdenominational events witnessed the vernacular preaching movements of the Spirit among the laity and sexual activities that came to symbolize the early nineteenth century southern revival experience.

Similar to the revivals at Hampden-Sydney, the calls for emancipation, and the acceptance of universal salvation, the break from the approved interdenominational vision at Cane Ridge generated disapproval within the ruling bodies of the Presbyterian Church. With the Cane Ridge revivals, however, the challenge was not confined to individual communities. The spirit of revival that spread across the South like a wildfire also spread the compromised doctrine and the enthusiastic excesses the ruling bodies wished to minimize. For many in the Presbyterian Church, those involved in the revivals had taken interdenominationalism too far and their mistake laid

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[57]Norton, *Religion in Tennessee 1777-1945,* 25. See also: Boles, *The Great Revival*, 66.

bare the dangers of uncontrolled intimacy. And because the General Assembly and the various southern Synods and Presbyteries were still ill-equipped to address the situation, the Cane Ridge controversy continued to grow.[58] The Kentucky revivals solidified the final component of the General Assembly's interdenominational approach that had been forming in the post-war period, a destructive fear of complete intimacy with other denominations. The Presbyterians would not have to wait long to witness the effects.

Negative responses by Church leaders to the liturgical and theological modifications brought about by the Cane Ridge revivals further contributed to the doubts among many southern Presbyterians that the General Assembly truly represented their local interests. After further failed attempts to alter various contested policies of the General Assembly, such as its position on slavery, universal salvation, enthusiastic styles of worship, and the

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[58]The controversy of the Cane Ridge revivals in the Presbyterian Church eventually led to the creation of the Cumberland Presbyterians and the Church of Christ. See also: Boles, *The Great Revival*, 100; Weeks, *Kentucky Presbyterians,* 35 and 44-50; Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit*, 128; and Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution,* 205.

ordination of uneducated men, many ministers and members chose to leave. In 1805, several ministers left their churches and the South altogether so as to avoid the policy of silence concerning the sins of slavery. Among these were: James Gilliland, Robert G. Wilson, James Hoge, Samuel Davies Hoge, George Bourne, and John Rankin.[59] Close behind them were the Disciples of Christ, comprised of Barton W. Stone and thirteen Presbyterian congregations from Kentucky and Ohio, and the Cumberland Presbyterians who, after nine years of debate, formed their own denomination.[60] The General Assembly's perpetual willingness to compromise for unity's sake had finally pushed many of its members to the conclusion that their interests would best be served by local organizations. Unfortunately, the Church's actions can again be seen strengthening sectional sentiment within the early republic.

With the dawning of the nineteenth-century, two important conclusions can be made concerning the interdenominational journey of the Presbyterian Church.

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[59]Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 336-338; and Daniel, "Southern Presbyterians and the Negro," 299.

[60]Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 155-165 and 144-153; Boles, *The Great Revival*, 100; Weeks, *Kentucky Presbyterians*, 35 and 44-50; Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit*, 128; and Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 205.

First, although the General Assembly continued to promote interdenominational nationalism well into the new century, the Plan of Union 1801 and the Cane Ridge Revivals represented the highs and lows for the approach, religiously. The former demonstrated how far the Church had transformed into the purely interdenominational body it hoped to become. The latter symbolized the stumbling block that would forever hinder the Presbyterians in realizing that dream. The second conclusion, and perhaps the most important, is that the methods the Presbyterian ruling body used to pursue interdenominationalism unintentionally fostered sectionalism rather than the desired nationalism. By continuing its pursuit of interdenominational nationalism into the new century, the General Assembly was effectively undermining both the integrity of the Church and the nation.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Through this dissertation I have shown the importance of the American Presbyterian Church to the formation of both national and sectional spirit in the early republic. The key to understanding the Church's contribution was the self-imposed interdenominational journey initiated in 1758 upon the Church's reunion. The Church encountered numerous obstacles in its interdenominational transformation, including residual Old/New Light conflicts, political and religious contests with Anglicans and Quakers, and the Constitutional Crisis with Great Britain. As the War for American Independence came to a close, the Church's interdenominational goals had been amended, but the Church was still determined to realize its potential for Christendom. The new addition, being a modified version of Puritan New England's "elect nation" ideology, created in the Church an appreciation for America's potential to benefit Christendom. By the end of the 1780s, the General

Assembly of the Presbyterian Church came to the conclusion that a united populace would enhance this goal, and so it encouraged its members to work for a united nation and Christendom. However, the ruling body's open-ended definition of national spirit fostered both sectionalism and nationalism by allowing the various American communities to develop unique ideas concerning the nation as long as they did not threaten the whole. This continued as the Presbyterian General Assembly tried in vain to establish a unified interdenominationally national spirit throughout its bounds, and its efforts rankled many. By 1801, with the finalization of the Plan of Union and the emergence of the Cane Ridge revivals, two counterproductive cooperative events, the Presbyterian Church had established its interdenominational national approach that would continue encouraging both the unity and division of the country and Christendom into the nineteenth-century.

The interdenominational nationalism that the Church developed during the last half of the eighteenth-century presented the denomination with ample opportunities to spread the boundaries of Christendom. The 1801 Plan of Union that brought together the Presbyterians and the Connecticut Congregationalists was followed by similar

agreements that united the Presbyterians with the other New England Congregational establishments. Their united efforts allowed them to advance the cause of Christ in the western states and territories. The interdenominational national spirit in the Church also led to the formation of and contribution to several prominent voluntary societies, such as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, American Home Missionary Society, American Bible Society, and American Tract Society. Within these societies the Presbyterians worked closely with Congregationalists, Baptists, and Methodists throughout the early nineteenth-century. In part, the hope for a closer union among Christians expressed by the Presbyterians in 1758 was realized in these activities. However, the difficulties the Presbyterian General Assembly experienced at the end of the eighteenth-century pursuing interdenominational nationalism also occurred in the new century.

Following the eventual schism that would form the Disciples of Christ and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the fear and threat of division plagued the Church throughout the first half of the nineteenth-century. Although the rise to prominence of Presbyterian minister

Charles Grandison Finney appeared at first to be a Providential grace, his modified Calvinist message sparked both widespread revivals in the North and the eventual Old School/New School division of the Church. The denomination formally separated in 1837 when the Old School majority in the General Assembly—who opposed the theological modifications of Finney and who also believed that the increasingly heterodox Congregationalists were responsible for the doctrinal contamination—abrogated the Plan of Union of 1801 and expelled the New School Presbyteries and Synods. The fears and distrust of interdenominational intimacy that had taken root by 1801 finally rose to the surface and resulted in the dissolution of the Congregational-Presbyterian unions and the Presbyterian Church. The divisions among the Presbyterians did not end there. By the beginning of the Civil War both New School and Old School Presbyterian Churches divided, but this time the divisions were sectional in nature pertaining to slavery and loyalty to the Union. The sectionalism fostered through the open-ended definitions of proper national spirit espoused by the Presbyterian Church had finally torn through the veil of national rhetoric. The goal of the Church in 1758 to bring about a true union in

the body of Christ was never fully realized, and in the end the Church's efforts in this regard only divided their denomination and helped to foster the sectionalism that would divide the nation.

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