EXSCINDED!: THE SCHISM OF 1837
IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND
THE ROLE OF SLAVERY

by

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Twelve years after the founding of the Synod of the Western Reserve in Northeastern Ohio, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America voted at its annual gathering in 1837 to remove that Synod, its members, churches and presbyteries bodily from the national fellowship, treating the Synod and its constituents as if they had never existed. Nearly fifty years earlier the General Assembly itself had been founded with representation from and enthusiastic support of ecumenical church bodies; thirty-six years since the Assembly had acted to cooperate closely with the Congregational churches and Associations to found churches on the frontier, which included the Western Reserve of the state of Connecticut; and thirty-four years since that frontier was accepted into the federal union as part of the state of Ohio. In a time of rapid growth, enthusiastic change and national optimism about the nature of the federal union, this church body turned its back on its own union and its growth, choosing a path that ultimately caused it to be reduced by nearly half its former membership.

What led to the outcome? Why did it happen at such a time? What was the nature of the body that participated in the split? How was it accomplished? Who were the men (for men only were able to participate in this vote) who found it necessary to excise a portion of their body, and why did they feel it necessary to take this action? This paper is an attempt to address all of these questions – and to note a way in which this exposition is relevant to the churches of the United States of America in 2009, a relevance beyond that of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) alone.
Twelve years after the founding of the Synod of the Western Reserve in northeastern Ohio, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America voted in 1837 to remove that Synod together with three other synods in Western New York, their members, churches, and presbyteries bodily from the denomination, treating the synods and their constituents as if they had never existed. In a time of rapid growth, enthusiastic change and optimism about the nature of the federal union, this church body turned its back on its own union and growth, choosing a path that ultimately caused it to be reduced by nearly half its former membership, and a new denomination to be formed of the excised portions together with like-minded others. This new denomination had the same name as the body that rejected it, but was popularly known as the New School of the Presbyterian Church.

Many who wrote about this incident, both contemporaneously and subsequently, attributed the schismatical decision to differences in doctrine, theology, or governance. Relatively few noted the overarching societal concern about chattel slavery, the role of the church in sustaining or removing slavery from the country, and the way in which agitation...
over slavery and anti-slavery affected both individual church members and the institutional church.

In the early 21st century, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), together with other Protestant denominations, faces schism over the ordination of active homosexuals. Parallels between the two eras are used to shed light on the earlier split, with analyses of the nature of believers who are Presbyterian, insights from earlier Presbyterian church history, a close reading of the General Assembly actions from 1834 through 1837, and a review of anti-slavery agitation found in contemporary religious newspapers. The conclusion reached is that considerations surrounding slavery became key for conservatives in their successful strategy to take over the church and assure that the chaotic frontier could no longer control the Presbyterian Church.
Prologue: The Nature of One Presbyterian

“History is nothing but a collection of fables and useless trifles, cluttered up with a mass of unnecessary figures and proper names.”

Isaiah Berlin, in his analysis of Leo Tolstoy’s theories and philosophy of history, states that Tolstoy believed that historians choose an “apparently arbitrary selection of material” with a “no less arbitrary distribution of emphasis.” In the years since Berlin wrote *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, historians have wrestled anew with the meaning and content of the historical task, its capacity for objectivity and its ultimate purpose. A writer of history, therefore, is well advised to attempt to be clear as to the meaning, purpose, and value of the project that is undertaken. In a way that would seem very strange to the historians of the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries in their search for the only and absolute “truth” of an historical event, current practice of the art and craft of history may include the placing of the explorer of historical facts into the narrative that is to be told, told through the particular view and vision chosen by the historian. In this way, the reader becomes a partner in discovery by being able to understand why a specific story is presented, rather than the myriad tales that might be told of the same incidents. The reader is encouraged to understand the “apparently arbitrary selection” which will frame the history through the special and specific lens chosen, and then judge its value or critique its insufficiency through that or another lens preferred by the reader.

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2 Ibid. p. 15.
Tolstoy further stated, “History does not reveal causes; it presents only a blank succession of unexplained events.” In writing about an incident that occurred 170 years ago, with seemingly limited value for today’s world, I find this material relevant, exciting, challenging, and illuminating for the complex religious and political world of the twenty-first century. The “blank succession of unexplained events” may be given interpretations which show, at the least, a part of our journey to the present, uncover forgotten experiences, and reveal areas which our mythology of past greatness and purity would prefer to ignore or forget. Tolstoy was wrestling with a world which had newly discovered “science” and which therefore claimed that history was also a science in which absolutes could be discovered and passed down from generation to generation. Ours is a cynical, fast-changing world in which little is valued except the future, the new, the odd, the different. Walking the tightrope between these two ways of interpreting life, neither negating the old nor over-valuing the new is the task of my project. Allowing the past to speak to the present is my goal.

In speaking of the task of the historian, Dominick LaCapra emphasizes the dialogic, as he says,

...there is in history a basic distinction between the attempt to reconstruct the object of inquiry, including its meaning or possibilities at its own time or over time, and the entry into a dialogic exchange with it that tries to bring out its potential in the present and for the future.4

It is my hope to be able to reconstruct a part of the history of the Presbyterian Church in the early nineteenth century, to bring insights from that era together with the experiences

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and understandings of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For this history to have relevance, to speak to and with a reader in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it will be helpful if the position of the writer is communicated, giving life to LaCapra’s contention that the “subject-position and voice of the historian are an integral component of historiography...”\(^5\) A short explanation of my “voice” and “subject-position” is therefore both necessary and relevant in exploring a topic that might seem to have little interest in a very different context of the nation and the church at present, allowing the reader to be a part of the discussion, rather than an eavesdropper on a conversation about a remote and long-forgotten event.

In discussing the long past event, my connection to and interest in it, it is also necessary to be aware that disputes are not novelties in the life of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The Presbyterian Church, together with many other churches in the United States, is alive at this moment with controversy over the ordination of homosexual persons that threatens the institutional structure of these denominations, or encourages the formation of new ecclesiastical bodies.\(^6\) In studying what occurred to split a church in an earlier time, a relationship to the present may be discovered. In understanding the position of the historian, exploring “the nexus between the remote or global levels of ...experience and its immediate or micro-local expressions” an understanding may be found, understanding both of the event and its interest for a later

\(^5\) Ibid. 805.
\(^6\) At the time of writing, the Episcopal Church has had defections of several dioceses to the care of overseas bishoprics over the issue of the consecration of a gay bishop. The Methodist Church and the Southern Baptist denomination also have debated similar issues, with new groups being formed in opposition to conservative viewpoints of the parent bodies.
In exploring these issues, however, it is important to understand and guard against what LaCapra described as the danger of allowing “figures in the past...to become vehicles or mouthpieces for contemporary values.” This prologue will serve to introduce the reader to the writer and her biases and experiences that inform the way in which the historical materials have been approached and utilized.

Being immersed in the life of the Presbyterian Church in the early nineteenth century may seem a strange place for a woman born into the world of Hollywood in 1936; Hollywood- that place of the new, the raw, the outlandish, the casual and surface life. As a child, I was not overly exposed to religion, though my fiercely Presbyterian grandmother finally “saw to it” that my brother and I were baptized in her congregation, the Presbyterian Church in Monrovia, California. He was 5 years old and I was 3, probably not in consonance with Presbyterian law, which calls for baptisms to be performed “without undue haste, but without undue delay,” and only to baptize children of church members. We never attended that, or any other Presbyterian Church until we moved to Cleveland, Ohio in 1947. Between my birth and my arrival in Cleveland, my family had lived in New London, Connecticut and Binghamton, New York, and we had attended a Seventh Day Adventist Church, as well as Congregational and Baptist churches, and no church at all for several years. From the age of 10, however, I became a part of the Presbyterian Church, eventually being ordained an elder, then a minister, while serving as the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve, and working for a time at the national level, the

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8 LaCapra. op. cit. 819.
General Assembly. Although I was earlier trained and served as a professional librarian, the church, the Presbyterian Church, became a vital part of my life.

As a church member for forty years prior to becoming a minister, I experienced the life of the local congregation, the regional presbytery and synod and the national church in many ways. However, my involvement did not remain with the church alone. Years of volunteer work with schools led to working in Cleveland’s inner city in a school library during the years of the 1960’s race riots. My college years in suburban Philadelphia at Swarthmore College, a Quaker institution, fostered an understanding of each person as unique, precious, and equal in value to all others. College experiences were followed by years of working for civil rights in my local community as well as nationally. Being involved in a denomination that was also actively working for civil rights and other justice issues was an easy transition.

Being a history major at Swarthmore meant being exposed to the history of the other - blacks, women, children, workers - at a time when this emphasis was perhaps unusual. In the mid-twentieth century, when prejudice against Jews was still alive and well in suburban Cleveland\(^\text{10}\), and there were only six African-American students in my high school, the children of live-in servants; Swarthmore, however, had race-blind admissions. One older black Swarthmore student even dated and eventually married a female language professor, much to the expressed horror of some of the residents of the village. In addition, the

\(^{10}\) The Rockefeller homes in the Forest Hill section of Cleveland Heights did not allow Jews to buy homes through deed restrictions during my high school days. The private schools only admitted Jewish students if at least one parent was a gentile. These regulations have, of course, been changed and diversity is an important part of the schools and the community.
college was a community in which students were actively involved in governance, serving on student and faculty committees, as well as the Board of Managers. While students did not determine their own grades or program requirements, the Honors program of external examiners encouraged students and faculty to consider each other as partners in learning, rather than adversaries. The majority of students were not Quakers, yet the Quaker faith and values permeated the learning environment.

While at Swarthmore, fellow students perceived me as a conservative, a member of the establishment, in part because my father was a college president. Leaving college for married life in Chicago and then in Hartford, Connecticut, my persona somehow changed, and suddenly I became a flaming liberal. I had not changed, but my context had. And so began lessons in the importance of context, of surroundings, of the perceptions of others in defining the nature of each person. Subsequent times of travel for my children and myself afforded space and time to analyze the nature of “America” as it was taught to its children and as it was perceived by citizens of other countries. Particularly influential for me has been the ongoing analysis of the role played by an understanding of community, the common good, even the broader world of which we are a part as contrasted with the impulse toward individualism which seems to be so powerful an influence in the United States today. The role of government, whether of a town, a region, a state or the country, has undergone considerable change in the 70 years of my life. Swarthmore College was a place for me in which the community was most important, though that community also nurtured the individual to achieve his or her capacity. Interest in community and in
institutions which enhance the life of the individual of that community has been a vital part of my life.

Even while the church became more important, education, history and institutions continued to play a major role in my life. Ordained as an elder, elected Moderator of the Presbytery, I was asked to serve as the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve, one of two officers of that body. I discovered that a part of my job was to preserve the history and records of all the churches in the presbytery, a region that covered six counties in northeastern Ohio. I quickly found that the polity of the church, the way in which the Presbyterian Church governs itself, was also my responsibility, both as teacher and interpreter of that polity.

In my early days in office, I discovered in the presbytery’s records (which date to the founding of the Presbytery of Cleveland in 1830) an early resolution against the institution of slavery, which also spoke of the necessity to educate black people in order for them to read the Bible. This resolution was passed by the Presbytery of Cleveland in 1834, early in the history of this area of the country, and a part of the escalating battle against slavery. Soon after, I discovered that the Presbytery of Cleveland, as a part of the Synod of the Western Reserve, had been ejected from the church in 1837. There was no clear explanation given about the reasons, and most people today have no idea that this incident, akin to excommunicating an individual, ever happened. I became very interested in delving deeper into this mystery.
Studying church history at seminary, especially the history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, gave me further insights into the nature of Presbyterianism and its adherents. Friends, knowing my interest, gave me copies of the constitutions of the church from 1821 and 1833. In addition, I was asked to serve on several national committees which explored the nature of Presbyterianism in the United States - the Task Force on Theological Pluralism in the Presbyterian Community of Faith, the Special Committee on the Nature of the Church and the Practice of Governance, and two committees which attempted to revise the Form of Government, Part II of the Constitution of the Church. I left my post as Stated Clerk in Cleveland after 10 years of service to act as the Coordinator for the Committee on Social Witness Policy for the General Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky, and then left to teach American Presbyterian Church History at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, which gave me the opportunity to delve in the library of the seminary as well as consult with church history colleagues. I also have served as a part of the editorial board for the *Journal of Presbyterian History*, the historical journal for the denomination, and served for nine years on the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission, the highest court of the church. These opportunities have given me a heightened awareness of the nature of Presbyterians, the way in which they approach issues doctrinally, politically, and historically. During all the years of my service to the church, Presbyterians in the United States of America were acting as Presbyterians usually do – engaged, concerned, volatile and voluble. The issues may have varied, the conflicts changing – but always present, as I discovered in returning to the office of Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve for a final four years before retiring. During this recent stint of service to the Presbyterian Church, the conflicts have escalated.
Whether the severity of the conflicts will lead to formal schism is not known. But as I continued my studies and my interest in Presbyterian history, conflicts and different approaches to dealing with those controversies, the pertinence of a former schismatic time has become more obvious to me. Is that history relevant? I believe so. Will we learn from it? That, of course, is not yet clear.

Tolstoy was involved in and concerned about history. His was a very conflicted and even jaded view of its possibilities and its practitioners. For me, the history project, the effort to be an historian, is an effort to make sense of the overwhelming – to have some control over the uncontrollable present, by sensing that there is a relevant past that, with effort, could be known, accessible, and discernable, even if only partially so. In thinking this and acting on it, perhaps we historians fool ourselves – enjoyably – even as we attempt to gain insights over future behavior through new understandings of the past. We may also attempt to think we understand the past when what we are really doing is interpreting the present – the present which is the only place we can live.
a. A traditional explanation and a response, doctrine or slavery?

Now, as in times past, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PCUSA) is facing a crisis in which churches are threatening to leave the denomination. A few have already gone. The issues that seem to be of concern have changed from the early nineteenth century, but the rhetoric has not. How should the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) deal with those of other denominations? What is the relative importance of purity of doctrine when weighed against freedom of conscience? What is important enough to cause a Synod to refuse to admit a presbytery to its company or the General Assembly to remove one already a part of its membership? What is the importance of its own internal rules of governance? What should or could be the relationship with the secular and civic world? How important is unity, remaining part of one organization, both in statements and in actions? What type of mission should be undertaken, by whom, and where? The conflict over biblical interpretations, the demonizing of parts of the body, and the struggle over who will run the church are all too familiar. Currently, as in 1729 and the

\[11\] The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a national Christian denomination of the Reformed Tradition. It has cordial relations with other bodies of the Reformed Tradition internationally, but is not in any type of organic union with them. Its structure begins with congregations, governed by elected bodies called sessions. A session is comprised of ordained lay persons called elders elected by the congregation, together with a minister who is the moderator of the session. Congregations in a regional area are brought together through representative elders and the ministers of that region in a governing body called the presbytery. The membership of a minister in the denomination is held in her/his presbytery, not in a local congregation. Presbyteries are formed, also by region, into a further governing body, called a synod. The highest representative body is the General Assembly, composed of ministers and elders chosen from each presbytery. The members of each governing body are called commissioners, recognizing that they are commissioned to their task, and are not to be instructed in any business or vote by those who have sent them to legislate in a governing body. Presbyteries are allotted a specific number of commissioners in the General Assembly based on the size of the sending presbytery. From its inception in 1789 until 2004, the General Assembly met annually. At the present time the General Assembly meets every two years.
1920’s, one of the issues facing the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) involves ordination, now the ordination of “avowed, practicing homosexuals,” the treatment of whom embroils the civil and secular world as much as it does the church. In similar fashion, a parallel issue that involved both church and society of the 1830’s was slavery.

To understand the way in which slavery was considered by Presbyterians in the 1830’s, or homosexuality is thought of today, it is helpful to understand who Presbyterians were and perhaps still are. The Presbyterian Church is a body that claims for itself a rule of law, a body governed by a written constitution and involving clear rules. It is a church that is consciously governed by men and women, by ministers and ordained lay people\textsuperscript{12}; a church in which nothing is ever accomplished quickly, as all parties are to be consulted, and business is referred to committees for study and recommendation prior to action by a representative body. Even the traditional function served by a bishop is not that of an individual, rather whole presbyteries act as corporate bishops. The PCUSA is an institution in which diverse opinions are expected to be present and will be aired, with no single central authority to veto or require uniformity.

The PCUSA is a denomination whose developing national structure paralleled the development of the national structure of the nation-state in which it found itself, the United States of America. Indeed, some of its members and ministers had a vital part to play in

\textsuperscript{12} The Presbyterian Church ordains men and women as both elders and deacons, though only elders form a part of the ruling or governing body, called the “session” of the church. Deacons perform pastoral and caring functions under the guidance of the session, which includes the minister of the church as a member and its moderator. Ministers have a vote on the session, but are outnumbered by the elders. In the other governing bodies, the presbytery, synod and General Assembly, ministers and elders are to be equal in number.
the foundations of that new country, as Horace Walpole stated in 1775, “Cousin America has eloped with a Presbyterian parson.” 13 John Adams, also in 1775, wrote to his wife following a Sunday sermon at Old Pine Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia that, “the clergy this way are but now beginning to engage in politics, and they engage with a fervor that will produce wonderful effects.” 14 And this sentiment was echoed by Ambrose Serle in writing to his employer, Lord Dartmouth of England in 1777, “When the war is over, there must be a great Reform established, ecclesiastical as well as civil; for, though it has not been much considered at Home, Presbyterianism is really at the Bottom of this whole Conspiracy, has supplied it with Vigor, and will never rest, till something is decided upon it.” 15 Clearly in its own history, the Presbyterian Church had the capacity to confront an issue, ecclesiastical or civil, with vigorous rhetoric and action. The outcome might be sanguine or surprising.

In reviewing the parallels embodied in the history of the church and of the state, the questions surrounding the actions of one part of the body excising another in 1837, seemingly precipitately, might be seen as one more instance of Presbyterians battling, though with each other and not an overseas power. Because of current issues that are threatening to split the church, the long-forgotten issues of 1837 seemed relevant. Even acknowledging Isaiah Berlin’s statement, “history will not, because it cannot, solve the

great questions which have tormented men in every generation,"\textsuperscript{16} pursuing knowledge concerning this earlier split still seems worthwhile. Some will argue that the issues today are not about homosexuality, the purported catalyst for the controversies, but rather about interpretation of the Bible, the theology on which the Church relies, the governance that underlies the relationships of each part to the whole, and ultimately the authority that is conceded to religion and religious practice. Yet, I argue, it is the societal issue of homosexuality in all its political, sociological, anthropological, ethical, even biological implications, taken together with the civil and religious issue of the meaning of and responsibility for marriage, that lie at the base of burgeoning theological discussions. It is the issue of homosexuality as a catalyst that has caused the church to consider again its relationship to its ministers and members, to other denominations and to the secular world that surrounds it.

The issues that faced the Presbyterian Church in 1837 were said to be about governance and doctrine. Yet here, too, another reality lay under all the voluminous doctrinal arguments. The Presbyterian Church split almost in two in 1837 and 1838. In 1869, the sundered parts came together again in an organic union. Nothing, they said, had changed. No doctrine needed correcting. No one had been wrong.\textsuperscript{17} Yet

\textsuperscript{16} Berlin, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{17} The statement that no doctrinal issues really were involved is one about which there has been some disagreement. However, James Smylie says that “theological tensions had dissipated,” (92) and Armstrong, Loetscher and Anderson take the stance that the differences were “forgotten.” (220) The anonymous annotators of the \textit{Presbyterian Constitution and Digest}, however, in their subject-driven compendium of all the actions of General Assemblies from 1789 to 1972, are less guarded in their assessment: “Inasmuch as there were no differences in the essential doctrines between the Old and New School branches of the Presbyterian Church, and neither had made any changes in the Constitution, the reunion was effected on the basis of the Standards, without amendment.” (Vol. II, 1313.) The Standards in this instance were the Westminster Standards, the Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of 1648.
one thing had changed, in the life of the Church and the country. A war had been fought and the “domestic institution,” slavery, was no longer legally permitted or protected.

Could this have been a major factor in the schism of 1837? Could this have been a (or even the) primary reason that the Synod of the Western Reserve, a “known” hotbed of abolitionism, was the first synod to be excised by the General Assembly of 1837?

These questions have led me to this study, and to the result that follows.

Approximately fifty years after its establishment as a national denomination, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was sundered at the General Assembly meeting in 1837, a schism that was made complete by the Old School at its General Assembly in 1838. Traditionally, scholars and others who have written about the church in 1837 have said that issues of doctrine and governance were to blame for the split. It will be the purpose of this paper to argue, however, that slavery was a major

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18 The terms “Old School” and “New School” were adopted or accepted by the groups which found themselves on opposing sides in the early 1800’s. The practice followed the earlier designation of Old Side-New Side in the split of 1741. At that time the subscriptionist and anti-revival group called themselves “Old Side,” while those who were in favor of revivals and cooperation with other Christians called themselves the “New Side.” According to Trinterud, the Old Side men tended to be the Scots and Scotch-Irish, who brought to the colonies their disputes from their former countries. (Leonard J. Trinterud. The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949.) George Marsden, in his thorough analysis of the doctrinal issues surrounding the New School, comments that the first use of the terms “Old School” and “New School” seem to occur in 1824 during a debate at Princeton. (Marsden, George. The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970, p. 43.) In the early 19th century, these terms defined self-designated groups, who differed in their treatment of theological and doctrinal issues, perhaps church governance or polity, and had a geographical and educational dimension. The terms also were used by some authors of the time to designate differences in how rigidly or flexibly the parties responded to issues presented. Generally, the Old School was designated as rigid, while the New School approached issues in a more tolerant fashion, accepting of differences, rather than requiring uniformity. In a long article in the Philadelphia Observer, the Rev. Dr. Skinner says, “But now a broad line of demarcation has been attempted to be drawn between what are called the old and new schools; and, we under the designation of the new school, (a designation which our brethren oblige us to bear,) – are on trial, virtually, for unsoundness...” (September 15, 1836 no. 22, whole no. 517, Page 149) The contemporary references given by the New School to designate the Old School include: Convention Party, Reform Party, New Basis, Disunionists; while they called themselves: Old School, the Orthodox, the true friends of the Presbyterian Church. New Schoolers called themselves the Constitution party or the Constitutional Assembly, and the Unionists.
cause and catalyst for the upheaval, even while acknowledging that other issues were also involved, complex and convoluted.

The very difficulties of studying this time in the life of the United States as well as the church lie in the raw, chaotic world of the early Republic. Now familiar institutions and patterns of national and local organization were being formulated, tested, and sometimes adopted following a certain amount of chaos. The promises of the Declaration of Independence and the new Constitution were believed and expected to come to fruition, sometimes in the face of disappointing reality. The presidency of Andrew Jackson has been described as moving in the direction of democratizing the nation, and its religious communities.19 Explosions of population together with the move westward of large numbers of people occurred at a time of financial experiment and instability, which was heightened by the addition of large areas of territory through treaty and exacerbated by a second war with Great Britain. Inventiveness, the onset of the industrial revolution, new modes of communication and transportation, taken with the promise and potential that anyone might better themselves make the first three decades of the nineteenth century a time of restlessness, rootlessness, exciting possibilities, and a breaking down of many traditional assumptions of behavioral standards. This was not an easy time, nor a simple one for the person or institution that wished to cling to the old ways.

The Presbyterian Church, as a part of this society and culture, reflected in its body and its actions all of the uneasiness of the adolescent, growing and becoming, challenging old mores, yet cherishing them, developing new traditions while wishing to cling to the old ways. This was a context ripe for action and reaction, and so it seemed to happen in the Presbyterian Church. Within the basically optimistic mood of the early Republic, the Presbyterian Church found itself firmly in the center of the chaotic new world. Leonard Trinterud, scholar of colonial Presbyterianism, reasons that,20

Nothing in colonial life was alien to the pioneers of this Church. No part of human life fell outside the reign of God and the responsibility of the Church. Therefore, for these Presbyterians, the birth, though in agony, of a new nation on a savage frontier was according to the purpose of God.

The difficulty, of course, is to be clear within the denominational body what the purpose of God truly is, and who it is that has the power and authority to determine God’s purpose. The answer to this puzzle was to be different at different historical periods. In the years leading up to 1837, the power dynamics of the Presbyterian Church were to shift back and forth, with neither party always a majority. Discomfort was felt particularly by the less flexible group, the Old School, who were in the tradition of those who wished to preserve and purify the old ways, and were uneasy with the changes they saw and were experiencing in the young country. As the frontier expanded west, the raw and the new became overwhelming. While the challenge to evangelize and civilize the developing areas was before them, and was welcomed, the

Old School worked to assure that the development was not out of control. This would mean accepting the new or novel slowly, and doing whatever was necessary to assure that the church remained true to its roots. That some of those roots arose out of disputes from former times and in far-away lands would become important.

b. Historiography

Attention to the schism in the Presbyterian Church by historians has varied. Given the prominence of the denomination in the 1830’s and ‘40’s, there were a number of contemporary accounts and analyses of the split. Following the Civil War and the reunion of the northern portions of the church in 1869, more accounts were written. There were articles produced as the 100th anniversary of the schism was experienced in the 1930’s, and some attention paid to it in the 1970’s, as historians changed the focus of their attention away from the population of elite white males, especially considering the role of women and non-whites in previously studied eras and events. As the history of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States as well as in Europe, has been to split and then reunite, it might have been expected that the 20th century reunions between the United Presbyterian Church of North America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1958, followed by the 1983 reunion of the southern Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) with the northern United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) would have caused some attention to be paid to this earlier division, yet such was not the case.
In the mid-twentieth century, the nation was aware of and paid great attention to the Civil War, especially as the centennial years of the war neared, which resulted in many studies concerning slavery and anti-slavery. At this same time, historians generally were abandoning the effort to see history in the sweep of large, even ordered, movements, and began to focus in large part on smaller and smaller arenas, often without making claims for the smaller experience having an influence, being determinative or even necessarily contributing to some over-arching theory concerning history as a field or the history of a nation. A revived interest in all of human life and experience led to a revival of attention to religion as an integral part of the human experience, and, especially in the eras of colonial history and the decades of the Early Republic, to have been an influence on all of life, not simply a part of the private existence of individual members of society. The result of this confluence meant that some general histories of the religious experience in America were written, notably that by Sydney Ahlstrom in 1972, *A Religious History of the American People*, which attempted in a single volume to display the myriad religious experiences and institutions of the United States of America. Less magisterial in scope, William Warren Sweet’s *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840* provides much valuable insight into the history of the Presbyterian Church. This work published in 1952 shows a broad interest in early religious movements, and a deep knowledge of the vagaries of the mainline denominations of the early Republic. He concluded his study with 1840, and therefore did not consider the continued westward expansion of the nation and its religious bodies.
Ahlstrom was preceded by a few one volume religious histories, which focused on a particular kind of religious experience over a broad area. The societal ferment of the 1960’s seemed to foster interest in more stable subjects, of which Winthrop Hudson’s general *Religion in America* is an example. General histories of American religion with a particular slant included Charles Foster, who published a 1960 work, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837,* concerned with the growing religious adoption of benevolent practices as an expression of an evangelical faith. Foster was partnered in that same year with the publication of Clifford Griffin’s work, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865.* These latter two works demonstrated the increasing interest shown in the cross fertilization of social policy and religion in the time of the early Republic, and written at a time in the life of the United States in which issues of social concern were vividly present, particularly in the area of civil rights, women’s issues of all sorts, together with issues of class, and the nature and future of the American experience in the world. The ground and origin of the nation’s social policy that under girded these matters, therefore, was a subject to be explored as a means to understanding the impetus for the sudden changes that were occurring throughout American society.

While the focus on good works and its impulse from religious experience was only beginning in the time prior to 1980, the subsequent decades saw an explosion of historical writing of a general religious nature, mirroring the context of the times, in which the religious life of the ordinary citizen had expanded from a few well-known
Protestant denominations into a plethora of all shades of religious, spiritual, faith-based interests and even passions, often global in nature. Works appeared in which much of the development of the life of the nation was now at least connected with, influenced by, or even developed as a result of the confluence of the pioneer spirit and the religious sensibility of the American people. These works might be exemplified by Jon Butler’s 1990 monograph, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*, supported by Butler and Harry Stout’s *Religion in American History: A Reader*. The format of readings from primary sources was followed as well by David Hackett’s 1995 book, *Religion and American Culture: A Reader*, and then by essays on religious influences in a 1997 volume edited by Stout and D.G. Hart, *New Directions in American Religious History*. Most influential of these more contemporary writings has been the 1989 work of Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, which broadly shows the parallels of the broadening spirit of the nation and of the changing face of Christianity, especially as experienced in the increasing diversity of the population. Equally broad in time frame, but limited in geographical scope has been the work of Beth Barton Schweiger, and Donald G. Mathews, who edited the 2004 book of essays, *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*.

Rather than a general focus on factual chronological history or broad strokes and contextual discussions of the influence of religion in American life, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, the very detailed and thorough work of evangelical Christian Mark Noll, published in 2002, is a general
religious history told through the history of theology of the time period covered, which is approximately 1750 to 1865. This large volume connects the actions of the denominations in a way akin to Sweet, yet through the lens of the formal theologies espoused by the varieties of sects and denominations. Noll necessarily focuses on writings which can be accessed, writings of a particular body of people – those who can read and write theology, largely the clergy of the groups, who at this time were male, and largely white. This is a work of a particular focus, yet Noll manages to combine the history of ideas in a type of intellectual history that aids in following the development of the belief systems which underlay some of the conflicts which inflamed the Protestant churches in this era.

While each of these works mentions Presbyterians within the larger scheme, there are few recent histories of the Presbyterian Church itself. The small volume by Balmer and Fitzmier is of some value, though very brief. It relies heavily on the very short books authored in several editions by Lefferts Loetscher, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, the most recent of which was published in 1983.

By contrast, scholars and churchmen of the 19th century produced several works of Presbyterian history. While fascinating in its detail and clarity of presentation, virtually all of these works are presented from a particular view, either Old School or New School. The issue of history and its objectivity does not seem to have troubled the authors, most of whom were participants in the split. Particularly

prominent is the work of Samuel Miller, who wrote many essays and papers for the Old School, all clarifying and justifying what he felt to be a necessary split in the body. Even the title of his history, *Presbyterianism, the Truly Primitive and Apostolical Constitution of the Church of Christ* places the work in the center of a claim for purity and authority of one view of the church as the correct one.

Several general volumes were written at or around the time of the Reunion between the Old and New School churches in 1869. Of particular value due to the breadth of its coverage is that of E.H. Gillett, a history in two volumes of the Presbyterian Church in America, published in 1864, with a new edition in 1873. Gillett demonstrates sympathy for the New School, but does not demonize the Old School. Other histories focused on the Presbyterian Church and its issues past and present were published in the late 19th century, notably among them by Charles Briggs, professor at Union Theological Seminary, who was the subject of one of the Presbyterian heresy trials which occurred in the late 19th century. Throughout this period, shorter essays continued to be written, though not with the scope of those previously mentioned. In some sense, the history being written into the twentieth and 21st centuries began to have a narrower focus, usually addressing a single topic, person, time period, or area, rather than a broad overview.

Typical of this narrower focus, the schism of 1837 for Presbyterians has been a subject of scholarly interest at different times, with different issues and concerns raised each time. The first group of reflectors, often participants in the events, was
followed by historians who wrote and analyzed the actions of the church in the years immediately following 1837. This early time included many who were reacting to what they perceived as revolutionary. These include a large number of contributors to newspaper columns, as well as those who wrote books, such as Harvey Woods from the New School perspective, writing *The History of the Presbyterian Controversy* in 1843, or Samuel Miller, an Old School man who wrote a *Report of the Presbyterian Church Case: The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania v. Ashbel Green and Others* in 1839. Typically, those who wrote of the split shortly after it happened did not address the issue of slavery. Their concern was to justify the legality or illegality of the action, both as to process and the content of what was decided, in light of what the participants themselves had said, written and done. Woods noted that the issue of slavery was raised in a meeting of the Old School, called the Convention, that occurred just before the 1837 Assembly. According to Woods, slavery was used to assure the cooperation of Southerners in order to effect the will of the Old School. Woods, however, did not emphasize elimination of slavery as of vital importance in the discussion but was primarily interested in the injustice of the Old School, its successes at the General Assembly and his worries about the future of the church. Woods’ observations are an illustration of the outpouring of frustration and anger of those who had been summarily thrown out of their church.

The monograph authored by Zebulon Crocker, however, was quite different. Crocker, a Congregational minister who had been the delegate of the General Association of Connecticut to the 1837 General Assembly, published an account of the
schism in 1838 in which he listed four causes that ‘united the majority’, the first of which was “the recent excitement in different parts of the church in respect to slavery and abolition.”22 The other causes in order were “fear of encroachment upon the supposed prerogatives of ‘the church in her distinctive character,’ ‘judicial proceedings of the church, growing out of real diversity of doctrinal views,’ and ‘theological controversies of New England, and especially of Connecticut.’ While he did not give any particular priority to slavery, Crocker, an eye witness, listed it in preference to issues of revivals or voluntary societies, both of which others mentioned. In his discussion of the impact of slavery, Crocker mentions particularly the way in which it was used strategically, to rouse the fears of the South and then to cement a coalition of Northern Old School men and Southern slaveholders, to assure a sufficient majority to accomplish the business of exscinding the four synods and abrogating the Plan of Union of 1801.

Old School men, writing histories of the split, either immediately or some years later, spoke only of the governance issues, the purported theological laxity of the New School, as well as the concerns about “foreign influences,” by which they meant the so-called “Accommodation Plan” with the Congregationalists, which had been in place for 36 years, years which had seen the rapid growth of the church in the areas covered by the Plan of Union of 1801.23 Though some of them, particularly Robert Breckinridge, had been in favor of emancipation of slaves in an early period, virtually

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23 The Plan of Union of 1801 provided for joint founding and governing of churches in the frontier areas being settled primarily in what is now Western New York and moving west to Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois.
all of them became silent on the topic of slavery from 1837 on. Their motives were undoubtedly mixed. The theologians from the Princeton Seminary, had been moderate in their views concerning slavery until the 1836 Assembly, when matters seemed to move beyond their control in both society and church.

Four major issues concerned Old School men24. One, already mentioned, was the ecumenical venture of the Plan of Union. This became an issue of the purity of the faith, as well as the governance of the church. Ministers of the Congregational Church were educated largely in seminaries not under the control of the Presbyterian Church. Congregational churches did not differ in the reality of church governance, as there was a standing committee elected which functioned similarly to a session, although members of the standing committee were not usually ordained as elders. This meant that it was possible, and the Old School believed usual, that governing was in the hands of the non-ordained, who could and probably would, become commissioners to the General Assembly, as well as serving in presbyteries and synods, where they might not be required to affirm their belief in the Westminster Confession or catechisms. While the most frequent practice was for all ministers, Congregational as well as Presbyterian, to join the presbytery of the region, the Old School argued that the Congregationalists were taking over the Presbyterian Church. By contrast, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, in

24 Lefferts Loetscher, Professor of Church History at Princeton Theological Seminary and author of The Broadening Church: a Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869, stated that there were three major causes of the 1837 schism: 1) differing views on church government, 2) theology, and 3) slavery. He does mention voluntary societies as an issue, but not a major one, and considers ecumenical issues and revivals under both church government and theology. Loetscher, Lefferts A. The Broadening Church: a Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954, p. 4.
quoting a letter from 1865, says “Denouncing the Plan of Union, which forbade Congregational expansion, one delegate declared that Presbyterians, ‘have often come from the West to our New England, and ranged over our fat pastures, and borne away the fleece from our flocks; they have milked our Congregational cows, but they have made nothing but Presbyterian butter and cheese.” 25

The second expressed concern was that of religious revivals, which had arisen particularly in the mid-eighteenth century around the person of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards, a Congregationalist, became the president of Princeton and a much cited and beloved figure in Presbyterian Church history. Later historians would call this the “Great Awakening.” Though revivals had never really ceased to exist, the turn of the 19th century saw another spate of religious enthusiasm, which has been identified as the “Second Great Awakening.” Though revivals occurred throughout the churches, those in the areas which were later excised by the Presbyterian Church have received much attention. Whitney Cross’ 1950 work, The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850, is especially helpful in understanding the power and influence of religious revivals in one area. For the Old School, the nature of revivals had changed from century to century, with the advent of Charles Grandison Finney and others who were accused of ceding some of the purity of the Presbyterian doctrine in favor of reaching the hearts of the

25 Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery. Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1969, 320. Wyatt-Brown has misunderstood the action of the General Assembly in 1801, as there is no stricture against founding Congregational churches, however he is accurate as to the outcome of the Plan of 1801 (see Appendix B), as most historians have seen the Presbyterians as the victors in the race for members. The usual reasoning given is that the Presbyterians were better organized and gave greater support to developing churches.
hearers, and encouraging them not to feel incapable of effecting their own salvation.

The methods of Finney’s revivals as well as the content of the doctrine that he espoused were very problematic to the Old School. Jon Butler’s *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* covers this topic particularly well, though there are numerous works on revivalism, the Second Great Awakening, and the ways in which the Protestant churches moved and expanded in the first third of the 19th century. The older monograph by William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Social Change in America, 1607-1977*, brings revivals of the period into conversation with societal issues.26

The third issue that concerned those of the Old School, particularly in the period immediately preceding the exscinding Assembly, was voluntary societies. These were inter-denominational bodies, often founded and heavily supported by Presbyterians and Congregationalists. In the early decades of the 19th century, and in the early years of the newly formed Republic, the will to do good, to make real the promises of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the pervading influence of religion with its emphasis on the Second Coming of Christ, and the feeling that America was God’s promised land, all combined to produce a feeling that citizens had responsibilities for the health and welfare of the whole body – that for the millennium to arrive, believers must work on behalf of others to purify and sanctify all in God’s Kingdom. Many new benevolent societies were formed in the decades from

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26 Other helpful and interesting works, such as *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, by Timothy Smith, focus on a later time frame than is covered by this project. They can give great assistance, however, in understanding some of the issues and the impetus to religious experiences of the earlier period and sometimes include relevant background material.
1810 to 1830, societies that were not under the control of any one church, let alone the Presbyterian, but which worked in and with the churches to recruit workers, raise money, and promulgate the faith. According to Marsden, “Almost every form of vice or oppression had a corresponding moral or benevolent society to stamp it out.”

Voluntary Societies have proved a fruitful topic for scholars. The works of Charles Foster and Clifford S. Griffin have been most influential, each of them emphasizing the way in which the era was a time when various religious conservatives attempted to make the world over in their own image, an attempt at social control. Opposing this view, Lois Banner’s critique in her article in the *Journal of American History*, largely cited the work of Presbyterians and Congregationalists as being humanitarian in nature, and mostly accomplished by those from non-established

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27 Marsden, George. *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970, p. 15. Marsden goes on to list the following as exemplary of the type of societies that were formed: the American Colonization Society, the American Anti-Slavery Society, the American Temperance Society, the American Peace Society – all of which are reviewed and followed in the religious newspapers of the day; together with smaller groups such as the Seventh Commandment Society, the American Seamen’s Friend Society, the Protestant Half Orphan Society, and the Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Domestic Servants in New York. Page Putnam Miller includes the following societies, mostly local or auxiliaries of national organizations, founded and/or operated by women before 1837: Female Bible Society of Philadelphia, the Orphan Society, the Indigent Widows’ and Single Women’s Society, Women’s Missionary Society of Virginia, Petersburg Education Society, Married Ladies Missionary Society, Tract Distribution Society, House of Industry, Dorcas Society, Ladies’ Society for the Relief of Distressed Women and Children, Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, and the list could go on and on. The bulk of societies in which women played a prominent part were concerned with the welfare of women and children. The American Home Missionary Society and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions were two voluntary societies whose existence and role in Presbyterian churches was central to the debate of the 1830’s General Assemblies.

religions, who had no desire to control the world. In whatever way these societies have been considered in the 20th century, for the 19th century Old School Presbyterians, voluntary societies were highly suspect because they were under the authority of no single church. These Old School men believed that the societies even lured newly ordained ministers away from churches where they were needed into other work, that of being agents for the voluntary societies where they would be exposed to non-Presbyterian doctrines, their orthodoxy might be tested and made suspect.

Finally, an issue which concerned not only the church but also the whole nation was slavery. This was not a subject that lent itself to calm and reasoned expositions. Presbyterians who wrote about the topic contemporaneously were passionate, no matter what their viewpoint. Particularly interesting is the essay of Catharine Beecher, daughter of prominent Presbyterian minister, Lyman Beecher, and an avowed anti-slavery exponent. Her work, published in 1837, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, with Reference to the Duty of American Females*, stated that, as a matter of common sense, all northern Christians wanted to end slavery, although she believed the best way was not abolition, but gradual emancipation, in a quiet and reasoned manner, similar to the work of Wilberforce and Clarkson in Great Britain. Catharine Beecher was typical of many in the Presbyterian Church, which had made official pronouncements even prior to its formation of the General Assembly, stating

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30 See Appendix J for the actual number of ministers in the excindened presbyteries who were identified as agents, a number far less than the Old School rhetoric would assume.
that slavery should come to an end.\textsuperscript{31} Exactly how that was to be accomplished was less clear, and not the subject of consensus.

Another contemporary Presbyterian voice spoke quite differently. Not a commissioner to the 1837 General Assembly, but directly in the heart of the debate is Theodore Dwight Weld, candidate for the Presbyterian ministry and goad to anyone who was pro-slavery. Weld was present at the 1835 Assembly, and stated that he had converted over a quarter of that Old School-dominated body to his anti-slavery position. Weld wrote and spoke widely, and particularly in the area of northeastern Ohio and Western New York. His letters speak of the way that his understanding of the issues changed over time, and of his passion for emancipation.

In discussing the ending of slavery, there is often a sense that the movement was singular in its mode and methods. However, the entire topic was one of nuance for those who were living it in the 1820’s and ‘30’s. The issue did not lend itself to a dichotomy – that is, either proslavery or pro-abolition. Many people could agree with Catharine Beecher that slavery should be ended, but were not willing to live with free blacks. They might belong to and advocate for the American Colonization Society, to free African-Americans and send them to Africa. Others might espouse immediatism, which could variously mean immediate emancipation (usually with some compensation for the owner, and even possibly training, education, and financial support for the slave), or beginning a gradual process of emancipation immediately, that is, quickly.

\textsuperscript{31} See Appendix C for transcriptions of the actions of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia prior to 1789, and of the General Assemblies after that time up to the Assembly of 1837.
At the far end of the spectrum, and not very powerful until the rise of William Lloyd Garrison from 1830 on, was abolition, that was immediately freeing the slaves with no conditions. Abolitionists, however, could also be split concerning whether former slaves should become citizens or be accepted in the predominant white society.

The autobiographical reflections of Lyman Beecher and Charles Grandison Finney, written later in their lives, speak of slavery and its affect on the church community of the time. Finney, in his autobiography published in 1876, recalls that in 1833 he had “taken the stand in my congregation in New York City that no slave holder could come to our communion. In that vast congregation some slaveholders of professed piety were almost always present, and the rebuke was being solemnly felt.”

Sometimes Finney’s recollections are those of an older man whose history is seen through the filter of many years that have passed, and so may be suspect. It is equally true, however, that contemporaries identified Finney as a radical in terms of anti-slavery. The same volume quotes a contemporary letter to T. D. Weld, written in July 1836, as saying that Finney is concerned “that the absorbing abolitionism has drunk up the spirit of some of the most efficient revival men…& many of our Abolition brethren seem satisfied with nothing less than this.”

Though Finney was reviled by his contemporaries as being a rabble-rouser, his anti-slavery stance was nuanced. While he did not in any way wish to give up anti-

33 Finney. Ibid. 363
slavery, yet the spread of the gospel was of primary importance. By contrast, Beecher’s autobiography contained a full chapter on the schism in the church, entitled “Revolution.” It was clear that his memory and understanding later in life was that the division in the church was finally caused by the issue of slavery. “It was a cruel thing – it was a cursed thing, and ‘twas slavery that did it.”

Beecher’s analysis over a lifetime was clear and stark.

Much more was written about the unfairness of the actions taken by the General Assembly of 1837 in preparation for the judicial cases which followed. A particularly cogent, if angry, review of the entire situation was provided by a book published in 1852 by the Synod of New York and New Jersey of the New School side of the Presbyterian Church. While the committee members were named, none was given the single title of author, nor was any authorship claimed on the title page.

Point by point and issue by issue, the text reviewed the arguments of doctrine, constitutionality of actions of the Assembly, issues of power and control, and the mission of the church. The last became the lynch-pin of the argument concerning why a group felt that the church had to be divided, the concern felt by the Old School over the question of the voluntary societies, those inter-denominational groups that had been formed to provide missionaries, tracts, educational materials, and social justice.

35 [Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.] Synod of New York and New Jersey. *A History of the Division of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America by a Committee of the Synod of New York and New Jersey.* New York: M.W. Dodd, 1852. There were ten men identified as committee members, five ministers and five elders. The ministers were: G. N. Judd, T. H. Skinner, E. F. Hatfield, Jos. S. Gallagher, and S. T. Spear. The elders, all judges, were: Jos. C. Hornblower, Cyrus P. Smith, John L. Mason, Danl. Haines, and William Jessup. Of the ten, only William Jessup had been a commissioner to the 1837 Assembly. Skinner was a regular contributor to newspapers and was often quoted.
activities for many churches. The authors described the activities of the Assembly as revolution and not as reform, the favorite encomium that the Old School used of itself and its action. This volume is particularly helpful in tracing the history and some of the conclusions of the court cases that were heard in 1839, together with the charge to the jury in the first case, which was decided in favor of the New School; and the decision rendered in a later case by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, in which Judge Gibson says that the only reason the court ruled in favor of the Old School was because at the time they were the stronger party, had the votes to pass their business, were legally constituted, and therefore their actions would stand.36

The fact that these cases were heard at a level beyond the Philadelphia courts where they were brought occasioned much discussion. Many writers and memorialists of the time did refer to the role played by slavery (and its contested twin, anti-slavery) as a factor in the impetus to the excision. It is largely in the newspapers at this time, however, that the issue of slavery is emphasized, positively or negatively. Most useful in understanding the communication of the early 19th century is Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse, by Richard John.37 John shows the relative importance, not to speak of cost, of sending letters or newspapers. As the new government was based on citizen participation, federal policy provided for newspapers to be sent free or at very low cost throughout the country. By comparison, letters were charged for by the sheet of paper, and for a time were paid for by the

36 Ibid. 202-203. For a transcription of the relevant portion of the decision, see Appendix K.
recipient, rather than the sender. Newspapers, even though sent to a subscriber, frequently were treated as public property until the owner took possession, and so many more people read them than paid for subscriptions. As a result, according to John, newspapers were far more influential among citizens of the 1830’s, and probably a clearer indicator of the relative importance of issues of this era than are letters, a factor in the final analysis of the pervasive nature of the anti-slavery debate and its influence in the strategy to excise a portion of the Presbyterian Church in 1837.

The Presbyterian newspapers of the time were full of articles about slavery, culled from newspapers all over the country, and indeed overseas as well. There were also many articles about revivals, sister denominations, and much reporting on and discussion about voluntary societies. Even though many only published weekly, the coverage included news both near and far, of the civil as well as the religious world, and included news on the health of individuals, their marriages, births and deaths, even when the one spoken of lived in Vermont or Missouri rather than New York or Philadelphia. The religious newspapers of the early 1800’s were a microcosm of the issues of the world and of the faith,

In an expansive review of the history of the Presbyterian Church from 1783 to 1840, William Warren Sweet provided both analysis and source materials in the form of extracts of minutes and letters as the church developed on the then frontier. Sweet’s view of the church was both sweeping and detailed, factual, rather than

38Ibid.156 John’s analysis found that because they had to pay for what they received, few people actually sent or received letters, prior to 1845. Prepayment by the sender was not required before 1855.
analytical, whereby the reader was invited to analysis by personal deduction. His volume on the Presbyterians is enlightening for the period covered, and provides many original sources and maps showing boundaries of presbyteries not easily available elsewhere.

In discussing the schism of 1837, Sweet proposed four “causes of controversy...: (1) the operation of the Plan of Union; (2) the conflict between the American Home Missionary Society and the Assembly’s Board of Missions in attempting to work in the same field; (3) the doctrinal controversy; and (4) the question of slavery.39 This last item Sweet claimed had generally not been acknowledged as particularly important, largely because it had not been mentioned in the minutes of the General Assemblies in 1837 and 1838. Sweet particularly emphasized the change in intensity of the anti-slavery movement after 1830, which he attributed to changes in the production and marketing of agricultural products in the South, as well as to the advent of William Lloyd Garrison and his followers. Sweet demonstrated the way in which this movement “was largely carried on within Presbyterianism itself,”40 and concluded that the absence of discussion did not mean the absence of influence.

Historians re-discovered the 1837 Presbyterian schism approximately 100 years after the split, in the late 1930’s, led by Sweet. Most of the discussion occurred in periodicals, particularly in the journal, Church History. For the purposes of this paper, however, the most important of the articles was one written by Bruce Staiger in

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40 Ibid. 117.
1949 for the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. Staiger’s essay followed the history of the schism and traced many of the activities of the men and their churches in the field of abolition or anti-slavery.

Although Staiger is often identified as the leading advocate for the importance of slavery as a cause of the split, in the broader field of American history, he built on the 1933 work of Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844.* Barnes reflected a growing interest in the historical community on the nature of slavery, its influence on twentieth-century life, and the growing concerns of and for the African-American community. In the essays written about the Presbyterian schism during the 1930’s, there was more attention to the topic of slavery and how it was treated than to doctrinal issues. Again, this may be due to the distance from the issues of that former time, yet the first third of the twentieth century was another time of strife for the Presbyterian Church, an era identified as the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, another time of mixed motives, both doctrinal and structural. Barnes’s work was produced shortly after the resolution of this conflict, yet the issues presented by conservatives at that time were and are still alive in the Presbyterian Church. The emphasis of Barnes and Staiger on the issue of slavery and its consideration by the Presbyterian Church of the 1830’s has been largely forgotten, especially in light of the analysis of George Marsden concerning the role of slavery in the schism.

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42 The issue of the 1920’s again involved ordination, and which body had the power and authority to determine what was to be subscribed to at the time of an ordination, as well as membership in voluntary societies. In the 1920’s, unlike 1837, the break in the church was minor, and the more conservative group left, forming its own denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
Staiger’s exposition of the role played by slavery is important to the argument in this paper; however, his position was challenged by a later group of historians. A growing interest in slavery, in the voices of women, workers, and people of color in general, is reflected in the last group of historians who wrote during the final 3 decades of the 20th century. The focus of this group is far less religious and deals to a greater extent with concerns of the growing disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and ethnology. Among several historians of the period, Paul Johnson’s *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* presents a study of revivals within a growing city in exactly the area which was to be excised, presenting the chaotic and exciting world which followed the rapid growth of the frontier with the opening of the Erie Canal. Johnson’s sole focus is not Presbyterians, but they are prominent players in Rochester, New York, and exemplify the growing cleavage between those who embraced the raw newness of this world and those who wished the world to be decorous, civilized and to preserve the old traditions and ways of being. Similar emphases can be found in the monographs of Whitney Cross, writing about revivals in all their intensity in Western New York, and Mary Ryan, focused on Oneida County, New York and the changes in the role of the family. Both give life and flavor to the world as it was lived in the nineteenth century on the frontier - vital, messy and growing.44

Writing outside the growing interdisciplinary trend was George Marsden, whose 1970 work, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* has been greatly influential among those who have considered issues of slavery and the church, or church schism, after his book was published. While a few authors, C.C. Goen as an example, have thought that slavery had some relation to the split, Marsden’s denial of its importance, together with his intimate knowledge of the time and the church, have had a dampening effect on any other view of the topic.

Marsden’s monograph grew from a doctoral dissertation, largely an intellectual history of the New School. In its scope it moves far beyond the time frame of this paper, and so his argument involving doctrine, theology and a final evangelical claim for the New School, is important, but peripheral and subsequent to the issues presented in this paper. His statement, however, that “real theological differences were the decisive issue in the controversy,” needs to be examined, and, I believe, refuted – refuted by the voices of those who were involved in the controversy as well as by a close examination of the way in which the controversy grew and was handled. His further desire to bring the study of evangelical thought back into the mainstream of intellectual history was admirable and important in 1970. His conclusion concerning

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46 Ibid. p. 250.
the nature of a social movement and its impact on the church in the early nineteenth century needs to be revisited.

There is no doubt that Marsden’s work is excellent, closely reasoned and valuable, even almost forty years after its publication. It is, however, limited in scope. As an intellectual history of its time, Marsden revived and recreated the ethos of nineteenth century New School Presbyterian thought. He wrote as an evangelical Christian, for whom doctrine and theology are of primary importance. In the exposition of his topic, however, he moved into a consideration of a societal issue, slavery, a topic that impacted the participants even if some of them did not feel it necessary, proper, or wise to speak of that topic. By considering the issue of slavery of little importance in the split, Marsden set the parameters for the discussion of the subject of the Presbyterian Church in 1837 and slavery, thereby influencing many future historians in their consideration of the “peculiar institution” in relation to the church. Yet in so doing, Marsden’s argument falls short of considering all that might have impacted Presbyterians and the Presbyterian Church of that era.

A more recent work by C.C. Goen, Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War, moves closer to acknowledging the key role slavery played in the 1837 schism. He argues that the splits in the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches occurred with so little damage to the faith and denominational institutions, that they gave tacit permission to those in the nation to contemplate division. He is not willing, however, to concede a
primary role to slavery and the surrounding agitation in the 1837 split of the Presbyterian Church, even while he traces early discussions among Old School Presbyterians who linked the issues about slavery and schism in the Presbyterian Church with a possible severing of the nation.\textsuperscript{47} Much of his argument is based on post-1837 discussion, but the possibility was considered by Presbyterians at an earlier time. Thus Goen begins a response to Marsden’s denial of the importance of slavery as a factor in the division of the Presbyterian Church.

Speaking of a limited area of this discussion is the work of Lawrence T. Lesick concerning Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio and the expelling of its students in 1834 over issues of anti-slavery and the freedom of its student body to discuss and act on such issues.\textsuperscript{48} Lesick wished to bring an understanding of the way in which evangelical theology impacted the social reform movement embodied in anti-slavery, but his story is most powerfully a day-to-day retelling of a group of men who were unwilling to be stifled in their understanding of the requirements in the living of their faith. This Presbyterian seminary was presided over by Lyman Beecher, and several of its students were prominent in the anti-slavery movement of the time. Many of the expelled students followed Theodore Dwight Weld in a body to the new Oberlin College in northeastern Ohio, where they were greeted by faculty and administration members, Charles Grandison Finney and Asa Mahan – thus connecting both the hated anti-slavery movement with doctrinal, revival, and governance issues of the church.

\textsuperscript{47} Goen, C.C. \textit{Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War}. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985, 72-75.
While Lesick does not speak about the schism of 1837, which is beyond the time frame of his narrative, his analysis of the impact of slavery upon the Presbyterian Church is instructive. As he used evangelical theology as the framework for his study, he, too, challenged Marsden’s denial of the impact of the debate over approbation of slavery and its continued existence in the nation on the Presbyterian Church of the 1830’s.

By utilizing both an understanding of and intimate experience with Presbyterians and their peculiar (if not unique) ways of functioning as a body, my paper posits a broader and more nuanced consideration of the nineteenth century Presbyterian church and slavery, influenced by and responding to a similarly troublesome and contentious twenty-first century issue, that of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and trans-gendered persons and their place in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The two issues are not the same, of course, but the division of the church in its response to this societal issue, the process of coping with it, and the ultimate outcome of a perceived necessity to distance oneself from the presenting irritant and its adherents are all too familiar. Today, we have much to learn from 1837 and additionally, the issues faced by churches in 2009 can perhaps be instructive in understanding the church and the world of 1837, leading to the conclusion that slavery, its possible sinfulness and its eradication or retention were far more important than has been generally acknowledged by historians.
c. Overview of Material presented

The argument of this project is based on an understanding and analysis of Presbyterians and how they view their institutions, the values that they profess to find important, how they govern themselves, discuss issues, view themselves in church and society, what their past history has been, as well as an intensive view of the days of the 1837 General Assembly. This will conclude with a section on slavery and its impact on the official business of the denomination, joined by a review of some of the newspaper articles that were generated at the time. Following this final section, there are appendices with relevant documents transcribed for the use of the reader and to give a flavor of the way in which argument was drawn in the 1830’s and earlier, as well as the passions felt by the stakeholders in the slavery and church debate.

Understanding a body of people and their actions is not an easy task 170 years after an event. I would argue, however, that Presbyterians, people of the Book (the Bible) and a written Constitution, have continued today many of the practices and processes of the Presbyterians of an earlier time. There is a reason why Presbyterians identify themselves as a part of the group of denominations and sects of the Reformed Tradition. That name in itself demonstrates that Presbyterians will attempt to hold two values in common, that which is and can be changed or reformed, and that which should remain as it was, the tradition. In an effort to help non-Presbyterians absorb some of the flavor of the group, the second chapter begins with an analysis of four major areas that comprise the Presbyterian ethos. This explication of values adopted and absorbed by many, if not all, Presbyterians aids in demonstrating how surprising
and shocking is the schism that occurred in 1837, as well as the process that led up to the split.

The first essay on Presbyterian values, “Decently and in Order,” traces the way in which Presbyterians tried to live out the biblical admonition that “all things should be done decently and in order.” Living up to this admonition, or breaking it (depending on the point of view) explains a good deal of the process undertaken in the split, the procedures followed before and during General Assemblies, and the discussions which ensued each year. An orderly, calm and quiet process, thoughtfully presented was and is the norm in Presbyterianism. When this normative process was not achieved or the perception was that this norm had been violated, Presbyterians became outraged, loud, and sometimes out of control. Vestiges of this behavior can be experienced today, for Presbyterians tend to be passionate about concerns in their churches.

The second essay pertains to the way in which Presbyterians function as a part of the larger Christian family, understood by them as the Body of Christ. Called, “Schisms and Relations to Other Christians,” this section traces Presbyterian views on ecumenism back to Reformation times and theologian John Calvin, giving some understanding of the way the mainstream of the denomination views itself as only a part of Christianity, a division in the whole Body that Presbyterians hope may someday be repaired. This portion assists in clarifying the action of the General Assembly in

49 I Corinthians 14:40
1801, as it willingly surrendered a portion of its purity of doctrine and even possibly the authority of a portion of its governance in order to further the spread of the faith, as well as the salvation of the individuals of the nation.

“Peace, Unity and Purity,” the longest of these analyses, is the third section. This triumvirate of values appears in the vows for ordination to this day. Appearing as three, there is no obvious priority order given. Yet at times and for certain groups in the church, one or more of these values may seem to carry greater weight. Tracing the use of these terms historically is the purpose of this essay, with the surprising discovery that by the time of the publication of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1833, unity is not a part of the vows to be taken by ministers. As a people of a written constitution which include these vows, and for whom what is promised in a vow is important, it is instructive to realize that not all of these values were given equal weight at all times in the history of the denomination.50

The relationship of Presbyterians to the world is covered in the fourth and final section, “Church and Society.” Again this piece traces the societal connection of the Presbyterian Church to its roots in Calvin, and connects to his theology. As Calvin understood God to be sovereign over all of life, and as God had called the Creation “good” and given humankind dominion over all that was created,51 Calvin taught that

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50 The General Assembly reviewed these three in a major paper at the 217th General Assembly in 2006. The result of that paper, a perception that a way had been found to allow the ordination of avowed practicing homosexuals, and which was approved by the General Assembly commissioners, has caused a number of churches to leave the PCUSA, mostly to join other and more conservative Presbyterian denominations.

51 Genesis, Chapter 1.
dealing with worldly things was both appropriate and important for all the church.
Again, the purpose of this section is to show that Presbyterians had historically and
typically spoken of and to the world through their assemblies and governing bodies.
That a portion of the church later found this to be inappropriate gives credence to the
unusual nature of the topic being discussed, American chattel slavery, and the
capability or propriety of the church speaking out about this issue.

Following this exposition of values is an overview of the history of the
Presbyterian Church that led up to the events of May and June, 1837. This chapter
begins with a short discussion of the ethos in which the church found itself, pointing
out how the very chaotic, unsettled nature of the times seemed to exacerbate the
changing nature of a portion of the flock. This is followed by the history of the
denomination in its European roots, which clarifies the analysis of historians, both from
the nineteenth century and more recent, that where the immigrant Presbyterians
originated was important to the way in which they understood their faith and their
relationship to their fellow members. The chapter on colonial Presbyterianism
highlights the issues that concerned those times, but whose impact was felt years later
in the diversifying church. Experiences of the early Republic and its issues, particularly
concerning ecumenism, issues of unity, and the relation to slavery, form the basis for
the next section. Especially important is the willingness to accept other Reformed
church groups into its fellowship, the way in which the church accommodated the new
people, and their influence on their new parent body. The final section of history is a
more detailed discussion of the three General Assemblies which preceded 1837, those of 1834-36. These three Assemblies and the meetings in between set the stage for all that would happen in 1837. Generally, the same men were involved, the issues were exposed, explained, and strategies for achieving goals were developed, leading to the debacle that was to follow.

The fourth chapter is a description in depth of the 1837 Assembly, following a day-by-day depiction of activity. Looking at these events closely gives an understanding of the ordinariness and orderliness of this revolutionary Assembly, the everyday surrounded by the surprising. The broad-ranging topics discussed are delineated, the actions and reactions of the parties can be seen, ending with the paucity of discussion of slavery. The final section gives a short description of reaction to the event, focused on the structural and governance issues which occurred as a result of the Assembly action, following which nearly half of the church left to form a new denomination, which came to be called the New School. The geography of this new denomination was virtually all northern. While the South was solidly Old School, Old School congregations continued to have a northern presence, centering in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

Chapter 5 is an exposition of the way in which slavery was considered or passed over by the Presbyterian Church. Though not the topic of discussion at every General Assembly, formal actions of the denomination were presented, together with the actions and reactions of Presbyterian churches, their members and governing
bodies. Much of this material is taken from a review of newspapers, as well as the writings of both contemporaneous and recent historians. The function of this chapter is to expose the constant discussion in some church and religious publications about slavery, and the way in which this continual prodding was received by adherents and opponents.

Conclusions are found in Chapter 6. The organization of this chapter uses peace, unity, and purity as its foundation, relating these issues to the need for the Old School to control their importance in the church. Three concerns that beset the church, that is, ecumenism, revivals, and voluntary societies, are again analyzed as issues that could be controlled internally by the Old School. The fourth issue over which they had no control, and which was therefore seen as too dangerous and divisive to handle by the church was slavery. This chapter closes with a short discussion of the issue which faces the Presbyterian Church today, that of the ordination of practicing homosexuals, an issue that affects civil society as well as the religious community.

In considering the 1837 split in the church, I do not deny the concern of church members over issues of structure and governance, but I do not believe that any single disagreement would have been powerful enough or could have garnered sufficient votes to excise a portion of the church without slavery undergirding all the other issues. Concerns about how and where to do mission were impacted by slavery, as were answers to the questions whether slaves were brothers and sisters with souls to be saved or some other form of life. Concerns about revivals and doctrinal issues were
exacerbated by societal unrest over the slavery issue. Concerns about education and the founding of schools, colleges, and seminaries were impacted by how and whether to offer education to slaves. Overarching all else was whether slavery was a sin, and therefore non-sinners should have removed themselves from those practicing the sin of slaveholding.
Chapter 2. The Nature of Presbyterianism and Presbyterians

a. “Decently and in Order”

Being concerned about propriety and particularly desirous to be true to the Bible, Presbyterians had long believed that their institutional life should be consonant with a part of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, which speaks of ways churches might deal with varieties of experiences and gifts of the faith, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” In practice this means that one of the first tasks of a group of Presbyterians newly formed into a congregation or other governing body was to propound a constitution by which it would govern itself, and which would prove the basis for discipline of the body should either individual or group stray from its precepts.

Though the constitution from the established Church of Scotland was available to them and, no doubt used as a model by some of the earliest Presbyterians in the New World, there were also similar documents in other areas in which the Presbyterian churches were not established, but where Presbyterians were dissenters, independents or non-conformists. England, even before the Westminster Assembly, had several documents used for governance: a book of discipline published in Latin and then translated into English in 1574, reissued in Geneva in 1580, revised several times by the synod in London and finally signed at an Assembly and by 500 ministers in 1590. Though Charles Briggs denoted it, “discipline”, the actual title and contents encompass the topics to be found later in sections of the Constitution entitled, “Form of Government.” These include such topics as: Of the

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52 I Corinthians 14:40, as found in The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments Translated out of the Original Tongues, and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised, the Text Conformable to that of the Edition of 1611, Commonly known as the Authorized or King James Version. (Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Company, no date.) 1114.
necessity of a calling; Of the manner of entering and determining a calling...; Of election; Of Preaching; Of the Catechism; Of the Communion; Of Students of Divinity, and their Exercises; Of the censures and so forth. In the section entitled, “Of Elders,” there are a few instructions as to duties, and this statement about the elders: “…they are not to be perpetuall, neither yet easily to be changed.”

Other instructions pertain to what matters are suitable to be spoken of in broader gatherings, who may speak in assemblies and who is to lead them. The leader of the Assembly, designated the “Moderator,” is not a permanent position. Rather, “Hee is alwaies, if it may be conveniently, to be changed.”53 Thus, virtually from the beginning of that group of Christians designated “Presbyterian,” and remembering that Calvin lived from 1509 – 1564, Presbyterians established both theory and practice in several areas; that governance would include both elders and ministers, but that lay leadership would not necessarily be for the entire lifetime of the elder; that business would occur in assemblies, and that those assemblies would be in several levels in order for business to be handled appropriately and so that appeals about decisions could be sent to the next higher body; that leadership was to be temporary, for purposes of order, and to move the business forward, “to procure all things to be done in it godly and quietly, exhorting to meeknesse, moderation of spirit, and forbearing one of another where need shall be…”54

54 Ibid. xiv.
As the first General Assembly held in the United States of America opened on Thursday, May 21, 1789, the newly formed Presbyterians did what to them was most important and orderly, opened the meeting with a sermon and chose a temporary clerk in order to be able to accept commissions from those who would become its members, noting that one who came without credentials could be seated, as the General Assembly wished to “promote the union of churches under their care…”, but made it clear that this was not to be considered a precedent for future behavior. A Moderator was elected, Clerks were chosen and several committees were appointed, including one to deal with rules for the government of the Assembly. By Saturday, May 23, these rules were ready to be voted on, and following some amendments, were adopted. The rules are familiar to anyone who has worked with parliamentary procedure, especially in deliberative assemblies, as sessions, presbyteries, synods and the General Assembly characterize themselves. They basically provide for business to be handled in an orderly and fair fashion, with a moderator who is empowered to make preliminary judgments in the case of disputes, to help the body hear all points of view in turn, a way to amend motions and to divide issues for ease of deliberation and decision. Rule XII provides that, “Every member…shall treat


56 Minutes, 1789-1820, 6.

57 A short history of parliamentary procedure can be found as the introduction to Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised, pages xxv – xlvii. (Robert, General Henry M. Robert and Sarah Corbin Robert, Henry M. Robert III, William J. Evans, Daniel H. Honemann, Thomas J. Balch. Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised. 10th Edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Perseus Publishing,2000 . Of interest here is that rules for assemblages in the British family can be traced to Anglo-Saxon tribes of the fifth century. In common usage from that time, the rules and principles of reasoned debate developed steadily, with many being put in place during the 16th and 17th centuries. These processes were brought to the English colonies, including credentialing members, devising accepted rules, and appointing committees to undertake work on behalf of the body. Thomas Jefferson, as Vice President (1797-1801) devised a set of rules for the Senate, based on the English parliamentary rules. His example was followed by Luther S. Cushing, who published a set of rules for deliberative assemblies which was published in 1845, and finally by Henry Martyn Robert, who worked on parliamentary rules during the Civil War and later, publishing his first version in 1876. Robert’s rules have become the standard rules of parliamentary procedure in use in the PCUSA and elsewhere.
his fellow members…with decency and respect. If a member act disorderly, it shall be the
duty of the Moderator, and the privilege of the other members to call him to order.”58

Provision was also made for anyone who disagreed with a decision to dissent or protest,
and have the reasons for doing so placed within the minutes.

By 1785, as the Synod of New York and Philadelphia was preparing to form itself
into a General Assembly with four synods and sixteen presbyteries, a committee was
appointed to:

…take into consideration, the Constitution of the Church of Scotland, &
other Protestant Churches; and agreeably to the general principles of
Presbyterian Government, compile a system of general rules for the
Government of the Synod, & the several Presbyteries under their inspection;
& the People in their communion, & to make report of their proceeding
herein at the next meeting of Synod.59

In 1787, as they were taking the final steps to form a General Assembly, the
Synod voted to amend, to adopt and to print the “draught of a plan of Government and
discipline.”60 This plan was adopted and the first General Assembly opened under its rules
on May 21, 1789 in Philadelphia.61 Provision for amendment was provided, though it was
not until 1800 that amendments were required to be approved first by the Assembly and
then ratified by presbyteries.62 From 1789 until 1820 the rules were amended several
times, the earliest concerns dealing with the process of discipline, a judicial function, and

58 Minutes, 1789-1820, 8.
59 Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1706-1788. Guy S. Klett, ed. (Philadelphia:
Presbyterian Historical Society, 1976), 388.
60 Minutes (Klett), 628.
61 Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Minutes of the General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from its Organization A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820
62 Ibid. 205.
what form censure should take. Another issue that was considered over several assemblies was whether rules were “standing rules” or were of constitutional nature. Those that were “standing rules” could be changed by the General Assembly alone, while constitutional rules needed presbytery agreement. From 1799 until 1804, this issue was considered, sent to the presbyteries for ratification, and each year it was announced that a few more presbyteries had made their decisions known.

Small amendments were suggested frequently in this time period, sufficient so that the body decided finally to look at and revise the entire document, reporting a number of changes to the Assembly in 1804. These amendments specifically did not include any change to the Confession of Faith or the two Catechisms. Rather, the Assembly looked at the “Form of Government, Directory for Worship, and Forms of process,” as being capable of being changed, “…being left to Christian prudence, and modified by the peculiar circumstances of religious societies…”63 The amendments suggested included clarifying a quorum, defining a synod, finally deciding the issue of constitutional versus standing rules, requiring that officers be “male communicating members in the church in which they are to exercise their office,” concerns about calling pastors, and providing an index to the Constitution.64 Unlike the dilatory response of the prior years on the standing rule/constitutional rule question, 25 of the 33 presbyteries responded with their votes by the Assembly in 1805, and all the suggested amendments passed.65

63 Ibid. 303.
64 Minutes, 1789–1820, 304–5.
65 Ibid. 332.
While changes were made, another edition of the Constitution was evidently not printed, with the result that the first edition was the one in force, necessitating a new edition to be produced, which would include not only the “notes” from previous General Assemblies, but also Scripture proofs. A committee was put into place to work on this new edition in the assembly of 1816. A vote to distribute this new edition for comment and possible amendment by presbyteries was taken in 1819, and a final version was reported for approval at the Assembly in 1820. The task seems to have been difficult, as they stated,

…it has been in many cases far more difficult, not to say sometimes wholly impracticable, to combine the opposite views, and to conciliate the diversified or contradictory wishes of Presbyteries and individuals. In these circumstances the committee have done the best in their power, and have made such modifications of their former report as are in their view best adapted to unite the opinions and promote the order and harmony of the whole Church.

The vote that authorized the printing of this new edition finally settled an ongoing concern as follows: “6. That every chapter, section or article, adopted by a majority of the Presbyteries, shall be considered as a constitutional article, ratified and binding on the whole church.”

From its beginning as a national church in 1789, Presbyterians had organized themselves in an orderly fashion, basing behaviors and practices on a written Constitution, with rules that all would follow under threat of discipline, and that were available to all through printed copies that were authorized by the General Assembly. Actions taken in

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66 Ibid. 628ff.
67 Ibid. 701ff.
68 Ibid. 734.
69 Ibid. 739.
meetings were recorded by the clerks, and minutes were read at the opening of every session of the General Assembly, as well as at other judicatories. Actions were not secret, therefore, and were frequently recorded in great detail and published by religious newspapers, which disseminated the information widely. At every level beyond the session, the minutes of the lower judicatories were read and critiqued for completeness, adherence to rules and policies, as well as for the rectitude and virtue of the actions that were taken. All meetings followed the adopted version of Parliamentary procedure, brought from England, Scotland, and Ireland, and modified as circumstances warranted – but always modified by a vote of the judicatory in open session. So began the life of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America as a church with a national presence, a church which clearly valued its heritage of accomplishing its business “decently and in order.”

b. Schism and Relations to Other Christians

As outsiders, perhaps tolerated - perhaps not, Presbyterians outside of Scotland and Switzerland no doubt learned the necessity to be in relationship with others. John Calvin, their probably inadvertent founding theologian, discussed the issue of leaving the church, working with others in a larger communion, and what should be done if issues arise which might cause schism. In the final Latin edition of his *Institutes of the Christian* 

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70 The actions of the first General Assembly in 1789 show that on the first day, following a sermon by John Witherspoon, appointment of a temporary clerk and enrollment of properly commissioned members, the Assembly appointed committees, among which was a committee to “draw up rules for the government of the General Assembly in their proceedings, and to make report as soon as convenient.” So important were these rules, that “as soon as convenient” became two days later, only after the Assembly expressed great concern over the delay in publishing the newly adopted Constitution of the Presbyterian Church. *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 5-8.
Religion (1559), Calvin is clear as he titles a section of Book IV, “the sin of schism.” The entire title of Book IV is, “The External Means or Aims by Which God Invites Us Into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein.” The section which will be quoted hereafter is from Chapter I of Book IV, entitled, “The True Church With Which As Mother of All the Godly We Must Keep Unity,” and all of its verbiage speaks of the necessity of unity in the church, even using language with which we are familiar as a part of the marriage vows, from Mark 10:9, ‘For what God has joined together, it is not lawful to put asunder, …so that, for those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother.’ Having set the bar very high in his understanding of the unity of the Church, Calvin defines the Church as “the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ.” He further defines the Church by its “marks” as, ‘Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.’ And finally, Calvin writes at the beginning of section 10, “(A church with these marks, however defective, is not to be forsaken, the sin of schism, 10-16).” Throughout Section 12, “Heeding the marks guards against capricious separation,” Calvin states clearly (if long-windedly) that some doctrines are essential in order to be called a Christian:

Such are: God is one: Christ is God and the Son of God: our salvation rests in God’s mercy; and the like. Among the churches there are other articles of doctrine disputed which still do not break the unity of faith….Does this not sufficiently indicate that a difference of opinion over these nonessential matters should in no wise be the basis of schism among Christians? First and foremost, we should agree on all points. But since all men are

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72 Ibid. Vol. II: I, 1. 1012.
somewhat beclouded with ignorance, either we must leave no church remaining, or we must condone delusion in those matters which can go unknown without harm to the sum of religion and without loss of salvation.\footnote{Ibid. Vol. IV: 1, 10ff, 1024-31.}

In this same fashion, Calvin says in subsequent section titles that, “Scandal in the church no occasion for leaving it;” tells the reader how Paul handled problematic folk in the early church; how to have “fellowship with wicked persons;” that “the false claim of perfection comes from distorted opinion;” and finally that, “The imperfect holiness of the church does not justify schism, but affords occasion for the exercise within it of the forgiveness of sins.” Calvin’s idea of a church would seem to be one that practices tolerance toward others who do not profess exactly the same beliefs. Early Presbyterians often followed those precepts.

The commitment to work together with the Anglicans was proposed by Archbishop Ussher in 1641, showing a way in which episcopacy could be retained while presbyterial and synodical government was utilized, along with the willingness of leaders of both parties to work together.\footnote{Briggs, xviiff.} However, with the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658, reactions set in and those persons who desired the purity of the church struggled and won the battle to maintain the distinctives of Presbyterianism, which meant in practice that their ministers became outcasts and members either “conformed” passively or became non-conformists to the rule of the Church of England.
The experience of the Irish Presbyterians was similar to that in England, with virtually all of the ministers following Presbyterian rules being removed from their callings. In Scotland, the Presbyterians were stronger and more stubborn, forcing King James II out of the country, and leading to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which the Protestant William of Orange and Mary came from the Netherlands to become King and Queen. Following their ascendance to the throne, they proclaimed toleration of other Protestant denominations. Through the recognition of denominationalism, the purity of each group won out over the unity of the church universal, establishing an ethos that would have lasting effects in later times.

Bringing together the theme of the conjunction of church and society with that of dealing with the plethora of Protestant sects and denominations, the Synod of New York and Philadelphia were sufficiently concerned about how others thought of them to issue a statement in 1781, which was expunged and then “revived and inserted” in the minutes of 1783 which said,

‘It having been represented to Synod, that the Presbyterian Church suffers greatly, in the opinion of other denominations, from an apprehension, that they hold intolerant principles.—The Synod do solemnly & publicly declare, that they ever have, & still do renounce and abhor the principles of intolerance; & we do believe that every peaceable member of civil society ought to be protected in the full & free exercise of their religion.’77

This understanding of both ecumenical cooperation and civil relations continued at the end of the American Revolution as the Synod in 1786 formally adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith as its confession, but gave leave to candidates for the

77 Klett, 572, 581.
gospel ministry not to subscribe to the 23rd chapter of the Confession in which it “gives authority to the Civil Magistrate in matters of Religion.” The statement continued, “The Presbyterian Church in America considers the Church of Christ as a spiritual Society entirely distinct from the Civil government; & having a right to regulate their own ecclesiastical policy independently on [of] the Interposition of the Magistrate.” Not content with speaking only of civil society, the Synod continued, “…we do not believe that God has been pleased so to reveal & injoin every minute circumstance of ecclesiastic government & discipline as not to leave room for orthodox Churches of Christ, in these minutiae, to differ with charity from one another.”

Until the third decade of the nineteenth century, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was remarkably consistent with its predecessor and sister denominations in Europe in terms of the orderly way in which business was conducted; its concern with doctrinal purity, but only if purity was tempered with tolerance; its concern and involvement in the civil society as an integral part of its understanding of the religious life; and its willingness to work with, live among, and honor the traditions of other Protestant faiths, particularly those with a similar background of the Reformed tradition. It will be seen that the General Assembly of 1837 was to change two centuries of that tradition.

78 Ibid. 604.
c. Peace, Unity, and Purity

Organizing the church in a growing, if young, nation was to attend to many issues, some new and some old. Discipline of wayward members was a large concern of many congregations. The national church also professed its concern for purity. Other concerns were expressed, and were often mirrored in the Constitution, and called the “standards” of the church. It has been shown that the diversity of the membership contributed to a schism in 1741 and compromise was the foundation of the subsequent reunion in 1758, as it was of the earlier Adopting Act of 1729. Woods and others posit a basic divide in the American branch of Presbyterianism, that composed primarily of those from Church of Scotland heritage, an established church, and those who came from or were comfortable with the more flexible and tolerant dissenting heritage of Calvinism from other lands.79

With the new Constitution, the church agreed upon several principles, and the basic understanding of its requirements for membership can be found in this document. It is, therefore, of interest to trace concepts that would prove important to the Presbyterian Church, and which I believe played a part in the split in 1837. Especially important would be those mentioned in the Constitution, concepts that were involved the leadership of the church, and the affirmations required in order to ordain or install ministers, elders and deacons in the presbyteries or local congregations.

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79 Leonard Trinterud is the primary modern historian suggesting this model, however it was mentioned in the histories of the early and mid-nineteenth century as well.
Order for Presbyterians translated itself into written rules that each member could know and follow; a written constitution that included those rules plus one or more statements of belief, known as confessions and/or catechisms; suggested or required ways to worship God; together with written rules for discipline, the ways members and leaders would treat each other if rules were broken.\(^{80}\)

This desire for order, organization, and the necessity for all to understand, as well as follow, the rules under which they lived together, (rules often spoken of as the “covenant” under which they lived), caused the American Presbyterians to develop a set of questions to be answered at the time of becoming a candidate under care, licensure\(^ {81}\), and later at the time of ordination to the ministry, as well as ordination to the eldership or diaconate. These questions were important enough to be placed in the Constitution, and required to be answered affirmatively by each man seeking sinecure or office in the denomination.

This process of orderly, routine examination of each man who wished to serve was found in the Constitution of the Church of Scotland, the form of governance followed by one group of those who came as Presbyterians to the American colonies. The “Form of Church Government,” modeled in the Constitution of the Church of Scotland of the early

\(^{80}\) All of this also implies an educated leadership and laity, which were extremely important to Presbyterians. Education, especially the ability to read, meant that each person could read scripture for themselves, not having to rely on the intercession of a priest to let them know and understand the Word of God. This becomes important to the way in which Presbyterians treated the matter of slavery and of the slaves themselves.

\(^{81}\) Licensure was an intermediate step that took place before ordination. Ordination could only occur if a call to a church was in place, but, while waiting for a call, those who were licensed were permitted to preach as probationers. Licensure was not required for ordination.
nineteenth century, called for offices and officers of the Church which were to include “pastors, teachers, and other church-governors, and deacons.” Teachers or “doctors” were ministers with a specialized calling to teach and could be found in congregations, but also in schools, colleges, and universities. “Other church-governors” were identified as “officers reformed churches commonly call Elders.” Provision was made, by scriptural warrant, for these officers to meet in “several sorts of assemblies, which are congregational, classical, and synodical.” In an orderly way, the duties and membership of each level were identified, and the scripture that pertains to each was footnoted. While deacons and elders were mentioned specifically as officers, there was no mention of a rite of ordination for them. The language used for their role in congregations, however, was the language of ordination, i.e. “In this company some must be set apart to bear office.” In keeping with mentioning no particular rite of ordination, no reference was made to an ordination process for deacons or elders. It is therefore unclear whether elders and deacons were actually “ordained” in the Church of Scotland.

The same is not true of ministers. A number of paragraphs and pages were devoted to the theory and justification of the ordination of ministers, the way in which

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82 *The Confession of Faith; The Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture-Proofs at Large: Together with the Sum of Saving Knowledge, (contained in the Holy Scriptures, and help forth in the said Confession and Catechisms,) and Practical use thereof; Covenants, National and Solemn League; Acknowledgement of Sins, and Engagement to Duties. Directories for Public and Family Worship; Form of Church Government, &c. Of Publick Authority in the Church of Scotland. With Acts of Assembly and Parliament, Relative to, and Approbatory of, the Same. Printed from the Last Edinburgh Edition.* (Philadelphia: Towar and Hogan, 1829), 565.

83 Ibid. 571.

84 Ibid. 572.

85 Ibid. 575. As this constitution was promulgated by the General Assembly, the General Assembly itself was not mentioned. “Synodical” was defined as being “provincial, national, and oecumenical.” (582) “Classical” meant the presbytery, a term which became in other Reformed denominational settings, the classis.

86 Ibid. 573.
ministers were prepared for office, and the process for calling, ordaining and installing
them into congregations. Trials for ordination were encompassed by many rules, beginning
with:

(1.) That the party examined be dealt withal in a brotherly way, with
mildness of spirit, and with special respect to the gravity, modesty, and
quality of every one.87

If all the trials proved to have a positive outcome, the congregation
agreed to call the candidate, and the ordination service took place. The minister
of the presbytery who preached the sermon that day followed the format set out in
paragraph 6 of the “Form of Church-Government,” requiring the ordinand to
comply with a statement about preserving the “truth of the gospel” and the unity
of the church against “error and schism.”88

The concept of unity was important to the Scottish church. The Confession of
Faith included several covenants, including an act of October 14, 1648, the “Solemn
Acknowledgement of Publik Sins and Breaches of the Covenant”. This document included
the following statement concerning the unity of the church:

…we do resolve and solemnly engage ourselves, before the Lord,
carefully to avoid for the time to come all these offences,…we do again
renew our Solemn League and Covenant; promising hereafter to make
conscience of all the duties whereunto we are obliged, …particularly of
these that follow.

1. Because religion is of all things the most excellent and precious,
the advancing and promoting the power thereof against all ungodliness
and profanity, the securing and preserving the purity thereof against all
error, heresy, and schism, and namely, Independency, Anabaptism,
Antinomianism, Arminianism, and Socinianism, Familism, Libertinism,
Scepticism, and Erastianism, and the carrying on the work of uniformity,

87 Ibid. 588.
88 Ibid. 590.
shall be studied and endeavoured by us before all worldly interests, whether concerning the King, ourselves, or any other whatsomever.  

Within this statement was contained both the purity and the unity of the Church, couched in language that emphasized uniformity in matters of religion. Unity was mentioned negatively through the statement against schism, and against all the types of errors that might exist which would militate against unity cast as uniformity.

By contrast, in this same book, the *Form of Church Government*, the governance manual, received very sparse treatment directly, with much of its verbiage being scriptural references as proof texts for each statement. Short sections named the nature of the congregation and its leadership, how they were to work together with an emphasis on orderliness, the necessity to aid the poor, to meet regularly, to exercise discipline, to come together in assemblies of the leadership of more than one church, and to provide for lay leadership of elders and deacons in addition to ministers.

In this relatively short provision of rules, the process for the ordination of ministers was given importance. Simply and clearly defined, it said, “Ordination is the act of a presbytery”. In order to be ordained, a man had to have a call to a congregation and be examined by the presbytery. That examination included credentials, degrees from a university, proof of his “taking the Covenant of the three kingdoms”, of his being “twenty-four years” of age, and that his life was “of such holiness as is requisite in a minister of the

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89 Ibid. 516-517.
90 Ibid. 585. This simple statement might be construed to mean that, though elected by the congregation, elders and deacons were not “ordained” in the 18th century Church of Scotland.
gospel." Further he was required to be competent in Greek and Hebrew testaments, as well as Latin, though “logick and philosophy” might be a substitute for the languages. Following exegesis of scriptures, preaching, inquiring into his suitability for the position desired (which process was expected to take two days), he was sent out to the calling congregation to preach three days, and consult with the members. Following all this, a public notice of his calling was to be posted in order for the church members to appear before the presbytery and state if, in fact, they wished to call this man and assist in his ordination. If all was found in order, the ordination took place at a convenient time and place during a full service, and a further examination by questioning took place in front of the congregation, under the following understanding:

After the sermon, the minister who hath preached shall, in the face of the congregation, demand of him who is now to be ordained, concerning his faith in Christ Jesus, and his persuasion of the truth of the reformed religion, according to the scripture; his sincere intentions and ends in desiring to enter into this calling; his diligence in praying, reading, meditation, preaching, ministering the sacraments, discipline, and doing all ministerial duties towards his charge; his zeal and faithfulness in maintaining the truth of the gospel, and unity of the church against error and schism; his care that himself and his family may be unblameable, and examples to the flock; his willingness and humility, in meekness of spirit, to submit unto the admonitions of his brethren, and discipline of the church; and his resolution to continue in his duty against all trouble and persecution.92

The two doctrines that stand out again are purity and unity, neither of which was to be contravened by the newly ordained. The penalty for breaching any of these requirements was to submit to the discipline of the church, - first to what might be said to him by elders and other ministers, and then to be judged through the disciplinary code of

91 Ibid. 588.
92 Ibid. 590.
the church as it was outlined in the Constitution. In this document, however, these “rules” appear as concepts, not as the actual questions to be uniformly asked of every ordinand.

By contrast to the Scottish practices, ordination came into the colonies under a new constitution particular to a new situation. This was a new church, not simply the Scottish church planted in a new place. A different procedure was developed, though a procedure which clearly was derived from its predecessors. While Presbyterian churches possibly were founded as early as 1614 and definitely by 1629, a regional presbytery is first noted in 1705 or 1706. The very first item of business noted in the minutes of the newly formed Presbytery in 1706 deals with the ordination of a candidate. It is not stated under what rules or by whose auspices this ordination occurred, but the familiar pattern of request for ordination by a candidate, educational requirements, preaching skill, familiarity with scripture and its various languages, showed that these newly arrived immigrants were familiar with the churches of their former homelands. By 1785, as the Synod of New York and Philadelphia was preparing to form itself into a General Assembly with four synods and sixteen presbyteries, a committee was appointed to:

…take into consideration, the Constitution of the Church of Scotland, & other Protestant Churches; and agreeably to the general principles of Presbyterian Government, compile a system of general rules for the Government of the Synod, & the several Presbyteries under their inspection; & the People in their communion. & to make report of their proceeding herein at the next meeting of Synod.

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93 Briggs, 87, 92.
94 Klett, 1. The first pages of these old minutes are missing, and therefore there is confusion about the exact dates. The record begins in the middle of a sentence, but clearly is dealing with the “tryals for ordination” of a man named John Boyd.
95 Klett, 388.
In 1787, the Synod voted to amend, to adopt and to print the “draught of a plan of Government and discipline.”\textsuperscript{96} The first General Assembly opened under these rules on May 21, 1789 in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{97}

Business at the first Assembly was transacted, of course, but the task undertaken immediately following the presenting of commissioners’ credentials, completing business assigned by the former Synod of New York and Philadelphia, and providing for the publication of major parts of the minutes, was to send a letter to all the synods concerning items of importance. Mentioned in the letter were items such as the way the body would help to pay the expenses of commissioners and mandating that synods each year submit informational statistics about churches, membership and ministers. The first item in the letter, presumably the most important and given priority of place, was as follows:

The dignity of our church, its weight and influence in the United States, and even the utility of its ordinances, to the great ends of religion, will depend much on the unity of our counsels; and on the order and efficiency of our government. While the interest of religion ought to be our first and ruling object, we ought not to forget how necessary it is, for that great purpose, to preserve our character as a body and our consequence in the republic, in comparison with other denominations of Christians. Without a common intelligence and concert in our measures, our respectability will be diminished; and our efforts for the public good, and for the promotion of religion, will be weakened by becoming divided. Division of sentiment, and, perhaps, in the end, alienation of mind, will result from division of counsels, and the want of concert, in that great source of power, which ought to pervade and unite the whole body.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid. 628.
\textsuperscript{97} Minutes, 1789 to A.D. 1820, 2.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid. 9-10.
Unity was presented as a value as high as that of purity, and the desire for the peace of the church became evident throughout the early disputes between members and churches, churches and presbyteries, and, even occasionally in the issue of synods and their boundaries. Unity of voice and action was presented here as a tool of evangelism. A unified voice was deemed respectable and of first importance in order to pass on their message and concern, a message which was to be found “in the republic” as well as in the church. The “efforts for the public good” were mentioned before advancing religion, demonstrating the Presbyterians’ belief in the body politic, which is part of the realm of God. This short paragraph also showed a lively concern with their public image, and with the way they would be perceived in comparison with other bodies of Christians.

From 1789 until 1820 the rules (constitutional or standing) were amended several times, but reprinting of the Confession of Faith and the rules evidently did not occur. Confusion about the authority of the rules became noticeable and eventually an amended version of the Constitution was printed in 1820, after the usual years of preparation, amendment and denomination-wide comment and voting on the proposed amendments. Peace, unity and purity were values that were affirmed in the 1820 Form of Government in several ways. The duties of the various governing bodies, called “judicatories” at this time, were carefully delineated. For the session, the duties of ruling elders were the following:

The Church session is charged with maintaining the spiritual government of the congregation; for which purpose, they have power to inquire into the knowledge and Christian conduct of the members of the church; to call before them offenders and witnesses, being members of their own congregation, and to introduce other witnesses, where it may be necessary to bring the process to issue, and when they can be procured to attend; to receive members into the church; to admonish, to rebuke, to suspend, or exclude from the sacraments,
those who are found to deserve censure; to concert the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the congregation; and to appoint delegates to the higher judicatories of the church.99

Many of these duties involved discipline, a judicial posture, consonant with maintaining the purity of the church. The elders who exercised this rule, unlike those in the predecessor Scottish church, had to answer questions specified in the Constitution in a chapter entitled “Of Electing and Ordaining Ruling Elders and Deacons”, including question #5, “Do you promise to study the peace, unity and purity of the church?”100 No promise is extracted to practice these values, knowing that all are fallible and will inevitably sin, but if the practice was not deemed adequate, a disciplinary process could follow.

Even more attention was paid to the process for preparing candidates for the ministry, examining them for suitability, and then ordaining them in an orderly fashion. Ordination of ministers was conceived as a process, the first part of which was “to license probationers to preach the Gospel,”101 allowing them to practice their trade and subsequently to be permitted to seek ordination upon receipt of a call from a congregation. For licensure, credentials similar to those for ordination were required, though some requirements could be eased such as that of a bachelor’s or master’s degree, which could be fulfilled by presenting, “at least, authentic testimonials of his having gone through a regular

100 Ibid. 367. Deacons were ordained as well, using the same questions with title changes where appropriate.
101 Ibid. 369.
course of learning.”

In the requirements mentioned for the licentiate, there was an emphasis on learning and knowledge as most important, “Because it is highly reproachful to religion, and dangerous to the church, to entrust the holy ministry to weak and ignorant men…” After considerable examination, these men submitted themselves to four questions asked of them by the moderator of the presbytery. Question #3 was, “Do you promise to study the peace, unity and purity of the church?” The Constitution then proceeded to detail the way in which this probationer could proceed to become a fully ordained minister.

The method, means and timing of being called to a particular church were presented in detail in the Constitution, all leading to ordination. There was more careful work looking at credentials, discerning if adequate knowledge of Greek and Hebrew could be demonstrated, along with “such other branches of learning as to the presbytery may appear requisite;” knowledge of the polity, governance and discipline of the church, and lastly preparation for preaching and teaching the “word of God.” On the day of the ordination, the questions to be asked increased in number to eight.

Comparing the questions asked of the different groups, i.e. elders and deacons, licentiates, and ministers of the Gospel, shows some interesting parallels and differences. For all the groups, the first question was the same, asking the candidate if he accepted the Scriptures as the word of God and the “only infallible rule of faith and practice?”

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102 Ibid. 370.
103 Ibid. 370.
104 Ibid. 372.
105 Ibid. 377-378.
second question also was the same question, that the candidate “receive and adopt” the confession of faith (the Westminster Confession) as “containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.” Question 3 for ordinands was also the same, asking if the candidate accepted the government and discipline of the church. As stated previously, the third question for the licentiate was the same as the fifth question for the elder/deacon candidates, that is, a mandate to “study” the peace, unity and purity of the church.

Strangely, however, the peace, unity and purity of the church were greatly changed when it affected the vows that minister ordinands will take. In both the 1821 and 1833 editions of the Constitution, the sixth question for ministers changed significantly and differed substantially from that asked of ruling elders and deacons and of licentiates. It was:

6. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel, and the purity and peace of the church; whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account? 106

The concept of unity is gone completely, only the peace and purity retained. Purity is actually mentioned twice, as “maintaining the truths of the Gospel” is a statement of orthodoxy, that there are truths and they are to be maintained against both persecution and opposition. I have not been able to locate any intentionality, any hidden machinations behind this change, this dropping of one part of the three-part value system. However, with a body of people as intentional about words, where discourse, discussion and argumentation was of primary importance, where each concept was continually contested,

the omission of this concept is telling. Unity was so important that it was emphasized several times in the Scottish constitution. Unity was so important that it was a part of the first communication, almost the first item of business, of the newly organized General Assembly. Unity was important enough to state in Chapter VIII (Of Church Government, and the several kinds of judicatories), “...we embrace in the spirit of charity, those Christians who differ from us, in opinion or in practice...”\(^{107}\) Yet, as ministers were asked to take vows of ordination, which bind them to the body and dedicate their lives to the church, unity was no longer mentioned.

Chapter X described the responsibilities and duties of the presbytery. Among other duties it stated the following:

> …to resolve questions of doctrine or discipline seriously and reasonably proposed; to condemn erroneous opinions which injure the purity or peace of the church…\(^{108}\)

Again, there was no mention of unity in the duties of the presbytery – or in the duties of the synod, which were remarkably slender in number and responsibility. Only in the responsibilities and powers of the General Assembly could be found a hint concerning a valuing of unity. Among the statements “of reproving, warning, or bearing testimony against error in doctrine, or immorality in practice...” is found the phrase requiring the Assembly to be active in “…suppressing schismatical contentions and disputations...”\(^{109}\) Responsibility for the unity of the church was required only of candidates for the ministry, persons ordained as deacons or elders, and the General Assembly. For ministers whose

\(^{107}\) *The Constitution of 1827*, 353.


\(^{109}\) Ibid. 364.
membership rested in the presbytery and for the presbytery itself, unity was left out in favor of purity (defined as right thinking, action, or practice) and peace, the absence of conflict. Ministers who have ceased to “study” or be concerned with unity, may find themselves sacrificing unity in favor of purity and peace in the church, as happened in 1837.

d. Church and Society

Tracing “peace, unity, and purity” through the Constitution and early years of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America does not mean that these were the only values given weight and importance these five decades.110 Unlike some other Christian groups or sects, the Presbyterian Church followed the lead of John Calvin in believing that God’s rule and realm included all of life, including the secular. While the American Presbyterian Church never became or desired to become a theocracy, church members and judicatories displayed an interest in and willingness to speak about and to be involved in the world in which they lived. Additionally, Presbyterians believed that the state ought to protect and support freedom of religious belief. First in 1781, and again in 1783, the Synod said, “The Synod do solemnly & publicly declare, that they ever have, & still do renounce and abhor the principles of intolerance; & we do believe that every peaceable member of civil society ought to be protected in the full & free exercise of their religion.”111

110 The 1837 split in the church occurred 48 years after the founding of the General Assembly.
111 Klett, 581.
Earlier, in 1739, the Synod addressed the Governor of Virginia, asking for “Liberty of their Consciences” to worship in new settlements in “remote Parts of your Government,” as people who “have upon all occasions manifested an unspotted Fidelity to our gracious Sovereign King George [II].”\textsuperscript{112} This display of loyalty was somewhat diminished by 1758, when the Synod of New York harangued the same king concerning, “….a potent, prevailing & cruel Enemy; - The divided State of these Colonies; - the Abounding of Profanity, Luxury, Infidelity, Error & Ignorance…” and implored King George II (and all his family) to … “solemnly endeavour sincere and thorough Reformation.”\textsuperscript{113} At this same meeting, the Synod approved an overture concerning the ongoing French and Indian War in which they prayed for “a Blessing on his Majestie’s Armaments by Sea & Land, in order to procure a lasting and honourable Peace, and in particular, for the success of all our intended Expeditions in America…”\textsuperscript{114}

And while no record exists that the Synod of New York and Philadelphia addressed the King on the subject of the hated Stamp Act, in 1766 the Synod did pass “an Address… to our Sovereign, on the joyful Occasion of ye. Repeal of ye. Stamp Act and thereby a Confirmation of our Liberties…”\textsuperscript{115}

This joyful attitude was distinctly abated in a long pastoral letter sent by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia to its constituents, with 500 copies to be printed for the public. In this letter, the Synod spoke of facing “all the horrors of a civil war

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. 158.  
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. 333.  
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid. 345.  
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid. 423.
th[roughout this great Continent,” but while wishing for peace, wished to prepare for the reality of a different outcome. This long letter was written in the usual careful, considered Presbyterian fashion, in which the underlying message was carefully worded, but clear. The writers were addressing their readers in the stance of “men and citizens,” asking them to “prepare themselves to be good soldiers,” although “it is well known…that we have not been instrumental in inflaming the minds of the people, or urging them to acts of violence.” In speaking about the King, however, the letter adjured its readers to:

“let every opportunity be taken to express your attachment and respect to our Sovereign King George, and to the revolution principles by which his august family was seated on the British throne. We recommend, indeed, not only allegiance to him from duty and principle, as the first magistrate of the empire, but esteem and reverence for the person of the Prince, who has merited well of his subjects on many accounts, and who has probably been misled into the late and present measures by those about him; neither have we any doubt, that they themselves have been in a great degree deceived by false information from interested persons residing in America.”

Having professed allegiance, and counseled caution, the writers also advised maintaining unity among “all the colonies” as “nothing can be more manifest than that the success of every measure depends on its being inviolably preserved…” because “… there is no example in history, in which civil liberty was destroyed, and the rights of conscience preserved entire.” Having spoken of the probable coming battles, and having exhorted their constituents to act with mercy, justice and “a spirit of humanity,” the letter concluded by saying, “That man will fight most bravely, who never fights till it is necessary, and who ceases to fight, as soon as the necessity is over.”

A most Presbyterian document,

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116 Klett, 543-46.
carefully and cautiously worded, not wishing to embark upon a dreaded task, but a
document that counsels care and prudence should the task become necessary.

While most actions of the Synod dealt with spiritual and religious matters
appropriate to the church, the body never hesitated to speak to or about matters in the
secular arena, or even to allow ministers to serve in secular posts, if that proved necessary.
John Witherspoon, the first Moderator of the General Assembly, was also the only minister
to sign the Declaration of Independence as a delegate to the Continental Congress from
New Jersey. Witherspoon followed Calvin, who not only addressed the monarchs of his
day, but, in his introduction to the Institutes, spoke directly about his belief in the “civil
polity” in which “…to entertain a thought of its extermination is inhuman barbarism; it is
equally as necessary to mankind as bread and water, light and air, and far more excellent.”
Calvin alluded to individual responsibility for secular government in the next few
paragraphs as he said, “Wherefore no doubt ought now to be entertained by any person that
civil magistracy is a calling not only holy and legitimate, but far the most sacred and
honorable in human life.” 117

Of course, most of the actions of the Synod and the subsequent General
Assembly were religious in character, and even the discussions concerning secular
topics had a religious basis and rationale, that of God’s sovereignty over the whole of
life. The first General Assembly in 1789, as one of its first acts, corresponded with
George Washington, commending his past and present service. Washington responded

Company, 1950. 46-47.
with a letter of appreciation that was appended to the General Assembly minutes in 1790. Following this, the Assembly dealt with issues in the secular life of the country, i.e. canals and the post office, both of which operated on Sunday; then with temperance, with public morality, with issues of liberty and law, with education for everyone, and with many kinds of justice and the welfare of citizens, and even non-citizens. Unlike the statements of the Old School Presbyterians and the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, an earlier church did not find it to be unbiblical or inappropriate to be concerned in matters of the civil polity.
Chapter 3. Past and Present Bring the Future: the context that led to 1837

a. 1837 – Annuus horribilis?

The world of 1837 was one of movement, innovation, and change, following years in which the pace of change accelerated, causing some to be concerned that the old values would not survive. As 1837 dawned, Presbyterian Andrew Jackson was President of the United States. Jackson had ushered in a new era and his time in office has been viewed as democratizing, presumed to be a good thing for all by those looking back at the times, but sometimes frighteningly out of control by those who lived through it. Harry L. Watson characterizes the average American as “suspicious of rapid change” and desirous of “social stability.” Social stability seemed hard to achieve, for the exuberant times and the economic changes also brought that most difficult of problems, the enslavement of Africans and their African-American descendants, to the forefront of issues to be faced by the body politic. Expanding rather than disappearing, the uproar caused by discussion about slavery was exacerbated by news of and rumors about attempted slave rebellions, while with the opening of the West arguments ensued about the spreading of slavery throughout the newly settled areas. Watson particularly highlights the question of slavery as one that needed to be coped with due to the danger that it could rend the union of the states.

The influence of Martin Van Buren on the nation was not as great by the advent of the 1837 General Assembly in May as that of Jackson, as he did not take office until

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119 Ibid. 8.
March of that year. At his inauguration on March 4, 1837, Martin Van Buren may have believed that he would be able to calm the fears of his slaveholding constituents by announcing his policy on the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, a topic which had generated much discussion in churches and innumerable petitions to Congress, leading to the placing of a gag rule to assure that Congressional time would not be taken by debating, or even reading, petitions concerning slavery. The reaction from anti-slavery adherents was swift. “It is the greatest political blunder he ever made,” said the New York Evangelist. The Emancipator responded, “IT IS USURPATION AND TYRANNY.”

Slavery, abolition and anti-slavery of many varieties continued to engage the body politic and the life of many churches. There was a concerted effort to change national policies on slavery, primarily those concerned with the slave trade in general and its presence in Washington, D.C., which was felt to be the only area where the Federal Government had jurisdiction and therefore capacity to change the policies on slavery. This effort was seen in the plethora of petitions, many of them organized and sent by women, by churches, and by anti-slavery societies, that were submitted to the House of Representatives in Washington. The result of this petition onslaught was resistance and the eventual passage of a “gag” rule in the House of Representatives in 1836 and renewed thereafter, which was constantly tested by John Quincy Adams, and which was imitated by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church.

120 New York Evangelist, March 11, 1837, p. 44. The full article can be found in the appendix.
121 The political background is well-documented in Leonard Richards, The Slave Power.
Some began to think of separation, both in the federal union and in the life of the church. The possibility of splitting the union in two was not a new concept. In the national battle over nullification of the national compact in 1832-33, citizens were reminded once more of the newness and fragility of the bonds of the Republic. James George, in an entire chapter tracing the notion of secession, quoted the constitutions of the original states arguing that the states ceded a part, but not all of their sovereignty to the union. George quotes a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in the state of Pennsylvania as having said, “But in this Constitution, the citizens of the United States appear dispensing a part of their original power in what manner and in what proportion they think fit. They never part with the whole; and they retain the right of recalling what they part with.”

Further, George tells of a gathering, called the Hartford Convention, called during the war of 1812 by Massachusetts to discuss items of mutual interest with others of the New England states, particularly about a perceived lack of interest in or concern about what was happening in New England during the war. Two states, Connecticut and Rhode Island formally accepted the invitation, though individuals were also present from New Hampshire and Vermont. Some delegates, especially those from Connecticut, advocated seceding from the Union, due to their anger over the lack of support from the federal government. New Englanders complained that they were generating revenues that were being used to support and protect the Mid-Atlantic and Southern states, instead of receiving sufficient aid themselves. Meeting at Hartford on December 14, 1814, the deliberations produced a declaration that it was not time to advocate the splintering of the newly formed

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123 Ibid. 22.
union of states. There remained, however, many issues that caused difficulties in the federation as it was currently constituted, among which was the giving of extra representation to the Southern slaveholding states by means of the three-fifths clause. In part, the declaration said of this constitutional provision, “It has proven unjust and unequal in its operation. Had this effect been foreseen the privilege would probably not have been demanded; certainly not conceded.” In the civil realm as in the church, the possibility of schism was close, whether by secession of one part of the body or perhaps by forcible removal of an offending part of the body.

The change that began with Jackson included an increasing experience of popular expression and participation in the choosing of leaders, and the expectation that part of citizenship meant voting privilege and exercise, an expectation that caused alarm among those who were opposed to slavery but didn’t wish to allow freed slaves to have either equal rights of citizenship or free movement in society. This growing and developing expectation only added to the uncertainty and chaos of the world of 1837. For Presbyterians, preferring life to be at least somewhat predictable, to be able to worship and do their business “decently and in order” seemed ever more difficult and yet ever more important in the proper preservation of the faith.

Taken in concert with the evolving and changing economic developments, the early 1830’s were fluid times, in which old traditions might be valued, but new realities were necessarily going to cause massive disruption. Not only a time of tension as democratic ideas conflicted with older ideas of aristocracy, natural or otherwise, but also a
new commercial and manufacturing world faced the old world of agriculture, the raw West confronted the older and staid East, and the religious world governed by the heart faced that of the rational and thinking head. This explosive newness was combined with a world in which influence of the next-door neighbor was being supplanted by communication from a great distance, by canal and newspaper. No longer could there be an assumption that family or personal knowledge of nearby neighbors together with common values would be a unifying force. Rather, the “imagined community” that Benedict Anderson\textsuperscript{124} has described would develop. Staying together would depend on how strong were the relationship and familial ties, or whether remaining together was to be the result of keeping the whole small, pure, and homogeneous. The rhetoric was about liberty, as fought and died for and as enshrined in official documents, while much of the exercise of governing was found in jockeying for power. A dichotomy in when and whether to exercise power or to follow ideals is reflected in both the actions and in the contemporary rhetoric of the religious men of the Presbyterian Church in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Examining Andrew Jackson’s approach to governing and the nature of the polity, Watson specifies “equality” as a value that Jackson wished to preserve, which demonstrated the worth of each person in a democracy, and which resonated with Calvin’s emphasis on “parity,” the concept that ministers and elders alike, the clergy and the laity, should share in governance, together with the understanding that the laity had just as much access to the Godhead as the ministers, that the intervention of a priest was not necessary

for prayers to be heard. Even Watson’s statement that “Jackson and his followers professed little faith in the benefits of a ‘natural aristocracy’ (which) resonates with Presbyterian beliefs in the universal sinfulness of all humans, spoken of as “total depravity.”¹²⁵ Thus Jackson in some ways mirrored the movements of the Presbyterian Church and in some ways caused upset and the confusion that may accompany change. Jackson, in his insistence upon virtue in governance combined with his understanding of the fallen nature of each person, was simply reflecting his Presbyterian background, which in its complexity, intellectual focus, and nuanced behavioral requirements seemed well-suited to cope with the issues of the day. Even in his unwillingness to emancipate his slaves, Jackson seemed to reflect his time and belief. After all, to Jackson, as well as a considerable portion of the Presbyterian Church, not only was slavery biblical, it was also constitutional, and solely the business of the states. Watson acknowledges this in his assessment of Jackson’s term in office, “White men gained rights in Jacksonian American, but men of color lost them.”¹²⁶

The presence of freed blacks in northern communities, as well as concerns about the continuation of slavery and the possibility of freeing many more slaves, caused great commotion and uproar. In “Gentlemen of Property and Standing”: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America, Leonard Richards traced mob violence of white Northerners who attacked abolitionists and blacks.¹²⁷ Richards posited that the reason for the populace

¹²⁵ Watson, 12.
¹²⁶ Ibid. 13.
¹²⁷ Richards, Leonard L. “Gentlemen of Property and Standing”: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970. While Richards places no particular emphasis on or even mention of this fact, many of the key persons of his narrative were Presbyterian, or influenced by and worked closely with Presbyterians, including Arthur Tappan, E.P. Lovejoy, J. G. Birney, Charles Grandison
choosing this form of violent protest and action seemed to be due to the agitation produced by William Lloyd Garrison and his *Liberator* which moved antislavery thought away from efforts at colonization, of forcing (or enabling) free colored people to leave the country and be transported back to Africa. In exploring the antislavery mob actions, Richards found that where the issues were most contested, where there were large and fairly equal numbers of people on opposite sides of the issue and where each side was unyielding in their efforts to persuade others through polemics and violent rhetoric and reactive and stubborn when faced with a mob, the scene was ripe for mob action and violence. The success of this venture pointed to the racism experienced everywhere, North as well as South. Much like Richards, Wyatt-Brown says, “Anti-abolitionism in the North owed much more to anti-racial feelings than to outright approval of the slave system. In most minds there was no contradiction between deploring southern custom and fearing Negro mixing at home.”

When colonization seemed to be no longer a viable option due to sudden lack of financial support in 1833, its adherents took this opportunity to fight for their cause and its continued existence by using mob action.

Richards alluded to the concerns of “racial assimilation” also called “amalgamation,” or “mulattoization,” or “mongrelization,” that supporters of slavery accused the adherents of various types of antislavery movements of professing. During this

Finney, Theodore Dwight Weld, Beriah Green, the Rev. Joshua Dansforth, Gerrit Smith, Lyman Beecher and his son Edward, the Rev. Henry G. Ludlow (pastor of Spring Street church in New York City), Rev. Samuel Cox (known as favoring integration in the church), Elizur Wright Jr., the Rev. Oliver Wetmore and his son, Edmund described as “staunch Presbyterians” and the Rev. Joshua Lacy Wilson, pastor of 1st Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, which remained staunchly Old School following the 1837 excision.


129 Ibid. 33, 26
time of mob action, many rumors were put forth - of ministers performing mixed-racial wedding ceremonies, encouraging blacks to “assume ‘airs,’” abolitionists wanting their daughters to be married to black men, or even of abolitionists themselves marrying black women in order to bring peace through intermingling of black and white blood. All these rumors were designed to offend the sensibilities of the proper middle-class citizens.

Beyond the issue of amalgamation, was “foreign” influence, especially that of Great Britain. In analyzing the make-up of the mobs in Utica, New York and Cincinnati, Richards found that many of the abolitionists who were part of the mob that reacted to the attacks were actually foreign-born, especially from British backgrounds. “While about 85 percent of the rioters could trace their American ancestry back at least three generations, one-third of the abolitionists in both Utica and Cincinnati were born abroad.” This meant that they were perceived to be less immersed in the traditions, laws and social context of which they were now a part, that they were not assimilated enough to honor fully the past compromises and sectional understandings that made slavery an integral part of the history of the land in which they now lived. Further, “The image of antislavery as subversive served to legitimize anti-abolition behavior. Anti-abolition mobs saw themselves defending the established order against the encroachments of internal subversives and foreign agents. …The view of antislavery men as subversive Tories allowed anti-abolitionists not only to visualize themselves as guardians of the past, defenders of orthodoxy, and protectors of the Union, but also to proclaim their faith in

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130 Ibid. 142.
freedom, democracy, and equal rights.”

They were therefore able to see themselves as righteous and patriotic, and able to ignore the aspects of slavery that did not equate with the rhetoric that proclaimed the equality of and freedom for all men that was the result of the successful Revolution fought so recently.

Richards’ analysis showed that mob violence in numbers of incidents followed the new anti-slavery organizations that were formed, first in 1835-36, second in 1836-37, and that Ohio had more anti-abolitionist violence than any other state, although incidents occurred throughout the country. The 1830’s were particularly violent with the greatest number of the mob events. The years 1833, 1834, and 1835 were found to have the largest sudden increase in violence, with the apex of the Northern anti-abolition riots occurring from 1834 to 1837. These riots dropped precipitately from 64 in 1836 and 41 in 1837 to four only in each year 1838-40. Some actions involved going after free Negroes, their dwellings and their places of business first, and then attacking those whites who were supporting them in anything other than colonization. It is plain that some decent and orderly Presbyterians would not be comfortable living in the midst of chaotic and dangerous times and might seek ways to lessen the possibility of such a mob action touching their lives.

131 Ibid. 69-70.
132 Ibid. 78-79.
133 Ibid. 13.
134 Ibid. 7.
135 Ibid. 156-157.
Richards also noted the explosion in the technology of printing that allowed the easy dissemination of tracts, petitions, and newspapers with antislavery and opposing anti-abolition materials throughout the country. Aiding mightily in this process, according to Richard John, was the postal system, supporting the government in its effort to educate all citizens in becoming knowledgeable voters, enabling all (at least all white men who had means) to be able to participate in public affairs. The support given by the federal government through the postal system was to make the sending of newspapers either free or extremely inexpensive, an early Internet of information found throughout the country. John cited James Madison, in the support for the Post Office Act of 1792, as believing that “improvements in the means of communication would more or less automatically promote the public good”, by “contraction” of the size of the country and so would be “favorable to the public good.” Madison’s essay, “Public Opinion,” stated “Public opinion sets bounds to every government” becoming the “real sovereign in every free one.” And what better means in the 1830’s to disseminate and form public opinion over a wide area than the newspaper.136

These newspapers were of every sort, covering a wide variety of points of view, and in conversation with each other through the widespread newspaper “exchanges,” which brought the country closer together as the editors quoted from and reacted editorially to the articles of other papers. Exchange newspapers made up between one-third and 1/2 of the total weight of the mail in the 1820’s and by the 1840’s all newspapers published in the

United States “received free of charge an average of 4,300 different exchange newspapers each year.”

John emphasized the importance of newspapers rather than letters as sources of information about what people really knew, saying, “Following the passage of the Post Office Act of 1792, with its generous subsidies for the newspaper press, thousands of Americans grew accustomed to receiving a newspaper through the postal system, while they seldom, if ever, received a letter that had been sent through the mail.” Post offices contained much reading matter, especially religious tracts that had been addressed to postmasters, and would be displayed so that anyone could pick one up, read it and take it home. While subscribers paid for the newspapers, they were seen as accessible to anyone in the community upon their arrival at the post office, and some postmasters even set up a reading room for patrons.

This accessibility to information widely disseminated, John found, did not extend to the black population, slave or free. Blacks were excluded from the postal system because there was a belief that they could or would start a slave rebellion. “Slave mail carriers were known to have carried news of a Virginia slave rebellion throughout the countryside in 1800, and public figures were determined to prevent them from ever doing so again.” Free blacks were also prohibited from becoming postmasters or from reading newspapers because they were the “most active and intelligent,” and because they might

137 Ibid. 37.
138 Ibid. 318.
139 Ibid. 154.
learn of all their rights. Postal officials favored Southern slaveholders, even if they did not themselves own slaves, and “sought to curry favor with the politically powerful slaveholding South,”¹⁴⁰ a stance which could be seen as the Postmaster General refused to allow Northern Anti-Slavery materials to be sent to Southern states in the 1830’s. This action, together with the passing of the gag rules in Congress in 1836, thus denying citizens the cherished right of petition, led to the issue of free speech becoming bound up in the issues of abolition and antislavery. In response, the “abolitionist techniques of agitation” of “pamphleteering, petitions, conventions, speeches, and sermons reached their “fullest development” in 1836 and 1837.¹⁴¹ The techniques were not unlike those used by the revivalists.

In an example of the way in which newspapers exchanged and discussed information from other areas of the country, the Ohio Observer for October 15, 1835 ran the following news from the Boston Courier:

“The Richmond Enquirer asks most pathetically,—Will not the North vindicate the rights of the South?” To which we reply—“With what face can the South call upon the North for vindication, while they continue to insult and abuse us in every way that ingenuity in the use of language can devise?”

We have a word for the Enquirer, and other southern prints. If they expect aid from the North in vindication of Southern rights, they must lower their arrogant and dictatorial tone, and leave our legislators to enact such laws as the Constitution allows, and prudence and patriotism dictate. Those prints have made more abolitionists within three months than all the abolitionists themselves had been able to make for three years.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 140-41.
¹⁴¹ Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan...,172.
¹⁴² Ohio Observer. Printed every Saturday in Hudson, Ohio. October 15, 1835, 3.
Slavery, however, was not the only concern noted by the newspapers in the 1830’s. A major financial crisis occurred in 1837, adding to the unrest of the average citizen. Starting in New Orleans, and involving the cotton markets, as well as banks and speculators, the panic spread to New York and New England, causing job loss and bank closings that affected many. While the churches were not primarily affected, money for missionaries and voluntary societies was in short supply, and the education of ministers in colleges or institutions affected by the panic was felt to be at risk.

The churches of the North had been affected most recently by revivals, with their challenging of the old ways of approaching the faith, bringing emotions into the logical, argumentative, intellectual faith of the orthodox Calvinist. Interest in religion was great in the country, particularly in parts of New England, Western New York and Ohio north and south. Bertram Wyatt-Brown spoke of the promotion of revivals, voluntary benevolent (and inter-denominational) associations for all sorts of purposes bound up with a “modified Calvinism”. Following the ending of the Congregational establishment of the state of Connecticut in 1818, together with the burgeoning of Unitarianism, the movement of Harvard to Unitarianism, and Yale to a moderate Calvinism, this “liberalizing trend” was naturally counteracted by the orthodox becoming more firm in their convictions.\textsuperscript{143} Support of religious projects and institutions was widespread. Wyatt-Brown wrote particularly of the Tappan brothers of New York, Lewis and Arthur, and their support of Oberlin College and Lane Seminary within the bounds of the Synod of the Western Reserve, and anti-slavery causes in many places. The Tappan brothers, while

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid. 27-28.
Congregational, were much involved with allied to all things Presbyterian, that is, the moderate, flexible, forward-thinking evangelical Presbyterian activities. Arthur Tappan had even been called the ‘leader of Presbyterian Christianity’ while in New York in the early 1830’s. Arthur Tappan’s business crashed on May 1, 1837 in the panic, just in time for the opening of the General Assembly. His loss was looked upon by his enemies as God’s judgment upon the Tappans and their antislavery activities.

Lane Seminary, on the outskirts of Cincinnati, Ohio, had been supported by the Tappans. When the wholesale expulsion of the anti-slavery students occurred, they went in a body to Oberlin, Ohio, where a new educational institution had recently been established. That this new college was to be open to women and to people of color, that its President was Asa Mahan, a known abolitionist, and that Charles Grandison Finney was to be its professor of theology meant that conservative Presbyterians would automatically be suspicious of this school. Western Reserve College, founded in Hudson in 1826 and also open to qualified students, even if black, suffered from its proximity to Oberlin, as well as from its own history of antislavery and abolition. Tensions were growing, and this area of northeastern Ohio became to be known as the center of “ultra-abolitionists.” With information being easily disseminated about national issues of great importance to newspaper readers, and since Presbyterians were among the most educated of the Protestant church-goers, growing unrest and polarization of views in the Presbyterian Church was not surprising.

144 Ibid. 69.
145 Ibid. 174.
146 Ibid. 135.
Ohioans had been kept abreast and aware of local and national issues through the *Ohio Observer*. In the issue of March 26, 1835, readers found an article from Joseph W. Brown, the Brigadier General in command of the 3rd Division of the Michigan Militia, who gave warning of an imminent danger and subsequent probable call-up of troops to counteract the prospect of one state invading another. “We cannot submit to an invasion of our soil; we are determined to repel with force whatever strength the State of Ohio may attempt to bring into our Territory to sustain her usurpations; and let the consequences which may follow rest on the guilty heads of those who attempted to deprive us by force of rightful jurisdiction.” 147 This notice gives a sense of the context of the times, which included concerns about petitions being sent from the North to Southern states; ministers from the North serving churches in the South; and women teachers traveling to the South to teach slaves how to read, thus perhaps causing insurrection, and being seen as utterly wrong and without any reasonable justification. The question was whether moral causes were sufficient to trump the legal rights of a state government, how porous the boundaries of any part of the nation were thought to be, and to what or whom primary allegiance is owed. These questions were real to those in 1837 in a way that we would not likely understand today.

1837 was not a year of peace and quiet in the United States or in the Presbyterian Church. Canals had been and were being built, bringing the world closer

147 In the *Ohio Observer* for September 17, 1835, there was a follow-up article, dated Perrysburgh (sic), Sept. 9, 1835, saying that “Michigan forces have, to use a military term, invested Toledo.” The heading was “WAR NEWS,” in which the army from Michigan found no matching army from Ohio. The article expressed hopes that the incident would die, and the troops return home.
together. But that connected world, and the world across the Atlantic, suffered in the financial panic of that spring. News was widely disseminated and readily available, but which meant that the issues of one area became the concerns of another far away in geography. The populace showed its concerns at times by riots or mob violence, in the belief that instant action was required if they were to fulfill their promise to prepare the world for the Second Coming of Christ, a concept called millennial thinking. Women were prominent in doing good works through various groups, including voluntary societies, yet were also a source of contention about their proper role in any public arena. Colleges and academies were being founded swiftly and throughout the country and the territories, but were also the place of riots over curriculum, living conditions and governance. Theology was developing that said that people were not simply God’s pawns, but could have a part, however small, in their own salvation. Yet this thinking threatened to split churches, as the issue of slavery threatened to split the country. The country struggled with the nature of its union – how much did the individual states retain rights or had all rights been ceded to a national government? This world of ceaseless activity, which included business on the Sabbath, was not an easy world for the staid Presbyterians. The struggle to remain one body, affirming tradition and yet open to new ideas and having new areas to evangelize, was a struggle which was bitterly fought in May and June of 1837 by the Presbyterian Church. But it had its roots many centuries before.
b. Presbyterians before 1837, a dip into history

1. European Origins

If history is the study of change over time, then the history of a church can be found in following the affairs of that group over an extended period. Edwin H. Friedman has compared the study of congregations to the family, and applied family systems theory to the church and synagogue.148 He posits that the understanding of pathologies in parts of a family will come from understanding the history of the family as a whole, that basic understanding of the roots of a religious institution will illuminate the current activities of that body. Questions such as,

"How and when was the [body] originally created? To what extent did it form out of the needs of the community or the natural coming together of the founders, and to what extent was it a splinter group from an established [body]? In what ways does the congregational charter (constitution) reflect the intensity of its origins? To what extent are the founding members still in power or present in the congregation at all? What has been the nature of the [body's] previous separations?"149

Using these questions as the basis upon which to consider this body of religious people, this denomination, the action of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America which "exscinded" a portion of itself in 1837 needs to be seen in light of its own history, as well as that of the parent bodies from which it came.

A recent national committee in its report to the General Assembly said, "The story of American Presbyterianism can be told in terms of its splits, divisions, and reunions.

149 Friedman, 272. Friedman posed these questions in regard to a single congregation, but I have chosen to apply them to the activities of a larger institutional setting.
Presbyterians, no matter what their convictions, take their faith seriously."\(^{150}\) The habit of 
"taking their faith seriously" is not surprising when seen in the light of the Reformers, who 
risked all to "reform" the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, and in the 
process founded a number of sects, which eventually became denominations, though that 
was rarely the original intent of those now recognized as the founders of these bodies.\(^{151}\) 
Among these "protesting" or Protestant sects, was a group identified as “Reformed.” This 
group included expressions of church government identified with national origins, 
including Scottish, Irish, and Welsh Presbyterians; English Puritans and 
Congregationalists; Dutch, German and Hungarian Reformed; Swiss Calvinists; French 
Huguenots; and Italian Waldensians.\(^{152}\) All were based to some extent on a presbyterial 
form of governance, which included ordained church officers, both clergy and laity; a 
parity between the clergy (no pope and usually without bishops); with authority and power 
derived from gatherings of ministers and elders, often regional, called presbyteries, 

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\(^{150}\) Special Committee on the Nature of the Church and the Practice of Governance. Presbyterian Church 
Assembly, 1993),364. This committee was formed shortly following the reunion of 1983 between the 
Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of 
America, healing the division that had existed since 1861 between the Northern and Southern streams of 
the Presbyterian Church.

\(^{151}\) This analysis is based on Claude Welch, Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Volume 2, 
1870-1914, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 294-295. Welch reported the work of Ernst 
Troeltsch’s The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, in which Troeltsch categorized the church 
typology as being in and of the world, including all of humanity, entwined with the ruling classes and 
typified by medieval Christianity; the sect as voluntary and personal, detached from worldly pursuits and 
often a product of the lower classes of society; and mysticism as a final typology which is based on direct 
inward and personal experience, characterized as volatile, often not permanent and tending to undermine 
the more established religious bodies. Troeltsch also recognized that these groupings could and did change 
over time, thereby recognizing the historicity of all religious behavior.

\(^{152}\) Leith, John H. An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition: A Way of Being the Christian Community. 
(Atlanta: John Knox Press,1981), 32-33. Leith claimed that the term, “Protestant”, had been given a 
negative connotation that it did not deserve, being a positive statement of beliefs rather than an argument 
against a doctrinal or polity position. He viewed all the early sixteenth century “protestations” more as 
confessions of belief than as broadsides designed to begin a process leading to schism.
consociations, or associations. In contrast to the prevailing Roman Catholic hegemony of Western Europe in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Presbyterian governance was non-hierarchical and based on the necessity of participation of members as part of the governing structure of the sects. The very name, presbyterian, derives from a Greek word, presbuteros or presbyteros, meaning “elder.”

Though contemporaneous with the rise of the Reformed churches, Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses of October 13, 1517 are considered peripheral to the genesis of the Reformed Churches. John Leith argued that Luther’s diatribes stemmed from a personal sense of unworthiness followed by conversion, leading through a personal relation to God to salvation, a salvation not to be attained through one’s works or worthiness. By contrast, the Reformed Churches arising in Switzerland, France and parts of Germany had their birth in the Christian humanism of Erasmus. Implied in this analysis is a connection to the civic world, a pragmatism and application to all of life that characterized churches of the Reformed Tradition, and which led to many of the revolutions which followed in civil governments in Europe, together with a lessening of the power of the Roman Catholic Church.

154 Arndt, William F. and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 699. This term can carry the connotation of age, a period of time, or officials of either the secular or religious realm. Scholars debate on the relationship to episkopos, to “bishop” or “deacon”, finding their use in the New Testament scriptures inconsistent. Generally speaking, the term came to refer to a status below that of bishop, but above deacons, hence the adaptation by Presbyterians, who came to use the term for all those who ruled, both ministers and lay elders.
155 Leith, 34ff.
Of the Reformers considered most vital and important for the future American Presbyterian Church the foremost was the French-born and educated Jean Cauvin or John Calvin. Calvin was born in 1509 of a father who was a minor Roman Catholic official, but who lost his position and required his son, John, to be trained as a lawyer rather than continuing his studies in the church. Following his father’s break with the Roman Catholic Church, and surrounded by the stimulus of the Reformation of the early 16th century, Calvin was identified with the “liberal Christian humanists,” who came under attack from the Church and the French government. Calvin left France in fear of his life, was called to Switzerland to serve both church and community in the new theocracy which had been founded in Geneva. It was not an easy tenure, as Calvin suffered through times of opposition when he was forced to leave the city, spending time in Strasbourg before returning to Geneva.

During his service in Geneva, many were influenced by his writings, his preaching, church organization and the governing of the city without kings, princes or the Roman Catholic Church. Among those was John Knox, influenced by Calvin as well as by Calvin’s followers and friends. Knox, educated and trained as a priest, had stood against queen and church in Scotland, been captured and made a galley slave by the French. He escaped to England, where he became a minister, got in trouble and fled to Frankfurt, serving there as a minister to English exiles. Subsequently, he fled to Geneva to serve a similar community and was profoundly influenced by Calvin. Knox returned to Scotland, where he found his place, in large part because of the turmoil surrounding the new Queen

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Elizabeth’s ascension to the throne, symbolized by the Treaty of Berwick which extended England’s protection to Scotland, and the subsequent Treaty of Edinburgh (1560) which assured Scotland’s freedom of both England and France. Into this vacuum stepped a group of scholars and churchmen, including John Knox, who acted with the Parliament to pass a confession, which had the effect of ruling both in the church and in much of the state as well.157

Thus in Scotland, Presbyterianism became the dominant religion. The General Assembly, with the Parliament, had charge of organizing churches, ordaining and installing ministers, organizing presbyteries and synods, and affirming ministers elected by congregations. It had responsibility for education and for much of the discipline of the country. Perhaps inevitably, the path of reform of religion, control of belief and behavior, and the living out of the faith were neither smooth nor simple in Scotland. Through the years from the 16th to the 18th centuries, wars, skirmishes, disagreements caused schisms in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, schisms that led some believers to emigrate to Northern Ireland and from there to the New World, or to emigrate directly, mostly to the Middle Atlantic States. In the colonies these devout, contentious, serious believers felt that they could practice their faith in the way they chose. Thus issues were not solved, simply not challenged for a time. This would change.

The Presbyterians in other countries, whose adherents ultimately became a part of the broad Protestant religious community, first in the colonies and then the United States of

157 This very slender analysis is based on information found in Leith as well as McNeill, John T. The History and Character of Calvinism. (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).
America, had followed a far different path. Many of the English-speaking Presbyterians who came to experience religious freedom came from England, though there were also many from Ireland and Wales. Calvin was influential in all the British Isles, not through personal contact, but through his writings and his disciples (notably John Knox) who came to Geneva to escape persecution, came into contact with ideas and practices of Calvin and subsequently returned to the British Isles.

A primary way in which Calvin’s influence was felt was through his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which systematized his doctrines, both those of theology as well as items of practical living. Though theology and doctrine would seem to be central to the *Institutes*, Calvin’s emphasis focused on the whole of life, on living as a faithful Christian, not separated from the everyday, from ordinary existence.\(^\text{158}\) Calvin wrote to Kings, Queens and Princes, explaining their special role in God’s plans as seen in scripture, a role which could include revolting against them if they proved unable and unworthy to carry their responsibilities to their subjects and to God’s commands as seen in scripture. In a section of the *Institutes* entitled, *(Necessity and divine sanction of civil government)*, Calvin spoke of civil government in terms that conflate both necessity and divine sanction to a single inseparable task:

> Its function among men is no less than that of bread, water, sun and air; indeed, its place of honor is far more excellent...(It) also prevents, idolatry, sacrilege against God’s name, blasphemies against his truth, and other public offenses against religion from arising and spreading among the people; it prevents the public peace from being disturbed; it provides that each man may keep his property safe and sound; that men may carry on blameless intercourse among themselves; that honesty and modesty may be preserved among men. In short, it

provides that a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians, and that humanity be maintained among men.\textsuperscript{159}

The way in which Calvin believed government and church should interact was to understand that each operated in distinct ways, yet both under the same ultimate source of power and authority, God. As the state derived its authority from God, it was to be obeyed, though a caveat existed. If the state disobeyed God’s will, then the edicts of the state were to be resisted. Conversely, the state was not responsible for the internal workings of the church, but instead was responsible to protect the church, to the end that a peaceful and ordered society in all areas would be maintained.\textsuperscript{160}

Referring to those who “rule” in the public sphere, Calvin delineated three areas of normal life: the “magistrate, who is the protector and guardian of the laws; the laws, according to which he governs; the people, who are governed by the laws and obey the magistrate.”\textsuperscript{161} This magistracy was ordained by God and was of the highest order, seemingly even above that of the religious leader, “…no one ought to doubt that civil authority is a calling, not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men.”\textsuperscript{162} Calvin continued to hold the civil magistrate responsible for what is described by McNeill as, “…secure and ordered liberty as opposed to both tyranny and anarchy,” through the following words,

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\textsuperscript{160} The argumentation of this section is to be found in many sources of Presbyterian Church history, and here follows Loetscher, Lefferts A. \textit{A Brief History of the Presbyterians}. Fourth edition. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 26ff.
\textsuperscript{161} Calvin, 1488.
\textsuperscript{162} Calvin, 1490.
\end{flushright}
“...magistrates ought to apply themselves with the highest diligence to prevent the freedom (whose guardians they have been appointed) from being in any respect diminished, far less be violated.”

England, Ireland and Wales never experienced Calvinism with the same governmental authority that it found in Scotland, leading to a far different expression of the faith than that of their northern cousins. Calvin wrote to members of the English government, counseled with exiles, shared his faith through the Geneva Catechism in translation, and encouraged and participated in the translation known as the Geneva Bible. Throughout this time period, Calvin seems not to have favored or advocated the presence of a Genevan-style civil government.

Calvin’s greatest influence was felt through his followers, sometimes called Calvinists, who were to be found in the Church of Ireland; in the settling of Ulster by Scottish Presbyterians beginning in 1606; and in the effort to purify, simplify, and remove all marks of episcopacy from the Church of England. This latter resulted in the calling of the Long Parliament, the rise of the Puritans in church and state, the Assembly of the Westminster Divines who met from June 1643 until February 1649, and in the death of Charles I. The Westminster Assembly first dealt with the civil unrest, adopting an agreement to provide for the “peace and safety of the three kingdoms” (England, Scotland and Ireland) and then taking up the issues of religion, producing documents which were

163 Calvin, 1494 and note 21.
164 Calvin died in 1564.
165 Woods, H[arvey.] The History of the Presbyterian Controversy with Early Sketches of Presbyterianism. (Louisville: N.H. White, 1843), 11. Woods notes that Presbyterians in the English Church were called Dissenters or Nonconformists as well as Puritans, while Congregationalists were called Independents.
titled the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Longer and Shorter Catechisms. These documents, which became the cause of conflict and splits in both church and society, began with the central and most frequently cited statement of the Westminster Confession, “God alone is Lord of the Conscience,” a statement adopted and promulgated by the emigrants who would become American Presbyterians. Internal dissension in the Westminster Assembly was rife, a division which found the Scots divines wishing to establish a religious state with little tolerance of differences, while the English sought to allow a civil society that was tolerant of episcopacy. The Westminster statements never became law in England or Ireland, due probably to the obduracy of the Scottish Presbyterians’ insistence on the divine right of the presbytery. However, the Westminster Confession traveled to the new land in America as the sole statement of belief, to be accepted or subscribed to by every candidate for the ministry, and honored by every member of the church.

166 These instruments were generally referred to by their contemporaries as "the Confession" or "the Confession of Faith" and the Longer and Shorter Catechisms.

167 The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: Containing the Confession of Faith, the Catechisms and the Directory for Worship, Together with the Plan of Government and Discipline as Amended and Ratified by the General Assembly at their Sessions in May, 1821. (Philadelphia: 1827), 90 and 343. The entire section reads: “II. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and have left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.” Within the “Plan of Government”, printed at page 343 in the same volume, the first sentence only is repeated, with the addition of the following clauses: “therefore, they consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: they do not ever wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and, at the same time, be equal and common to all others.” This latter construction, designed to clarify the separation of church and state, is preserved today in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as two separate paragraphs in the first chapter of the “Form of Government”, G-1.0301a and b.

168 Woods, 16.

169 Woods, 19. Woods claimed that it was at this time that the slogan appeared, “For union in all things necessary, for liberty in things unnecessary, and for charity in all.” He stated as well that this slogan is identified with the English party, but not with the Scots who won the immediate battle to claim the divine right of presbytery and strict covenant uniformity, but lost the war of applying them to the government of the British Isles.
Other Reformed communions were also to be influential through the emigration of believers to the infant United States of America. The Reformed Church of France, commonly known as the “Huguenots”, was treated with severity. At times its members faced death, at other times official toleration which lasted but a brief time. From the 17th through the 18th centuries, over 400,000 of its members could be found in exile in Holland, Germany, Switzerland and England, and many then came to North America, both to Canada and the United States. In the Netherlands, Calvin’s ideas competed with Lutheranism and the Anabaptists, finally finding official sanction when William of Orange adopted Calvinism in the later part of the 17th century. By the 1570’s the country was well-organized in its Reformed mode, and its synods were officially treating each other with tolerance and respect, while fighting the Catholic influences of Phillip II of Spain.

Other areas on the European continent sought mutual support in the face of armed conflict, and ultimately were influential in the writing of religious statements of faith, confessions and catechisms. From the region of modern Germany came the well-known and much beloved Heidelberg Catechism in 1563. Several of the German states adopted this catechism in preference to the Augsburg Confession of the Lutherans, which had been adopted in several variants between 1540 and 1580. Calvinism also found adherents in Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and Transylvania, though always with contention, physical fighting and often limited governmental acceptance. The experience of those who would come to the colonies of the New World and later to the newly formed “United States” brought with them a heritage of fighting for tolerance of belief and freedom to practice
their religion. These groupings of devout persons acted against what might have been perceived to be their best chances for worldly success and long life, some being martyred for their faith, and many finding it necessary to leave their homelands for other areas. Out of this combination of acting in faith and emigrating, was the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America born.

2. The Presbyterian Experience in the Colonies, the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Balmer and Fitzmier, authors of a short history of Presbyterianism, while disclaiming any personal experience with or particular expertise concerning Presbyterians, said of their subjects, “…our appreciation of the internal dynamics, the remarkable durability, and the blessed diversity of American Presbyterians grew as our work proceeded…”170 These attributes were not confined to a particular time period in American Presbyterian Church history, but may be seen developing over time, and yet amazingly stable throughout that history.

The European thread of Presbyterian history responds to several of Friedman’s questions concerning the origin of the original body, particularly how and when the body was created. In addition it touches to a certain extent on the second question which concerns the extent to which the new body responded to the needs of a community, and whether the body was a splinter group from a larger body. By definition all Presbyterians, with all their sister and brother Protestants, were a splinter group. Presbyterian believers

170 Balmer and Fitzmier, x
who came first to the New World colonies and later were part of the early republic in the United States, however, came from different backgrounds and experiences, even if claiming the same name to identify themselves.

Several characteristics of religious life of the newly settled can be detected. In common, they were devout. Following Calvin, they believed that God was sovereign and governed all of life, not just that of the church. They followed Calvin in active involvement in the economic affairs of their new homes, and were allowed to both pay and receive interest on loans. They valued education and acted as quickly as possible to provide it for their children and for those whom they wished to convert, believing that each person needed to be able to read the scriptures for themselves, and hear God speaking to them through those holy words, without the intervention of a priest.\(^\text{171}\) They came from various European locations, often in a body, as they left their native lands in order to be able to worship as they thought right. They came from diverse polities, many of which were influenced by the governance of the country in which they arose. The Scots had experienced an established church. The Puritans of England (whose background was Calvinist, though Congregational as well as Presbyterian) had recently experienced controlling the country and its rule, through Cromwell and the Parliament, though they were only able to stay in power long enough to cause the group of "divines" to write the Westminster confession and catechisms, and so at the time of emigration were dissenters religiously and outcasts politically in their homeland. The French Reformed Church, the Huguenots (perhaps so named after King Hugh Capet), had mostly been driven from France and resided largely in the Netherlands or the British Isles. The Dutch Reformed

\(^{171}\) Loetscher, 27
Church was the favored church of the rulers of Holland, though not established. In all other countries of Europe that had considerable communities of those following the Reformed Tradition, believers in this tradition were outsiders and tolerated, though sometimes persecuted by the dominant Lutherans or Roman Catholics. Whether under active attack in their original homelands or not, what was certain was that those who emigrated in groups as true believers sought to have the freedom to worship as their consciences dictated, though they did not necessarily expect to accord that same freedom to others.172

Returning to Edwin Friedman’s questions concerning the institutional church, the growth of Presbyterianism in American colonies can begin to answer the third and fifth questions,173 i.e.” In what ways does the congregational charter (constitution) reflect the intensity of its origins? What has been the nature of the [body’s] previous separations?” Those who claimed formal Presbyterian church affiliation were among the earliest settlers, together with many others who followed Calvinist precepts, (i.e. Huguenot, Congregationalist, Dutch and German Reformed, early Baptists, and even some Anglicans) although not the usual Presbyterian polity, at least at first.174 These varied groups settled in areas which ranged from the Dutch Reformed in New York City and north up the Hudson River, German Reformed in Philadelphia, the Puritans and subsequently the Congregationalists in New England. The largest numbers of Scottish Presbyterians came to

173 The fourth question, “To what extent are the founding members still in power or present in the congregation at all?,” will be answered implicitly throughout this paper, though obviously the particular persons covered by the question on its face are long dead.
174 Smylie, 39.
the mid-Atlantic colonies, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and a number as far south as the Carolinas. For those who emigrated from England or Ireland in the mid- to late seventeenth century, the immediately previous experience was that of connection between the groups of moderate Presbyterians and the Congregationalists in Great Britain, which had culminated in an effort to effect a union in 1653, by ‘articles of concord.’ Woods, writing in 1843, goes on to quote another historian, Neal,

The chief of the Presbyterian and Independent divines, who were weary of divisions, and willing to strengthen each others hands, united in these assemblies, though the exasperated prelatists, the more rigid Presbyterians, and the severer sort of Independents, kept at a distance.

Woods then notes that a further and “firmer” union between the bodies took place through a declaration of union on April 6, 1691 at Stepney in England, where,

“by the blessing of Almighty God, after talking over their differences and agreements, consummated a union of the two denominations, by adopting what was called the heads of agreement, embracing a few cardinal principles, which were to govern them in their fraternal intercourse.”

This understanding of their bodies being in a union between the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians affected especially those who emigrated to Connecticut, where the Congregationalists were particularly strong (though they were comfortable uniting with Presbyterians), and those who moved to the southerly areas (New

\footnote{Woods, 25.}
York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia and the Carolinas,) where the predominant Presbyterian emigrants tended to attract Congregationalists to their Presbyterian congregations.\textsuperscript{176} Woods argued that the Scottish Presbyterians “came into these arrangements somewhat reluctantly,” and had not favored the union, largely because they were part of a church “disposed to adhere to her arbitrary principles,” a church that as late as 1712 had “published an act or testimony against religious toleration.”

The differences and the diversity of the Presbyterian experience in the New World were recognized early in the history of the American Presbyterians. In some sense, then, the “intensity of the origins” of the American Presbyterian Church was born of civil and religious strife in the British Isles as well as Europe, and was to prove to be heavily influenced by that strife as well as by accommodations which had been reached by some of the parent groups prior to, during, and subsequent to the movement to the new world. Calvinists migrated in the 17th century and churches were formed, though many of them are described by Smylie as “congregationalized,” rather than having traditional Presbyterian form.\textsuperscript{177}

Wishing to have the benefits as well as the name of Presbyterian, several ministers from various locations came together in 1706 to form a presbytery, which was located in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{178} This body was called The Presbytery, or occasionally, the

\textsuperscript{176} Smylie, 40.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid. 40.
\textsuperscript{178} Because the first page of the minutes of that presbytery has been lost, it is not clear whether the first meeting of The Presbytery took place in 1705 or 1706. Dr. Samuel J. Baird, and Dr. William M. Eagles in writing over 100 years later about the formation of the first presbytery, thought the organizing date to be
"General Presbytery". It was unique in Presbyterianism, not being a subordinate part of another body, as well as being the "supreme judicature" for the colonies. The purpose stipulated for this meeting was "to associate and join with one another statedly, for the exercise of church government among themselves, being first agreed as to principles of faith and government." \(^{179}\)

The importance of Presbyterian orderliness was obvious very early, with minutes being taken even in that first meeting. There were 7 ministers in attendance: from Ireland were Francis Makemie, John Hampton, and George McNish, all of whom were working on the eastern shore of Maryland, and Samuel Davis who labored in Delaware. From Scotland came John Wilson, working in New Castle, Delaware. Jedediah Andrews was from New England, though working in Philadelphia; Nathanael Taylor worked in the area of the Patuxent River with a congregation of Independents. They were joined by John Boyd, whose ordination is the subject of the first recorded action by the Presbytery, and who labored in Freehold, New Jersey. From the first, diversity was built in to the American Presbyterian experience. These ministers were from different places, with differing doctrinal backgrounds, different circumstances of religious toleration, and came from different colonies on the American continent.

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\(^{179}\) This quotation came from a fragmentary encyclopedia in the library at McCormick Theological Seminary.
Laymen, ordained as elders, were involved from the second meeting on. By that second meeting, held in March, 1707, the small group was setting up rules and purposes for itself, which included reading a chapter of the Bible each Lord’s Day and commenting on it, traveling about on foot to “encourage private christian societies,” and supplying nearby pulpits (“neighbouring desolate places”) that were without ministers. Many assumptions lay behind these actions: the freedom to organize and worship as they felt called; no effort to have Presbyterianism become established or favored; and ordination and licensensure of men to the ministry as they found necessary and wise.

Historians, who have written about the formation of the Presbyterian Church on the American continent, have remarked particularly that this denomination was formed by actions of local men and groups, rather than following the pattern of many religious bodies in Europe, including Scotland, in which the worshipping group was formed by or under the rule of the government. This “bottom-up” activity quickly resulted in the formation of a Synod in 1716, composed of three presbyteries, Philadelphia, New Castle and Long Island. Philadelphia covered East and West Jersey and the part of Pennsylvania north of the Great Valley; Long Island covered New York; and New Castle, included every place else. At the first convening of New Castle Presbytery, there were 17 ministers registered,

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180 At this time in the history of the Presbyterian Church in America, elders were ordained and expected to serve for life. Because there had been little formal structure to this point, it is likely that many of the elders were themselves first generation immigrants, or at least that any formal ordination may well have been approved by churches in the Old World.
181 Klett, 3.
182 These historians include James Smylie, Balmer and Fitzmeier, Lefferts Loetscher, George Laird Hunt, Harvey Woods, Samuel Miller, Samuel Baird, E. H. Gillett and most of the 19th and early 20th century scholars of Presbyterianism.
183 A fourth presbytery, Snow Hill in Maryland, was to be a part of the Synod, but was never organized. The Synod was at first designated as a group of “subordinate Meetings or Presbrys constituting one annually as a Synod.” Klett, 29.
though only 13 were in attendance, who came from an area that stretched from Long Island to Virginia. From the names of these presbyteries, an important principle of American Presbyterianism becomes obvious. All presbyteries were to have geographic bounds, comprised of one ruling elder from each congregation and all the ministers “within a certain district.”

The Synod followed the practice of the presbyteries that formed it, discussing and deciding many issues of importance to ministers, congregations and presbyteries, including that of deciding who could be ordained as ministers. The diversity experienced in the first presbytery continued in the several presbyteries and in the Synod. As ministers and elders joined from Scotland and Ireland, England and Wales, France, Holland, Switzerland plus New Englanders, diversity led to problems, including subscription to the Westminster Confession and catechisms; the issue of "experimental" religion, that which came from the heart, was emotionally driven, and led the believer to experience a conversion; strict following of Presbyterian polity and governance procedures; and how much education was needed to qualify as a minister. The zealous orthodox called themselves the "Old Side", while those who placed greater stress on vital and personal piety were called the "New Side" or "New Light".

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184 Constitution, 1821, 357. While this is quoted from a later time, the principle that presbyteries were formed regionally and geographically had long been the norm.

185 Subscription involved acquiescence to a set of beliefs, in this case the Westminster Standards. The usual procedure was to give verbal assent to one’s beliefs through the ordination vows, and then to sign a document that could be used in evidence against the subscriber if a church court later found it necessary to prosecute a case against the one who had signed. Subscription was urged in 1727 in an effort to assure that all ministers were doctrinally pure. For further information see Armstrong, Maurice W., Lefferts A. Loetscher, Charles A. Anderson, eds. The Presbyterian Enterprise: Sources of American Presbyterian History. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956, pages 27-32. Subscription continues in the PCUSA today in the form of the constitutionally required vows for ordination (W-4.4003f), together with the enrollment of a new minister in her/his presbytery of membership, recording the ordination and installation service “along with the acceptance and subscription of the new minister to the obligations undertaken in the ordination vows,” (G-14.0485), though the form of that subscription is not specified.
Following a few years of dissatisfaction and interim decisions, and after contentious debate concerning ordination and whether to remove the locus of decision-making for ministers from the local bodies who had formerly exercised the responsibility for such decisions, the Synod approved a compromise in 1729 that would inform the actions of the Presbyterian Church to this day.\footnote{This compromise came to be called “The Adopting Act.” Following the adoption of the overture, each minister in attendance submitted himself and his scruples to the full Synod, which “unanimously agreed in the solution of those Scruples.” The last sentence concerning the Confession and its application to the ordination of ministers reads, “The Synod observing that Unanimity, Peace and Unity which appeared in all their Consultations and Determinations relating to the Affair of the Confession did unanimously agree in giving Thanks to God in solemn Prayer and Praises.” See Appendix A for the full text of the action adopted on May 19, 1729.} For the organized and orderly Presbyterians, the immediate concern in 1729 was whether all ministers would have to swear to believe the same doctrine, or whether each man could be received as a Christian without that subscription. After much discussion, a compromise was reached, as the Synod declared that all would agree to adopt the Westminster Confession and its companion catechisms, “as being in all the essential and necessary Articles, good Forms of sound words and systems of Christian Doctrine,” and also to adopt them as “the Confession of our Faith.”\footnote{Klett, 103.}

While this would seem to satisfy one party to the dispute, those who believed that unity could only be achieved through uniformity of belief, were also accommodated, as the overture went on to state that anyone who found something in the Confession or Catechisms that caused him a problem of belief could declare a “Scruple.” The scruple would be considered by the body to which he had sought admittance, and a decision made
concerning his fitness to serve as a minister. A presbytery could receive a minister who declared a scruple if the presbytery judged the scruple “or mistake to be only about articles not Essential and necessary in Doctrine, Worship, or Government.” Even if the body did decide that the scruples were against a necessary or essential article of the Confession, all were enjoined to “treat them with the same friendship, kindness and brotherly Love, as if they had not differed from us in such sentiments.”

Clearly, this admonition would not have been necessary had the disagreements not been the source of name-calling, accusations, and even occasionally blows between parties.

The issue was not only the location of the ordination decision, but also whether certain doctrines were so important that all minister members of the Synod would be required to “subscribe” to them, either in writing or verbally. These concerns did not arise spontaneously or solely from the colonists, but reflected conflicts brought from the British Isles, which were exacerbated by the varied background and experience of the newly arrived and those whose heritage included longer residence in the colonies.

This compromise of 1729 was not long-lived, due in part to other factors of religious ferment which arose. The issue of revivals and conversions complicated matters for Presbyterians, bringing into their midst evangelists who were not as thoroughly educated, understood the tenets of the faith differently, and appealed to the senses, as well as the mind. The presence and the evangelistic techniques of a non-Presbyterian, George Whitfield, exacerbated the problems, as Whitfield stirred up emotions, and seemed to have

\[^{188} \text{Klett, 104.}\]
little patience with or interest in the orderly institutional processes that seemed important to the Presbyterians. The colonies were on the verge of a time of revival, which would be called the Great Awakening.

Additionally, the struggles of the Presbyterians in Scotland brought to the colonies the divisive issues of the immigrants, followed by separation into parties, which identified themselves as Old Lights and New Lights, or the Old Side and the New Side, depending on the time and the issue. A split along these lines occurred in 1741, which led to the Synod expelling the Presbytery of New Brunswick, and then to the formation of two Synods, that of Philadelphia (Old Side) and of New York (New Side.) Typical of Presbyterians, however, both sides came together, decided that the differences that separated them were not as important as the faith they held in common, thus a reunion of the two sides occurred in 1758.

Several items of that reunion will become key to understanding the sadness, anger, and sense of betrayal felt by both sides 79 years later in the schism of 1837. The basis of the reunion was to be the Adopting Act of 1729, keeping in place the Westminster statements together with the scruples to be decided by the ordaining or receiving body. Additionally, there were to be no “Names of Distinction,” no designations of party to be allowed, as they were to be “for ever abolished.” The duty of the Synod was to see that “no Acts be made but concerning Matters that appear to be plain Duty or concerning Opinions that we believe relate to the great Truths of Religion,” and the process was to include a provision that members were either to agree to decisions actively or passively, or to leave
peaceably if they could do neither.” Clarifying everyone’s role toward the “Fathers and Brethren,” a clause required that no one accuse another of “error in Doctrine or Immorality in Practice” publicly without a court procedure. Supporting the importance given to education, another section admonished ministers from impinging on each other’s territory or charge and required proof of extensive education before being accepted into the ministry by a presbytery. In order to effect this amicably, and to give life to not living with party designations,

“we think it necessary that our Presbyteries Shall be made up every where of the Ministers that live contiguous to one another, so that there be no such Party Names as old and new Presbyteries, for old and new Congregations to repair to, that they may obtain Ministers bearing Party Names…”

In the spirit of compromise, however, any minister who was unhappy with where he was assigned could apply to the Synod for permission to join another neighboring presbytery. Concern about what was an “essential tenet,” about standards for ordination, whether presbyteries could be formed on some basis other than geography, on what should be the standards of membership would all return as issues in the 1830’s, as well as societal concerns which would complicate and exacerbate the differences.

Following this schism and its repair, the Presbyterian Church continued to grow, as well as to participate in the growing pains of the colonies. Presbyterians declared their allegiance to the King, but at the same time were clear that they expected to receive all the liberties of Englishmen. “God alone is Lord of the conscience” is the first preliminary

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189 Klett, 323.
principle to be declared, which continues that “they do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and, at the same time, be equal and common to all others.”¹⁹⁰ This statement, drawn from the Westminster Confession, led to the Synod sending a pastoral letter to their constituents, swearing allegiance to King George, though saying that he must have been misled by his advisors, that the union that exists among the colonies should be maintained together with the highest of moral standards of the members of the Continental Congress, yet reflecting that,

If … the British Ministry shall continue to enforce their claims by violence, a lasting and bloody contest must be expected: Surely then it becomes those who have taken up arms, and profess a willingness to hazard their lives in the cause of liberty, to be prepared for death, which to many must be certain, and to every one is a possible or probable event.¹⁹¹

Participation in societal and governmental issues continued for many, as Presbyterians were generally to be found among those supporting the rebels, including John Witherspoon, who both supported independence, signed the Declaration, and encouraged the students at Princeton (of which he was the president) to join in the conflict. As a parallel to the new foundations in the civil realm, Presbyterians also reorganized themselves, with presbyteries dividing into several smaller geographic units and the Synod being split into four synods. Following this action, a General Assembly was to be formed, to meet with men commissioned by the presbyteries annually. Being proper Presbyterians, devoted to long and careful deliberation before taking any action, this plan was first

¹⁹⁰ Constitution, 1821, 343.
¹⁹¹ Klett, 543-546.
presented in 1786, but was not finally implemented until 1789, following the report that the presbyteries were willing to concur in the proposed action.

The first meeting of the General Assembly took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 21, 1789, in the Second Presbyterian Church. John Witherspoon acted as its opening and temporary Moderator, until the delegates elected Dr. John Rodgers of the Presbytery of New York as its permanent Moderator. In attendance as commissioners were 23 ministers and eleven elders from fourteen presbyteries. Then, as now, commissioners were only sent from presbyteries, not from sessions or synods.192

The new General Assembly was formed on the basis of a “Form of Government and Discipline” together with the Confession and Catechisms, and the Directory for the Worship of God, which would comprise the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. A good deal of preparation and deliberation had gone into the formation of this document, with some assuming that the new body would simply adopt the Constitution of the Church of Scotland, while others were not sure that the established Church of Scotland provided the best model for the new organization. Woods, in trying to trace the “Presbyterian Controversy” of 1837, describes the situation:

It will be seen, that American Presbyterianism was not Scotch Presbyterianism; and while the Presbyterian church of Scotland was sitting securely in the lap of civil power, the American Presbyterian church was laboring for full religious liberty for all.193

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In the six days of the first meeting, the General Assembly went through the process of devising parliamentary rules to govern itself, discussed how to assure that commissioners could attend when the cost of attendance in time and money was so high for some, held trials and gave advice and counsel in disciplinary proceedings, arranged for all presbytery and synod records to be inspected, asking those bodies to keep good statistics on their ministers and churches, and discussed several items which would continue to be important nearly 50 years later, though the outcome would be different.

Primary among its interests and concerns was mission, the evangelizing of the rapidly expanding country. To effect this evangelism, the Assembly requested each Synod to recommend two members to be missionaries “on our frontiers,” including collecting the funds necessary to support them, but sending those funds to the central location in Philadelphia. The following day, the Assembly organized a committee to effect the printing, promoting and circulating of the Bible, saying that it “wishes the countenance and support of all denominations of Christians.” This cooperative effort was to extend to having any committee, “from any other denomination,” aid in proof-reading and revising the pages of scripture. Ecumenism was affirmed on May 25 as the Assembly heard the report of a convention held with the Associate Reformed Synod and the Reformed Protestant Dutch Synod the prior October, approved the actions (unrecorded) of their delegates and appointed seven ministers and two elders to be the delegation to the next conventions to be held in June, 1789.
Issues of conscience and orthodoxy were addressed as the Rev. Adam Rankin of the Transylvania Presbytery asked the Assembly to rule on whether the “churches under the care of the General Assembly have not, by the countenance and allowance of the late Synod of New York and Philadelphia, fallen into a great and pernicious error in the public worship of God, by disusing Rouse’s versification of David’s Psalms, and adopting in the room of it, Watt’s imitation?” After allowing him to speak to the issue, the Assembly said that they were sorry that he felt so strongly about the topic that all their efforts were futile, and “…recommend to him that exercise, of Christian charity, towards those who differ from him in their views of this matter, which is exercised towards himself; and that he be carefully guarded against disturbing the peace of the church on this head.”

Upon being asked whether to admit to their Assembly presbyteries that would not allow judicial cases to be heard and appeals sent to the higher governing bodies, as an act of conscience and not consistent with either the scripture or the practice of the primitive churches, the Assembly was circumspect in acknowledging the right of appeal to be “an important privilege, which no member of their body ought to be deprived of;” but they also did not wish any member to have to act in a way “which may be inconsistent with the dictates of his conscience.” The taking of a stance that was rigid and didn’t allow for an affirmation or acknowledgement of differences was not the way of this first Assembly.

On the sixth and final day of the Assembly, a letter to George Washington was approved, praising him for past military service, for his willingness to leave retirement to serve the country as President, and for being such a “steady, uniform, avowed friend of the
Christian religion…” In this way, the Presbyterian Church hoped in turn to render service to the country, “when we contribute to render men sober, honest, and industrious citizens, and the obedient subjects of a lawful government.” The Presbyterian Church did not feel it necessary to call the government evil, or to keep itself pure by remaining out of touch with the secular world, but they did appreciate order in the civil realm as much as in that of the church.

Another pastoral letter was sent to the Synods, which carried the seeds of matters which would later concern all Presbyterians. The commissioners to this first Assembly seem to have been very concerned that all their members would realize that they were a part of one body that needed to be together and to act together. The opening lines speak about the difficulties of being able to meet because of distance, or “perhaps of poverty,” and are eloquent about the needs of their body.

The dignity of our church, its weight and influence in the United States, and even the utility of its ordinances, to the great ends of religion, will depend much on the unity of our counsels; and on the order and efficiency of our government. While the interest of religion ought to be our first and ruling object, we ought not to forget how necessary it is, for that great purpose, to preserve our character as a body, and our consequence in the republic….Without a common intelligence and concert in our measures, our respectability will be diminished; and our efforts for the public good, and for the promotion of religion, will be weakened by becoming divided. Division of sentiment, and perhaps, in the end, alienation of mind, will result from division of counsels, and the want of concert, in that great source of power, which ought to pervade and unite the whole body.194

194 All the foregoing is from the Presbyterian Church, Minutes, 1789-1829, 2-14.
In the first meeting of the General Assembly, short though it was, were all the elements which would cause concern at a later time. The answers in 1789 were to prove very different from the answers given to the church and the world in 1837. This early church reached out to others not of their communion, was gentle in its decisions, requested results rather than ordering them, and wished to be friends with all. Perhaps this was due to its newness, and yet this Assembly was really no different from the Synod that preceded it. The question to be pondered is what changed in the years between 1789 and 1837 to cause the outcome to be so very different.

3. Expansion in the New Republic, 1790-1833

E.H. Gillett, in his two-volume history of the Presbyterian Church, first published in 1864, characterizes the actions of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia as having a “liberal and cooperative spirit” in terms of relationships with others, especially the Congregationalists. The early relationships of the General Assembly continued the relationships of the Synod. Ecumenism for Presbyterians included several bodies of the Reformed Tradition, the minutes for 1790 specifically mentioning the Associate Presbyterian Synod of Scottish origin and the Reformed Protestant Dutch Synod as those with whom a continued relationship was desired. Of primary importance, however, was the relationship with the clergy of the Congregational Churches in New England, with whom the Presbyterians had held an annual convention prior to 1776. A resolution was passed unanimously,

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Whereas there existed, before the late Revolution, an annual convention of the clergy of the Congregational Churches in New England, and of ministers belonging to the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, which was interrupted by the disorders occasioned by the war; this Assembly, being 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 evidently are, and remembering with much satisfaction the mutual pleasure and advantage produced and received by their former intercourse, did

Resolve, That the ministers of the Congregational Churches of New England, be invited to renew their annual convention with the clergy of the Presbyterian Church.\textsuperscript{196}

And to assure that the resolution was effected, a committee was appointed and a report ordered to be brought to the ensuing Assembly.

In 1791 the report brought back news of progress, as negotiations had formulated agreement that, “in order to renew and strengthen the bonds of union” between the Congregational Churches in Connecticut and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, correspondence would take place in three ways: first by letter, second through reviving the Convention process, and third by exchanging delegates, “reciprocally from each body, who shall sit in their respective meetings,” to facilitate the answering of questions which might have been raised by the letters.\textsuperscript{197}

By 1792, this process was further formalized, including the receiving of credentials of ministers, who might be laboring on each other’s territory. Attending each other’s meetings was also formalized, though the delegates “shall have no right to vote.”

Ministers when traveling were commended to the care of whatever Association or

\textsuperscript{196} Presbyterian Church. \textit{Minutes, A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820}, 29.

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid. 33.
Presbytery they happened to find themselves in, “considering 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, as far as possible, the general interest of the Redeemer’s kingdom…” 198

It is perhaps not so surprising that the Congregationalists and Presbyterians should share so closely in each other’s governance. Gillett spoke of the presbyteries of New England as, “the early churches of New England were largely leavened with Presbyterian tendencies.” 199 The Presbytery of Londonderry, founded in New Hampshire in 1745, grew without any connection to the Synod or a General Assembly, the area being populated by Irish immigrants. Another church, that at Leyden, is described by Gillett as following a “French Presbyterian” model, in which elders were chosen for a term not for life. A presbytery was formed in Boothbay, Maine and another in Boston, without connection to the Synod. The settlements in early New York State were described by Gillett as “Congregational with Presbyterian leaven,” which Gillett found unsurprising as there were so few settlers or churches.

With both Congregational and some Presbyterian ministers going West as missionaries, the area of Western Pennsylvania became both populated and “churched” by way of the rivers and trails of Southern Pennsylvania. The churches of the area were again a mixture of Congregational and Presbyterian, with the Congregational “leaning toward a

198 Ibid. 52.
strict usage,” which Gillett described as “substantial unity in doctrine.”\textsuperscript{200} His careful and detailed account of this area and extending into Ohio, gives a flavor of how challenging it was to move into the sparsely populated Western areas, with few roads and danger from Indians and the natural wildlife. The most successful settlers were those who traveled and subsequently lived in groups, together with the missionary ministers who were sent largely through the largesse of the Connecticut Missionary Society, which was Congregational. One of the primary missionaries to the area of the Connecticut Western Reserve was Joseph Badger, a “true and convicted Congregationalist,” who joined and was welcomed by the appropriate presbytery, saying, “I am alone, I need your watch and counsel.”\textsuperscript{201}

The practice in the General Assembly of not permitting Congregational delegates to vote was soon overridden, as from 1794 to 1827, Congregational delegates were treated as if they were Presbyterians, including voting and serving on committees of the Assembly. Those bodies that were given this privilege were expanded to the General Associations of Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts, as well as eventually other Reformed bodies. The sentiment of the body was expressed by John Blair Smith, the Presbyterian minister who became the first President of Union College in Schenectady, New York, who as he commented on denominational differences, said that the orthodox churches of New England held ‘substantially the same faith as the Presbyterian,’ ‘this being the case, is it wise, is it Christian, to divide the sparse population holding the same faith, already scattered, and hereafter to be scattered, over this vast new territory, into two distinct ecclesiastical organizations, and thus prevent each from enjoying those means of grace which both might much sooner enjoy but for such division? Would it not be better for the entire Church that these two divisions should make mutual concessions and thus effect a

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid. 112-4.
\textsuperscript{201} Gillett, vol. II, 136.
common organization on an accommodation plan, with a view to meet
the condition of communities so situated?’”

Gillett believed this to be the germ of the idea which took form in 1801 as the
Presbyterian General Assembly’s Plan of Union\(^{203}\) in the frontier communities. He spoke
of communities settled by Congregationalists, who nevertheless organized their churches
on “Presbyterian Principles,” perhaps because of the need for greater structure and
connection in that area where people were sparse, and where the government was not
intimately involved in the affairs of the church.

When challenges to its policy and practice of cooperating with other
denominations arose, the General Assembly spoke in 1797 to others in Europe as well as in
the new United States, “It is natural for different denominations to be most tenacious of
their peculiar distinctions, whether they regard objects essential or indifferent. …Perhaps
the best method of promoting a more intimate connexion among various communions is to
cultivate a good understanding with each other by personal communications and familiar
acquaintance…”

At the same Assembly in 1797, a letter was sent to the Presbytery of
Abingdon, which stated in very Presbyterian terms how the Assembly understood its
position with regard to doctrine, unity, and even peace in the church.

We take the present occasion of declaring our uniform adherence to
the doctrines contained in our Confession of Faith, in their present
plain and intelligible form; and our fixed determination to maintain

\(^{202}\) Gillet op.cit. vol.1. 393.
\(^{203}\) The full text of the Plan of Union of 1801 can be found in the Appendix.
\(^{204}\) Presbyterian Church. *Minutes A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820*, 125.
them against all innovations. We earnestly wish that nothing subversive of these doctrines may be suffered to exist, or to be circulated amongst the churches; …We are also extremely anxious that the peace of the church, as well as its purity of doctrine, may be preserved inviolate; that every thing calculated to inflame the passions, to invert the order of the church, or to interrupt and disturb its union, will be cautiously avoided. 205

Thus the General Assembly stated its preference for adherence to ordination standards affirming peace and unity as well as purity. With those specific issues clarified, the turn of the nineteenth century found the Presbyterian Church consumed by missionary zeal, which was hindered by the number of new churches formed and the paucity of ministers to serve in them. This led the Assembly to consider ways of working with like-minded non-Presbyterians. In 1799, the General Assembly had formalized its relationship with the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church and the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Church, by which three delegates of each would attend the other body.

Good experiences and communication between the Congregationalists of Connecticut and the Presbyterians were institutionalized in the passage of the Plan of Union of 1801, which provided for a common understanding of governance in the new settlements206, “with a view to prevent alienation, and to promote union and harmony in those new settlements which are composed of inhabitants from these bodies.” The Plan charged all “missionaries to the new settlements” to work with others in a spirit of “mutual forbearance” and “accommodation,” choosing for themselves to be either fully Presbyterian, fully Congregational or a combination of both in the calling of ministers or

205 Ibid. 129.
206 These new settlements were largely understood to be those of western New York, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana- those areas where the explosion in westward movement and population was taking place, and where the Connecticut Missionary Society had already begun to send missionaries.
the means of governance.\textsuperscript{207} This type of accommodation fit in with the tenor of the times, the newly revived interest in religion as experienced in the revivals of what would be called the Second Great Awakening, the rapid expansion of the population of the country to the west, and the raw character of the new settlements. Even so, according to Gillett, the accommodation would not be too great, as his analysis was that, “there was no such diversity of views or ecclesiastical preferences as to justify collision or to excite mutual suspicions between the two bodies…”\textsuperscript{208}

With cooperation so irenic, the next natural step for those Congregationalists who wished for more structure and more support was to seek to combine in a formal way. In 1808 the Congregational Middle Association was absorbed into the Synod of Albany as separate presbyteries, probably the first of the “elective affinity” presbyteries. Not worrying about the particular type of church governance, the Synod of Albany said:

Knowing the influence of education and habit, should the churches under your care prefer transacting their internal concerns in their present mode of Congregational government, we assure them of our cheerfulness in leaving them undisturbed in the administration of that government, unless they should choose to alter it themselves.

Notwithstanding this gracious description, however, the Synod also said that it expected the Middle Association to “become a constituent branch of our body, by assuming the characteristic & scriptural name of Presbytery; adopt our standard of doctrine and

\textsuperscript{207} Presbyterian Church. Minutes, A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820, 224.
\textsuperscript{208} Gillett, vol. 1, 439 n. See Appendix B for the full letter from the Hartford North Association of Ministers, which delineated their understanding of the effect of the Plan of Union of 1801.
government, & sit & vote with us in all the great & interesting concerns of the Church.”

The General Assembly accepted this action by reading the plan as the Synod of Albany proposed it, and “the subject discussed, Resolved, That the Assembly sanction the aforesaid plan.” There is no further mention in the General Assembly minutes of this Congregational incursion into the body of the Presbyterian Church. The Synod of Albany was not exscinded in 1837.

The separate Congregational presbytery in the Synod of Albany did not last, however, and the Synod split the presbytery into three separate presbyteries combined with the Presbyterian churches in the same geographic area, and formed the presbyteries of Cayuga, Onondaga and Geneva. The efforts by some to establish Congregational Associations in the same vicinity were unsuccessful and the attempts ceased for many years in that area, as “many of the Congregational brethren, especially among the ministry, thought that the general principles of Presbyterian government were better calculated to preserve unity of action and purity of doctrine while in a forming state and to a great extent destitute of a State ministry, than the Congregational form.”

Local mission societies exploded in number, with the Assembly forming a committee on missions in 1802, which became a “Board of Missions” in 1816. But the General Assembly’s Pastoral Letter of 1817 warns against rigid sectarianism,

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210 Presbyterian Church. *Minutes, A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820,* 404.

211 Gillett, op. cit. vol. II. 114.
Endeavour to maintain a spirit of harmony with all denominations of Christians. While you contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and bear a faithful testimony to the apostolic doctrine and order, which we profess to receive; let no bigotry, or prejudice, no party rancour or offensive crimination, pollute your testimony…. [W]hile we hold fast the form of sound words which we have received, let us guard against indulging a spirit of controversy…. That differences of opinion, acknowledged on all hands to be of a minor class, may and ought to be tolerated, among those who are agreed in great and leading views of divine truth, is a principle on which the godly have so long and so generally acted, that it seems unnecessary, at the present day, to seek arguments for its support.…. Surely those who can come together, on the great principles of our public standards, however they may differ on non-essential points, ought not to separate, or to indulge bitterness or prejudice against each other. Dear brethren, let there be no divisions among you…

Divisiveness did occur, however, as the presbyteries in Kentucky saw differences of opinion, leading to the formation of a new presbytery in 1803 that essentially declared itself separate from the rest of the presbyteries of the Synod of Kentucky. The General Assembly reviewed the new Cumberland Presbytery in 1807 concerning ordination practices and standards. At this time, the Assembly reiterated in a letter to the Synod of Kentucky, which had been dealing with the conflicted situation surrounding the Cumberland disaffection:

…we cannot be supposed to recommend that any demands of our constitutional standards of doctrine, discipline, and government, should be violated or disregarded. These demands are equally binding on us and on you, and the recognition of their justice and obligation ought to be considered as indispensable in all who are to exercise the holy ministry in connexion with our Church. But there is, and ever must be supposed in those who are vested with power, the right and the duty of exercising a sound discretion; which will consult the spirit as well as the letter of the law; which will sometimes forbid the exercise of power which is possessed; which will endeavour with equal caution to avoid the extremes of rigour and of laxness; which will yield something, yet not concede every thing to circumstances;

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which, in a word, will recollect that power is given for edification and not for destruction, and endeavour to be guided by this rule.\textsuperscript{213}

None of this was successful, however, in restoring the Cumberland Presbytery to the fold, and in 1825 the General Assembly finally declared that the Cumberland Presbytery was to them as a new denomination.

Some felt this division in particular was due to the revivals that pervaded the area, as well as to laxness in requiring subscription to the Confession of Faith, especially by incoming ministers. The very late 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries was a time of revivals throughout the church and particularly in New England, Western New York, Ohio and points west, a time that would later be called “the Second Great Awakening.” Many were brought into churches as a result of these revivals, with Gillett saying that five-sixths of the increase occurred in the North and West as a result of the Plan of Union. While the number of ministers doubled from 1815 to 1825, the number of members tripled, from 40,000 to 122,000.\textsuperscript{214} Revivals occurred also at this time throughout the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia, bringing difficulties and divisions, as the traditionalists and the non-traditionalists often were not comfortable in each other’s presence, and so splits in presbyteries and churches occurred. However, Gillett also said that the growth in this area, up to the “commotion of the last war with England” was due to revivals whose “influence was powerful and extended.”\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid. 390.
\textsuperscript{214} Gillett, vol. II, 214-5.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid. 89-09.
Yet the spirit of unity was still present, as negotiations with the Associate Reformed Synod led to a union with the General Assembly in 1822, in which the members of that “rigid, fiercely orthodox” Synod were brought into the Church and immediately given seats in the General Assembly, which Gillett describes as an “irregularity.” Gillett goes on to characterize the entry of this body as “…far from favoring with any unanimity the plan of union…” and saying further,

“…it well may be doubted – in light of subsequent events – whether the element thus introduced into the Church was calculated to promote its harmony or efficiency. Names which, fifteen years later, occupy a prominent place in the history of the Excision, now first appear in the Minutes of the Assembly.”

It may also be that in their zeal to uphold the oneness of the Body of Christ, at least that part of the Body that they recognized as Reformed, the commissioners and delegates to the General Assembly were acting in a way that would ultimately betray the Biblical value of oneness, as well as their own history, a history in which, according to Gillett, “they felt little sympathy for any policy which would introduce upon these shores an ecclesiasticism of a rigid Scottish type.” This very type of rigid ecclesiasticism is exactly what motivated the Associate Reformed Synod, as well as the Dutch Reformed Church, with whom there was a “plan of correspondence” developed in 1823.

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216 Gillett, vol I. 485.
217 Gillett, vol. 2, 236.
218 John 17:11,21 (a biblical reference)
219 Gillett, vol. 1, 374.
220 Gillett, vol. 2, 233ff. The Associate Reformed Church in the Americas began in opposition to the Burgess oath required in Scotland, from which group of Seceders was formed first as the Associate or Anti-Burgher Synod in Scotland in 1747 and Pennsylvania in 1753. Later the Covenanters, also from Scotland, had joined the Reformed Presbytery in 1774. These bodies united in 1804 as the Associate Reformed Synod. This was the body that was taken into the Presbyterian Church by action in 1821 of the Presbyterian General Assembly, and ratified by the presbyteries of the Synod in 1822. Entering the
The interest in missionary ventures continued throughout this period, with the Assembly minutes being filled with concerns for so-called “feeble” churches, that is, congregations without ministers to serve them. Because of this reality, combined with the Presbyterian devotion to an educated ministry, much time was spent in the founding of colleges and seminaries designed ultimately to provide homegrown ministers. Interest in having a seminary in the United States was spoken of in the General Assembly as early as 1808, and after much careful discussion and querying of the desires of the presbyteries in the matter, Princeton Theological Seminary opened its doors in 1812. While it was the first seminary founded by Presbyterians, it was not the last. Establishing colleges was a constant for Presbyterians. To provide the needed new ministers, many colleges included a theological department as well as the usual collegiate studies. Some seminaries were connected formally with the General Assembly and some were recognized by the Assembly, but were instead attached to the Synod or even a group of presbyteries. Auburn in New York State began thus in 1818; the Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1825-6; and Western Reserve College in Hudson, Ohio which had a theological department which trained and educated Presbyterian ministers, though it never had a formal relationship with the General Assembly. In that same year a seminary was begun in Rock Spring, Illinois; Tennessee saw the founding of Southern and Western Seminary in 1827, as well as Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia; Columbia Seminary was founded in Georgia in 1828, as was the theological department of Centre College in Danville, Kentucky; a theological seminary at South Hanover, Indiana in 1829; with Union Presbyterian Church at that time were W.W. Phillips, Dr. Dickey, Drs. Junkin and Engles, all of whom would be leaders in the excision of 1837.
Theological Seminary in New York finally coming to fruition in 1836. By the end of this period almost all Presbyterian ministers serving churches in this country had been born and educated in this country, though many were still educated on the apprentice system as well as having formal instruction in a college, university or seminary. Most of the seminaries educated non-Presbyterians as well, though all those that were formally connected with presbyteries, synods or the General Assembly required their instructors to subscribe to the Confession of Faith, thus assuring orthodoxy – something not possible in the older universities of Harvard and Yale.

Throughout this time period, a further testimony to the ecumenical spirit of the church and the wish to further the mission of the church was the forming of voluntary societies, most of them with strong or even overwhelming Presbyterian presence, though not with Presbyterian control. Many mission societies were formed from local churches and regions, as well as at a national level. As early as 1796, the New York Missionary Society was working in Northern New York, joined by the Connecticut General Association in 1797, together with the Massachusetts Society and the Berkshire and Columbia Society. In 1802, the Western Missionary Society in Pittsburg formed, a society which remained operational for the next three decades.

With the explosion in missionary zeal, with the revivals especially in the northern and western areas, together with a strong sense of denominational cooperation, it was a short step to forming societies on a regional and then a national level. Because

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221. The spelling conforms to the usage of the time, as well as the works cited.
settlement was uneven, and missionaries willing to serve in far distant areas also unevenly dispersed, consultation with several denominations occurred and in May 1826 a meeting was held in New York City that culminated in the founding of the American Home Missionary Society, with the cooperation of the Presbyterian, Congregational and Reformed Dutch churches. Its object was to be helpful, not to dominate as “it designed no interference with the benevolent exertions of those who might deem it their duty to act apart from its advice.” This voluntary society was one of a long string of such societies formed on a national level to encourage and enhance what historians have denoted “the benevolent empire.” The national societies were all multi-denominational, but they were “laymen and clergymen of several Protestant denominations, most of them Presbyterians and Congregationalists,” according to Clifford Griffin.

Building on a long tradition of organizations of the like-minded which allowed greater strength in accomplishing a task, these societies also were not responsible to the Presbyterian Church directly, nor under the jurisdiction and control of its members

224 A particularly helpful article concerning the benevolent empire is that of Lois W. Banner, first published in the Journal of American History, LX (June 1973, p. 23-41). Banner notes the ways in which Presbyterians were of primary importance in the founding of voluntary associations, attributing the success of the societies to the ecumenical spirit of the Presbyterians and to their emphasis on the religious nature of all of life, including serving the needs of the secular or civil society. This essay has been reprinted in Mulder, John M. and John F. Wilson, eds. Religion in American History: Interpretive Essays. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 1978.
225 Griffin, Clifford S. Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960), xi. The list of some societies in which Presbyterians were either founders or prominent on the boards, together with their dates of founding, includes the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions or ABCFM(1810); the American Education Society (1815); the American Bible Society (1816); the American Colonization Society (1816 and the only one founded in the South); the United Domestic Missionary Society (1822), reformed as the American Home Missionary Society (1826); the American Tract Society (1823); the American Sunday School Union (1824); the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance (1826), which merged into the American Temperance Union (1836); the American Peace Society (1828); and the American Antislavery Society (1833).
and judicial system. As the country increased in size, as well as the church and its members, the possibility of control grew less. The growth was both explosive, and at times seemed out of control. As seen by Gillett, “The growth of the Presbyterian Church in this country has never been more rapid than during the first portion of the period now under review,” that is, the early 1830’s. At the same time, some members felt it to be incumbent for the church to have a greater say in the decision about whom to educate for the ministry, what the content of that education should be, and what and where a man’s mission should be following his education and ordination, that is, to have total control of the process from beginning to end. Together with the addition of members who wished to have more direct authority over every part of the life of church members, ministers, and governing bodies, came increasing anxiety over the state of the church.

4. General Assemblies, 1834-36 – Leading up to Schism

Although the decisive actions to rend the church asunder were not taken until 1837, a few issues troubled the Presbyterian Church in the early 1830’s. The formation and eventual ripening of these issues can be seen through the actions of the assemblies that preceded the excising Assembly of 1837. They included so-called heretical statements and publications of the Rev. Albert Barnes, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia; the nature of the eldership in light of churches that had both Congregational

226 An especially rich detailing of benevolent societies founded and aided by Presbyterian women in the ante-bellum area is Page Putnam Miller’s, A Claim to New Roles. (Metuchen, N.J. and London: The American Theological Library Association and the Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985). Most of the voluntary societies included women’s auxiliaries, and some of them allowed women to become members, though few allowed the women to speak in the assemblies.

227 Gillett, vol. 2, 443ff. Gillett cites the membership in 1829 as 173,329. By 1837 before excision, the membership numbered 220, 557. The greatest growth was in the years 1831 to ’34, with a drop-off in new members in 1835-'37 by nearly one-half.
and Presbyterian members; abrogation of the Plan of Union of 1801; responsibility for the formation of presbyteries and whether a presbytery could be formed that was non-geographic, but rested upon some other basis of “affinity.” Other issues included what bodies had the authority to conduct the mission and missions of the Church or of the churches; how transfers of ministers should be handled and whether a “subscription” to the Confession of Faith (the Westminster Confession of 1648 as amended) was required, and/or further examination was permitted; and whether the agitation, name-calling and general bad feelings among brothers in the faith should continue. The issue of slavery was also considered at each Assembly, and whether the body should act upon the strong statement of the Assembly of 1818 declaring slavery “evil” and “utterly inconsistent with the law of God.” The way in which business in these assemblies was conducted was a harbinger of the final outcome of 1837.

A. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America - 1834

Prior to the Assembly of 1834, items were written in the religious newspapers concerning business to be presented. The gist of one of those articles, as printed in the Ohio Observer, on April 24, 1834, concerned a Memorial to be presented to the Assembly. The editor, Warren Isham, had criticized the Memorial in an earlier paper, which caused other papers to reply, claiming that the Memorial was never intended to be secret, that it is

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228 The Congregational Church, while doctrinally virtually identical to the Presbyterian at this time, differed in terms of governance of the local congregation, which had a standing committee in place of the session, did not ordain lay members as ruling elders, and had an association in place of the presbytery. The association had power only to advise, but not require certain behavior from the churches and the ministers, who were members of the church they served, rather than being members of the broader regional association. Presbyterian ministers were called to a church by its members and with the acquiescence of the presbytery, but they were not members of a local congregation, but rather of the regional presbytery.

229 The full text of the 1818 statement can be found in Appendix D.
not “full of wrath and bitterness; nor designed to produce a revolution in the Presbyterian church, and expel the New School men; but simply to restore a strict adherence to the standards of the church; &c.”

Isham’s response to this in part is to say, “…we have no doubt, that both the editor of the Standard and the correspondent of the Philadelphian, from whom we obtained our knowledge, mean to tell the truth; how to reconcile their contradictory assertions we leave to themselves.” Continuing his response, Isham states that this is the expected effect which is a result of a petition that had been presented “about five years” before to the General Assembly by the Synod of Pittsburg “asking in effect an entire separation and expulsion of all, who did not take the same view of our standards of orthodoxy as they did.” He also states that the Rev. Ashbel Green of Philadelphia is currently urging the same action, or if that cannot be accomplished, “that the orthodox should secede and claim the right and privilege of being the only true and original Presbyterian church.” This was the prelude to the Assembly in 1834.

The General Assembly for 1834 met in 7th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and the Rev. Dr. Philip Lindsley of the Presbytery of West Tennessee was unanimously chosen Moderator. Somewhat longer than usual, the Assembly met for 21 days, from Thursday, May 15, 1834 to Wednesday, June 4, 1834.

Judicial matters would prove particularly important and divisive in this Assembly. After the first routine business, the permanent clerk reported on judicial matters that had been received. That day 12 cases were brought before the Assembly; four were
from and concerned churches and members from the Synod of Philadelphia, while three were from the Synod of Utica and three from the Synod of Cincinnati. All the latter concerned heresy charges against the Rev. Lyman Beecher. Two days later two more judicial complaints were received from the Synod of Philadelphia, together with two from the Synod of Indiana.

The first appeal and hearing concerned the contentious and contended matter of the way in which the 2nd Presbytery of Philadelphia had been formed by the General Assembly, and whether the Synod of Philadelphia\textsuperscript{230} could be forced to enroll this presbytery as a part of its membership. The 2nd Presbytery had been ordered to be formed through a General Assembly action in 1832, following another judicial case in which “A complaint of certain members of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, against the Synod of Philadelphia for refusing to divide said Presbytery,” a case that had been decided against the Synod,\textsuperscript{231} and resulted in the Assembly’s forming an “elective affinity” presbytery in Philadelphia, and in ordering the Synod of Philadelphia to enroll the new presbytery.\textsuperscript{232} This ongoing and continued case occupied the business portion of the Assembly meeting from Saturday afternoon May 17 through Monday morning, May 26, (8 business days, as the Assembly did not meet on Sundays.) The final result was a vote of 90 in favor to 81 against, once again to uphold the 2nd Presbytery of Philadelphia against the Synod of

\textsuperscript{230} At this time the Synod of Philadelphia included the presbyteries of Philadelphia, including Philadelphia 2nd; New Castle, Wilmington and Lewes in Delaware; Baltimore in Maryland; and Carlisle, Huntingdon, and Northumberland in eastern and central Pennsylvania.

\textsuperscript{231} Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. \textit{Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from A.D. 1821 to A.D. 1835 Inclusive.} (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, [no date]), 356.

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid. 361. The resolution passed by an almost two to one margin, and read as follows: “Resolved, That said Second Presbytery of Philadelphia, is hereby declared to belong to the Synod of Philadelphia, and is attached to the same as an integral part thereof.” The vote to uphold those who wished to form a new presbytery was 163 in favor, 87 against. The vote on the above resolution was 158 in favor, and 83 against.
Philadelphia. Several other judicial matters were dismissed or withdrawn, as not properly under the jurisdiction of the General Assembly, and yet several other items were submitted later, meaning that the Assembly spent much of its meeting time acting as a court in contentious matters in the church.

The issue at question in the first Synod of Philadelphia case was whether the Synod could nullify the existence of the 2nd Presbytery of Philadelphia and force it to become a part of the original or “old” Presbytery of Philadelphia. Complicating this already complicated situation was the fact that the Synod in the meantime had formed another presbytery in Philadelphia, also called the 2nd Presbytery. The original 2nd presbytery (or “Assembly” presbytery) was formed around the person of the Rev. Albert Barnes, who had written a commentary on the Book of Romans that seemed to some to question several of the primary theological doctrines of Calvinism. This presbytery, called an “elective affinity” presbytery, that is, one without specific geographical bounds, formed by the General Assembly in 1832, had caused and would continue to cause difficulties and dissensions within the more orthodox and conservative members. The resolution of this issue in favor of the elective affinity 2nd Presbytery would prove to be only temporary. Eventually, however, and upon the prodding of the Assembly of 1834, the name was changed to the 3rd Presbytery of Philadelphia. Later in the Assembly, a resolution was passed that “except in very extraordinary cases, this Assembly are of the opinion that Presbyteries ought to be formed with geographical limits.” 233 That any exceptions were allowed, however, was not to the liking of the Old School party. A protest in this matter was later submitted and appended to the minutes, stating that the Assembly could not

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233 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, A.D. 1821 to A.D. 1837, 441.
constitutionally form a presbytery, as well as complaining against the idea or practice of affinity presbyteries.\textsuperscript{234}

In a further effort to solve the problem of several presbyteries being attached to the Synod of Philadelphia (which was a conservative, contentious synod unsympathetic to new ideas, new measures, or new ways), on June 2 the presbyteries of Lewes and Wilmington, together with the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Presbytery of Philadelphia, requested to be formed into a new synod, which was accomplished on June 3 with the formation of the Synod of Delaware. By this action, these presbyteries hoped to avoid the contentiousness of the Synod of Philadelphia, and to be able to work together with more compatible brethren.

Surrounding this first judicial issue, was the issue of baptism; could the rite be performed by immersion, was a baptism valid if performed by a “popish” (Roman Catholic) priest, whether baptism of a child of non-believing parents could be valid. Other issues concerning church membership and the responsibility of parents to baptize their children were introduced in the Assembly also on June 2. Because of the necessity to continue to hear judicial cases, much business was introduced and very little decided. On Wednesday, May 21, an item of business was actually concluded, a resolution saying that men who were being called or sent to a presbytery as missionaries should not be ordained in advance, but ordained by the presbytery in which they were to labor.\textsuperscript{235}

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid. p. 446. The response to this protest, found on page 451, states that the Assembly had formed presbyteries in 1794, 1802, 1805 and 1826, under “extraordinary circumstances.”

\textsuperscript{235} This issue continues to have life today, especially since the reunion of 1983, with various patterns persisting; some desiring to have examination and ordination in the presbytery that has had responsibility for preparing a candidate for ministry (the presbytery of care), while others believe that the examination and ordination should only take place in the presbytery in which the candidate will work (the presbytery of call).
An effort to bring the issues of the Old School to the Assembly in the form of a *Narrative on the State of the Church*, signed by 11 presbyteries and several sessions, eventually was voted down, but only after two days of discussion. The Assembly declined to abrogate the Plan of Union of 1801; would make no further statement beyond what had already passed concerning the ordination of ministers, and that the responsibility for all those matters rested solely with the presbyteries; that the practice of name-calling, that is “publishing to the world ministers in good and regular standing as heretical or dangerous” should cease; that the Assembly “have no authority to establish any exclusive mode of conducting missions,” this matter being the responsibility of “individuals and inferior judicatories;”\(^{236}\) that presbyteries ought to trust each other and accept transferring ministers simply on the presentation of appropriate credentials;\(^{237}\) that to condemn as heretical written works individually is tantamount to calling the author heretical, which should only be accomplished through proper judicial process;\(^{238}\) that, unless there were evidence to the contrary, it should be assumed that everyone had accepted all the terms of the Confession of Faith, or else the presbytery ought to be diligent in examination in its process of preparation for ordination; and finally, that all bodies ought to determine such issues peaceably and quietly within their own appropriate venue, not bringing them to the General Assembly, as public statements simply exacerbate the purported problems and

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\(^{236}\) Ibid. 440

\(^{237}\) This item also continues to be a matter of contention in the church since 1983, some presbyteries requiring a full examination on the floor of the presbytery of all transferring ministers, some accomplishing the task by a full committee, a small sub-committee or even just reference checks done by a presbytery staff member.

\(^{238}\) This is a reference again to the work of the Rev. Albert Barnes, who had been accused of heresy, tried and not convicted. All efforts to chastise him failed at the Assembly level.
undermine the reputation of the ministers involved. A resolution passed, however, which stated that it was not proper for this Assembly to “censure” the “proceedings and measures of former General Assemblies.”

The final resolution on the proposed narrative, as adopted and reported on May 30, Friday, gave no satisfaction to its proponents and led to a protest submitted by 38 commissioners on June 3. The result of this action was the calling of a meeting immediately following the Assembly by the members of the minority, and the drafting of a statement, called the “Act and Testimony,” which became the basis for subsequent actions in the church.

Thursday morning, May 29, found the Assembly voting on the members to be appointed to serve on the Assembly’s Board of Missions, most of whom were Old School men, active participants in the meetings and agitation that led to the excision of 1837. Prominent among the Old Schoolers were ministers, William Plumer, James Hoge, Cornelius Cuyler, George Baxter, Andrew Wylie, Samuel Winchester, and James Blythe.

On that same Thursday afternoon, the Assembly agreed to allow the Synod of the Western Reserve to divest itself of several presbyteries in order to form the Synod of Michigan, which would consist of the presbyteries of Detroit, Munroe and St. Joseph. In the excision of 1837, this new synod was allowed to remain in the church, although it, too,

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239 Ibid. 440-441.
240 Ibid. 435.
241 The text can be found in the minutes on pages 447 and 448.
242 The full text of the “Act and Testimony” will be found in Appendix C.
243 Ibid. 436.
was formed under the Plan of Union, was directly a part of those synods that were presumed to be tainted by Congregationalism, and voted routinely with the New School men.

B. Act and Testimony

Following the Assembly in 1834, there were a number of commissioners who were extremely disaffected and angry, virtually all of whom had signed one or more of the protests against the actions taken in the Assembly with respect to: 1) the formation of elective affinity presbyteries; 2) censuring those who spoke against actions of prior assemblies; 3) the keeping in place of the Plan of Union of 1801; 4) the action not to declare Barnes’ book heretical and; 5) the suggestion that transferring ministers be accepted only on examination of credentials, rather than examination on doctrine. Their final grievance was that the Assembly turned down the memorial on these issues, which they said was:

…submitted by eleven presbyteries and several sessions, as well as numerous individuals – a support greater than any other memorial has received that has ever been presented to a General Assembly in this country – is calculated deeply to grieve and wound the feelings of a large part, and we must think not an unsound or undeserving part, of the Presbyterian Church. Their pious, and as we think, their just and reasonable expectations of some redress from the General Assembly, will be utterly and hopelessly disappointed.244

Utterly and hopelessly disappointed, a number of these men, together with others who were also unhappy and concerned, met immediately following the Assembly and drafted a position paper, which they called the “Act and Testimony.”245 This document

244 Ibid. 448.
245 The full text of the “Act and Testimony” will be found in Appendix D.
set out at length all that had been presented in the memorials on the state of the church, all of which the majority of the 1834 Assembly had voted against. Here were most of the doctrinal issues that had been the subject of the various charges against Albert Barnes. Here were discussed the problems of fellow Presbyterians not adopting their point of view with regard to matters of church discipline, and again a statement of sadness mixed with anger that their righteous point of view had been neglected and negated. Finally, a strategy was suggested, asking others to sign the document, get their presbyteries to sign on, publicize its existence and its content, and to call for another meeting of these like-minded men just before the 1835 Assembly. That meeting did take place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, from Thursday, May 14, 1835 to Thursday morning May 21, 1835.

C. Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Convention, Called by the Signers of the "Act and Testimony": May 14-20, 1835

This meeting was organized as if it was a General Assembly. Representation was by one elder and one minister from each presbytery that had chosen to send delegates; from men who had a commission or certificate that proved they had been appointed by their presbyteries, or by the minority of their presbyteries. 73 men eventually were enrolled, from 54 presbyteries.246 45 of them, well over half, were commissioners to the

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246 The presbyteries represented were largely from areas reasonably nearby. Eventually the following presbyteries were represented, shown with their synods for ease of identification: Synod of Genesee- the Presbytery of Genesee; the Synod of New York- the Presbyteries of New York and Bedford; the Synod of New Jersey- the Presbyteries of Newton, Susquehanna, and New Brunswick; the Synod of Philadelphia-
1835 Assembly.\textsuperscript{247} Of those in attendance at this convention, almost 20\% were still active and became commissioners to the 1837 Assembly. The others probably represented the minorities of their presbyteries and so were not elected as actual commissioners to the 1835 Assembly. Generally, the presbyteries represented were geographically near to Pittsburgh as well as being predominantly Old School. Those who were not represented included New School men as well as Old Schoolers who were geographically distant, or in some cases certainly, unable to spend another full week at a meeting in addition to the Assembly.

The Rev. Dr. James Blythe was asked to preach that afternoon, and the meeting adjourned until 12 noon on Thursday, a week before the Assembly. The Rev. John Witherspoon was “called to the Chair.”\textsuperscript{248} The Rev. Isaac Brown of New Brunswick Presbytery and the Rev. Thomas Alexander of South Alabama Presbytery were appointed temporary secretaries. All these were subsequently replaced, the Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green of New York being appointed President (not Moderator in this instance,) and the Revs. James

\begin{footnotesize}
New Castle, Carlisle, Philadelphia, Philadelphia 2\textsuperscript{nd}, Northumberland, and Huntingdon; the Synod of Pittsburg – the Presbyteries of Blairsville, Beaver, Redstone, Steubenville, Erie, Washington, Ohio, and Allegheny; the Synod of the Western Reserve – the Presbytery of Portage; the Synod of Ohio – the Presbyteries of Richland, Lancaster, and Wooster; the Synod of Cincinnati – the Presbyteries of Cincinnati, Miami, Oxford, and Chillicothe; the synod of Indiana – the Presbyteries of Salem, Madison, Crawfordsville, and Indianapolis; the Synod of Illinois – the Presbytery of Kaskaskia; the Synod of Kentucky – the Presbyteries of Louisville and West Lexington; the Synod of North Carolina – the Presbyteries of Fayetteville and Concord; the Synod of Tennessee – the Presbytery of Abingdon; the Synod of West Tennessee – the Presbytery of the Western District; The Synod of South Carolina and Georgia – the Presbyteries of South Carolina, Harmony, Bethel, and Georgia; the Synod of Alabama – the Presbyteries of Tuscaloosa and South Alabama; the Synod of Mississippi – the Presbytery of Mississippi, and the Presbytery of Amite. There was no one in attendance from the Synods of Albany, Utica, Geneva (New York), Michigan, Missouri, and Virginia.

\textsuperscript{247} There were 123 total presbyteries listed in the records of the General Assembly for 1835.

\textsuperscript{248} Minutes of the Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Convention, Called by the Signers of the "Act and Testimony": May 14, 1835. (Pittsburgh: White and Grant, Printers, 1835), p. 3. This John Witherspoon was the grandson of the former Moderator of the General Assembly, a renowned advocate for the colonies in the Revolutionary War, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and one of the primary figures in founding the General Assembly and drafting the first American Book of Order.
\end{footnotesize}
Culbertson and Ashbel Fairchild being named Secretaries. John Witherspoon was appointed the Vice-President.

Following worship services and routine matters, the Convention appointed a committee to bring a recommendation concerning possible ways that the business of the Convention could be presented to the General Assembly soon to follow, and decided to present a memorial and petition from the group.

Next was considered, debated and approved a statement presented by the Presbytery of Indianapolis, that gave short shrift to voluntary societies, particularly those not exclusively Presbyterian and devoted to mission or to education. The language was similarly condemnatory in each, calling the existence of these societies, “a usurpation of the rights of the church” and “inconsistent with her peace and integrity.”249 The body asked that this action be considered by the committee that was drafting the memorial to the Assembly.

The following day, the Convention considered and acted on past actions of the Assembly that had formed “ecclesiastical judicatories” on the principle of “elective affinity,” meaning that the members of the presbytery (ordinarily the ministers, as the churches only had representation based on the minister’s membership) could choose to belong to a presbytery based on something other than geography, which at this time usually meant that members either came from the same group, such as the Associate Reformed Synod of Scotland or followed the same theology, such as those who were placed together.

249 Pittsburgh Convention. Minutes, 6.
in New York or Philadelphia to avoid the bickering and quarrels that had made their lives together difficult.

The next item agreed upon, also designed to make presbytery membership more stringent, said that each presbytery had the right and the responsibility to examine transferring ministers, no matter where they came from, and then to decide whether to accept the minister as a member of the presbytery or not. Following this action, the group next agreed that the last General Assembly had been wrong, and that they had the right to ask for a repeal of its action that said that a presbytery could not try or condemn “heretical publications.”250 Continuing to consider items that caused them concern, the next action was to ask the upcoming General Assembly, through the memorial being drafted, to repeal the Plan of Union of 1801 as “injurious to the Presbyterian Church.” All of the items above were referred to the committee being asked to draft the memorial statement.

On the day following, the Convention passed a resolution saying that the General Assembly should be informed that the dissensions, disorders and divisions were keeping them from doing the work of the church, which was “to send the gospel to the heathen, the Jews, and the Mohamedans.”251 In order to accomplish this aim, the Assembly should back and adopt as the Assembly’s own the Western Foreign Missionary Society which was operating under the auspices of the Synod of Pittsburg.

250 Ibid. 7. While it is not stated in the minutes of this convention, this no doubt refers to the action of the Assembly of 1834 which acquitted the Rev. Albert Barnes of Philadelphia 2nd (Assembly), which action continued to upset the Old School men.
251 Ibid. 8.
On Wednesday afternoon, May 20, the day before the opening of the Assembly, the Convention heard the proposed memorial, amended it and adopted it unanimously. It encompassed all the items which had been presented in the Convention, in terms of “grievances that we mourn….” With regard to the repeal of the Plan of Union, they admit that the present situation with the Congregational delegates is at least better, because the General Assembly removed the right to vote in the Assembly from the Congregational Associations that sent delegates to the General Assembly. Clearly these members of the Convention would not be content, however, until any taint of Congregationalism was removed.

On the issue of the errors which were allowed to stand by the acquittal in the heresy trials of Albert Barnes (again not mentioned by name), it is clear that under their anger lay an understanding of the human mind, that it is easily persuaded and led astray, and that the proper mode of behavior is for the laity to be informed of the right way of thinking and those responsible in the church will judge whether the correct ways are being followed or not. To be sure that there was no misunderstanding, the memorial contained a brief outline of the theology that under girded their action, and which they requested the Assembly to consider in order to reform itself.

Eventually 108 men from 47 presbyteries signed the document, though not all of them had been sent officially to represent their presbyteries, and several presbyteries had more representatives than could have been officially delegated. Twelve men, for instance, signed with Ohio Presbytery as their identification.
On the final day, Thursday, May 21, just prior to the opening of the Assembly, the convention thanked their hosts, the city of Pittsburgh, and the editors of the religious newspapers that printed the “Act and Testimony” of the year before, and which led to this successful conclusion of this Convention. The memorial would be submitted by its signers to the Assembly.252

D. *The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1835*

This meeting of the General Assembly in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was held on 19 days, from May 21, 1835 until its adjournment on the afternoon of June 8, 1835. While a most recent past moderator, Dr. William A. McDowell, was present, he requested Princeton Theological Seminary professor, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Miller (Old School), to preach the opening sermon. In the absence of the Moderator of the 1834 General Assembly, a recent, present, and commissioned participant, the Rev. Dr. Nathan S.S. Beman of Troy Presbytery and a New School man, was called to the chair. This action did not stand, however, and through various parliamentary actions, Beman was removed and Old School member, the Rev. Dr. William McDowell253 took the

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252 At this early date in the life of the General Assembly, it was still possible for non-members and even non-Presbyterians to submit requests for business to the Assembly by memorial or petition, though the submitters did not have automatic permission to speak to the issues on the floor and would have to seek out sponsors from the commissioners. It was in this way that women submitted petitions on slavery in an attempt to be heard by the full Assembly.

253 McDowell as a past Moderator could be asked to serve temporarily even though not a member of the Assembly. The Moderator of any governing body must be a member of the body. As McDowell was not commissioned to this Assembly, he could not remain as its moderator. For the implication of removing
chair. His tenure lasted only a few hours, however, and the Rev. Dr. William W. Phillips, of the Old School Presbytery of New York, was elected Moderator.\footnote{254 The election of the moderator is often used as a barometer for the actions of the Assembly. Whichever faction is able to receive sufficient votes to elect a moderator, may also be able to find sufficient votes to pass legislation favorable to their side. Of course, this is not universally true, although to this day, there is considerable interest in and speculation surrounding the election of the Moderator of each General Assembly, followed by discussion concerning what this election may mean for the future of the Church.}

Again, as in 1834, business was presented in the form of the recently drafted memorial and petition on the same topics as the year previous; that is, how ministers were received, whether the Plan of Union with the Congregationalists should be rescinded, the nature of heresy and how it could be halted, and so on. The request was assigned the designation, Overture 16. The nature of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Presbytery of Philadelphia (Assembly) was again questioned and a request to forbid them to form new churches was presented, which was withdrawn from consideration in the final days of the Assembly. As with other issues, these were submitted to committees designed to make specific recommendations upon which the Assembly as a whole could act.

Some decisions were made on Tuesday, May 26, among them that even if a man were elected an elder for a specific term, rather than for life, he retained the status of elder beyond his term and could be a commissioner to the Assembly. Part of the further business that afternoon was the presentation of Overture 12, on the subject of slavery. This business consisted of petitions and memorials from both Presbyteries and individuals, and it was assigned to a committee, consisting of commissioners from Transylvania (Kentucky), Cincinnati and Columbus (Ohio), Winchester (Virginia), and from the
Assembly’s 2nd Philadelphia Presbyteries. Dr. Cleland, from Transylvania, was Old School, but moderate, and the others were evenly split between Old School and New School men. An added memorial concerning slavery, a petition signed by 198 persons, was also committed to this committee. Its fate would not be decided until the close of the Assembly.255

The Assembly’s deliberations and actions on Overture 16 took more than four days before a decision could be reached. The response was adopted without a counted vote, and so must have been clearly in favor. The tenor of the answer can be found in the opening words, which state that the committee had no intention to follow any particular party line, but to:

“take for their guide simply the word of God. …The moment we depart from these, we are not only exposed to all the evils of discord, but also run the risk of destroying those bonds of union by which we have been so long bound together as an ecclesiastical body.”

The Old School, by their careful organization and strategic planning, found itself in the majority at this Assembly. The resolution stated that there were principles to which all were expected to subscribe and maintain, but they wished to “maintain the ‘unity of the

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255 The Ohio Observer for June 11, 1835 presented a report from H.K. (Harmon Kingsbury of Cleveland) concerning the General Assembly, dated June 3, 1835. The memorial, the Act and Testimony, had been accepted as a piece of business, and was to be the order of the day on the following Tuesday morning. Kingsbury’s issue, however, on the desecration of the Sabbath, was set aside by the Committee on Overtures, he assumes possibly because so many of the commissioners had traveled on Sunday to reach the Assembly. He comments on the difference in treatment of the “memorial” and the issue of the Sabbath, “Heresies in doctrine are very dangerous in the church, but immoralities in practice are matters of little moment!! Be sound in the head and let the heart take care of itself!!! I had supposed that the heart and not the head governed the man.” Commenting on further business, Kingsbury says, “The Committee to whom was referred the overture, on Slavery reported, which was accepted and laid on the table without comment. Whether either of the last mentioned reports will be called up for consideration I think, judging from the present character of the Assembly, is doubtful.”
Spirit’ in the bonds of peace and love…” If this was not possible, they said, then “it is in vain that we assemble from year to year….”

In answer to each specific question presented in the memorial, the 1835 Assembly reiterated the proposition that the presbyteries alone were responsible for judging candidates and ministers who come to them, accepting the judgment of other presbyteries and doing further examinations if necessary. Further, any judicatory could warn against a printed publication if they believe it to be heretical. In response to the question about the action of the 1834 Assembly to form the Synod of Delaware, the 1835 Assembly declared that the formation of that body with its elective affinity presbytery was not legal and so was void; that the presbyteries that had been a part of the Synod of Delaware were to revert to the Synod of Philadelphia; and the Synod of Philadelphia was free to organize its presbyteries as it saw fit and apply to the next Assembly for a change of venue.

The only issue on which the Old School made no headway at the Assembly of 1835 concerned voluntary societies, especially the Home Missionary and Education Societies. Forbidding them to exist in the churches at this time was not “expedient.” However, they stated that Presbyterians ought first to support their own boards and bodies. As for the Plan of Union of 1801, the Old School was only partly successful, for the Assembly stated that no new churches should be formed under that plan and that it should be annulled after the next meeting of the General Association of Connecticut, but that churches already formed under the plan should not be disturbed. In addition, the friendly relations with the Congregational Associations in New England should be maintained as

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256 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, A.D. 1821 to A.D. 1835, 484-486.
they were, by which delegates were welcomed, but their voting power had been removed. Finally, while not naming them, the Assembly agreed to condemn alleged doctrinal errors, if they in fact did exist, enjoining “…all our Presbyteries and Synods to exercise the utmost vigilance in guarding against the introduction and publication of such pestiferous errors.”

Saturday, June 6, also found the Assembly taking action to form a committee to explore the transfer of the Western Foreign Missionary Society, then under the supervision of the Synod of Pittsburgh. The committee to discuss and recommend action on this issue was composed solely of Old School men. This subject was another that would continue to rile the Assembly and the church for several years, some believing that the Presbyterian-dominated American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), a voluntary society, was both sufficient and best able to spread the gospel which belonged to the whole church, rather than just to the Presbyterian part of it. In the final hours of the Assembly, the committee was also given the authority to complete the process, much as a commission could do today.

In its last day, Monday, June 8, 1835, the Assembly returned to the issue of an elder who is no longer serving as an elder being permitted to have a seat in the Assembly, and decided by a vote of 76 to 15 that only serving elders were eligible to be

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257 Ibid. 487.
258 The minutes of the General Assembly are quite various in the way in which they spell “Pittsburgh.” Sometimes it is found with an “h” at the end, sometimes without. I have chosen to spell it in each instance as I have found it at the time that is being discussed.
259 The current law in the PCUSA states that a committee has authority only to recommend actions to its organizing body, while a commission functions as a smaller version of the whole, and its actions are considered to be the actions of the originating body, with the specific powers being designated by action of the governing body that names the commission. Administrative commissions act in lieu of the full body taking action, while judicial commissions carry out the governing body’s functions as a court.
commissioners. The “no” votes included mostly commissioners from New School presbyteries, where the use of elders was thought not to be universal.

On the issues on slavery, the Assembly was unable to make a decision. Under time constraints of the imminent completion of the meeting, the topic was referred to a committee that was to report to the Assembly in 1836. That committee represented a number of points of view, and was composed of some of the strongest and best-known ministers of the Presbyterian Church; Dr. Nathan S.S. Beman of Troy, and the Rev. James H. Dickey of Chillicothe, both known to be opposed to slavery; the Rev. John Witherspoon of Harmony Presbytery in South Carolina, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Miller of New Brunswick Presbytery in New Jersey, and the Rev. Dr. James Hoge of Columbus. Of these last, Witherspoon was a slaveholder, and Miller and Hoge were staunchly Old School. Thus the majority of the committee was conservative and at least sympathetic to all the societal issues surrounding the wisdom, if not the ethical implications, of continuing to allow slavery to exist as a legal entity, not to be disturbed in a precipitate fashion. As it proved, the outcome of this committee’s work would not be favorable to those who viewed slavery as a sin and slavery’s continued existence in the United States of America as harmful to the moral and ethical life of the country and its citizens. Even though the items concerning slavery were placed last in the agenda when many commissioners had left or were anxious to leave the meeting, the matter was of such importance that those assigned to study and work on a recommendation concerning the issue were leading figures of the church of that time. The assignment of two New School men, one of whom was doctrinally conservative, and three Old School men, by an Old School-dominated Assembly, might cause some to
question whether the outcome would be fair and balanced. Questions did arise before the next Assembly.

E. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 1836.

Following the Assembly in 1835, further calls were made by adherents and signers to complete the actions mentioned in the “Act and Testimony,” and another convention was called for and held before the next Assembly, but the 1836 Assembly, with a slight majority of New Schoolers, acted to negate some of the advances of the previous year realized by the Old School.

The General Assembly of 1836 was held in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, from Thursday, May 19 to June 10, 1836, a total of 23 days. The Moderator of the 1835 Assembly, the Rev. Dr. William W. Phillips, opened the meeting with a sermon and enrolled members, who eventually numbered 249. Even though the previous Assembly had removed the voting privilege from them, there were seven corresponding members, mostly Congregationalists from New England, but also including a representative from the General Synod of the Reformed Dutch Church and the General Synod of the German reformed Church.

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260 A corresponding member was permitted to be present on the floor of the Assembly, could speak to any issue, but was not permitted to vote. Delegates from other bodies had even been assigned to committees, giving them a powerful voice in the preparation of recommendations on Assembly business. The New School members certainly continued to consult and meet with ecumenical delegates, but their participation was now limited.
On Thursday afternoon a new Moderator was chosen, the Rev. John Witherspoon of Harmony Presbytery in South Carolina. As the Rev. Dr. Ezra S. Ely had resigned from all offices in the church, the Assembly took action to proceed with the nomination of a new Stated Clerk. On the following Monday, the Rev. Dr. John M’Dowell of the 2nd Presbytery of Philadelphia (Synodical) was chosen unanimously to become the new Stated Clerk, though only after other nominations were withdrawn.

Following much routine business, the Clerk reported that judicial appeals and complaints had been submitted, including several against the Synod of Philadelphia and its actions, some concerning Albert Barnes and others dealing with the various presbyteries that were or had been under its purview. Most of the cases that were not directed at the Synod of Philadelphia were again from the Synod of Utica or the Synod of Cincinnati. By Friday afternoon, even more complaints were filed against the Synod of Philadelphia, making a grand total of nine judicial cases to be heard against that contentious Synod.

Preliminary reports were presented and docketed, some of them held over from the 1835 Assembly. The committee, designated by the 1835 Assembly and vested with the power to negotiate with the Synod of Pittsburg and the Western Foreign Missionary

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261 Dr. Ely was a beloved, elderly minister, a moderate with New School proclivities, who had joined the Second Philadelphia Presbytery with Albert Barnes. Ely had served as the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, a responsible and powerful on-going position, unlike that of Moderator, which lasted only for one year. Ely had resigned all his duties, as he was moving onto the mission field in Missouri. For information on John Witherspoon see footnote 115.

262 This presbytery, which eventually retained the name of 2nd Philadelphia, was a mostly affinity presbytery that found its membership among the former members of the Associate Reformed Synod. Its members were sometimes called the Scotch presbytery or the Seceders, referring to their origins in the splits in the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, and who emigrated as a group to the colonies and the new United States of America. For further information, see footnote 103.

Society to transfer the Society to the General Assembly, to conclude the business and report to the ensuing Assembly, reported a successful completion of the work. Part of the terms of agreement included: “…that the said Assembly will never hereafter alienate or transfer to any other judicatory or board whatever, the direct supervision and management of the said missions…”\textsuperscript{264} This transfer included not only the administration of the project, but the choosing of the missionaries, the assignment of financial support to them, the number and powers of the Board of Directors, and all property including houses, land, tenements and permanent funds which might currently belong to the Society. Even where the Society was to be located was now for the Assembly to decide. This recommendation caused a great deal of discussion before it was finally decided the following week.

The next major item of business was another assignment from the prior Assembly in 1835, concerning the memorials and petitions on the subject of slavery, had been given to a small group to make a recommendation to the 1836 Assembly. Dr. Miller\textsuperscript{265}, from this committee on slavery, as reported in the \textit{Philadelphia Observer} two weeks after the start of the Assembly, said that a majority of the committee (Witherspoon, Hoge and himself) wanted to have nothing to do with the issue, “inasmuch as the subject of slavery was one of a political character, involving the political institutions of the country, and the references in the standards on the subject had never been authorized by the Assembly to be put there.”\textsuperscript{266}

Their report, reflecting this discomfort with the subject and their belief that it was

\textsuperscript{264} Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. \textit{Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church with an Appendix, A.D. 1836.} (Philadelphia: The Stated Clerk of the Assembly, 1836), 243.

\textsuperscript{265} Rev. Samuel Miller, D.D. was the Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government at Princeton Theological Seminary, and one of the editors of the \textit{Biblical Repertory} published by that institution. He was staunchly Old School.

\textsuperscript{266} \textit{Philadelphia Observer}. New Series, No. 7, Whole No. 565. June 2, 1836, p. 86.
inappropriate to be discussed by the church or in church courts, recommended the following resolution:

That, after the most mature deliberation which they have been able to bestow on the interesting and important subject referred to them, they would most respectfully recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following preamble and resolutions, viz.

Whereas, the subject of slavery is inseparably connected with and regulated by the laws of many of the states in this Union, with which it is by no means proper for an ecclesiastical judicatory to interfere; and involves many considerations, in regard to which great diversity of opinion and intensity of feeling are known to exist, in the churches represented in this Assembly: and whereas, there is every reason to believe that any action on the part of the Assembly in reference to this subject, would tend to distract and divide our churches, and would, probably, in no wise promote the benefit of those whose welfare is immediately contemplated in the memorials in question – therefore,

1. Resolved, That it is not expedient for the Assembly to take any further order in relation to this subject.

2. Resolved, That, as the notes which have been expunged from our public formularies, and which some of the memorials referred to the committee, request to have restored, were introduced irregularly—never had the sanction of the church—and therefore never possessed any real authority, the General Assembly has no power to assign them a place in the authorized standards of the church, and does not deem it proper to take the constitutional measures for effecting their restoration.267

According to the Philadelphia Observer, the Assembly received the report and it was moved to lay it on the table. The official minutes, however, only reflect that consideration of this report was made the order of the day for Monday, May 30, 1836 at 10 a.m.

The committee’s report did not arise from unanimous opinion, however. In fact, there was actually a question as to whether the full committee had ever actually met

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267 The notes referred to were additions, interpretations, and scriptural proof texts of parts of the Westminster Standards. A note concerning “man-stealing” had been added by the Assembly in 1805 and removed in 1816. The note as it was printed in the Constitution of 1805 can be found in Appendix C.
together to decide on a report and recommendation.268 The Rev. James Dickey, from the Chillicothe Presbytery in southern Ohio on the Ohio River, which was a hot-bed of antislavery, wrote a much longer and scathing statement concerning slavery and the church’s role in perpetuating, even aiding it. Dickey’s report, which was supported by the fifth member of the committee, the Rev. Dr. Nathan S.S. Beman of Troy Presbytery in upper New York State, was read to the Assembly, functioning as a substitute motion. It includes the following:

The whole system [of slave holding] is at war with the divine institutions. It is therefore sin—essentially SIN—and all its claims are founded in justice….Therefore, as the sense of this Assembly, resolved,

1. That the buying, selling, or holding of a human being as property, is, in the sight of God, a heinous sin, and ought to subject the doer of it to the censures of the church.

2. That it is the duty of every one, and especially of every Christian who may be involved in this sin, to free himself from its entanglements without delay.

3. That it is the duty of every one, and especially of every Christian, in the meekness and firmness of the gospel, to plead the cause of the poor and needy, by testifying against the principle and practice of slave holding; and to use his best endeavours to deliver the church of God from this evil; and to bring about the emancipation of the slaves in these United States and throughout the world.269

This “counter report,” too, was docketed for the following Monday at 10 a.m. These two reports were not the only items of business on slavery that were placed before the Assembly, however. A petition on slavery was presented by the Rev. J.L. Harrison and referred to the Committee on Bills and Overtures. On Tuesday, another petition on slavery from ladies was presented and referred to Bills and Overtures. A third petition was also

268 Ibid. 86.
presented, and was attempted to be read, to much anxiety, and was finally referred without the reading, and with a further directive to present all such petitions directly to the Bills and Overtures Committee, “without troubling the house.”²⁷⁰

That Monday “order of the day” time, however, proved to be elusive, as one of the many cases against the Philadelphia Synod that involved the Rev. Albert Barnes intervened. Begun on Monday, May 23, 1836, this complaint and appeal, hearing, and trial were to consume the Assembly through Monday afternoon, June 6, 1836. The Philadelphia Observer said the General Assembly has been in session already for three weeks, and “it is as yet but on the threshold of its duties.”²⁷¹ Other routine business was conducted as well as the appeal, but all of the deliberative time was spent on determining if Albert Barnes was a heretic, or at least, if his Biblical commentary on the Book of Romans was heretical. In this case, the Assembly sat as a court, listening to both sides present their arguments.

When Monday morning, May 30, arrived, the Assembly remained mired in the Barnes case. As reported in its review of the Assembly, the editor of the Philadelphia Observer said that the Assembly began again to hear Barnes’ appeal from the decision of the Synod that castigated him and his writing for his theological doctrines. The deliberations were interrupted by a call for the order of the day.

“Mr. M’Ilhenney moved that the order of the day, viz: the report of the committee on the subject of slavery, be taken up. There were not a few in this house, he said, who felt a deeper interest on this subject than on any other.” A great discussion ensued, including

Mr. Bergen, who “put it to the conscience of every member of the Assembly, can we postpone the solemn subject now before the Assembly and introduce such an agitating question as that of slavery?” “Mr. Price remarked, that such a proposition or expectation was what would make the South refuse to postpone the order of the day.” “Dr. Miller thought that as the Assembly should gratify the beloved brethren of the South in taking up the subject, so they could vote that it would not be proper to take any vote on the subject of slavery.” Mr. Nesbitt continued,

“…The interests of the Church in five or six States depended on the action of this Assembly. The crisis had arrived which was to put to the test the adherence of the southern churches to the General Assembly. The question must be settled or we are paralysed. Any postponement, oblique action, evasion, or temporizing policy as to the question, will be deemed equivalent with the declaration that the South are sinners in the tenure of slaves as property.”

The subject of slavery was of interest to many, thought to be divisive by most, and the outcome of a discussion was unknown and feared. The antislavery hope was to condemn slaveholding as a sin and work to remove slavery from the land, gradually or swiftly. The hope of the Old School and its Southern allies was for the Assembly to state clearly and finally that the church had no business speaking about the topic, which for them was not appropriate as it moved into the area of church-state relations. Other biblical and theological arguments for maintaining slavery would follow soon after. In this case, Mr. Bergen’s position prevailed, as the Assembly’s action was to postpone the slavery issue, “to be taken up immediately after the issue of the appeal of Mr. Barnes…”

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272 Ibid. p. 90.
274 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1836, 260. Mr. Hoge, member of the majority of the committee to report on slavery, was given further power in this Assembly, being designated as the chairman of the Judicial Committee, the body that screened all the cases, determined if they were to be combined, dismissed, and if
Further complicating and slowing consideration of slavery, this “agitating subject,” was an issue of power and control, especially the control of mission, centered on voluntary societies. An earlier Assembly had established a Presbyterian Church board for mission, a board that concerned itself with missions within the United States and its territories. At the time of the General Assembly action to form its own board, the largest and most influential purveyor of mission and missionaries was the independent, non-denominational, (but Christian,) American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM,) largely founded by, supported by, and even run by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, with the addition of a few Methodists and Baptists. However, some Presbyterians, largely Old School conservatives, believed that only if the Assembly and Presbyterians alone controlled the mission, its money and its men, could they be sure that the proper message was being sent abroad. The Synod of Pittsburg, acting upon this premise, had founded its own foreign mission board, the Western Foreign Missionary Society. Highly successful, the Old School men saw this as an opportunity to adopt an existing Presbyterian institution, keep its agents, missionaries and message under their control, rather than continue to support a multi-denominational body that might or might not propound pure Calvinistic doctrine.

The deliberations and debate of this issue consumed any spare time that the Assembly could find away from the Barnes trial. At issue was not only actually accomplishing the task of adopting this Society as the Assembly’s own, but also whether heard, in what order – giving him a great deal of power. The only committee with similar power to determine what would be heard and ultimately debated by the Assembly, was the Committee on Bills and Overtures, also carefully chosen to have an Old School chairman and majority Old School members.
the process undertaken had been correct. The concern was therefore multiple: did the Assembly have the power and/or authority to commission a small group to act on its behalf; could the Assembly constitutionally have its own boards; could the Assembly change its structure without a prior vote of all the presbyteries?²⁷⁵ It seemed that all sides agreed that evangelism, sending out missionaries to win converts and save souls, was important, appropriate, and should continue. Beyond the obvious questions of legality of process of the General Assembly’s absorbing the organization that belonged to one Synod, lay the message to be promulgated. Dr. Miller, speaking in regard to the existence of and Presbyterian membership in voluntary societies, said, “…he believed the Church was founded for the purpose of maintaining pure and entire all the ordinances of Christ…” The question for him, clearly, was whether a body not under the supervision and constraint of one denomination could assure the purity needed to justify the Church’s existence.

The Rev. Dr. Absalom Peters, commissioner from the elective affinity New School 3rd Presbytery of New York, in speaking of the ABCFM, addressed both the issues of process as well as message, said that the Assembly didn’t have the power to make its own board. Using the arguments of the “Act and Testimony,” signed and endorsed by Miller, Peters noted that it said that “…all authority originates with the Presbyteries.” He offered his support of mission as an ecumenical venture, saying, “The glory of Presbyterianism is that it stands on liberal ground. It is the usage of this church to hold

²⁷⁵ Trinterud addresses the history of this issue in tracing the history of the first General Assembly and the Constitution upon which its organization was based. “The draft of 1786 had been concerned to restrict drastically the power of the General Assembly by denying it the right to ‘assume the business of a presbytery…’ The Plan of 1787…made this restriction more general, but included a provision that no act of a General Assembly could become a standing rule without first being referred to the presbyteries, and securing the consent of at least a majority of them.” Trinterud, Leonard J. The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949), 298.
communion with evangelical Christians of all denominations.\textsuperscript{276} Purity, for Miller, was paramount, hence the Presbyterian Church and its General Assembly needed to be in control. The glory of the Presbyterian Church for Peters was to act communally with all denominations, which would necessarily mean compromising on some positions. Again, the issue of peace, unity and purity, the triumvirate of the ordination vows, was at the heart of the issue.\textsuperscript{277}

The matter of the transfer of the Western Foreign Missionary Society did not eventually turn out well for the Old School. Supported largely by New Schoolers, a motion to postpone the ratification of the action already adopted (under some pressure) by the Synod of Pittsburg, actually was lost, 133 in favor to 134 against.\textsuperscript{278} Ordinarily, the difficulty in waiting to consider an item of business until the last moments of the Assembly was that a number of commissioners would already have left. The final recorded vote, however, was 106 in favor of completing the transfer, to 110 against; 216 men still present and voting out of a total possible of 249.\textsuperscript{279} The important business of the Assembly kept many more men in place than was usual for that late in the Assembly. Immediately, the Stated Clerk was ordered to “inform the Board of the Western Foreign Missionary Society, that the Assembly have not carried into effect the stipulation touching the receiving that

\textsuperscript{277} A full exposition of the nature of peace, unity, and purity in the ordination vows can be found in Chapter 2c. The Philadelphia Observer, on June 2, 1836, page 87, quoted Dr. Miller as saying that “…he believed the Church was founded for the purpose of maintaining pure and entire all the ordinances of Christ…”
\textsuperscript{278} While the minutes do not reflect this, it may have been a motion to postpone indefinitely, or to kill the issue, because the action on the recommendation actually was postponed until very late in the Assembly, not being addressed until Thursday morning, June 9, the penultimate day. To consider an item of business at the same session, the appropriate postponing motion would be to table.
\textsuperscript{279} Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1836, 278-79.
society under their care.” The on-going Barnes trial continued to occupy the Assembly’s time and attention.

The failure of this transfer was a huge blow to those in the Church who wished to be sure of the purity of the message, the orthodoxy of the messengers, and the speed of the undertaking. Having been assured that they could effect this merger, and wishing to keep mission issues and money out of the hands of any but themselves, this failure to complete a much-desired action was another source of overwhelming anxiety.

In the midst of concern over all the minutiae that surrounded the annual meeting of the Assembly - synod minutes to be read, presbytery reports presented, visits to other denominational meetings spoken of, elections to boards, concern about raising funds to pay seminary professors, plus the judicial cases and discussion on the major topics of slavery and the Western Foreign Missionary Society - the Assembly continued to experience some surprises. On Wednesday morning, June 1, the Rev. Horace Pratt of Georgia stood and read a headline from the *New York Evangelist*, “The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S. in the year 1836 is a SLAVEHOLDER!!” (The Rev. John Witherspoon, of Harmony Presbytery in South Carolina, was the Moderator.) The Moderator replied, “…that that paper for once had spoken truth if it should never do it again—that it was true he was a slaveholder!…and made some remarks calculated to allay the excitement manifested by the house…” Many comments ensued, including a fear that the Moderator needed to be protected from the expected viciousness and violence of the abolitionists present. Other voices said that the newspaper simply stated a fact. A motion
was made to remove the editor (Congregational minister, the Rev. Joshua Leavitt) from the house, but the maker of the motion refused to withdraw his motion, and it was eventually indefinitely postponed. Mr. Leavitt, however, was no longer a welcome guest, and was removed from the special vantage point close to the Moderator, reserved for the religious press.280

Agitation about slavery was not at an end, however. On Friday morning, June 3, the Rev. John Rankin, of Chillicothe Presbytery, well-known as an antislavery proponent, asked why the petitions and memorials on slavery had not been returned to the assembly, as they were to be considered at the completion of Barnes’ case as an order of the day, yet the Assembly was considering other items of business. He was told to ask for them to be considered when the other petitions were presented and that they would be read. And he sat down.281 Among others, Rankin was joined in his outspoken views by the Rev. Elijah Parish Lovejoy, minister commissioner from the Presbytery of St. Louis, Missouri and the editor of a newspaper, who would be killed in November 1837 because of his unwillingness to moderate his views and editorials on the necessity to abolish slavery.

Finally, on Tuesday morning June 7, the Assembly returned to the subject of slavery. Parliamentary procedure in the form of other motions and resolutions intervened in the consideration of the previous recommendations, which by Assembly action had remained on the table from days before. A motion was made to postpone the consideration of both the majority and minority reports of the committee that had been charged by the

280 Philadelphia Observer. June 9, 1836. p. 90. Leavitt and others from the various religious newspapers attended the Assemblies faithfully, took notes in shorthand and reported much of the proceedings in their periodicals.

281 Ibid. 91.
Assembly of 1835 with consideration of how to handle the issue, the petitions and the memorials. In their place, a substitute was offered by the Rev. John M’Elhenny of Lexington Presbytery, Synod of Virginia. His motion said:

“That after the most mature deliberation which they have been able to bestow on the interesting and important subject referred to them, they would most respectfully recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following preamble and resolution, viz.

“Whereas, the subject of Slavery is inseparably connected with the laws of many States of this Union, in which it exists under the sanction of said laws, and of the Constitution of the United states; -- And whereas, Slavery is recognized in both the Old and New Testament as an existing relation, and is not condemned by the authority of God, therefore,

“Resolved, That the General Assembly have no authority to assume or exercise jurisdiction in regard to the existence of Slavery.”

The discussion was intense, and involved. Some agreed that slavery was “inseparably connected with the laws of many states…” and was not a proper subject on which a church might take action. Others wished to return to the original report, which stated that any action would “tend to distract and divide our churches…” Yet others, especially those whose presbyteries had submitted the petitions and memorials, wished to have a fair hearing. Eventually, a few of the memorials were read, including one from the Synod of Illinois, one from the Presbytery of Erie, and one from the Presbytery of Chillicothe.282 After much discussion and many motions, there was a move to postpone the issue and the reports indefinitely. Dr. Hoge, again involved in virtually every issue of the Assembly, made the motion. There were two parts, a preamble and the motion to postpone. The motion is as follows:

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282 Philadelphia Observer no.9, whole no. 567, June 16, 1836, p. 94
Inasmuch as the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, in its preliminary and fundamental principles, declares that no Church Judicatory ought to pretend to make laws, to bind the conscience, in virtue of their own authority; and as the urgency of the business of the Assembly, and the shortness of the time during which they can continue in session, render it impossible to deliberate and decide judiciously on the subject of slavery in its relations to the church; therefore, resolved that this whole subject be indefinitely postponed.

By request, the motion was divided and the body agreed that the first vote should be to postpone the entire subject indefinitely and the previous question was called for and passed. Following this, the motion to postpone carried 154 in favor and 87 against, with 4 declining to vote. Then, even though the body had decided to postpone the “whole subject,” a vote was taken on the preamble, which passed without a counted vote. Immediately, a number of commissioners stated their wish to be recorded as dissenting from the vote on the preamble.

This was not quite the end of the issue, however. On Friday, June 10, the last day of the Assembly, a protest was read by Elijah P. Lovejoy, and was answered by Mr. Pratt of Georgia. In the course of procedure, the answer was amended and an attempt made by the Moderator to get him to withdraw it. He refused and the amended version passed.283 This protest concerned the process of voting, as well as the content of the preamble, which could be construed to mean that the Assembly had stated that it believed that any action on the topic of slavery was designed “to legislate on the subject…to bind the consciences of men…” Pratt’s answer was that the process was appropriate, as in the division of the

283 Ibid. 95.
question, both parts should be voted on, and therefore, there was no injustice. He further
goads the minority on this question, however, in his final answer, saying:

“The Assembly judge, that no injustice was done to any by their
decision because it was evident, that a majority of the House was
utterly opposed to any action that would have met the views of those
who now protest against the decision of the Assembly in this
matter.”284

A short time later another protest was registered by 21 Old School men, being
a protest against the protest’s answer. Moderator Witherspoon had attempted to have this
last protest withdrawn. The original answer had included the words, “because the
memorials and some of the speeches were highly abusive and disorderly, denouncing a
large number of the members of the Assembly…” These words were removed by
Assembly action. The complaint, which sought to have them reinstated, included three
reasons: 1) The words removed were true; 2) The words removed were the basis for the
subject having been postponed; and 3) Because the vote occurred while members were still
seeking to speak on the issue.285 This protest to the answer of the protest only shows how
rancorous and contentious was the dispute concerning slavery as appropriate business for
the General Assembly or the Presbyterian Church to discuss or on which it could take
action. No assignment was made to draft an answer to the last protest and no answer was
given.

This still was not the final effort of those for whom the issue of slavery was of
primary importance, however. Yet another protest was submitted during the final minutes

284 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1836, 291.
285 Ibid. 293.
of the Assembly. This protest expressed dissatisfaction with the body’s dealing with the
slavery question as mostly a question of internal concern (i.e. is it possible for the
Assembly to speak on the issue of slavery?) as well as the action to postpone, which
precluded the commissioners from considering either McElhenny’s substitute motion or the
counter recommendation from Mr. Dickey. In essence, stated the protest, this meant that
the voice of the church through its petitions and memorials had not been heard. And
finally, the reasons were given specifically:

1. Because such decision is inconsistent with former doings of the
   Assembly on the subject of Slavery.
2. Because said decision is founded on a false interpretation of the
   constitutional powers of the General Assembly.
3. Because it is the sacred duty of the Presbyterian Church, in her
   distinctive character, to give a frank response to respectful
   petitions and memorials of her members, both at the north and
   south, relative to the system of slavery as it exists in these United
   States.

12 members of the Assembly, five elders and 7 ministers signed this protest.
Almost all were from the areas and synods that would be exscinded the following year, or
from notably New School, liberal and notoriously antislavery areas. Two were from the
Synod of the Western Reserve, five from the Synod of Geneva, and three from the Synod
of Genesee. Of the remaining two, one was from the newly formed Synod of Michigan’s
Presbytery of St. Joseph, and one from the Philadelphia 2nd (Assembly) Presbytery, soon to
be known as Philadelphia 3rd, and removed from the church in the exscinding acts of 1837.
These were not men who were in the power structure of the Assembly, with the exception
of Elder Harmon Kingsbury from Cleaveland, whose passion was Sabbath observance, but
who also followed New School principles and supported New School issues.
Following this last protest, the Assembly quickly wound down. The body had already decided to send an action to the presbyteries that would make the synods the court of last resort in most cases, thereby cutting down on the number of appeals that the Assembly would have to handle in the future. This was no doubt a reasonable response to the large majority of cases that could not be handled by the 1836 Assembly, which had postponed them to the 1837 Assembly. In a final insult to the Old School party, which wished to discuss the sad state of the church, the committee to which the topic had been assigned reported, but its report is not recorded and was indefinitely postponed.²⁸⁶

Much discussion about matters that had been before the Assembly in 1836 took place in the religious press in the intervening times between the 1836 and 1837 Assemblies. The *Philadelphia Observer*, in its issue of September 15, 1836, published an article based on a letter from WW Philips (also signed by George Potts, Francis M’Farland, John Krebs, Henry Rankin, James Lenox, J. M’Elroy, John Breckinridge, Wm A. M’Dowell, and Hugh Auchincloss, all of the Old School) which said that since the Assembly didn’t convict Barnes of heresy, nor act on Samuel Miller’s Resolution condemning certain doctrines, they were concerned with next steps, for “can we continue united in one body, and maintain the integrity of our standards and promote the cause of truth and righteousness in the earth?”

²⁸⁶ It was the custom in all the early General Assemblies to send a letter to all the churches at the close of the Assembly, called the “Narrative on the State of the Church,” that reflected on all the reports that had been submitted, as well as discussing to some extent the actions that had been taken by the Assembly.
The Philadelphia Observer’s editor’s response to their question was that this was another step in a six year long process which had “tended to distract the Church, and ultimately to aim at a division.”

The steps he said had been followed are these (in paraphrased form):

1. “excite suspicion in regard to individuals”

2. “raise the cry of alarm that the Church was in danger.”

3. Keep the alarm quiet until an opportune moment arose, “an opportunity was seized upon more publicly to concentrate it, and give it tangible form by the Old Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1830 in the case of Mr. Barnes."

4. The General Assembly of 1831 presumably “settled” the case, “virtually declaring that the cry of alarm was unfounded; that the authors of the cry had been mistaken in their fears, and unwise in their zeal; and that the doctrinal sentiments in question were not such as to impair the confidence of ministers and people in those who had been directly or indirectly assailed as heretical.”

5. Not agreeing with that decision, Miller issued his “letters to Presbyterians,” which raised the level of anxiety, saying, “they have operated more extensively in undermining confidence in Christian ministers, and leading to ulterior measures…than all other causes put together.” The editor mentioned also the publishing of the “Act and Testimony,” plus what he described as “prosecutions,” and the “present state of alarm and suspicion,”

6. During the Assemblies of 1832,’33,’34, the same issues surfaced, and so the minority at the close of the 1834 Assembly, through the “Act and Testimony,” attempted to register the names of all the elders and ministers (and presbyteries
and sessions) in the Church who would adhere to the principles mentioned in that document. The writer described these as “novel” tactics, which showed the strength of the movement, who was willing to be a part of it, and where they were located. It was important that the names were published, and that the list therefore was public.

7. The writer stated that the genius of this tactic, (that is, public adherence to the cause), was that, “Self-respect; the love of consistency; or the fear of reproach or scorn as unfaithful, or the supposition that all this is the love of piety and truth, will secure his firmness and allegiance.” He gave as an example of his claim that public adherence to the cause breeds loyalty to it in the face of controversy that at the trial of Albert Barnes in 1836 at the Assembly,

67 members who had signed the ‘Act and Testimony’ voted for his condemnation; not a man who had signed that instrument voted to sustain him. That they had prejudged the case, and came pledged men not to sustain him, PERHAPS could not be demonstrated. That they were true to their former public pledge all parties will admit.

8. The next item in the list of conspiracy strategy was to attack another prominent person, Lyman Beecher in this case, and bring both trials to the 1835 GA, which, being held in “Pittsburg” would be expected to be Old School in majority. The writer stated that who the individuals were who were charged was unimportant, but they were seen as representative of the New School party. He characterized the activities as a “conspiracy.”

9. After both men, Barnes and Beecher, were upheld in their trials at the General Assembly, that should have been the end of the issue, according to Presbyterian polity. Yet, the next action was the circulation of the Phillips’ letter to “a portion”
of the church, with “ulterior motives” and working in secret, specifically to arrange for a meeting in a “secret” convention before the 1837 Assembly.

The discussion of what the editor saw as the plan to split the church continued in editorial form. The editor dealt specifically with the issues of Congregationalists trying to “revolutionize our church; to disrobe it of its Presbyterian form,” noting the activities of the 1836 Old School minority as follows: “rumors of dissatisfaction were afloat, and threats of rebellion against some of the decisions were made…A secret meeting was held in Pittsburgh; a resolution of nullification adopted; and central committee of correspondence appointed, with the avowed design clandestinely to mature a plan for a division of the Presbyterian Church.” The editor stated that this is happening “with so much Masonic secrecy.” He went on to analyze, stating his belief that this plan, this rift, this schism has happened because, “The chairman and one other are ministers who have come into our connection from the Associate Reformed Church.” He also noted that the leadership included a Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, and the Corresponding Secretary and General Agent of the Board of Missions, both of whom are paid by the Presbyterian Church and yet are acting to undermine it.  

And so the Assemblies moved into 1837. The Old School invited its friends and allies to yet another Convention, to be held one week before the Assembly began in May 1837. This Assembly and Convention were held back in Philadelphia, so much more convenient to the Old School commissioners, close to the home of the Princeton

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Theological Seminary, and inconvenient to the presbyters from the West, where it was thought, resided the heart of the New School men. The tactics of the 1837 Convention were similar to the Conventions held before - a memorial to be drafted, men (who were commissioners) to be pledged to voting the “right way,” elections to put in positions of power the Old School men, if a majority could be secured.

The reporting of this Convention, both before and after, was to be different depending on the nature of the reporter. The *New-York Evangelist* reported extensively concerning the Convention before it happened, commenting on items that it found curious, or felt might be of interest to its readers, who were largely in sympathy with the New School. Sounding very contemporary, the editor spoke of the changing of position of a major figure, the drafter of the “Act and Testimony,” a professor at Princeton and a prominent writer in the *Biblical Repertory*, the Rev. Dr. Robert Breckinridge. As he had, in the past, in the pages of that periodical, written against the Convention-mode, as well as against a division in the church, the editor calls him to account as “much surprise” has been expressed at his presumed about-face.

“…that Gentleman has at length come before the public, through the columns of the Presbyterian, with a long explanation of his views. He prefers calling the meeting a conference, rather than a convention, and avows his growing conviction that ‘those among us who reject our standards, and trample on our order, should be separated from us.’ He protests against all revolutionary measures; for ‘the cutting off of an unsound member from an otherwise healthy body, is not the dismemberment of the whole body.’ A ‘Convention with powers,’ he denounces as ‘both unconstitutional and ruinous,’ and he had, until lately, opposed even an advisory convention, until after the next General Assembly. He says,

‘At the subsequent and last meeting of the committee, it became apparent, however from abundant replies to their circular, then read, and from a survey of the whole subject, that a Convention of some sort
was indispensable in order to prevent an immediate rupture, and an ultimate division of the church. The nature of the meeting which the committee finally agreed on, is well known to the public. Nothing surely could be more mild, respectful, and innocent in its character.’

The editor adds a comment, “May such counsels prevail in the Convention.”

Judging from the outcome, they did not.

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Chapter 4  The General Assembly of 1837

a. An orderly and ordinary beginning?

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America opened its sessions in Central Presbyterian Church in the city of Philadelphia on May 18, 1837 in the usual fashion, according to its minutes. The Moderator of the previous Assembly, John Witherspoon, gave a sermon, and then a prayer. Following an extended recess, the Assembly reconvened in the late afternoon to enroll its commissioners, the men who were empowered to legislate for that year. Each would present credentials, the commission from a presbytery, in order to be enrolled.

1837 found an Assembly composed of 158 ministers and 105 elders, plus 12 members from “corresponding bodies”, who were Congregationalists from New England, also members of the Reformed Dutch Church, the German Reformed Church, and the Evangelical Consociation of Rhode Island. Over the next few days, these men would take a number of actions, the most startling of which was to adopt a resolution that “the Synod of the Western Reserve is, and is hereby declared to be no longer a part of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.” The vote was 132 to 105, with the bulk of the majority votes coming from the South and the East, the bulk of the minority coming from the then West (Michigan, Cincinnati, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and

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Minutes are not ordinarily founts of emotion, yet this action could hardly have been received as calmly by those who had just been removed from the Church as the minutes seem to record.

In 1837 the Synod of the Western Reserve consisted of eight presbyteries: Grand River, Portage, Huron, Trumbull, Cleveland, Maumee, Lorain and Medina. These presbyteries were comprised of more than 6,000 members, 113 churches and 100 ministers. What had caused the broader church to take this action against a part of its body? What really happened on those days from May 18, 1837 when the Assembly was called to order until it came to a close on June 8, 1837?

John Witherspoon, as the Moderator of the previous General Assembly, chose his sermon text carefully, I Corinthians 1:10-11. “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no

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291 Ibid. 440.
292 Generally, these presbyteries corresponded to counties. Grand River included the churches in Ashtabula County, which were thirty-five in number and these churches reported a total of 1864 members. Of these churches, six still exist as Presbyterian churches in the Presbytery of the Western Reserve; Pierpont, Rome, Ashtabula, Kingsville, Orwell and New Lyme. Two, Andover and Austinburg, still exist in the United Church of Christ.
Portage covered Portage County, south of Cleveland, with Akron as its center and comprising 24 churches, with 1946 members. It is no longer in the Presbytery of the Western Reserve, except for Northfield Church. Interestingly, Western Reserve College has a church that is listed as a part of this presbytery. Portage is now in Eastminster Presbytery.
Huron, to the west, had 23 churches with 1126 members, among them Sandusky, Milan, Vermillion and Norwalk. Today this area is a part of the Muskingum Valley Presbytery.
Further to the west, around Perrysburgh (sic), Toledo and Defiance, was the Presbytery of Maumee, comprised of only 8 churches and 212 members.
The Presbytery of Cleveland reported 10 churches with 463 members. Of these ten, only five still exist in the Presbytery of the Western Reserve, though two others merged and thus are part of existing churches.
The Presbytery of Medina had 13 churches, none of which reported members or ministers, and none of which are currently a part of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve. The presbyteries of Trumbull and Lorain had no report, though Trumbull had reported 12 ministers, 18 churches and 263 members in 1836.
293 Presbyterian Church. Minutes,1837, 572-576.
294 Ibid. 411.
divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared to me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.²⁹⁵ The minutes do not record the way in which the members present received this direct message, presumably from God, cautioning them about actions they might be contemplating. Witherspoon’s message seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

Sermons in those days were not short, yet there was a considerable gap in time between the preaching at 11 a.m., the prayer which followed, and the beginning of the first session at 4 that afternoon. In the meantime, the Standing Committee on Commissions received and verified the commissions of those men who would be enrolled as voting members of the 1837 General Assembly. Those commissions were given in proportion to the number of ministers in the presbytery. For each nine ministers, the presbytery was to send one minister and one elder, and another pair for each additional nine ministers.²⁹⁶ The Synod of the Western Reserve sent a total of nine ministers, though they would have been able to send 12. Equally, they would have been able to send 12 elders, yet only four were enrolled. In those days of difficult travel, and very long assemblies, it is perhaps not too surprising that the Synod of the Western Reserve could muster only 13 people to represent it instead of 24 for those 22 long days. This might have been especially true of lay people, for whom attendance would not be an expected part of their vocation. Had the

²⁹⁵ The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments Translated out of the Original Tongues and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised: The Text Conformable to That of the Edition of 1611, Commonly Known as the Authorized or King James Version. (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, (no date)),1103.
Presbyterians of the Synod of the Western Reserve been more aware of the plans of their brethren, perhaps there might have been a greater effort to attend.

The General Assemblies were ordinarily held in Philadelphia in an area much more accessible to the older, more settled, more conservative parts of the church. In fact, in the 49 years since the first assembly in 1789, only five meetings had been held outside of Philadelphia, and two of those were in Carlisle in southeastern Pennsylvania, which is near to Philadelphia. Philadelphia meetings were far more accessible to commissioners from the east and south than to those from the western “frontier”, the very part of the church that would be exscinded. The General Assembly had taken notice of the difficulties in attendance, and as early as 1791 provisions were made to collect monies to defray some of the expenses of those commissioners coming from distant places.297

Perhaps to balance the distances to be traveled by commissioners from the west, the two assemblies that preceded the exscinding assembly were both held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The actions of those Assemblies had proved to be problematic for those who were concerned about the continuing orthodoxy of the church, as the “New School” commissioners proved to be in the ascendant. Returning to the comfort of Philadelphia in 1837 changed those dynamics. There continued to be problems about meeting, however, evidenced by the immediate appointment of a committee of three to “inquire whether a more convenient place can be obtained for the sessions of the Assembly.”298

297 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820, 40.
298 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1837, 415.
The appointing of committees to do the preliminary business of the assembly was a powerful tool of the Moderator. In this case, a decision about convenience in Philadelphia was sensibly assigned to three men from Philadelphia. However, they were diverse in their representation. The Rev. Cornelius C. Cuyler was a minister commissioner from Philadelphia 2nd Presbytery. Elder Ambrose White was sent by Philadelphia 3rd Presbytery, and Elder Ambrose Symington was a commissioner from Philadelphia Presbytery. Philadelphia, the original presbytery of the church, was very conservative and saw itself as the leader, the older brother of all the brethren. The Second Presbytery of Philadelphia had been founded because of the strife which had occurred over the admission into membership of the Rev. Albert Barnes, originally a Methodist and considered a heretic by some in Philadelphia. He was formally accused of heresy, brought to trial at the General Assembly of 1831, and acquitted.

In order to bring peace to Philadelphia, the Assembly in 1831 suggested that a division of Philadelphia Presbytery be made on “Elective Affinity”, rather than the usual geographic lines. This was accomplished through the Synod of Philadelphia in 1832 following much discussion and strife. The issue was not simply whether it was wise to divide in this fashion in order to bring peace to the church, but that it was unconstitutional because the Form of Government provided that presbyteries should consist of “all the ministers and one elder from each congregation within a certain district,” as well as explicitly providing that the “exclusive authority” and power to erect new presbyteries belonged to synods, not the General Assembly.\textsuperscript{299} The General Assembly recommendation

\textsuperscript{299} Baird, Samuel J. D.D. History of the New School and of the Questions Involved in the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church in 1838. (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1868), 395.
caused continuing and ongoing division, especially as the Synod of New York had also allowed an elective affinity presbytery to be formed, the Third Presbytery of New York, which was populated with men who would become known later as the New School.\textsuperscript{300} Philadelphia 3\textsuperscript{rd} Presbytery, by contrast, was the result of this confusing and divisive set of actions between Philadelphia, the Synod of Philadelphia and the General Assembly.

For the first years of its existence, the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia was called Second Presbytery (Synodical), while there was another presbytery named “Second Presbytery of Philadelphia,” which was the affinity presbytery. By 1836, the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia was the name of the affinity presbytery, which included Albert Barnes and his followers. The Third Presbytery of Philadelphia, by contrast, was the expansion presbytery formed by the Synod of Philadelphia in the usual way and included congregations and ministers in a geographic area. Therefore, although all the men appointed to the committee to find new housing for the Assembly came from Philadelphia, they were a diverse group theologically in true Presbyterian fashion.

In addition to being concerned with where they would meet, the Assembly saw the appointment of a Committee of Elections, which dealt with concerns about enrolling commissioners. Of several would-be commissioners mentioned in the minutes, one was a ruling elder from the Presbytery of Lorain, who appeared with a commission that had not been signed by the presbytery’s Moderator. In that time, with no telephone, telegraph or even trains to communicate or travel quickly, such concerns were both serious and not easily solved. In the case of Henry Brown from Lorain, however, the committee was

\textsuperscript{300} Ibid. 402-403.
satisfied that he had actually been commissioned and enrolled him as a voting member of the Assembly, the only man to come from Lorain that year. At this point in the Assembly, there seemed to be no strategy or hidden agenda to keep Synod of the Western Reserve members from voting.

The next action of the Assembly was to elect a moderator. Voted into the one-year term of office was the Rev. David Elliott of the Presbytery of Ohio. Presbyteries were usually named for the region or “district” in which they were founded and the Presbytery of Ohio was no exception, as the name did not refer to the state, but rather the Ohio River, and was located largely in southwestern Pennsylvania. The Rev. Horace S. Pratt of Georgia Presbytery was elected Temporary Clerk. Expecting many visitors in addition to the commissioners, the Permanent Clerk was asked to have 1000 copies of the roll printed “for the use of the Assembly.” Following the preliminary enrollment and elections of Moderator and Clerks, the Assembly adjourned until 9 a.m. the following day.

On Friday, May 19, 1837, the Assembly opened with prayer, the roll was called and the business began in earnest. Most of the morning was spent in assigning committees for various purposes: A Committee on Commissions; a Bills and Overtures Committee; a Judicial Committee; a committee on leaves of absence; a committee to collect travel statistics and disperse the funds for mileage given to the “commissioners’ fund” in order to ease the burden of travel for those from far away; a Committee of Arrangements to provide for special “devotional exercises;” a committee to receive reports on the state of religion from the presbyteries and to produce a narrative from those reports. The moderator was
empowered to choose the members of all Assembly committees, a powerful tool, as the committees would hear the business, give preliminary recommendations for deliberation by the entire body, draft the language of the Assembly’s response to overtures and other business, as well as having the capacity not to report out difficult items of business.

The Bills and Overtures Committee was the most powerful committee of the Assembly. It handled, assigned and recommended action on every piece of business that the Assembly received. It also seems to have had the capacity to withhold business from the Assembly, to combine or recommend the combining of overtures, and in general to decide how and in what order the Assembly would handle its business. Who was chosen to serve on this committee, therefore, became vital to the way in which business was handled and even to the final outcome of that business.

At this point in the proceedings, Moderator Elliott seemed to have chosen a variety of people, though there was also a repetition of some names, no doubt better known, more practiced and more frequent attendees at assemblies. Business held over from the last assembly was assigned to other committees, particularly one item which would require candidates to present three years of study in a seminary, rather than two; and an effort to have synods be the final judge of judicial cases brought by sessions and presbyteries.

The committee which had been assigned the task of moving the assembly to a more comfortable (probably larger) location, reported that the Seventh Presbyterian Church
would be ready for them on the Monday following. The morning ended with the offer of
space in Sixth Church, to which the Assembly adjourned, to meet at 3:30 p. m. In a fashion
that would mirror later confusions at this Assembly, evidently Sixth Church was not
informed of its new task. Some members came, found the church locked, and so proceeded
with prayer outside the door. The church was subsequently opened, the group found Dr.
Witherspoon, the most recent past moderator, to preside. Witherspoon promptly appointed
another committee to go back to Central Church to find their missing members. In the
meantime, another group of commissioners had returned to Central Church with the
Moderator and Clerks, had opened their meeting with prayer and started to conduct
business. The committee from Sixth Church appeared, talked with the others, and decided
to ask all to return to Central Church, which was done. The Moderator of the Assembly
then took the chair, opened the meeting once again with prayer and business began.301 This
divided state of the Assembly was prescient in its mirroring of the divisions which were to
follow, though this incident was resolved fairly quickly and peaceably.

The rest of Friday afternoon was consumed with reporting on credentials and
enrolling additional members of the Assembly, including the Rev. Zebulon Crocker of
the General Association of Connecticut, who would write a full account of the incidents
of this Assembly in a book published in 1838.302 The Judicial Committee received a
sheaf of complaints and appeals, many of them coming from areas which would be
contested later as being New School, and most of them seeming to involve the

301 This incident is to be found on pages 416 and 417 of the 1837 minutes.
302 Crocker, Catastrophe.
orthodoxy of ministers being received by a presbytery. Of ten complaints, all but two concerned Philadelphia presbyteries or Western New York presbyteries and synods.

The next piece of business concerned a “document purporting to be a memorial from a Convention of Presbyterian Ministers and Elders, now in session in this city,” which was received and assigned to the Bills and Overtures Committee, thus beginning the movement toward actions, which would split the church. Following this action, and clearly needing more space than the Lecture Room of Central Church provided, the Assembly adjourned with prayer to meet the following morning at 9 a.m. in Seventh Presbyterian Church.

Saturday morning, May 20, 1837, began routinely with prayer, the reading of the minutes of the last session, the presentation of the Treasurer’s report made available for inspection by all members, and the appointment of three-member committees to examine the records of the twenty-three synods. The Committee on Bills and Overtures reported the receipt of four overtures, requests for action by the General Assembly which were usually received from presbyteries or synods. The first was titled, “Testimony and Memorial of the Convention,” and it was stated that its subject matter was “errors and irregularities in the Presbyterian Church.” The Convention had been a meeting of a group of Old School ministers and elders that took place just before the Assembly. For the Assembly to receive a statement from such a group was unusual, though not unheard of. The Old School had held such meetings before the General Assemblies of 1835,

1836, and 1837, following the publication of the “Act and Testimony” of Old School members in 1834. On that Saturday morning of May 20, the following three overtures from the presbyteries of New Brunswick (New Jersey), Albany (New York) and Lancaster (Pennsylvania) were identified as being “on the same subject” as Overture No. 1.304 Upon a motion to receive and read these overtures, debate ensued and finally they were sent back to the Committee on Bills and Overtures to discuss again.

While the Bills and Overtures Committee continued to debate how these overtures should be handled, the debate in plenary of the Assembly continued with routine work, reading and sending to a committee the annual report of the Trustees of the General Assembly; the reading, accepting, and order to print in the Appendix to the Minutes the annual report of the Trustees of Princeton Theological Seminary. And then the Bills and Overtures Committee appeared again, with a recommendation that Overture No. 1 be read and given to a committee to study and prepare a recommendation for the Assembly as a whole.

The committee consisted of seven men, five ministers and two elders.305 These men were: the Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander of New Brunswick Presbytery, who was a professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, and a convinced Old Schooler; the Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green of Philadelphia Presbytery, who had been President of the College of New Jersey, founder and President of the Board of

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304 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1837, 418.
305 Though the number of ministers constituting the committee overwhelmed the number of elders, the Constitution at this time did not specify that there should be parity on committees, as it would at a later time and does today.
Trustees of Princeton Seminary, chaplain of the U.S. Congress, former General Assembly Stated Clerk and Moderator (1824) and a prolific writer on Old School issues; the Rev. Dr. George A. Baxter of West Hanover Presbytery, who had been president of the Old School Convention; the Rev. William S. Plumer, East Hanover Presbytery, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia and a leader of the Old School movement in the South; and three more who were less well-known, the Rev. Dr. Aaron W. Leland of Charleston Union Presbytery and Elders James Lenox of New York Presbytery (the more conservative of the three) and Walter Lowrie of Allegheny Presbytery. No doubt all these men were carefully chosen, all Old Schoolers. Tracing their subsequent votes through the later Assembly business shows their unanimity in favor of abrogating the 1801 Plan of Union, excising the Synod of the Western Reserve wholesale, as well as voting against any further connection with the American Home Missionary Society and the American Education Society.

And so the Assembly adjourned for the weekend, to be constituted at 9 o’clock the following Monday morning, May 22, 1837. The session was concluded with prayer. The minutes do not reflect what occurred during this recess. It is hard to believe that there were not significant discussions, strategizing, and meetings over meals and in between times. The minutes, of course, are silent.
b. May 22, 1837 – The Strategy Begins

Monday morning, May 22, 1837, brought the usual routines; opening with prayer, reading the minutes of the last session, reporting of new commissioners’ arrival. The Committee on Bills and Overtures was given a “memorial on the subject of slavery.” As was their prerogative, the timing of reporting on this document was solely in the hands of the Bills and Overtures Committee. Nothing was stated in the minutes concerning whom this “memorial” was from, what it said or asked for, or why nothing was subsequently reported to the body concerning it.306

The Bills and Overtures Committee gave a report to the plenary of the Assembly, stating that six more overtures had been received, from presbyteries and synods, ranging in topics from Sabbath observance to foreign missions, vacant churches and the right of presbyteries to examine, which was not explained further as to whether examination referred to incoming ministers or candidates. There was even an overture which simply wished to know to whom the presbytery “should report on the subject of Education.”307

The substantive part of the Assembly began in earnest. The committee to which Overture 1 had been referred - Alexander, Green, Baxter, Leland, Plumer, Lowrie and Lenox - now reported. A motion was made to adopt the portion of the report, which dealt with doctrinal errors, followed by attempts to add more doctrinal errors to the original by

306 This would not happen in the General Assembly of today, as the reunion of 1983 between the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (South) stripped the Bills and Overtures Committee of any power to retain business. This committee’s function now is to be a pass-through, solely to decide which committee of the Assembly will deal with the business. There is in place an elaborate tracking system to be sure that all pieces of business come to the plenary of the Assembly for action, even if that action is “no action.”
307 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1837, 419.
amendment. Finally a resolution occurred, to postpone the whole subject, making it an order of the day for Tuesday morning. Following this action, the Assembly resolved that the portion of the overture that dealt with the connection between Presbyterians and Congregationalists would become the order of the day for Monday afternoon. The first step on the road to schism had been taken, yet the Assembly continued in routine fashion, distributing copies of the last annual report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; receiving a letter from the American Sunday School Union which invited commissioners to attend various events in the next two days that were part of an anniversary celebration of that group; and acknowledging a letter from the Trustees of the General Assembly which said that there were two vacancies on the Board caused by resignation and a death, following which consideration of that issue was docketed. And with prayer, the Assembly adjourned until the afternoon.

That afternoon, Monday, May 22nd, 1837, began as usual with prayer and the reading of the morning’s minutes. Routine business always seemed to be available. Reports were read - delegates to the General Synod of the Reformed Dutch Church reported, as did the Directors of the Theological Seminary in Princeton. Overture No. 6, the credentials of “a foreign minister,” was received and referred to a committee for perusal and recommendation. Then the order of the day was called, and the part of Overture No. 1 that dealt with the “Plan of Union” as adopted by the General Assembly in 1801 was brought before the Assembly. With no recorded vote, and no statement of serious debate, the Assembly adopted two parts of the report brought to them by the committee. As adopted, this portion of the report reads:
In regard to the relation existing between the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches, the committee recommend the adoption of the following resolutions:

1. That between these two branches of the American Church, there ought, in the judgment of this Assembly, to be maintained sentiments of mutual respect and esteem, and for that purpose no reasonable efforts should be omitted to preserve a perfectly good understanding between these branches of the Church of Christ.

2. That it is expedient to continue the plan of friendly intercourse, between this Church and the Congregational Churches of New England, as it now exists.\[308\]

A third resolution concerning abrogating the Plan of Union was presented, but not adopted. A closer view of the adopted portions will show that the usual pattern would be followed, to say that nothing should change, although all would change. The movement of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to combine its efforts with others, to work in concert, to labor ecumenically to win the world for Christ as it is said today, would slow, and in its place would be “mutual respect,” but not action together. The activity would be at the level of “the branch,” rather than the local congregation as it had been for the past 36 years. Interaction would be between the churches at a national level, as seen by the use of the capitalization for “this Church,” the normal rubric for denoting the broader communion rather than the local congregation. Even what was expected to happen between them wasn’t described as action on a number of levels, but was to be “friendly intercourse.” They would surely communicate with their brethren, “the Congregational Churches of New England,” but nothing more was promised, planned for, or expected. No statement of concern for the way church members who were sitting in pews together in the same congregation might be expected to respond is recorded. The third resolution concerning abrogation was “discussed for some time,” and

\[308\] Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1837, 420.
the Assembly adjourned with prayer to ponder over night and begin again on Tuesday morning at 9 o’clock.

Tuesday morning arrived with the usual routines. A prayer was offered, the minutes read, another commissioner arrived and was seated – a practice which was to continue through Saturday, May 27, the tenth day of the Assembly. A plan was devised and ultimately approved to have a major worship service the following day, a service that included eight participants. Five of them were Old Schoolers (Ashbel Green of Philadelphia, William Plumer and George Baxter of Virginia and E. Johnston who is not identified, plus Moderator David Elliott of Ohio); two were New Schoolers (John Richardson of Rochester and Thomas M’Auley of New York); and one was a Congregationalist, Alfred Ely of the General Association of Massachusetts. At this point, the Assembly still felt comfortable being in worship with those whom they would later deem unacceptable. The “address” or sermon was even to be given by Dr. M’Auley, though he was surrounded by those from the other side.

The routine continued. Old Schooler, the Rev. Nicholas Murray, reported on his experience of being sent as a delegate to three New England Associations, those of Maine, Rhode Island and Connecticut. A report was given concerning a book of psalms and hymns that a prior Assembly had authorized to be printed and sold. An overture from the General Conference of Maine on the general subject of peace was received by the Bills and Overtures Committee, given the number 11 and docketed for consideration at a later time.
The order of the day was called for, but the business was postponed in order to continue consideration of the report from the committee that had been given the assignment to deal with the unfinished issues of Overture No. 1, that is the abrogation, repealing, and setting aside the Plan of Union of 1801. The minutes say, “The third resolution on this subject was taken up, and discussed for a considerable time.” The “considerable time” ended with adjournment until the afternoon at 3:30, when again the routine was followed – an opening prayer, reading of the minutes of the prior session, a favorable report on Overture No. 6, which had requested that “Mr. Jardine, a foreign minister” have his credentials approved that he might be received by the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia. It was done. Then the discussion concerning abrogation continued. Eventually someone moved to halt debate, “the previous question was demanded” and a vote was taken. A very close vote, taken by name, found 129 voting in favor of ceasing to discuss the topic, with 123 voting against.

In keeping with parliamentary procedure, the vote on the question followed immediately. By a polling of the commissioners, again with each vote recorded by name, the resolution to abrogate the Plan of Union of 1801 was adopted with 143 voting in favor of abrogation and 110 voting against. 253 commissioners voted, virtually everyone who was enrolled at that time. The vote concerned a means of handling evangelistic concerns on the then frontier of Western New York and Northern Ohio in areas which the Congregational Church, as represented in the General Association of the state of Connecticut, and the Presbyterian Church had mutual relations. The expressed desire

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309 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1837, 420.
was “to prevent alienation” and to “promote union and harmony.” The actual language of the resolution was as follows:

But as the ‘Plan of Union’ adopted for the new settlements, in 1801, was originally an unconstitutional act on the part of that Assembly—these important standing rules having never been submitted to the Presbyteries— and as they were totally destitute of authority as proceeding from the General Association of Connecticut, which is invested with no power to legislate in such cases, and especially to enact laws to regulate churches not within her limits; and as much confusion and irregularity have arisen from this unnatural and unconstitutional system of union, therefore, it is resolved, that the Act of the Assembly of 1801, entitled a ‘Plan of Union,’ be, and the same is hereby abrogated.

The Assembly, following this action, adjourned with prayer until the following morning, Wednesday, May 24 at 10 o’clock. The morning was spent in worship rather than debate, though a report from the Board of Missions was read and ordered to be published. The morning ended with prayer.

The afternoon began with deliberation on the first half of Overture No. 1, which dealt with “so much of the memorial as relates to the toleration of gross errors in doctrine, or disorders in practice, by inferior judicatories.” Not able to leave this subject, the Assembly first accepted the report, and then, seemingly unsatisfied with its content, recommitted the report to its drafters.

This confusion and uncertainty continued with the next item of business, postponed from the day before, which was to discuss the portion of the previous report.

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310 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820, 224.
311 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1837, 422. The minutes do not reflect whether the use of the term, “inferior,” refers to the position of the bodies as subject to the General Assembly, or to their practices and behaviors as not quite orthodox. Perhaps both were to be inferred.
that is on overture No. 1, which concerned the doctrinal errors of the areas covered by the Plan of Union. Discussion ensued, and amendments were offered to add to the list of specified errors. A motion was made to indefinitely postpone action on the amendment adding additional errors, which would have the effect of defeating the motion as it could not be reintroduced, according to parliamentary procedure. Further debate was had, and, without taking a vote on indefinite postponement, the Assembly recessed until the following morning.

Parliamentary procedure occupied a portion of the morning, following the usual routines of prayer, minutes, seating late-comers, and nominating persons to fill vacancies in the Board of Missions. A resolution was evidently passed, though the minutes are not specific on this topic, to alter the standing rules so that the previous question (i.e. the main motion) could be requested to be voted upon, and if “demanded” by a majority of those present, would be put without debate or further amendment.312 The confusion which must have lain behind this action is only hinted at by the previous day’s inaction and inability to complete business through usual processes.

The effect of this motion was to keep the New School followers from being able to block action on the proposed piece of business. Following a motion to consider this unfinished business, the Moderator proposed to take the vote without further debate, his ruling was appealed, the appeal lost, and then the motion was defeated, meaning that the

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312 Ibid. 423. This motion read as follows: “The previous question shall be in this form, ‘shall the main question be now put?’ and when demanded by a majority of the members present shall be put without debate. And until it is decided shall preclude all amendment and further debate on the main question.” Though the minutes do not report a vote upon this alteration of the standing rules of the Assembly, subsequently all actions were taken as if it had passed.
body had “refused to take up the unfinished business,” that is, the motion to postpone indefinitely or kill any further consideration of the “memorial.” This empowered those who had an agenda to be considered, as the next motion was to take up another part of the Assembly committee’s report on the Memorial, that is the portion which concerned “the toleration of disorders in practice, and errors in doctrine, by inferior judicatories.” The motion having been made, without further discussion the Assembly adjourned to the afternoon at the usual time of “half past 3 o’clock.”

The minutes of the afternoon session were remarkably short. Prayer was offered, minutes were read, and the Committee on Mileage reported that $1232.78 had been collected to defray commissioners’ travel costs. Commissioners traveled 42,885 miles, and, at a rate of $.0287 per mile, were paid a total of $1230.80 out of the fund, approved by the Assembly. The unfinished business of the morning was introduced, and passed, which allowed another lengthy period of discussion concerning the resolutions to force the “inferior judicatories” which were being charged “by common fame with irregularities” to appear before the next General Assembly to answer for their actions. Again, no decisions were made prior to the evening adjournment.

Friday, May 26, was the ninth day of the Assembly. On this morning, the matter of slavery would surface in the form of a petition on the subject, which was referred to the committee on Bills and Overtures. The order of the day having been called, the Assembly moved to the election of officers for the Board of Missions, by a written ballot which was counted by a committee of two Old Schoolers (Murray of Elizabethtown

313 Ibid. 423.
Presbytery and Anderson of West Hanover Presbytery) and one New Schooler (Cleaveland of Detroit Presbytery.) Sent off to count, the Assembly returned to the unfinished matters of the previous day, “viz. the resolutions to cite to the bar of the next Assembly such inferior judicatories as shall appear to be charged by common fame with the toleration of gross errors in doctrine, and disorders in practice.” Speaking at length and without any resolution, the Assembly adjourned until the afternoon.

Routine prevailed for a short time in the afternoon session, with the report of the morning’s vote to fill the vacancies on the Board of Missions. And then debate on the morning’s unfinished business, a call for the previous question, with a subsequent roll call vote, which ended debate by a count of 141 in favor to 108 against. Again nearly all the commissioners were present and voting, 249 out of a possible 263 persons seated at this time. In the final vote on the resolution, another person voted, a total of 250, of whom 128 voted in favor of the resolution and 122 against.

In this pattern of voting following the calling of the previous question, there was no description or detailing of exactly what the extent of the “inferior judicatories” might be, nor of what was the “common fame” spoken against them. The resolution had three parts. In the first the erring judicatories were required to appear at the next Assembly. The second clause appointed a special committee to determine which bodies were to be cited and what they were to be charged with, including a plan for dealing with the issues. Reporting was to be “as soon as practicable.” The third part of the resolution stated that the preceding clauses would deal with the right of membership in the Assembly and so
these judicatories were not to be given a seat in the next Assembly until the case was decided.

Two parts of the stated agenda of the Old Schoolers had been accomplished, though only one, the abrogation of the Plan of Union, took effect immediately. In typical careful Presbyterian fashion, the most recent decision was not to make an abrupt and final decision, that is to remove any body or any portion of the church from membership, but to set up a committee to work on the issue, albeit a committee which was charged with a judicial-sounding task, to cite wrong-doers to appear before the court to answer charges. Also in typical Presbyterian fashion, the task to be given to the committee involved a process, denoted, “…a suitable plan of procedure…” The vote on this issue was taken and approved 128 to 122, with one abstention, before there was any publicly stated knowledge about who these bodies would be who were to be so tried and charged on account of “common fame.”

Practicality was the next order of business. Five members were to be named to the special committee to name, charge, and set up procedures to judge the inferior judicatories, though there were no persons specified at this point. Members of the Assembly gave notice that they were planning to file protests concerning the business of the morning, as well as of the day before in abrogating the Plan of Union. And the juggernaut moved forward as the Rev. Robert Breckenridge of Baltimore Presbytery, Synod of Philadelphia, Old Schooler, stated that he planned the next day to request a

314 Ibid. 425.
committee to explore a “voluntary division of the Presbyterian Church.” And with prayer, another session was adjourned.

Saturday, May 27, brought the last time in which new commissioners would be seated. Interestingly, one of the last two commissioners to present credentials and be seated in the Assembly was James Thornwell, a minister member of Bethel Presbytery in the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia. Thornwell would become the main spokesperson and apologist for slavery as a biblically warranted practice, and for the necessity of the church not to speak out on issues that were not specifically mentioned in the scriptures. From the point of his arrival, Thornwell would prove to be a rock-solid vote for the Old School in every roll call until the final adjournment. This morning was also the first time that one of the commissioners gave notice that he would be absent, the Rev. Lewis Loss from Oneida Presbytery, the first of those from the disputed area to leave, with the resulting loss of a vote from the New School minority. As Loss left, his vote was replaced not only by Thornwell’s but by that of an elder commissioner also from the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia, seated at this time without the signature of the Clerk of the Presbytery and who voted reliably with the Old School majority.

The Assembly was informed of the appointment of the special committee to deal with the citation of the inferior judicatories, all of whom had voted in favor of the resolution and all of whom were ministers, Dr. Cuyler of Philadelphia 2nd, Breckinridge of Baltimore, Dr. Baxter of West Hanover, M’Kennan of Indianapolis and Baird of Ohio (the last of whom represented the same presbytery as Moderator Elliott.) After more

Corresponding members, those from sister denominations, continued to be received until May 30.
routine business, Breckenridge followed through on his intention to offer a motion to
appoint a committee, now to be charged with exploring the “state of the church,” which
topic the night before was put more bluntly as exploring the possibility of a voluntary
division of the denomination. Evidently the motion passed, as two members of the
majority group and two members of the minority in the vote on the citation of inferior
judicatories were charged with nominating five members of the Assembly to represent
each viewpoint of the body, a total of ten, and reporting those nominations back to the
plenary. The desire to be seen as presenting each side of the issue in a fair and balanced
matter, of living up to their value of doing everything “decently and in order” can be seen
in this action. To that end, unlike most appointments up to this time, one of each
nominating bloc was a minister, and one an elder and each pair represented different
synods. For the majority position, the Rev. Dr. Junkin of Newton Presbytery and Elder
Ewing of Redstone Presbytery were given the responsibility; for the minority The Rev.
A. Campbell of Lewes and Elder Jessup of Montrose Presbytery were appointed.

While the nominating process continued, two reports were made; the first
cconcerned overtures No. 2, 3, and 4, which were placed on the docket together with their
reports for action – these three overtures all dealing with the issues contained in the
Memorial. The second report concerned a routine financial report from the Stated Clerk,
also ordered to be placed on the docket. In the meantime, the nominations had been
formulated and the group to be called the “Committee of Ten on the State of the Church”
was voted into place. The two sides would each include the elders of the nominating
group. All the others were ministers: For the majority side which favored citing the
“inferior judicatories” the nominations were the Revs. Robert Breckinridge (Baltimore), Dr. Archibald Alexander (New Brunswick), Dr. Cornelius Cuyler (Philadelphia 2nd), Dr. John Witherspoon (Harmony) and Elder Nathaniel Ewing (Redstone); for the minority nominated were the Revs. Dr. Thomas M’Auley (New York 2nd), Dr. Nathan Beman (Troy), Dr. Absalom Peters (New York 3rd), Baxter Dickinson (Cincinnati), and Elder William Jessup (Montrose). The nomination report was adopted and the ten were told to meet in the morning recess and then as frequently as needed. So serious was their task that prayer was offered for the task, for the persons assigned to it, as well as for the issue which necessitated the forming of the committee. Clearly, the body was aware of portentous nature of what lay ahead.

Routine still prevailed in the midst of upheaval. Overture No. 12 was received and assigned to a committee, a matter concerning the reception of “a foreign minister” by the Presbytery of New York. While the ordinary reception of ministers was a matter for the local, that is, the presbytery, to decide, the credentialing of a minister from abroad was a suitable topic for the national body, and was referred to a committee, composed of Old School and New School members. A similar request from the Presbytery of Philadelphia, Overture No. 6, had already been referred to a committee. In short order, Overtures No. 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10 were referred, with no reference to the content of each, to committees composed of Old School and New School commissioners. On the other hand, Overture No. 11 was read, and instead of being assigned, was “erased from the docket.” Overture No. 11 was a request from a Congregationalist, a layman, William Ladd, that he be given floor time and the attention of the commissioners on the subject of

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It seems the will of the Assembly was not to be confused by the vision of an outsider, true or not.

Contention lay just ahead. A motion being made to address the remaining items of the “Memorial,” those pieces of business dealing with “Reform,” the body listened once again to the proposal, particularly to those items which dealt with the process by which “Reform” would take place. Parliamentary procedure ensued, and a division of the business was called for, in order for the body to deal with issues one at a time. The first resolution was moved, debate occurred and the Assembly adjourned for the Sabbath without resolution, but with prayer.

As the Assembly was not in session on Sunday, May 28th, there were obviously no minutes. It is safe to imagine that after worship, various groupings of men were discussing, strategizing, listening to each other in wonderment, anger, fear, apprehension or triumphantly counting the past successful votes and projecting future ones. Though the Sabbath was presumably to be kept as sacred space, it is highly doubtful that there was much rest in Philadelphia that late May of 1837.

c. A New Week: Reports, Reports

Routine was still the norm on Monday, May 29. An ecumenical delegate was welcomed, the unfinished business on the reform portions of the Memorial were postponed to a later time, and the Committee dealing with the State of the Church was

317 Ibid. 414, 420, 427.
permitted to work during the plenary hours of the Assembly. This was not an out-of-control, chaotic time, but rather another instance of Presbyterians proceeding “decently and in order.” Time was docketed for judicial cases, and for business left unfinished by the previous Assembly, business which would transfer Western Theological Seminary to the Synod of Pittsburg.

An interesting sidelight is noted, the inability of the Theological Seminary at Princeton to pay its professors, necessitating a voluntary collection of funds from willing Presbyterians throughout the denomination. It was a truly national show of support with the sum of $160.18 being collected from nine individuals and 2 congregations in amounts ranging from $4.18 to $30, and coming from New York, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Tennessee, Ohio and North Carolina.318 Broad as the support might be, however, there was clearly a reluctance on the part of the national body to implement a plan for individuals and bodies throughout the church to support a project that affected them all and benefited them all.

Following the acceptance of the very Presbyterian and dry Digest (a compilation of past acts and policies, another instance of the very orderly Presbyterian mindset), “various papers on the subject of slavery” were brought to the Assembly, and, rather than being submitted to a committee as 45 out of 49 previously introduced pieces of business had been, these four pieces of business were handled differently. One that was treated exceptionally was the request of the delegate from the General Conference of Maine to be heard on the subject of peace, and the other three were all items concerning slavery. This

318 Ibid. 428.
divisive and difficult topic seems to be lurking in the background, hidden but present nevertheless.

Slowly the body started to receive reports back from some of the committees. One which sought national standards for the examination of candidates for the ministry was answered by saying that an action of the 1835 Assembly would suffice, a standard that acknowledged that “the presbyteries are the true fountain of all ecclesiastical power” and that “the right of judging of the qualifications of their own members, the presbyteries have never conceded.” The resolution went on to state that “…until said decision is reversed, the subject requires no farther legislation.”

The morning continued with arrangements to reimburse two commissioners for their travel, though their papers were “mislaid;” accepting an invitation to visit the Pennsylvania Institution for the instruction of the blind; which was added to a previous invitation extended the past Saturday to visit Eastern Penitentiary. A judicial appeal intervened and, not being able to come to a conclusion, was set aside and the Assembly adjourned until mid-afternoon, when another judicial case left over from the year before was discussed and finally dismissed as one of the presbyteries involved hadn’t brought its records.

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320 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1837, 428.
Not being satisfied with work already accomplished, the Assembly reconsidered its action of the morning on the presbyteries’ right to examine ministers applying for admission. The morning’s action had given the presbyteries the right to determine both their members and the standards of admission by which they would be judged. That right was reconsidered, and a new action adopted, one which said that the 1835 absolute right would prevail, but the examination had to include “experimental religion, didactic and polemic theology, and church government.” This change was not insignificant, for it gave permission for a national standard to be required, while retaining the local application and possibly interpretation of that standard.

The rest of the afternoon was occupied in hearing a judicial case, which began with a statement which is still in use today in the Presbyterian church’s judicial process, reminding commissioners “of their high character as a court of Jesus Christ, and the solemn duty in which they are about to act.” Apparently there was insufficient time to settle this case, as the session ended without resolution, but by adjournment to the next day.

Tuesday, May 30, began at 9 a.m. with the usual prayer, reading of the minutes, the enrollment of an additional corresponding member, who came from the General Synod of the German Reformed Church. Another judicial case was to be considered, but again the records from the Synod of Missouri not being present, the case could not be tried, but was instead to be postponed to the following year’s Assembly. To wait for an entire year to solve a problem may seem strange to one living in the modern world. It

321 Ibid. 429.
seemed so normal to the world of the early 19th century as not to cause any comment, however. This careful consideration and willingness to be patient in the interest of justice and fairness was a considerable contrast with the actions which the Assembly had already taken, with no time for study or consideration of the consequences of radically changing practices and procedures of the Church.

Following the non-completion of the case the Assembly discussed the possibility and wisdom of printing its minutes from the beginning of the Assembly in 1789 to the present, provided that no money be required of the Assembly for any expense. Another committee was appointed to this thankless task, nominations were made to the boards of directors of two seminaries, and then the grave issues began in earnest.

The committee of Ten on the State of the Church reported that they were hopelessly deadlocked and asked to be relieved of their responsibility. They did not come silently, however, but with extensive reports which showed how far apart they were in terms of their understanding of what the state of the Church was or what it should be.

The five Old School members, the Revs. Archibald Alexander, Cornelius C. Cuyler, John Witherspoon, and Robert J. Breckinridge with Elder Nathaniel Ewing, reported through five separate papers. These five statements presented introductory

322 Dr. Ashbel Green and Dr. John M’Dowell were appointed to this task, both staunch Old Schoolers. The memory and official records of the national church were thus in the hands of those who were given discretion to a certain extent over what was to be published. “It is believed that the committee should have a discretionary power as to the selections to be made from some other papers than the records of the church...” Ibid. 430.
323 These five came from New Brunswick Presbytery (and Princeton Seminary), Philadelphia, Baltimore, Redstone Presbytery (western Pennsylvania) and South Carolina. The rest of the committee, the
views which showed ultimately the impossibility of agreement between the parties. The areas of agreement were slight as stated; firstly that there was some sense in a voluntary separation of the two disagreeing parties and secondly, upon the formation of two denominations out of one, that they were in agreement as to the names to be given to each group, the disposition of corporate funds and records of the church and the continuance of its Boards and Institutions.324

These areas of agreement were outweighed by lack of agreement on procedure to be followed in separation, the nature of the power of the Assembly to effect such change unilaterally, and the insistence by the “minority” group that neither “new” denomination should be considered the successor of the former Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.325

The issue of procedure in separation was identified by the Majority as concerning whether the Assembly should act itself, or send the proposed action back to the presbyteries to seek their acquiescence in the action. Building on the concern for the locus of authority was the question of power, that is, did the Assembly as it was constituted have the power to effect the proposed action, or did this require a change in

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324 Though purportedly in agreement, these topics would prove difficult, leading eventually to court cases to determine the disposition of those corporate funds and the records of the church. While the first case in Philadelphia found the New School on the winning side, the appeal to the upper level court ended the battle with the Old School as the final victor, and therefore recognized as the true church in continuance. A further split occurred in 1861 with the beginning of the Civil War, leading to four new denominations, the Northern Old School and New School and the Southern Old School and New School. Very quickly, the New School in the South died out; and the Northern cousins reunited at the 1869 General Assembly.

325 From this point on, the minutes use the terms, “minority” and “majority,” a recognition of the places now occupied by those who were in disagreement and an implicit statement of superiority in a body which governed itself through voting in assemblies composed equally of those ordained as ministers and lay people ordained as elders.
the Constitution. The third issue was based on the former two and concerned “fact and law” in ownership and rights to name and property. The Majority claimed for itself “utmost liberality” in these and all questions, yet it clearly could be seen as unwilling to settle these issues in any way but its own. Its way included immediate action, “effectually, and at once.” Further, and clearly, “…it seems to us not only needless, but absurd, to send down an overture to the Presbyteries on this subject.” Their elaboration stated that they believed “full power exists in the Assembly, either by consent of parties, or in the way of discipline, to settle this…” and goes on to say again that “…speedy settlement is greatly to be desired.” By claiming for itself and naming itself the Majority, the Old School group was not going to allow its power to be brought into question through a vote by the very people in far-flung, mostly western presbyteries, who, it perceived, had caused the problems in the first place. Through the votes taken and won to this point, the Old School was in the ascendant and would continue to push its views forward as long as the votes to do so existed.

The third issue as identified by the Old School concerned succession. In this issue, the Old Schoolers stated the New School had a “plan” which would clarify that a separation of the two into new denominations meant that the old denomination would cease to exist and two new denominations would be born. The final statement of the five commissioners of the Old School imputed to the New School commissioners a lack of understanding and willingness to cooperate. If the Old School’s proposal won, then the others would not be bound by it. Yet if the New School’s plan prevailed, the New School would see that the matter was put off, “perhaps indefinitely.”

326 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1837, 431.
The “Minority” group responded, identifying themselves not as the minority, but as “subscribers, appointed members of the Committee of Ten on the State of the Church.” While this self-identification may seem trivial, yet it points to the content of the report, as well as the attitude of those who made it, the Revs. Thomas M’Auley, Nathan S.S. Beman, Absalom Peters, and Baxter Dickinson and Elder William Jessup. They state that they see no necessity to split the church, and that, if that action is taken, the effects on the church will be very problematic. Because they have been given the task, however, to ascertain if such a decision is wise or feasible, they have attempted to fulfill their assignment, but only if “…the same could be accomplished in an amicable, equitable, and proper manner.” Evidently the groups met separately, and the Old Schoolers only wished to communicate through the writing of papers, and were not willing to discuss together any of the issues. As a result, the majority presented five short papers and the minority four. The minority group claimed that the only major dissension between them was the basis upon which everything else rested, that is whether it was possible for the Assembly to effect what the majority wanted. Their terms were just as obdurate and unyielding as the statements of the majority:

…the members of this Assembly have neither a constitutional nor moral right to adopt a plan for a division of the Church, in relation to which they are entirely uninstructed by the Presbyteries; believing that the course proposed by their brethren of the committee to be entirely inefficacious, and calculated to introduce confusion and discord into the whole Church, and instead of mitigating, to enhance the evils which it proposes to remove…”

With these words, the New School subscribers presented their alternatives to the Assembly for a vote.
The next six pages of the minutes then present each of the papers of the majority and minority in turn, and in response to each other, beginning and ending with the majority. In the first paper of the majority, the first proposition stated that the “peace and prosperity of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, require a separation” and named the two parts “the old school and new school parties,” not capitalized, but identified as “represented by the majority and minority in the present Assembly.” The lines were drawn. The first paper of the minority was much longer, stating as an opening proposition that the Assembly was too large, that representation seemingly could be reduced, and that the church had become both geographically large and extremely diverse. Because of this, the minority would acquiesce in separation, but only under a number of terms. By contrast, the majority paper was far simpler, claiming for itself the name and corporate property of the church, because it was in the majority in the General Assembly. Though not stated, but undoubtedly because of that convenient majority in this year of 1837, the majority paper continued stating the proposed process of instant separation, effected by election by each commissioner of the body each chooses for his affiliation and that of his presbytery. As there might be disagreement when the commissioner returned home, a process was proposed for the presbyteries to reverse the decision of the commissioner, or for minorities to affiliate with another body if they desired. Again, the emphasis on speed of action was remarkable for a denomination that took years to form its first seminary, that showed remarkable patience when presbyteries were to vote on constitutional changes, that generally was willing for almost any topic to

327 Ibid. 432.
be set aside until a subsequent assembly in order for study to occur. The emphasis on
swift, instantaneous action was strange from the denomination which quoted scripture
throughout its constitution and adopted 1 Corinthians 14:40 as its usual mode of
behavior, “but all things should be done decently and in order.”

While the first paper of the minority was much longer, much more precise and
mirrored the “decently and in order” motto, the introduction to this lengthy resolution set
the argument when it required that all that follows was to be “sent down to the
Presbyteries for their adoption or rejection as constitutional rules…” The minority
proposed a new name for one body, that is the “General Assembly of the American
Presbyterian Church.” It stated careful ways in which each session, congregation, church
member, presbytery and synod could choose which they wished to affiliate with, and
what procedures would be followed in case of dissent. In addition they proposed to
transfer the Boards of Education and Mission to the body that was to retain the name,
“Presbyterian Church in the United States of America,” together with the Princeton
Seminary, if it could be done. However, unlike the majority and while providing for
records maintenance, distribution, and the splitting of the corporate funds, never does this
group of subscribers name either the majority or minority of the 1837 Assembly as the
inheritor of a specific new name or future responsibilities. Finally, the subscribers said,
almost in passing and without numbering it, that a resolution should be passed which
would result in “suspending the operation of the controverted votes until after the next
Assembly.”

328 Ibid. 433.
329 Ibid. 434.
This paper is followed immediately by the second paper of the minority, responding to the majority by saying that all division of property, funds or anything else was to be equal, and that the terms, “old and new schools” or “majority and minority” of the current Assembly should have no affect on any such decision. If any Boards in existence were to be retained, they could go by the name of the then standing Assembly. And, finally, the subscribers reiterated that they could not, would not and did not have the power to effect such a division right away, neither as commissioners acting as a body nor as individuals.

In response, the Old School group began a process of responding to the individual items presented by the subscribers, stating first that they rejected the opening words of the New Schoolers, which mentioned size and diversity of place, points of view and even theology as reasons to accept the separation. This “No. 2, of the majority” actually read like a response brief in a trial, with the Old School committee members stating that they could accept portions of what is presented, but there were parts that it would not agree to. However, most of what was proposed by the New School members they would not agree to, except that what the Old School proposed concerning the immediate action by the 1837 Assembly “is insisted on.” A small concession concerning records was given, with two full copies to be made, and they agreed to the proposition concerning the Princeton Seminary. It was almost as if there was an effort to give way in small things in order to push the agreement in the one large area of disagreement, the
power and authority of a single assembly to cause schism without recourse to its constituent members.

“No. 3, of the minority” agreed to the minor changes, but resisted the notion that the current assembly can effect change. “The only effect would be a disorderly dissolution of the present Assembly, and be of no binding force or effect upon any member who did not assent to it.” The minority then pledged to urge their presbyteries to adopt the new rules, themselves holding fast to their understanding that a major change such as separation needed to be presented to the presbyteries.

“No. 3, of the majority” first addressed the issue raised by the New Schoolers in No. 2, that of the terms, “old and new school, majority and minority,” which were denoted as “descriptive” and therefore in some way neutral. With regard to the issue of the way in which the funds were to be divided, they said that they had already “substantially acceded” to the proposal of the minority, and nothing more needed to be said. But they continued to be firm on saying that no constitutional issues were addressed in their action, and therefore that there was no business to refer to the presbyteries. All decisions were within the purview of this Assembly, and should be addressed immediately. Paper No. 4 followed, but brought no new light, saying simply that their “final propositions” had been delineated in the previous papers.

The response in Paper No. 4, of the minority, was remarkable in its effort to bring some unanimity. It stated the areas of agreement of the whole committee, that agreement had been reached that a division of the church “is expedient” and that the principles of

330 Ibid. 435.
that division had actually been fairly well agreed upon. Only the “manner of effecting it” remained a matter of contention. The plan proposed, therefore, was to present the disagreement to the Assembly for its vote on immediate decision versus sending the action down to the presbyteries for their vote. They recommended that their plan be followed if the vote was in favor of the minority, or that the majority plan be followed if immediate action was agreed upon. While this seemed rather naïve, as the “minority” had already lost several votes, by decisive although not overwhelming margins, the impetus for regularization of the process must have been very important, as they stated a desire to simply be able to report to the Assembly if a vote was not agreed upon.

The Old School committee members’ response, No. 5, of the majority, was reactive, stating that they could not put this to a vote of the Assembly, as that would force either one side or the other to carry out a scheme with which it could not agree. Therefore, they considered a “voluntary separation” to be “manifestly impossible” and the entire proposal “as virtually a waiver of the whole subject.”

Following the printing of these nine papers, without any further motions, the minutes stated that the “Committee on the State of the Church was discharged.” Immediately following, a motion was made to indefinitely postpone any further consideration of these reports. In parliamentary procedure, indefinite postponement means that the item is permanently out of consideration. This vote was supported primarily by the Old School men, who prevailed to drop the subject of voluntary separation, 138 to 107. But the issue wasn’t dead at all. The next step followed

331 Ibid. 436.
immediately, with a resolution that stated, “that the Synod of the Western Reserve is not a part of the Presbyterian Church,” after which the Assembly adjourned until the afternoon session.332

After the momentous, even tempestuous meeting of the morning, the afternoon of Tuesday, May 30 began quietly and routinely. Following prayer, the minutes of the preceding session were read. A trustee of the General Assembly, John W. Thompson, Esq., submitted a letter resigning from that post, and nominations were made for vacancies in the Board of Trustees of the General Assembly. The election was put off until the following Thursday, June 1, 1837.

The Assembly then proceeded to take up the resolution which declared the Synod of the Western Reserve “not to be a portion of the Presbyterian Church.” Debate began, but no action was taken, the minutes revealing only deep silence about the subject of that debate. And the Assembly adjourned with prayer, to meet again on Wednesday morning, May 31, at 9 a.m.

Wednesday morning was filled again with the minutiae of business, prayer, minutes, followed by the process and procedure of election Directors for two seminaries, Princeton and the Western Theological Seminary. While the appointed ballot counters did their work, the Assembly heard a report on past constitutional proposals that had been referred for ratification to the presbyteries throughout the country. On the matter concerning extending the period of study required of candidates for the ministry from two

332 Ibid. 437.
to three years, 90 of 135 presbyteries had voted with 52 in favor of the proposal and 38 against. By contrast, the action which proposed naming the 23 synods as the judicatories of last resort had garnered only 65 votes from presbyteries, 42 of them in favor of removing the final judging of judicial cases from the national body and 23 against.

These two pieces of business were referred at different times, the former from the 1835 General Assembly, the latter from the Assembly of 1836. While the 1837 Assembly simply reported the vote, with no action except to lay the report on the table, the 1836 Assembly had stated the following:

> By the Constitution of our Church, the consent of a majority of the Presbyteries is necessary to authorize the alteration contemplated. And as a majority of the Presbyteries have sent up no report to this Assembly, that such Presbyteries be careful to send up their opinion in relation to the proposed alteration in the Constitution, to the next General Assembly.

Perhaps it was felt unnecessary to re-state the need for patience, or to cut off voting when a majority of presbyteries had not yet been achieved. However, in a denomination in which there was an understanding that actions of one General Assembly could not bind a subsequent General Assembly, it was unusual for an Assembly not to state specifically that it planned to continue an action of a previous Assembly. There was even a statement, perhaps not understood by the majority of Presbyterians, that there was not to be a new meeting of the Assembly in a given year, but a meeting of a new Assembly. As an Assembly met, it could agree with the actions of a previous Assembly if it acted on the same piece of business, or it could change the action. If the

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333 Ibid, 438.
334 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1836, 276.
335 The language which closed the 1837 Assembly reads, “Resolved, that this General Assembly be dissolved; and that another General Assembly, chosen in like manner, be required to meet in the Seventh Presbyterian Church, in the city of Philadelphia, on the third Thursday of May, 1838, at 11 o’clock, A.M.” Presbyterian Church., Minutes 1837, p. 498.
same piece of business were not presented, the action stood as the action of the previous Assembly. The way to be sure that business was adopted permanently, as with the case of either constitutional changes, or of a policy decision which affected the whole church, was to send it to the presbyteries for their ratification. The presbyteries did not have the power to amend an action that was sent to them, but could only vote for or against the submission. If it were felt by a presbytery that the action was so poorly written or thought out, that presbytery would need to submit a change in the form of an overture to a subsequent Assembly, and if that action was of constitutional status, it would be sent back to the presbyteries for ratification. Any action of this sort, therefore, was not a matter of speed, but of deliberation; of measured thought carefully planned and discussed with all the parties and their elected representatives.

Following the unremarkable, routine actions, the Assembly continued with business, the reading and approval of the annual report of the Board of Education and the passing of a resolution which empowered that Board to raise funds by accepting interested persons as honorary members of the Board with voice but no vote, upon the payment of a required fee. Vacancies to the Board were announced and nominations made.

More routine followed, the announcement of the filling of the vacancies on the Board of Directors of the seminaries, both Princeton and Western Theological Seminary. The men who were elected, as might be expected, were largely Old School in sympathy.
The routine matters having been settled with some alacrity, the Assembly returned to the matter of “the resolution declaring the Synod of the Western Reserve not to be a part of the Presbyterian church.”336 While deliberation and debate continued, no conclusions were reached, leading to a motion to postpone the action of sending to the Presbyteries a resolution to divide the Presbyterian church. With this added controversial topic, the morning ended and the Assembly recessed until the afternoon with its usual prayer. The afternoon brought no resolution, despite hours of debate, and so adjourned until the following morning, leaving the two resolutions on the floor – the removal of the Synod of the Western Reserve from the church and the postponement of that action in favor of a resolution to divide the church which was to be voted on by the presbyteries. Given the usual careful nature of the business of General Assemblies, it might have been assumed that the vote to postpone would prevail. Given the desire of the majority of this Assembly for action, and based additionally on the agitations which had followed each Assembly since 1834, the multi-year route of a resolution sent to the presbyteries for ratification seemed unlikely.

d. Beginning of the End: Action and Protest

As Thursday morning, June 4, 1837 began, there were several orders of the day, which should have taken precedence of all other business. They were routine matters, however, such as the reporting on the election of new members to the Board of Education. Other concerns clearly were uppermost in the minds of the commissioners. The Assembly, therefore, set aside those “orders” and moved immediately to the discussion concerning the Synod of the Western Reserve, thus ignoring the motion to

336 Ibid. p. 438
postpone. Much debate ensued and finally a commissioner asked for the “previous question,” the parliamentary procedure to halt debate, thus allowing a vote to be taken on the main motion on the floor. This vote to end debate, as many more to follow, was taken by roll call. Those who wished to move ahead with business prevailed, 130 to 102. Only one person abstained. The majority was comprised largely of the Old School men; those who lost were the New Schoolers.

Moving immediately, therefore, to the vote on the resolution to exscind the Synod of the Western Reserve, the roll call vote was decisive. The Synod was removed from the church by the action of the General Assembly of 1837 by a vote of 132 to 105. Each side was able to add a few votes, but not enough to change the outcome of the vote to close debate. No further business was undertaken, and the Assembly recessed with prayer until the afternoon.

Following the usual prayer, the Assembly resumed at 3:30 in the afternoon. A slight change from the routine occurred with the announcement of the death that morning of one of the men who had been nominated to serve on the Board of Education. A resolution of sympathy on his behalf was passed, and another was nominated to take his place. There was an effort made to allow those who had been out of the Assembly in the morning when the vote was taken to add their names to the appropriate place in the voting list, but this motion was “laid on the table.” Though this was a practice, which was allowed in the Congress of the United States, there was a theological reason for not affirming such a practice in the Presbyterian Church. Each time any governing body or
“judicatory” of the church met, the presence of the Holy Spirit was invoked through prayer, hence the frequent prayers and beginning and end of each session. If a commissioner were not present, it was understood, he was not under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which had not only enlivened and informed the discussion and debate, but also was the author of the decision. Hence, not being physically present meant that one could not be a part of the decision, no matter how well informed or vitally involved one might have been in all the affairs which led up to the decision. The General Assembly of 1837 did not allow names to be added to the roll of those who had participated in the vote on the floor of the Assembly.

Following this activity, the Assembly turned to the order of the day, which was to elect trustees of the General Assembly itself. Upon a motion that this election take place by secret ballot, another roll call vote was taken, which showed remarkably few commissioners to be present. The vote was affirmative, 68 to 6. Of 265 commissioners, only 74 were present and voting. The vote was not according to party lines. The small number of votes gives insight into the turmoil which the vote of the morning had brought. Many of the vocal New School adherents were missing, as was the Old School leadership, with the exception of Plumer, Witherspoon and J. Smylie.

The configuration of this new world that they found themselves in made itself known immediately, as a motion requested that the names of the commissioners from the Synod of the Western Reserve be polled. That motion was ruled out of order by the Moderator. When the out-of-order ruling was appealed, the Moderator’s ruling was
sustained, though by a voice vote, the numbers not being recorded, nor was a division requested, which must have meant that the vote was not close. When William Jessup of Montrose Presbytery presented a written “demand that the members of the Western Reserve Synod be admitted to vote” and also “protesting against the rejection of their votes,” his request was “laid on the table.”\textsuperscript{337} In the subsequent minutes, no mention is made of taking up this item of business, so the body effectively dropped this request in favor of other protests, which perhaps covered the same topic. The Assembly, as usual, continued with routine business, appointing members to count and report on the votes for the Trustees of the General Assembly, minus the members of the Synod of the Western Reserve.

With success clearly on their side, the majority members put into consideration the next item on the agenda of the Convention, which concerned two societies, the American Home Missionary Society and the American Education Society. These items were debated until the adjournment of Thursday’s session. The “voluntary” societies had

\textsuperscript{337} Ibid. p. 441. In parliamentary procedure, to “lay on the table” means to put an item of business aside until a later time. It is usually used for an item of business which is not timely or should not be considered because there is more urgent business that must be dealt with first. In Presbyterian practice, there are (and were) two ways of expressing discontent with an action of a governing body after a vote has been taken, a dissent or a protest. A dissent allowed a commissioner to record displeasure with a vote by appending his/her name to a list of those who disagree with the outcome. No further action was taken and no discussion of reasons for dissenting follows. A protest was a written statement giving reasons for the disagreement with the outcome of a vote. The protest was reviewed either by a group of commissioners specially appointed for that purpose, or by a standing committee. At the General Assembly level it was often the committee on Bills and Overtures. The committee decided if the protest was “decorous,” (i.e. not inflammatory or impolite) and made a recommendation to the body to receive the protest, which was then appended to the minutes of the session. The committee also might draft a response, if it seemed prudent or necessary, which was also recommended to the body. These recommendations were then presented as regular pieces of business to be debated and voted on by the full body. Because of the time consumed by the review and possible drafting of a response, such protests ordinarily took several days to be submitted and voted on by the governing body. The submission of the protest and the response to it had to be completed, however, before the final adjournment. In this case, the first protest heard by the Assembly concerned the action on June 1, was dated June 2 and was presented and adopted on June 7, 1837.
been in operation for a number of years, largely founded by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, though other denominations were also represented.

At the time of their founding, formal church bodies, or denominations, were ecclesiastical in function, providing for the founding of churches and for the training, credentialing and provision of ministers. The Presbyterian Church had a printing arm, which published hymnals, but there was no attempt to provide Sunday School materials or to assist in the provision of programs designed to provide for missionaries either within the United States or in foreign countries. Those faithful who wished to support these two functions had banded together and formed separate organizations to provide for these services. Since the time of their organization, these societies had found welcome in churches, which subscribed to their policies and purposes. There had been a growing concern among some Presbyterians, however, that if the church itself was not in charge of the content being produced, promulgated and taught, certain issues and even heresies would be introduced into their congregations. The members of the voluntary societies were beyond the jurisdiction and discipline of the Presbyterian Church, and therefore beyond the power of the presbytery, synod or General Assembly. The concern became one of control, and the rationale was the “one rotten apple in the barrel” syndrome.

Forbidding membership in these societies, or use of their materials by Presbyterian churches, was debated on Friday morning, June 2, following the usual routines of reporting on the election of a minister and two elders to be trustees of the General Assembly and voting on and appointing members to be tellers in the election of
persons to the Board of Education. Because it was an Order of the Day, the Assembly also gave approval to a “foreign minister,” who was seeking to become a member of the Presbytery of New York, and also received a protest against the earlier resolution of the Assembly, the resolution that abrogated the Plan of Union of 1801, assigning the review and answer to three Old School stalwarts, Dr. Junkin (Newton), Dr. Green (Philadelphia 1st) and Mr. Anderson (West Hanover.) The debate on the voluntary societies and their status for Presbyterians completed the rest of the morning until adjournment.

In the afternoon, following the report on the election to fill vacancies on the Board of Education, there was further debate on the societies, which resulted finally in a resolution, denying access of these societies, their agents, and their programs to Presbyterian churches. The language was blunt, as well as introducing a subtle form of demeaning the societies by the use of “so called” and the implication that the groups might underhandedly attempt to use other names in order to insinuate themselves into the churches.

While couched in the usual polite, decorous terms, the resolution demonstrated an underlying suspicion and a sense of the superiority of the pure Presbyterian.338 Once again, there was emphasis by the Old School party on the peace and purity of the church, to the detriment of the third part of the trio, the unity either of the Presbyterian

338 The resolution reads as follows: “Resolved, That while we desire that no body of Christian men of other denominations should be prevented from choosing their own plans of doing good – and while we claim no right to complain should they exceed us in energy and zeal – we believe, that facts too familiar to need repetition here, warrant us in affirming, that the organization and operations of the so called American Home Missionary Society, and American Education Society, and its branches, of whatever name, are exceedingly injurious to the peace and purity of the Presbyterian Church. We recommend, accordingly, that they should cease to operate within any of our churches. Ibid. p. 442.
denomination or its relationship to the larger Body of Christ, in previously successful
ecumenical relationships. The vote was 123 to 86, the absence of the votes of the Synod
of the Western Reserve making the majority even more secure for the Old School. 54
members did not vote, including the 13 from the Synod of the Western Reserve who had
been excluded. Following this vote, the Assembly then adjourned with prayer until the
following morning.

On Saturday morning, June 3, 1837, and following prayer, the Assembly was
presented with another protest by Elder Jessup, this time concerning the resolution that
“declared that the Synod of the Western Reserve is not a part of the Presbyterian
Church.” Again, the prejudice against those who found themselves not in power can be
seen in the way in which the Stated Clerk wrote that the paper “purported to be a protest
from the commissioners, members of the Western Reserve Synod…” Yet the protest was
assigned to three prominent Old School men, the Rev. Dr. Plumer of East Hanover
Presbytery, and Elders Ewing of Redstone and Woodhull of New Brunswick. This
protest was accepted, perhaps because Mr. Jessup was still recognized as a member of the
Assembly, even though the authors of the protest presumably had no standing in the
Assembly, as evinced by the refusal to let them vote on a routine matter the day before, a
matter on which their votes could have made absolutely no difference, even if they had
voted in a block.

Perhaps in an effort to be sure commissioners and the world at large heard from
the voices that were appalled by earlier actions of this Assembly, the respected Rev. Dr.
Nathan Beman of Troy introduced a further protest of two parts, one concerning the excision of the Synod of the Western Reserve, the other concerning the “citation of inferior judicatories as may be charged by common fame with irregularities.” A response was again assigned to three well-known Old Schoolers, the Revs. Robert Breckinridge of Baltimore and William Annan of Redstone, together with Elder C.S. Todd of Louisville. The Moderator used his power of appointment to assure that answers to the protests would be thoroughly orthodox and in line with actions that the majority had taken, and that were presented in the Memorial written and endorsed by the earlier meeting of Old Schoolers in Pittsburgh, reflecting the thoughts of the “Act and Testimony” of 1834.

Those who were to report on the “State of Religion” submitted their report, which was read, accepted and laid on the table for future action. And then the battle to purify the church continued. Robert Breckinridge of Baltimore presented a resolution, designed to take some action concerning three synods in New York State, the synods of Utica, Geneva and Genesee. Utica had a total of nine commissioners present, six ministers and three elders. Geneva had a total of 17, eleven ministers and six elders. Genesee had a total of 12, nine ministers and three elders. This totaled a vote of 38, most of which would have been New School. However, these three synods could have provided 57 total votes, had all of the eligible commissioners been elected and attended. Added to the totals of the Western Reserve, the commissioners from these presbyteries could have come much closer to overriding the votes of the Old School majority. Removing 57

339 Ibid. p. 443.
340 The Western Reserve had 13 commissioners present, 9 ministers and 4 elders; a full complement could have totaled 20 men with the addition of one minister and 6 elders.
votes from the totals cemented the power of the Old School to effect all the changes that they deemed necessary to reform the church.

Parliamentary procedure, however, was used to halt the Old School juggernaut, as Elder Jessup of Montrose requested that the question be divided.\textsuperscript{341} Before any action could be taken, he moved to postpone the resolutions in order to submit a substitute. The substitute motion asked the Assembly to postpone any action until the start of the 1838 General assembly in order that the three synods (Utica, Geneva and Genesee) could know what was causing the stated “important delinquency and grossly unconstitutional proceedings” and could be prepared to answer the concerns. The reasons for the postponement were listed as follows: “no specified act of the said Synod has been made the ground of proceeding against that body, nor any specific members of that body have been designated as the delinquents…., the charges are denied by the commissioners representing those bodies on this floor, and an inquiry into the whole matter is demanded…., a majority of the members of the Synods have had no previous notice of these proceedings, nor of any charge against them, individually or collectively, nor any opportunity of defending themselves against the charges so brought against them…” The motion went on to delineate carefully what Jessup felt were the reasonable way to proceed, that is, the Assembly would tell the Synods what they were accused of, would allow them time to explain themselves and answer the charges, then would deliberate,

\textsuperscript{341} This is a parliamentary procedure to deal with a complex issue, this time perhaps because there were three synods being questioned, by breaking it down into smaller parts and then dealing with each part separately and by separate motions. This is often done when one part of an action is controversial, while other parts seem to be more universally accepted, and perhaps can be disposed of more easily.
debate and judge the merits of the case “according to the Constitution and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.”

Debate continued until adjournment with prayer. The Assembly did not meet on Sunday, but opened Monday morning, June 5, 1837, with prayer and minutes and more parliamentary procedure. The entire morning was consumed with debate on the motion to postpone the Breckinridge resolution, which would exscind the synods of Western New York. Mr. Plumer of East Hanover was speaking, when he was accused of “adducing certain papers and letters.” These added papers, perhaps from questionable sources, no doubt, were offered as proof that the presbyteries and synods in question were guilty of practices that caused the Old Schoolers to question their orthodoxy, and therefore their right to be a part of the Presbyterian Church. The Moderator decided that Mr. Plumer was in order, and the appeal of his ruling failed, though not by a roll call vote. The Assembly continued to debate this motion to postpone until adjournment to the afternoon.

With the afternoon came an unusual parliamentary situation. The motion to postpone caused further debate, and then there was a motion for the previous question. Not taken by roll call, it was reported that cutting off debate was decided in the affirmative, but rather than move to decide on the question to postpone, the Moderator decided that the previous question had been the resolution to exscind, and the Assembly moved to vote on that issue without further debate, with the Old School winning by a vote of 115 to 88. This was a vote that would have failed had the all the eligible New

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342 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1837, 443-444.
Schoolers been present to vote. It is also interesting to note how the votes fluctuated, with this important vote garnering only 203 total votes out of a possible 264 enrolled commissioners, (251 with the Western Reserve votes removed.)

The substance of this part of the resolution stated that because the Plan of Union of 1801 had been abrogated, and these three synods were formed under that plan, which was “null and void from the beginning,” their union with the Presbyterian Church was not valid, that they were “out of the ecclesiastical connexion of the Presbyterian Church” and that they are “not in form or in fact an integral portion of said church.” This was the first part of the resolution, which had been divided for purposes of voting.

The Assembly then went on to adopt without discussion, but with a roll call vote, the other portions of the resolution, seemingly through a single vote, 113 to 60. The Old School bloc had remained virtually intact from the prior vote, (115 vs. 113), while the New School had dropped by 28 votes (88 vs. 60.) These three resolutions were designed to mop up after the slaughter, keeping faith with the Presbyterian biblical motto of doing everything “decently and in order.” The second resolution seems to be an attempt to justify the actions taken, putting the best light possible on what had been done, through saying that the Assembly had acted with “solicitude” and that the “urgency for the immediate decision” was necessitated by the “gross disorders which are ascertained to have prevailed” in all the excinded synods. The resolution went on to say that it was now clear that the Plan of Union was never truly effected even “by those professing to act under it.”

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343 Ibid. 444.
The third part of the resolution was designed to state that the actions taken were not to be construed as a disciplinary effort against any churches or their members, either individually or as congregations. Under the circumstances, and as good Presbyterians, who gain their name and their understanding through the very structure of their governing bodies, this seems either ingenuous or craftily manipulative – to attempt to force bodies, which had organized themselves as Presbyterian congregations and declared themselves bound by Presbyterian polity, to become congregational by fiat and by removing the major tie that bound them to each other. This third resolution made two claims; that the Assembly had to act out of necessity in order to state “the truth”\textsuperscript{344} and that they had “full authority” to do so. The first claim could reasonably be argued and remain a matter of disagreement. The second would cause much discussion, in the public and religious press, in books, which would subsequently be written, and in court cases that ensued.

The fourth resolution gave permission and a process for any churches, ministers, or presbyteries which felt themselves to be “strictly Presbyterian in doctrine and order” to apply with full reasons to the appropriate body for readmission into the church – to a near-by presbytery if a church or minister, or to the subsequent General Assembly if a presbytery.

The uproar at these actions can only be imagined, but the minutes at this point reflect again the “decent and orderly,” as the Rev. Baxter Dickinson of Cincinnati

\textsuperscript{344} The words used in this resolution, “declare and determine” are necessary by the Constitution then and now, that the power of the General Assembly is only “ministerial and declarative,” meaning that there is no coercive power of any sort available to any governing body, outside of making verbal or written statements. (G-1.0103 of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.)
submitted a protest against the action taken to forbid the voluntary societies from operating in Presbyterian churches. As usual, the Moderator appointed a team of three to examine and answer the protest, the group this time including the formidable Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander, Princeton luminary and member of New Brunswick Presbytery; the Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green, leader of the Old School, President of the Pittsburgh Convention, and member of Philadelphia Presbytery; and the Rev. George Potts, a conservative member of New York Presbytery.

In an unusual note for these or any other formal minutes, the clerk next took note that there was “some disturbance…among the spectators,” which caused Mr. Breckinridge to move that the Assembly not permit spectators, closing its doors to all but its now diminished roll of commissioners. The motion was neither debated nor decided, but joined the others, which were “laid on the table.” The hour being late and the uproar continuing, the Assembly concluded with prayer as it adjourned for the evening.

Tuesday morning was the 6th of June and the Assembly was nearing its end, the commissioners having been meeting for 19 days, and some of them having already been meeting for nearly four weeks. Reports which had been assigned had been written and submitted, overtures from presbyteries and synods needed to be dealt with. The previous Assemblies had contracted for books of psalms and hymns in an official edition to be printed, which was done and the bill submitted. Altogether 8,000 copies had been sold, with 800 still remaining. The reckoning was submitted, accepted, and ordered to be

345 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1837, p. 446.
printed in the appendix to the minutes\textsuperscript{346}, but no statement was made that the printer should be paid. The committee assigned to consider Overture 8, a memorial from the Synod of Michigan on the Sabbath, recommended that no action be taken “under existing conditions.”\textsuperscript{347} The Assembly agreed and the committee was dismissed. Three commissioners, all Old Schoolers, were assigned to recommend a place to hold the next Assembly.

Routine having been accomplished and order restored, the Assembly majority returned to cementing its gains over the minority. The Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander of Princeton presented two resolutions to ensure that only men from approved presbyteries be able to be seated as commissioners to subsequent Assemblies. The first resolution provided that no commissioner could be received, accepted and seated until the presbytery represented by that man was recognized by the Assembly. This rule was to apply even to a presbytery that merely changed its name.

The second resolution took aim at any strategy that the minority might use to increase representation, particularly forming new presbyteries just for that purpose. The resolution then gave the Assembly the power and authority to direct the synod involved in forming a new presbytery\textsuperscript{348} to “reunite it to the Presbytery or Presbyteries to which the members were before attached.” After extended debate, there was a motion made to postpone action by laying these resolutions “on the table.” The motion failed, by a vote

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{346} Ibid. p. 519. This is the last item in the report of the Trustees of the General Assembly. \\
\textsuperscript{347} Ibid. 446. \\
\textsuperscript{348} Ibid. 447. The power to form new presbyteries was given to the synods by the Constitution, and it was unusual for the Assembly to intervene in that process.}
count of 115 to 44. Following more discussion, the resolutions were adopted without a roll call vote. The minority was coming apart, either by not being allowed to vote, by leaving, or by virtue of caucuses being held outside the meeting room. The time to discuss the item thoroughly was not available, however, as adjournment occurred immediately following this last vote.

Tuesday afternoon’s session opened as usual with prayer and the reading of the minutes. A protest from the commissioners of the Synods of Genesee, Geneva, and Utica was submitted, and the usual appointment of a committee to review and answer it was made. Again, as usual, a stellar group of three commissioners was assigned this task, the Rev. Murray of Elizabethtown, the Rev. Dr. Witherspoon of Harmony, who had been the Moderator of the 1836 Assembly, and Elder Dr. Simpson of South Carolina Presbytery. The committee that was assigned the responsibility of finding a place for the next Assembly to meet reported that they needed more time to make this recommendation. It was granted.

Routine ceased abruptly, as prominent Old School Commissioner Robert Breckinridge offered six resolutions, all designed to further cement the majority’s position, and to “purify” the Church. The first was the crucial one upon which all the others depended, to dissolve the Presbytery of Wilmington and the Third Presbytery of Philadelphia. The resolution stated that this was to be accomplished, not at some future time, but right now. The other five resolutions were designed to effect the complete and utter eradication of the two presbyteries. The second sent them back to the presbyteries
from which they were formed, instructed the stated clerk to deposit all records and papers with the stated clerk of the Synod of Philadelphia. The third assigned candidates for the ministry and any missionaries outside their bounds to other presbyteries; in the case of Wilmington to the Presbytery of New Castle, and in the case of Third Philadelphia to the dreaded and staunch Old School First Philadelphia Presbytery.\textsuperscript{349}

The fourth resolution delineated a process for the affected ministers, churches and licentiates to keep their good standing in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America by applying to whatever presbytery “they most naturally belong for admission to them.”\textsuperscript{350} However, the resolution continued, “but as great, long continued, and increasing common fame charges irregularities in doctrine and order on both these Presbyteries,” the presbyteries are enjoined to examine any such applicants thoroughly for any signs of deviation from the orthodox faith and practice that is required to be a part of the Presbyterian Church. The fifth resolution moved the next step to absolute clarity about the removal of ministers, churches, candidates, licentiates and missionaries, that is that if they didn’t follow the steps in resolution #4, they were “hereby declared to be thenceforward, \textit{de facto}, out of the communion of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and no longer an integral portion thereof.” The sixth resolution put the

\textsuperscript{349} The term used in the minutes of the Assembly was “foreign missionaries.” Even missionaries that were sent to western territories or the native populations within the continent of North America were labeled “foreign missionaries.”

\textsuperscript{350} Licentiates were those men who had completed all their studies as candidates for the ministry, had not yet received a call to a church or a ministry which a presbytery could validate and which was necessary in order to be ordained, but where the candidate had been examined by a presbytery and approved to be allowed to go out, preach in churches and seek a call.
final touch on the excision of the two presbyteries by saying that this action would be in effect immediately following the final adjournment of the Assembly of 1837.\textsuperscript{351}

The discussion and debate began and was lengthy, ending only when, amazingly, an Old School stalwart, Elder Walter Lowrie of Allegheny Presbytery, moved to amend the resolutions by striking the examination portion of the 4\textsuperscript{th} resolution, as well as striking both the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th} resolutions, thereby removing the strong language and absolute clarity of action contained in all three resolutions. The debate had taken virtually the entire afternoon, and so the Assembly decided to send these resolutions to a special committee (unnamed) and adjourn to the following morning, of course, with prayer.

The Assembly opened on Wednesday morning, June 7\textsuperscript{th}, with the usual prayer and reading of the minutes. Without a roll call vote, the report of the committee to identify a place for the subsequent Assembly was adopted. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America would meet again in Philadelphia in 1838 in the Seventh Presbyterian Church, whose pastor, Samuel D. Blythe, was a confirmed Old Schooler.

Following that report, the Committee on Leave of Absence reported that 22 commissioners had been given permission to leave the Assembly. Of the 22, 11 voted consistently with the Old School and 9 with the New School. Two, Elder Isaac Coe of Indianapolis and the Rev. Thomas Cleland of Transylvania are less easily identified, voting sometimes with the Old School and sometimes with the New. Both men voted to

\textsuperscript{351} Presbyterian Church. \textit{Minutes 1837}, 447-48.
abrogate the Plan of Union of 1801, but did not support removing the four synods from membership in the Presbyterian Church. Their reasons for leaving were not given, though, with a single exception (Elder William Fahnestock who lived in Philadelphia), all lived a considerable distance away and had been gone from home for a considerable period of time, and more time would be needed for them to return to Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Southern Ohio, as well as those returning to upstate New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey.

Then Mr. Plumer presented both the protest from the commissioners of the Synod of the Western Reserve and the answer of the responding committee, which were adopted without a roll call vote, and entered into the minutes. The protest, which is signed by the 13 commissioners from all eight of the presbyteries of the Synod begins by stating their upset and concern at the “unconstitutional and unjust act of the Assembly,” which also removed them from the floor of the Assembly, so that they were unable to participate after the vote was taken to exscind the Synod. They argue that they all belong to regularly appointed presbyteries and churches and even were formed before the constitution which is currently governing the church, put in place in 1821. Their origin was through the thoroughly orthodox Presbytery of Pittsburg, they argue, and has been in place, and accepted by, 22 General Assemblies. Further, if a concern with “accommodation” churches had arisen, why bother all the regularly formed churches and presbyteries. As well, why had they been singled out for this action as other presbyteries had the same system, especially those of Albany, New Jersey, South Carolina and Georgia. Carrying this argument to its logical conclusion, the signers raised a question as
to the validity of any action of the past 36 years undertaken by an Assembly in which commissioners from these tainted presbyteries were allowed to vote.

Finally, the protesters said that while they had been victimized by clever parliamentary procedures designed to silence them and others, the real problem raised by this action is that now the Assembly would feel itself free to remove any commissioner or group from the body “who, for the time being, may be obnoxious to the majority,” which would serve to negate the very constitution upon which they were founded.352

The response of Commissioners Plumer (Minister, East Hanover in Virginia), Ewing (Elder, Redstone in Pennsylvania) and Woodhull (Elder, New Brunswick in New Jersey) began by stating categorically that these commissioners had no right to protest anything because they were not and never had been proper members of the Presbyterian Church. Self-righteously they stated, “But the Assembly desire to treat those brethren with all courtesy, and therefore allow their Protest a place in the records.” Their basic argument was that the Assembly of 1801 permitted non-elders to be a part of the governing bodies of Presbyterian churches and so these men also were allowed to be commissioned to serve in synods and the General Assemblies, and the Western Reserve was guilty of this practice. In fact, because these “committee men” probably voted for those elected as commissioners, and might even have been a majority of voters, their commissions could not be valid. Under the theory that every Assembly is independent and not simply a continuation of the prior meeting of the Assembly, the argument of past Assembly acceptance of these commissioners is irrelevant.

352 Ibid. 449-50.
In answer to other arguments, the responders answered with consistency that the forming of presbyteries under an illegal system did not require them (the majority of the Assembly) to accept their illegal founding or their representation on the floor of the Assembly. “We consider it a fundamental departure from our system to organize a Presbytery with one or two Presbyterian churches, and ten or twelve of another denomination of Christians.” Statistics which are not attributed or verified in any way stated that the Synod contained “twenty-five, or at most thirty Presbyterian churches, and one hundred and nine Congregational churches…” The responders stated that the members of the Synod and their “friends” had had plenty of time to speak and so there was no necessity to answer the parliamentary questions at all.353

Seemingly without taking a breath, the Assembly moved to the next topic, answering an overture (#7) from the Presbytery of Salem in Indiana, which led to the Assembly forming its own Board of Foreign Missions. The work of foreign missions for Presbyterians had been accomplished through an ecumenical effort, a voluntary society, formed largely by Presbyterians and Congregationalists and called, “The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions” or ABCFM. 354 Having no real control over this body, and clearly being fearful of the consequences of allowing other parts of the Body of Christ to make decisions for Presbyterians, the Old School majority passed this resolution

353 Ibid. 450-52.
354 In the 20th century, this same type of issue would become the focus for a schism in the church, as the issue of belonging to an ecumenical voluntary society, rather than remaining in its Presbyterian counterpart led to the ouster of Gresham Machen and was part of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy that roiled the church from 1910 to 1927. At that time, the sides were somewhat reversed, with the more conservative members being in favor of the non-Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, and the more progressive members arguing that Presbyterians needed to remain loyal to the formal structures of the Presbyterian Church.
which set up the Presbyterian Board which would be responsible to the Assembly. It would have a total membership of 80, 40 laymen and 40 ministers, chosen for a four-year term. All the structures, processes and programs were delineated in this action, including “all property, houses, lands, tenements, and permanent funds…” which were to be taken and managed for the Trustees of the General Assembly by the newly appointed Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, which included all the properties, assets and personnel of any foreign missionary societies that existed in the church at the time.355 This action passed on a roll call vote of 137 in favor to only 29 against. Not every New Schooler was off the floor or had already gone home to grieve or in disgust, but very few were present for this vote, which continued the major changes in the way in which the Presbyterian Church would govern itself.

Following the vote which set up the structure of this Board, the Assembly then voted, without a vote count, to authorize a committee to appoint the directors for the newly created Board, set a time and place for their first meeting,356 and in the same breath present a resolution that a pastoral letter be sent to “the churches under our care, relative to the present posture of the Presbyterian Church, and our duty under our present trials.” Perhaps also feeling a need to explain to a wider audience their reasons for action, Mr. Plumer’s fourth resolution asked for a similar letter to be sent to “the Churches of Jesus Christ, throughout the earth.” Not yet having completed his task, Mr. Plumer next presented a resolution for a letter to be sent to all the churches that had been formed from

355 Ibid. 452-53.
356 The first meeting was scheduled for October 31, 1837 in Baltimore, the home of the Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge, Old School leader in the Assembly and the Conventions that preceded it.
the Plan of Union of 1801, giving them a deadline to re-organize themselves (April 1, 1838), becoming Presbyterian or Congregational, and further stating:

> And, where the majority in any church shall determine in a particular way, it is the opinion of this Assembly, that whenever the minority have no serious conscientious difficulties, they ought not to divide the congregation, but unite with their brethren of the majority in maintaining in vigour and unity the ordinances of the Gospel.\(^{357}\)

Unity was important to the Old School on some occasions, though not on others. There seemed to be a sense in which they did not wish to be perceived to be divisive, or schismatic, even if their ordination vows did not speak to unity as directly as did the vows taken by elders and licentiates. The General Assembly, after all, had been charged to suppress “schismatical contentions and disputations,” which charge might have been difficult to fulfill in the realm of this Assembly.

Business proceeded without interruption, and without the necessity for roll call votes. Dr. James Blythe, a minister commissioner from Indiana, offered a resolution, which was passed following amendment, concerning the missions of the church, their expense, asking that ways be studied for greater frugality in collecting funds, along with increased donations and the utilization of a greater number of laymen as agents of the missionary enterprise, with a report on the success of this enterprise to be reported the next year to the Assembly in 1838. Following the intense focus on ecclesiastical and structural issues, this may have been a relief to the body, which was why the clerks of the Assembly could record it as business routine enough not to require a roll call vote.

\(^{357}\) Ibid. 454.
Dr. Blythe, maker of the previous motion, serves as an interesting example of the complexity of this Assembly. He had just resigned as the President of Hanover College, was from the Presbytery of Madison, Indiana, a presbytery formed under the Plan of Union, and located in a town in Southeastern Indiana on the Ohio River, across the river from Kentucky. This portion of Southern Indiana is about midway between Cincinnati, Ohio, and Louisville, Kentucky, areas where fugitive slaves hoped to find their way to freedom, yet where the economics of transportation and trade meant that there were both anti-slave and slave-holding sympathizers, that the region was contested. Abolitionists were often hated, spoken against, and there were uprisings and riots in both cities over the issue of slavery.

Dr. Blythe, in his voting pattern, seemed to reflect the contests which roiled the area he represented. He was enrolled and attended the entire Assembly, during which there were 25 roll call votes. For nine of the recorded votes, no vote was recorded for him at all, though the reasons for his absence are unclear. He voted with the Old School majority on all the early votes, those which led up to abrogating the Plan of Union of 1801, and citing the “inferior judicatories charged by common fame with gross errors.” When the votes were taken concerning the excision of the Synod of the Western Reserve, however, no vote is recorded for Dr. Blythe. He returned to voting with the majority in ridding the church of voluntary societies, yet voted “no” with the minority on excising the three synods of Western New York. Similarly, he voted against dissolving the Third Presbytery of Philadelphia, a New School stronghold friendly to the perceived renegade

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358 *New York Evangelist*, page 15, January 21, 1837.
and heretic, Albert Barnes. However, Blythe voted with the Old School majority on the issue of tabling any and all overtures on slavery, which came on the last day of the Assembly. In all the votes taken to approve the responses to the several protests of the minority New School commissioners, both those which were answered by the majority and those which were not, Dr. Blythe did not vote. Clearly he was present, however, as he voted immediately following to send a letter explaining this unusual Assembly to all the churches of the world. This pattern indicates a strong conservative and evangelical stance, but equally the view of a person who did not wish the church to act in a schismatic fashion. In an Assembly in which many of the votes of Old Schoolers were predictable, the Rev. James Blythe, D.D. was unusual. In his efforts to return the Assembly, and thereby the church, to its traditional role of evangelism and mission, he perhaps represented the ordinary church-goer and believer.

From this point on June 7, the minutes of the Assembly reflect the confusion, anger, upset and concerns felt by the members of the minority, together with the intransigence of the majority. Of the remaining 44 pages of minutes (excluding the appendices) of the General Assembly of 1837, 40 are taken with protests, answers and the recorded votes on those items of business. Unlike routine minutes, which rarely carry any hint of emotion or conflict, these protests and the answers speak eloquently of the anguish, surprise, and righteous indignation of the minority, as well as the determination, argumentation and resolve of the majority. Yet throughout all this argument, all this rhetoric, is the underlying belief in process as the right way to proceed. Even if their world has been shattered and turned upside down, the Presbyterians still wanted to do
their business “decently and in order,” which meant that the way to make known to the body and the world that you are not in favor of actions taken by a body is to protest those actions. In return, the majority of the body can, and often does, state for the public what its reasons have been for following a particular course of action.

The first protest of this final group together with its answer, placed in the record the day before the Assembly adjourned, was presented by the Rev. Dr. George Junkin, of the Presbytery of Newton in the Synod of New Jersey, a staunch Old Schooler. The protest and the answer by Dr. Junkin’s committee were routinely heard, accepted and adopted. The protest was signed by 103 commissioners, virtually all of those 110 who had voted against the action when it was presented on May 23, 1837, as the first in the inexorable march toward division.

The argument of the protesters opened by stating that the action of 1801 cannot be unconstitutional because it is not mentioned in the Constitution at all. The most it could be is non-constitutional. In addition, the Plan had been in place when the Constitution was adopted in 1820. The protesters admitted that the plan had not been sent to the presbyteries to be ratified, but that was because the only thing that needed to be sent to the presbyteries was a constitutional change, which this was not. Also, the plan did not pertain to all churches, but only those formed under its terms of agreement, that is, those on the northwestern frontier, where the General Association of Connecticut had the capacity to form new churches. Further, this was actually following the constitutional mandate that the Presbyterian Church itself could “declare the terms of admission into the
communion of the Presbyterian Church.”Constitutionally, the protesters did not understand how an act that was in place when the current constitution was designed, developed and ratified, an act that had lasted for 36 years, 16 of them under the current constitution, could be now called unconstitutional.

The protest also raised the issue of process in constitutional enactment. When the full Constitution was drafted and then adopted in 1820, the plan had been in place for years and, they said, “…was felt to be morally binding as a solemn agreement or treaty duly ratified by the power constitutionally competent to do so…” In addition, they said, the Plan of Union provided a process by which any church which was organized as both Presbyterian and Congregational could become fully Presbyterian.

The final protest argument attempted to equate the action forming the Plan of Union with every other act taken by Assemblies in later years, especially those to establish Presbyterian Boards of Education and of Mission, and the founding of the two seminaries, Princeton and Allegheny.

359 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1837, 454.
360 Ibid p. 455. There is an interesting constitutional parallel in the recent reunion in 1983 of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). The Stated Clerks of the General Assembly of each of the former denominations became the co-Stated Clerks of the reunited body. In issuing non-binding interpretations of the new Constitution of the re-united body (the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)), the co-Stated Clerks argued that a new constitution included everything that was needed; that if anything further had been desired, it would have been added prior to reunion. In addition, the Articles of Agreement that legally merged the two bodies carried with it a statement that all the actions and policies of the former churches would be the actions and policies of the re-united church. These two lines of argument would have supported the protest of the minority of the General Assembly of 1837.
Why go against the constitutional language and intent of the Presbyterian Church? The protest stated quite bluntly that the protesters believed this effort to abrogate a long past and well-accepted act to be a power play by a group that found themselves in the minority in 1836, felt they were losing power, and decided to act decisively to change the power dynamics. The former minority’s mode of action was to call their friends, fellow believers and former (and hopefully future) commissioners to the Assembly together in a “convention,” which was designed to meet in the same place and just prior to the Assembly. The protesters believed that the purpose for this convention, which was carried out in practice, was to draft a series of proposed actions that would overcome the power of the western group that was in the ascendance in the 1836 Assembly.

The next portion of the lengthy argument states that other Plans of Union, (i.e. those of the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Church) were also not sent to the presbyteries for ratification. In addition, there was an important theological and structural reason for the Plan of Union, which was to avoid schisms and contentions that were occurring in the frontier areas as various churches vied for converts among the new settlers. This argument clearly rests on the importance each group placed on the trinity of purity, peace and unity. In the northern areas, the Old Schoolers believed, purity was and would be losing out to false unity. As a result, there could be no peace. A later argument addressed this issue directly, characterizing the plan as it was conceived as “a

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361 Again, this group of values is contested at the present time, with the adoption of the report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity by the 217th General Assembly (2006), which has led to turmoil in the church, to withholding of money from denominational entities and to the withdrawing of churches who believe that the report sacrifices the purity of the church and the orthodoxy of its beliefs to the heterodoxy of the secular world and its values.
The third argument was based on the origin of the action – a matter of disagreement. The Old Schoolers stated that an outside body, the General Association of Connecticut (a body of the Congregational Church), had proposed the plan. The New Schoolers said that this was a General Assembly idea and initiative. In an effort to bolster their argument, the protesters state that the General Association of Connecticut had more to lose because they gave up the sole right to direct and control their own churches and church members.

In the final analysis, however, because it was a mutual agreement, no one party could break the compact. The argument continued that there was no reason to break the agreement, as Presbyterians knew that the purpose was to move all the churches to become good Presbyterian organizations, Presbyterians “in full, as many of them have already done…”

The protesters showed their anger at the process followed in accepting the memorial of the Convention as business at the Assembly, business which they argue was filled with false statements, neither supported nor proven; from a group which was not of the Assembly, even if some members of its members became commissioners, and who misused parliamentary processes to win success for their desires. They particularly railed

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362 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1837, 457.
363 Ibid. p. 457.
against the appointment of Convention members as the committee appointed byModerator Elliott to consider and report on the proposed Assembly action for thismemorial.364 Because so large a majority of the commissioners who voted in favor ofremoving the plan were also members of the Convention that determined that the Plan ofUnion had to be removed and proposed the action that set that removal in motion, theprotesters continued to feel that the action was based on unproven facts, and wasprecipitate. They called into question, finally, the pious declaration of the proponents ofabrogation that this action was needed because, “…the doctrinal purity of our ancientConfession of Faith is endangered, and not because of any preference for a particularsystem of mere church government and discipline.”

If the protest was long, nearly four full pages of minutes, the answer was evenlonger, consuming almost seven pages. The response answered each of the six points ofthe protest, though beginning with the second point and answering what they stated to be the most important point last.

Their first response dealt with the claim that the plan was designed to avoidschism in the body of Christ. The reply stated that the Plan actually caused a schism in

364 Again, to seek a parallel to such an issue at the present time, business to be considered by the GeneralAssembly today comes from several sources: first, from business that has been assigned to a committee oragency of the General Assembly by a prior Assembly; second, from overtures or requests of synods and presbyteries (but not individual churches or members, who must have their concerns acted on by a presbytery or, in unusual circumstances, a synod); third, by what is called a “commissioner’s resolution.” In this last, sitting commissioners may present proposals to the body for action, but only under specificcircumstances. Deadlines mean that overtures and reports of agencies and assembly committees are read inadvance of the Assembly and often discussed throughout the denomination. Commissioner’s Resolutions are presented during the first hours of an Assembly, and generally considered last on the dockets ofAssembly committees. Under these circumstances, it would be possible for business such as the memorialof the Convention to be considered by a General Assembly, but very unlikely to be the first item ofbusiness of the Assembly today.
the Presbyterian Church, easily seen by the divisions of the last few General Assemblies, in which “the representatives of churches formed on this plan have always opposed the Boards of Education and of Missions, and the efforts toward reform, and the suppression of errors and of schismatical contentions.”365 In modern terms, the plan allowed for ecumenical relations of a particular sort, and the Old Schoolers saw that as leading to heresies.

Another response concerned the General Association’s power to control its churches, to exercise authority over them. Since the responders stated that the General Association had no power, hence there actually can have been no compact or covenant between them. One party was not competent to make such a covenant by the very nature of its structure and being.

Next the response moved to attack the faith of some of the New School commissioners, stating that there were some who voted who did not profess the Confession of Faith. 366 As for the appointing of a committee composed of those in favor of the action, the responders said that this was only common sense, but in any case the committee was proportional, and also included those not in favor of the action. The fact of holding a convention was justified by saying that all Christians who contemplate action should check with others before acting, and so, whether denoted a convention or a

365 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1837, 458.
366 This Confession of Faith is now known as the Westminster Confession of Faith and is one of 11 confessions that form the first volume of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The adoption of a Book of Confessions occurred in 1967 in the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, in itself a time of great contention in the church, as many believed that the only confession was, is and should be the Westminster of the 1640’s.
caucus, the meeting together was justified. Moving on to parliamentary procedure, that is whether the motion to “call the question” was precipitate, the response says that it was hardly “impatient” as two days had been spent in debate, and the minority had the floor over half the time. As to not proving whatever allegations were made concerning doctrinal errors, the responders made it clear that parliamentary games were in progress by the minority to keep the majority from being able to put any evidence in front of the body, a ploy which would have required a super-majority or 2/3 vote, which they could not have achieved. The majority, however, said they were wise to the ploy, and put off consideration of doctrinal errors to avoid losing the entire vote. However, in stating what had happened, they also acknowledged that the charge of the protest was true. The breaking up of the Plan of Union and ousting of its churches, members, ministers, presbyteries and synods did occur prior to any agreed-upon reason for the action being voted on by the full body.

Finally, the responders came to the heart of the matter, whether the act that brought the Plan of Union into being was constitutional. They once again reiterated the understanding that the power of the General Assembly was specific and only those powers given specifically in the Constitution could be exercised. Further, the only implied powers that could be exercised were those in fulfillment of specific duties given in and required by the Constitution. Hence the Plan of Union was illegal from its inception.

Presbyterians are noted for not doing anything without appointing a committee first and studying an issue to death, seeming to lose out to Methodists and Baptists who could act on their own and thus more quickly. This comment in the answer would seem to acquiesce and affirm the righteousness of acting in this slower and more deliberative way.
Next, using the protesters' own argument, the responders say that no statement was ever made by the Presbyterian Church concerning what the “terms of admission into its communion” are or would be. Under these circumstances, no action could have been taken with going to the source of power, which was and is the presbyteries, who have all the reserved powers, (that is, those powers not enumerated can be exercised by the presbyteries.) This argument makes an assumption, which was not as clearly delineated by the protesters, that the union contemplated under the Plan of Union of 1801 was an organic union, a full merger of the bodies. Both groups seem to display some confusion in their efforts to prove their case.

The arguments that followed dealt specifically with the concerns that churches formed under this plan would not have sessions composed of elders, hence the presbyteries formed from these churches also would not have elders. While this is a logical conclusion, of course, no proof beyond statements purporting to be fact were ever presented, and the argument uses the most egregious possible instance to prove its point. The responders, however, do not attempt to say what the source of their information was, or why it would not suffice for the individual objectionable congregations to be removed, rather than removing entire geographical areas from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

One of the protesters’ arguments about there being no barrier to having churches with only committee men and no elders rested on the number of churches with no
deacons. The answer was that this was irrelevant, because deacons do not rule. The interesting part of their answer, however, lay in the stated reasoning. “The argument therefore is lame, and shows its eastern birth.”

The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was settled by waves of followers; those from the Church of Scotland, a church established to the point of being a theocracy, largely populated the Middle Colonies from Virginia south to Georgia. Those being chastised as “eastern,” reflected the immigration that populated the New England states and New York, with Pennsylvania being of mixed immigration religiously.

Not only was sectionalism at the base of the argument, but the power of one part of the country and the church to determine what all will do was being questioned. Using biblical images and arguing through implication and result rather than written rule or constitutional provision, the responders said,

Have they not given rise to heterogeneous bodies, who have come up here and bound us almost to our undoing? Have they not bound with green withers and new cords this body and its Boards of Education and Mission? Have they not well nigh shorn us of the locks of our strength, and forbidden us to go forth into the field of missionary conflict against the foes of our God and King?

In answer to the argument about parallel actions, those of establishing seminaries and the Boards, the responders said that those bodies did not affect the government of the church nor claim to be rules or regulations. Their argument that founding seminaries, and training ministers arose from two parts of the Constitution, one to “superintend… the concerns of the whole church,” the other from a responsibility and power to “promot[e]
charity, truth, and holiness, through all the churches under their care.”370 Obviously, these statements are correct, but it is also difficult to understand why they would not also and equally apply to the work undertaken by the churches, members, and ministers serving under the Plan of Union.

A later argument concerning the training and sending of missionaries, and therefore the Assembly’s capacity to form a Board of Missions, seems to state that the protesters would not allow the Assembly to form a Presbyterian Board of Home or Foreign Missions, rather than acknowledge that the protesters might not approve such an action because it would be duplicating an ecumenical board already in place. In fact, there is in this place no statement on the part of the protesters that they would not allow a solely Presbytery Board of Missions to function. Rather, they could be viewed as expressing a desire that both exist. The existence of the ecumenical body, however, certainly acted as a drain on the voluntary contributions of Presbyterians, as well as keeping the locus of power away from those Presbyterians who wanted total power and control of the missionaries and their message.

In answer to the argument about other bodies being admitted, the responders stated that the Synod of the Associate Reformed Church was thoroughly Presbyterian, and did not require any change in the regulations or rules of the Church. There was no credence given in this response to the understanding that taking in an added group of people, people who come from outside, even if they seem to be just like the original body, will always change the nature of the group. A later Assembly, that of 1927, in 370 Ibid. p. 463.
dealing with issues of ordination, power and authority in the church, described the Presbyterian Church as “an organism.” As an organism, it would be impossible to insert a new part into the body without changing the body in some way.

In their final response to the protest, the Old School stated that the Synod of the Western Reserve had “only from twenty-four to thirty Presbyterian churches in it.” There was no statement that allowed the listener, or subsequently the reader, to know the origin of the statistics or to judge their accuracy, but the statistics published in the same volume and covering 1836 would seem to belie these facts. There are a few ministers shown as serving Congregational churches, particularly in New England. There are no such designations for the churches or ministers of the Synod of the Western Reserve. That is not to say that mixed congregations did not exist, for the minutes of churches in the city of Cleveland alone show the occasionally transient nature of the relationship between the Presbyterian Church and its putative members. However, all the churches showed that they participated in and their ministers belonged to presbyteries.

Protest to the contrary, the majority in the General Assembly of 1837 was not about to change its mind. Rather the body moved immediately to consider, place in the minutes, and approve the answer to another protest, this one from the commissioners of

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371 Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 1927, “Report of Special Commission of 1925 [Final report],” p. 56. The relevant paragraph is as follows: “The Presbyterian Church is not a unity in the sense that it consists of an undivided oneness without distinguishable parts; neither is it a group of smaller bodies with common history and tradition which find it advantageous to work together in close harmony for the accomplishment of purposes common to all of them. Our Church is an organism. Its unity is not a unity of articulation, part touching part, like the bones of a skeleton, but the unity of life, the parts united by vital bonds, thus constituting a living whole and that whole imparting impulse and strength and order to the several parts, as the body to its members.”

372 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1837, 464.
the three synods in Western New York (Geneva, Genessee and Utica) to the action which removed them, their presbyteries, their members and their ministers from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Very much shorter in length than its predecessor, it was signed by less than half of the commissioners from those synods, a total of 17 out of a possible 38 commissioners. While, inexplicably, 12 commissioners from the presbyteries of the three synods did not vote when the time came to vote on excising the three western New York synods, thus seeming to remove themselves from the possibility of signing the protest\textsuperscript{373}, yet at least 9 more commissioners who did vote against the action did not sign this protest.\textsuperscript{374} The voting pattern of the commissioners of these three synods shows some differences of opinion, yet a mostly predictable allegiance to the minority or New School.

The protest of commissioners from Geneva, Genessee and Utica Synods is clear and straightforward. They state that there was no warrant in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church for the type of action taken in this assembly, as the powers granted the Assembly are specified and “no authority to exercise such summary process and excision is there granted.”\textsuperscript{375} The actions taken and the results of those actions are characterized as judicial, yet no judicial process had occurred. The protesters disputed the statistics of the majority, as well as the nature of the churches being removed from membership. Their reference point was an action of the 1808 Assembly which brought in

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\item[373] On page 475 of these minutes, in a vote on the protest concerning the procedure, process and result of excising the Synod of the Western Reserve, the Rev. Philip C. Hay, Geneva Presbytery, excluded himself from voting on all the resolutions in the protest “being out of the house when the last was passed.”
\item[374] For a listing of the commissioners of these synods and the way in which they voted, please see Appendix.
\item[375] Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church with an Appendix, A.D. 1837, p. 464.
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Congregationalists from the “Middle Association,” erecting two presbyteries from these churches. This Assembly, they stated, did not challenge the existence of those presbyteries. In addition, parliamentary procedure did not allow them respond to accusations, which they characterized as “unfounded statements” and “vague and injurious reports,” which members of those synods were not able to challenge or refute, as they could not speak due to a call for the previous question. In a final note of irony, the protesters stated that the majority said no ecclesiastical relations had been disturbed, but denoted a process for rejoining the parent body, “thus attempting to exercise authority over bodies already declared not to be constituent portions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America…” 376 And, they said, in exscinding the three synods there was no due process, no notice or opportunity to challenge the majority’s actions. The result, according to the protest, was “to disturb the peace of our churches, to injure our ministerial character and standing, and to impair our usefulness, and thus to retard the progress of truth and righteousness in one of the most populous and important sections of the country.” 377

Here is a hint of an underlying issue, one in which certain sections of the country are possibly seen as dangerous, chaotic and out of control of those now in the majority of the General Assembly. In his pamphlet written in 1837 and published after the Assembly, James Wood, an Old School member, said:

Though many individuals in those Synods [i.e. Western Reserve, Utica, Geneva, and Genessee] accord with the views and policy which have long distinguished the Presbyterian church, yet, considered as a whole,…they have become so numerous that, instead of being under the control of the

376 Ibid. 466.
377 Ibid. 465.
Assembly as it was formerly constituted, they have assumed the control themselves, and are rapidly changing the character of the church.\textsuperscript{378}

Change is difficult for many. Change with loss of power would be hard for most. Change with loss of power and challenge to a belief system would likely be a stumbling block for all. The answers to protests by commissioners justifying their actions are understandable on a human level, even if difficult to accept on a strictly constitutional, structural, or traditional pattern of behavior.

The Rev. Nicholas Murray of Elizabethtown Presbytery, supporter and predictable voter for the Old School causes, responded crisply in his answer to this protest.

as these Synods became connected with the General Assembly by an unconstitutional Plan of Union, they have never been a constitutional part of it….As there was no judicial process instituted against them, no citations were necessary….The great majority of churches of these Synods…are in form Presbyterian, but in prejudice and in fact Congregational….The evidence of great errors in doctrine and gross irregularities in practice, prevailing to an alarming extent within the bounds of said Synods, and if not countenanced, certainly unsuppressed by them, is before the church and the world.”\textsuperscript{379}

These answers are not designed to appease. They are stated without elaboration, almost with disdain, as if the protester is a small child who has been told several times what the problem is that needs correction, and who is recalcitrant and not listening to Daddy. All the evidence presented is without factual foundation, rather it is stated as “common fame,” that is to say, “we all know this and so we do not need to bring concrete

\textsuperscript{379} Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1837, 466.
factual information as evidence.” In essence, unless founded as Presbyterian, born in that structure, surrounded by that ethos, a church cannot ever become truly Presbyterian and so should not expect to be a part of that body.

As those protesting were no longer able to speak or vote, this being June 7 and they having been removed from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America on June 5, in its decent and orderly way the Assembly moved on to more pressing business. A resolution brought by the venerable Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander was adopted, that the Stated Clerk of the Assembly be given a salary of $100 per year.

Money matters continued to concern the Assembly, and the Rev. Robert Breckinridge offered several resolutions, which were adopted following discussion. The substance of these actions were to counteract an effort by the former commissioners from the Synod of the Western Reserve to instruct the Treasurer of the Trustees of the General Assembly not to honor any directives from the General Assembly that had been sent after the time of the action to remove that synod from the church. The discussion about the resolutions acknowledges that “said notice is no doubt to be considered as the commencement of a series of judicial investigations, grown out of the proceedings of this Assembly, in reforming the church, during its present sessions…” The resolutions informed the Trustees that they were to honor the directions of the Assembly. Yet the exscinded members had not yet conceded and are fighting back.

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380 Ibid. p. 467.
In typical fashion and reduced by 51 voting members, the Assembly moved to appoint several committees to write letters and nominate directors for the Board of Foreign Missions, now wholly under the control of the Assembly. And then they adjourned for their midday break.

e. Done! Order Prevails, But Was It Decent?

In the afternoon, the Assembly returned to the tabled doctrinal errors that had been named in the Memorial of the Convention. After using parliamentary procedure to overcome the motions to allow further debate and to postpone action, the Assembly voted overwhelmingly (109 to 6, with 11 abstentions) to approve the stating of the doctrinal errors thought to be rife in the areas of the church now exscinded. These errors, now named, carried with them specific injunctions presbyteries to discipline any who are already ordained whose theology was tainted by the errors, to keep these errors from poisoning their number, saying, “They…enjoin it upon all the inferior judicatories to adopt all suitable measures to keep their members pure from opinions so dangerous.”

The Assembly, accomplishing housekeeping tasks in the wake of their actions, directed the committees reviewing exscinded synods’ records to return them, and to return an appeal from the Synod of Genessee to the church which brought the appeal. Returning to the matter of notices served on the Board of Trustees, this time by all four exscinded synods, the Assembly resolved that what had been said in the morning was a sufficient response to this ploy of those no longer members of the body by fiat. And

381 Ibid. 469.
returning to business, the newly formed Assembly Board of Foreign Missions had 80 directors nominated to serve it, 40 ministers and 40 “Laymen.”

After all this had been accomplished, the Rev. Mr. Plumer of East Hanover Presbytery presented resolutions designed to have the Assembly adopt the rest of the Memorial of the Convention, and which were passed without a roll call vote, that finally stated the nature of the disorders and irregularities “practiced in some portions of the Presbyterian Church, …without determining the extent of them…” These irregularities included forming affinity presbyteries, rather than geographic bodies; ordaining men who weren’t qualified and didn’t follow “our standards;” formulating “a great variety and multitude of creeds;” ordaining men as evangelists, thus neglecting the “pastoral office;” not using the office of elder; allowing those not strictly Presbyterian and operating under other names to gain power over Presbyterian bodies, even the General Assembly.382

Having stated the irregularities, the Assembly instructed its Bills and Overtures Committee to develop an overture to be sent to the presbyteries concerning the way in which they chose and sent commissioners, again dealing with issues of power, saying, “…the actual representation seldom exhibits the true state of the church, and many questions of deepest interest have been decided contrary to the fairly ascertained wishes of the majority of the church and people in our communion…”383 However, an effort by New School elder William Jessup of Montrose Presbytery to change the constitution so that commissioners would be chosen on the basis of church members, rather than by

382 Ibid. 471.  
383 Ibid. 471.
presbytery, was tabled. And returning to the Memorial, Mr. Plumer moved and the Assembly passed a further resolution from the Memorial concerning the wisdom of discipline, “wholesome and Christian,” to be widely exercised, “…as being one of the surest means of restoring purity to the church, and maintaining permanent peace.” Of course, there is no mention of the third value, unity.

Reaching the end of the day, and of their patience, the commissioners took up the final issues of removing affinity presbyteries and the New School-leaning Presbytery of Wilmington. Mr. Breckinridge engineered a parliamentary process which included returning tabled motions to the floor, amending the resolutions to remove all mention of the Presbytery of Wilmington and return to a prior motion which removed the Third Presbytery of Philadelphia from membership, and returned all its members and churches to their former presbyteries. An attempt to table the motion failed, 59 to 71. While the majority remained in the ascendancy, it was by no means unchallenged. And by a vote of 75 to 60, Third Presbytery, Philadelphia, was returned to the Presbytery of Philadelphia, the more conservative of the two presbyteries in that city. Undoubtedly exhausted, the Assembly adjourned until the next morning at 9 a. m., its final day.

On June 8, 1837, Thursday morning, the Assembly opened in its usual fashion with prayer, the minutes of the previous session were read, and the Assembly began its

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384 Ibid. 472.
385 Affinity presbyteries were those that had been formed to accommodate some value rather than on a geographic basis. The one in this instance, the Third Presbytery of Philadelphia, was formed following the heresy trials of the Rev. Albert Barnes, in order that his purported heresies not harm the peace of the other two presbyteries in Philadelphia. Mr. Barnes was twice acquitted of charges of heresy in trials before prior General Assemblies, much to the annoyance of his opponents.
business, which included five protests and their answers, as well as a number of actions designed to tie up all loose ends before adjournment.

Signed by 101 commissioners\textsuperscript{386}, the first protest concerned two actions of the Assembly, both the citing of inferior judicatories for errors and the exscinding of the Synod of the Western Reserve. Their first concern was the mode of the action, which first asked that a report be made to the 1838 Assembly concerning possible deviations from orthodoxy in certain presbyteries; secondly, and in a separate resolution, to identify the straying presbyteries; but when sent to a committee to bring a recommendation, the committee brought instead an action condemn immediately. The protest stated that the committee was composed solely of convention attendees who, “petition themselves, consider their own petition, and then grant to themselves what they themselves ask.”\textsuperscript{387} Actually, said the protest, the Assembly had no right to ask anything of presbyteries, as their only constitutional power rested solely with the synods. Also, they stated that it is not right, fair or just to deprive presbyteries of seats in the Assembly due to the possible misguided action of a synod, or without charges and a trial, the only way that the Assembly can unseat commissioners from a presbytery.

Combining the issues of citing inferior judicatories with the action to exscind the Synod of the Western Reserve, the protesters stated that the removal of the latter took place while the action of the former was still in committee, thus cutting short the process.

\textsuperscript{386} These actions took place on May 26 and June 1 respectively, and some of the signers included commissioners from all four of the exscinded synods, who were permitted to sign as they had still been members at the time the actions took place.

\textsuperscript{387} Presbyterian Church. \textit{Minutes 1837}, 474.
Further, this synod was formed from the Synod of Pittsburg with three presbyteries, which then formed five presbyteries, none of which was formed through the Plan of Union, as no “committee of the churches” was entitled to a seat in the Synod assembly and therefore was incapable and did not vote on the forming of these presbyteries. With emphasis, they say: “…that the Plan of Union, either in its existence of abrogation, could have no effect upon the formation or existence of a Presbytery or Synod.” And they concluded this protest by stating once more their upset at the use of the parliamentary procedure of calling the previous question to close off debate.

The protest had been largely about fairness, but the response was about legality, saying that everything was according “to the book, and within the constitutional power of this Assembly.” The responders said that it is right to pay attention to the Memorial of the Convention because, “The right of petition is guaranteed by every well regulated government, whether civil, political, or ecclesiastical…” In essence, the response said, “We had enough votes, we could do it, and we did it!” Their major justification for all actions was stated as: “The General Assembly, by its very constitution, is regarded as having a general control of the whole church, and in its conservative character shall superintend all of its concerns.” The Synod of the Western Reserve was characterized as “radically anti-Presbyterian,” with the answer continuing, “Its abrogation destroyed no rights, because none existed under it; and every lover of the purity and peace of the church will contemplate with satisfaction the moral courage and Christian fortitude

388 Ibid. p. 475.
389 Ibid. p. 476.
which, under God, has aroused the friends of truth to the great work of reformation.”  

Written after the final exscinding actions, this answer stated that many of the signers came from the exscinded synods and their arguments, therefore, lack force, and besides, if the Assembly had not been prevented by the protesters, the business could have proceeded in proper order.  

In this answer, having just claimed the right of petition for itself, as for “every well regulated government,” the Assembly, by committee recommendation, next moved to “lay on the table” “various overtures to the Assembly on the subject of slavery.” That many of these “overtures” were in the form of petitions to the Assembly was not seen as giving them any more validity. Having waited until the last possible moment, and having accomplished its goal of purifying and reforming the Church, there was neither time nor energy to tackle this great and growing national subject. With the commissioners from four synods removed from the roll of voters, synods all within the area known for anti-slavery agitation, the vote was not close, 93 in favor and 28 against. 

The Assembly immediately passed an action calling for a special committee to report to the next Assembly in 1838 a recommendation on representation in the General Assembly, followed by a recommendation that the General Assembly treasurer pay $6,800 to the Theological Seminary at Princeton for professors’ salaries for the year.

390 Ibid. 478.
391 The actual language reads: “And it seems that their whole procedure shows clearly how unreasonable, inconvenient, and impracticable it is to suitably protest in regard to business which has not yet assumed its final shape, and to attempt to fasten on this Assembly conclusions, which the persons protesting contradict themselves to reach, and which, if they had exercised only a small degree of patience, would have been presented to them in a complete and somewhat different aspect from the regular and necessary progress of the business of the house.” Ibid. 478.
Following that, the letter drafted to be sent to all churches on the “accommodation plan” was presented for action. Though the Rev. Dr. Beman of Troy Presbytery moved to table this motion, his effort failed. Even so, when the vote was taken, the report and letter were not adopted by the body. Instead, another committee was formed to send a letter to the four excised Synods telling what had happened and assigning reasons for the actions. A report on the Western Theological Seminary was evidently found unsatisfactory and recommitted to the drafting group. Finally, the pastoral letter to be sent to all the churches was approved, to be printed as well as an Appendix to the minutes. Continued dissatisfaction with drafts caused the Narrative on the State of Religion to be recommitted to the Committee on the Narrative, but with two extra men added to the drafting team.

With time growing short, the Assembly formed itself as a court to hear an appeal against the Synod of Indiana, deciding to remand the case to the Synod, due to procedural lacks and the language being “vague and inconsistent with itself.”\(^\text{392}\) Quickly, the Moderator appointed a committee to prepare an overture on General Assembly representation to be sent to the presbyteries, the Judicial Committee recommended that another case be dismissed because the appeal was not timely, and another case which had been held over from the 1836 Assembly was voted to be referred to the 1838 Assembly. Nine further cases were disposed of, six of them being referred to the next Assembly and three being given permission to “withdraw their papers.”

\(^{392}\) Ibid. 480.
More routine mop-up ensued as the committees that had examined the papers of various synods reported, and either approval or approval with exceptions were given. The committees designated to review the records of several synods, 8 in number, were reported as not having submitted their records and therefore the committees were discharged. The Assembly took an action to “specially enjoin” them to submit them to the next Assembly – and the morning ended with business to be resumed at 3 p.m.

The afternoon session found much of its time taken up with the four final protests and the answers to them. The venerable minister, George Duffield, enrolled as a member of the Third Philadelphia Presbytery, but now, by Assembly fiat a member of Philadelphia Presbytery, entered a lengthy protest concerning the erroneous doctrines cited by the memorialists. The first protested item concerned the process of handling the doctrines, considered very important, but left to last and with no time for discussion. The second concerned parliamentary procedure used, it was alleged, to keep the subject off the floor. The third allegation of the protesters stated that keeping the issue from the floor prevented a vote that, “it became obvious, that there would be a general if not unanimous testimony of the Assembly against the errors proposed to be condemned.” This vote to agree with the memorialists concerning the doctrinal errors in the church, they alleged, would have completely undermined their stated reasons for exscinding the synods with their presbyteries, ministers, and members. Further, the minority was kept from stating their real views, and from being able to state both what the error is perceived to be, and then followed by the statement of the true belief. Because they were prevented from joining with the majority in expressing their understanding of their true beliefs, this
protest acted to “bear testimony” fully, in a form which stated the error followed by the “True Doctrine.” This protest was signed by 15 men, and the majority refused to answer it. However, they did characterize it as containing “several important mis-statements of facts, and much extraneous matter…” The Assembly also approved an additional action concerning this protest, requiring that it be sent to the presbyteries of the signers to be reviewed for theological correctness and “enjoining on them to inquire into the soundness of faith of those who have ventured to make so strange avowals as some of these are.” The Rev. Dr. Beman attempted to have the protest sent to all presbyteries, but he lacked the votes and the motion lost.

Mr. Duffield then introduced another protest, signed by 25 men from various presbyteries, against the dissolution of the Third Presbytery of Philadelphia of which he was a member. His protest cited history first, that this presbytery was put into place by the 1832 Assembly, following the refusal of the Synod of Philadelphia to divide the Presbytery of Philadelphia as required by the 1831 Assembly. Because of the concern about the supposed unconstitutional nature of its status as an “affinity presbytery,” the 1836 Assembly assigned it geographical limits. The protest continued to object to the reasoning and the facts used to justify the Assembly’s action, in part because it was done after the removal of 51 commissioners from the excised synods, and in part because the protesters fear that the same conflicts would again occur in the presbytery, the

393 This same form was later used by Christians in Germany in the Barmen Declaration to answer the effort of Hitler’s Third Reich to take over the church. The Barmen Declaration was adopted in 1967 by the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America as a part of its Book of Confessions, part 1 of its Constitution.
394 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1837, 484-486.
churches, and “in our apprehension serious injury will be inflicted on the interests of religion in this city.”

The answer given by Mr. Plumer was that the reasoning was not relevant, that everyone knew that affinity presbyteries were unconstitutional, and that if an Assembly could cause it to be formed, this Assembly had the right to cause it to be dissolved, “whenever its continued existence is found to be injurious to truth and charity.”

The postponed action on the Western Theological Seminary was presented, the report of its Board of Directors quickly approved and placed in the Appendix to the minutes, and $5,000 appropriated to the Seminary, “for different purposes” in the current year.

After this short interlude, another protest was introduced, dated June 5, 1837, and signed by 83 commissioners, including those from the western New York synods, which had not been removed from ability to vote until after the vote had been taken to disallow voluntary societies to have access to Presbyterian churches, the subject of this protest. The protest cited history first, stating that the American Home Missionary Society and the American Education Society had been working well in Presbyterian churches since their founding, had not been found to be corrupt, but rather “we believe their designs to be pure, their management wise, and their influence immensely good in enlarging our

395 Ibid. 488.
396 Ibid. 488.
church, and strengthening the cause of truth and holiness…" Secondly, this action interfered with the rights of individuals and churches to accomplish church mission as they were led, and more importantly, it would cause over 400 “ambassadors of Christ” to lose at least part of their funding, while it called into question “two of the greatest enterprises of the age and world.” Finally, they protested that the action was based falsely on an assumption that the churches and presbyteries had no control over the activities of the societies.

The answer, prepared and given by the Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green of Philadelphia Presbytery, said that there have been “serious evils” of these bodies, which call for correction, and that at least one of them, the American Home Missionary Society, had stated that the Assembly’s formation of its own Board of Missions “is considered incompatible with the action of the voluntary society.” In response to the second concern, Dr. Green stated that the Assembly had a right to save churches from pernicious influences. And, although the Assembly certainly didn’t want to dictate to individuals what they would support, it “would earnestly recommend to all to give wisely, and in such a manner as to sustain and not undermine the church with which they have entered into covenant.” Considering the people who would lose funding, the response said that they should “shrink with horror” before they entered into a contracted position where there was not clear support, and that the majority was not in favor of a program “which subjects so large a portion of the ministry of our church to the control of a power without

397 Ibid. 489.
398 Ibid. 491.
the church.”399 The issue presented by the majority again is that of power and control. Where they perceive that power will be, is being or has been lost, they have acted, reasonably in their eyes, to bring everything and everyone back under their now clear control.

And finally, in responding to the protest, Dr. Green was clear in stating that where these voluntary societies are strong, the Board of the Presbyterian Church are not supported, and so are weakened. In strong language he stated, “How should an institution, which has the centre of its operations in New England, hold itself responsible to the Presbyterian Church?” In saying this, once again an issue is raised which is still active in the young Republic – how can geographically disparate regions and states with different needs and concerns become a unity? In such a way, the Presbyterian Church of 1837 mirrored its secular context. Dr. Green went on to attack funds and support given by the societies to Methodists, Cumberland Presbyterians and Lutherans as well as to institutions such as Oberlin and Yale, all of which are clearly not orthodox Presbyterian. Finally, he called into question a society which was not dependent upon annual gifts of individuals and churches which it dispersed fully, but which had funds which have been given and invested, allowing the society to dispense its own money. To have such funds which it can dispense at will obviously removed the society from the oversight of donors, an activity which was characterized as “truly alarming.”400

399 Ibid. 492.
400 Ibid. 494.
Returning to regular business, the Stated Clerk was instructed by the Assembly to include in this year the statistics of all the presbyteries and churches, including those excinded, but to note that this would be the last year for them to be included. And then the Stated Clerk was instructed to sell copies of the Minutes of this Assembly for 50 cents each.

The letter to be addressed to “all the churches of Jesus Christ, throughout the earth” having been prepared, was read and approved by a roll call vote, 90 in favor and 29 opposed. The Assembly, which at its height had 264 voting commissioners, was now reduced in its final recorded vote to 119, in part by its own actions. And the numbers of Christians in the country under the influence of the Presbyterian Church would show loss, rather than gain.

Routine prevailed again, as the letters to be sent to churches and throughout the world were to be printed in pamphlet form and authorization given to pay for them. Also the housekeeping of paying for janitorial service was approved, and an honorarium given to the Seventh Church, where they had been meeting.

And still, the Rev. Dr. Beman introduced another and final protest, a desperate last gasp during this Assembly. This protest, signed by members of the synods and others, again protested the action of the Assembly to excind the Synods of Utica, Geneva and Genessee. No new ideas were presented, though several were restated. The Assembly should not have removed entire synods and their constituents because all that
had happened was that individual churches had been attached to presbyteries. The implication is that those could have been removed without dismissing the full synod. The reasons for removal amounted to charges of heresy, uncited and unproven, which removal occurred prior to any citation of irregularities. The Synods were formed before the Constitution was adopted and had contributed funds generously to the Church. Finally, because the act to excise the three synods occurred after the Synod of the Western Reserve had been voted out of the Church, and were therefore deprived of a vote, the vote on these synods was illegal and “must consequently be null and void.”

The answer given by Mr. Plumer was that all this was ground that had been covered before and had already been answered. An effort to offer another protest, this time about the letter to be sent to all the churches, was tabled upon a motion by Mr. Breckinridge.

Yet one final major act remained, the citing of the inferior judicatories. After all that had already occurred, the committee recommended and the Assembly approved what amounted to warnings given to several presbyteries, who were required to pay attention to problems that were perceived to be in their midst. These included the Synods of Albany and New Jersey, warned of irregularities “charged by common fame,” as well as the Synod of Michigan whose three presbyteries were charged with doctrinal errors. The Synod of Cincinnati was also told to watch out for doctrinal errors, and the Synod of Illinois with errors both in doctrine and church order. Even though it was stated that these were warnings, the Synods were to consider the matters at their first meetings, and

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401 Ibid. 496.
report back what they have done to the next General Assembly. In addition, the Assembly wished to see copies of all the abbreviated creeds and any covenants adopted by all churches under their jurisdiction, to be brought by commissioners to the next Assembly.

Again, a constitutional change was prepared for submission by overture to the presbyteries, stating that judicial cases, except for ministers accused of heresy or of cases that begin in the Synods, are to be final with the Synod. No doubt the Assembly was feeling that adding judicial cases to its already full plate of business was not a good use of its time. All the presbyteries were requested to respond to this overture with a report of their votes by the next Assembly.

And the final wrap-up actions were rushed to completion. An overture on education was set aside through the discharge of its committee. The General Assembly Trustees were instructed to pay for printing the minutes and take care of any other expenses of the Assembly, through taking out a loan if necessary. The Assembly decided it would not send any delegates to corresponding bodies in this year, thereby effectively closing down any ecumenical activity. Thanks were offered to the citizens of Philadelphia for hospitality, as well as to two institutions that had offered hospitality and housing to the Assembly. A small committee was appointed to assist the Stated Clerk with preparing the minutes for publication and a decision was made not to call the roll prior to dissolving the Assembly. A vote was taken to dissolve, and the Assembly, like
every other Assembly was called to its next meeting, to be held on the third Thursday of May, 1838, at 11 a.m. in the city of Philadelphia.

So ended, in a routine, usual and mundane fashion, a most unusual, provocative and far from ordinary meeting, a meeting which might have been said to reflect the chaos of the context in which it was held, - a meeting in which what was not said, not mentioned, not written may have been just as important as that which was.


In his reporting about the Presbyterian General Assembly on June 10, 1837, Joshua Leavitt, Congregational minister and editor of the *New York Evangelist*, gave advice to the victims of what he characterized as “The guillotine” of the General Assembly. Rather than continue to fight what had been this year a losing battle, with all the efforts and costs of that battle, Leavitt advised the ousted Presbyterians to “return to the Institutions of your Fathers.”402 To him this meant that there could be good relations, but no “entangling alliances,” that is, no mergers with other churches. This advice, wise though it may have been, was premature. The Presbyterian churches and congregations would take several years before settling into that pattern, a pattern which ultimately would bring another Presbyterian reunion of the Northern Old School and New School churches in 1869, preceded by a break between northern and southern portions of each church just before or at the time of the Civil War.

402 *New York Evangelist*. June 10, 1837. 94-95.
The *Evangelist* continued its coverage in the next issue, giving verbatim reports of Assembly debate and discussion. Finally, there is a report of public meetings held by the minority, some in Philadelphia and some in New York. Reporting on a New York meeting held on Wednesday, June 14, 1837, Leavitt notes the emotions of some minority commissioners, and their advice to congregations:

Rev. Baxter Dickinson…said the first emotion in view of what has been done is astonishment. He believed the great body of the majority were themselves astonished at the lengths they had gone, which must be far beyond anything they had anticipated. He exhorted the churches to remain calm and peaceful, to retain their organization, to cultivate a spirit of union among themselves and of forgiveness towards others; to resist every influence from every quarter leading to discouragement, division or change; and to send up a full representation next year, with instructions to seek a reunion, if possible, and if not, to withdraw in a body, and organize as the only true and legitimate Assembly of the Presbyterian church.

The religious newspapers, of course, were filled with articles about what had happened, together with commentary about the impact of the decisions. *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* covered the Assembly thoroughly, justifying each item of business, analyzing all from the Old School point of view. They repeated all the charges about doctrinal irregularities as well as the governance issues, saying essentially that all the churches, members and ministers in the excised areas were like tribes on the borders of a state to which the government had extended privileges. When the tribe members in numbers overwhelmed the state body, it was appropriate to cut them off and end the relationship, as they are now strong enough to live on their own.\(^{403}\) Thus, the author speaks of the New School as if they were strangers and outsiders, and therefore it was appropriate to remove them from the body.

The authors noted further that the issue of slavery as a cause of the schism had also been raised, which was described as “the most laboured effort at misrepresentation has been made to produce the impression that the desire to protect slavery was the ruling motive of the majority.” However, there is recognition paid that it is not only the abolition papers that have stated this proposition, but amazingly also “papers which have hitherto been of a different character”… “which is not so easily accounted for.”404 Disposing of this suggestion as having no validity, the article concludes by claiming that the actions of the Assembly were,” …the most feasible, the most just and proper method of attaining the great object of peace and purity in the church…”405

The excised members were not content to accept the Old School’s view of creating peace and purity in the church. Immediately following the Assembly, the New School commissioners called a meeting for August 17 at Auburn Seminary in Auburn, New York. This meeting was attended by most of the New School commissioners to the Assembly, as well as others who were concerned about the permanence of the schism and perhaps were stunned with the swiftness and completeness of the actions of the commissioners in May and June.

Those in attendance at the Auburn meeting issued what came to be called the Auburn Declaration, a statement-by-statement refutation of the charges of doctrinal impurities and abuses brought against the New School by the Old School. Each error was

404 Ibid. 479.
405 Ibid. 481.
stated, and a response of “True Doctrine” followed. The New School believed that this reasonable and rational set of statements would surely convince the Old Schoolers of their orthodoxy, and the 1838 Assembly would reverse the decisions of the Assembly of 1837. In the preface to the Declaration, the New School men said that indiscretions might have occurred during the excitement of revivals, yet “that such errors and irregularities have never been sanctioned by these synods and presbyteries- that the prejudice has in a great degree arisen from censorious and exaggerated statements, and from the conduct of persons not in connexion with the Presbyterian Church—that all such departures from the sound doctrine or order of the Presbyterian Church we solemnly disapprove, and when known, deem it our duty to correct by every constitutional method.” The report continues, “…this convention cordially disapprove and condemn the list of errors condemned by the late General Assembly…”

The effort to answer the charges clearly and logically was to prove as vain, however, as were their formal protests at the exscinding Assembly. Having achieved their goals as stated in the Act and Testimony of 1834 and the Act and Memorial of 1837, the Old School was not about to back down. The advice of many, as found in newspaper articles, was to remain calm, act as if nothing had happened, and send commissioners to the next Assembly with all the proper documentation. And many in the exscinded synods did as was suggested.

Some church members were less content, however, even those of the Old School majority. Illustrative of the reaction which followed the 1837 Assembly, in both Old School and New School, are the events at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia, pastored by the Rev. William Plumer, primary actor in both the Convention and the Assembly. A minority of members was “dissatisfied with the course pursued by their pastor in the last General Assembly…” and petitioned the presbytery of East Hanover to become a separate congregation, which was granted. The split took 90-100 members out of 280, “the five elders of the church, and most of its wealthiest members. …We understand an equitable division will be made of the property of the church, about four fifths of which is owned by the minority.”

Concern about the actions of the exscinding Assembly reached compatriots overseas. One response was published by the Evangelist.


“…there are other circumstances which rather trouble us in our anticipation of an early settlement of the question of slavery. One circumstance is, the aspect which the Presbyterian church presents with reference to this subject. I refer not to the go-by which they gave to it at their last convocation in Philadelphia, when memorials were presented from abolitionists; but to the fact, that the leading men, who succeeded by means that I will not venture to characterize as they deserve, in carrying resolutions against the New-School men and their Congregational brethren, are not only Colonizationists, but violent anti-Abolitionists; while the parties against which they directed the edicts of an American Star-Chamber included among their number devoted and talented friends of the slave and enemies of slavery. We cannot help connecting the one thing with the other, and concluding

407 New York Evangelist, January 27, 1838, page 19. Coolidge and Lambert are now the publishers; Rev. N.E. Johnson, the editor. A portion of the letter of the disaffected elders to the congregation may be found in Chapter 5.
that heterodoxy on the question of slavery very much magnified their displeasure against their supposed heterodoxy in religious opinions! We go further than this, and cannot help cherishing the fear, that the most able and inconsistent opponents of Abolition will be that successful party pro tempore; especially those who live in the Southern States. Some of us now begin to think, that if there were not sufficient religious grounds on which a separation would take place between the two parties of the Presbyterian Church, by and by – a sufficient cause will soon be furnished by the question of slavery.”

Amid much advice given to commissioners of both parties prior to the 1838 Assembly, an interesting notice appeared in the *Evangelist*. “I was informed yesterday, by a member of the Assembly, that a number of the Southern delegates, who had not joined either body, were holding a meeting for the purpose of discussing the propriety of an organization on Southern principles.” However, a third General Assembly was not formed at this time.

In the midst of continuing upset and agitation, the year went on, and as usual, on the third Thursday in May, the General Assembly in 1838, held in Seventh Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, opened with a sermon by the previous Moderator, Old School minister, the Rev. David Elliot, D.D. After the meeting had been constituted with prayer, a minister from the Third Presbytery of New York, the Rev. William Patton, D.D., asked to speak. According to the minutes of the New School General Assembly, he gave resolutions requesting that the excluded commissioners of the previous year be seated, partly on the grounds that the Stated Clerks of the previous year had been required to pledge that they would not enroll anyone as a commissioner in 1838 who was not a part

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408 Ibid. February 17, 1838, page 26
409 Ibid. May 26, 1838, Page 82
of the Assembly at its close in 1837. This, said Patton, was illegal, because each Assembly is a new Assembly, can set its own rules, and cannot be bound by the rules of a previous Assembly. The Old School minutes of that same Assembly did not spell out what he tried to do, but merely that he was called out of order. All manner of parliamentary procedure was attempted, to no avail. Finally, the New School commissioners simply elected their own moderator and clerks, constituted their own full roll, together with corresponding bodies.

A notice was received from the Board of Trustees of the Seventh Presbyterian Church that the only body that was permitted to meet at the church was the one “which shall be organized under the direction of the Moderator, and Clerks, officiating during the meeting of the last Assembly…”410 And so a portion of the men duly commissioned to the Assembly of 1838 moved to the Lecture Room of the first Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Albert Barnes’ church and continued with their business in the usual decent and orderly fashion. Of course, the removal was far from orderly, and many more commissioners than those who were from the four exscinded presbyteries followed them, nearly half of the church. In addition to the four exscinded synods, most of the synods of Albany (which included New Hampshire), Michigan, Illinois, and Tennessee; much of the Synod of New York, the presbyteries of Newark and Montrose, the Delaware Presbyteries, Erie and Philadelphia 3rd presbyteries in Pennsylvania; half of the Synod of Indiana, together with the presbyteries of Athens, Ripley, Dayton and Cincinnati in Ohio and Winchester, the District of Columbia, and Hanover in Virginia, and even one

commissioner from Clinton Presbytery in the Synod of Mississippi, joined the New School assembly. There was no representation from the Synod of Philadelphia or presbyteries in central and eastern Pennsylvania. The Synod of Pittsburgh was virtually all Old School, as was half of Ohio – Columbus, Wooster, Richland, Chillicothe, Miami, Oxford, and Sidney presbyteries. Half of Indiana remained Old School, including Indianapolis; together with all of Missouri, Kentucky, North Carolina, West Tennessee, South Carolina and Georgia, and Alabama. The meeting was shorter than usual, lasting from May 17 to May 28, 1838. The usual routine business was followed in both Assemblies, though they were hampered by minutes of synods being missing, court cases having parties not present, and less work to do because of the lack of heresy trials.

It is likely that the Old School did not entirely anticipate what would follow. The presumption was that the excised synods, assuredly all Congregational, would simply follow that denomination’s rules of order and cease to be Presbyterian. Those who formed the New School body, however, did not agree. Calling themselves the “Constitutional” party, and believing themselves to be the true church, they remained Presbyterian, and so felt it necessary to claim property, assets, seminaries as their own. A suit was brought against the Old School body in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, a case that first was decided in favor of the New School. The case was appealed, an order for a new trial was granted. Before the second trial could be held, the presiding judge, Chief Justice Gibson, gave the opinion that no judicial process had been followed at the Assembly because “the Synods had committed no offence,”411 and thus the Old School

was in the right to do as it had. Following the publication of this opinion, and before the second trial actually began, the New School withdrew its case. However, a second trial was held at the Pennsylvania Supreme Court level, and Judge Gibson gave a clear statement of his reasoning for ruling in favor of the Old School, in the words of Woods, “He (Gibson) says that the order for a new trial, in the former case, was granted not because the Old School ‘were more Presbyterian than the New’—but because the Old School were at the time ‘the stronger party.’”

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court, in a subsequent case involving a church in York, further explained that reasoning, saying that they “did not determine that the excision was expurgation and not division. Indeed the measure would seem to be as decisively revolutionary as would be an exclusion of particular states from the Federal Union for the adoption of an anti-republican form of government.” The judge characterizes this division as being “not of expurgation but of division.” Woods then concludes his analysis:

And did the court say that one party was truly Presbyterian and the other was not? No. They consider the New School as much Presbyterian as the Old School—‘each so like its fellow as to pass for its twin brother.’ They decided that the claims of the New School in the former suit were as strong as those of the Old School with one exception, and that accidental, viz.: that at the time of the revolution or excision, the Old School were the stronger party—having a majority of six in an Assembly of two hundred and fifty.

Woods then followed this opinion to its logical conclusion, that the New School had lost its chance when it had the majority in earlier Assemblies to do the same, and take over the church in its name, removing the others—but, as Judge Gibson said that had the
New School followed that course, it ‘would have loaded the New School party with such a weight of popular odium as would have sunk it.’ 412 Woods concludes his narrative with the results of several other cases, showing the willingness of the Constitutional party (the New School) to be flexible and reasonable, and of the New Basis party (the Old School) to stick rigidly by its principles. The party that prevailed in individual cases varied.

The two General Assemblies continued to meet, annually in the case of the Old School, and less frequently for the New School, though that Assembly eventually also became annual, until the New School in 1850 declared that slaveholding was a breach of discipline. Agitation followed until in 1857, following a rebuke of slaveholding and slaveholders, several Southern New School presbyteries severed their bonds and formed the United Synod of the Presbyterian Church in the south. The final break occurred after Fort Sumter at the May 1861 General Assembly, when a motion to support the union was adopted by the General Assembly. The southern presbyteries of the Old School then formed a General Assembly, the first of what was to be the Presbyterian Church in the United States. The two northern bodies, Old and New Schools, reunited shortly after the Civil War was over, in 1869 with the following statement:

Believing that the interests of the Redeemer’s kingdom would be promoted by the healing of our divisions, and that the two bodies bearing the same names, having the same Constitution, and each recognizing the other as a sound and orthodox body according to the principles of the Confession common to both, cannot be justified by any but the most imperative reasons in maintaining separate and, in some respects, rival organizations; we are now clearly of the opinion that the reunion of those bodies ought, as soon as the necessary steps can be taken, to be accomplished… 413

412 Ibid. The previous three quotes can all be found on pages 202-203. See Appendix J for a transcription of the relevant portions of Gibson’s decision.
413 Armstrong, et al., 220-221.
It happened in Pittsburgh, was heralded by many, and only fully completed in 1983 with the reunion of the northern and southern streams of the Presbyterian Church. And it took place in 1869 on the basis of acceptance of each other’s orthodoxy. Changed was that which was so fraught with tension and danger that many in the Assembly could not or would not speak of it – slavery.
Chapter 5 Through the Years: Slavery/Antislavery and the Presbyterian Church

“Moderator, is it true or not, that the leading abolitionists of the present day are connected with the Presbyterian church?”  
Rev. Mr. M’Ilhenny of Lexington Presbytery in Virginia

a. National Context

Other than the discussion of the General Assembly of 1836, there has been little mention of slavery in this exposition of the 1837 split in the Presbyterian Church. Some historians have stated that this is because of the relative unimportance of the topic to the church, its commissioners, its governing bodies and its members. My contention is that slavery was the unspoken topic that was present and underlay the discussion of Biblical interpretation, doctrinal adherence, Confessional obedience, church growth, governance and discipline. Relatively little surfaces in official statements. A great deal can be found, however, particularly in the pages of the Presbyterian religious press, which followed the issue very closely in the years just preceding the 1837 General Assembly.

The topic of slavery in the United States of America, together with the role of some church members in the abolition movement, has been well-documented by historians. That slavery was of concern to everyone - slaveholder, sympathizer with slavery, or opponent to the “domestic institution”- and affected the governance of the whole country is pointedly demonstrated by Leonard Richards as he discussed how there was agreement that the country was run by ‘the slaveholders of the South,’ who were able to affect every Congressional decision and effect the programs they wished largely through the use of the three-fifth rule of

414 New-York Evangelist Saturday, June 18, 1836, p. 97.
counting persons of color in order to determine representation in the Federal Congress.\textsuperscript{416} Richards quoted Rufus King in the Constitutional Convention following the end of the Revolution as characterizing this rule as ‘a most grating circumstance to his mind’ and ‘would be so to a great part of the people of America.’\textsuperscript{417} Being accepted as a part of the compromise that led to the passage of the Constitution of the United States of America did not halt consideration of the ‘grating circumstance,’ however.

The nature of the bond that united the infant Republic was not clear in its earliest years. Could colonies that became states remain sovereign even as they surrendered a portion of that sovereignty to the new unity? This discussion remained, either in the foreground or background for years. It came to a head following the War of 1812, as delegates from New England states (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Vermont) met in Hartford from December 1814 to January 1815 to discuss “revising the Federal Constitution” as a result of non-support by the Federal Government at the threat of British attack during the war. Concern over the issue of representation and the counting of non-citizens held as chattel was reflected in the outcome of this “Hartford Convention,” which, among other grievances included “that the Federal Constitution be so amended that representatives and direct taxes should be apportioned among the several states ‘according to their respective numbers of free persons.’”\textsuperscript{418} The Hartford Convention came

\textsuperscript{416} Richards acknowledges that many early historians considered the “slave power” a reality until it was presumably debunked in 1921 by Chauncy S. Boucher. In a useful rehearsal of the historiography, Richards traces the discussion of this issue, its growing into disuse and disfavor, and continues the rest of his exposition by delineating the ways in which the slave power was a reality, and how it affected each political decision made in the early Republic.

\textsuperscript{417} Richards, \textit{Slave Power}, 39.

perilously close to advocating secession from the Union if its grievances were not addressed, among those grievances being the under-representation of the citizens and voters in the New England states, and the over-representation and greater power of those whose per capita representation was enhanced through the addition of the slaves to the total numbers of white male property holders, those usually allowed to vote by the laws in the various states.

As the Congress and President deliberated the role of government in the new republic, education of and communication with citizens was considered an important task. The development of the Post Office Act of 1792 was seen as important legislation in preparing citizens for their role in governing the new nation. The part to be played by newspapers was considered to be key, informing the populace about each other and providing background information and opinions in order for the public to be prepared to be voters, independent thinkers rather than mere followers of a master or overseer, and so the mailing of newspapers throughout the country was a lively topic of discussion in Congress. In a debate concerning whether all newspapers should be allowed to be sent free of charge through the postal system, or whether the practice of allowing printers to send exchange papers free of charge should continue, a suggestion was made that only newspapers from cities should be allowed, which would therefore be essentially those from the North and East, as the South had few large centers of population. Elbridge Gerry said during this debate, “Wherever information is freely circulated, there slavery cannot exist; or if it does, it will vanish, as soon as information has been generally diffused.” 419

This recognition of the power of the written word in disseminating knowledge and forming opinion was brought to the fore once again in the 1830’s, as the anti-slavery societies and other groups flooded the south with pamphlets, letters, tracts, and anti-slavery newspapers. Extreme unrest followed these efforts, peaking in 1835. Wyatt-Brown, in describing this situation, noted that, “Torchlight parades, vigilance committees, speeches, and resolutions reassured southerners that Yankee subversion would not destroy their way of life without broad resistance. Community spokesmen fulminated in press and pulpit against ‘the extensive conspiracy,’ this ‘new emission of mischief,’ ‘the Abolitionists’ pandemonium of New York,’ and the Yankee ‘banditti’ and ‘desperadoes.’”  

In response, southerners accused anti-slavery groups of abusing the postal system and interfering in business that rightfully belonged only to the state. In their efforts to keep the offending materials from their populace, the southerners agitated for the New York Postmaster, Samuel L. Gourverneur, to withhold all such mail headed for the South. Gourverneur complied, after consulting with Amos Kendall, President Jackson’s Postmaster General. Kendall told him that the withholding policy was probably illegal, but the administration supported it, informing him that, “‘the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy entirely concur with me in my general views of this subject and approve the attitude which has been assumed.’” Kendall went on to say, “‘As a measure of great public necessity, you and the other postmasters who have assumed the responsibility of stopping these inflammatory papers, will, I have no doubt, stand justified in that step before your country and all mankind.’”

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b. Official actions of General Assemblies and Their Predecessors

The issues of the nature of the union, the use of slaves to gain political control and retain power, and the propriety of breaking a covenanted relationship underlies all that happened in the early days of the country. The concerns of the Presbyterian Church from 1789 to 1837 can be seen in a similar light, reflecting similar circumstances as those of the nation, though in understanding and expressing the nature of the national covenant, the Presbyterians had more experience of the theory, and theology, of a covenant relationship, as well as more experience of splits and schisms in that union. That the church did not speak of slavery and its consequences at every turn is not to acknowledge that slavery was peripheral, unimportant or a minor consideration for its members and institutions. The issues even invaded the deliberations of church bodies as a clergyman of Virginia is reported to have warned his Presbytery, “If there be any stray goat of abolitionism, let him be ferreted out, silenced, excommunicated, and LEFT TO THE PUBLIC TO BE DISPOSED OF IN OTHER RESPECTS.”422

E.H. Gillett’s extensive history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, published during the Civil War, found every aspect of the work of the Synod before the formation of the General Assembly worthy of mention. He clearly attempted to attain the goal at that time thought achievable by historians, Truth, but it is both probable and likely that he was aware of the all the issues of the day that exploded around him. After discussing the role of church members and ministers in the Revolution, especially the role played by

422 Wyatt-Brown. *Lewis Tappan*, 150.
John Witherspoon, Gillett spoke of “the subject of civil freedom, at least in its moral aspect,” as he reviewed actions of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia on the topic of slavery.

Gillett stated that although the subject of “Negro slavery” was raised in conjunction with the sending of two Negroes as missionaries to Africa, and an overture on the “subject of Negro slavery” was assigned and docketed in 1774, the Synod did not receive nor act on any statement until 1787, but rather “the Synod agree to defer the affair to our next meeting” due to “some difficulties attending the discussion…” Difficulties that kept the body from reaching agreement, even to take a vote on the matter, must have been major difficulties indeed. While one of the four members, Dr. John Rodgers of New York Presbytery, charged with presenting further consideration of the topic of Negro slavery was present at the Synod in 1775, no mention is made of the charge laid upon him concerning slavery. Instead, of the rather small number of people present at this Synod, much of their time was occupied in discussing and then in drafting a pastoral letter to the church concerning “all the horrors of a civil war th[roughout this great Continent…” Given the Revolutionary War which soon followed, it is not surprising, perhaps, that slavery received little attention from those who lived in different colonies with a variety of practices, and that those in attendance at the Synod had neither the power nor the inclination to change at that time.

423 Klett, Minutes, 1706-1788, 535. With respect to the issue of the missionaries, the Synod eventually expressed its “readiness to concur with and assist in a mission to the African Tribes,” seeing it as “…the will of God…”
424 Ibid. 543.
The subsequent minutes of the Synod show that routine business continued to be attended to, but somewhat more peripheral items were dispensed with, such as the assignment of Presbyterian delegates to attend the General Convention of the Congregational Associations. The attendance at the Synod continued to be sparse throughout the period of the war, largely consisting of those who lived closest to the place of the meetings in Philadelphia or New York, or upon occasion in “Bedminster, in Somerset County, New Jersey,... it not being practicable to meet in Philadelphia according to the Adjournment of last year; as that City is now in the possession of the Enemy.”

Though the numbers remained small, not a single year was missed in holding meetings, though whole presbyteries sometimes found it impossible to send commissioners. Routine business continued, both of a specific nature regarding education, enrollment of new minister members, concerns about adultery and marriage in individual cases, and of a general nature, such as whether the education requirements for ministers ought to be relaxed in light of the necessity for more pastors needed in churches and more missionaries to carry the gospel to new settlements. The topic of slavery per se did not appear again in the Synod minutes until 1786, when Donnegal Presbytery in Pennsylvania, brought forth an overture asking whether “Christian Masters or Mistresses ought in duty to have such Children baptized, as are under their care, tho: born of parents not in the communion of any Christian church?” The Synod’s answer was that they should, if they had the right to baptize their own children. Further, the same overture asked if “Christian slaves”

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425 Ibid. 558.
426 Ibid. 593. The Synod in 1785 wrote to the members of the Presbyteries of Hanover, Orange, Suffolk, & Duchess about their non-attendance for a number of years past, the worry that this would lead to “a mouldering away of the body,” and asking that members of these presbyteries come to the meetings, or at least send letters to inform the body why they were unable to attend.
whose masters were not Christian should have their children baptized, and should a “gospel
Minister” agree to baptize them, presumably against the wishes of the master, and perhaps
without the slave parent having the capacity to nurture the child in the faith. “Synod
determined the question in the affirmative.”

Both of these questions answered issues raised because there was slavery, but did
not address the question of slavery in general, or its moral or ethical implications for the
faithful. However, in the Synod minutes of 1787, in the midst of the examination of
Presbytery record book, monetary collections from presbyteries, printing of selections from
the Synod minutes – totally routine matters -- a proposal was brought in by the Committee of
Overtures, stating that because God had made all humanity, each was required to assist the
others, to teach the precepts of Christianity and to assist all “to extend the blessings of equal
freedom to every part of the human race.” The next clause of the overture was more blunt:

Overtured that the Synod of New York and Philadelphia
recommend in the warmest terms to every member of their body and to all
the Churches and families under their care, to do every thing in their
power consistent with the rights of civil Society to promote the abolition
of Slavery, and the instruction of Negroes whether bond or free.

Consideration of this overture was scheduled for the following Monday, this being a
Saturday and the Synod not doing business on Sunday. When the time arrived to consider
the overture, the final outcome was a more modest, less clear and bold statement – in many
ways a more careful statement, less likely to cause rebellion or breaking of the body, and
more cognizant of regional differences, saying that the Synod approved of “the general

427 Ibid. 614.
428 Ibid. 627. The full statement can be found in Appendix C.
principles in favor of universal Liberty that prevail in America; and the interest which many of the States have taken in promoting the abolition of Slavery.” However, because the newly freed slaves might even be a danger to the community without proper education, appropriate habits of behavior and experience as free workers responsible for themselves, the Synod suggested that freeing slaves be a goal for a later time, while their masters educated them, even giving them financial support as well as time to appropriate these skills.

The final clause of the action taken by the Synod in 1787 is rather curious.

Finally, they recommend it to all their people to use the most prudent measures consistent with the interests & the state of civil Society in the countries where they live, to procure eventually the final abolition of Slavery in America.429

The reference to the “countries where they live” may indicate an issue for the General Assembly, which included in its membership commissioners from every part of the country, but not from every part of the world. At this early time in the life of the United States of America, it was still unclear what the relationship between the states was or was to become. With this lack of clarity in civil Society, the church did not view itself, or wish to be seen, as interfering in something that could be considered as different as another country, not simply another area of the same country. This statement of 1787 remained the policy of the Presbyterian Church for a number of years, cautious, careful, reasoned, and certainly not as inflammatory as the statement that had been submitted originally by men unknown.430

429 Ibid. 629. The full statement can be found in Appendix C.
430 Overtures at this time could be submitted to the Synod and were assigned to a special committee, or as in this case, the previously named committee on overtures could bring forth a recommendation on its own, without attribution of its source.
In 1793, following the founding of the General Assembly, the subject of slavery was again brought to the attention of the Assembly by a “memorial” signed by a non-Presbyterian, Warner Mifflin, and presented to the Assembly Moderator a few days after the opening of the Assembly. According to a note appended to the minutes, this memorial was “from one of the Society of Friends, related to the subject of slavery.” While it was “ordered to lie on the table,” the Assembly actually took immediate action to have the “...records of the General Synod of the year 1787, on the subject of slavery, be published among the extracts to be printed of the proceedings of this Assembly.” The whole topic of slavery was important enough and the Presbyterian Church influential enough to make sure that its views on this contentious current topic were known.

Agitation on the subject of slavery continued. The Minutes of the Assembly of 1795 contain an overture brought by the Committee on Bills and Overtures:

‘A serious and conscientious person, a member of a Presbyterian congregation, who views the slavery of the negroes as a moral evil, highly offensive to God, and injurious to the interests of the gospel, lives under the ministry of a person, or amongst a society of people who concur with him in sentiment on the subject upon general principles, yet for particular reasons hold slaves, and tolerate the practice in others. Overtured, ought the former of these persons, under the impressions and circumstances above described, to hold Christian communion with the latter?’

Here was the delineation of a part of the slavery agitation, that is, could a slaveholder be accepted as a member of the church or remain in a church whose minister

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431 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1789 to 1820, 76. At this point in the life of the Assembly, the entire record was not printed, but instead extracts which were thought to be most important for the life of the church were printed and disseminated. This practice continued until 1821. Later, the General Assembly decided that it was important to have the full minutes available, and a volume containing General Assembly minutes from 1789 to 1820 was published in 1841 by the Old School General Assembly, which had control of the records.
owned slaves? The response of the Assembly in this instance was to choose peace and unity over purity, saying that differences of opinion exist with respect to slavery, yet people in those places live together “in charity and peace,” and so should “all conscientious persons” including those who have brought the overture to the Assembly. Even so, the Assembly reiterated its stance taken in the actions of both 1787 and 1793, concerning its “deepest concern” over any possible “vestiges of slavery which may exist in our country.” With this response “they trust every conscientious person will be fully satisfied.”

The question of slavery was addressed, yet the underlying questions remained and the answers did not satisfy those who wished absolute or even greater clarity. The moderating response spoke to past deliverances, which said that the institution of slavery was not a good one for anyone, but that reasonable people differ; that the slaves were incapable of handling freedom; and responsibility rested with the individual, not with the church, to effect change, change which lay somewhere in the future. Left hanging was the definition of “conscientious” and what was to occur if the conscience of a church member was not satisfied with the response, a church member who believed in the Westminster Confession’s statement, “God alone is Lord of the conscience.” Not addressed was the underlying ethical and moral issue of the institution of slavery being so offensive that it was a sin against God. The passion of those presenting the overtures could not be satisfied.

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432 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1789-1820. 103.
That unanimity did not exist was made clear by the action that followed immediately, forming a committee of three commissioners to draft (“draught”) a letter to the Presbytery of Transylvania on the subject of the overture that had been submitted and answered. In 1794, the Transylvania Presbytery had enacted items that both said that slaves should be prepared for ultimate freedom, and that one major way of doing so was to encourage them to become professing Christians by reading the Bible. Obviously, in order to do this, slaves would have to be taught to read. Two members of the committee charged to draft the letter concerning issues of slavery were themselves members from that Presbytery, the Rev. David Rice and Elder Robert Patterson. The third member, the Rev. Dr. James Muir was a member of Baltimore Presbytery, pastoring the Presbyterian Church in Alexandria, Virginia.

Two of these men clearly understood the local issues which had occasioned the submission of the overture. In the case of Rice, he was known as an antislavery proponent, but Muir was perhaps asked to assist in order to represent the more moderate, or even opposing, voices of the Assembly. Even so, the product of their consultation was not what the Assembly wished. The official minutes simply say that the “draught” was “debated for some time,” and that eventually a motion was passed to consider the draft paragraph by paragraph.

This ad seriatum consideration led to the deleting of a large portion of the proposed letter. Because in 1841 a copy of the original draft minutes were found, it is possible to know what the Assembly felt necessary to remove. What remained acknowledged that the institution of slavery had occupied much of the time of the Transylvania Presbytery, and that
such discussions even threatened to cause schism. So, too, slavery had been the subject of
repeated deliberations in the General Assembly, where the outcome had been to speak to
what the Assembly “deemed expedient or wise.” What was expedient and what was wise
was not further separated for the listeners, but included encouraging emancipation of slaves,
and to treat the slaves in a way “as mild and tolerable as possible.”

From this heavily edited letter, it can be seen that even the most cautious of
interpretations of the policy of 1787 was too dangerous to allow to be promulgated in a time
of contested values. The Assembly in this letter only “encourages” emancipation, removes
most hortatory language, as well as any discussion of bringing slaves into a position to be
independent. The statement carefully and specifically mentioned not encouraging the
teaching of reading. Even the acknowledgment that freedom was desirable, albeit neither
immediate nor without responsibilities, was too strong to send forth to Transylvania. The
implicit sense that slavery is a temporary status that may lead to something different in the
future was not retained, nor any chastising of those whose “obstinate adherence” to policies
and practices of slavery might threaten either the peace or the union of the Church. Finally,
just to be sure that no one misunderstood the message being conveyed, many of the biblical
references were removed, and what was left focused on peace, asking the brethren to desist
from fighting with each other over such issues.

The statement of 1787 on slavery continued as the policy of the General
Assembly through the early years of the new Republic, reaffirmed by these Assembly
Assembly

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434 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1789-1820, 104-105. The full text of the draft letter before it was
amended can be found in Appendix C.
actions in 1793 and 1795. But obviously, every issue concerning slavery that was faced by Presbyterians and their ministers did not surface at the national level. Speaking of the Synod of the Carolinas in 1800 – 1820, Gillett discussed James Gilliland, minister at Broadway Church, called there in 1796 and who was anti-slavery, “fearless in the utterance of his sentiments,” but was removed from his pulpit because of the “difficulties and differences of sentiment and feeling upon this subject.” The issue of his speaking plainly concerning slavery caused such dissension that a case was brought against him and appealed to the Synod of the Carolinas because the Presbytery had “enjoined upon him silence in the pulpit on this subject.” The response of the Synod was to declare that, “to preach publicly against slavery in present circumstances, and to lay down as the duty of every one to liberate those who are under their care, is that which would lead the way to disorder and open the way to great confusion.”435 Gillett spoke of Gilliland’s going to the “churches of the Northwest436, where freer utterance might be allowed him.”437 In a note attached to this little story about Gilliland, Gillett said that “the subject of slavery had been discussed at Charleston, and violent results had followed, as early as 1802,” though the objects of the violence were two antislavery Methodist ministers, not Presbyterians.

Another minister native to North Carolina who moved to Ohio because he was “opposed, on principle, to any connection with slavery,” was Robert G. Wilson, who

435 Gillett, II, 150.
436 The Northwest in this instance meant southern Ohio.
437 Gillett, II, 60-61. Gillett picks up Gilliland’s story later in Ohio, at the Red Oak Church in Chillicothe Presbytery, 126, 150, 291, 297. According to Gillett, Gilliland moved “previous to 1809.”
became pastor of a church in Chillicothe in 1805, and subsequently, in 1824, the President of Ohio University in Athens.\textsuperscript{438}

Not too far away in Mercer County, Kentucky, the commissioner to the 1795 General Assembly and a member of the drafting committee for the letter to the Presbytery of Transylvania, the Rev. David Rice, better known as “Father Rice,” arrived in 1783. Rice was characterized in heroic terms by Gillett, and was clearly a remarkable leader in the settlement and evangelization of both Kentucky and Southern Ohio, founding the First Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati, as well as being a major figure in the split with the Cumberland Presbytery in the early 1800’s. Gillett said of him, “Of the cause of freedom he was a bold and consistent champion. ‘Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Policy’ was the title of a pamphlet issued by him in 1792. The views presented in it were forcibly urged by him in the convention that formed the State Constitution.”\textsuperscript{439}

Presbyterian ministers did not always bring their sentiments to the notice of the Synod or the General Assembly, but they spoke out about their convictions and even acted upon them in the civil arena.

The Presbytery of Transylvania at this time was a part of a geographically far-flung Synod, the Synod of Virginia, which stretched from Virginia west including Kentucky and north through western Pennsylvania as far as Erie and Buffalo, then beyond into Ohio. The Presbytery of West Lexington, responding to the request of the same Synod in 1800 for a report on the progress of religion within its bounds, a report

\textsuperscript{438} Ibid. 126, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{439} Gillett, I. 405, vol. II, 522.
which was to be forwarded yearly to the General Assembly, spoke of slavery as “a subject likely to occasion much trouble and division in the churches in this country.”

In 1800 the General Assembly returned to its concern for education under the guise of evangelizing the western regions. Prominently mentioned is that the “General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church have it in contemplation to attempt, more extensively than has heretofore been done, ...the instruction of the black people...by the distribution among them of Bibles, religious books, and by other means...” This resolution was passed by a new Assembly, perhaps because it did not mention slavery directly and perhaps because the effort was not to support the emancipation of slaves.

Subsequent reports on evangelizing within the frontier areas, however, spoke about the opportunities and difficulties of evangelizing the “Indian tribes,” who were also described as “wandering and warlike savages,” though the reports were mostly about how hard it was to recruit anyone to accept a call to this particular evangelism task. The minutes of the Assembly in 1803 reflected some slight advance in that area, however, saying, “The Assembly also observed, with great pleasure, that the desire for spreading the gospel among the destitute inhabitants on our frontiers, among the blacks, and among the savage tribes on our borders, has been rapidly increasing during the last year...”

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440 Ibid. vol II. 522. Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1789-1820, 239-241. By 1802, there were sufficient churches and presbyteries that this large Synod was split into three synods, one in Virginia, one in Kentucky, and the third encompassing Ohio and western Pennsylvania, which was called the Synod of Pittsburgh. (Pittsburgh is spelled both with and without the “h” throughout this time frame.)

441 Presbyterian Church. Minutes 1789-1820, 206.

442 Ibid. 261.

443 Ibid. 275.
Similarly, in 1804 the narrative on the state of religion told of “increasing efforts” made to “extend the knowledge of the way of salvation to the unhappy and enslaved blacks in our country...”444 Following the 1804 Assembly, however, the minutes for several years reflected growing numbers of missions to the Indian tribes, particularly in the Carolinas and Georgia and in the northern part of Ohio, but no mention was made of attempts to evangelize or to educate blacks, slave or free. In 1809, the narrative on the state of religion returned to its former pattern, though once more, evangelizing blacks took second place to the effort to Christianize Indian tribes, and the description of the people changed, “…the unhappy children of Africa are also greeted with those glad tidings of salvation to which, in a Christian country, they have a peculiar claim.”445

Among the many reports of missionaries being assigned by name to various areas and groups of people, a single one in the minutes of 1812 stands out, as the Rev. John Gloucester was appointed a missionary for three months “to the blacks in Philadelphia.”446 In this entire list of 39 appointments, however, Gloucester’s is the only one that specifies a group of people to be evangelized. All the rest are assigned by place and time only. Mr. Gloucester’s appointment was made again in 1814 to the same group of presumably free blacks.

Another individual whose antislavery activities and actions were to be important to the actions of the General Assembly, as well as to people in Virginia, and later in New York State, was George Bourne. Bourne was born of a non-Conformist
family, educated, and ordained in England, came to the United States as a young man, and settled in Baltimore where he edited a newspaper. While he was introduced to the issues of slavery in Great Britain, his connection to anti-slavery in the United States seems to have stemmed from his experiences in Maryland where he worked as a reporter for the *Baltimore Evening Post*, and where he was exposed to ads to sell slaves, to his growing horror.

When the newspaper failed, Bourne began to write, first a history of newspapers, then a biography of John Wesley, and other pamphlets. Some of this writing caused him to be known and disliked by the power structure of the city, and Bourne eventually moved to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, near Lexington, where he taught school and preached. He applied to the Presbytery of Lexington, and was eventually received as a licenciate in April 1812. During his time in Maryland and Virginia, his antislavery passions had grown.

Having to study and commit to memory much of the Westminster Confession in order to be received as a member by the Presbytery of Lexington, Bourne was struck by question 142 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, and its answer as found in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in its 1805 edition: “What are the sins forbidden in the Eighth Commandment?” The Catechism notes twenty-five sins, but the third is the sin of “man-stealing,” following “theft and robbery.” At that time, the official version of the Confession, which was contained in the Constitution, included notes that

447 The eighth of the ten commandments found in the Bible in Exodus 20:15 is “Thou shalt not steal.”  
were to clarify points that might be confusing, as well as give Biblical citations. The note appended to question 142 included the following:

1 Tim. I. 10 (The law is made) For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for men-stealers. (This crime among the Jews exposed the perpetrators of it to capital punishment; Exod. 21, 16 and the apostle here classes them with sinners of the first rank. The word he uses in its original import, comprehends all who are concerned in bringing any of the human race into slavery, or in detaining them in it...Stealers of men are all those who bring off slaves or freemen, and keep, sell, or buy them. To steal a freeman, says Grotius, is the highest kind of theft. In other instances we only steal human property, but when we steal or retain men in slavery, we seize those who in common with ourselves, are constituted by the original grant, lords of the earth. Gen: 1,28...) 449

Having what was seemingly a clear authority from both the Bible and the Larger Catechism, Bourne was not silent about his view concerning the nature of slavery. As he was at once a preacher and a writer, he used both talents and opportunities to speak out about his beliefs. This was to lead him into great difficulties eventually. However, in his first years as a member of the Presbytery of Lexington, his leadership was affirmed in his being elected the stated clerk of the Presbytery in 1814, as well as being chosen a commissioner to the General Assemblies in 1813, 1814, and 1815.

During the 1815 Assembly, Bourne was appointed to a national committee supporting Princeton Theological Seminary. 450 Somewhat later in this same Assembly, however, he brought an overture from the elders of his South River Church in Port Republic, Virginia, directly to the

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449 This condensed version of Bourne’s life is taken from Christie, John W. and Dwight L. Dumond. George Bourne and ‘The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable’. Wilmington and Philadelphia: The Historical Society of Delaware and the Presbyterian Historical Society, 1969; pages 1-18. The quotes are from the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, 1805, 277-278; and the King James Bible, from which the I Timothy, Exodus 21, and Genesis texts are taken. The quote from Exodus 21:16 is: “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.” Genesis 1:28 is the following: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

450 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1789 to 1820, 579.
floor of the gathering asking if slaveholders could be considered Christians, this overture having been refused by the Committee on Bills and Overtures. As justification, Bourne quoted the passages from the Constitution, the “Larger Catechism,” and the notes that earlier General Assemblies had appended to question 142.451

The Assembly had also received an overture from the Synod of Ohio, asking if slave owners could be considered honest men, Presbyterians, or even Christians, which was referred to a committee to report back to the Assembly at a later time. Bourne’s overture was also referred to that committee.452 The Assembly’s response to Bourne’s overture, as well as to the overture from the Synod of Ohio was to repeat what had been said before, by repeating the references to the statements of 1787, 1793, and 1795. There was an addition to the previous statements, however, with renewed emphasis on trafficking in slaves and abusing them “as inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel.” And they recommended the revised statement to the Presbyteries and Sessions under their care, “to make use of all prudent measures to prevent such shameful and unrighteous conduct.”453 The response again was “prudent,” but not satisfying to the passionate anti-slavery stance that Bourne had understood to be a part of the standards of the Presbyterian Church in 1815.

Following this Assembly, Bourne’s conduct again caused him trouble with his church and in his presbytery. Bourne had for some time been acting on his principles and had refused to

451 Christie, 22. Christie and Dumond state that they believe this to be the first public airing of his argument on man-stealing in the General Assembly.
452 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1789 to 1820, 582.
453 Ibid. 586. The full action can be found in Appendix C.
allow slaveholders to be members of his church.\textsuperscript{454} He was brought up on charges by the Presbytery of Lexington; charges which eventually resulted in his being removed from the ministry by the General Assembly in 1818. In the prosecution of these charges, which continued in various forms throughout the General Assemblies of 1816, 1817, and 1818, the Rev. George A. Baxter was the primary prosecutor. (Baxter, of West Hanover Presbytery in Virginia, was also one of the major leaders of the Old School movement to remove specific synods, ministers and congregations from the Presbyterian Church in 1837.) These charges were based on “Common Fame,” and accused Bourne of “having made several unwarrantable and unchristian charges against many of the members of the Presbyterian Church in relation to slavery.”\textsuperscript{455}

Because of his several trials in the presbytery and the General Assembly, Bourne was present, and no doubt actively speaking to commissioners concerning the issues that he felt so passionate about in the Assemblies of 1816 and 1817. In 1816, the Assembly faced another in the ongoing questions concerning slaves, their owners and their standing in the Presbyterian Church, specifically, “Should the children of non-member slaves be baptized?” The Assembly’s answer was unusually short. Such children should be baptized if their masters could assure them of proper education and nurturing in the faith, and it was the responsibility of the ministers to perform the sacrament.\textsuperscript{456}

Bourne’s charge that the Westminster “Larger Catechism,” as it was to be found in the Constitution, would prohibit slavery for Christians was not forgotten, however. The General

\textsuperscript{454} Christie, 22.
\textsuperscript{455} Ibid. 34. The citation comes from the Minutes of the Lexington Presbytery, September 29-30, 1815.
\textsuperscript{456} Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1789-1820, 613, 617. The full text of the question and answer can be found in Appendix C.
Assembly chose to deal with the issue in a particularly Presbyterian fashion, that is, to deflect a contentious issue by addressing it tangentially, through structure, through polity, or through parliamentary procedure. The Synod of Philadelphia had questioned, not the argument itself, but rather the validity of the placement of explanatory notes in the *Constitution*. After much discussion, the Assembly decided that two of the extra notes should be removed, as having no validity, and that none of the notes had any more authority than any other action of a General Assembly and could be removed by a subsequent Assembly if that was desired. Since one of the two notes to be removed concerned question 142 on man-stealing, the Assembly found it necessary to append an additional remark.

In regard to this last omission, the Assembly think proper to declare, that in directing it, they are influenced by far other motives than any desire to favour slavery, or to retard the extinction of that mournful evil, as speedily as may consist with the happiness of all concerned.

Thus Bourne realized a result quite opposite to that which he desired, though obviously his argument had made an impression on other bodies of the Church, and was seen as dangerous enough that the offending notes had to be removed from the *Constitution* of the Church.\textsuperscript{457}

The Assembly of 1817 reflected Bourne’s on-going quest to remain Presbyterian. On May 22\textsuperscript{nd}, the Assembly nullified the decision of the Presbytery of Lexington to remove Bourne from the ministry, and gave as its decision in the case that the presbytery’s judicial process was flawed, its sentence too harsh and, therefore, the removal of Bourne from the ministry was reversed. As nothing was ever simple for Bourne, the Assembly reviewed its resolution the

\textsuperscript{457} Christie and Dumond argue that it was Bourne’s argument that was seen both by Angelina Grimke and by William Lloyd Garrison, who adopted it as their own and claimed original authorship of the idea. They also state that Ashbel Green was both a co-author of the original notes that had been added to the *Constitution*, and the primary author of this resolution removing the note on man-stealing. p. 59. Green continued to be a commissioner to nearly every General Assembly and was a primary participant in all the Old School meetings and agitations prior to and during the 1837 Assembly.
following morning, with the decision being the same, but requiring that another trial at the presbytery level take place.

George Bourne’s second trial at the presbytery level took place in August and September, 1817. George Baxter was once again the prosecutor, and the outcome again was not favorable to Bourne, setting the stage for his next and last appeal to the General Assembly. The Assembly of 1818 considered Bourne’s appeal from the second day of the Assembly, May 22, through May 30. The discussion is not recorded, but must have been lengthy and contested. The outcome, however, was finally clear. Bourne was no longer to be a minister in the Presbyterian Church.458

The only other official discussion of topics related to the condition of blacks in the country and in the Presbyterian Church from the General Assembly of 1817 was in the “Narrative on the State of Religion,” which included two items that showed the Assembly recognized the needs and growing numbers of “people of colour” within the non-slaveholding states. The churches in Connecticut Farms and Bloomfield, Connecticut, were singled out for mention in terms of revivals that included blacks, together with a general notice that work had been accomplished “to alleviate the condition of the people of colour, in almost all parts of the country.” This work concerned the establishment of the American Colonization Society, as well

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458 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1789-1820, 672, 675, 676, 682, 685. The Minutes of the General Assembly for 1823 and 1824 show Bourne attempting to be reinstated (p. 71), his petition being refused (p. 93), his return to the Assembly in 1824 with the Assembly at last turning the whole case over to the Presbytery of New York (p. 124), which ultimately voted in August 1824 to restore Bourne’s ordination. He remained active in that presbytery and continued his antislavery activities, as well as his writing against the institution of slavery through many venues. He joined the Dutch Reformed Church in 1833, serving congregations in New York City until his death in November, 1845. (Christie and Dumond, 98.)
as an institution “for the education of men of colour for the ministry, and as instructors of their brethren,” sponsored by the Synod of New York and New Jersey.\textsuperscript{459}

In the 1818 Assembly, another of the official statements which demonstrate the on-going concern with and discussion about slavery could be found in the usual “Narrative on the State of Religion,” which was expected to be published and disseminated as part of the extracts of the Assembly. In the paragraph on “Public Morals,” the Assembly praised its constituents while making clear the depraved nature of the Negro slaves, saying:

\begin{quote}
We feel constrained here to mention, and we do it with pleasure, that in those States where slavery unhappily prevails, the negroes are treated with more attention than heretofore, and increasing exertions are made to promote their comfort and correct their vices, which are the natural result of their state of bondage.\textsuperscript{460}
\end{quote}

The influence of George Bourne was not entirely lost at this Assembly either, as another question concerning the status of church members who owned, bought and sold slaves was asked, brought before the Assembly relatively late, on June 1, 1818 during the afternoon session. It concerned the selling of a slave who was a member of the Presbyterian Church, who did not wish to be sold, and asked whether the master who persisted in this deed should not be barred from the church. This question was referred to a committee that included Bourne’s nemesis, the Rev. Dr. George Baxter, as well as the orthodox and conservative Princeton professor, the Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green. As the ongoing agitation concerning slavery was of concern to the Assembly and the Church, the direction given to the committee was to include the preparation of a report

\textsuperscript{459} Ibid. 651. The full statement can be found in Appendix C.
\textsuperscript{460} Ibid. 680. The full statement can be found in Appendix C.
that would answer the question of the selling of the slave, but also would be “expressing the opinion of the Assembly in general as to slavery.”

The response to the assignment was made promptly the following morning and adopted unanimously, evidently without discussion, which would seem to indicate that it had been drafted in advance and its provisions been adopted following consultation by the committee. The answer to the question actually asked, if a slave who was a church member could be sold against his will with impunity and with no consequence to the master, was not addressed until the last paragraph of the response. The answer to this narrow question was that, in the very unlikely event of such a contested sale actually occurring to a slave who is a member in good standing of a Presbyterian Church and whose master is also a member in good standing, the matter should become a case to be tried in the church, and “...it ought to be followed, without delay by a suspension of the offender from all the privileges of the church, till he repent, and make all the reparation in his power, to the injured party.” However, the resolution noted that these circumstances were both “peculiar,” and “can but seldom happen.”

The many words that occurred before this answer to the original question dealt with the rest of the charge, to express “the opinion of the Assembly in general as to slavery.” This long statement called slavery, “a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature,” “utterly inconsistent with the law of God,” and “totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ.” It did not call the practice “sin,” nor did it state any action that was to be taken by the church either locally or nationally. The resolution identified practical

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461 Ibid. 688. The full statement can be found in Appendix C.
462 Ibid. 694.
problems, moral ambiguities, and encouraged action. While stating that immediate emancipation would cause further “injury” to the slaves by freeing them before they were prepared for freedom, the resolution warned against using rationalizations to avoid moving toward ending slavery or mistreating those currently enslaved. Finally, the recommendation to the church was to support the colonization of free “people of colour,” a movement that the Assembly graciously acknowledged had “its origin and organization among the holders of slaves.” Perhaps being suspicious of the motives of the owners of slaves, those interested in emancipation were led to suspect and then reject this method of freeing the slave population. They then rejected the chosen institution for dealing with freed slaves, the American Colonization Society itself. 463

Gillett presented this action of the Assembly in 1818 without much comment, though quoting most of it. He said that the Assembly encouraged an end to slavery, praised those who had been working toward that end, stated the reasons for slowing the process of emancipation and ended with support for the American Colonization Society. 464 Immediately, Gillett moved to a statement from the Assembly of 1825, which commended four Southern presbyteries for their work in evangelizing the slaves in their midst. Though the statement was presumably placed in the narrative on the state of religion, the official minutes for 1825 do not reflect this report.

Gillett’s omission of seven years of General Assembly actions with regard to slavery was not accidental, for following the statement of 1818 there was no mention of blacks, or of their status as slaves, in the minutes or the appendices to the minutes. There was mention of evangelizing Jews, of missionary efforts in Ceylon, and of efforts to connect more closely with

463 Ibid. 691-694. The full statement can be found in Appendix C.
other denominations, leading to a merger with the Associate Reformed Church in 1822 and
closer relations with the German Reformed Church. Slightly more distant relations with the
General Associations of Connecticut and Massachusetts could also be traced, following the
embracing of the Associate Reformed Church. The only mention of slavery or concerns over
emancipated blacks occurred in the yearly affirmation of the American Colonization Society,
with calls for prayer and collections of money to benefit its causes.465 The American
Colonization Society was viewed by some as the bridge between slaveholders and those who
believed in emancipation, as seen in the supposed center of abolitionist agitation in Ohio and in
its newspaper, the Ohio Observer, which described its local society:

  Debate continued about the Colonization Society’s stance on slavery
  and speaking of abolitionists, “They charge us with obstructing them
  in their efforts to promote emancipation. We are not an antislavery
  society; neither Pro-Slavery Society. It is not for us to oppose any
  efforts which others may make to abolish it. …The Colonization
  society is to stand on neutral ground. Its members may be
  slaveholders or abolitionists. Our Society is wickedly deficient in love
  to the colored race …Our Society has not felt sufficient pity for the
  colored man. But it has done something.”466

c. Actions of Presbyteries and Synods

  Responding to the agitation in the world around them as well as to the official
  statements of General Assemblies, the presbyteries and synods of the Presbyterian
  Church expressed their views about slavery and the appropriate role for the church to
take. Usually these statements took the form of resolutions, which were then

465 Presbyterian Church. Minutes, 1821 to 1835, 63, 84, 87, 102, 93, 118, 154, 179, 180, 229, 365, 411.
466 Ohio Observer, February 20, 1834. (no page number)
published in local newspapers, sent by exchange to other papers, and copied by papers throughout the country. Presbyteries in the 1830’s typically expressed themselves on many subjects in this way.

The Presbytery of Cleveland, formed in 1830, passed a resolution on the topic early in its life, a resolution that covered points that others would also make. Slavery was morally wrong and the church should say so; civil law should not keep “our colored brethren” from learning to read and such laws should be repealed; every Christian should work for the “utter extermination” of slavery; all in their churches should work both to end slavery and “for the enfranchisement of the whole colored race.”467 This statement went far beyond what most Presbyterians would agree to, north or south, as it spoke of enfranchising freed slaves. Amalgamation was anathema to many, although most in the church believed that religious education for the salvation of souls was to be encouraged. Religious education did not necessarily include learning to read, however. While the General Assembly of 1818 had come close to declaring slavery to be a sin, many did not believe it so, and would use biblical proofs to justify its existence. Many also might believe that slavery should be ended, but that such action was the proper business only of the states individually. For a presbytery and its members in Ohio to tell the slaveholding states of the South what they should do was considered to be unjust interference in the proper business of a sister state.

467 The Presbytery of Cleveland. Minutes. September 17, 1834, p. 115. The full resolution can be found in Appendix E.
Religious instruction of slaves, however, was thought to be appropriate.

Gillett mentioned actions by the presbytery of Transylvania in Kentucky in 1794 advocating slaves be taught to read the scriptures as well as “be prepared for freedom.” Other reports, however, such as that of West Lexington Presbytery to the Synod of Virginia, characterized slavery as ‘a subject likely to occasion much trouble and division in the churches in this country.’

Attempting to find a way to defuse the issue, encourage emancipation and remove the colored populace from the country, the American Society for the Colonization of the Free People of Color of the United States was founded in 1816. This society was welcomed by many, including most in the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church, both north and south, as a way to work to end slavery gradually, and not have to deal with the presence of blacks in the general population.

The issue of religious instruction and considering slaves as human beings with a soul was a continual topic in presbyteries and synods. The *Ohio Observer* for June 18, 1835 quotes a southern Presbyterian synod’s pronouncement:

> “The Synod of South Carolina and Georgia stated in an official document [dated 5th December 1828]…that ‘From long continued and close observation, we believe that the moral and religious condition of Slaves is such that they may justly be considered the heathen of this country, and will bear comparison with heathen in any country in the world.’ Now if it be right to take the money which the slaveholder receives by selling the bodies of his fellow men, or by making heathen of them as above stated, and cast that money into the treasury of the Lord, to be sent for the conversion of the heathen, in other countries; if *this be right*, WE WERE WRONG in speaking against it as inconsistent. If it be *wrong* –we were RIGHT in doing so. This is all we have to say in our own behalf.

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468 Gillett. op. cit. vol II. p. 522.
If our brother will take the question for issue to the bar of his own conscience—we will make no appeal. We hope however in making up the verdict such authorities from Scripture as those in which God says, ‘I hate robbery, for burnt offering,’ will be taken into account.”

A resolution from Transylvania Presbytery in Kentucky reported that effort was being made to assist the colored population through preaching and Sabbath instruction, to the end that “all our church members will feel it to be a privilege as well as a duty, to act towards this unfortunate portion of our fellow-men in such a manner as will show to all that they feel the obligation of the command to ‘love their neighbor as themselves.’”

Northern presbyteries also spoke out. The Presbytery of Detroit passed a resolution in May 1835 that included the following: “That the Presbytery regard the system of slavery in this country AS WRONG, AND BELIEVE THAT IT OUGHT TO BE UNIVERSALLY ABANDONED; -- That they view it as an enormous and alarming evil, whether it be considered in its physical, social, political, or moral relations; -- That it strongly tends to endanger the free institutions of our country, and THE PEACE AND PERPETUITY OF THE UNION...”

In October of 1835, the Synod of Genesee passed a resolution requesting the General Assembly to “take order on this subject, and to devise such measures as in their wisdom shall be judged the safest and best to effect the extinction of the evil in our own church, at as early a day as possible.” The Synod of the

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469 NY Evangelist for 1836, August 20, 1836.
470 New-York Evangelist, June 20, 1835, p. 98. The full statement as reported can be found in Appendix E.
Western Reserve added its voice, “...that slavery as it exists in the United States is a sin against God; a high-handed trespass on the rights of man; a great physical, political and social evil, which ought to be immediately and universally abandoned.” And the Synod of Utica said that, “...slavery as it exists in these United States, is repugnant both to the letter and the spirit of the gospel; a flagrant violation of the law of love; a sin against God and man.” The Synod of Geneva issued a similar statement. The Synod of Cincinnati went further in asking that the Assembly “enjoin it on all the presbyteries and church sessions under their care, to exclude from the communion of the church all persons who shall claim the right of property in their fellow-men.”

By the time of the Assembly in 1836, at least 12 different memorials had been presented to the Assembly asking the Presbyterian Church to take a stance on slavery.

Response to this type of rhetoric caused reaction in the southern presbyteries. Hopewell Presbytery passed a resolution as reported in the *Charleston Observer* in April 1836, as it informed and instructed its commissioners to the 1836 Assembly.

“The political institution of domestic slavery, as it exists in the South, is not a lawful or constitutional subject of discussion, much less of action by the General Assembly…So soon as the General Assembly passes any ecclesiastical laws or recommends any action which shall interfere with this institution, this Presbytery will regard such laws and acts as tyrannical and odious – and from that moment will regard itself independent of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church…Our delegates to the approaching Assembly are hereby enjoined to use all Christian means to

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471 Crocker, 65-66.
472 Instructing commissioners to a governing body of the Presbyterian Church is not permitted, as each commissioner is to vote his conscience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that commissioners who are not present in the assemblage are not allowed to vote, hence there is and was no proxy voting allowed. The instructions of this resolution, therefore, should have carried less than absolute weight with those carrying the commission.
prevent the discussion of domestic slavery in the Assembly – to protest in
our name against all acts that involve or approve abolition—and to
withdraw from the Assembly and return home if in spite of their efforts,
acts of this character shall be passed. 473

Also in April 1836, Charleston Union Presbytery instructed its commissioners to
discourage any attempt to speak about slavery, not to participate if it were introduced,
and to remove themselves from the Assembly, as they were “not willing to be associated
with a body of men who denounce the ministers and members of southern churches as
pirates and man stealers, or cooperate with those that thus denounce them.”474

Adding another voice from the south, the Synod of Virginia in November 1836
enacted a resolution, to be read to every congregation, stating that abolition had become a
pressing issue “in some parts of our country,” discussed why slavery was both legal and
found in scripture, and further affirmed, “the General Assembly of the Presbyterian
church have no right to declare that relation sinful, which Christ and his apostles teach to
be consistent with the most unquestionable piety.”475

Hopewell Presbytery continued to present resolutions instructing its
commissioners. In preparation for the 1837 Assembly, the presbytery resolved that:

Hopewell Presbytery will send Commissioners to the General Assembly at
its next meeting and will instruct the Commissioners to ask respectfully
and affectionately that the Assembly expressly deny or affirm the doctrine
of abolitionism; and that if the Assembly shall refuse to act upon the slave
question, or take any indirect action upon it short of an unequivocal

473 Smith, Elwyn A. “The Role of the South in the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-38.” Church History, Vol
474 Sweet, Presbyterians, 120.
475 Crocker, 65.
settlement on it; then and in either of such events, said Commissioners shall declare this Presbytery independent of the General Assembly and retire from its deliberations.476

So difficult had become these deliberations, and so divisive the language and resultant feelings, that Lancaster Presbytery in central Ohio sent a resolution which gave permission to effect a separation.

Resolved, That if the approaching Assembly close without opening a door of hope that existing evils will be remedied, then we will approve of measures designed cautiously to pave the way for a division of the church, by sending down overtures to the Presbyteries, and by endeavors generally to effect an amicable separation.

Yeas - 20
Nays - 17

Attest, James Culbertson, S.C. Lancaster Presbytery, Ohio477

At the General Assembly of 1837, as at all General Assemblies of the time, reports on the “state of the church” were submitted by presbyteries. Reports from southern presbyteries spoke of providing religious instruction or services for slaves, while those of the northern presbyteries noted efforts to abolish slavery. These reports were submitted to the full Assembly and assigned to a committee to write a report on the state of the entire Church. If their commissioners requested, and the Assembly Moderator believed there was sufficient time to do so, some of them were read aloud and appeared in the final copy of the minutes. The report on the state of the church was then printed

476 New York Evangelist. October 22, 1836, 3.
477 New York Evangelist, May 6, 1837, 75. The resolution in the original includes by name the men who voted for and against it.
and sent throughout the country, reaching the public at large through religious newspapers.478

Hopewell Presbytery did not give up, even after the successes of the 1837 Assembly in ridding the denomination of areas of the church perceived to be particularly in favor of anti-slavery measures. Before the 1838 General Assembly, another resolution was passed.

From the Cincinnati Journal
HOPEWELL PRESBYTERY, Georgia, Saturday, March 3, 1838
Instructions to commissioners to the General Assembly were presented by committee and adopted by the presbytery as follows:
“The Committee recommend that the Commissioners be, and they are hereby instructed to avoid introducing unnecessarily the subject of Abolitionism…And further that they be instructed to vote on no proposition, in relation to the institution of domestic slavery, unless it be in favor of declaring it to be a civil institution, guaranteed by the Constitution of our common country, upon which the judicatories of the church have no right to legislate. And said Commissioners are hereby further instructed to withdraw from the Assembly, should that body take any action which, in their opinion, asserts the right to legislate on that subject.”

On the subject of slavery, its role in the church and in society, it was clear that the Presbyterian Church was not in agreement, would not be in the future, and that in some areas, church members and bodies were willing for a separation to occur rather than try to come to any accommodation over the areas of disagreement.

478 See Appendix E for more presbytery reports, together with some discussion of what has not been transcribed.
d. From the Periphery: material from contemporary newspapers and other sources.

This section of the chapter will consider some of the agitation about slavery from several sources, contemporary books and memoirs, as well as information found in newspapers from New York, Philadelphia and Hudson, Ohio, largely favorable to abolition that reprinted information obtained from newspapers printed throughout the country.

A newly founded seminary near Cincinnati, Lane, was the focus of both interest and anti-slavery that peaked in 1834. Lane was home to the Beecher family, and its students were influenced by Charles G. Finney. The Beechers and Finney added their voices to the slavery-anti-slavery discussion, as did the print media that was influential at the time. Newspapers printed much that was then discussed widely, giving information and in depth analyses for church members, speaking about the issues of slavery and schism. The articles spoke of slavery as the catalyst or cause of division in the church, as too divisive or inappropriate to be considered; considered the way in which votes in the Assembly might have been manipulated; used slavery as both tool and strategy; and weighed the idea of separation, including possible national division paralleling church division.479

From 1818, the official record of the General Assembly concerning slavery was sparse. This was hardly surprising, considering the statements, official and unofficial,

479 A number of extracts from newspaper articles may be found in Appendix G, covering much of the same material, and giving a flavor of the rhetoric of the time.
that slavery was a topic too sensitive to consider, too contentious to take the vast amount of time required to bring it to any conclusion that might begin to satisfy all parties. Newspaper accounts do not display similar reticence, or a lack of interest or passion about the issue among certain commissioners to the General Assemblies who discussed the parliamentary maneuvering that avoided the issue of slavery by not allowing it to be introduced or acted on as Assembly business.

The newspapers printed reports of presbytery actions about slavery and anti-slavery activities, in addition to the reports of multi-denominational or secular events. In both the Presbyterian Church and the culture at large, these issues were exaggerated and exacerbated by the riots that occurred in various areas of the country, particularly from 1834 through 1837. These riots, as mentioned in the section on the history and context of the country in 1837, were primarily anti-abolition in nature, followed closely the forming of new anti-slavery societies, targeted whites and free blacks, and, though some occurred elsewhere in the country, there were larger numbers of incidents in the north.

Exacerbating the concern about the growing disorder in society was the rapid development of anti-slavery agitation and the formation of societies dedicated not only to removing freed slaves from the country, but to emancipation in all its many forms. The lack of ministers in the western areas was being addressed by the founding of seminaries. These two matters met each other in 1834 at Lane Seminary. One of the first students at the new seminary was Theodore Dwight Weld, a mature student, who had been trained under Charles Grandison Finney and schooled at the Oneida Institute. He had moved
from favoring colonization, through gradual to immediate emancipation, and was soon to be a full-fledged abolitionist. The President of the seminary was Lyman Beecher, anti-slavery and moderate, yet who was also brought up on heresy charges by the Rev. Julius Wilson, one of the founders of Lane. In February of 1834, Weld held multi-day lecture-debate sessions, using revival techniques, which were so successful that virtually the whole student body was converted to the anti-slavery cause. Putting his words into action during the rest of the term, Weld and the others wrote letters to newspapers, published pamphlets, organized classes for blacks off the campus and also invited blacks from the town to share meals with them on campus, a response which caused the townspeople to become increasingly agitated over what seemed to them to be amalgamation. Beecher was quoted as saying to Weld, “If you want to teach colored schools, I can fill your pockets with money, but if you will visit in colored families, and walk with them in the streets, you will be overwhelmed.”

Weld did not heed Beecher’s advice, although Beecher felt things to be sufficiently under control that he could go east on a fund-raising trip at the end of July. In his absence and that of most of the faculty, the Board of Trustees became upset, issued strong regulations governing student conduct and speech, which resulted eventually in most of the student body resigning. A sizeable proportion of those students followed Weld to newly founded Oberlin in northeastern Ohio, where they were joined by Finney in an institution supported by the Tappan brothers of New York which was to educate both blacks and women. The Lane incident was far more complex than this brief telling.

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a classic confrontation between faculty, administration, trustees and student body, intertwined with town-gown concerns, donor relations, and institutional survival - all in the context of anti-slavery and race relations. Yet with the leaving of virtually the entire student body of one of its seminaries, the Presbyterian Church had another circumstance about the “domestic institution” that brought slavery to the forefront of national denominational attention.

With Lane in the background and the “Act and Testimony” circulating throughout the denomination, the level of anxiety among those in the church was also growing throughout the years before the 1837 Assembly. Written prior to the 1837 General Assembly, a short volume by Lyman Beecher’s daughter, Catharine, was also influential in the maelstrom that preceded and followed the Assembly. Entitled, “An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, with Reference to the Duty of American Females,” Catharine Beecher was forthright in her support of the principle of emancipation, but also clear that radical abolitionism would not succeed in its purpose, and that women had no business interfering in this issue in a public way. The little volume was prepared in answer to a query from a “gentleman” who asked why “he should not join the Abolition Society,” as well as responding to “Miss Grimke” in a personal letter and in a public answer to Miss A. D. Grimke’s speeches.

The first response is to state the proposition that, of course, all northern Christians believe in the principles of abolition.

Your remarks seem to assume, that the principles held by Abolitionists on the subject of slavery, are peculiar to them, and are not generally
adopted by those at the North who oppose their measures. ...I know not where to look for northern Christians, who would deny that every slave-holder is bound to treat his slaves exactly as he would claim that his own children ought to be treated in similar circumstances; that the holding of our fellow men as property, or the withholding of any of the rights of freedom, for mere purposes of gain, is a sin, and ought to be immediately abandoned; and that where the laws are such, that a slave-holder cannot legally emancipate his slaves, without throwing them into worse bondage, he is bound to use all his influence to alter those laws, and, in the meantime, to treat his slaves, as nearly as he can, as if they were free.

I do not suppose there is one person in a thousand, at the North, who would dissent from these principles. They would only differ in the use of terms, and call this the doctrine of gradual emancipation, while Abolitionists would call it the doctrine of immediate emancipation.\textsuperscript{481}

Having agreed to the first premise, the remainder of the essay applauded the gradualism of the British model, attacking the institution by undermining first one part and then another. To do otherwise would cause a reaction, as all the pressure on the South is coming from the outside.

“The more they are goaded by a sense of aggressive wrong without, or by fears of dangers within, the more they will restrain their slaves, and diminish their liberty, and increase they disabilities. They will make laws so unjust and oppressive, not only to slaves, but to their Abolitionist advocates, that by degrees such men will withdraw from their bounds. Laws will be made expressly to harass them, and to render them so uncomfortable that they must withdraw. Then gradually the righteous will flee from the devoted city.”\textsuperscript{482}

Beecher argued that leaving behind a smaller and ever more oppressive proportion of whites, and more oppressed blacks would lead inevitably to insurrection, to war and bloodshed on both sides. The whole argument was based on change brought about by peaceful means, rather than violent change that is coerced. Finally Beecher

\textsuperscript{482} Ibid. 90-91, 96.
stated that this might well lead to “the severing of the Union.” She seemed to offend everyone while satisfying no one, though her message meant primarily to recommend moderation to male abolitionists, while advocating that women remain in their appropriate place and provide “exemplary discharge of all the domestic duties; humility, meekness, delicacy, tact, and discretion”. In such a polarized world as the church had become, it was too late for the moderating voice.

Women’s involvement in anti-slavery activities had begun long before this time. An example of a group founded prior to the publication of Beecher’s essay was reported in the *Ohio Observer* of February 4, 1836. The formation of an anti-slavery society for women in northern Ohio followed a speech given by a Presbyterian, J.A. Thome of Kentucky, one of the Lane rebels who himself had been a slave holder, and spoke of the evils of slavery from his experience. Differing from Beecher, Thome spoke of the common practice of denying to women the right to form “Societies in opposition to systems of Crime.” By contrast, he advocated for women to speak out, for slavery impacted in deleterious fashion the family of the slaveholder by neglecting education, especially that of “the Ladies of the South.” While they were sent away to school, their schooling was only that of painting and music, and little that was designed “for usefulness.” Even more, “profound thought is despised, while superficiality in every department of science is the norm. The female is educated, not to discharge the high duties of sisters, daughters, and brothers, but to flirt through a parlour, maze in a Ball Room and thrum on a Piano.” Thome blamed this on slavery, which also wasted the mind of the slave by not allowing him to be educated at all. “Slavery riots upon ruined mind, &
while it feeds upon that of its victim, it saps the foundation of universal mind.” He claimed that it caused the disposition of women to be harmed, by hardening their hearts. “It scathes the sensibilities of woman, freezes all her sympathies and begets the ferocity of a tigress….Slavery unmakes woman, deforms her, makes her hideous as a demon.”

Even worse, Thome averred, slavery harms the institution of marriage, causing “the utter annihilation of marriage among the slaves….Marriage is destroyed, God’s command is nullified, the dearest ties are wrenched asunder, till under the agonizing violence the very strings of life are snapped. Women’s virtue is made a common prey.” Additionally, the mother-child relationship was violated, as slavedrivers took children away from their parents. Amazingly, Thome’s speech ended by saying, “Remember, the ruin does not stop with the colored woman! The far reaching havoc sweeps over the whole field of woman’s rights….The assault is made upon woman! upon you!” If being anti-slavery was not sufficient, women’s rights were clearly also being introduced, an element that would prove even more difficult as the years went on.

Lane Seminary and anti-slavery also involved two of the most prominent ministers of that time. Both Charles Grandison Finney and Lyman Beecher wrote autobiographies in later life in which they commented on the issues behind the schismatic actions of the General Assembly. Finney, who in March of 1836 had become a Congregationalist, was not actively involved in the Assembly, but his influence was felt, nonetheless. Finney had been a Presbyterian, had been responsible for the extreme

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483 Finney formally left the Presbyterian Church and the Third Presbytery of New York on March 13, 1836 in order to serve the Tabernacle Church, a Congregational congregation in New York City.
success of revivals in much of the area which was to be exscinded, and had by the time of
the Assembly in 1837 been teaching at Oberlin College in northern Ohio. His ministry
was surrounded with issues of discontent over theology and methods of conversion,
which had placed him in the center of the controversy over doctrinal issues. Doctrine
alone did not make Finney anathema to the conservatives, however. They also perceived
him to be an abolitionist. Finney described himself as thoroughly anti-slavery in his
memoirs.

When I first went to New York I had made up my mind on the subject
of the slavery question, and was exceedingly anxious to arouse public
attention to the subject. I did not, however, turn aside to make it a hobby,
or divert the attention of the people from the work of converting souls.
Nevertheless in my prayers and preaching I so often alluded to slavery and
denounced it, that a considerable excitement came to exist among the
people.  

Denouncing slavery for Finney meant more than simply speaking out against it, however. He stated in the *New-York Evangelist* of November 8, 1834, that slavery was a sin, and that
ridding the nation and the world of that sin was the duty of all. Practically, “I had taken the stand
in my congregation in New York City that no slave holder could come to our communion.”
Finney put his words into action, but yet he could not be described as the most radical of
abolitionists, as he also stated clearly that conversion and revivals were most important, and that
slavery was simply another sin that would die when the world was saved for Christ.

Finney’s own moderating tone and words, and his leaving the Presbyterian Church, did
not stop the Old School men from invoking his name as part of the reason for exscinding the area

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485 Ibid. 362, n. 29.
where he had the most success and influence. And Finney had not helped his cause of putting revival first when he said of the church and its leaders, “...The fact is that slavery is, pre-eminently, the sin of the church. It is the very fact that ministers and professors of religion of different denominations hold slaves, which sanctifies the whole abomination, in the eyes of ungodly men....it is the church that mainly supports this sin.”

Finney’s contemporary, Lyman Beecher, President of Lane Seminary and member of the Old School Cincinnati Presbytery in Ohio, had been accused of heresy, but had weathered the trial and been acquitted. His stance on slavery was the subject of an essay by J. Earl Thompson, Jr. in which Thompson described Beecher as a “Conservative Abolitionist;” that no matter how one characterized the nature of Beecher’s anti-slavery, favoring colonization or immediate abolition, it was against any mixing of the races, against radicalism, against societal equality, and would be judged in terms of a vision of a white male, if slave-free, world. This surely did not put him in the midst of the radical abolitionists, as was attested to by the Lane Rebels led by Theodore Dwight Weld, who had felt totally betrayed by Beecher. Conservative or radical, however, Beecher did not believe in the institution of slavery. In the second volume of his autobiography and correspondence, Beecher’s son and editor quotes him about the role of slavery in causing the schism in the Presbyterian Church:

The South had generally stood neutral. They had opposed going to extremes in theology either way. ... John C. Calhoun was at the bottom of

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486 Finney reciprocated the feelings of his opponents, saying in a lecture about the General Assembly in 1835 that “No doubt there is a jubilee in hell every year, about the time of the meeting of the General Assembly. (Reported in the New-York Evangelist, March 14, 1835, p. 42.)

487 Ohio Observer June 25, 1835. (There are no page numbers in this issue.) A longer portion of the reportage of Finney’s lectures can be found in Appendix G.

it. I know of his doing things—writing to ministers, and telling them to do this and do that. The South finally took the Old School side. It was a cruel thing—it was a cursed thing, and ‘twas slavery that did it.  

There has been little agreement that it was “slavery that did it,” either on the part of contemporary analysts or more recent historians. Bruce Staiger’s conclusion was that the evidence “leaves little doubt that the Presbyterians were the first important denomination to be torn by the slavery question.” Marsden believes otherwise, citing other historians and aligning himself with those who agree with his conclusions. Considering contemporary sources might suggest that both are correct.

Many who wrote in the abolitionist newspapers, of course, were convinced that slavery was sinful. Finney, in a lecture delivered in 1834 as reported in the Ohio Observer, said, “…The fact is that slavery is, pre-eminently, the sin of the church.” On the last day of the 1835 Assembly, when the slavery memorials were finally to be considered, an elder from the Presbytery of Ottawa, William M. Stewart, spoke to the issue:

Mr. Stewart, a ruling elder from the presbytery of Schuyler, Illinois, said, “…I hope this Assembly are prepared to come out fully and declare their sentiments, that slaveholding is a most flagrant and heinous SIN. Let us not pass it off in this indirect way, while so many thousands and thousands of our fellow creatures are writhing under the last, often inflicted too, by ministers and elders of the Presbyterian church.” (And of course he was chastised for being mean to fellow Presbyterians.) Even in the face of a motion to postpone, Mr. Stewart offered this resolution and spoke to it, and the moderator allowed it: “That in the opinion of this General Assembly...”

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491 Marsden, Appendix 1, 250-251.
492 Ohio Observer. June 25, 1835. (no page number)
Assembly, involuntary servitude, (except for crime,) or the holding our fellow men as property, is a highly aggravated SIN, and ought to be so regarded by all the judicatories of the church."^{493}

Of course, his motion did not prevail, nor did James Dickey’s minority report in the Assembly of 1836 that minced no words:

1. That the buying, selling, or holding a human being as property is in the sight of God a heinous sin, and ought to subject the doer of it to the censures of the church.
2. That it is the duty of everyone, and especially of every Christian, who may be involved in this sin, to free himself of its entanglements without delay.\(^494\)

According to at least one writer, all that was ever desired by those in favor of emancipation was the statement that slavery was a sin, “The most that abolitionists have ever desired of the Assembly was to bear testimony against slavery as a sin.”\(^{495}\)

That statement, however, was not believed by Southerners or Southern sympathizers. A letter from a Massachusetts Congressman, H.A.S. Dearborn, sent to a Congressman from Ohio, Elisha Whittlesey, is quoted as saying:

“As to the Abolition of slavery, it is chimerical and impracticable, other than by the gradual process of transporting such, as may be voluntarily manumitted, to Liberia or some other distant region. It is a subject with which the citizens of the non-slave holding states have no right to interfere. The rights of the people of the south, as respects slaves, was secured to them by the constitution...The organization of societies for the emancipation of the slaves, is not only a treasonable attempt to embroil the country in a civil war, but is a piratical crusade against the property of the farmers and planters of the South. It is a rash and reckless effort, under the garb of mercy, which will inevitably produce a servile war, which is, of all the disasters that can befall a country the most horrible. So far from such proceedings being humane, they would be productive of the most

493 New-York Evangelist, June 20, 1835, 98.
495 Philadelphia Observer, July 13, 1837, 110.
terrible, barbarous, and sanguinary consequences, and inevitably lead to a dissolution of the republic..."\(^{496}\)

Those who were concerned to keep slavery as it was made their voices heard in the Assemblies. The editor of the *New-York Evangelist* was upset at the idea, and the possible result:

> It has come to this! A portion of the members of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, are convened by a public notice from the Moderator, to devise measures for the defense of SLAVERY against the power of truth. What a record!

> It is understood that they have had repeated meetings already, and have come to the determination, that the General Assembly must and shall take some order on the subject of slavery, and that this order must and shall be a solemn declaration that it has no right or power to interfere with the matter in any way, directly or indirectly. Otherwise it is held out that the southern delegates will withdraw, ‘with becoming dignity,’ and form a new denomination – perhaps calling it by the descriptive and attractive title of THE SLAVEHOLDING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.\(^{497}\)

One of the reasons given for avoiding discussion about slavery in the judicatories of the church was that it was not appropriate, or possibly too divisive. Dr. Miller, from the committee on slavery, reported that a majority of the committee (Witherspoon, Hoge and himself) wanted to have nothing to do with the issue, “inasmuch as the subject of slavery was one of a political character, involving the political institutions of the country...”\(^{498}\)

Late in the 1836 Assembly, when it was too late to deliberate adequately, Dr. Hoge said,

> ...that the church could not deal with this issue because it was “inseparably connected with the laws of many states...and involves many considerations in regard to which great diversity of opinion and intensity of feeling are known to exist in the churches represented in this Assembly; and whereas there is every

\(^{496}\) *Ohio Observer*, October 5, 1833. (no page number)

\(^{497}\) *New-York Evangelist*, June 20, 1835, 98.

\(^{498}\) *Philadelphia Observer*, June 2, 1836, 86.
reason to believe that any action on the part of the Assembly in reference to this subject would tend to distract and divide our churches...“\(^{499}\)

However, it was not only the churches that might be distracted or divided, but the nation. Mr. M’Elhenny of the Lexington Presbytery in Virginia, again speaking in favor of a resolution to that presbytery that stated that neither the General Assembly of 1836, nor any General Assembly, had a right to speak or act on the subject of slavery – or all would rue the consequences:

WHEREAS the subject of slavery is inseparably connected with the laws of many of the states of this Union, in which it exists under the sanction of said laws, and of the constitution of the United States;  
AND WHEREAS slavery is recognized in both the Old and New Testaments as an existing relation; and is not condemned by the authority of God; therefore

Resolved, That the General Assembly have no authority to assume or exercise a jurisdiction in regard to the existence of slavery.”

In his discussion of his motion, M’Elhenny fleshed out his concerns:

“Either we will seek protection under our own banner, or we must abandon the Presbyterian cause in the whole Southern country…And if we are driven to the other course, sir, I tremble when I say, it will be the first step to the dissolution of the union of this happy country. …Sir, let this take place, and we may look for the judgments of heaven, the curse of civil war with all its horrors, to pervade this glorious country, which God has blessed beyond all lands. Some of us may live to see it, but whether we see the day or not, history will trace it back to its origin in a decree of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church.”

“True it is that politics makes strange bedfellows,” so said Charles Dudley Warner in 1870.\(^{500}\) Warner’s wisdom is certainly relevant to the Presbyterian Church in 1837. Contemporary writers of newspaper articles mention this interesting anomaly

\(^{499}\) Philadelphia Observer, June 16, 1836, 94.

when speaking of the General Assembly whose acts eventually split the Presbyterian Church nearly in two. Warner and his contemporary, Ralph Waldo Emerson, had other wisdom that sheds light on those who saw the actions of the members of the Convention as part of a longer strategy. “When classes are exasperated against each other, the peace of the world is always kept by striking a new note. Instantly the units part, and form in a new order, and those who were opposed are now side by side.”501 “If you wish to save men from any particular vice, set up a tremendous cry of warning about some other, and they will all give their special efforts to the one to which attention is called.”502

Sudden changes of interest or emphasis and new alliances were favored topics of contributors to the religious newspapers of the period. Elijah Parish Lovejoy, prior to his being murdered, wrote an analysis of the situation that was published in the Philadelphia Observer.

When in last General Assembly, we saw enough to satisfy us of the intrigue which was there going on, and of its probable results. We saw that the leading men on both sides were laboring to conciliate the South, to effect which they were both making concessions on the subject of slavery.

This evidence consists in the fact that the South have voted, with almost entire unanimity, along with the Old School party. Five or six years ago, there was a majority of New School, or moderate, liberal men in the church at the South. But now we see them coming up with united force to execute Lynch law upon brethren with whom a year or two since they were acting harmoniously. Whence is this? The reply to this question is found by calling to mind the fact that since 1831 the Slavery Question has come up in the church, creating new affinities and new antipathies. The Southern churches have determined to hold on to the slaves come what may; and have warned the Assembly not to touch their “domestic institution.” Being determined to preserve this, they were prepared to seek allies from any quarter...and so they went over, in a body to the Old School side, where they found a corresponding disposition, and cut off precisely those four synods where there existed the most opposition to Slavery. ...The question then was, who would go farthest in a compromise

of principle and in this dishonorable and most humiliating contest, we
rejoice to say that our Old School brethren carried the prize beyond all
dispute.503

Lovejoy blamed the change on the willingness of the southerners to adopt and
adapt to Old School principles in order to assure that the church did not take a stand on
slavery. Others, however, laid the blame on the northern Old School men, who wished to
purify the church, as they saw the effect of their actions. “But it is not true that a majority
of the ejected Synods are abolitionists... They are opposed to slavery, (as Princeton
always professed to be until it wanted the AID of the south to put down New
Schoolism...”504 This theme was resumed in a later article,

“No one doubts that the question of slavery modified the acts of
the last Assembly. The Old School party at the south have laboriously
endeavored to identify New Schoolism with abolitionism, and in this they
have been aided most assiduously by the ‘Presbyterian’ of this city, and
by the influence of Princeton.”505

The author of this last was not identified, but the duality of the argument could be
found in these quotations. It was to the advantage of both sides to cooperate.

Following the Assembly, the Richmond Religious Telegraph spoke of the issue
that seemingly hid behind the rest.

It is our earnest protest against the appeal to the feelings of the
south on the subject of abolition. The questions involved are too
solemn and too important to be decided by our feelings. If every man
in the exscinded synods, were a fierce abolitionist: that circumstance,
were it fact, ought not, and we trust will not influence the southern
churches to sanction an unrighteous decision. It is unmanly to appeal
to the fears of the south in discussing this subject. Southern Christians

503 Philadelphia Observer, July 27, 1837, p. 119. The article is entitled, “From the Alton Observer.”
505 Philadelphia Observer, July 13, 1837, p.110.
are not afraid of abolitionists; are not afraid to meet them any where, either alone, or in respectable company.\footnote{Ohio Observer, July 20, 1837. There are no page numbers in this issue.}

An explanation for their statements may lie in the following, from the \textit{Philadelphia Observer}.

\begin{quote}
‘We learn that the ‘Convention party’ at the south are telling the churches a tale like the following. ‘We know the measures of the Assembly seem strange to you and appalling, but you have not heard what we heard at the north. There was no other way to save the south, but to cut off those Synods. Only sustain the Assembly, and abolition will never trouble you again.’\footnote{Philadelphia Observer, July 13,1837, 110.}
\end{quote}

Continuing in this vein, the next week the \textit{Philadelphia Observer} again spoke of the strategy that they claim was followed by the south,

\begin{quote}
…Of Plumer, ‘His best friends speak of his conduct as most outrageous. The Southern delegation, in general, seem to have felt that their business at the Assembly was to cut off in the fact of the constitution enough Northern Synods to render slave-holding impregnable in the Presbyterian church.’\footnote{Philadelphia Observer, July 20, 1837, 114.}
\end{quote}

Individuals sometimes found themselves caught in the middle, with mixed concerns and warring principles. Particularly prominent in this regard were Julius Wilson of Cincinnati, an Old School supporter who believed in emancipation, and Robert Breckinridge, author of the “Act and Testimony.” Breckinridge and his willingness to use the fear of abolition of slavery as a tool to achieve his ends is described thusly:

\begin{quote}
In Scotland, in his discussion, he took the ground that he was opposed to slavery as really as the abolitionists, but thought his mode of abolishing it preferable to theirs...
But has Mr. Breckinridge changed? No. In the late ‘Convention,’ he said in substance, that he held to his old principles on this subject, but he was willing to let the subject alone for the present, because the ‘Convention’ had now a common foe in the \textit{New School} – a common object to promote.\footnote{Philadelphia Observer, July 13, 1837, 110.}
\end{quote}
Power and the capacity to control the actions of the Assembly was seen as another reason for the southerners to be wooed by the Old School of the north. The author identified as a “New Jersey Yankee” reviewed the actions of the Assembly in an article entitled, “Guess Work.”

2d. I guess that it was feared at Princeton, that the church would be divided on the subject of slavery – that the southern churches would secede and form an Assembly by themselves, and that the Northern churches would form by themselves, and that this would leave the Princeton party in so small a minority that they would not be able to control the church as in former times. And I guess this, because I had it direct from one of the D.D.’s at Princeton.510

However it was seen after the fact, and whatever the motivation of the participants, the use of strategy and coalitions to accomplish a goal was recognized as happening. Particularly clear was the identification of the process being followed as it was outlined in the Philadelphia Observer’s columns of September 15, 1836, written after the New School-dominated Assembly of 1836, and warning the readers of the way in which the church was being manipulated. This warning did not halt the actions of the Old School, although it did bring reaction, particularly to the idea of secrecy and conspiracy, both of which were denied in Old School newspapers.511

In response to the actions of the 1836 Assembly, in preparation for that of 1837, attention was drawn to an interesting fact:

Parties in the Presbyterian Church - The editor of the Presbyterian, in urging the Presbyteries to send up a full delegation of elders to the next General Assembly, urges this as the first reason: “The parties in the church are VERY NEARLY BALANCED.” How unjust it is, then, that either party should oppress or injure the other, or assume that IT is THE church, barely on the ground of having an accidental majority.512

510 Ibid. 110.
511 A longer analysis following the steps of the original article can be found in Appendix G.
512 New-York Evangelist, March 11, 1837, 44.
That majority, accidental or not, did happen. Many words poured out of men who were appalled or gladdened by the result. There were then, and continue to be now, many who believed that all that happened was due to differences of doctrine, or biblical interpretation, or governance. Some of those at the time, however, in areas throughout the northern portions of the church took a different view. A headline from the *New England Spectator* trumpets, “SLAVERY has done it all.” The bulk of the article, however, speaks of why the action had to be taken at this particular time.

“SLAVERY has done it all. All at once, slave holding ministers have discovered that the “Plan of Union” is unconstitutional, and that New England divines both at home and in the west, teach error. Why all this jealousy, just at this time? And why are those who live in the midst of and approve slavery, the most prominent in the work of excision? Formerly, a large part of the presbyterian clergy at the south were on the side of “new school” men. Now they are suddenly changed. Now their eyes are opened to the errors of their former brethren. Yes, the young New England clergy at the west, and the students in our theological seminaries, being eminently Bible men, carry out the principles and precepts of that holy book, on the subject of slavery. Here is the rub. Now is the time for excision; for if a delay is made, the pretext of error in doctrine and discipline will no longer hide the real monster, abolitionism. Soon the question most have been, in the Presbyterian church, had the offensive synods remained, - slavery or no slavery. Now the slavery party have the majority; and when there is dange[r] from the rapid-spread of abolition principles at the north, that a majority may soon become obnoxious to slave-holders, another and another excision may take place. There never will be wanting pretexts, when the object is resolved upon. We should not be surprised, if it should soon be resolved by ecclesiastical bodies at the south that an abolitionist cannot be a Christian. Even now they have practically declared that they are not citizens of the United States; for they will not allow them the privileges and immunities of citizens at the South.

And even the Cincinnati Journal, reflecting a heretofore reliably Old School ethos, was clear, both in what happened and why. “The question is not between the new and old school – is not in relation to doctrinal errors; but it is *slavery and anti-slavery*. It is not the standards which
were to be protected, but the system of slavery.” \footnote{New-York Evangelist, July 1, 1837, p. 106.} Slavery, and the battle against it, may not have been the only cause of the split in the church, but to ignore it or deny its power and influence is equally inaccurate.
Chapter 6  Conclusions

“… I have no doubt, that if the acts of the General Assembly should be properly sustained, and the separation begun should be carried out, the Presbyterian church, by getting clear of the New School, will, at the same time, get clear of abolition.”

DR. BAXTER

Actions of institutions enacted through legislative bodies seem to be simple and clear. What is enacted is recorded, and in our parliamentary bodies, becomes law at the end of the process. The motivations of those who were a part of the legislative body are less clear, sometimes very contested, and rarely known, unless they themselves make their motives known. So it was with the General Assembly of 1837 of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The outcome, the law if you will, was known. At the end of the Assembly there were meetings, exchange of writings through newspapers, letters, and even books were written. Churches changed their allegiance, new churches were formed, and eventually two denominations emerged, each approximately one-half of the former single entity. This much is known and is clear.

As is true of any complex society or institution, its diversity brings mixed messages, complicated outcomes, and contradictory histories. Considering the actions of a body from the vantage point of 170 years in the future means that all motivations are not known, and information is only as good as the sources. In the case of this project, there is the added dimension, however, of a body whose practices have been modified over the years, but whose basic ways of being are known and have been perpetuated. In addition, the Presbyterian Church today is not only heir to many practices and ways of

514 New-York Evangelist. September 2, 1837, 142.
being of the nineteenth century church, but is being buffeted by winds of controversy very similar to those that beset the Presbyterian Church in 1837. As is true of the world we experience today in all its complexity, the search for a singular cause of behavior is fruitless. At the same time it becomes necessary to try to search for, understand and perhaps give different weight to evidence that is available, even at a distance. Insight can be found from a great distance. Past conclusions may be found partially correct but not sufficient to be the last word. History helps us to widen our vision of the past while we live in the minutiae of the present and anticipate a future that is unknown.

In discerning the role of the institution of slavery and its effect on a church schism in 1837, many answers were found that could account for the motivation of the participants. In this conclusion, several will be considered first, including the issue of power and control, the impact of a Presbyterian ethos on its participants, and three major church concerns – ecumenism, revivals, and voluntary societies. A second section will consider how slavery was viewed, and the way in which it permeated and underlay the common life of the participants. Finally, there will be a short exposition and comparison of the ordination issues in the first decade of the 21st century with church life in the third decade of the 19th century. The quotation by one of the primary exscinders at the head of this chapter carries the clues – by removing the offensive part of the body, more than one goal was accomplished. The church could be purified both religiously and in society, a society that they understood God had made and over which God was sovereign and in charge. Therefore, the societal issue was also a religious issue, and the religious response had great impact on a civil concern.
a. Power and control; peace, unity or purity; Presbyterian or Christian?

Old School purists had been subject for years, as they saw it, to the will of the New School. The 1835 Assembly, in which the Old School had the majority, had given them a taste of what the church would be like if they could be in charge. Ever since the beginning of the heresy trials, those of Nathan Beman, Lyman Beecher, and most particularly Albert Barnes, the conservatives had attempted to purify the church through church judicial processes. It had not worked. A new tactic was necessary and possible, that of capturing control of the Assembly itself. While their published rhetoric, written after the fact, does not admit of this possibility, it is obvious from articles published after the conventions and from the analysis of opponents that the gathering of sufficient votes in the Assembly to accomplish their purpose, to control the Church, was a priority.

The strategy was laid out by the *Philadelphia Observer* in 1836, and the correctness of their predictions became apparent in May and June of 1837. The strategy began when the Assembly responded to conflict in 1831 by developing an affinity presbytery so that Albert Barnes would no longer be a flash point in the Old School Philadelphia Presbytery. Its movement to the final dénouement has already been told. However, there needed to be sufficient votes available in order to accomplish the goal of Assembly control. The receiving by the Assembly of the Associate Reformed Synod in 1821 was a key in the process to achieve control. The crucial role played by this presbytery, received by the Assembly as a body, and which became the second 2nd
Presbytery of Philadelphia, was recognized by contemporaries. “Mr. Brown…showed that Elective Affinity was first introduced into the Presbyterian church by the Old School, when they brought in the Associate Reformed church. It did not come from New England, but from good old Scotland.”

The writer recognized what both contemporary and later historians have suggested, that Presbyterian belief and behavior at this early time could be explained, at least in part, by whether the individual or group had immigrated from Scotland, where Presbyterianism was established and as dissenting groups emigrated together in response to prior church conflicts, or whether their origin was that of being tolerated or as a dissenting sect before immigration. Major leaders of the Old School in 1837 came from Philadelphia’s Second Presbytery. The editor of the Philadelphia Observer at the end of the article in which he revealed the strategy for excision and purifying, characterized the leadership of the Old School group responsible for the strategy: “The chairman and one other are ministers who have come into our connection from the Associate Reformed Church.” Others were even more specific, noting that the leadership included a Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, and the Corresponding Secretary and General Agent of the Board of Missions, both of whom were paid by the Presbyterian Church and yet were acting to undermine it.

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516 Philadelphia Observer, September 15, 1836, 149.
Non-geographic presbyteries had been in place long before the presbytery organized around Barnes, including one in Albany Synod in which an entire Congregational Association had been received, and one in New York City, as well. The Associate Reformed body’s reception was not the first, but was overlooked as a precedent by those who said they wished to rid the church of Barnes and the Assembly-designated affinity presbytery.

William Hill wrote a public letter to George Baxter in the *Southern Religious Telegraph* in which he compared the excised churches, presbyteries and synods to the Associate Reformed Synod, and then said that it was this new body that was the primary cause of the excision. Rigidity and purity here went hand in hand.

“but my dear friend, with all the glossing you can give this act, you give evidence yourself that these wild acts of excision, were not based upon the mere constitutional question. If this had been all, they would have been suffered to remain where they had been for 36 years before, and where the members of the old associated reformed synod, who were admitted into our church in the year 1821, are suffered still to remain in undisturbed possession. This former branch of seceders were admitted among us, without ever having adopted our form of government and discipline in any sense, nor have they to this day. But these were good, sound, orthodox, old school men, and the others accused, AND BYThem MAINLY, of being new school heretics.”

In the case of a merger, it is often necessary for both parties to concede something for the merger to be successful. Presbyterians in their earlier history in the American

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518 *New-York Evangelist*. September 30, 1837, 158.
519 It can also be true that mergers can fail even after they have been accepted. In a similar experience a few years after the 1983 merger of the northern and southern streams of the current PCUSA, in the context of a national committee, one southern stream member said that he had given up a lot to join the north.
continent had not been a large enough group to associate only with those exactly like
themselves. As a result, the early experiences had been those of conflict, followed by
necessary compromise, which had brought success. Later arrivals, with greater numbers,
had less reason to compromise, and less will to work at it. The willingness to make
connections outside their denomination through the Plan of Union of 1801 was necessary
for reasonable survival as a denomination on the sparsely populated frontier. Rapid
growth, however, brought unity but less purity. Those whose main value was purity were
not averse to violating unity in order to achieve peace. Tracing these three concepts is
quite easy in the writings of the protagonists. Few of the Old School spoke of unity at all,
and unity had been removed from the ordination vows. However, in the letter written by
the five elders of George Baxter’s church explaining their anger with him following the
Assembly, the ending of the congregational letter said, “we should seek forgiveness and
reconciliation from Him, and study to maintain the unity of the spirit, and the bond of
peace. …”

A later statement was issued by New School followers in preparation for the 1838
General Assembly was reported by the Boston Recorder,

Twenty-one distinguished clergymen of this church, among whom are Drs. McAuley, Richards, Halsey, Beecher, &c. have issued a circular
“To the Commissioners of the General Assembly of 1838” requesting them
to meet on Monday evening, May 14th in the first Presbyterian church of
Philadelphia, for the purpose of interchanging views, and of devising such
measures, as the present exigencies of the church may require. The request
is made to all, without distinction of party, in the hope that, by free
consultation, and by prayer, the unity and peace of the church may be
preserved, and unhappy collisions avoided. 520

“After all you accept the Westminster Confession.[1648] I only accept the Synod of Dort.[1618]” He
subsequently removed his congregation from the PCUSA. [This statement was made in the presence of the
author, a member of the Special Committee on the Nature of the Church and the Practice of Goverance.]
520 New-York Evangelist, Saturday, March 31, 1838, 49.
Unity and peace ended both statements, and purity was nowhere to be seen, the purity that was Baxter’s stated goal. Later in the letter already cited, William Hill acknowledged Baxter’s pursuit of purity in the church, as he spoke of “the church, whose constitution is too inefficient to preserve purity, and is therefore worth nothing. And just so was the constitution treated by the last Assembly, as a thing not worth regarding. And is this my old friend, Dr. Baxter, betraying himself in these inconsistencies and absurdities?"521

Among the inconsistencies and absurdities felt by many in the excised synods was the way in which the Assembly treated the successful cross-denominational voluntary societies, the issues of revivals, ecumenism and slavery – the four concerns that have been identified as causes of the schism in the Presbyterian Church in 1837. Voluntary societies were removed by fiat from being able to function in Presbyterian churches. Many newspaper columns and even a book were dedicated to justifying the work of the societies and their Boards, saying that they were really not partisan and were doing good things for the church in the world. That was immaterial to the Old School cabal that wanted control.

Revivals were accused of encouraging participants to be spontaneous and physical, encouraging women to be vocal and active participants in public meetings (called promiscuous gatherings when both men and women were present), and generally

521 New-York Evangelist. September 30, 1837, 158
encouraging what was seen as non-orthodox theology as converts were reportedly given the sense that they were capable of taking some part in their own salvation, small though it might be. Much of the difficulty surrounding revivals was removed by moderating the behavior of the worst of the purported offenders, Charles Grandison Finney, and was completed when he voluntarily left the Presbyterian Church. Even though no longer Presbyterian, Finney’s name evoked righteous anger and fear. The revivals continued, but at a much more modest pace, and largely in the northern and eastern areas where they had originally been so successful.

Ecumenism was successfully removed when the Plan of Union was abrogated, though the excision had actually begun years earlier when the former delegates to the Assembly who had earlier been welcomed as full participants with voice and vote, had first their vote and then their voice in the Assemblies removed. They might visit, yet were no longer full partners, but rather treated as strangers. The very success of the Plan of Union in which virtually all of the ministers in the excised areas became Presbyterians, and many of the churches as well, was problematic, as they might not be as pure in their theology as the Old School wished. However, all the tests that had been brought of that theory, as well as of the orthodoxy of the New School theology, had continuously come to naught in the courts of the church.

Even the nature of all the churches in the excised areas had not been tested, as Dr. Richards, the President of Auburn Seminary, stated in his letter sent to the Southern Religious Telegraph. Richards thanked the editor for supporting those who were
summarily removed from the church, saying that many who voted to excind had been fooled badly and acted “with so great precipitation.”

They are perfectly hoodwinked by unfounded rumors, and by the fears and prejudices which these have occasioned. Hundreds of ministers and churches, as thoroughly Presbyterian as themselves, both in doctrine and discipline, they have declared to have neither lot nor portion in the church which gave them birth. They have done this without careful investigation—without the shadow of a trial. Two of the Presbyteries, and I believe more, of the Synods of Geneva, to which I belong, never adopted nor acted upon the plan established in 1801; and yet we are proscribed, as if this were the fact.522

If, in his personal knowledge, Richards was aware of two thoroughly Presbyterian presbyteries, how many more would a thorough examination have uncovered? The swiftness of the action as well as its finality was a matter of question for Presbyterians who were to do all things “decently and in order.”

However, if one considers the four issues of the time, the only one that is completely out of the control of any single religious body is slavery. Each of the other issues could be and was controlled by the majority in the 1837 Assembly. The legality of the actions of the 1837 Assembly under the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church was in question at the time, and could still be debated. In retrospect, the legality of these actions, either in church or state jurisprudence, is very questionable, though that question was solved in the civil courts as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania found that there was no difference between the two parties, no clear owner of the assets

of the church. Rather, one year for a short time, one side had more votes and therefore the capacity to control the business and the assets of the denomination.

For some members of the majority of the 1837 Assembly, each of these items was important. Some were vitally concerned with purity or peace, some with removing ecumenical impurity, some with the questionable theology associated with both the revivals and the ministers who encouraged them. If each commissioner concerned himself about only one item, there likely would not have been sufficient votes to accomplish the task. Banding together meant that control over church issues might be possible. It had not been accomplished in the past assemblies, however. It took slavery to complete the job.

b. The Role of Slavery in the Excision of 1837

Documenting issues of slavery in the society is important, as Presbyterians did not see themselves as being apart from an impure society, but being an integral part of it. Everything that was secular was religious. Everything that was religious had a secular counterpart. Therefore, a part of the church could not accept the Old School concept of the church standing apart from issues of society such as slavery, or even of not interfering in the internal affairs of another state. The theology of Calvin emphasized that all people are related, a community together, and that God was sovereign over all, including the State and the states. For those people, interference was not only appropriate, but
required, in order to help save the souls of the lost, who in this instance were the slaveholders.

However, anti-slavery was far more multi-faceted than is usually understood by the general public. Abolitionist vs. slaveholder is not a sufficient description, especially at this time, early in the wars against slavery. As the church acknowledged that slavery was a problem and was not the chosen path for its people, different types of solutions were presented. Because of the early time period, compromises and slow change were presented and expected. Radicalism was less likely to be found, and was unlikely to be tolerated by the rational and reasonable Presbyterians. The removal of George Bourne from the Presbyterian Church, first physically and then by status, can be explained because of his radical and vituperative voice. The radical voice of students were equally to be shunned, with the result that the Federal Government withheld funding from Hamilton College until the faculty got the students under control, and Lane Seminary expelled the large part of its students because of anti-slavery activity. These very painful actions were frequently accomplished through procedures or statements that had little or nothing to do with slavery, but to assume that strong statements against slavery preceding the ousters were not to blame is to ignore the obvious. Because no mention was made in contemporary papers or books about slavery did not mean that slavery was not an issue. It may well mean that the issue was too painful and divisive to address directly. It is far easier to say that a process has been violated than to say that certain behavior is sinful and must therefore be changed.
A further argument about what had happened in the Presbyterian Church revolves about what had happened in the context in which the church found itself. Initially, as a tiny group, Presbyterians acted out of their experience of community and need to be together, even if that meant that their brothers in service of the faith were not Presbyterian. As the country and the church grew, the desire of the body was to manage the growth carefully and well, decently and in order. This meant following rules and identifying clearly who they were over against others. The church became big enough to exclude some people, rather than clustering together for mutual support. As the colonies became a nation, and the nation expanded through the addition of more immigrants, the diversity that had marked the first churches and presbyteries reached sufficient numbers for some to achieve purity of doctrine, at which time they could form a viable independent church, or to believe that it was possible to change others to mirror their beliefs, thus causing the larger group to become like themselves. That the product would become more like a sect than a denomination was not of concern. Purity was the greatest priority for some.

Were there causes beyond the doctrinal, though? Wyatt-Brown, speaking of the Old School-New School split, quoted an 1865 letter:

“Denouncing the Plan of Union, which forbade Congregational expansion, one delegate declared that Presbyterians, ‘have often come from the West to our New England, and ranged over our fat pastures, and borne away the fleece from our flocks; they have milked our Congregational cows, but they have made nothing but Presbyterian butter and cheese.”

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The Plan of Union did not forbid Congregational expansion, yet even so, the conclusion is opposite to what was being claimed by the Old School – that the Congregationalists were taking over the Presbyterians. The perception that early ecumenism was the problem was easier to justify than slavery. Ecumenism could also carry the taint of doctrinal irregularity. The history of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, particularly, was one of splits and schisms growing out of doctrinal differences. Having come from that recent (and for some, very recent) experience meant that fighting a doctrinal battle could actually deflect the argument from the division with slavery at its core. For some, the order of the church required that reform should embody purity of governance as well as purity of doctrine. Those who wished for order of only one kind, that of their tradition, were in the ascendant in 1837.

The slavery/anti-slavery debates had come to a head at the Assembly in 1836. The debates in and out of the Assembly were passionate. Dr. John Witherspoon, of the Old School, but respected by many and who had been the Moderator of the General Assembly in 1836, a New School dominated Assembly, was deeply involved in the actions of the Convention and the 1837 Assembly. He also was in correspondence with Lyman Beecher after the contentious slavery debates that roiled the 1836 Assembly, and which ended with the Assembly making no strong statement against slavery. Witherspoon, who lived in South Carolina, but had said that he wished to leave the slave
states for the good of his family, wrote to Beecher immediately following the 1836 Assembly about the church, the possible move to division, abolition and the South:

> Division I do most sincerely and deeply deplore; and if it must, as a dernier resort, come to this, I am strongly inclined to the opinion that Mason and Dixon’s line must be the ridge. It needs but the lifting of a finger to bring this to pass; and if it will promote the peace of the Church, it shall be done as speedily as the most violent Abolitionist could desire. And what will be the effect of this? Southern ministers will be utterly excluded from Northern pulpits and churches—Northern ministers driven from the South, or conducted to the ‘lamp-post a la mode de Paris’—a pretty state of things in Christian America, the nest of the eagle, home of the stranger, asylum of the oppressed.

Yet so it will be if the Abolitionists rule. Our land must be deluged in blood by a contest fiercer and more bloody and unrelenting than even Tory warfare during the revolutionary struggle. When men contend for liberty—an opinion—they will fight like men; but when they contend for property, they will fight like devils. This cause will arm son against father, daughter against mother, and prostrate the strongest and most tender ties of life. I have been a slaveholder from my youth, and yet I detest it as the political and domestic curse of our Southern country; and yet I would contend to the death against Northern interference with Southern rights, and would follow Dr. Beman to the scaffold on Charleston Neck if he continued to hold the sentiments he expressed at Pittsburg in 1835. I give you, Brother Beecher, my honest, undisguised sentiments. They may be wrong, but I think them right.

Abolitionism leads to murder, rapine, and every vile crime that an enthusiastic ignorant slave could commit, and therefore I abhor abolitionism and detest the Abolitionist. It was well that I was not on the floor of the last Assembly; but if God spare me, I shall be on the floor of the next; and let Lovejoy, or Patterson, or Dickey, or any like them, dare to advance the opinions I have heard expressed, and—the consequences be theirs.524

While this is a lengthy quotation, it is included because it speaks of nearly all of the issues that were before those who were to act in the Assembly of 1837: division of the church with ministers excluded and unity lost; division of the nation at the Mason-Dixon line; peace in the church because unity is no more; threat of violence, cloaked in

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patriotism; warfare of the gravest sort, inter-familial; cynical truths – men fight for liberty, but become devils when property is at stake; as a slave owner, Witherspoon hated the institution, but has greater hate over the thought of Northern interference in the business of the state; such interference will cause him both to kill and to rejoice in the death of his fellow minister. The very language he used, sprinkled with emphasis and threatening future strong action spoke of the passion this subject engendered in one who was in many ways a centrist. Witherspoon did not speak once of doctrine, or being in concert with other churches, or having voluntary societies within his presbytery, or of revival techniques. He spoke of slavery and its abolition, of his discomfort with slavery and his greater discomfort with someone from another part of the country removing slavery by fiat. Witherspoon’s type of passion first split the Presbyterian Church and soon the nation in a horrendous war, as he had predicted.

After the Rev. George Baxter, leader of the Old School, had accomplished his goals at the General Assembly, he began to be quoted on topics of abolition and slavery in general. The following is another quote from an exchange paper, the *N.Y. Spectator*, which illuminates Baxter’s public statements on emancipation.

SOUTHERN THEOLOGY.—Dr. Baxter, professor of Union Theological seminary, ‘denies that the relation is unlawful, it was recognized by the Scripture. If it were not true, that the Bible sanctions the existing relations, then the abolitionists are right in their principle of immediate emancipation; for if there be sin in the relation, its immediate abandonment is a duty.’

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In this quote lies the heart of the problem. The South did not want to lose the institution of slavery, an institution that brought it wealth and that was the source of its political power through the 3/5 clause of the Constitution. For conservative, literal interpreters of the Bible, to call something a sin is to identify that which must be removed from one’s life, followed by repentance. The South was not ready to repent.

Slavery, retaining slavery, was so important to a portion of the body that they could and would adopt theology that was not their first priority. Doctrinal purity was so important to others that they would adopt the retention of slavery in order to achieve their goals. In the case of both, the groups could and would agree that this particular cause of conflict, chattel slavery, was too volatile for the church to deliberate, and so they would act against their own heritage of John Calvin’s understanding of God’s sovereignty over all.

Without the bloc of votes brought in by slaveholders and their compatriots, there would have been no majority for the Old School. The slim majority they mustered in 1837 would not have occurred again, as the excised synods and presbyteries and congregations were expanding, while the rest of the church was contracting. The church split may well have happened later, but the Old School might have become victim rather than victor. At this time, however, the role played by slavery was clear and important. It was instrumental in the schism.
c. Relevance in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Mainline Unrest in the early 21st Century

It was early in the fall, and two of us had come from the presbytery to a congregational meeting in a small town church to speak about the actions of the 218th General Assembly that had caused concern in this church. Most of the concerns dealt in some way with the contentious issue of homosexual ordination. We gave a presentation for over an hour, answered a number of questions, and tried to communicate that much of the effect of the General Assembly actions were not and would not be known soon, perhaps not for several years. After this lengthy discussion, the final congregant, in tears, made a statement and asked a question, “In all this discussion, I have lost my Bible. What has happened to the purity of the Scriptures?” All the logic and explanation had been as nothing to her. She was in a state of grief and no amount of reasoning had persuaded her otherwise. Her question was not one that could be answered for her in a logical fashion, because it was a question from the heart.

Many such issues of the heart are heard in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) today. Their appeal to the purity of the church resonates with the calls in 1837 for the purity of the church. In the 20th and 21st centuries, however, the societal issue that has brought forth calls for purity does not begin with the long-ago issue of chattel slavery, but with all that surrounds homosexuality. Formal discussion in the PCUSA about homosexuality as it pertains to ordination in the Presbyterian Church began with overtures to the General Assembly in 1976 from the Presbyteries of the Palisades and
New York City, asking whether avowed, practicing homosexuals could be ordained in the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The response, received at the Assembly in 1978, was that: “unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the requirements for ordination...”526 This policy document and its recommendations were the beginning for an on-going dialogue in the Presbyterian Church. There have been many church court cases concerned with various aspects of homosexual ordination, and finally in 1996 an amendment was added to the constitution of the church that has been construed to prohibit such ordination.

Arguing the fine points of a current dilemma is not the purpose of this discussion, however. Rather, can we ascertain parallels between a time in which the church split into two parts over an issue that caused dissension in church and society and the ordination conflicts as they are found today in several mainline churches? The questions point in both directions. Can a societal issue of the early 19th century illuminate a current dispute? Can the arguments of a twenty-first century conflict aid in understanding and unraveling a nineteenth century church schism?

The nature of the Presbyterian ethos is remarkably consistent over the centuries. Presbyterians are educated and thoughtful, serious and self-absorbed. They are concerned about the nature of themselves in relation to their God, mediated through theologians as well as the tradition of years of existence, and holding in tension values that might well conflict, values that begin with being part of the “Reformed Tradition.”

A self-identification is often telling, and to honor both constant reformation and tradition leads to constant discussion and debate over proper paths and outcomes.

Having accomplished the prohibition of the ordination of practicing homosexuals through court cases followed by a constitutional amendment, it might seem that the church would finally be at peace. However, in the late 20th century, as in the early 19th, peace was not to be had, as both sides continued to press legislatively for their points of view. The constant pressure to change and modify rules and laws in order to assure uniformity of behavior and belief is very difficult. Many may be willing to be reasonable, yet it is those who are the true believers, the radicals on both ends of the spectrum, who continue to fight for their fiercely held beliefs. In the Presbyterian Church that often leads to schism. Presbyterians are not apathetic about matters of salvation, correct thinking, and especially decent process.

To recognize ambiguity is not to challenge the integrity or motives of another. To ignore such ambiguity is to allow assumptions or hidden prejudices to stand. So it was in 1831 – 1837, and so it might seem to be in conflicts that currently threaten the stability of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Peace, unity and purity must be held in tension, yet to do so was not possible in 1837 and may not be possible now. Dissension over one issue may be perceived to be so divisive that it is easier to deflect it – into questions of process, of legality, of constitutionality, or even to completely move the issue into a different field, that of doctrine, theology, and scriptural interpretation.
Another story. A small group of presbytery officials were meeting with leaders of a disaffected church in the office of the minister of that church. Discussion was being held about what was causing the concerns, concerns so serious that the church leaders felt that they must remove themselves together with their congregation from the denomination. I tried to bring up the topic of homosexuality, the topic that seemed to be omnipresent in all the church’s written literature about disagreements. The minister replied, with heat and condescension, “Oh, we don’t have any problem with homosexuality. We got over that long ago!” We did not talk about homosexuality again. We talked about the Bible, the nature of Jesus Christ, the constitution of the church – and yet, homosexuality, its purported sinfulness, and its role in church leadership and government was the catalyst, the hidden agenda behind all else that was said. It was the subject of biblical proof-texting, the discussions of purity of doctrine, and anger over the continual agitation by other portions of the church for the acceptance of changes in the constitution of the denomination. The leaders said that going to a more conservative denomination would mean that the church could do mission in peace without being disturbed by those who held different views. Here was a group of people who had taken a vow to “further the peace, unity and purity of the church” sacrificing unity, honoring purity above all, and thereby achieving peace.

The church today has had much experience in ambiguity, affirming the civil rights of homosexuals while denying them full church rights. The echoes of debates over slavery, over the interpretation of the Bible in the Fundamentalist-Modernist clashes of the early 20th century, over the acceptance of racial ethnic people as full partners in the
church, over the ordination and service of women, all are still present in the discussions about issues of human sexuality. The nature of argumentation in the church today revolves around the nature of Biblical interpretation, of doctrines presumably breached, and much is said about these large issues of faith. In an argument from silence, however, that nothing is said directly and constantly about slavery, or about homosexuality, does not mean that the issue is not vitally significant. The fact that relatively little was written about slavery in official documents does not mean that it was unimportant or not a factor. Rather, it was so divisive or felt to be so divisive that it could not or should not be discussed because it might split the church. When the church was split, it did not any longer need to be discussed.

Issues in this trajectory of problems also include the lack of trust – and show clearly how upset the New School was, because the Old School wasn’t playing the game – and was not just losing the battles, but was then subverting the agreed-upon process. Unless there is trust that both sides will agree or disagree reasonably and rationally, then all prior agreements may fail. The lack of trust in the process, of congregation members in their elected sessions, of churches in their presbyteries, of any of these bodies in synods or General Assembly is endemic today. The current constitution of the church includes a statement that “The organization rests upon the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.”

In 1837, when the General Assembly acted to remove, summarily and without judicial process, 4 synods, their presbyteries, churches, ministers and members from the denomination, trust was gone and love was in short supply. The

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extended contentious process concerning ordination today, together with a shrinking population and difficult economic times, has left little trust between the higher and lower governing bodies. The very diversity that characterizes a denomination has made it hard to achieve unity that doesn’t also require uniformity. Some parts of the body, in response to a variety of differences, real or perceived, have made a decision to leave the larger group in search of peace. In doing so, one hears the echoes of 1837 – where peace is achieved, doctrinal purity accomplished and unity sacrificed.

When two parts of the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Church reunited in 1869, no doctrine was changed to accommodate the newly reunited body. There was one major change, however. Yes, the Plan of Union had disappeared. (It has new life, in almost identical form, in the new relationship that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, the Reformed Church in America, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America formed fairly recently, sharing ministers just as in 1801.) The major change in the church and in society was that slavery was abolished, making possible the reunion between Old School and New School. The reunion did not include the Old School churches in the South, as they had seceded to form a new denomination, the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, in 1861, a denomination that subsequently became the Presbyterian Church in the United States. The precipitating cause for the schism in 1861, however, was not a vote on slavery, but rather a motion that was made – and passed - to have the Presbyterian Church affirm and support the Federal Union. For the churches in the part of the country that had already seceded from that Federal Union, this was too much – too much church interference in civil life, too much
speaking out by the church in the absence of a clear biblical warrant, too much Northern agitation to end slavery.

It is possible to consider the question of the 1837 exscinding by looking at current issues and arguments rather than trying to bring relevance to the present by looking at the past. While this may be dangerous, as the times are surely different, it is of interest that the media of the 1830’s, newspaper articles, reflect a continual raising of the same issues. A General Assembly statement in 1818 that was just short of calling slavery a sin did not cause the anti-slavery zealots to cease and desist. A gag order in 1836 of not talking about the subject at all didn’t halt the discussion. Always placing a discussion of slavery at the end of a docket for the Assembly didn’t silence the critics. Forbidding petitions to be presented didn’t stop them from being generated. Refusing even to consider the subject did not bring silence. Finally, in the General Assembly of 1837, at the end of several years of planning in secret and in public, the doctrinal people and the pro-slavery people, the purists and those valuing peace, came together strategically, thus negating the third part of the vow – the unity of the church. And slavery was the linchpin, the catalyst, the annoyance, even at times the glue of the event – not alone, not for everyone, not at all times – just omnipresent.
APPENDIX A

The Adopting Act of 1729


19 Day. At 9 a Clock A. Meridm. Post preces sederunt qui supra.

The Committee brought in an Overture upon the Affair of the Confession, which after long debating upon it, was agreed upon in haec verba;

Altho’ the Synod do not claim or pretend any Authority of imposing our faith upon other men’s Consciences, but do profess our just Dissatisfaction with and Abhorrence of such Imposition, and do utterly disclaim all Legislative Power and Authority in the Church, being willing to receive one another, as Christ has received us to the Glory of God, and admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances all such as we have Grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the Kingdom of Heaven; yet we are undoubtedly obliged to take Care that the faith once delivered to the Saints be kept pure and uncorrupt among Us, and so handed down to our Posterity. And do therefore agree, yt all the Ministers of this Synod, or that shall hereafter be admitted into this Synod, shall declare their agreement in and approbation of the Confession of Faith with the larger and shorter Catechisms of the assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being in all the essential and necessary Articles, good Forms of sound words and systems of Christian Doctrine; and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the Confession of our Faith. And we do also agree, yt all the Presbyteries within our Bounds shall always take Care not to admit any Candidate of the Ministry into the Exercise of the sacred Function, but what declares his Agreement in opinion with all the Essential and Necessary Articles of said Confession, either by subscribing the said Confession of Faith and Catechisms, or by a verbal Declaration of their assent thereto, as such Minister or Candidate shall think best. And in Case any Minister of this Synod or any Candidate for the Ministry shall have any Scruple with respect to any Article or Articles of sd. Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the Time of his making sd. Declaration declare his Sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall notwithstanding admit him to ye Exercise of the Ministry within our Bounds and to Ministerial Communion if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not Essential and necessary in Doctrine, Worship or Government. But if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge such Ministers or Candidates erroneous in Essential and necessary Articles of Faith, the Synod or Presbytery shall declare them uncapable of Communion with them. And the Synod do solemnly agree, that none of us will traduce or use any opprobrious Terms of those yt differ from us in these extra-essential and not-necessary points of Doctrine, but treat them with the same friendship, kindness and brotherly Love, as if they had not differed from us in such Sentiments.

528 In this and subsequent appendices, text that is a direct quotation will appear in usual type, while authorial interpolations will appear in bold-faced italics.
APPENDIX B  The Plan of Union of 1801 and Related Documents

Plan of Union of 1801


The report of the committee appointed to consider and digest a plan of government for the churches in the new settlements, was taken up and considered, and after mature deliberation on the same, approved, as follows

Regulations adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in American, and by the General Association of the state of Connecticut, (provided said Association agree to them,) with a view to prevent alienation, and to promote union and harmony in those new settlements which are composed of inhabitants from these bodies.

1. It is strictly enjoined on all their missionaries to the new settlements, to endeavour, by all proper means, to promote mutual forbearance, and a spirit of accommodation between those inhabitants of the new settlements who hold the Presbyterian, and those who hold the Congregational form of church government.

2. If in the new settlements any church of the Congregational order shall settle a minister of the Presbyterian order, that church may, if they choose, still conduct their discipline according to Congregational principles, settling their difficulties among themselves, or by a council mutually agreed upon for that purpose. But if any difficulty shall exist between the minister and the church, or any member of it, it shall be referred to the Presbytery to which the minister shall belong, provided both parties agree to it; if not, to a council consisting of an equal number of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, agreed upon by both parties.

3. If a Presbyterian church shall settle a minister of Congregational principles, that church may still conduct their discipline according to Presbyterian principles, excepting that if a difficulty arise between him and his church, or any member of it, the cause shall be tried by the Association to which the said minister shall belong, provided both parties agree to it; otherwise by a council, one half Congregationalists and the Presbyterians, mutually agreed upon by the parties.

4. If any congregation consist partly of those who hold the Congregational form of discipline, and partly of those who hold the Presbyterian form, we recommend to both parties that this be no obstruction to their uniting in one church and settling a minister; and that in this case the church choose a standing committee from the communicants of said church, whose business it shall be to call to account every member of the church who shall conduct himself inconsistently with the laws of Christianity, and to give judgment on such conduct. That if the person condemned by their judgment be a
Presbyterian, he shall have liberty to appeal to the Presbytery; if he be a Congregationalist, he shall have liberty to appeal to the body of the male communicants of the church. In the former case, the determination of the Presbytery shall be final, unless the church shall consent to a farther appeal to the Synod, or to the General Assembly; and in the latter case, if the party condemned shall wish for a trial by a mutual council, the cause shall be referred to such a council. And provided the said standing committee of any church shall depute one of themselves to attend the Presbytery, he may have the same right to sit and act in the Presbytery as a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church.

Resolved, That an attested copy of the above plan be made by the Stated Clerk, and put into the hands of the delegates from this Assembly to the General Association, to be by them laid before that body, for their consideration; and that if it should be approved by them, it go into immediate operation.


The Plan of Union of 1801 from the standpoint of Congregational Ministers in Hartford, Connecticut in 1799.

This Association give information to all whom it may concern that the constitution of the churches in the State of Connecticut, founded on the common usages, and the Confession of Faith, Heads of Agreement, and articles of Church Discipline, adopted at the earliest period of the settlement of the State, is not Congregational, but contains the essentials of the government of the Church of Scotland or [the] Presbyterian Church in America; particularly as it gives a decisive power to ecclesiastical councils; and a Consociation, consisting of ministers and messengers, or a lay representation from the churches, is possessed of substantially the same authority as Presbytery. The judgments, decisions, and censures in our churches and in the Presbyterian are mutually deemed valid. The churches, therefore, in Connecticut at large, and in our district in particular, are not now, and never were, from the earliest period of our settlement, Congregational churches, according to the ideas and forms of church order contained in the Book of Discipline called the Cambridge Platform. There are, however, scattered over the State perhaps ten or twelve churches (unconsociated) which are properly called Congregational, agreeably to the rules of church discipline in the book above mentioned. Sometimes, indeed, the associated Churches of Connecticut are loosely and vaguely, though improperly, termed Congregational. While our Churches in the State at large are, in the most essential and important respects, the same as the Presbyterian, still in minute and unimportant points of church order and discipline both we and the Presbyterian Church in America acknowledge a difference.

The Hartford North Association of Ministers

**Letter to the Middle Association of the Congregational Church from the Moderator of the Synod of Albany, 1807**

Cooperstown, Oct. 9\(^{th}\), 1807.

Rev. Brethren,

We received your communication by the Rev. Mr. Leonard with great pleasure, & were highly gratified with the object of his mission, which has occupied our serious deliberation. Blended as our people are, in the same settlements, & holding the same Divine doctrines; it is certainly an object of importance that we should be connected in some intimate bond of union & correspondence. Such an union would facilitate the establishment of the Gospel in many of the destitute settlements of our Country, by uniting our people in one common cause, & it would enable us to combine our exertions more effectually in suppressing error, licentiousness & vice; & promoting the great interest of pure morality & undefiled Religion.

Prompted by these considerations the Synod of Albany stand ready, with the approbation of the General Assembly, to form as intimate a connection with your Association as the Constitution of our Church will admit. We most cordially invite you to become a constituent branch of our body, by assuming the characteristic & scriptural name of Presbytery; adopt our standard of doctrine and government, & sit & vote with us in all the great & interesting concerns of the Church. Deeming the name, however, of less importance than the thing, although of consequence to uniformity in the same body; yet should you be solicitous to retain yours, it will not be considered on our part a bar to such an union. Nor do we confine our invitation to you as ministers, but we also extend it to delegates from your Churches, whom we are willing to receive as substantially the same with our ruling elders; to assist us in our public deliberations & decisions. Knowing the influence of education and habit, should the churches under your care prefer transacting their internal concerns in their present mode of Congregational government, we assure them of our cheerfulness in leaving them undisturbed in the administration of that government, unless they should choose to alter it themselves.

By order of Synod

Saml. F. Snowden, Mod.
APPENDIX C   Actions of the Synod and the General Assemblies

1. Pronouncements of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America through the General Synod on Slavery


May 26, 1787, page 627:
The following was brought in by the Committee of Overtures,

The Creator of the World having made of one flesh all the children of men, It becomes them as Members of the same family, to consult and promote each others happiness. It is more especially the duty of those who maintain the rights of humanity and who acknowledge and teach the obligations of Christianity, to use such means as are in their power to extend the blessings of equal freedom to every part of the human race.

From a full conviction of these truths, and sensible that the rights of human nature are too well understood to admit of debate.

Overtured that the Synod of New York & Philadelphia recommend in the warmest terms to every member of their body and to all the Churches and families under their care, to do every thing in their power consistent with the rights of civil Society to promote the abolition of Slavery, and the instruction of Negroes whether bond or free.

The answer was given on the 28th of May, 1787, page 629:
The Synod taking into consideration the overture concerning Slavery, transmitted by the Committee of Overtures last Saturday, came to the following judgment. The Synod of New York & Philadelphia do highly approve of the general principles in favor of universal Liberty that prevail in America; and the interest which many of the States have taken in promoting the abolition of Slavery. Yet inasmuch as men introduced from a servile State to a participation of all the privileges of civil society, without a proper education, and without previous habits of industry may be, in many respects, dangerous to the community; therefore they earnestly recommend it to all the members belonging to their communion, to give those persons who are at present held in servitude such good education as to prepare them for the better enjoyment of freedom. And they moreover recommend that masters, whenever they find servants disposed to make a just improvement of the privilege, would give them a peculium, or grant them sufficient time, & sufficient means of procuring their own Liberty at a moderate rate, that, thereby, they may be brought into society with those habits of industry that may render them useful citizens, and finally, they recommend it to all their people to use the most prudent measures consistent with the interests & the state of civil Society in the countries where they live, to procure eventually the final abolition of Slavery in America.
The following overture was brought in by the Committee of Bills and Overtures, viz.

“A serious and conscientious person, a member of a Presbyterian congregation, who views the slavery of the negroes as a moral evil, highly offensive to God, and injurious to the interests of the gospel, lives under the ministry of a person, or amongst a society of people who concur with him in sentiment on the subject upon general principles, yet for particular reasons hold slaves, and tolerate the practice in others. Overtured, ought the former of these persons, under the impressions and circumstances above described, to hold Christian communion with the latter?”

Whereupon, after due deliberation, it was

Resolved, That as the same difference of opinion with respect to slavery takes place in sundry other parts of the Presbyterian Church, notwithstanding which they live in charity and peace according to the doctrine and practice of the Apostles, it is hereby recommended to all conscientious persons, and especially to those whom it immediately respects, to do the same. At the same time, the General Assembly assure all the churches under their care, that they view, with the deepest concern, any vestiges of slavery which may exist in our country, and refer the churches to the records of the General Assembly published at different times, but especially to an overture of the late Synod of New York and Philadelphia, published in 1787, and republished among the extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of 1793, on that head, with which, they trust, every conscientious person will be fully satisfied.

Resolved, That Mr. Rice and Dr. Muir, ministers, and Mr. Robert Patterson, an elder, be a committee to draught a letter to the Presbytery of Transylvania, on the subject of the above overture, and report in the afternoon.

Page 104, 3 o’clock in the afternoon of May 26, 1795

The committee appointed to prepare a draught of a letter to the Presbytery of Transylvania, reported a draught, which being read and debated for some time, a motion was made, Shall this draught of a letter be read and debated by paragraphs, or not? The vote being taken, the question was carried in the affirmative. The consideration of the draught was resumed, and after very considerable time spent therein, it was amended and adopted, and ordered to be signed and sent to the Presbytery of Transylvania by their commissioners.

*We have found the original draught of this letter, which it seems cause much discussion; and, as a part of the history of the discussions on this much litigated question,
we insert it, with the passages included in brackets, which in the course of the discussion were stricken out.

To our Brethren, members of the Presbyterian Church under the care of Transylvania Presbytery.

Dear Friends and Brethren—The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church hear with concern from your commissioners, that differences of opinion with respect to holding Christian communion with those possessed of slaves, agitate the minds of some among you, and threaten divisions which may have the most ruinous tendency. The subject of slavery has repeatedly claimed the attention of the General Assembly, and the commissioners from the Presbytery of Transylvania are furnished with attested copies of these decisions, to be read by the Presbytery when it shall appear to them proper, together with a copy of this letter, to the several churches under their care.

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.

[The General Assembly earnestly recommend to all under the care of any of their Presbyteries, who may be in possession of slaves, to make conscience to bring all of them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; to have them taught to read; to impress their minds with the importance of Christianity, ad to familiarize them to habits of industry and order. A neglect of this is inconsistent with the character of a Christian master; but the observance might prevent, in great part, what is really the moral evil attending slavery, namely, allowing precious souls under the charge of masters to perish for lack of knowledge. Freedom is desirable, but it cannot at all times be enjoyed with advantage; a parent to set his child loose from all authority, would be doing him the most essential injury. The child must first be prepared by education and discipline to act for himself, before the restraint of parental authority is taken off. A slave let loose upon society, ignorant, idle, and headstrong, is in a state to injure others, and to ruin himself. No Christian master can answer for such conduct to his own mind. The slave must first be in a situation to act properly as a member of civil society, before he can advantageously be introduced therein.]

Forbearance and peace are frequently inculcated and enjoined in the New Testament. [We at present know in part only. The most perfect knowledge of mortals in reference to immortals, is the knowledge of childhood in reference to manhood. We ought therefore always to be diffident of ourselves, and rather to suspect ourselves, than by an obstinate adherence to any favourable opinion, to hazard the peace and union of the Church.] Blessed are the peacemakers. Let no one do any thing through strife and vainglory. Let each esteem others better than himself. The followers of Jesus ought conscientiously to walk worthy of their vocation, with all lowliness, and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. If every difference of opinion were to keep men at a distance, they could subsist in no state of society, either civil or religious. The General Assembly would impress this upon the minds of their brethren, and urge them to follow peace, and the things which make for peace.

[The most showy, useful, and desirable talents, shall pass away; prophecy, and knowledge, and tongues be forgotten, but love shall remain. It unites holy angels, and
pure human spirits. Let it be the cement of all the members of the Church of Christ on earth.

The General Assembly commend our dear friends and brethren to the grace of God, praying that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may possess their hearts and minds.

Signed by order of the Assembly.


Page 578, May 19, 1815
An overture from the Synod of Ohio on the subject of slavery was laid before the Assembly, and committed to Messrs. Osgood, Wilson, McIver, Dickson, and Connelly.529

Page 582, May 23, 1815
Mr. Bourne brought before the Assembly a paper, which the committee of Overtures had decided not to Overture, signed by several individuals in communion with the Presbyterian Church, some of them ruling elders, requesting advice in relation to the proper manner of dealing with members of the church who retain people of colour in slavery.

This paper was read, and the subject being for some time discussed, it was referred to the committee appointed to report to the Assembly on an overture from the Synod of Ohio on the subject of slavery.

Page 584, May 24, 1815
The committee to which was referred the petition of the Synod of Ohio, concerning the buying and selling of slaves, together with the request of several elders for advice on the same subject, reported; and their report was accepted. The report having been amended, a motion was made and seconded, that it be adopted. This motion being under discussion, the Assembly Adjourned till 4 o’clock, P.M.

4 o’clock, P.M.

The consideration of the report of the committee on slavery, which had been left unfinished in the morning, was resumed, and the report was recommitted to the same committee, with the substitution of Mr. Brown in the place of Mr. McIver, who had resigned.530

529 All of these men were ministers, except Connelly. Samuel Osgood was a Congregationalist, from the General Association of Massachusetts. Robert G. Wilson was from the Presbytery of Washington (Southern Pennsylvania), Colin McIver from the Presbytery of Fayetteville (North Carolina), Hugh Dickson from the Presbytery of South Carolina, and Elder John Connelly from the Presbytery of Philadelphia. The Synod of Ohio was comprised of presbyteries in southern Ohio, south of Columbus.

530 The Rev. Isaac V. Brown was from the Presbytery of New Brunswick in New Jersey, generally a conservative presbytery, but he replaced a North Carolinian from a slave state.
The committee to which was committed the report of the committee to which the petition of some elders, who entertain conscientious scruples on the subject of holding slaves, together with that of the Synod of Ohio, concerning the buying and selling of slaves, had been referred, reported, and their report being read and amended, is as follows, viz.

“The General Assembly have repeatedly declared their cordial approbation of those principles of civil liberty which appear to be recognized by the Federal and State governments in these United States. They have expressed their regret that the slavery of the Africans, and of their descendants, still continues in so many places, and even among those within the pale of the Church, and have urged the Presbyteries under their care to adopt such measures as will secure at least to the rising generation of slaves, within the bounds of the Church, a religious education, that they may be prepared for the exercise and enjoyment of liberty, when God in his providence may open a door for their emancipation. The committee refer said petitioners to the printed extracts of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, for the year 1787, on this subject, republished by the Assembly in 1793, and also to the extracts of the minutes of the Assembly for 1795, which last are in the following words, viz.

“A serious and conscientious person, a member of a Presbyterian congregation, who views the slavery of the negroes as a moral evil, highly offensive to God, and injurious to the interests of the gospel, lives under the ministry of a person, or amongst a society of people who concur with him in sentiment on the subject upon general principles, yet for particular reasons hold slaves, and tolerate the practice in others. Overtured, ought the former of these persons, under the impressions and circumstances above described, to hold Christian communion with the latter?”

Whereupon, after due deliberation, it was

Resolved, That as the same difference of opinion with respect to slavery takes place in sundry other parts of the Presbyterian Church, notwithstanding which they live in charity and peace according to the doctrine and practice of the Apostles, it is hereby recommended to all conscientious persons, and especially to those whom it immediately respects, to do the same. At the same time, the General Assembly assure all the churches under their care, that they view, with the deepest concern, any vestiges of slavery which may exist in our country, and refer the churches to the records of the General Assembly published at different times, but especially to an overture of the late Synod of New York and Philadelphia, published in 1787, and republished among the extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of 1793, on that head, with which, they trust, every conscientious person will be fully satisfied.

This is deemed a sufficient answer to the first petition, and with regard to the second, the Assembly observe that although in some sections of our country, under certain circumstances, the transfer of slaves may be unavoidable, yet they consider the buying and selling of slaves by way of traffic, and all undue severity in the management of them, as inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel. And they recommend it to the Presbyteries and Sessions under their care, to make use of all prudent measures to prevent such shameful and unrighteous conduct.
Page 608, May 18, 1816

An extract from the minutes of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, relative to the Notes appended to the Confession of Faith, was overtured, and committed to Drs. Wilson, Woodhull, Blatchford, and Nott, and Mr. Finley.531

Page 613, May 22, 1816

The following question, viz. ‘Ought baptism, on the profession and promise of the master, to be administered to the children of those slaves who are not communicants?’ was overtured and committed to Mr. Timothy M. Cooley, Drs. Spring and Romeyn, and Messrs. Hoge and Vandoren.532

Page 617, May 23, 1816

The committee to which was referred the following question, viz. ‘Ought baptism, on the profession and promise of the master, to be administered to the children of those slaves who are not communicants?’ reported, and their report being amended, was adopted, and is as follows, viz.

1. That it is the duty of masters who are members of the church to present the children of parents in servitude to the ordinance of baptism, provided they are in a situation to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, thus securing to them the rich advantages which the gospel provides.

2. That it is the duty of Christ’s ministers to inculcate this doctrine, and to baptize all children of this description when presented by their masters.”

Pages 629-630. May 27, 1816

The committee, to which was referred an inquiry proposed to the Assembly by the Presbytery of Philadelphia relative to the notes found in the book containing the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, reported; and their report being amended, was adopted, and is as follows, viz.

That the book referred to was first published with nothing but the simple text, without any Scripture proofs, or any notes of any description whatsoever. This is evident not only from the minutes of the General Assembly, but from the numerous copies of this first edition of the Standards of our Church which are now in existence. It is also equally evident from examining the records of the General Assembly, that not a single note in the book has been added to, or made a part of the Constitution of the Church, since it was first formed and published, in the manner above recited. Several alterations and additions have been made by referring them, when contemplated, to the Presbyteries for their decision thereon, in the manner pointed out in the constitution itself. But among all the

531 A reply to this overture was made on May 21, and was adopted, but was reconsidered, and so the clerks did not record the original answer.

532 The committee to which this question was referred was interesting in its composition. All were ministers, though two were Congregationalists, both from the General Association of Massachusetts. Only Samuel D. Hoge came from a slaveholding area, the Presbytery of Winchester in Virginia. John B. Romeyn was from the Presbytery of New York, and Isaac Vandoren from Hudson Presbytery in upstate New York. In addition, two members, Romeyn and Cooley, served on the Bills and Overtures Committee, which was the body that filtered all the business of the Assembly, and was able to choose what the Assembly would consider and in what order.
points thus referred, there is not found a single note which now appears in the book containing the Constitution of our Church. Hence it follows, beyond a doubt, that these notes are no part of that constitution. If, then, it be inquired how these notes obtained the place which they now occupy, and what is the character, as to authority, which they possess, the answer is this: when a second edition of the Standards of our Church was needed, it was thought by the General Assembly, that it would be of great use in itself, highly agreeable to the members of our church generally, as well as conformable to the example of the church of Scotland, from which we derive our origin, if the Scripture proofs were added, in support of the several parts and clauses of the Confession of Faith, catechisms, and form of government. A committee was accordingly appointed by the Assembly to select the Scripture proofs, and to prepare them for being printed in the second edition of the book. The work of this committee was, the following year, referred to another, and ultimately the committee charged with preparing the Scripture proofs, reported, along with these proofs, the notes which now appear in the book, and which were approved by the General Assembly, and directed to be printed with the proofs, in the form in which they now appear. These notes, then, are explanations of some of the principles of the Presbyterian Church, given by the General Assembly, and which, of course, the General Assembly may modify or altogether exclude, at their pleasure, whereas the articles of the constitution must govern the Assembly themselves, and cannot be altered or abrogated, but in the manner pointed out in the constitution itself.

On the whole, in the book containing the Standards of our Church, the text alone contains the Constitution of our Church; the notes are an exposition of principles given by the highest judicature of that church, of the same force, while they continue with the other acts of that judicature, but subject to alterations, amendments, or a total erasure, as they shall judge proper.

Resolved, That as it belongs to the General Assembly to give direction in regard to the notes which accompany the Constitution of which they are the supreme judicatory, this Assembly express it as their opinion, that in printing future editions of the Constitution of this Church, the parenthesis on the note, on this part of the Form of Government which defines a Synod, and which is expressed in these words, ‘since a Synod is only a larger Presbytery,’ be omitted, as well as the note connected with the Scripture proofs in answer to the question in the Larger Catechism, what is forbidden in the eighth commandment, in which the nature of the crime of man-stealing, and slavery is dilated upon. In regard to this last omission, the Assembly think proper to declare, that in directing it, they are influenced by far other motives than any desire to favour slavery, or to retard the extinction of that mournful evil, as speedily as may consist with the happiness of all concerned.
(Following is the note that was removed from the printed version of the Westminster Confession and the Catechisms, together with the original question found in the Constitution as approved by the Assembly in 1805 and printed in 1806. This information was taken from pages 17-18 of Christie, John W. and Dwight L. Dumond. George Bourne and 'The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable'. Wilmington and Philadelphia: The Historical Society of Delaware and the Presbyterian Historical Society, 1969.)

The note [was] appended to the word manstealing in the answer to Question 142 in the Larger Catechism. The question was: ‘What are the sins forbidden in the eighth commandment?’ The answer was comprehensive, including ‘theft, robbery, man-stealing and receiving anything that is stolen…’

‘…the note, added as all notes were after the original Constitution was adopted, was thorough and specific:
‘I. Tim. I, 10 (the law is made) for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for men-stealers. (This crime among the Jews exposed the perpetrators of it to capital punishment; Exod. 21, 16 and the apostle here classes them with sinners of the first rank. The word he uses in its original import, comprehends all who are concerned in bringing any of the human race into slavery, or in detaining them in it…Stealers of men are all those who bring off slaves or freemen, and keep, sell, or buy them. To steal a freeman, says Grotius, is the highest kind of theft. In other instances we only steal human property, but when we steal or retain men in slavery, we seize those who in common with ourselves, are constituted by the original grant, lords of the earth. Gen: 1, 28 vid. Poli synopsis in loc.)

Page 651, 1817
From the ‘narrative on the state of religion:’ The Assembly farther notice with pleasure, the general attention and exertion to alleviate the condition of the people of colour, in almost all parts of the country. A society, for the colonization of free people of this description is formed, and is patronized by the first characters of our nation. An institution likewise is established under the direction of the Synod of New York and New Jersey, for the education of men of colour for the ministry, and as instructors of their brethren.

Page 680, 1818
[From the ‘narrative on the state of religion’, the following sentences found in a paragraph on Public Morals]
4. Public morals are decidedly better than they were some time back throughout the church, but particularly in the Presbyteries of Niagara, Onondaga, Bath, Albany, Long Island, Lexington, Transylvania, and the cities of Philadelphia and New York. In these the improvement has been specially observed—though in other Presbyteries and places it is progressing. We feel constrained here to mention, and we do it with pleasure, that in those States where slavery unhappily prevails, the negroes are treated with more attention
than heretofore, and increasing exertions are made to promote their comfort and correct their vices, which are the natural result of their state of bondage.

Page 688, 1818
The following resolution was submitted to the Assembly, viz.
Resolved, That a person who shall sell as a slave a member of the Church, who shall be at the time of sale in good standing in the Church, and unwilling to be sold, acts inconsistently with the spirit of Christianity, and ought to be debarred from the communion of the Church.

After considerable discussion, the subject was committed to Dr. Green, Dr. Baxter, and Mr. Burgess, to prepare a report to be adopted by the Assembly, embracing the object of the above resolution, and also expressing the opinion of the Assembly in general as to slavery.\textsuperscript{533}

Pages 691-694. June 2, 1818.
The committee to which was referred the resolution on the subject of selling a slave, a member of the Church, and which was directed to prepare a report to be adopted by the Assembly, expressing their opinion in general on the subject of slavery, reported, and their report being read, was unanimously adopted, and referred to the same committee for publication. It is as follows, viz.

‘The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, having taken into consideration the subject of slavery, think proper to make known their sentiments upon it to the churches and people under their care.

We consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another, as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature; as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves, and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ, which enjoin that ‘all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.’ Slavery creates a paradox in the moral system; it exhibits rational, accountable, and immortal beings in such circumstances as scarcely to leave them the power of moral action. It exhibits them dependent on the will of others, whether they shall receive religious instruction; whether they shall know and worship the true God; whether they shall enjoy the ordinances of the gospel; whether they shall perform the duties and cherish the endearments of husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbours and friends; whether they shall preserve their chastity and purity, or regard the dictates of justice and humanity. Such are some of the consequences of slavery—consequences not imaginary, but which connect themselves with its very existence. The evils to which the slave is always exposed often take place in fact, and in their very worst degree and form; and where all of them do not take place, as we rejoice to say in many instances, through the influence of the principles of humanity and religion on the mind of masters, they do

\textsuperscript{533} Ashbel Green was a minister member of New Brunswick Presbytery, George Baxter was a minister member of Lexington Presbytery and Dyer Burgess a minister member of the Presbytery of Miami (Ohio). According to Christie and Dumond, Burgess was a compatriot of Bourne’s, who had been “withholding communion from slaveholders since going to Ohio in 1816,” and had at one time nearly been lynched by slaveholders for his beliefs. (Christie and Dumond, 59)
not—still the slave is deprived of his natural right, degraded as a human being, and exposed to the danger of passing into the hands of a master who may inflict upon him all the hardships and injuries which inhumanity and avarice may suggest.

From this view of the consequences resulting from the practice into which Christian people have most inconsistently fallen, of enslaving a portion of their brethren of mankind—for ‘God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth’—it is manifestly the duty of all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day, when the inconsistency of slavery, both with the dictates of humanity and religion, has been demonstrated, and is generally seen and acknowledged, to use their honest, earnest, and unwearied endeavors, to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and if possible throughout the world.

We rejoice that the Church to which we belong commenced as early as any other in the country, the good work of endeavoring to put an end to slavery, and that in the same work many of its members have ever since been, and now are, among the most active, vigorous, and efficient labourers. We do, indeed, tenderly sympathize with those portions of our Church and our country where the evil of slavery has been entailed upon them; where a great, and the most virtuous part of the community abhor slavery, and wish its extermination as sincerely as any others—but where the number of slaves, their ignorance, and their vicious habits generally, render an immediate and universal emancipation inconsistent alike with the safety and happiness of the master and the slave. With those who are thus circumstanced, we repeat that we tenderly sympathize. At the same time, we earnestly exhort them to continue, and if possible to increase their exertions to effect a total abolition of slavery. We exhort them to suffer no greater delay to take place in this most interesting concern, than a regard to the public welfare truly and indispensably demands.

As our country has inflicted a most grievous injury on the unhappy Africans, by bringing them into slavery, we cannot indeed urge that we should add a second injury to the first, by emancipating them in such manner as that they will be likely to destroy themselves or others. But we do think that our country ought to be governed in this matter by no other consideration than an honest and impartial regard to the happiness of the injured party, uninfluenced by the expense or inconvenience which such a regard may involve. We, therefore, warn all who belong to our denomination of Christians against unduly extending this plea of necessity; against making it a cover for the love and practice of slavery, or a pretense for not using efforts that are lawful and practicable, to extinguish this evil.

And we, at the same time, exhort others to forbear harsh censures, and uncharitable reflections on their brethren, who unhappily live among slaves whom they cannot immediately set free; but who, at the same time, are really using all their influence and all their endeavors, to bring them into a state of freedom, as soon as a door for it can be safely opened.

Having thus expressed our views of slavery, and of the duty indispensably incumbent on all Christians to labour for its complete extinction, we proceed to recommend, and we do it with all the earnestness and solemnity which the momentous subject demands, a particular attention to the following points.
We recommend to all our people to patronize and encourage the Society lately formed, for colonizing in Africa, the land of their ancestors, the free people of colour in our country. We hope that much good may result from the plans and efforts of this Society. And while we exceedingly rejoice to have witnessed its origin and organization among the holders of slaves, as giving an unequivocal pledge of their desires to deliver themselves and their Country from the calamity of slavery; we hope that those portions of the American union whose inhabitants are by a gracious providence more favourably circumstanced, will cordially, and liberally, and earnestly cooperate with their brethren, in bringing about the great end contemplated.

We recommend to all the members of our religious denomination, not only to permit, but to facilitate and encourage the instruction of their slaves in the principles and duties of the Christian religion; by granting them liberty to attend the preaching of the gospel, when they have opportunity; by favouring the instruction of them in the Sabbath schools, wherever those schools can be formed; and by giving them all other proper advantages for acquiring the knowledge of their duty both to God and to man. We are perfectly satisfied, that is it incumbent on all Christians to communicate religious instruction to those who are under their authority, so that the doing of this in the case before us, so far from operating as some have apprehended that it might, as an incitement to insubordination and insurrection would, on the contrary, operate as the most powerful means for the prevention of those evils.

We enjoin it on all church sessions and Presbyteries, under the care of the Assembly, to discountenance, and so far as possible to prevent all cruelty of whatever kind in the treatment of slaves; especially the cruelty of separating husband and wife, parents and children, and that which consists in selling slaves to those who will either themselves deprive these unhappy people of the blessings of the gospel, or who will transport them to places where the gospel is not proclaimed, or where it is forbidden to slaves to attend upon its institutions. And if it shall ever happen that a Christian professor in our communion shall sell a slave who is also in Communion and good standing with our Church, contrary to his or her will, and inclination, it ought immediately to claim the particular attention of the proper judicature; and unless there be such peculiar circumstances attending the case as can but seldom happen, it ought to be followed without delay by a suspension of the offender from all the privileges of the church, till he repent—, and make all the reparation in his power to the injured party.
“Act and Testimony”

To the ministers, elders and private members of the Presbyterian Church in the United States

Brethren beloved in the Lord: - In the solemn crisis, to which our church has arrived we are constrained to appeal to you in relation to the alarming errors which have hitherto been connived at, and now at length have been countenanced and sustained by the acts of the supreme judicatory of our church.

Constituting, as we all do, a portion of yourselves, and deeply concerned, as every portion of the system must be, in all that affects the body itself, we earnestly address ourselves to you, in the full belief, that the dissolution of our Church, or what is worse, its corruption in what once distinguished its peculiar testimony, can, under God, be prevented only by you.

From the highest judicatory of our church, we have for several years in succession sought the redress of our grievances, and have not only sought it in vain, but with an aggravation of the evils of which we have complained. Whither then can we look for relief but first to Him who is made head over all things, to the church which is his body, and then to you as constituting a part of that body, and as instruments in his hand to deliver the church from the oppression which she sorely feels.

We love the Presbyterian Church, and look back with sacred joy to her instrumentality in promoting every good and noble cause among men; to her unwavering love of human rights; to her glorious efforts for the advancement of human happiness; to her clear testimonies for the truth of God; and her great and blessed efforts to enlarge and establish the Kingdom of Christ our Lord. We delight to dwell on the things which our God has wrought by our beloved church; and by his grace enabling us, we are resolved that our children shall not have occasion to weep over an unfaithfulness which permitted us to stand idly by, and behold the ruin of this glorious structure.

‘Brethren, says the Apostle,’ I beseech you by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.’ In the presence of that Redeemer which by whom Paul adjures us, we avow our fixed adherence to those standards of doctrine and order, in their obvious and intended sense, which we have heretofore subscribed under circumstances the most impressive. In the same spirit, we do therefore solemnly acquit ourselves in the sight of God, of all responsibility arising from the existence of those divisions and disorders in our church, which spring from a disregard of assumed obligations, a departure from doctrine deliberately professed, and a subversion of forms publicly and repeatedly approved. By the same high authority, and
under the same weighty sanctions, we do avow our fixed purpose to strive for the
restoration of purity, peace, and scriptural order to our church; and to endeavour to
exclude from her communion those who disturb her peace, corrupt her testimony, and
subvert her established forms. And to the end that the doctrinal errors of which we
complain may be fully known, and the practical evils under which the body suffers be
clearly set forth, and our purposes in regard to both be distinctly understood, we adopt
this Act and Testimony.

AS REGARDS DOCTRINE.

We do bear our solemn testimony against the right claimed by many, of interpreting the
doctrines of our standards I a sense, different from the general sense of the church for
years past, whilst they still continue in our communion; on the contrary, we aver, that
they who adopt our standards, are bound by candour, and the simplest integrity, to hold
them in their obvious, accepted sense.
We testify against the unchristian subterfuge to which some have recourse, when they
avow a general adherence to our standards as a system, while they deny doctrines
essential to the system, or hold doctrines at complete variance with the system.
We testify against the reprehensible conduct of those in our communion, who hold, and
preach, and publish Arminian and Pelagian heresies, professing at the same time to
embrace our creed, and pretending that these errors do consist therewith.
We testify against the conduct of those, who while they profess to approve and adopt our
doctrine and order, do, nevertheless, speak and publish, in terms, or by necessary
implication, that which is derogatory to both, and which tends to bring both into
disrepute.
We testify against the following as a part of the errors, which are held and taught, by
many persons in our church.

ERRORS

1. Our relation to Adam. – That we have no more to do with the first sin of Adam
   than with the sins of any other parent.
2. Native depravity. – That there is no such thing as original sin: that infants come
   into the world as perfectly free from corruption of nature as Adam was when he was
   created: that by original sin nothing more is meant than the fact that all the posterity of
   Adam, though born entirely free from moral defilement, will always begin to sin when
   they begin to exercise moral agency, and that this fact is somehow connected with the fall
   of Adam.
3. Imputation. – That the doctrine of imputed sin and imputed righteousness is a
   novelty, and is nonsense.
4. Ability. – That the impenitent sinner is by nature, and independently of the aid of
   the Holy Spirit, in full possession of all the powers necessary to a compliance with the
   commanding God: and that if he laboured under any kind of inability, natural or moral,
   which he could not remove himself, he would be excusable for not complying with God’s
   will.
5. Regeneration. – That man’s regeneration is his own act: That it consists merely in
   the change of our governing purpose, which change we must ourselves produce.
6. Divine influence. – That God cannot exert such an influence on the minds of men as shall make it certain that they will choose and act in a particular manner without destroying their moral agency; and that in a moral system, God could not prevent the existence of sin, or the present amount of sin, however much he might desire it.

7. Atonement. – That Christ’s sufferings were not truly and properly vicarious.

Which doctrines and statements, are dangerous and heretical, contrary to the gospel of God, and inconsistent with our confession of Faith. We are painfully alive also to the conviction that unless a speedy remedy be applied to the abuses which have called forth this act and testimony, our Theological Seminaries will soon be converted into nurseries to foster the noxious errors which are already so widely prevalent, and our church funds will be perverted from the design for which they were originally contributed.

AS REGARDS DISCIPLINE

The necessary consequence of the propagation of these and similar errors amongst us, has been the agitation and division of our churches, and ecclesiastical bodies; the separation of our ministers, elders, and people into distinct parties; and the great increase of causes of mutual alienation.

Our people are no longer as one body of Christians; many of our church sessions are agitated by the tumultuous spirit of party; our presbyteries are convulsed by collisions growing out of the heresies detailed above, and our synods and our Assembly are made theatres for the open display of humiliating scenes of human passion, and weakness. Mutual confidence is weakened; a respect for the supreme judicatory of our church is impaired; our hope that the dignified and impartial course of justice would flow steadily onward, has expired; and a large portion of the religious press is made subservient to error. The ordinary course of discipline, arrested by compromises, in which the truth is always losers, and perverted by organized combinations to personal, selfish and party ends, ceases altogether, and leaves every one to do what seems good in his own eyes. The discipline of the church, rendered more needful than ever before, by the existence of numberless cases, in which Christian love to erring brethren, as well as a just regard to the interests of Zion, imperiously call for its prompt, firm and temperate exercise, is absolutely prevented by the operation of the very causes which demand its employment. At the last meeting of the General Assembly, a respectful memorial presented in behalf of eleven presbyteries, and many sessions and individual members of our church, was treated without one indication of kindness, or the manifestation of any disposition to concede a single request that was made. It was sternly frowned upon, and the memorialists were left to mourn under their grievances with no hope of alleviation from

534 It is interesting to note that this is exactly the way in which memorials on slavery would be treated in later assemblies, particularly in the 1837 GA, in which the memorials on slavery, though sent from several presbyteries, were pushed to the end of the docket, lumped together, and then, stating that there was a lack of time, were never considered at all by the Assembly.
those who ought to have at least shown tenderness and sympathy, as the nursing fathers of the church, even when that which was asked was refused to the petitioners. At the same time they, who have first corrupted our doctrines, and then deprived us of the ordinary means of correcting the evils they have produced, seek to give permanent security to their errors and to themselves, by raising an outcry in the churches, against all who love the truth, well enough to contend for it.

Against this unusual, unhappy and ruinous condition we do bear our clear and decided testimony in the presence of God of all living; we do declare our firm belief that it springs primarily from the fatal heresies countenanced in our body, and we do avow our deliberate purpose, with the help of God, to give our best endeavours to correct it.

AS REGARDS CHURCH ORDER

We believe that the form of government of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, is, in all essential features, in full accordance with the revealed will of God; and therefore whatever impairs its purity, or changes its essential character, is repugnant to the will of our master. In what light then shall we be considered, if professing to revere this system, we calmly behold its destruction, or connive at the conduct of those engaged in tearing up its deep foundations?

Some of us have long dreaded the spirit of indifference to the peculiarities of our church order, which we supposed was gradually spreading among us. And the developments of later years have rendered it most certain, that as the perversion of our doctrinal formularies, and the engrafting of new principles and practices on our new church constitution, have gone hand in hand; so the original purity of the one cannot be restored without a strict and faithful adherence to the other. Not only then for its own sake do we love the constitution of our church, as a model of all free institutions, and as a clear and noble exhibition of the soundest principles of civil and religious liberty; not only do we venerate its peculiarities, because they exhibit the rules by which God intends the affairs of his church on earth to be conducted; but we cling to its venerable ramparts, because they afford a sure defense for those precious, though despised doctrines of grace, the pure transition of which has been entrusted as a sacred duty to the church.

It is therefore with the deepest sorrow that we behold our church tribunals, in various instances, imbued with a different spirit, and fleeing on every emergency to expedients unknown to the Christian simplicity and uprightness of our forms and repugnant to all our previous habits. It is with pain and distrust that we see, sometimes, the helpless inefficiency of mere advisory bodies contended for and practices, when the occasion called for the free action of our laws; and sometimes the full and peremptory exercise of power, almost despotic, practices in cases where no authority existed to act at all. It is with increasing alarm that we behold a fixed design to organize new tribunals upon principles repugnant to our system, and directly subversive of it, for the obvious purpose of establishing and propagating the heresies already recounted, of shielding from just process the individuals who hold them, and of arresting the wholesome discipline of the church. We do therefore testify against all the departures from the true principles of our constitution; against the formation of new presbyteries and synods, otherwise than upon the established rules of our church; or of the Church of Christ; and we most
particularly testify against the formation of any tribunals in our church, upon what some call principles of elective affinity, against the exercise by the General Assembly of any power not clearly delegated to it; and the exercise even of its delegated powers for purposes inconsistent with the design of its creation.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE CHURCHES

Dear Christian Brethren, you who love Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth, and adhere to the plain doctrines of the cross as taught in the standards prepared by the Westminster Assembly, and constantly held by the true Presbyterian Church; to all of you who love your ancient and pure Constitution and desire to [restore] our abused and corrupted church to her simplicity, purity, and truth, we, a portion of yourselves, ministers and elders of your churches, and servants of one common Lord, would propose, most respectfully and kindly, and yet most earnestly,

1. That we refuse to give countenance to ministers, elders, agents, editors, teachers or to those who are in any other capacity engaged in religious instruction or effort, who hold the preceding or similar heresies.

2. That we make every lawful effort to subject all such persons, especially if they be ministers, to the just exercise of discipline by the proper tribunal.

3. That we use all proper means to restore the disciplines of the church in all its courts, to a sound, just, Christian state.

4. That we use our endeavours to prevent the introduction of new principles into our system, and to restore our tribunals to their ancient purity.

5. That we consider the presbyterial existence or acts of any presbytery or synod formed upon the principle of elective affinity, as unconstitutional, and all ministers and churches voluntarily included in such bodies as having virtually departed from the standards of our church.

6. That we recommend that all ministers, elders, church sessions, presbyteries and synods, who approve of the act and testimony, give their public adherence thereto, in such a manner as they shall prefer, and when a church court, a copy of their adhering act.

*[footnote] They can be forwarded to the Office of the Presbyterian, No. 9 George Street, Philadelphia.

7. That inasmuch, as our only hope of improvement and reformation in the affairs of our church depends on the interposition of Him who is King in Zion, that we will increasingly and importunately supplicate a Throne of Grace, for the return of that purity and peace, the absence of which we now sorrowfully deplore.535

8. We do earnestly recommend that on the second Thursday of May, 1835, a convention be held in the city of Pittsburg, to be composed of two delegates, a minister and ruling elder from each Presbytery, or from the minority of any presbytery, who may concur in the sentiments of this act and testimony, to deliberate and consult on the present state of our church, and to adopt such measures as may be best suited to restore her prostrated standards.536

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535 Note here again that only purity and peace are referenced. Unity is ignored or given a less high value for the church.

536 This timing was set for one week in advance of the 1835 Assembly, which was held on the usual third Thursday in May of each year, and in 1835 was held in Pittsburgh.
And now brethren our whole heart is laid open to you, and to the world. If the majority of our church are against us, they will, we suppose, in the end, either see the infatuation of their course, and retrace their steps, or they will, at last, attempt to cut us off. If the former, we shall bless the God of Jacob; if the latter we are ready for the sake of Christ, and in support of the testimony now made, not only to be cut off, but if need be, to die also. If, on the other hand, the body be yet in the main, sound, as we would fondly hope, we have here, frankly, openly, and candidly, laid before our erring brethren the course we are, by the grace of God, irrevocably determined to pursue. It is our steadfast aim to reform the church or to testify against its errors and defections, until testimony will be no longer heard. And we commit the issue into the hands of him who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

MINISTERS
James Magrave
Robert J. Breckinridge
James Latta
Ashbel Green
Samuel D. Blythe
S. H. Crane
J. W. Scott
William Latta
Robert Steel
Alexander A. Campbell
John Gray
James Scott
Joshua L. Wilson
Alexander McFarlane
Jacob Coon
Isaac N. Candee
Robert Love
James W. McKennan
David R. Preston
William Wylie
William M. Engles
Cornelius H. Mustard
James C. Watson
William L. Breckinridge
John H. Symmes
I.V. Brown
David McKinney
George Marshall
Ebenezer H. Snowden
Oscar Harris
William J. Gibson
William Sickles
Benjamin F. Spilman
George D. McCuesin
George W. Janvier
Samuel G. Winchester
George Junkin

ELDERS
Samuel Boyd
Edward VanHorn
Williamson Dunn
James Algeo
James Agnew
Henry McKeen
Charles Davis
William Wallace
A.D. Hepburn
Joseph P. Engles
James McFarren
A. Symington
A. Bayless
Wm. Agnew
George Morris
Hugh Campbell
Thomas McKeen
James Wilson
Daniel B. Price
Carver Hotchkiss
Charles Woodward
W. A. A. Posey
James Carnahan
Moses Reed
James Steel
George Durfor
John Sharp

Philadelphia, May 27, 1834
The consideration of the unfinished business of the morning. Overture No. 9 was resumed and the resolutions contained in said Overture were amended, adopted and ordered to be published in the Ohio Observer as follows viz.

**Resolved**, That this Presbytery consider slavery as it exists in our Country to be morally wrong; a direct and palpable violation of the Moral Law and at utter variance with the Spirit and precepts of the Gospel, and that in our opinion the Presbyterian Church in the United states ought so to consider and declare it.

**Resolved**, That we deeply deplore and wholly disapprove of those laws which debar our colored brethren whether bond or free from common education, and thereby from reading and hearing the truth of the Bible.

**Resolved**, That this Presbytery consider it the duty of every Christian immediately to use all means warranted by the word of God for the utter extermination of Slavery and for the repeal of all such unjust and oppressive laws.

**Resolved**, That we recommend to the churches under our care to offer special and fervent prayer to Almighty God for His blessing to accompany the efforts which we are making for the removal of Slavery from our land and for the enfranchisement of the whole colored race.

Presbytery had a recess until 7 o’clock.

*New-York Evangelist*, June 20, 1835   VI, No. 25, whole no. 273
Page 98

**Under the heading**, “A Voice from the West”
Detroit Presbytery on May 18, 1835, passed the following unanimously:
That the Presbytery regard the system of slavery in this country AS WRONG, AND BELIEVE THAT IT OUGHT TO BE UNIVERSALLY ABANDONED; -- That they view it as an enormous and alarming evil, whether it be considered in its physical, social, political, or moral relations; -- That it strongly tends to endanger the free institutions of our country, and THE PEACE AND PERPETUITY OF THE UNION; -- That those who are in bondage are eminently entitled to the sympathies and prayers of all true Christians, and that it is the duty of Christian freemen to promote in all suitable, kind, and becoming ways, the physical, intellectual, and moral elevation and emancipation of the enslaved; especially, by disseminating information, allaying prejudice and excitement, and cultivating a spirit of fervent and united prayer. A true copy of the minutes of Presbytery.  John P. Cleaveland, Moderator
Resolutions on Slavery

[In his article, “The Role of the South in the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-38,” Elwyn A. Smith reports on a story from the Charleston Observer, stating that Hopewell Presbytery had instructed its delegates very clearly on the subject of slavery and the stance of the Presbyterian Church, saying:]

“The political institution of domestic slavery, as it exists in the South, is not a lawful or constitutional subject of discussion, much less of action by the General Assembly…So soon as the General Assembly passes any ecclesiastical laws or recommends any action which shall interfere with this institution, this Presbytery will regard such laws and acts as tyrannical and odious – and from that moment will regard itself independent of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church…Our delegates to the approaching Assembly are hereby enjoined to use all Christian means to prevent the discussion of domestic slavery in the Assembly – to protest in our name against all acts that involve or approve abolition—and to withdraw from the Assembly and return home if in spite of their efforts, acts of this character shall be passed. [Charleston Observer, April 16, 1836, Benjamin Gildersleeve, ed.]

NY Evangelist for 1836, August 20, 1836

[Page 92 in a report from Transylvania Presbytery in Kentucky:]

“We regret to say that little appears to be doing among us for the IMPROVEMENT OF THE COLORED POPULATION. The attention of our people is beginning to be directed to this object. In some few places exertions are made both by preaching the gospel at stated times especially to them, as well as by family and Sabbath instruction, to promote the intellectual, moral and religious advancement of this race. We trust that the day is near at hand, when all our church members will feel it to be a privilege as well as a duty, to act towards this unfortunate portion of our fellow-men in such a manner as will show to all that they feel the obligation of the command to ‘love their neighbor as themselves.’

(Signed by the order of the Presbytery)

James C. Barnes, Stated Clerk”

NY Evangelist: Vol. VII, no. 43, Whole # 343, 10/22/1836   P. 3, Col. 3

A SIGN OF THE TIMES. – At a meeting of the Hopewell Presbytery (Madison, Morgan County, Geo) of the Presbyterian Church, the following resolutions were adopted: -

Resolved, That the following resolution be submitted to the Presbytery of Hopewell at its next meeting in Milledgeville, viz: Resolved, That Hopewell Presbytery will send Commissioners to the General Assembly at its next meeting and will instruct the Commissioners to ask respectfully and affectionately that the Assembly expressly deny or affirm the doctrine of abolitionism; and that if the Assembly shall refuse to act upon the slave question, or take any indirect action upon it short of an unequivocal settlement on it; then and in either of such events, said Commissioners shall declare this Presbytery independent of the General Assembly and retire from its deliberations.
Rev. Joshua Leavitt – At a meeting of the Synod of Geneva at PennYan on the 4th day of Oct. inst. The following resolution on the subject of Slavery was adopted which, if you think best, I would be glad to have published in the Evangelist and Observer both. Very respectfully yours, DYAR FOOTE, Ludlowville, NY October 8, 1836

Whereas the subject of Slavery has been extensively discussed within our bounds; and whereas the judgement of this body has been asked on the merits of the case: Therefore, Resolved, in the judgement of this Synod, that Slavery is both a moral and political evil, and ought to be abandoned by all professed followers of Jesus. Which was entered on the minutes.

Resolution of the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia

SYNOD OF S.C. AND GA. – This Synod, at its late meeting adopted resolutions on abolition, similar to those of Charleston Presbytery. In regard to the General Assembly they say that the proceedings “evince a radical difference, in the views of its members, on subjects of vital importance touching the appropriate powers of the church, her doctrinal standards, and the legitimate exercise of her discipline,” which must necessarily defeat one of the main designs of the Assembly, to constitute the bond of union, peace, correspondence, and mutual confidence among all our churches. They go on to say that “an ecclesiastical is preferable to a mere voluntary organization for Missionary purposes,” especially because it more effectually embodies the energy of the church and calls forth her resources on established principles, and through its own appointed and responsible officers, and because such an organization partakes of the spirit of the church, receives and imparts spiritual life, and in perpetuity runs parallel with the church without depending upon extraneous aid – that the present condition of the church and the world demands such an organization not only on the ground of duty but of expediency. They therefore unanimously approve the Western F.M. Society, and hope it will soon become the board of the Presbyterian church, in which case they will join it without delay. In regard to their own southern board, which is perfectly independent and ecclesiastical, they say unanimously, that

Since it has never been interfered with in any way by its Executive Committee, the A.B.C.F. M. in the exercise of its preferences and plans – since it is pledged to Missionaries from among ourselves, who are Presbyterians, who have gone forth with our assurances of support, and who are now located in fields of great importance, and of heavy expense, and who have not been consulted on this subject, and whose support demands an amount greater than we can raise, and which the A.B.C.F.M. is engaged to see met – and since it is not yet absolutely certain that the whole south may not be required to act independently in this cause – this Synod do not think it expedient, at present to alter the relations of the S.B.F.M.

They also voted unanimously, that Barnes’ Notes merit the reprehension of our ecclesiastical judicatories, and they give their sanction to the proposed convention on the state of the church at Philadelphia, of “delegates from orthodox presbyteries and minorities of presbyteries, clothed with full powers.”
March 4, 1837  page 39, col. 2-3  Ontario Presbytery

“Mr. Editor – The undersigned were appointed by the Ontario Presbytery at their Sessions, held at Mount Morris, Jan. 7, 1837, a Committee to procure the publication of the following extract from their minutes on the subject of slavery, in the New York Observer, New-York Evangelist, and Buffalo Spectator. Will you have the goodness to insert the same in your paper? C. H. Goodrich, S. C. Brown, Felix Tracy, Committee January 20, 1837

“The Committee appointed on the subject of slavery would respectfully report, that they have endeavored carefully to examine the subject, and beg leave to recommend to the Presbytery the adoption of the following resolution:

Resolved, That we consider the enslaving of one part of the human race by another, as a gross violation of the most sacred rights of human nature; as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves; and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ, which enjoin, that Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”

That, therefore, we consider it the duty of all Christians, adopting all wise and prudent measures, “To use their honest, earnest, and unwearied endeavors, as speedily as possible to obtain the complete abolition of slavery in our land, and if possible, throughout the world.”

“The report was accepted and adopted unanimously.”

New York Evangelist, March 18, 1837, page 46
ANNUAL NARRATIVE OF THE PRESBYTERY OF GENESEE
James B. Shaw  Stated Clerk

The subject of moral reform has also excited considerable interest and attention in some of our churches, and suitable efforts have been made for its advancement. The principles of Abolition have obtained a deep and permanent interest in the feelings of our ministers and members generally. While some indeed report silence in the matter, others report that their members almost universally are the friends of the immediate emancipation of the slave. The monthly concert of prayer in behalf of the oppressed, is attended in some of the churches.

New York Evangelist, April 8, 1837, Page 58
Presbytery of Otsego
Cooperstown, March 22, 1837
To the Editor of the Evangelist:

Dear Sir - I am directed by the Presbytery of Otsego to send you the following preamble and resolutions accompanied with the request that you will give them an insertion in your paper.

Yours, &c,        A. E. Campbell, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Otsego
Sessions of Presbytery, Feb. 11, 1837
The Presbytery having received through their stated clerk, the circular of the Rev. Messrs. Phillips, McElroy and others, in behalf of the minority of the last General Assembly, informing us that a convention would be held on the 2d Thursday of May next, in Philadelphia, to deliberate on the causes and remedy of the present distracted state of the Presbyterian church, and inviting a delegation from this Presbytery to attend the same - would say:

That having attentively and prayerfully considered the whole subject, they are of the opinion that it would not be the part of wisdom with this Presbytery, to comply with the request, while at the same time they would not impugn the motives which have governed those brethren, in the proposal of the measure.

In support of our opinion, we present the following reasons:
1. The agitation of this subject might have an influence to create a morbid excitement in our own minds unfriendly to that spirituality and directness of aim and effort in the work of the ministry, which is now indicated to be specially needful in the present spiritless state of the churches.
2. As a Presbytery we are a united body, acting on the principle of minimal forbearance and love, with respect to differing sentiments and feelings, and should therefore be unwilling to do anything that might jeopardize that union.
3. We are of opinion that this system of perpetual agitation, is directly calculated to increase the very evils which the circular deplores - that it does this by directing the minds and hands of the ministry and the churches from those direct and practical efforts to enlighten and sanctify the world - which constitutes so important an item in the whole duty in the church of Christ.
4. We doubt whether such a crisis has yet come, in the affairs of our church, as would justify so extraordinary a measure as the one contemplated in the circular.
5. As we look at the proposed remedy, especially in connection with the line of operations which has for years been urging toward this crisis, we fear that we behold in it an aggressive movement against the reputation and influence of eminent individuals in the ministry, and also against the peace of the church - movement which is not without the appearance of spiritual ambition, though we hope pure from the intention of it. At the same time we are most strongly convinced of the entire unconstitutionality of the whole measure.

SLAVERY
The following preamble and resolutions on the subject of slavery were unanimously adopted.
Slavery exhibits moral accountable and immortal beings as mere chattels, things of bargain and sale - scarcely possessing the power of moral action. It holds them who were created equal with ourselves, lords of this lower world, to be mere bondages to the existence and comfort of others. ....in all the divinely constituted relations of life, and violates their claims Under its rule, the marriage relation, the source of all others, cannot exist, and in its stead is introduced, a debasing and corrupting system of universal concubinage. It forbids children to honor and obey their parents, and renders it impossible for parents to train up their children according to divine directions. It deprives
female chastity of its protection, and opens the flood-gates of licentiousness. In a word, it violates the claims of... the social relations of God’s appointment, and puts the property, the morals and even the life of the slave, in the power of the master: it is therefore an institution contrary to nature - unsanctioned by the divine law of love. The authority it claims is usurpation, and the subjection it demands, is unreasonable. The whole system is at war with the divine institutions. It is therefore sin, essentially sin, and all its claims are found in injustice - therefore

Resolved, That the buying, selling and holding of human beings as property, is, in the sight of God, a heinous sin, and ought to subject the doer of it to the censures of the church.
Resolved, That is it the duty of every one, and especially of every Christian who may be involved in sin, to free himself from its entanglements without delay.
Resolved, That we view this subject as coming...within the ecclesiastical supervision of the General Assembly, and moreover that we entreat that body to act upon it, and to express their decided disapprobation of the whole system of slaveholding.

(Parts of this article are illegible.)


THIRD PRESBYTERY OF PHILADELPHIA
The stated clerk having submitted to Presbytery a circular, which he had received from rev. John Breckinridge, D.D., and others, calling the selves a committee of the minority of the General Assembly - which circular recommends a Convention, composed of delegates from Presbyteries and minorities of Presbyteries, to be held in Philadelphia, before the meeting of the next General Assembly - the Presbytery,
1. Resolved, That the call upon Presbyteries and minorities of Presbyteries to elect Delegates to the said Convention, ...exercise of power nowhere given by our constitution...on the contrary, is directly at variance with the fundamental principles of Presbyterianism, a departure from the spirit and letter of our excellent standards; against such a departure this Presbytery desire to bear their decided testimony.
2. Resolved, That the perpetuated organization of ministers to resist the decision of ecclesiastical courts, is opposed to the letter and spirit of our form of government, which limits the action of minorities in the General Assembly to a simple protest. The minorities of the last General Assembly having claimed and exercised this right, they were bound hereafter “to submit to their brethren in the Lord,” or peaceably withdraw from the Presbyterian church.
3. Resolved, That our Form of Government regards the General Assembly “as constituting the bond of union, peace, correspondence and mutual confidence among all the churches” - and that consequently any efforts to impede its constitutional action, by ex parte conventions, composed in part of minorities of Presbyteries, summoned by minorities in the General Assembly, is revolutionary, schismatical, and adopted, if not designed, to rend the body of Christ.
4. Resolved, That this Presbytery, while it recognizes in its fullest extent the right of private opinion and action, under responsibility to God, is not less surprised than grieved
to perceive in this circular, and the pamphlet which preceded it from the same source, painful evidence, that one of our theological Professors and the Secretaries of our Boards of Missions and Education, have lent their official influence to weaken the authority and resist the deliberate decisions of the General Assembly, whose agents they are, and from which they derive their support.

5. Resolved, That we regard the prospective session of an unconstitutional Presbyterial Convention in this city, in advance of the General Assembly, as an outrage upon the feelings of the sound and peaceful portion of our Presbyterian population, who have been accustomed to regard with affection and confidence, the highest judicatories of the Presbyterian church.

6. Resolved, That the efforts made by the signers to the call for a Convention, (in a pamphlet issued by them) to impeach the orthodoxy of one of our members, after he had submitted to a constitutional trial and had been honorably acquitted by the General Assembly, is at war with the constitution of the Presbyterian church and a violation of ordination vows. It is one great design of church organization to afford a shield to character unjustly assailed -This design must utterly fail, when men claiming to be Presbyterians, assume to vilify those who have been tried and honorably acquitted by the highest judicatory of the church.

7. Resolved, That nothing is wanting to restore peace to the church but the ceasing of all attempts to agitate and revolutionize on the part of a few - and a general spirit of mutual forbearance and submission to constitutional authority.

A true extract from the minutes of the Third Presbytery of Philadelphia.

Attest, Thomas Eustace, Stated Clerk

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**New-York Evangelist, April 29, 1837, page 71.**

Brother Leavitt - The following preamble and resolutions were adopted by the Presbytery of Onondaga during its late session at Cazenovia, viz:

“Whereas the principles comprised in the system of American slavery are condemned in the word of God as highly sinful; and whereas, the action of the church in reference to the subject of slavery, in all former times, has adjudged it sinful according to the Bible; and whereas, a guilty apathy has pervaded the church at large, both in the north and in the south, in respect to this great and growing evil; therefore,

Resolved, That it is the duty of the church immediately to awake to the importance of this subject - to humble themselves before God for their past neglect of it, and appropriately to consider and rebuke the sin, and to wash their hands from the guilt of any direct or indirect participation in its baneful continuance.

Resolved, That it is the duty of the ministers of the church of Christ, to instruct their people, in the particulars of the sin of slavery as it exists in our land, and to admonish them of the duty to “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.”

Resolved, That the commissioners from this Presbytery to the General Assembly, be, and hereby are, requested, to use every appropriate influence in the Assembly to deepen the impression, that the system of American slavery is a heinous sin, and a flagrant outrage upon God and man; and as such, should be immediately wiped from the bosom of the church.”
It is, perhaps, proper to say, that Presbytery were not unanimous in the passage of the above resolutions.
Yours, John Gridley
Pompey, April 15, 1837

*New-York Evangelist, May 6, 1837, page 75.*

Lancaster Presbytery, Ohio
Resolved, That if the approaching Assembly close without opening a door of hope that existing evils will be remedied, then we will approve of measures designed cautiously to pave the way for a division of the church, by sending down overtures to the Presbyteries, and by endeavors generally to effect an amicable separation.
Yeas - 20
Nays - 17
Attest, James Culbertson, S.C.

*New York Evangelist, June 10, 1837, page 96*
Consisting of extracts of official memorials, testimonies, and reports sent to the General Assembly by various presbyteries.

*Genesee, N.Y.*—The principles of abolition have obtained a deep and permanent interest in the feelings of our ministers and members generally. While some indeed report silence on the matter, others report that their members almost universally are the friends of the immediate emancipation of the slave. The monthly concert of prayer in behalf of the oppressed is attended in some of the churches.
*Delaware, N.Y.*—Monthly concerts of prayer, embracing the conversion of the world, the success of Sabbath schools and of the Bethel cause, the abolition of slavery and the suppression of licentiousness, are observed in our churches; the first in most of them, the remainder in many.

*Philadelphia Observer, July 6, 1837, page 107,*
*Resolution of the Presbytery of Cayuga at Ithaca, June 21, 1837, which was “adopted unanimously.”*

*In part, the rationale for the resolution to follow:* “The doctrinal errors alleged to prevail and obtain countenance among the ministers, churches, and subordinate judicatories of the Synod of Geneva, are, so far as known to us, neither held nor connived at by the Presbytery of Cayuga…”

“As respects the gross irregularities in church order and discipline, with which we, in common with other Presbyteries, were charged with in the speeches of certain members of the majority of the late General Assembly, we know of no such disorders within our
bounds at the present time; and except to a very limited extent, they have never come within the sphere of our ecclesiastical jurisdiction. We have never, as a Presbytery, countenanced or connived at them, but have uniformly exerted our influence in favor of order, and wholesome discipline.

“We feel ourselves aggrieved, moreover, that while any member of the Assembly who saw fit, was permitted to retail slanderous and injurious reports against us to any extent he chose, no opportunity was afforded to our commissioners, although they demanded it, to deny, or disprove, or even to palliate these charges…” ‘Doth our law condemn any man before it hear him?’

Then, speaking of the Plan of Union as the main reason used to abrogate these four synods, the resolution says: “Now it is a fact that not a single church within the bounds of the Synod of Geneva was organized on this plan…”

Later, “We are shocked and scandalized by the avowal of the motives which actuated the majority of the last General Assembly in the aforesaid doings, which was that of securing forever a majority to certain men – a motive which we are astonished to find avowed by men professing godliness, holding offices in the house of God, and under solemn vows to study the peace and purity of the church.”

Finally, “We, in common with other Presbyteries, were respectively charged with originating and fomenting the present contentions and difficulties in the church; whereas we are free from all charges of this nature, and repel it as lying against men who have for a long succession of years been endeavoring to revolutionize our church by destroying its noble and expansive genius, and in circumscribing its liberal and tolerant spirit to the limits of certain contracted models of the old world unsuited to the character of the American people, and at war with the spirit and prospects of the gospel. We have been endeavoring to cherish and propagate the Presbyterian church on the frame work and with the genius of its pious and magnanimous founders; they have been endeavoring to reduce it to the measure and imbue it with the spirit of sectarianism, bigotry, and intolerance.”

And so they declare the acts to be null and void, that they will uphold all articles of the constitution (“observe scrupulously;”) send commissioners to the next Assembly; speak against the action binding the Assembly clerks to respect the past Assembly’s actions not to receive such commissioners; if such commissioners are not seated, to move to form a new Assembly; warn their ministers against tactics of the majority to get them to switch membership; ask for support of presbyteries not affected by the actions of the last Assembly; appoint a committee of correspondence to act as their agents in the foregoing; and pray to God to be delivered from all sins and forgive the church for its actions and consequent disorder.
HOPEWELL PRESBYTERY, Georgia, Saturday, March 3

Instructions to commissioners to the General Assembly were presented by committee and adopted by the presbytery as follows:

“The Committee recommend that the Commissioners be, and they are hereby instructed to avoid introducing unnecessarily the subject of Abolitionism…And further that they be instructed to vote on no proposition, in relation to the institution of domestic slavery, unless it be in favor of declaring it to be a civil institution, guaranteed by the Constitution of our common country, upon which the judicatories of the church have no right to legislate. And said Commissioners are hereby further instructed to withdraw from the Assembly, should that body take any action which, in their opinion, asserts the right to legislate on that subject.”
APPENDIX F  Testimony and Memorial, 1837

[Portions of the document developed at the pre-Assembly Convention of the Old School, showing the governance issues raised by the Old School, which were purportedly due to Congregational influence.]


In Relation to Church Order
Among the departures from sound Presbyterian order, against which we feel called on to testify, as marking the times, are the following:
1. The formation of Presbyteries without defined and reasonable limits, or Presbyteries covering the same territory, and especially such a formation founded on doctrinal repulsions or affinities; thus introducing schism into the very vital of the body.
2. The refusal of Presbyteries, when requested by any of their members, to examine all applicants for admission into them, as to their soundness in the faith, or touching any other matter connected with a fair Presbyterial standing; thus concealing and conniving at error, in the very strong-hold of truth.
3. The licensing of persons to preach the gospel, and the ordaining to the office of the ministry such as not only accept of our standards merely for substance of doctrine, and others who are unfit and ought to be excluded for want of qualification – but of many even who openly deny fundamental principles of truth, and preach and publish radical errors, as already set forth.
4. The formation of a great multitude and variety of creeds which are often incomplete, false, and contradictory of each other, and of our Confession of Faith and the Bible; but which even if true are needless...
5. The needless ordination of a multitude of men to the office of Evangelist, and the consequent tendency to a general neglect of the pastoral office; frequent and hurtful changes of pastoral relations; to the multiplication of spurious excitements, and the consequent spread of heresy and fanaticism, thus weakening and bringing into contempt the ordinary and stated agents and means, for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of the body of Christ.
6. The disuse of the office of Ruling Elder in portions of the Church, and the consequent growth of practices and principles entirely foreign to our system; thus depriving the pastors of needful assistants in discipline, the people of proper guides in Christ, and the Churches of suitable representatives in the ecclesiastical tribunals.
7. The electing and ordaining Ruling Elders, with the express understanding that they are to serve but for a limited time.
8. A progressive change in the system of Presbyterial representation in the General Assembly, which has been persisted in by those holding the ordinary majorities, and carried out into detail by those disposed to take undue advantage of existing
opportunities, until the actual representation seldom exhibits the true state of the Church, and many questions of the deepest interest have been contrary to the fairly ascertained wishes of a majority of the Church and people in our communion; thus virtually subverting the essential principles of freedom, justice, and equality, on which our whole system rests.

9. The unlimited and irresponsible power, assumed by several associations of men under various names, to exercise authority and influence, direct and indirect, over Presbyters, as to their field of labour, place of residence, and mode of action in the difficult circumstances of our Church; thus actually throwing the control of affairs in large portions of the Church, and sometimes in the General Assembly itself, out of the hands of the Presbyteries into those of single individuals or small communities at a distance.

10. The unconstitutional decisions and violent proceedings of several General Assemblies, and especially those of 1831, 2, 3, 4, and 6, directly or indirectly subverting some of the fundamental principles of Presbyterian government – effectually discountenancing discipline, if not rendering it impossible, and plainly conniving at and favouring, if not virtually affirming as true, the whole current of false doctrine which has been for years setting into our Church, thus making the Church itself a principal actor in its own dissolution and ruin.

In Relation to Discipline

With the woeful departures from sound doctrine, which we have already pointed out, and the grievous declensions in Church order heretofore stated, has advanced step by step, the ruin of all sound discipline in large portions of our Church, until in some places our very name is becoming a public scandal, and the proceedings of persons and Churches connected with some of our Presbyteries, are hardly to be defended from the accusation of being blasphemous. Amongst other evils, of which this Convention and the Church have full proof, we specify the following:

1. The impossibility of obtaining a plain and sufficient sentence against gross errors, either in thesi, or when found in books printed under the name of Presbyterian ministers, or when such ministers have been directly and personally charged.

2. The public countenance thus given to error, and the complete security in which our own members have preached and published in newspapers, pamphlets, periodicals, and books, things utterly subversive of our system of truth and order; while none thought it possible (except in a few, and they almost fruitless, attempts) that discipline could be exercised; and therefore none attempted it.

3. The disorderly and unseasonable meetings of the people, in which unauthorized and incompetent persons conducted worship in a manner shocking to public decency; females often leading in prayer in promiscuous assemblies, and sometimes in public instruction; the hasty admission to Church privileges, and the failure to exercise any wholesome discipline over those who subsequently fall into sin, even of a public and scandalous kind; and by these and other disorders, grieving and alienating the pious members of our Churches, and so filling many of them with rash, ignorant, and unconverted persons, as gradually to destroy all visible distinction between the Church and the world.
4. While many of our ministers have propagated error with great zeal, and disturbed the Church with irregular and disorderly conduct; some have entirely given up the stated preaching of the Gospel, others have turned aside to secular pursuits, and others still while nominally engaged in some part of Christian effort, have embarked in the wild and extravagant speculations which have so remarkably signalized the times; thus tending to secularize and disorganize the very ministry of reconciliation.

5. The formation in the bosom of our Churches, and ecclesiastical bodies, of parties ranged against each other, on personal, doctrinal, and other questions; strifes and divisions amongst our people – bitter contentions amongst many of our minister: a general weakening of mutual confidence and affection; and, in some cases, a resort to measures of violence, duplicity, and injustice, totally inconsistent with the Christian name.

**Method of Reform**

Such being the state of things in the Presbyterian Church, we believe that the time is fully come, for the adoption of some measures, which shall speedily furnish relief from the evils already referred to…In a word, it needs but a glance at the general character, the personal affinities, and the geographical relations of those who are antagonists in the present contest—to be satisfied that our present evils have not originated within, but have been brought from without—and are, in a great degree, the consequences of an unnatural intermixture of two systems of ecclesiastical action—which are in many respects entirely opposite in their nature and operation.

(This extract was taken from S.J. Baird, *Assembly’s Digest*, rev. ed., 1855, 712-715)
APPENDIX G  Newspaper articles, before and after the schism

[Ohio Observer “is published every Saturday morning at Hudson, Portage Co. Ohio by Warren Isham.” October 5, 1833, no page numbers, Columns one and two]

Letter from the “Hon. H.A.S. Dearborn, member of Congress from Mass. to the Hon. Elisha Whittlesey, member of Congress from this State.”

[Dearborn was evidently present when Whittlesey spoke on the 4th of July, 1833 before the Tallmadge Colonization Society, and Dearborn is commenting on the topics presented at that meeting. Dearborn says that colonization will work and be efficacious “if the whole people cordially co-operate, with the government, in providing the requisite funds.”]

As to the Abolition of slavery, it is chimerical and impracticable, other than by the gradual process of transporting such, as may be voluntarily manumitted, to Liberia or some other distant region. It is a subject with which the citizens of the non-slave holding states have no right to interfere. The rights of the people of the south, as respects slaves, was secured to them by the constitution. In fact they consented to come into the Union, on the express condition that the general government should not have the power to legislate on the subject, farther than to lay a tax upon, or prohibit the importation of slaves after 1808.

The organization of societies for the emancipation of the slaves, is not only a treasonable attempt to embroil the country in a civil war, but is a piratical crusade against the property of the farmers and planters of the South. It is a rash and reckless effort, under the garb of mercy, which will inevitably produce a servile war, which is, of all the disasters that can befall a country the most horrible. So far from such proceedings being humane, they would be productive of the most terrible, barbarous, and sanguinary consequences, and inevitably lead to a dissolution of the republic…. We have no right to advise, or power to dictate as to the course, or make any movement to effect the object, promulgated by the Abolitionists, either as individuals, or under the sanction of societies, or authority of our state or National governments. Prudence, justice, magnanimity and patriotism, therefore, demand that we should be silent and quiescent, until called upon, to give our support to such a plan, as the states directly interested shall devise. To them alone belongs the right, and to them must it be left to decide as to the time and the mode. Whenever we are requested to aid in such a scheme of transportation, or emancipation, as shall be deemed expedient and desirable, by the southern states, there is not the least doubt of a cheerful, hearty and liberal cooperation, in the north; but until then, we are bound by every principle of duty, of humanity, of honor, and a holy regard for the constitution and the perpetuity of the Union to refrain from every declaration, every act, every intimation of a desire to precipitate events, which must and should be left to the sole management of those, who have their lives, their fortunes, their all at risk, and who must be presumed to be the best judges, of the best mode of conducting their own affairs.

Editor Isham adds a column in which he says that the letter from Dearborn was published because he had been requested to do so by several people. It was his hope
that readers would be able to understand the full scope of the issue, of the way that slavery and its favored remedy, colonization, was impacting all the country, not just the south. Isham believes that the call to division and possible war, stated implicitly and explicitly by Dearborn, only serves to emphasize the vast amount of education needed. After much more lengthy argument with Dearborn’s premises, Isham then says that he hopes the sentiments expressed by Dearborn are not as widely accepted as Dearborn claims. Perhaps there are like-minded persons in the non-slaveholding states, “though we believe the number is small on the Western Reserve.”

Ohio Observer    Thursday, Feb. 20, 1834

/The paper has a column in it about Robert J. Breckinridge and his success at his new call in the Third Presbyterian Church of Baltimore. Taken from the Lexington Luminary.
Further from this same paper is a letter from John Frost, reprinted from the Western Recorder, and date-lined, Washington, Jan. 25, 1834, which speaks further of the Rev. Mr. Breckinridge, who attended the Annual Meeting of the American Colonization Society. Breckinridge is reported as saying,

“…this resolution comes to my heart. I go, sir, where religion leads. Where that stops I stop.” Breckinridge said, “…we are not to be restricted in speaking our sentiments as to the evils of slavery. We are at liberty to assail slavery. We support colonization, because we believe it undermines slavery. We believe too, that the principles of the Bible condemn slavery.”

Frost further quotes from the meeting, saying debate continued about the Colonization Society’s stance on slavery and speaking of abolitionists, “They charge us with obstructing them in their efforts to promote emancipation. We are not an antislavery society; neither Pro-Slavery Society. It is not for us to oppose any efforts which others may make to abolish it. …The Colonization society is to stand on neutral ground. Its members may be slaveholders or abolitionists. Our Society is wickedly deficient in love to the colored race …Our Society has not felt sufficient pity for the colored man. But it has done something.”
Ohio Observer 3-27-1834

Obviously Robert Breckinridge is still involved in the American Colonization Society. This issue continues the letter from John Frost concerning the annual meeting of the Colonization Society, as reported in the Western Recorder, and dated Washington, Feb. 19, 1834.]

“If the races are to be separated for the safety and comfort of the whites, the government must do it. It is too expensive a business for the church. Her funds are needed for more important purposes.”

(As the Society is being accused of secretly being an Abolition Society, Breckinridge’s speech “alarmed the southern members of the Society,” as well as the southern Congressmen. Frost gives special commendation to Gerrit Smith as well as Breckinridge for standing up to the panic-filled behavior of the southerners present, and then chides abolitionists for exulting in the failure and humiliation of their brothers in the cause, as the danger is that the public will become suspicious of and disaffected from all the societies, no matter what their cause or activities.)

New-York Evangelist, June 20, 1835, p. 98.

On Monday, June 8, the Assembly finally got around to slavery, which, because it was so late in the docket (of course) was moved to be referred to the next Assembly. Rv. J.H. Dickey of Chillicothe Presbytery, said, “…it was evident that the house would not enter into this discussion now. He believed there were many and great evils in the Presbyterian church, but the doctrine of slaveholding, he was fully persuaded was the worst heresy now found in the church. He believed it could be proved to be more insidious, more difficult, ruinous to more souls, including its influence on both master and slave.”

Mr. Stewart, a ruling elder from the presbytery of Schuyler, Illinois, said, “…I hope this Assembly are prepared to come out fully and declare their sentiments, that slaveholding is a most flagrant and heinous SIN. Let us not pass it off in this indirect way, while so many thousands and thousands of our fellow creatures are writhing under the last, often inflicted too, by ministers and elders of the Presbyterian church.” (And of course he was chastised for being mean to fellow Presbyterians.)

Even in the face of a motion to postpone, Mr. Stewart offered this resolution and spoke to it, and the moderator allowed it: “That in the opinion of this General Assembly, involuntary servitude, (except for crime,) or the holding our fellow men as property, is a highly aggravated SIN, and ought to be so regarded by all the judicatories of the church.”

Breckenridge now stated that he was “in principle an abolitionist.” He analyzed the positions as follows:
“1. Those who love liberty, and who believe in the birthright of man, and who desire that it should be given to all men as soon as is consistent with the public safety. These are found all through the slave states as well as the free, and constitute a majority of the people of this nation.

2. Those who like to drive this matter forwards, Jehu-like, reckless of the consequences.

3. Those who love slavery and are determined to maintain it.

It has come to this! A portion of the members of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, are convened by a public notice from the Moderator, to devise measures for the defense of SLAVERY against the power of truth. What a record!

It is understood that they have had repeated meetings already, and have come to the determination, that the General Assembly must and shall take some order on the subject of slavery, and that this order must and shall be a solemn declaration that it has no right or power to interfere with the matter in any way, directly or indirectly. Otherwise it is held out that the southern delegates will withdraw, ‘with becoming dignity,’ and form a new denomination – perhaps calling it by the descriptive and attractive title of THE SLAVEHOLDING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

Ohio Observer  6-25-1835

[These lectures, written and delivered in the fall of 1834, were published largely early in 1835 by Charles Grandison Finney, at this time a member of the 3rd Pby of New York. Finney gives his opinion of the way in which ministers, churches and members should act concerning slavery.]

“First of all, a bad spirit should be avoided. Nothing is more calculated to injure religion, and to injure the slaves themselves, than for Christians to get into angry controversy on the subject....Slave holding professors ...may endeavor to justify themselves, and may be angry with those who press their consciences, and call upon them to give up their sins. Those proud professors of religion who think a man to blame, or think it is a shame to have a black skin, may allow their prejudices so far to prevail, as to shut their ears, and be disposed to quarrel with those who urge the subject upon them. But I repeat it, the subject of slavery is a subject upon which Christians, praying men, need not and must not differ.”

[The next concern addressed by Finney is whether the church or anyone else can be neutral on the subject of slavery, because]

It is a great national sin. It is a sin of the church. The churches by their silence, and by permitting slave holders to belong to their communion, have been consenting to it....It is in vain for the churches to pretend it is merely a political sin. It repeat it, it is the sin of the church to which all denominations have consented. They have virtually declared that it is lawful. The very fact of suffering slave holders quietly to remain in good standing in their churches, is the strongest and most public expression of their views that it is not sin.
For the church, therefore, to pretend to take neutral ground on the subject, is perfectly absurd. The fact is that she is not on neutral ground at all. While she tolerates slave holders in her communion SHE JUSTIFIES THE PRACTICE.

*Even with the emphasis Finney adds to his words, he is clear that slavery is a topic on which there is and will be difference of opinion, and Christians should not censor each other, denounce each other, but should treat each other “with great forbearance,” because to act otherwise will harm revivals, the church and even the slaves. He even says that all parties should inform and educate themselves on the subject, because it is such a difficult subject “that many good ministers who are themselves entirely opposed to slavery dread to introduce the subject among their people through fear that their churches have not religion enough to take it up, and consider it calmly, and decide upon it in the spirit of the gospel.”*

*Yet, his advocacy not to censor or denounce notwithstanding, Finney then gives his own practices concerning slaveholders. “We have excluded slaveholders and all concerned in the traffic from the communion. By some, one of this church, this course has been censured, as unwarrantable and uncharitable, and I would by no means make my own judgment, or the example of this church, a rule for the government of other ministers and churches….If I do not baptize slavery by some soft and Christian name, if I call it SIN, bold consistency and conscience conduct to the inevitable conclusion, that while this sin is persevered in, its perpetrators cannot be fit subjects for Christian communion and fellowship.*

To this it is objected, that there are MANY MINISTERS in the Presbyterian church, who are slaveholders. And it is said to be very inconsistent that we should refuse to suffer a slaveholder to come to our communion, and yet belong to the same church with them, sit with them in ecclesiastical bodies, and acknowledge them as ministers. To this I answer, that I have not the power to deal with those ministers, and certainly I am not to withdraw from the church because some of its ministers or members are slaveholders. My duty is to belong to the church, even if the devil belong to it.—Where I have authority, I exclude slaveholders for the communion, and I always will as long as I live. But where I have no authority, if the table of Christ is spread, I will sit down to it, in obedience to his commandment, whoever else may sit down or stay away.

I do not mean, by any means, to denounce all those slaveholding ministers and professors; as hypocrites, and to say that they are not Christians…It is no more inconsistent to exclude slaveholders because they belong to the Presbyterian church, than is to exclude persons who drink or sell ardent spirits.

“…The fact is that slavery is, pre-eminently, the *sin of the church.* It is the very fact that ministers and professors of religion of different denominations hold slaves, which sanctifies the whole abomination, in the eyes of ungodly men….it is the church that mainly supports this sin. Her united testimony upon this subject would settle the question. Let Christians of all denominations meekly but firmly come forth and pronounce their verdict, let them clear their communions, and wash their hands of this thing, let them give forth and write on the head and front of this great abomination, SIN,
and in three years, a public sentiment would be formed that would carry all before it, and there would be not a shackled slave, nor a bristling, cruel slave-driver in this land.”

*He particularly calls attention to the recent General Assembly, at which a rebuke was given concerning revivals through a ‘Pastoral Letter’ to the churches,* “calculated to excite suspicions, quench the zeal of god’s people and turn them off from giving glory to God for the greatness of the blessing, to finding fault and carping about the evils.” *He predicts dire happenings for the church with diminished revivals, and with ‘disputes and ecclesiastical litigations,’ notably those in Philadelphia, both in the presbytery and the synod. Just to be perfectly clear about his feelings, he says,* “These things in the Presbyterian church, their contentions and janglings, are so ridiculous, so outrageous, that there is a jubilee in hell every year, about the time of the General Assembly.”

*[Ohio Observer 9-17-1835. On the second page of this issue was an article from Richmond Virginia.]*

A person who left Richmond on Friday morning, informs us that the excitement on the subject of slavery and abolition was very great. Many Northern people, including several clergymen and teachers, had abandoned their posts, or were about to do so and retire to non-slave-holding States. Even natives of Virginia, who had given countenance directly or indirectly to the Abolition movements, could not remain there without the most imminent peril. A gentleman who had taken great interest in the welfare of the slaves, and had been the means of procuring a number of teachers from the North for families and schools, remarked to our informant that hereafter Virginia must find its own teachers; he could no longer procure them from the North, with safety either to himself or them. Indeed he was thinking seriously of leaving the State. The Richmond Religious Telegraph of Friday expresses in strong terms its disapprobation of the Abolition movements, and from the numerous explanations, &c. in its columns, we infer that the editor was not without apprehensions of personal danger. Hitherto he has strenuously advocated the religious instruction of the slave; but in the number before us, he gives notice that he shall advocate it no more until the present excitement is past. *Jour. Com.*

*[Ohio Observer  April 14, 1836]*
A column not attributed, but the editor seems to be moving in a newly clear direction of almost radical anti-slavery.*]
“Our country is in danger of ruin, by falling a prey, to the ruthless, withering dominion of slavery. The predictions of Washington, Jefferson, Pinckney, Edwards, and a host of old Patriots, that the growing spirit of despotism, imbibed and cultivated by slave holders, and soul drivers, would ultimately rob us of our liberties, are now in bold relief before the Nation. Our civil and religious rights and privileges which have hitherto bid defiance to the elements of Tyranny, a sacred trust committed to us by our Fathers under the consecrated seal of their blood, are fearfully exposed to the hand of the spoiler. Our country is now invaded by a deadly foe, in the character of a factious demoralizing spirit, sweeping thr’o its length and breadth, unobstructed in the progress of its contaminating influence. A storm more terrible than the combined elements of nature, is now lowering in our moral and political horizon. We hear the low discordant murmurings of office seekers and disappointed Politicians, the contending elements of religious bigots, and enthusiastic fanatics! The triumphant howl of scepticism and Infidelity! and the more subtle and delusive tones of hypocrisy(sic) and deceit, all disguised, under the multiform characters of kind and human slave holders, Benevolent Presbyterians, Pious and devoted Baptists, humble and cross bearing Methodists, Philanthropic, Episcopalians, Charitable Universalists, liberal Freethinkers, inspired Mormonites, and infallible Papists, all of whom seem to be pushing onward, preparatory to the final struggle with the civil, and religious liberties of our country. A factious spirit has for years been ripening, and is now approaching maturity, and mingling with every department of human life, disseminating principles and practices most repugnant to our institutions. The doctrine of political despotism resounds from every state which has yielded to the dominion of slavery, while the aristocracy of the non-slaveholding states, cheerfully respond to the sentiment. The southern churches, cling to a long established practice, which originated in robbery, piracy and murder, as an institution of god, sanctioned by all the holy Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, and as sweetly harmonizing with all the fundamental doctrines of the Bible: While many professors of the Christian church at the north, act in sweet concert with their brethren at the south, in sustaining and perpetuating, the most monstrous system of oppression that was ever suffered to escape the just penalty of God’s violated law. Many of our halls of Legislation, already ring with the triumphs of despotism, already ring with the triumphs of despotism, while many of our sacred altars, smoke with the warm blood of its victims. …A great portion of our once happy country is now under the control of mobs, and murder on a large scale, is in some parts, encouraged and perpetrated, in the character of mock tribunals, or by a banditti of human monsters, who were born and educated in a country, where the strong man, tears asunder all the strong bonds of love and affection, and regardless of consequences sells his fellow man: this to in a Country that boasts of its civil and religious liberty…”

This is only the beginning of what continues for more than a column of small print, haranguing the reader with the righteous indignation of the true believer, and evidently no longer concerned that readers would be offended by the strong statements made. This is not language designed merely to inform, nor to leave the reader trying to discover what the correct belief might be for the Christian who reads the column. From a declared position of moderation, if not neutrality, the editor has moved to a position of advocacy, advocacy for a clear position of anti-slavery, if not as clearly of immediate emancipation – except by implication.
“SOUTHERN CHURCHES. – We learn from every quarter that the destitutions of the southern church are most deplorable. The Presbytery of Hopewell, Ga., has under its care 40 churches, while it is composed of 22 ministers, five of whom are engaged in instructing youth, thus more than half of the churches within its bounds to be without the ministry of the gospel. This presbytery we presume to be a fair example of the state of the church within the limits of the Synod. In the entire state of Georgia, comprising within its territory, a population of more than 500,000 persons, there are not more than fifty ministers of the Presbyterian order actually engaged in the work of the ministry, making a proportion of one to every ten thousand. Nor do we see any prospect of improvement while slavery continues, for they have now chiefly closed the doors against northern ministers, while their own churches do not furnish young men enough to supply the wastes made by death and removal.”

*New-York Evangelist March 5, 1836 (whole number 310, vol. VII, No. 10, Page 38.)*

*Philadelphia Observer, May 26, 1836, p. 83.*

*Noted that a petition on slavery was presented by the Rev. J.L. Harrison and referred to Bills and Overtures. Much later, two petitions from a number of ladies on the subject of slavery were presented and referred to Bills and Overtures. A third petition was also presented, and was attempted to be read, to much anxiety, and finally was referred without the reading, and with a further directive to present all such petitions directly to the committee, “without troubling the house.”*

*New-York Evangelist Saturday, June 4, 1836, whole number 323, vol. VII, No. 23 Page 90 [in the midst of a report from the General Assembly, Saturday morning May 28, 1836. The body has been considering, off and on, for the last several days, the judicial case of Albert Barnes for heresy, then, at the time for adjournment:]*

“In just before the closing prayer, the Moderator gave out several notices, the last of which was a request that ‘the members of the Assembly from the SLAVEHOLDING STATES will meet this evening in the lecture room of Mr. Blythe’s church on business of importance. A general attendance is requested.’

*Philadelphia Observer, June 2, 1836, p. 86.*

*[Pg. 86] About the Assembly: Dr. Miller, from the committee on slavery, reported that a majority of the committee (Witherspoon, Hoge and himself) wanted to have nothing to do with the issue* “inasmuch as the subject of slavery was one of a political character, involving the political institutions of the country, and the references in the standards on the subject had never been authorized by the Assembly to be put there.” The GA
accepted the report and it was moved to lay it on the table – however, others presented a counter report; and a motion was made to make the topic the order of the day the following Monday; it was questioned if the committee had ever actually met as a whole. On Tuesday, another petition from ladies on slavery was presented and referred to Bills and Overtures.

[Hoge, chairman of Judicial committee, also on Bills and Overtures]

Philadelphia Observer, June 9, 1836, p. 90.

[This article notes that the GA has been in session already for 3 weeks, and “it is “as yet but on the threshold of its duties.” The deliberations started again on Barnes’ appeal, which was interrupted by the order of the day, which was the petitions and memorials on slavery.]

“Mr. M’Ilhenney moved that the order of the day, viz: the report of the committee on the subject of slavery, be taken up. There were not a few in this house, he said, who felt a deeper interest on this subject than on any other.” A great discussion ensued, including Mr. Bergen, who “put it to the conscience of every member of the Assembly, can we postpone the solemn subject now before the Assembly and introduce such an agitating question as that of slavery?” “Mr. Price remarked, that such a proposition or expectation was what would make the South refuse to postpone the order of the day.” “Dr. Miller thought that as the Assembly should gratify the beloved brethren of the South in taking up the subject, so they could vote that it would not be proper to take any vote on the subject of slavery.” Mr. Nesbitt continued, “…The interests of the Church in five or six States depended on the action of this Assembly. The crisis had arrived which was to put to the test the adherence of the southern churches to the General Assembly. The question must be settled or we are paralysed. Any postponement, oblique action, evasion, or temporizing policy as to the question, will be deemed equivalent with the declaration that the South are sinners in the tenure of slaves as property.”

Also: Wednesday morning, June 1, opened with Mr. Pratt of Georgia standing and reading from the New York Evangelist, “The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S. in the year 1836 is a SLAVEHOLDER!!!” (John Witherspoon was the moderator.)

And the Moderator said, “…that that paper for once had spoken truth if it should never do it again—that it was true he was a slaveholder!…and made some remarks calculated to allay the excitement manifested by the house…” Many comments ensued, including the Moderator needing to be protected, others stating that the newspaper simply stated a fact, and since the maker of the motion refused to withdraw his motion to kick the editor out of the house, the motion was eventually indefinitely postponed.

Philadelphia Observer, Page 91, on Friday morning, June 3, Mr. Rankin asked why the petitions and memorials on slavery had not been returned to the assembly, as they were to be considered as soon as Barnes’ case was completed as an order of the day, yet they were considering other items of business. He was told to ask for them to be considered when the other petitions were presented and that they would be read.
Philadelphia Observer, June 16, 1836, p. 94.
Tuesday morning and afternoon, June 7: The Assembly finally reached the subject of slavery. Resolutions were made, amended, superceded saying that the church could not deal with this issue because it was “inseparably connected with the laws of many states…and involves many considerations in regard to which great diversity of opinion and intensity of feeling are known to exist in the churches represented in this Assembly; and whereas there is every reason to believe that any action on the part of the Assembly in reference to this subject would tend to distract and divide our churches, and would probably in no wise promote the benefit of those persons whose welfare is immediately contemplated in the memorials in question…”

So they started wrangling – including finally reading a few of the memorials – one from the Synod of Illinois, one from the Presbytery of Erie, and one from the Presbytery of Chilicothe (sic). After much discussion and many motions, there was a motion to postpone indefinitely – which had a preamble from Dr. Hoge stating that judicatories cannot legislate in this issue, that there was too much business to go on, as it would “render it impossible to deliberate and decide judiciously on the subject of slavery in its relation to the church…”

New-York Evangelist Saturday, June 18, 1836, page 97.
It was moved, then a substitute presented by Rev. Mr. M’Ilhenny of Lexington Presbytery in Virginia, and referring to the committee which made an earlier report by Miller, after having been appointed by the last Assembly:

“That after the most mature deliberation which they have been able to bestow on the interesting and important subject referred to them, they would most respectfully recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following preamble and resolution, viz:

WHEREAS the subject of slavery is inseparably connected with the laws of many of the states of this Union, in which it exists under the sanction of said laws, and of the constitution of the United States;

AND WHEREAS slavery is recognized in both the Old and New Testaments as an existing relation; and is not condemned by the authority of God; therefore

Resolved, That the General Assembly have no authority to assume or exercise a jurisdiction in regard to the existence of slavery.”

M’Ilhenny spoke to his resolution, including the following:

“…it is well-known that this is now a great subject of political agitation in the country, and that it seriously threatens the dissolution of our happy national union. The interest which this question awakens at the south, is not to be realized by those who are not involved in it. And unfortunately, sir, it is a fact, that in the minds of many, Abolitionism and Presbyterianism are identified. Nothing is or can be more abhorred than abolitionism. But why is it identified with Presbyterianism? Why is the Presbyterian
church made to bear the odium of a copartnership in this thing? Casting my eyes over this General Assembly, sir, I see why it is. While the ecclesiastical representatives of other denominations either let the subject wholly alone, or say plainly they have no control over it whatever, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church allows itself to be called on, from year to year, to discuss the subject, and to decide upon it. This leaves the impression on the public mind, that in this church, the subject is open to discussion, and the ground to be taken yet unsettled. In the region where I live, it is generally believed, that the abolitionists are ready, as soon as they have the power, to carry out their objects by a resort to violence. …Moderator, is it true or not, that the leading abolitionists of the present day are connected with the Presbyterian church? I need not consider. …Suppose the abolitionists were included in the bosom of any other church or denomination, and yet the judicatories of that church refused to act in any way against them. Would it not inevitably leave the impression on the minds of the people at large, that they did regard it somehow as a church concern?”

He goes on to say that this is seen by some as the PCUSA grasping for civil power, as this is strictly a civil matter, and further that it needs to be voted on and settled;

“If it is true that we are living under the constant influence of moral turpitude, in the estimation of the church with which we are connected, we appeal to that church to do her duty at once, and cut us off from all connection whatever. …If this relation involves all who hold it in such deadly sin, can the General Assembly be innocent and not place us under the censures of the church.”

His next statements agree that “we who hold slaves do not deny” that there may be “evils incident to the system.” However, he argues that many types of human endeavors include evils, but that the Bible, instead of advocating removal of slavery, gave directions for good behavior under the system to both slaves and masters. He follows this by a statement that if the Assembly finds that they will not be able to agree to drop the issue completely, he predicts what will inevitably happen:

“Either we will seek protection under our own banner, or we must abandon the Presbyterian cause in the whole Southern country…And if we are driven to the other course, sir, I tremble when I say, it will be the first step to the dissolution of the union of this happy country. …Sir, let this take place, and we may look for the judgments of heaven, the curse of civil war with all its horrors, to pervade this glorious country, which God has blessed beyond all lands. Some of us may live to see it, but whether we see the day or not, history will trace it back to its origin in a decree of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church.”

In the afternoon, the topic again was taken up, as the Rev. John Rankin of Ohio, among others, wanted to hear all the memorials on the subject. It was objected to as too long, there being 39 memorials to be presented (though only six were described as being from judicatories under the care of the General Assembly.) Rankin is quoted as saying:
“He thought it due as well to our brethren of the south as to the memorialists, that the papers should be read. The south ought to have the opportunity of knowing precisely the object which the memorialists had in view. And the memorialists, as members of the Presbyterian church, had a right to be heard, especially on a subject in which they conscientiously believe both they and the whole church are deeply concerned.”

A Col. Edwards then agreed that slavery was an evil, yet it was actually the activities of the abolitionists that were getting in the way of the sure movement that was freeing slaves and bringing an end to the practice. Others spoke that both the presenters of the memorials had a right to have them heard, that the Assembly had spoken before of the nature of slavery, that the slaves were human beings, and should be treated by them as the Good Samaritan treated the one he found along the road. A southerner spoke, saying that the northerners had had slaves and had gotten rid of slavery and sold the slaves to the south, and, having profited thereby, were willing to deny others the possibility of the same profit. The conversation continued a long time, including saying that they needed to hear from the churches. The Rev. Stow from Montrose, Pa., said,

“…Sir, those members who come here with memorials believe that silence on the subject is sin, and that this sin of keeping silence is a reproach on the Presbyterian church. The eyes of the world are on us, our brethren in bondage turn an imploring voice on us, and ask us to speak in their behalf. Our power is not legislative, but declarative. This Assembly has power to utter the voices of the scripture, and sound it out, long and loud, till it is heard from one end of the land to the others.”

This last seemed to cause the Moderator to say, “Let the papers be read.” They started, then someone called the previous question, and there was debate on that motion, and then the debate on the issue began again. A call for M’Ilhenny’s resolution as one that all the southerners could vote for caused more discussion. (The reporter noted that he seemed to be the chair of the southern group and was bringing the resolution from that group.) Challenges occurred, and M’Ilhenny said that his group wanted to have the Assembly be clear if they thought they had the power to speak to this question at all.

Eventually, they voted to call the previous question, to vote on Dr. Hoge’s original resolution to postpone indefinitely the whole subject. It passed 154-90. Hoge’s resolution said:

“Inasmuch as the constitution of the Presbyterian church, in its ‘Preliminary Fundamental Principles declares, that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws, to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and as the urgency of the business of the Assembly, and the shortness of the time in which they can continue in session, render it impossible to deliberate and decide on the subject of slavery in its relations to the church; therefore

Resolved: That this whole subject be indefinitely postponed.”
[Philadelphia Observer, June 23, 1836, p. 99, gives the full report of James H. Dickey, who presented a minority opinion of Bills and Overtures to the question about whether slavery should be discussed or presented. Included is that slavery is a sin, that it harms the individuals involved and ends as follows:]

3. That the buying, selling, or holding a human being as property is in the sight of God a heinous sin, and ought to subject the doer of it to the censures of the church.

4. That it is the duty of everyone, and especially of every Christian, who may be involved in this sin, to free himself of its entanglements without delay.

5. That it is the duty of everyone, and especially of every Christian, in the meekness and firmness of the Gospel, to plead the cause of the poor and needy, by testifying against the principle and practice of slave holding, and to use his best endeavors to deliver the church of God from this evil, and to bring about the emancipation of the slaves in these United States and throughout the world.

“Schism.” [Speaking of the last GA, the writer says,]

“Threats of separation and division were made, and they came from two quarters, north and south, but on different grounds.” He then states that an attempt was made by the minority at the assembly to place an action on division before the house, but the bills and overtures committee would not allow it, because members on the other side could not be found to support it.

Ohio Observer, August 14, 1836
[Clearly the Ohio Observer with a change of editors was now on the side of those who would advocate a radical anti-slavery position, and one that saw the church as needing to be in the forefront of the fight for the freedom of the slaves. Mr. Clark, the new editor, addressed the issue:]

We have endeavored, in some previous numbers, to develop the true principles of Abolition, and we now ask, Who can have any reasonable objection to those principles? Are they not true? Are they not principles dear to every American heart? Do they not form the basis of all our republican institutions? Can we prove recreant to them, without peril to all that we hold dear either in possession or prospect?

‘But what can we do, some one is ready to reply, ’even if these principles are admitted to be true? What have we at the North to do with Slavery?’

Much, we answer, MUCH. We are men, and whatever affects men, affects us. …And can slavery, we ask, withstand ‘THE INDIGNATION OF AN ENLIGHTENED AND CIVILIZED AGE? Can
manifest oppression and violence endure ‘THE OUT-RAGED OPINION OF MANKIND?’
And yet we do nothing!

A person who called himself FREEDOM speaks of his belief:

Who would have hazarded the presumption five years ago, to believe that a great portion of the American Church, would, at this time, be found aiding and assisting in sustaining a system stained with blood,—a system of legalized murder, fraught with wretchedness, suffering and misery, to a large portion of their fellow men—fatal to religion, to the church, and to the character and happiness of the nation; a system pregnant with all the horrors and abominations, that was ever suffered to disgrace the pagan world, sustaining and cherishing crime in all its multiplied and modified forms, (Oh! Tell it not on missionary ground,) and would to God it might be forever blotted from the history of the American Church….

I have, for some length of time been a critical observer of the movements of the church on various occasions but more especially on that of Slavery: Expecting whenever that subject should be presented to the minds of the American people, there would be one grand simultaneous movement on the part of the Church, to break the bands, undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free.”

[Instead, says Freedom, what he has witnessed is the Church aiding the slave holders, and even denouncing other church members. ]

“I have seen prominent members of the church wickedly denounce their brethren for advocating the cause of human rights. I have heard professors, with bitterness revile, slander and abuse those who felt a desire that their colored brethren might be delivered from the ruthless hand of the spoiler, and speedily elevated to the rank and condition of men….I have seen humble devoted ministers of the cross, assaulted by mobs, urged on to these midnight scenes of riot and disorder by men who have entered into solemn Covenant with the Saviour of sinners. I have heard them exult and triumph in the persecution of a brother, for exercising the great law of love to his fellow men.”

[Freedom speaks of a “professor of religion in the Presbyterian church” who “declared that the abolition lecturer should not enter the house of worship to lecture again, unless he passed over his dead body.” Someone who came from the outside should not come in, but Freedom also tells of a church member who brought a “pious colored man” to worship, giving him a seat in his pew, upon which a trustee of the church “ordered him not to bring that black man to meeting again.” He even says that he is aware of church brethren, “some of whom contend that the colored man has no soul, and is not a human being.”]

[An article noting a letter from WW Philips (also George Potts, Francis M’Farland, John Krebs, Henry Rankin, James Lenox, J. M’Elroy, John Breckinridge, Wm A. M’Dowell, and Hugh Auchincloss) which says that since the Assembly didn’t convict Barnes of heresy, nor act on Miller’s Resolution condemning certain doctrines, they are concerned with next steps, for “can we continue united in one body, and maintain the integrity of our standards and promote the cause of truth and righteousness in the earth?”]

[The Philadelphia Observer response is that this is another step in a six year long process which has “tended to distract the Church, and ultimately to aim at a division.”]

The steps that are followed are thus:

10. “excite suspicion in regard to individuals”
11. “raise the cry of alarm that the Church was in danger.”
12. [Keep the alarm quiet until an opportune moment arises.] “an opportunity was seized upon more publicly to concentrate it, and give it tangible form by the Old Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1830 in the case of Mr. Barnes.”
13. [The General Assembly of 1831 presumably “settled” the case.] “virtually declaring that the cry of alarm was unfounded; that the authors of the cry had been mistaken in their fears, and unwise in their zeal; and that the doctrinal sentiments in question were not such as to impair the confidence of ministers and people in those who had been directly or indirectly assailed as heretical.”
14. [Not agreeing with the decision, [Samuel] Miller issued his “letters to Presbyterians,” raising the ante, and “they have operated more extensively in undermining confidence in Christian ministers, and leading to ulterior measures…than all other causes put together.” The article specifically mentions the Act and Testimony, the prosecutions, and the “present state of alarm and suspicion.”

6. During the Assemblies of 1832, ’33,’34, the same thoughts prevailed, and so the minority at the close of the 1834 Assembly, through the “Act and Testimony,” attempted to register the names of all the elders and ministers (and presbyteries and sessions) in the church who would adhere to the principles as mentioned. The writer describes these as “novel” tactics, showing the strength of the movement, who was willing to be a part of it, and where they were. It was important that the names were published, and that the list therefore was public.
15. The writer says the genius of this tactic (public adherence to the cause) is that, “Self-respect; the love of consistency; or the fear of reproach or scorn as unfaithful, or the supposition that all this is the love of piety and truth, will secure his firmness and allegiance.” Example: “At the trial of Albert Barnes in 1836 at the Assembly, 67 members who had signed the Act and Testimony voted for his condemnation; not a man who had signed that instrument voted to sustain him. That they had prejudged the case, and came pledged men not to sustain him, PERHAPS could not be demonstrated. That they were true to their former public pledge all parties will admit.”
16. Next, attack another prominent person, Lyman Beecher, and bring both trials to the 1835 GA, which, being held in “Pittsburg” would be expected to be Old School in majority. The writer states that the individuals were unimportant, but they were seen as representative of the New School party. He characterizes the activities as a “conspiracy.”

17. After both were upheld in their trials at the General Assembly, that should have been the end, according to Presbyterian polity. And yet, the next action is the circulation of the Phillips’ letter in “a portion” of the church, with “ulterior motives” and working in secret, specifically to meet in a secret convention before the 1837 Assembly.

Philadelphia Observer, October 6, 1836, p. 164.
[This is a statement about an article in the Presbyterian, in which the activities are equated to the nullification battle in the country.]
 “…it does appear to me that this writer feels very much as the Nullification party at the South did a year or two ago. ‘O! we can never gain the ascendancy. We can never submit. We must be separated.’ “ And tells of the battle toward separation, but that Gen. Jackson nipped it in the bud. “A division of the States would have been of no benefit; and of incalculable evil. And so it will be in our noble church.”

Philadelphia Observer, November 10, 1836, p. 179.
Reporting an article from the Boston Recorder, speaks of the secret letter and what has been written about the issue of schism:
“Several writers in several of their religious papers also urge the necessity of division. Some of them are even discussing the question, where the dividing line shall run; a point which it seems not very easy to settle to any body’s satisfaction. In order to answer the purposes, it must run through the midst of Synods, Presbyteries, churches, and families, dividing the Old School members from the New, and the Abolitionists from their opponents. And furthermore, it seems necessary, in many instances, to run the line through an individual, placing him on one side in some respects, and on the other side in other respects. For example; in respect to theology, Dr. Wilson and Dr. Beecher must be put into different churches; but in respect to abolitionism, in the same church.”

New York Evangelist, February 25, 1837 p. 35
ANTI-SLAVERY AND REVIVALS.—Dear Brother,—It is often said that anti-slavery efforts prevent revivals, and drive the Spirit of God from the church. …
 Monday evening, monthly concert. I appealed to the church in behalf of the poor slave, and presented before them millions in our midst, whom the Synod of South
Carolina and Georgia have recently declared to be in a worse condition than the heathen—forbidden to read God’s word—shut out of the kingdom of heaven by law—their souls shrouded in midnight darkness by the professedly Christian nation. Can a church thus polluted—thus buying and selling God’s image—be the instrument of converting the heathen? Never. …

What effect has this anti-slavery effort had on the revival? The influence, according to the testimony of the ministers and elders, and superintendents, has been good—has helped rather than hindered the revival. I have never seen the juvenile mind of any place in a more tender and interesting state than in Paterson at this moment. Children’s prayer meetings are held—children take the anxious seat, asking the prayers of God’s people—children love to converse about Christ, and his dying love for them and the poor slaves—children pray for souls in Paterson, and for the slaves, in their closets, and in the prayer meetings. One little girl of four years, “Ma, I want to go and pray for the poor slaves.” “Go then, my dear.” She did. Soon she said, again, “Ma, I want to pray for Mr. Wright, the children’s agent.” Such is the spirit that pervades many tender little hearts in Paterson. H. C. Wright, Children’s Anti-Slavery Agent, Paterson, N.J. Feb. 15, 1837

New-York Evangelist, March 4, 1837  p. 38

IMPORTANT-ACKNOWLEDGMENT. We were gratified to find the following important acknowledgment on the first page of the Rev. James Smylie’s recent work on slavery, in which he endeavors to prove the doctrines of Governor McDuffie from the holy scriptures:

‘From his (the author’s) intercourse with religious societies of all denominations in Louisiana and Mississippi, he was aware that the abolition maxim, viz: that Slavery is in itself sinful, had gained on, and entwined itself among the religious and conscientious scruples of many in the community, so far as not only to render them unhappy, but to draw off the attention from the great and important duty of a householder to his household. The eye of the mind resting on slavery itself as a corrupt fountain, from which, of necessity, nothing but corrupt streams could flow, was incessantly employed in search of some plan by which, with safety, the fountain could, in some future time, be entirely dried up; never reflecting, or dreaming, that slavery, in itself considered, was an innoxious relation, and that the whole error rested in the neglect of the relative duties of the relation.’

We here have the confession of a southerner, that so great has been the influence of anti-slavery doctrines on the consciences of slaveholders, that many of them in Louisiana and Mississippi have been rendered unhappy, and have been persuaded that slavery is itself a corrupt fountain, and that they are incessantly engaged in devising some plan by which it may be entirely dried up.—What encouragement this is to us to labor at the north, if those labors are producing such salutary effects on southern consciences.

New-York Evangelist, March 11, 1837, page 44
Parties in the Presbyterian Church - The editor of the Presbyterian, in urging the Presbyteries to send up a full delegation of elders to the next General Assembly, urges this as the first reason: “The parties in the church are VERY NEARLY BALANCED. How unjust it is, then, that either party should oppress or injure the other, or assume that IT is THE church, barely on the ground of having an accidental majority.”

A whimsical illustration of the fact that it is caste but not color, and that Americans have no objection to seeing colored people in their places of resort, IF THEY WILL KEEP THEIR PLACE, is found in a late publication of the New-York Zoological Institute. After setting forth their claims and eulogizing their attractions, the proprietors say in a note, “The proprietors wish it to be understood that PEOPLE OF COLOR are not permitted to enter, EXCEPT WHEN IN ATTENDANCE UPON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.”

It is saying “We, and our patrons, the American public, care not how many colored people come if they will come as servants. But COME AS MEN they shall not.”

New York Evangelist, March 18, 1837    p. 46
WORTHY OF CONSIDERATION—During the late excitement in Congress, a member of that body, for whom we entertain great respect, wrote a letter to one of our contemporaries, urging the incongruity of pressing the subject on the attention of Congress, while the Church is at ease in countenancing the sin of slavery:

‘In a political point of view, slavery is a mote compared with the great sin which the church is daily committing by suffering it to be continued within its own bosom. Can you suppose for a moment that God will dispose the hearts of political men to give up slavery when the churches are stained and cursed with it? Look at the last General Assembly of the Presbyterian church. It’s chief officer a slaveholder, and the subject of slavery given the go by, for fear of a division in the church. The Methodist Episcopal and Baptists churches are in no better situation. And yet members of these churches petition Congress to abolish slavery in this district, instead of petitioning the ecclesiastical bodies to which they belong. The reason urged is, that it will divide the churches. I say, let them be divided and cleansed from all impurity. Let every brother withdraw from those who walk disorderly—this is my doctrine, and I have put it in practice as far as the church is concerned. I abhor slavery in all its forms. I believe the time will come when it will be done away as the greatest curse that ever visited this land. But the churches must first be purified, and come up to this great work, before much can be done.’

We unite with our worthy friend in condemning the heartlessness of those who are willing to harass Congress with the question of slavery, and yet refuse to allow the agitation of it in their congregations, or in ecclesiastical bodies, “lest the church should be
divided.” If a portion of the church, large or small, are so wedded to slavery that they will not yield to Christian argument and persuasion, the sooner a division separates the dead mass from the living body the better. Our view is that since both church and state are infected with this sin, and since slavery is an evil, both religious, moral, and political, the agitation should all go on together. We see with pleasure that measures are already taken by many synods and presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church, to bring the subject prominently before the General Assembly at its next session, where it will probably become the leading topic of interest. Those presbyteries which have not yet chosen their delegates will see the importance of sending up men who have not only talents and influence but moral courage, to meet in a becoming manner the most exciting question that has ever come up before any deliberative assembly in this nation.

New York Evangelist, April 8, 1837, p. 60
GROUNDLESS ALARMS—The following is a sample of the frantic folly with which the editor of the Presbyterian is laboring to agitate the Presbyterian Church:

It is affirmed to be the intention of the New School, anti-Presbyterian party, if they have the majority in the next Assembly, first to destroy the Boards of Mission, Education and dismiss their present officers—then to cut off obnoxious ministers who have been prominent in upholding orthodoxy—and then to dismiss such professors in our theological institutions as have taken sides with the orthodox—and then by summary measures to keep the rest in check! Of the truth of the information we have no doubt.

Philadelphia Observer, April 13, 1837, p. 58.
Editorial—THE SLAVERY QUESTION

“Will the next General Assembly consider the Slavery question? This enquiry is frequently proposed to us. The reply to it is plain. The discussion and decision of the question cannot be avoided. The subject is to come before that body in the twofold form of a judicial case and of memorial. How it can be correctly evaded, we cannot conjecture. Why there should be a desire to evade it we have yet to learn. The idea that its discussion must necessarily produce uncontrollable agitation is fanciful. It is only excitable men who harbour such an idea. No necessity exists for such a result. Cannot the minister of Jesus Christ, who shall compose the next Assembly, dispassionately argue and judiciously decide the question, in view of their responsibilities to God and the Church, without quarrelling with each other? We are persuaded that they can. It is one of those elevating topics which will put in requisition talents of the highest order, and piety of the most deep-toned character; and if it is approached and considered in a prayerful spirit, and in dependence on the promised aids of the Saviour in the discharge of duty, it will be calmly discussed and wisely decided.”

New York Evangelist, April 15, 1837, page 62
Embarrassing - Rev. Dr. Witherspoon, the moderator of the last General Assembly, was very desirous of removing to a free state, for though he argued that slavery was
sanctioned by scripture, yet he saw that somehow it did not work well in Carolina. He received an appointment to the presidency of the Indiana college, but at the same time had a call from the church in Columbia, S.C. Like a good Presbyterian, he suppressed his own wishes, and referred the matter to his presbytery, who decided that he should go to Columbia, and proceeded to dissolve his relation to the church at Camden, and appointed a day for his installation over that at Columbia. But in the mean time, the Camden church thought they had been too much overlooked, and they therefore appealed to the synod, and thus arrested the proceedings. So, says the Southern Herald.
Dr. Witherspoon remains, for the present, at least, pastor of the Camden church, which has evinced so strong attachment to him.

New York Evangelist, April 15, 1837 p. 62
Rev. Dr. Breckinridge and the Convention. – Much surprise having been expressed that the Rev. John Breckinridge, one of the Professors at Princeton, should have signed the call for the Convention at Philadelphia, after all that the “gentlemen of Princeton” have done and written against a division of the Presbyterian Church, that gentleman has at length come before the public, through the columns of the Presbyterian, with a long explanation of his views. He prefers calling the meeting a conference, rather than a convention and avows his growing conviction that “those among us who reject our standards, and trample on our order, should be separated from us.” He protests against all revolutionary measures; for “the cutting off of an unsound member from an otherwise healthy body, is not the dismemberment of the whole body.” A “Convention with powers” he denounces as “both unconstitutional and ruinous,” and he had until lately, opposed even an advisory convention, until after the next General Assembly. He says, ‘At the subsequent and last meeting of the committee, it became apparent, however, from abundant replies to their circular, then read, and from a survey of the whole subject, that a Convention of some sort was indispensable in order to prevent an immediate rupture, and ultimate division of the church. The nature of the meeting which the committee finally agreed on, is well known to the public. Nothing surely could be more mild, respectful, and innocent in its character.”
May such counsels prevail in the Convention.

New York Evangelist, April 22, 1837 p. 66
MINISTERS AND POLITICS.—It has been represented a very great impropriety for ministers to labor and pray for the emancipation of slaves, on religious principles because it is “meddling with politics,” slavery being established by the laws. But the other party makes no scruple of engaging ministers of the gospel on their side, although by their own acknowledgment their movements are exclusively political. At the anti-abolition meeting in Pittsburgh, two ministers took an active part, Rev. T. W. Haynes and Rev. John Tassey.
TIOGA COUNTY, N.Y.—Dear Brother Leavitt—I have recently attended two protracted meetings in this region...And I can assure you, that Anti-Slavery is not entirely unknown. In our presbytery we have a few staunch abolitionists. I fear that we are too much in the background on all these subjects, but hope we shall come along by and by.

I have observed, in some of your late numbers, a notice of a book published by the Rev. James Smylie, of Mississippi, in favor of slavery. The public need not think it strange that such a work should come from him. He is a Scotchman, born in North Carolina, and some thirty years ago, after completing his theological course, emigrated to Mississippi, for the purpose, as was supposed, of preaching the gospel in that destitute region; but he soon married to a gang of slaves, (as we used to say at the South) his wife being worth some twenty thousand dollars. She lived but a few years, and died. He then, as I was informed, married another daughter of the same family, by whom he got as much more. She lived also a few years, and died. He then married his third wife, a widow, worth nearly as much as both. No wonder he pleads for slavery, for by this craft he has his wealth. I am credibly informed that he never would take the pastoral care of a church; and no doubt all will admit that he had cares enough without, and sure I am that he will think and feel so at the bar of God.

New-York Evangelist, May 6, 1837, page 74
The Rev. James Smylie- This gentleman has become considerably distinguished at the north, by the publication of a learned defence of the “patriarchal institution” of slavery. We learn from the New-Orleans Observer, that he is chosen a member of the next General Assembly of the Presbyterian church. Why cannot both parties unite and make him moderator? He has long been used to driving.

New York Evangelist, May 6, 1837, p. 76
From the Herald of Freedom.
DANGER TO THE CHURCH. One of the most serious objections which has been brought against the cause of abolition is that of danger to the church. Appeals are made to the friends of religion to discountenance all excitement on this subject, lest the union and harmony which is now existing among them, should be broken up. …if the church at this day is not a supporter of slavery, if it stands not up as a guard and defence of that accursed system, which takes the Bible from two millions of immortal beings, crushing body and spirit, how can it be disturbed by the excitements of Anti-Slavery? But this is not so. We say it calmly and advisedly, the church is the supporter of slavery in the U. States.
THE PHILADELPHIA CONVENTION

Circumstances rendered it inconvenient for us to attend the sessions of the Philadelphia Convention, called by the provisional committee, which was appointed by the minority of the last General Assembly. We have therefore prepared a brief sketch of its proceedings, from the full account published in the Presbyterian, with some particulars gleaned from other authentic sources.

[Here follows information about the organizing of the meeting; of Dr. Blythe’s proposing a commission to visit the Synod of the Western Reserve as a temporary measure; of Dr. Junkin saying they should stay out of the Assembly if any of the Western Reserve Synod were allowed to attend; and Mr. R. J. Breckinridge proposing to examine those members, but allow them into the Assembly. Breckinridge accused the new school of Pelagianism. Dr. Baxter then spoke.]

All agreed that the church is in danger and that something must be done. All seemed unanimous that the connection with northern associations had done no good, and must be terminated.

[More discussion ensued, then a decision to allow each member at the convention to speak.]

Mr. Owen, ruling elder, said,

Mr. President—The Bedford Presbytery from which I come, are nearly homogeneous. [John Owen was a commissioner to the General Assembly. He speaks at length of doctrinal errors, the problems with the Home Missionary Society, and the fact that the 1836 Assembly were not willing to condemn Albert Barnes’ book. He then speaks of slavery.]

On the great question of domestic relations, which now agitates the south and the north, although some of us agree with many of our brethren on this subject, and think it a great evil, the almost unanimous desire both in and out of the church is to let it alone. It will doubtless be used by the New school to divide us. Let us not touch it, but go forward, shoulder to shoulder in the great work of reform and purification of the church, in all our bodies and on all subjects. We deprecate division, and conceive that it should only be maintained as a measure of the last resort. Purification, reform, union in the truth, is what I fervently desire. Evidently we are not agreed, and cannot walk together, and so long as this continues, we can neither grow in grace or in numbers.

As to the mode of effecting the desired object, I will not attempt to devise a plan. Very much has been said, assuming the position that we have a majority in the approaching assembly. Should that be the case, reform may be easy. But if in the minority, and I fear we may be, we should prepare for the worst. Shall we go on year after year, disputing, striving neglecting the Master’s work, a by-word to the world? Oh, no; let us have peace, or separate.

[Others spoke from their perspective, and then Mr. Smith, of Charleston, who was not a commissioner to the Assembly.]

In regard to slavery, all we ask is that you leave the question untouched.
New York Evangelist, June 3, 1837  p. 92

THE CINCINNATI PRESBYTERY, VS. SLAVERY.—Mr. Joseph C. Harrison, a minister of the gospel, formerly of Kentucky, where he yet holds slaves;-- the same gentleman whose case in connexion with ministerial slaveholding has been before the Christian public for the last year or two;--having, some months since, removed to Ohio, and taken charge of a congregation, made application the other day, to the Presbytery then in session in this city, to be admitted to membership. His application was rejected by a vote of 21 to 13 – on the ground, as we are informed, that he is a slaveholder.

New York Evangelist, June 10, 1837. 94-95.

MORE TO BE DONE.

The work is not quite done. A few minor details remain, like the dessert after the feast, to prolong the entertainment of this new “reformation.” The synods of Michigan and Illinois are marked for the guillotine under the abrogation act. That of East Tennessee will probably fall under the doctrinal declaration, as its members uniformly supported Mr. Barnes. The presbyteries of Philadelphia 3d, of Wilmington, and of New York 3d, will go because they have no territorial bounds. Whether Terror will here terminate her reign, or whether she will merely repose on her conquests for the present, and leave it to another year to complete the cleansing of the church, or whether she will now proceed to exclude by name every individual who voted last year against Dr. Miller’s resolution, are points of minor moment now. The great work is done, by delivering the Presbyterian church from the power of the “Northern hordes,” as they are familiarly called by these self-styled successors of Luther and Knox. The church must now have peace—the peace of Poland. “Order reigns in Warsaw.”

THE EFFECT OF THESE MEASURES

The first effect to be noticed is, that the Presbyterial relations and powers of all the expelled churches are dissolved, de facto. The synods, as such, had their existence and their powers under the General Assembly, which is, presbyterially, the tribunal of the last resort, in all cases whatsoever. That body having terminated the relations of the synods to itself, they, of course, cease to be synods of the Presbyterian church; the only way in which they ever were synods at all. So, the presbyteries, in like manner, were constituted by the synods, as presbyteries in the Presbyterian church. And ceasing to belong to that church, all the pastoral power which they derive from the act of the presbytery, as a presbytery, has ceased. It is a universal dissolution, a return to the original elements, with nothing left but the churches, who derive their incorporated nature from the laws of Jesus Christ, and the ministers, who have been commissioned by the Holy Ghost. A new act of the churches, electing their pastors, will make them such under the laws of Christ. And a new union of pastors and churches, will bind them together in any such covenant as they may think fit to adopt; so it be not, like that of Presbyterianism, inconsistent with the constitution of Christ’s kingdom. Had the original constitution of these synods and presbyteries been a government of the people, like that of our states, it would have remained unaltered by a change of its exterior relations. But claiming their existence and their powers from the higher body, the legal effect is
doubtless what I have expressed. Had presbyteries and synods been of divine constitution, no earthly power could have unmade them, as no earthly power can dissolve a church without its own consent.

THE SPECTACLE CONTEMPLATED

It is a sad spectacle! One of the largest, and most enlightened Christian denominations in our land, and that bid fair to do most for the salvation of the world, perpetrating by its highest representative body, a public breach of faith scarcely paralleled in the annals of national profligacy. The Presbyterian church dismembered, and virtually dissolved, by the potent voice of the Rev. Dr. Junkin, Mr. Breckinridge and Mr. Plumer. This great and splendid fabric of Presbyterianism, founded by the fathers of our American Zion, and built up by their combined efforts, to be a temple of beauty and a tower of strength for all who could unite in supporting ministerial parity, Calvinistic theology, the Abrahamic covenant, and freedom in prayer; this tall edifice, the observation of every eye, now dismantled and overthrown at a blow, by George Junkin, Robert Breckinridge and William Plumer. But yesterday, the Presbyterian church in the United States of America stood up as one of the four leading denominations of our land. Now it takes its position along with the Lutheran, the German Reformed, Protestant Methodist, Seceder, and other stars of a minor magnitude; perhaps a little larger than either, but hampered by its impracticable form of government, choked by a strict construction of its antiquated creed, and burdened by the mill-stone of slavery tied voluntarily about its neck.

It is an instructive spectacle. It repeats the lesson, taught by the ruins of Babylon, the desolations of Jerusalem, the tomb of Napoleon; how little God values the splendor of earthly glory, the projects of earthly ambition. It is a solemn spectacle. The fabric of American Union has begun to crumble. The cords of religious confidence and affection between the churches of the north and the south have begun to break, severed by the hand of the slaveholder. The brilliant anticipations with which we have so long fed our dreams, are covered with a cloud. The Presbyterian church has done great good; the honor of its life shall not be forgotten in the baseness of its dissolution. But what it has been, it can be no more. Its history is written.

WHAT OUGHT THE EJECTED CHURCHES TO DO?

It may seem arrogant, in me, to obtrude advice unasked. But my deep conviction of its soundness constrains me to show my opinion:

RETURN TO THE INSTITUTIONS OF YOUR FATHERS

These ruins can never be built again. For it will be impossible to restore that fullness of Christian confidence without which even the preliminary negociations of reunion could not be carried on. The act of dismemberment is clearly unconstitutional and unlawful, and the charter by which the Trustees of the General Assembly hold their funds, and the clerk hold his records, is doubtless broken. And the disbanded presbyteries may remain together; and send up their delegates next year, and claim their seats. And if they and their friends should then have a majority, it is probable the civil power would put them in possession of the records and the funds. But it would be at the heel of a tedious litigation. And how would religion be the better? Or they might claim a continued existence de facto, and send up their delegates next year, empowered to form a new union, on the idea suggested by the committee, to be called the American Presbyterian Church. But to what end? The great object, which has operated on the
minds of wise and good men in the churches, to make such efforts and sacrifices as they have for the sake of preserving the integrity of the Presbyterian church, is now lost, and lost forever. The idea of combining into one body the Calvinistic Paedobaptist churches of our whole country, has been a precious object with many.—But now that is gone, they will pause before they subject themselves to similar trials for a smaller advantage. The numerous churches which have sprung from the old puritan stock, and retain a veneration for the institutions of their fathers, will require some very clear evidence of duty and safety, before they consent again to put on the yoke of Presbyterianism.

The great effort which it has cost in the last five years to bring the now disbanded churches to assume a Presbyterian form, cannot be kept up. The churches will not sustain their ministers in it. They will not consent that so great an amount of time, and strength, and piety, and character shall be sacrificed in future, now that they see the past to have been all in vain. The more simple combinations must be resorted to. The interest of religion demands it. The cause of truth demands it. A dying world demands it. Jesus Christ demands it.

Each church has now to choose for itself in regard to the relations it shall enter into with its sister churches. God throws this matter upon the churches. The beloved brethren who have been insulted and turned out of doors by this General Assembly naturally have their feelings excited with a sense of injury, and it will not be strange if they should strongly desire to renew the struggle, and restore what has been destroyed. But the churches can look calmly at the question. And they will ask, “Why should we perpetuate a strife, which all experience shows us, can have no end?” The present majority love Presbyterianism for its own sake; the disbanded churches chose it for the sake of promoting union and religion. Why sacrifice the end to the means? The accumulation of ecclesiastical power, which is the occasion of these disgraceful contentions, is the very genius of the system. It will convulse and eventually divide the present organized fragment of the church. It would be an inherent element of any new organization that should be made with the same constitution. The doings of the presbytery of Geneva with regard to revivals, of the 3d presbytery of New York in the case of McDowall, of the presbytery of Newark in excluding every preacher from their bounds who does not obtain leave from their committee, and a hundred other stern and stubborn facts, ought to satisfy the churches, of the impolicy of again placing themselves under such a dynasty.

Let each church, then retain its present internal organization, until for good reasons and in a harmonious manner, it shall be changed. Let the pastors form associations or unions among themselves, for mutual improvement and counsel; holding their Christian character under the care of the church, or the presbytery of the church (the eldership.) Let the churches assume towards all other churches of Christ the position of fellowship and communion, without entangling alliances. Let the ministerial unions within certain large districts gradually combine on principles of liberty and mutual confidence. Let all the trouble and turmoil of the last ten years, connected with the now defeated attempt to uphold Presbyterianism in these northern regions, be buried and forgotten as soon as possible. And let us all set ourselves, each over his own house, and all united by prayer and love to a common Savior, to build up the walls of Jerusalem. I have done.

Yours, JOSHUA LEAVITT.
Philadelphia Observer, June 15, 1837, p. 94.

General Assembly in 1837
Then the committee to which was given the memorials on slavery reported, recommending that everything be laid on the table. Dr. Beman, Mr. Jessup, Dr. Peters and others at least wanted the papers read before being laid on the table. “Several asked to say a few words on points of order which were raised: but the Moderator, in a boisterous and rapid manner, refused to let any one speak, and put the question. Another scene of great confusion ensued: the ayes and noes were demanded, and upon counting the votes, the motion to lay the whole on the table was carried. Ayes 97, noes 28.

New-York Evangelist, July 1, 1837, p. 106.

VOICE From the SOUTH. – The Charleston Observer says:
“On examining the votes of the General Assembly, there is a much nearer approximation to a geographical division between the majority and the minority, than we could have anticipated. The synod of Albany, and the synods Westward, including Missouri, were chiefly on one side; while four-fifths of the members South of this line, were on the other, which composed the majority of the Assembly.”

New-York Evangelist, July 1, 1837, p. 106.

“ The article, ‘Obstacle to Harmony in the Presbyterian Church,” is written by a gentleman of great worth and respectability, in the middle states, an elder of long standing in the Presbyterian church where he resides and one whose civil station, as well as judicious counsel and zealous cooperation in every Christian enterprise, have given deserved weight to his opinions.

The piece signed ‘A Pilgrim’ is from one of the leading divines of New-England, and may be regarded as the voice of a large portion of the New-England churches to their injured brethren in the dismembered synods.

The article on the Sabbath is from Harmon Kingsbury, and will be received as one proof more, that his zeal for God’s fourth commandment is neither to be dumped by indifference, disheartened by opposition, nor wearied out by effort. Should our land ever come to enjoy its Sabbaths by the free consent of the people, those who then live will regard brother K. as the hinge on which this reformation turned. Should God be driven at length to take the matter into his own hands, as he did in reference to the land of Canaan, posterity will remember that there was at least one man who bore his testimony to the claims of Jehovah’s law, and who ceased not to speak though all turned away their ear like a ‘rebellious house.’”

New-York Evangelist, July 1, 1837, p. 106.

“FROM WESTERN NEW-YORK. – A correspondent of the Evangelist, residing in the extreme west part of New-York, writes: ‘I do not know how it could be possible for the General Assembly in any other way, to have crucified the Lord afresh so effectually as they have in the session [missing words] who rejoice and laugh at their proceedings, and who are equally opposed to abolitionism, see and know that slavery lies at the bottom
of the whole. If they had only told us to make our churches strictly Presbyterian or advise those who would not become such to join an Association, we could have persuaded every church in this country to do it, and had no division or hard feeling. But they have cast out the free woman and her children; for it seems they shall no longer be heirs with the ‘bond.’

New-York Evangelist, July 1, 1837, p. 106.

“VOICE FROM THE GREAT VALLEY.—The Cincinnati Journal which is the most widely circulated and influential Presbyterian newspaper in the valley of the Mississippi, has fixed upon slavery as the leading cause of the late astonishing resolution in the Presbyterian church. Last week we gave the voice of the Western Reserve. We now give that of Cincinnati:

We had occasion, but lately, in speaking of the sins of the nation, to allude to slavery as one of these sins, and to the evils which the system engendered. And never did these evils appear to us so alarming as now. We have no doubt when the course of the General Assembly was manifested, and when the four Synods were cut off, of the cause which was urging on that body to such extremes of violence. Our belief is confirmed by our correspondent. The question is not between the new and old school— is not in relation to doctrinal errors; but it is slavery and anti-slavery. It is not the standards which were to be protected, but the system of slavery. To this system the constitution of our church has fallen a sacrifice; ominous, indeed, has been its fall. To sustain this system mobs had been got up, and laws lost their power to protect, and magistrates sat silent amidst civil convulsions. And now when public opinion had bid down these riots, the south come forth almost as one man into the councils of the Presbyterian Church, and backed by men in the free states, break down every barrier of the constitution- trample under foot the most sacred rights. The natural desire of men for power receives new impulse and force from this cause, and per fas aut nefas it is determined to secure it.

Synods cut off. Presbyteries threatened, and then since we have been writing, the news is brought that no new Presbyterys hereafter formed, however constitutionally, shall have its representation in the next Assembly—the stated clerk is instructed to withhold the commission of all such, and he pledges himself to obey. If the system of slavery at the south can only be maintained by such means, let it come to an end, whatever may be the consequences.

We tell our brethren there, political and ecclesiastical, that the men of the North will not become slaves, that the whites of the South may remain masters. A warning voice shall go forth through all the length and breadth of this land, when the rough hand of violence is laid upon our dearest rights, and the spirit of Christian liberty will wake up to vindicate the rights that are assailed, and to put down the tyranny of power, be it ecclesiastical, or be it political. – Abolitionists, and anti-abolitionists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians, whatever be our name, and however we may differ about forms and modes, will present one solid phalanx—one unbroken front against the coming deluge. If war we must in defence of our rights as Presbyterians- as Christians- as men—it shalt be no child’s play; nor yet will we hurl poisoned darts. Our weapons shall be truth, and Christian principle and the spirit of liberty, and to those God will give victory.

But, it may be asked, what is the course to be pursued in this exigency? Let every minister, and every church, and [page 107] every member hold firm, and remain, looking
to god, and to united counsels for instruction. The Synods which have been cut off, yet belong to the Presbyterian church. The act is unconstitutional and a nullity. We have been at pains to obtain all the information within our reach, of the intentions for the future. We find but one sentiment among our friends, and that is, that there should be no hasty action either among these Synods or by those who sympathize with them. Let us await the leadings of Divine Providence. The exigency has thrown a weight of responsibility upon those who disapprove of the proceedings of the General Assembly. A great evil has been perpetrated, and must be remedied—there are great principles at stake, which must be sustained—we owe duties to the church and to our country, which must be discharged. The law, civil and ecclesiastical is on our side, and the Presbyteries in the four Synods will have their commissioners in the next Assembly, and then, if it be necessary, we will take measures to divide, but not in violation of the constitution. It may be necessary that there should be a general consultation in the course of the summer or autumn. In the mean time let us remain united—let us be prepared to defend our rights with firmness—let us pray for the outpouring of the Spirit, with all his healing and sanctifying influence, and let us labor, that amidst these excitements and agitations the cause of religion may be advanced, souls saved, and the glory of the Lord displayed. We have this rich consolation, that there is a God in heaven who can bring good out of evil, and who will make the wrath of men to praise him.”

Philadelphia Observer, July 6, 1837, pp. 106-7
Finally!
Letter as follows:
“Mr. Editor—I perceive that the “Convention party” are endeavouring to justify the outrageous excision of four Synods, without a hearing, by representing all the members of those synods as violent abolitionists. This was broadly hinted by the Rev. Mr. Plummer in his famous story telling speech on the floor of the Assembly.
If abolitionists of the most violent kind are to be rebuked, this rebuke comes with a bad grace from the Convention party. What are the charges against the abolitionists?
1. That they endeavoured to revolutionize the church, by making that an intolerable ecclesiastical offence which was tolerated when the constitution was adopted. The ‘Convention party’ have done this openly and avowedly, by raising a hue and cry against tolerating ‘the doctrine of natural ability’ and ‘general atonement’ and by denouncing the “plan of Union.”
2. That the abolitionists have been disposed to excommunicate Christians in masses, without making the proper distinction between the innocent and the guilty. The ‘Convention party’ have done this literally, and by wholesale; excluding without trial 60,000 members of the Presbyterian church.
3. That the abolitionists have pick up insulated and unproved facts, and drawn from these facts, in the absence of the accused, conclusions unfavourable to the piety of southern Christians. The whole business of the late ‘Convention’ was to collect and embody the gossip which could be collected from partisan tattlers, and a great part of the business of some leading men, of the majority, was to retail the gossip, and make it a reason for cutting up the church of our fathers.
4. That abolitionists have endeavoured to reform the South, not by going there in the spirit of kindness, but by remaining aloof and denouncing ministers and Christian, and by endeavouring to disgrace their opponents by ecclesiastical censures. The ‘Convention party,’ from first to last, have practiced no conciliation. They have employed no persuasion to endeavour to win their opponents. Their whole course from the first trial of Mr. Barnes to the outrageous acts of the last Assembly, has been one of perpetuated violence. The main purpose has been to lash up the church to a willingness to excommunicate one half of its members. The ‘Convention papers’ have groaned under the reiterated calumnies against the best men in the church.

5. Abolitionists have been accused of being willing rather to divide the church, than to fail in their efforts to change its policy. The ‘Convention party’ have avowed their determination, always, to change the policy of the Presbyterian church, or rend it. The latter they have now accomplished.

6. The abolitionists have been accused of using hard names. In this they have fallen far behind the ‘Convention party.’ ‘Traitors,’ ‘hypocrites,’ ‘apostates,’ ‘vipers,’ ‘Goths and Vandals, heretics, &c. are the sweet epithets applied by the ‘Presbyterian’ to the opponents of its editor. So far it is clear, that the ‘Convention party’ are identified in their modes of operation with the most offensive measures of the most ultra abolitionists. In some points the abolitionists have a decided advantage.

1. They were not the first to endeavour to promote a change in the policy of the church. The Philadelphia old school party, first set up examples of denouncing brethren, and stirring up agitation in the church. The ‘old school party’ had inoculated the discussions of the church with a spirit of bitterness and violence, before abolitionists had raised a note.

2. The abolitionists opposed a practice which the General Assembly as early as 1794, and often since, declared to be wrong. The ‘convention party’ have assailed doctrines always held in the church, and make that to be heresy of the deepest dye, which Dr. Witherspoon and others regarded as truth.

3. The abolitionists have never expressed a determination to reach their purposes by trampling upon the constitution. They have never seized upon the temporary absence of their opponents from a church judicatory, to grasp at the elements of power at the expense of justice.

4. They have never shown a disposition so to change the rules of a church judicatory as to allow them an opportunity to repeat slanderous tales, and then choke down their opponents. If they have assailed character, they have been willing to have the grace to hear replies.

5. The abolitionists have never held a convention at the door of the Assembly, and endeavoured to overawe and thus control the Assembly. They have never seized upon the funds of the church and laid a plan to retain their spoils.

*Philadelphia Observer, July 6, 1837, p. 107.*

So much the writer feels bound to say for the abolitionists, when a comparison is instituted between them and the ‘convention party.’ I have always stood aloof from the
efforts of both these revolutionary parties, but am clear in the belief that so far as
courtesy to opponents is concerned, and propriety of measures, abolitionists are far in
advance of the ‘convention party;’ so that if the members of the exscinded Synods were
all abolitionists, that fact would not justify the ‘convention party’ in their ultra measures.

But it is not true that a majority of the ejected Synods are abolitionists in the
modern sense of that term. They are opposed to slavery, (as Princeton always professed
to be until it wanted the AID of the south to put down New Schoolism,) but they are not
generally members of the anti-slavery society. There are many members of the anti-
slavery society in the Synods, but there are as many, and probably more, that are opposed
to the measures of that society. No doubt just at this time there is in those Synods a great
excitement against the south, in consequence of the violence of Mr. Plummer, &c., in the
last Assembly. The south could have done nothing more likely to alienate every friend at
the north, and give a universal success to abolition in its most aggressive form, than she
has done in sending delegates to cut off without trial, 60,000 northern church members.
This is the most unkind cut the south has ever received, and when she sees her Old
School leaders thus guiding her sons into outrages upon northern Christians, she may
well lift her hands to heaven, and pray ‘Lord, save me from my friends.’

The N.Y. Evangelist of June 24th, an abolition paper, has the following:
How it works – A friend in Jefferson co. N.Y. writes to this office, June 14th: ‘Our
delegate to the General Assembly has returned. Be assured the doings there will greatly
advance the cause of abolition, in this portion of the state at least.’
The Cincinnati Philanthropist, a leading abolition paper, edited by J. G. Birney,
June 23, 1837, says:
‘Look at the doings in the General Assembly, and see there a pattern furnished by
ministers of the gospel, of what slave-holders will do when they have the power –
constitution to the contrary notwithstanding.
‘Give them rope enough and they will hand themselves’ – a homely proverb, may
be applied with peculiar propriety to slave holders. If they had designed to array in open
opposition against slavery the entire Presbyterian church at the north, they could not
have taken a more effectual method.

The above shows what use the abolitionists are making of the fact that the south
was drawn in to support the ‘convention party.’ They regard it as a windfall to them.
One hundred abolition lectures in a whole year could not have done so much to convert
the whole north to abolitionism, as was done by the action of some southern delegates at
the last Assembly.

The Cincinnati Journal, edited by E. Chester, Esq., who resided 15 years in the state of
Georgia, and who has been denounced by abolitionists for his regard to southern
rights, says, in his paper of June 23, 1837:
‘The south come forth almost as one man into the councils of the Presbyterian
church, and, backed by men in the free states, break down every barrier of the
constitution – trample under foot the most sacred rights. Synods cut off, Presbyteries
threatened, and then since we have been writing, the news is brought that no new
Presbytery hereafter formed, however constitutionally, shall have its representation in the
next Assembly – the stated clerk is instructed to withhold the commission of all such, and
he pledges himself to obey!! If the system of slavery at the south can only be maintained
by such means, let it come to an end, whatever may be the consequences.’

We express no opinion of the merit of these remarks. We quote them only to
show that the action of the last Assembly, if designed to be kind to southern institutions,
was most cruel kindness – kindness which tends more than any thing that ever before
occurred in this country, to divide the Union, and cover the southern country with blood.

We know there are at the south scores and perhaps hundreds of ministers who
totally disapprove the acts of the Assembly in rending the church. To such the mistakes
of Dr. Witherspoon, Mr. Plummer, &c., should not be imputed. If we mistake not the
signs of the times, another year will show that southern Christians are not willing to
trample upon the constitution of the church at the beck of the ‘Presbyterian.’ No where
will the members of the Synods unrighteously excluded from the church, find warmer
sympathy than at the south. Thousands there will never submit to the measures of the
late Assembly. They already begin to make their voice heard.

Let all true men unite, north and south, and the constitution may again be restored
to its proper influence over the courts of the church. Next week this subject will be
resumed. PHILEMON

Philadelphia Observer, 7/13/1837, p.110
Continuation of the “The Convention Party and Slavery,” No. 2

“No one doubts that the question of slavery modified the acts of the last
Assembly. The Old School party at the south have laboriously endeavored to identify
New Schoolism with abolitionism, and in this they have been aided most assiduously by
the ‘Presbyterian.’ No where will the members of the Synods unrighteously excluded from the church, find warmer
sympathy than at the south. Thousands there will never submit to the measures of the
late Assembly. They already begin to make their voice heard.

There are some point conceded on this subject, as for example that some of the
leading New School men are open and avowed advocates of immediate emancipation.
This is the case with Dr. Beman, Mr. Jessup, &c. In this respect these men differ in
opinion, with Drs. Beecher, Richards, Peters, McAuley, Skinner, Patton, and Messrs.
Barnes, Stowe, Dickinson, A.D. Eddy, &c. It may be conceded that among those who act
with the New School party there is a larger proportion of immediate abolitionists than
among the Old School, though it is not true that one fourth part of the leading New
School men are members of any anti-slavery society. In the free states, until quite
recently, every minister in the Presbyterian church pronounced slavery in the abstract to
be very wrong. Until the Princeton Repertory took the ground that slavery in the abstract
is right, such an opinion had almost never been heard of north of Mason and Dickson’s
line. This opinion came out on the eve of the session of the general Assembly last year,
and was thought by a vast number of Old School men to be an electioneering trick to
curry favour with southern delegates. One of the most talented and influential Old
School ministers in the United States denounced the article, in our hearing, as the result of policy.

‘With the exception of the ‘Princeton gentlemen,’ and a few who may have become convinced of the abstract justice of negro slavery by their influence, we know no body of ministers at the north who are not opposed to slavery. In a general hostility to slavery, the mass of Presbyterian ministers of the north, Old School and New School, heartily concur. But the writer has yet to learn that any thing like a majority of either New or Old School ministers ever designed to enter the south, and cut off ministers and church members, by church discipline. The most that abolitionists have ever desired of the Assembly was to bear testimony against slavery as a sin. There are probably not five Presbyterian abolition ministers in the United States who would have dared to tolerate the thought of cutting off southern Synods and southern Presbyterians, after the unrighteous manner of the last Assembly. Those who have made the greatest approximation to this, have been Old School abolitionists, like those in the Synod of Cincinnati, and the Presbytery of Indianapolis (sic).

‘We can state as the result of the solemn assurances of the leading New School abolitionists, that they never approached a General Assembly with a desire to gain from that body any order for the exscinding of slave holders. They only asked the moral influence of its decisions upon the consciences of their southern brethren. Much as they have been excited, they could never have brought themselves to the work of excommunicating ministers and church members by wholesale, for a practice which had existed from the organization of the church.

‘We learn that the ‘Convention party’ at the south are telling the churches a tale like the following. ‘We know the measures of the Assembly seem strange to you and appalling, but you have not heard what we heard at the north. There was no other way to save the south, but to cut off those Synods. Only sustain the Assembly, and abolition will never trouble you again.’

‘But let us look at this subject, and see how many Old School abolitionists we can find.

1. Look at the Rev. R. J. Breckenridge, of Baltimore. When he shall have carried his purposes against the New School, by using the south, will he let slavery alone? On the 9th of October, 1833, at a meeting of the Synod of Kentucky, Mr. Breckenridge was present, and was invited to sit as a corresponding member. He improved the occasion to introduce a resolution declaring slavery to be sinful. He advocated this resolution with great zeal and power, and when the Synod refused, from a sense of expediency, to pass the resolution, he arose and declared that he could not conscientiously sit as a corresponding member in such a corrupt body. He left them immediately, shaking off as it were, ‘the dust of his feet’ against them!!

But has Mr. Breckenridge changed? No. In the late ‘Convention,’ he said in substance, that he held to his old principles on this subject, but he was willing
to let the subject alone for the present, because the ‘Convention’ had now a common foe in the *New School* – a common object to promote. In Scotland, in his discussion, he took the ground that he was opposed to slavery as really as the abolitionists, but thought his mode of abolishing it preferable to theirs. Is it to be doubted that the Rev. Mr. Breckenridge will finally carry the same war of extirpation into the south, which he has urged against his brethren at the north.

2. Let us now look to the *Synod of Kentucky*. This Synod last autumn, by an overwhelming majority, voted the Home Missionary Society out of the state, so that the orthodoxy of the Synod will not be questioned. This same Synod, in 1834, passed the resolution

That ‘this Synod believe that the system of absolute and hereditary domestic slavery, as it exists among the members of our communion is repugnant to the principles of our holy religion, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

In an address of their committee to the churches of their communion, it is said ‘None of us believe that God has so created a whole race that it is better for them to remain in perpetual bondage. One mode of emancipation may be preferable to another, but ANY MODE is preferable to the perpetuation through generations to come, of a degrading bondage.

‘We assert it to be the unquestionable duty of every Christian to use vigorous and immediate measures for the destruction of this whole system.’

This committee consisted of Rev. Wm L. Breckenridge, Rev. James K. Burch, Rev. Robert Stewart, Rev. Nathan H. Hall, Rev. John C. Young, and five distinguished laymen of Kentucky. One member of this committee, John Green, Esq., of Danville, recorded deeds for the emancipation of his slaves, immediately after the meeting of Synod. The Rev. W. L. Breckenridge is editor of the *Western Presbyterian Herald*, and at the same meeting of Synod, when the above resolution on the sin of slavery was adopted, he procured the adoption by the same body, of the ‘Act and Testimony.’ Robert Stewart was a signer of the ‘Act and Testimony.’ N. H. Hall, pastor of the first church in Lexington, has written much the last year for the Old School papers. John C. Young is President of Centre College, Ky.; a moderate man.

Now compare the views of these distinguished men with the southern doctrine on slavery, and see how they agree, and whether the cutting off of the New York Synods will leave harmony of views in the church.

The *Synod of Virginia*, at its session in 1835, resolved unanimously, “That the dogma, that slavery, as it actually exists in the slaveholding states, is necessarily sinful – is directly and palpably contrary to the plainest dictates of common sense; that it is the duty of all ministers of the gospel to abstain
entirely from all interference with slavery, as established in the commonwealth of Virginia, &c., &c.”

Now are not the above Synods totally at variance in principle? Would this variance justify Virginia in expelling the Synod of Kentucky from the Presbyterian church, without a trial, if a plausible pretext could be found? ‘Judge ye.’ If the southern delegates who acted in the ‘Convention,’ mean to justify the violence of the Assembly, by stirring up the prejudices of the south on abolition, they must put the ploughshare deeper yet next year, and find some apology for excommunicating their good Old School brethren in Kentucky.

3. Let us now look at the Presbytery of Indianapolis(sic) – a strong and influential Old School Presbytery, in the centre of Indiana. This Presbytery adopted the Act and Testimony. Mr. McKeen, its delegate, was one of the ‘Inquisitorial Committee’ on common fame at the last Assembly – one of the leaders in that body.

Last year this Presbytery adopted resolutions, excluding every slaveholder, and every one who had bought and sold slaves, without giving evidence of repentance, from admission into their churches. We have not the words of the resolution, but this is its spirit. The above resolution of the Indianapolis Presbytery was brought up before the Synod of Indiana, in review of the records. Why were not the southern delegates consistent? Why did they spare this Synod? It had a majority of ‘Act and Testimony’ men on the floor of this Assembly.

4. While adverting to Indiana, it may be proper to remark, that on the 8th of March, 1836, a society was formed, called the Anti-Slavery(sic) Society of Hanover College and Indiana Theological Seminary, auxiliary to the American Anti-Slavery Society. In the published preamble to the constitution, it is said:

“In endeavoring to aid in advancing the cause of the oppressed, we will advocate the doctrine of emancipation without expatriation, as the duty of the master, the right of the slave, and the only remedy at once safe and practicable, for the system of slavery.”

The Trustees of South Hanover College published the Standard, when the laws were passed abolishing anti-slavery societies in Lane Seminary. These laws the Standard denounced, and published, without disapprobation, the long appeal of the seceding students. In regard to the anti-slavery society in Indiana Theological Seminary, the trustees, while they disapprove the organization of the society, say, “They leave it to the voluntary disapprobation of an enlightened public,” &c. That is, they pass no laws against such organizations. A monthly concert of prayer for the abolition of slavery is held by a portion of the students.
Next week this subject will be resumed. Enough has been said already to show that the ‘Convention party’ are aiding to cry ‘abolition,’ and alarm the south, to put down the New School party, while at the same time, they cherish the abolitionists who will aid their oppressive course. But more anon.

Philemon

*Philadelphia Observer, 7/13/1837, p. 110*

“Guess Work”

Speaking of what transpired, A New Jersey Yankee, talks of the causes of the actions at the last Assembly.

“The whole seems to be an inexplicable mystery. Some attribute it to Slavery – some to Abolition – some to the love of power, and some to the love of money.” He goes on to speak of “guesses” in a sarcastic or cynical fashion:

1st. I guess that the whole plan was laid and concocted, and matured at a certain Seminary, not 1,000 miles from Princeton. And I guess so, because one who had a peep behind the curtain there, told me so last February.

2d. I guess that it was feared at Princeton, that the church would be divided on the subject of slavery – that the southern churches would secede and form an Assembly by themselves, and that the Northern churches would form by themselves, and that this would leave the Princeton party in so small a minority that they would not be able to control the church as in former times. And I guess this, because I had it direct from one of the D.D.‘s at Princeton.

3d. I guess that letters were written to several clergymen at the south, informing them that it was the purpose of the ‘northern hordes,’ the ‘Goths and Vandals’ of those northern Synods to cut off the whole south at one blow, and that the last struggle must be made now.

4th. I guess, too, that a league was proposed, by which it was agreed, that if the south would consent to be the humble servants of Princeton, and enable her to rule the church by her own dictum, as of right she was entitled to do, Princeton agreed to put forth her strong arm to stay the progress of the ‘northern hordes,’ and to grant plenary indulgence to all the southern churches to hold slaves, until it should be found for the interest of Princeton to change its tone, and strike hands with the opposers of slavery, which she holds herself at liberty to do as soon as the weather-cocks shall indicate the path of duty. And I guess this, because a clergyman from the south told me that he was knowing to the facts. Who was it that said in a certain conclave, “We must use the southern men while we have them, for one thing is certain, we shall not have them long.” And I guess they have used some of the southern men till they are about USED UP.

5th. I guess, too, that the same wily policy was employed to use those simple-hearted men called “Old Hopkinstians,” and that a little convention was held at Princeton, previous to the great convention, in which these ‘Old Hopkinsians’ were duly ‘rubbed down, curried, and harnessed in’ for a full tilt against ‘new measures,’ ‘new divinity,’ ‘Oberlin and the Dickins,’ and that they have a little team of this sort hard at work for the use, and behoof, and benefit of the Princeton dynasty in the almost deserted walls
of the East Windsor Seminary. And I guess so, because I had it from one of the members of the little convention, which was convened to dictate to the great convention, which was held to dictate to the General Assembly, which was established to promote the interests of Princeton Seminary, which was appointed to control the Presbyterian church.

6th. I guess that two D.D.’s will be conferred at Princeton as a quid pro quo for services rendered in the late Convention and Assembly, and that the same honor is promised to two others if they draw well in the harness for another year. But Lastly, I guess that before another year comes round, the men who have been used so effectually this year, will find themselves so entirely used up that they will be of very little use to any body.

If in any of these particulars I have guessed wrong, I will guess again.

*Philadelphia Observer, 7/13/1837, p. 111*

(This page has many articles from “exchange” papers.)

The N. E. Spectator says:

“SLAVERY has done it all. All at once, slave holding ministers have discovered that the “Plan of Union” is unconstitutional, and that New England divines both at home and in the west, teach error. Why all this jealousy, just at this time? And why are those who live in the midst of and approve slavery, the most prominent in the work of excision? Formerly, a large part of the presbyterian clergy at the south were on the side of “new school” men. Now they are suddenly changed. Now their eyes are opened to the errors of their former brethren. Yes, the young New England clergy at the west, and the students in our theological seminaries, being eminently Bible men, carry out the principles and precepts of that holy book, on the subject of slavery. Here is the rub. Now is the time for excision; for if a delay is made, the pretext of error in doctrine and discipline will no longer hide the real monster, abolitionism. Soon the question most have been, in the Presbyterian church, had the offensive synods remained, - slavery or no slavery. Now the slavery party have the majority; and when there is danger from the rapid-spread of abolition principles at the north, that a majority may soon become obnoxious to slave-holders, another and another excision may take place. There never will be wanting pretexts, when the object is resolved upon. We should not be surprised, if it should soon be resolved by ecclesiastical bodies at the south that an abolitionist cannot be a Christian. Even now they have practically declared that they are not citizens of the United States; for they will not allow them the privileges and immunities of citizens at the South.

We hope our older New England clergy, and those controlled by them, will soon have their eyes opened on this subject.

*Philadelphia Observer, July 20, 1837, p. 114.*

(Continues reports of “exchange” papers. This same report can be found in the New-York Evangelist, page 106-7 of July 1, 1837)
“Mr. Plummer [sic], in alluding to the ministers who have embraced the ground that slavery was wrong, called them *demagogues* and *fanatics*. He said they would ruin the church and the nation, and called upon the Assembly to cut them adrift. He read several extracts from printed papers, and some private letters, to sustain his position.” …Of Plumer, “His best friends speak of his conduct as most outrageous. The Southern delegation, in general, seem to have felt that their business at the Assembly was to cut off in the fact of the constitution enough Northern Synods to render slave-holding impregnable in the Presbyterian church.”

The Alton Observer: “Lynch law triumphs in the Presbyterian church, as well as elsewhere in the land. All these acts, in cutting off Synods, are perfectly mobocratic in their character; not only without law, but against all law. Leading men in the last General Assembly, on both sides, gave way to the influences of slavery. For the sake of accomplishing ulterior objects, they yielded to its imperious and sacrilegious demands. This Evil Spirit stalked triumphant in the midst of that venerable body, before whose bar a few vainly sought to arraign it as a criminal; now he might be seen with “hideous grin” peering over the shoulder of the moderator, and anon whispering in this ear in the shape of a certain Mr. M., next you might behold him, with impudent face, passing from pew to pew in the sanctuary, laying his palsying hand upon this Doctor of Divinity, and that Theological Professor, while his foul and fetid breath filled the room with a presence as pestilent and oppressive as the miasma of a charnel-house; till finally, unharmed and unrebuked and with a virtual “God speed” from the Presbyterian church, he took his departure and went back to the rice fields and sugar plantations of the south, there, like another Moloch, to re-gorge himself with human victims, and feed and fatten on those whom God has made in his own image!

The Illinois Observer asks what should they do? The eastern brethren seem inclined to hold on for another year, which may be the best road for them. For Illinois, however, they are not so sure of that method of action, as they think separation both likely and needed.

“But in one point we are firm, and nothing we are resolved shall drive us from our position, even though we have to stand alone. In any new church organization that may be devised, if we are to be one of its humble members, slavery must be excluded from it. We are tired of the guilt and misery of being connected with a slaveholding church. We rejoice at any means of deliverance from so intolerable a burden; and once freed from its crushing weight, no human power shall ever fix it again upon our shoulders or our conscience. And we call upon all our antislavery brethren to take this stand with us, and to remain firm. And we do this the more earnestly because it is well known that some of our leading brethren at the east have been disposed to temporize and resort to expedients of human wisdom in their management of this matter. Whatever plan, therefore, may be devised, whatever organization proposed, let all who believe *slavery* to be a SIN, and one too of peculiar aggravation in the sight of God, make this a *sine qua non* of all
negociation, all action, all union, on their part, that slavery shall be forever excluded from
the church.”

*Philadelphia Observer, 7/20/1837 p. 115.*
From Luther.--
Mr. Editor – I see that the Rev. John Burtt of Cincinnati, and W. L. Breckenridge of
Louisville, are endeavoring to show that Old School men, did not appeal to the “spirit of
slavery,” to carry their measures in the last assembly. Let them read the following extract
from the speech of the Rev. Mr. Plummer, on the excision of the Synod.

‘These statements, sir, are a brief specimen of what might easily be shown; and if I
had a desire to continue my statements I could bring such authority, from all quarters, as
would amply satisfy every sound Presbyterian that it is necessary, not to cast out these
Synods, for they were never in, but to keep them out of the Presbyterian church. It is not
safe for us, while things are in so unsettled a state there, to open our doors, and say they
may now become a component part of our church. There is such a state of turmoil and
confusion there, such a reign of darkness, such a spirit of fanaticism, as must be met and
kept out. And I believe that, unless the Presbyterian church shall be, under God, the
means of arresting this spirit, it will ruin our nation; and through it ruin the world. And I
believe that nothing can arrest its progress, unless the Presbyterian church can be kept
free from this fanaticism, in all our borders. Why, sir, the fanaticism of Western New
York once found its way down to Virginia; but its propagators soon found it expedient to
return, satisfied that the time had not yet come to plant their banner on our soil; for there
are certain consequences which they will regard, however much they brag to the
contrary.

What is this fanaticism of which Mr. Plummer speaks? The last sentence quoted
above explains all.

Can any honest man read the implied threat, and bravado in the above, and then deny
that slavery controlled the decisions of the Assembly?”

Full document transcribed from pages 118-119 of the *Philadelphia Observer, July 27,*
1837
SLAVERY QUESTION

The following counter report, brought in by the Rev. James H. Dickey, of Ohio, one of
the committee was read. The report was published last week.

*Report of Mr. Dickey of the minority on slavery.*

The minority of the committee in whom were referred sundry petitions and memorials
on the subject of slavery, which had been presented to the last assembly from different
parts of the church and have had that subject under consideration, and beg leave to lay
before the present assembly the result of their deliberations.
Since the last assembly, the discussions on the subject of slavery have been conducted in a spirit of extreme excitement; and a strong reckless feeling of party zeal has manifested itself in some places, even within the pale of the church; and sentiments have been avowed which are at war with the genius of our government, and strike at the very foundations of our civil and religious liberties. It appears to us, after the most dispassionate review of the whole subject of which we are capable, that, at such a time as this, when sentiments are advanced, and claims are set up, so inconsistent with the civil and religious rights of the poor and with the long settled and expressed doctrines of the Pres. Church, if the Assembly should all together hold their peace, (especially after the pledge given year before last to our Brethren in Scotland) they would be recreant to the cause of truth and mercy, false to their brethren and unfaithful to Him who has set them as watchmen on Zion’s wall, and commanded them to cry aloud and not spare. We therefore propose the following as the declaration of the Assembly on that subject.

The General Assembly of the Presby. Church of the United States of America continue to declare their unwavering and undiminished attachment to those principles of liberty which are so clearly expressed in the declaration of independence, and in the Federal and State constitutions of these United States. They do unhesitatingly believe that all men are by nature free and equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We rejoice to know that Presbyterians have been, from time immemorial, the advocates of civil and religious liberty. The Puritans of England and the Presbyterians of Scotland, from who we claim to be descended, were the uncompromising opposers of tyranny, and waded through seas of difficulties, and were baptized with their own blood for centuries, to achieve liberty. And when they could not enjoy it in Europe they fled to the wilds of America, and braved the dangers and toils of settling a new world, that they might there enjoy the blessings of liberty, which they had in vain struggled to obtain in the land of their father. To this new world they brought the seeds of those liberal sentiments which produced the revolution and which have been embodied in the constitutions of these confederated republics where we live and enjoy so many privileges.

These sentiments have been avowed by several Assemblies. And this Assembly are cordial in the declaration that every peaceable member of the Society ought to be protected in the full and free exercise, it being his in indefeasible, in alienable right to worship God according to his understanding of the sacred oracles. The Assembly have also from time to time expressed unfeigned regret, that a state of things inconsistent with the above expressed sentiments should obtain in any part of our country. The slavery of the Africans and their descendants, not only continues but is becoming more and more deeply rooted in the land, and intimately incorporated with the very frame of civil society; and even within the pale of the church it begins to claim a lodgment, not by indulgence, merely but as of right.

The hope has been indulged and expressed by former Assemblies that a state of things so inconsistent with the maxims of christianity would yield to the light of divine truth, and be destroyed by the brightness of the gospel, without the direct exercise of discipline.
And hence the church as been exhorted to the exercise of patience forbearance toward those who were entangled in its snares. But instead of realizing that hope, the church has found herself deeply involved in its toils, and in some parts, in danger of being crushed in its folds in as much then as past forbearance has been used not to put away the evil but to give it strength, fortify its position and spread a shield around it to defend it against the shafts of divine truths; it seems, therefore, needful and incumbent that the church take a more firm and decided stand on this subject.

Slavery similar to that which exists in the United States prevailed extensively in the heathen world when the Gospel was first published; but it was destroyed with all the other institutions of heathenism by the power of primitive Christianity. Whereas instead of declining it has attained a fearful maturity under our administrations - a sure evidence that we have not treated it as the Apostles and primitive Christians did.

Instead of being based on the same foundation as the other relations of life, slavery creates a paradox in the moral system. It exhibits moral, accountable and immortal beings as mere chattels, things of bargain and sale - scarcely possessing the power of moral action. It holds them who were created equally with ourselves, lords of this world to be mere appendages to the existence and comfort of another. It breaks in upon all the divinely constituted relations of life, and violates their claims. Under its rule the marriage relation, the source of all others, can not exist; and, in its stead, is introduced a debasing and corrupting system of universal concubinage. It forbids children to honor and obey their parents; and renders it impossible for parents to train up their children according to the divine direction. It deprives female chastity of its protection, and opens the flood gates of licentiousness. In a word, it violates the claims of all the social relations of God’s appointment, and puts the property, the morals, and even the life of the slave in the power of the master. It is, therefore, an institution contrary to nature, unsanctioned by the divine law of love. The authority it claims is usurpation, and the subjection it demands, is unreasonable. The whole system is at war with the Divine institutions. It is, therefore, SIN, essentially SIN, and all its claims are founded in injustice. Its withering influence and its ruinous effects are seen, felt and acknowledged wherever it has obtained a footing. “Such” (to use the language of the Assembly of 1818) “is the character and some of the consequences of slavery, - consequences not imaginary, but which connect themselves with its very existence.” God declares himself to be the friend and protector of the stranger, the widow, and the fatherless; but every black man in the United States is a stranger (an alien), every slave mother is a widow, (destitute of the guardianship of her husband) and all her children are fatherless. God has placed His church in the world to be a light to the word and he requires her to set a good example, and how much soever the world may affect to despise the church, it has always taken its standard of morals from her. And no evil can long maintain its hold in society against which the church continues to bear a clear and consistent testimony. *** Hence the manifest equity of the Divine maxim that judgment should begin at the House of God. God’s express command is, Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy....(Prov. XXXI . 6.9.) It is then plainly the duty of ecclesiastical bodies, in their associated capacity as well as every minister, elder, and every private member of the church, to hold
up a most decided, consistent and persevering testimony against the crying sin of slavery.

...Therefore, as the sense of this Assembly resolved,

1. That the buying, selling, or holding a human being as property is in the sight of God a
   heinous sin, and ought to subject the doer to the censures of the church.

2. That it is the duty of every one, and especially of every Christian in the meekness and
   firmness of the Gospel, to plead the cause of the poor and needy by testifying against the
   principle and practice of slave holding, and to use his best endeavors to deliver the church
   of God from this evil, and to bring about the emancipation of the slaves in these United
   States and throughout the world.

Signed, James H. Dickey


From the Southern Religious Telegraph

[First two paragraphs were on whether it was right or possible for the Assembly to
rescind its own actions. They say no, that it opens the door for the grossest
immorality.]

“The judicatory may take from others the rights secured to them by contract, and free
itself from any and every obligation, simply by declaring its own acts unconstitutional.”

Then was the item appropriately before them? The presbyteries did not bring it. And if
the Synods involved were unconstitutional, and their acts Null and Void then the acts of
thirty-six General Assemblies, in which these unconstitutional voters have taken part, are
NULL AND VOID!

The abolition question

We deprecate as earnestly of any of our brethren, the introduction of abolition discussions
into the judicatories of our church; and we never will consent that the General Assembly
shall legislate or act upon the subject of slavery in any form whatever. And we would say
to all who desire the Assembly to act on the subject - that it must be wholly excluded; or
the church MUST BE DIVIDED GEOGRAPHICALLY. With these views of the glaring
impropriety of introducing slavery into our judicatories for discussion, we must add, that,
We regret exceedingly that an argument has been framed on this subject to persuade the
south to sustain the acts of the late Assembly. We regret it - for we consider it immoral
to decide the question in debate on THE PRINCIPLES OF EXPEDIENCY. If it were a
mere question of expediency, we would be silent. Such is not its nature. It is a great
question of RIGHT and WRONG - of CONSTITUTIONAL and LEGAL RIGHT. Many
in the southern churches, and in every part of our country, believe the Assembly made a
wrong decision; a decision which deprives others of rights which we are legally and
morally bound to secure to them - a decision which subverts the constitution and order of
the church. And on a question so important, affecting vitally the honor of religion and the
character of our church in the rights of sixty thousand communicants, shall the case be
argued on the ground of expediency - on the principles of advantage! We solemnly
protest against this course as unmanly, and as an argument unworthy of consideration in
the decision of a great moral question of this character.
But are all those called the New School almost all abolitionists? If so, how happened it that in Philadelphia, where there is a whole Presbytery of them, that they could not get a church or lecture room for an anti-slavery meeting, without going to the Universalists? And how happens it that many places in Western New York, the abolitionists are unable to obtain the use of a church in which to hold their meetings? We do not impeach the veracity or Dr. B’s informant - but we think he made erroneous inferences from what we saw. For more than ten years we have regularly received several papers and periodicals, from different portions of the territory in question, - and we have personal acquaintances scattered over it; and with the information derived from these sources, we do not believe that one fifth part of the members of those churches are abolitionists.

But abolitionists are not confined to the New School, they abound among those who are called Old School. In correcting misrepresentations on this subject we have more than once been reminded that we were favoring a party. We will give them an extract of a letter from a minister of the Gospel, an alumnus of Union Theological Seminary a man whose statements no one will impeach who is acquainted with him. He is speaking of the ultra Old Schoolism which is prevailing in some parts of the southern churches. He remarks - “This state of things has been brought about, in no small degree, as I believe, by such Old Schoolmen in the free states as Dr. Miller and his son-in-law Dr. Breckenridge, representing to the south that the abolition excitement is solely produced by the New Schoolmen of the north. See Dr. Miller’s letter to Mr. McElhenny. And this representation we all know is untrue - perfectly so. It was commenced by the infidel Garrison and carried on by as many Old Schoolmen as new, and perhaps more. In this state the preponderance is on the Old School side. - unreadable...

From the Alton Observer
GENERAL ASSEMBLY. - Our readers were informed in our last, that the General Assembly had adjourned. And with the close of its sessions close the history and the existence of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. And (word illegible) it may be said of that body, with perfect truth, that it died as the fool dieth.

It has been our aim, as our readers well know, since we became editor of the Observer, to keep its columns as free as possible from the contentions and bickerings so sadly prevalent in the Presbyterian Church but the crisis of these heart-burnings has now arrived, the inflamed imposthume has suppurated, and the stench of its offensive matter has pervaded the whole land like a pestilential presence. We cannot, therefore, longer remain unmoved and still, if we would. If we would not be infected with the contagion, we must take measures to remove the cause or get beyond its reach.

To speak without metaphor, we regard the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church as virtually destroyed, and all who were under its jurisdiction as at liberty to adopt and act upon the self-preserving maxim of Sauve Qui Peut - save himself who can.
The violence and injustice that characterized the proceedings of the late General Assembly, are absolutely astounding to all such as believe that the essence of Christianity consists in brotherly love, peace and good will; and show conclusively that whatever was the influence that it acted, that influence did not come from above.

The question then recurs, who or what has done this thing? What is it that has made the Presbyterian church a “hissing” (literally true-see debates of the late Assembly) and a by-word in the land? What is it that, for years, has made this body comparatively powerless to do good and finally brought it to a disgraceful end? “Is there not a cause?” There is, and an all-sufficient one.

We have evidence going to prove irresistibly, as we think, that slavery has destroyed the Presbyterian church.

This evidence consists in the fact that the South have voted, with almost entire unanimity, along with the Old School party. Five or six years ago, there was a majority of New School, or moderate, liberal men in the church at the South. But now we see them coming up with united force to execute Lynch law upon brethren with whom a year or two since they were acting harmoniously. Whence is this? The reply to this question is found by calling to mind the fact that since 1831 the Slavery Question has come up in the church, creating new affinities and new antipathies. The Southern churches have determined to hold on to the slaves come what may; and have warned the Assembly not to touch their “domestic institution.” Being determined to preserve this, they were prepared to seek allies from any quarter...and so they went over, in a body to the Old School side, where they found a corresponding disposition, and cut off precisely those four synods where there existed the most opposition to Slavery. Had they proceeded, as was at first determined on, to cut off Illinois and Michigan, there would have been comparatively little anti-slavery sentiment left in what they would call the Presbyterian church. And we have little doubt that, unless prevented, they will carry out their design another year. When in last General Assembly, we saw enough to satisfy us of the intrigue which was there going on, and of its probable results. We saw that the leading men on both sides were laboring to conciliate the South, to effect which they were both making concessions on the subject of slavery. The question then was, who would go farthest in a compromise of principle and in this dishonorable and most humiliating contest, we rejoice to say that our Old School brethren carried the prize beyond all dispute. While the Assembly were in session, an elaborate article from Princeton Seminary appeared in the “Repertory,” designed to show that slavery was justified by the Bible. This ended the contest; and Princeton and its friends effected a secure lodgment in the hearts of the slave-holding ministry and eldership, by a coup de ‘main’, which for boldness and success has scarcely its parallel in all church history. This precious specimen of Biblical interpretation was printed in pamphlet form and distributed with careful zeal to every member of the Assembly and from that moment the contest was over. The compact was sealed - the compact which, like the league of Pillnitz, had for its object to perpetuate the slavery of the human race. Princeton had conferred upon the South the divine right to buy and sell human beings, and the South was now ready to join Princeton in anathematizing all who will not say “Shibboleth” with the same smooth and unaccented tone, as its
learned Professor of Church Government. The result has been witnessed in the proceedings of the late Assembly. Did ever Christian men and Christian ministers act so before? Led on by Messrs. Plummer and Breckenridge the majority of the Assembly constituting this “Holy Alliance” of Slavery and Fatalism, went to work as though they neither “feared God nor regarded man.”

And now the question recurs, What shall those members of the Presbyterian church who cannot endure these things, do? Shall we remain, or shall we secede? What shall we, in Illinois do? This is a question that comes home with great interest to all our churches. We speak, of course, without authority, but we suppose that all expectation and all desire or remaining in permanent connexion with the General Assembly is gone from most of our ministers and churches. On the question how and when we shall separate, there will not, probably, be found so much unanimity. We can speak but for one, Our brethren at the east, it seems, are for continuing the struggle for another year. This may be the best way, though we confess it does not so strike us now. We wait to see their plan, however. But in one point we are firm, and nothing we are resolved shall drive us from our position, even though we have to stand alone. In any new church organization that may be devised, if we are to be one of its humble members, slavery must be excluded from it. We are tired of the guilt and misery of being connected with a slave holding church. We rejoice at any means of deliverance from so intolerable a burden; and once freed from its crushing weight, no human power shall ever lay it again upon our shoulders or our conscience. And we call upon all our anti-slavery brethren to take this stand with us, and to remain firm. And we do this the more earnestly because it is well known that some of our leading brethren at the east, have been disposed to temporize and resort to expedients of human wisdom in their (illeg.) proposed, let all who believe SLAVERY to be a SIN, and one too of peculiar aggravation in the sight of God, make this a sine qua non of all negociation, all action, all union on their part, that slavery shall be forever excluded from the church.

From the N.Y. Observer
They say that both parties in the last GA declared that they were in favor of division. In their analysis, this is going to happen around the friends of the “excluded Synods” and those who were in favor of excluding the Synods. Further, they believe that both will claim to be the GA and regardless of who seems to be in the right, this separation will continue. Some feel this separation to be inevitable. They then consider the motives for division. “These motives are neither more nor less than the feelings, that is the sins of the members. If all on whom the decision of this question depends, could, within six months, be brought to repentance for their sins in this controversy, the work of division would be arrested, and the unity of the Presbytery church be preserved. We believe that repentance or division is inevitable; that division is needed only as substitute for the repentance of the guilty; and that the guilty will gain nothing by division without repentance.”

They seem to believe that all are guilty of adding to this controversy, that all need to repent, and that if this is done then some coming together may occur.

From the Cleveland Journal
“We do not want a union with the men who composed the majority of this Assembly. They possess to us no one feature of attractive affinity, as ecclesiastical associates. Let them go by themselves. If they choose the fat vallies of the plain, let us retire to the mountains.

They then suggest that all the churches on the Reserve, whether Presbyterian or Congregational, could be combined. But perhaps:

“it is desirable to maintain some sort of union, at least with our ‘companions in tribulation.’ Nor are we to suppose their number will long be limited to the present catalogue of proscription. The mark of reprobation is already set down against numerous presbyteries, and individuals. The signal is given. The war is begun. As many as one third of the remaining Ministers will, in all probability, be brought up for decapitation, unless they save themselves by a prudent and timely retreat.”

They then note that no delegates were appointed this year to corresponding bodies, but

“Who, that had any sense of propriety, would consent to go as a delegate, to the outraged associations of New England?”

DR. BAXTER

“The President of the late Caucus in this city, by which “Common Fame” was idolized, has received a home thrust from a writer in the last number of the Southern Religious Telegraph. His zeal in the Convention and Assembly in cutting off so many ministers, has sharpened a knife which, to carry out his own principle, might be employed in his own excision. We give an extract.

The extract which follows delineates the Form of Government, ch. 14, sect. 3 in which “candidates applying to the Presbytery to be licensed to preach the gospel....” are to have “satisfactory testimonials of their good moral character, and of their being regular members of some particular church.” Form Gov. 9, sec. 6 - only the session can receive members.

But the “President of the Convention was never so received; he was therefore an unfit applicant for licensure; and the Presbytery acted unconstitutionally, in taking him on trial. According to the Dr.’s own showing, all that has grown out of this unconstitutional act, viz. His licensure, his ordination, his preaching, his administration of the Christian sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper, must be considered null and void. Yes, and all that was done by the late General Assembly is null and void; said Assembly being composed in part of such members as the Dr. who never had constitutional membership in the church. These truths are fully established, if the Dr.’s reasoning be sound.

Baxter goes on to say that the session can delegate its power to the minister, which it did and the minister received him. But they want to see proof of the delegation and discussion about whether that power can actually be delegated. “If a session may delegate the power in question, then may a Presbytery delegate its constitutional powers and duties to license and ordain ministers of the gospel?” They go on to talk about all the issues that they face in delegation if it is taken to the farthest reaches. The Observer [which one?] says that he could not rightly be ordained as he was not properly a member of a church prior to ordination. Baxter says, “It is true indeed, that when a man is ordained with all the Presbyterian forms, the ordination and reception take place together.’ What is this? New Schoolism? A Presbytery ordaining, contrary to all constitution and order, yet with
all the Presbyterian forms, a man to the full work of the gospel ministry, who has never been received, and who is not a member of the church at all!!! If this is Presbyterianism, we do indeed need a convention. But, though the man is not a member of the church, his ordination and reception will take place together. How? The Dr. says ordination does not make him a member. Then there must be some part of all the forms of ordination not designed for ordination, but for reception to church membership. Is anything like this in the book? Nothing in the least like it. It is not Presbyterianism.”

The article goes on to say that this is the condition “in which a great portion of the ministers and elders in Virginia will find themselves. And to what extent it may be true of the ministers and elders throughout our southern churches, it might be well to enquire. For, if the reasoning of the lecture or address, be around, and applicable to the accomplishment of the purpose of the convention, in the excision of four Synods and two Presbyteries, let us beware. Our turn may soon come. An occasion only is wanting.”

For the Philadelphia Observer

THE CONVENTION PARTY AND SLAVERY

No. III

The writer, in these communications, does not design to discuss the subject of Slavery. Neither does he mean to give any opinion, as to the propriety or impropriety of abolition movements. He wishes, to show the public, that while some of the Southern delegates, avowedly, voted to exclude the New York Synods, because those Synods embraced a considerable number of abolitionists, that they must either pause and undo what they have done, or else go farther and apply the pruning knife to abolitionists in their own ranks, or else stand before the public justly charged, with having used the abolition excitement, to promote the views of the “Convention party,” while they are quite willing to be leagued with abolitionists, who will vote right on a few ecclesiastical questions.

We now come to the Presbytery of Chilicothe. This Presbytery embraces twenty-three ministers. They are mostly from Virginia or Kentucky. They are able men of old school views in Theology, and without a single exception devoted immediate abolitionists. In this cause they were earnestly engaged, before Garrison was known to the public.

Their representatives on the floor of the Assembly this year, were the Rev. Samuel Steele, and Col. Wm. Keys. The Rev. Mr. Steele, has long been known to the public as a leader in the abolition ranks. He was appointed to defend the action of the Synod, in the case of the Rev. Joseph Harrison.

In a published letter to the Rev. John C. Young, under date of Nov. 12, 1835, he says:

‘Now abolitionists desire heartily that state governments, should emancipate in either way (by legislative or voluntary emancipation), but I would prefer the latter course. It is evident however, that they have no design to act at all, at present, and hence we urge emancipation upon each individual Slaveholder, as it is the only way by which he can clear his skirts of sin.”
Again speaking of the desirableness of the government’s purchasing the slaves, after the manner of Great Britain, he says:

‘I have great fears, however, as to the willingness of the South to enter into such a measure. Some years ago, her leading men would have spurned at the idea; and if they are still of the same mind, it will be a melancholy illustration of the old proverb - ‘Whom God sees fit to destroy, he first permits to become infatuated.’ My chief hope of their willingness arises from the great fear and dread into which the people of the South have been thrown by the efforts of a few abolitionists. A dozen Southampton insurrections could not have produced a greater alarm; and yet it has been effected without the shedding of blood. Now, if this state of things should lead to such an arrangement as we have mentioned, the South [bottom cut off] arbitrary fears - drove them into a plan for linking their pockets with money, and terminating the system of slavery in a peaceable manner.”

It will be seen that Mr. Steele rejoices in the fears which have been excited at the South. He has now more occasion to rejoice, as it has enabled him to carry out by the aid of the South, the spirit of the Act and Testimony of which he was a most zealous advocate.

Again in the same letter, Mr. Steele, in showing the good tendency of abolition movements, says, “Many slaves have been free in the Carolinas and Virginia, within the past and present years from conscientious scruples, and sent over to Ohio and Indiana; and that many more soon will be released, we may reasonably expect when we read such paragraphs as the following from the Virginia Whig: ‘Independent of pre-existing causes, abolitionism is to be thanked for imparting an increased impulse to the migrating mania. It is actually all-pervading and most alarming. Thousands have gone, yet more thousands are preparing to go—and still increased thousands are revolving the expediency of doing so.’ ‘Nor is this the worst. The bulk of the emigrants are the best of our population--men of intelligence, worth, and property. –And it is still that class among which the mania is most contagious.’ Surely many of these thousands are just such characters as will take their slaves to a free soil; and abolitionism, by the testimony of an enemy, is to be thanked for it.”

Here we see Mr. Steele felicitating himself that the fears excited by abolition are driving from Virginia her best men. He takes this as evidence of the excellence of his plans and the first fruits of ultimate success. He can now rejoice that the abolition excitement has not only driven out some of the best men in Virginia, but has helped him and his ‘Act and Testimony’ brethren to drive 60,000 Presbyterians, without trial, from the church of their fathers.

But what place did Mr. Steele occupy in the Assembly? With a full knowledge of his sentiments, the Moderator appointed him chairman of the committee to draw up the Narrative on the state of Religion. This was designed as a “sop” to the Old School abolitionists to keep them cool, while so many of their brethren were driven from the church.

“Common fame,” with much more truth than the illeg usually brings, says that Mr. Steele informed a brother abolitionist, that the leading Southern men had consented that he should occupy two hours, in showing that the Synod of Cincinnati had done right in excluding Mr. Harrison, a slaveholder, from preaching in one of their churches. This
was a compromise. Mr. Steele was to be allowed ‘to speak two hours’ against slavery—
he was to be allowed to throw into the Narrative a few scraps about the oppressed
Africans. And what consideration was Mr. Steele to render for this? He was to vote with
the Convention party, to help each man as Dr. Witherspoon, (who has declared that he
could follow Dr. Beman to the gallows in Charleston) in their efforts against the Western
Reserve, &c. which were suspected of new schoolism and abolitionism. The “Convention
party” had an end to reach, and they were not very particular about the instruments. They
could irritate the fears of the South with one hand, and tickle the vanity of a few old
school abolitionists with the other. And all around the house, while the work of the
dismemberment was going on the song in substance was,

Tickle me, Billy, do, do, do,
And in my turn I’ll tickle you.”

We are not now blaming Mr. Steele for being an abolitionist. We only wonder at
the inconsistency at which he has outraged the south in his published letters, and at the
same time allied himself to some of her excited and phrenzied delegates, in their efforts,
in the face of the constitution, to exclude whole synods on the suspicion of abolitionism.
We also wonder how Dr. Baxter and Mr. Plummer will justify their voting for an
abolitionist to draw up a narrative of the state of religion, spiced with abolitionism, while
they were so willing to appeal to the prejudices of the south to sustain the excision of the
Western Synods.

But they might suppose that the end justified the means; that it was right to hug a
few abolitionists to get powers sufficient to throw a platoon of them out of the church.
This was certainly politic in a war of extermination, and they doubtless will have their
reward.

Col. Keys, the lay delegate from Chillicothe Presbytery, is a very respectable
man, but has long been known in Ohio as a most devoted abolitionist. The following is
an extract from a letter of his published in the Cincinnati Journal, April 4, 1834:

“A minister of Jesus Christ lately (in the region of Virginia where I come from)
sold a slave for $300. I look upon this as a great sin, and as inconsistent with religion, as
if he had sold that much worth of rum or whisky, and the crime infinitely more unnatural
and inhuman; and I would just as soon attend the ministrations of the one as the other.
All such ought to be expelled as apostates from religion, and a disgrace to the church.
Such men however give more countenance to the sin of slave-holding than a thousand
negro-traders can do.”

“A writer Presbyterian, lately asserts that the apostle Paul recognizes Philemon
as a slaveholder, and restores Onesimus his runaway slave, without passing any censure;
and thus consoles our slaveholding ministers who never preach a word against the sin of
it. This is a cruel slander on St. Paul and the religion he preached.”

The above shows the opinion of Col. Keys. Dr. Baxter, in his late address to his
students, says, “Both these delegates, Messrs. Steele and Keys, ‘professed to be very
moderate’ in their opposition to slavery. The above shows how they feel and act at home
when they are not overawed by extraneous influences.

Can southern ministers read the above, and then believe that sustaining the
violence of the last Assembly will exclude abolitionists from the floor of the Assembly?
An old school abolitionist, a member of the Convention and of the Assembly, and one of the majority, says, in a communication to the Cincinnati Philanthropist, July 14, 1837:

[illeg]assembly everything like a full discussion of slavery—the most desirable of all things for carrying truth respecting it into our churches. Nor could there be a reasonable ground of hope for any other result so long as these continued. A speedy termination of them therefore was highly desirable on this as well as many other accounts.

It seems Dr. Baxter would have the south sustain the Assembly, because it has put down abolition. His brother of the ‘Convention party’ wishes the Assembly to be sustained in its violence because the way is now clear for introducing abolition to the floor of the next Assembly. What delightful harmony of views prevails in the reformed church!!

Another old school minister, the Rev. J. S. G. Of Springfield, Ohio, one who approved the acts of the Assembly, writes July 14, in the Philanthropist:

“We regret that the highest Court of the church treated the abolition memorials so indecorously in their last session, but let the subject come up fairly, and when the abolition friends can expect a free discussion of their principles and we don’t fear any backing out or compromise. In the meantime, our business is to keep the subject agitated, possess our souls in patience under trials, and while we have a voice to be heard in the church or out of it let it be lifted up before God and man in behalf of our oppressed fellow men.”

When Dr. Baxter is crying to his friends, “only sustain our acts in the Assembly, and all will be well,” we find that his “Convention associates” are “rallying the clan” for a great campaign in the reformed Assembly of next year.

But we have written enough for the present week.

PHILEMON

New-York Evangelist August 26, 1837, page 138

[Under the heading of “Address of Mr. Plummer’s Elders,” the Evangelist reprints a long letter from the elders of William Plumer’s church, 1st Presbyterian Church, Richmond, Virginia, who were unhappy with his actions in the 1837 Assembly. The letter had been printed in the Southern Religious Telegraph on the 18th of August. The editor of the Evangelist presents this letter saying that it is irenic and in contrast to the actions of the Assembly which attempted to “exercise ecclesiastical lordship over God’s heritage.”]

[What follows is a small portion of the letter:]

“DEAR BRETHREN—The publication, by our pastor, in an extra Southern Religious Telegraph, of the 8th inst., giving statements concerning some of the late acts of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church, renders it incumbent on your elders to address you, in order to explain the grounds on which they have differed, and do differ from him, in respect to the propriety of those acts; and to make known to you the
unpleasant circumstances in which his course of action in regard to them, has placed the church of which he has pastoral oversight.

We feel especially exiled to this duty, because as the immediate representatives of this church, we are bound to watch over and protect its members in the exercise and enjoyment of their rights and privileges; and these, we think, are endangered by the late acts of the General Assembly....

The effort to bring the subject of abolition to bear upon the matter at issue, we consider to be unfair and uncandid. You must know that we and you have no sympathy with those who hold or teach the doctrines of the abolitionists, and are ready from such to withdraw ourselves at any moment, that the peace or the interests of the church may require. The true question is, whether the constitution, and the rights, privileges and liberties which it secures, are to be maintained inviolate, or whether the new code of expediency and summary justice adopted by the last General Assembly, is to be sanctioned and take the place of the constitution...

For the many years that we have held our office, there has not before been an instance of collision or difference with a pastor...How can we give up these bonds of peace and affection? But they are gone!...we must sorrow for these afflictions, and lift up our voice in warding and exhortation, that we should seek forgiveness and reconciliation from Him, and study to maintain the unity of the spirit, and the bond of peace. ...” signed by five ruling elders, Richmond, August 12, 1837

It is of interest that the elders speak only of unity and peace, not purity – although the long letter says they are quite orthodox, but always test and require members to agree in essentials, but have not required “a perfect agreement in non-essentials.”

New-York Evangelist  September 2, 1837, page 142

[The editor of the Evangelist chose to present the letters of two lawyers concerning the legality of the actions taken at the Assembly. One is identified as being from a Virginia lawyer to the editor of the S. R. Telegraph, entitled,] “THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION. DR. BAXTER’S PRECEDENTS.” It begins, “I perceive that in his anxiety to bolster up the proceedings of the General Assembly, Dr. Baxter still invokes the aid of his precedents, drawn from the civil history of this country.”

[The letter goes on to cite the ways in which the General Assembly actions were not only illegal by any standard, but had not been followed the church’s own precedent found in the ousting of the Cumberland Presbytery of Kentucky, which followed strictly, and at the expense of many years, the judicial practice of the Presbyterian Church. The example that this writer then uses is that of the Louisiana Purchase, and the possibility that all of the slave holding states admitted to the Union through this purchase should be the subject of removal by abolitionists. It is of interest that the subject chosen by the lawyer to frame his argument is that of slavery and its abolition, a topic that could be accepted by the readers as appropriate to use to make a point about something so divisive that it would be the subject of political maneuvering and ultimately cause a rift in the union of the United States. The following article continues with information from Baxter, who is quoted as follows:]
“From these facts and others which I could mention, I have no doubt, that if the acts of the General Assembly should be properly sustained, and the separation begun should be carried out, the Presbyterian church, by getting clear of the New School, will, at the same time, get clear of abolition.”  DR. BAXTER

[Following this quote the editor of the Evangelist, writes a long column about civil rights and responsibilities, but begins, “Abolition is to be put down, or at least to be removed from the Presbyterian church.” After citing all the possible problems that might be encountered civilly by citizen or visitor, the editor says,]

“Thus far, in Church and State, the North has yielded, and we have endeavored to soothe the passions and calm the tempest. To please the South, we have torn down presses,--we have called forth mobs,--we have bid the tongue be silent, when its language grated too harshly in Southern ears.

Shall these thing continue, until against the institutions of slavery, there shall be none to move the wing, or open the mouth, or peep? Shall the Southern section of the Presbyterian church, united with a faction in other States, cut off thousands from the church, and avow the intention of going on to rid it of all who have raised their voice against the institution of slavery, and the free States feel no alarm? The same thing—the same principles are operating both in Church and State….”
APPENDIX H The Auburn declaration, August 17, 1837


From the Minutes of the Auburn Convention, Held August 17, 1838, to Deliberate Upon the Doings of the Last General Assembly, etc. (Auburn, N.Y., 1837).

Report of the Committee on Doctrine

Whereas it is declared in the “Circular letter” of the late General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church “to all the churches of Jesus Christ,” that “very serious” and “alarming” errors and disorders have long prevailed in the bounds of the excinded synods and other portions of the Church, and as the late Assembly appears to have been influenced in deciding on the case of these synods, by these alleged errors and disorders, therefore

1. Resolved, That while we bear in mind that with the excitement of extensive revivals indiscretions are sometimes intermingled – and that in the attempt to avoid a ruinous practical Antinomianism, human obligation is sometimes urged in a manner that favors Arminian errors – yet, we are bound to declare, that such errors and irregularities have never been sanctioned by these synods or presbyteries – that the prejudice has in a great degree arisen from censorious and exaggerated statements, and from the conduct of persons not in connexion with the Presbyterian Church – that all such departures from the sound doctrine or order of the Presbyterian Church we solemnly disapprove, and when known, deem it our duty to correct by every constitutional method.

2. Resolved, That, as the declaration of the religious sentiments of the synods and presbyteries whom we represent, we cordially embrace the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, “as containing the system of doctrine taught in the holy Scriptures,” as understood by the Church ever since the Adopting Act of 1729: viz. “And in case any minister of the Synod, or any candidate for the ministry, shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles of said confession, he shall in time of making said declaration, declare his scruples to the Synod or Presbytery; who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds, and to ministerial communion, if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruples not essential or necessary in Doctrine, Worship or Government.”

3. Resolved, That in accordance with the above declaration, and also to meet the charges contained in the before-mentioned Circular and other published documents of the late General Assembly, this convention cordially disapprove and condemn the list of errors condemned by the late General Assembly, and adopt, as the expression of their own sentiments, and as they believe, the prevalent sentiments of the churches of these synods on the points in question, the list of “true doctrines” adopted by the minority of the said Assembly in their “Protest” on this subject, as follows, viz:
Errors and True Doctrine

FIRST ERROR. “That god would have prevented the existence of sin in our world, but was not able, without destroying the moral agency of man; or, that for aught that appears in the Bible to the contrary, sin is incidental to any wise moral system.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. God permitted the introduction of sin, not because he was unable to prevent it, consistently with the moral freedom of his creatures, but for wise and benevolent reasons which he has not revealed.

SECOND ERROR. “That election to eternal life is founded on a foresight of faith and obedience.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. Election to eternal life is not founded on a foresight of faith and obedience, but is a sovereign act of God’s mercy, whereby, according to the counsel of his own will, he has chosen some to salvation; “yet so as thereby neither is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established;” nor does this gracious purpose ever take effect independently of faith and a holy life.

THIRD ERROR. “That we have no more to do with the first sin of Adam than with the sins of any other parent.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. By a divine constitution, Adam was so the head and representative of the race, that, as a consequence of his transgression, all mankind become morally corrupt, and liable to death, temporal and eternal.

FOURTH ERROR. “That infants come into the world as free from moral defilement as was Adam when he was created.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. Adam was created in the image of God, endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. Infants come into the world, not only destitute of these, but with a nature inclined to evil and only evil.

FIFTH ERROR. “That infants sustain the same relation to the moral government of God, in this world, as brute animals, and that their sufferings and death are to be accounted for on the same principles as those of brutes, and not by any means to be considered as penal.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. Brute animals sustain no such relation to the moral government of God as does the human family. Infants are a part of the human family; and their sufferings and death are to be accounted for on the ground of their being involved in the general moral ruin of the race induced by the apostacy.

SIXTH ERROR. “That there is no other original sin than the fact, that all the posterity of Adam, though by nature innocent, will always begin to sin when they begin to exercise moral agency; that original sin does not include a sinful bias of the human mind, and a just exposure to penal suffering; and that there is no evidence in Scripture, that infants, in order to salvation, do need redemption by the blood of Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Ghost.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. Original sin is a natural bias to evil, resulting from the first apostacy, leading invariably and certainly to actual transgression. And all infants, as well as adults, in order to be saved, need redemption by the blood of Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Ghost.

SEVENTH ERROR. “That the doctrine of imputation, whether of the guilt of Adam’s sin, or of the righteousness of Christ, has no foundation in the Word of God, and is both unjust and absurd.”
TRUE DOCTRINE. The sin of Adam is not imputed to his posterity in the sense of a literal transfer of personal qualities, acts, and demerit; but by reason of the sin of Adam, in his peculiar relation, the race are treated as if they had sinned. Nor is the righteousness of Christ imputed to his people in the sense of a literal transfer of personal qualities, acts, and merit; but by reason of his righteousness, in his peculiar relation, they are treated as if they were righteous.

EIGHTH ERROR. “That the sufferings and death of Christ were not truly vicarious and penal, but symbolical, governmental, and instructive only.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. The sufferings and death of Christ were not symbolical, governmental, and instructive only, but were truly vicarious, i.e. a substitute for the punishment due to transgressors. And while Christ did not suffer the literal penalty of the law, involving remorse of conscience and the pains of hell, he did offer a sacrifice, which infinite wisdom saw to be a full equivalent. And by virtue of this atonement, overtures of mercy are sincerely made to the race, and salvation secured to all who believe.

NINTH ERROR. “That the impenitent sinner is by nature, and independently of the renewing influence or almighty energy of the Holy Spirit, in full possession of all the ability necessary to a full compliance with all the commands of God.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. While sinners have all the faculties necessary to a perfect moral agency and a just accountability, such is their love of sin and opposition to God and his law, that, independently of the renewing influence or almighty energy of the Holy Spirit, they never will comply with the commands of God.

TENTH ERROR. “That Christ does not intercede for the elect until after their regeneration.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. The intercession of Christ for the elect is previous as well as subsequent to their regeneration, as appears from the following Scripture, viz. “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou has given me, for they are thine. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.”

ELEVENTH ERROR. “That saving faith is not an effect of the operations of the Holy Spirit, but a mere rational belief of the truth or assent to the word of God.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. Saving faith is an intelligent and cordial assent to the testimony of God concerning his Son, implying reliance on Christ alone for pardon and eternal life; and in all cases it is an effect of the special operations of the Holy Spirit.

TWELFTH ERROR. “That regeneration is the act of the sinner himself, and that it consists in change of his governing purpose, which he himself must produce, and which is the result, not of any direct influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart, but chiefly of a persuasive exhibition of the truth, analogous to the influence which one man exerts over the mind of another; or that regeneration is not an instantaneous act, but a progressive work.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. Regeneration is a radical change of heart, produced by the special operations of the Holy Spirit, “determining the sinner to that which is good,” and is in all cases instantaneous.

THIRTEENTH ERROR. “That God has done all that he can do for the salvation of all men, and that man himself must do the rest.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. While repentance for sin and faith in Christ are indispensable to salvation, all who are saved are indebted from first to last to the grace and Spirit of God.
And the reason that God does not save all, is not that he wants the power to do it, but that in his wisdom he does not see fit to exert that power further than he actually does.

FOURTEENTH ERROR. “That God cannot exert such influence on the minds of men, as shall make it certain that they will choose and act in a particular manner, without impairing their moral agency.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. While the liberty of the will is not impaired, nor the established connexion betwixt means and end broken by any action of God on the mind, he can influence it according to his pleasure, and does effectually determine it to good in all cases of true conversion.

FIFTEENTH ERROR. “That the righteousness of Christ is not the sole ground of the sinner’s acceptance with God; and that in no sense does the righteousness of Christ become ours.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. All believers are justified, not on the ground of personal merit; but solely on the ground of the obedience and death, or, in other words, the righteousness of Christ. And while that righteousness does not become theirs, in the sense of a literal transfer of personal qualities and merit; yet, from respect to it, God can and does treat them as if they were righteous.

SIXTEENTH ERROR. “That the reason why some differ from others in regard to their reception of the Gospel is, that they make themselves to differ.”

TRUE DOCTRINE. While all such as reject the Gospel of Christ do it, not by coercion but freely – and all who embrace it do it, not by coercion but freely – the reason why some differ from others is, that God has made them to differ.

In further illustration of the doctrines prevalent in these sections of the Church, the Convention declare that the authors whose exposition and defence of the articles of our faith are most approved and used in these synods – are President Edwards, Witherspoon, and Dwight – Dr. Smalley, and Andrew Fuller – and the Commentators, Henry Doddridge, and Scott.
APPENDIX I. EXTRACT FROM 1837 MINUTES SHOWING OFFICIAL REPORTING OF DISTRIBUTION OF MINISTERS SERVING CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES

Synod of Albany (not exscinded)
a. Presbytery of Londonderry (New Hampshire) had 25 ministers; 8 of whom were serving congregational churches.

b. Presbytery of Newburyport (Maine) had 16 ministers; 8 of whom were serving congregational churches, 2 of whom were professors, and one was an agent.

Synod of Geneva (Exscinded)
a. Presbytery of Chenango had 10 ministers; one was serving a congregational church, and one was an agent.

b. Presbytery of Cayuga had 37 ministers; one was serving a congregational church, and one was an agent, 2 were professors, 4 were missionaries.

c. Presbytery of Tioga had 17 ministers; one was serving a congregational church.

d. Presbytery of Cortland had 13 ministers; none was serving a congregational church.

e. Presbytery of Chemung had 14 ministers; none was serving a congregational church.

Synod of Genesee (Exscinded)
a. Presbytery of Genesee had 26 ministers; none was serving a congregational church, and none was an agent.

b. Presbytery of Ontario had 22 ministers; none was serving a congregational church, and one was an agent.

c. Presbytery of Rochester had 29 ministers; none was serving a congregational church, and none was an agent, 3 were missionaries.

d. Presbytery of Niagara had 13 ministers; none was serving a congregational church, and none was an agent.

e. Presbytery of Buffalo had 34 ministers; none was serving a congregational church, and 3 were missionaries.

f. Presbytery of Angelica had 11 ministers; none was serving a congregational church, and none was an agent.

Synod of the Western Reserve (Exscinded)
Presbytery of Grand River had 27 ministers; none was serving a congregational church, and none was an agent.
Presbytery of Portage had 29 ministers; one was serving a congregational church, and three were agents, one President, three were professors.

Presbytery of Huron had 17 ministers; none was serving a congregational church, and one was a missionary.

Presbytery of Cleveland had 11 ministers; none was serving a congregational church, and one was an agent.

Presbytery of Medina had 10 ministers; none was serving a congregational church, and none was an agent, one was a missionary.
In speaking of the actions of the 1837 General Assembly:

There was not merely a secession of particles, leaving the original mass entire, but the original mass was split into two fragments of nearly equal magnitude; and though it was held by this Court, in the Commonwealth v. Green, 5 Wheat. Rep. 531, that the party which happened to be in office means of its numerical superiority at the time of the division, was that which was entitled to represent it and perform the functions of the original body, it was not because the minority were thought to be anything else than Presbyterian, but because a popular body is known only by its government or head. That they differed from the majority in doctrine or discipline was not pretended, though it was alleged that they did not maintain the scriptural warrant of ruling elders. But the difference in this respect had been tolerated if not sanctioned by the Assembly itself, which with full knowledge of it, had allowed the heterodox Synods to grow up as a part of the Church; and it could not therefore have been viewed as radical or essential. We were called, however, to pass, not on a question of heresy, for we would have been incompetent to decide it, but on the regularity of the meeting at which the trustees were chosen. I mention this to show that we did not determine that the excision was expurgation, and not division. Indeed, the measure would seem to have been as decisively revolutionary as would be an exclusion of particular States from the Federal Union for the adoption of an anti-republican form of government. The excluded Synods, gathering to themselves the disaffected in other quarters of the Church, formed themselves into a distinct body, governed by a supreme judicatory so like its fellow as to pass for its twin brother, and even lay claim to the succession. That the Old School party succeeded to the privileges and property of the Assembly was not because it was more Presbyterian than the other, but because it was stronger; for had it been the weaker, it would have been the party excluded, and the New School party, exercising the government as it then had done, would have succeeded in its stead, and thus the doctrine pressed upon us would have made title to Church property the sport of accident. In that event an attempt to deprive the Old School congregations of their churches, for an act of the majority, in withdrawing from the jurisdiction of the Assembly, would have loaded the New School party such a weight of popular odium as would have sunk it. Here then was the original mass divided into two parts of nearly equal magnitude and similar structure; and what was a congregation in the predicament before us to do? It was not bound to follow the party which was successful in the conflict merely because superiority of numbers had given it the victory. – See Watts and Sergeant’s Reports, Vol. I., pages 38-39.

APPENDIX K Voting Record from the General Assembly of 1837

Key for the voting chart
July 21, 2006

First column is name and any honorific
Second column will be a designation of Old School or New School as I feel confident enough to identify them as such
Third column is Minister or Elder
Fourth column is presbytery
Column 1 is a vote to end debate on abrogation of the plan of union, or Previous Question (PQ) 5/23/37
Column 2 is the vote on abrogation of the 1801 Plan of Union 5/23/37
Column 3 is a vote to end debate on "citing to the bar inferior judicatories that are charged by common fame with gross errors..." (PQ) 5/26/37
Column 4 is the vote on citing to the bar inferior judicatories that are charged by common fame with gross errors, plus a special committee to decide which they are, and if they should be removed from membership in the Assembly, (Special Committee and other irregularities, i.e. SC/OI) 5/26/37
Column 5 is a vote to table the report of the committee on the state of the church (Cte/SoCP for postponed) 5/30/37
Column 6 is a vote on closing debate on exscinding the Synod of the Western Reserve (Previous Question, PQ/SWR) 6/1/37
Column 7 is the vote to exscind the Synod of the Western Reserve (SWR/Ex) 6/1/37
Column 8 is to elect the Board of Trustees of the General Assembly (BT) 6/1/37
Column 9 is a vote not to allow voluntary societies to operate in the churches any longer (No Voluntary Societies or NVS) 6/2/37
Column 10 is a vote to exscind the Western New York synods (No to other synods or NOS) 6/5/37
Column 11 is a vote to set up a process for churches to apply to be reinstated if they are orthodox enough (OK to Come Back or OK/CB) 6/5/37
Column 12 is a vote to table a motion to add a rule that presbyteries that seem to have been formed to "unduly increase representation" (i.e. a power play to put the Old School out of power) are to be turned away, not given membership and their members sent back to a previous presbytery (Motion to table M/T) 6/6/37
Column 13 is a vote establishing an in-house Board of Foreign Missions (IBFM) 6/7/37
Column 14 is a Protest (Prst) against abrogating the 1801 Plan of Union 6/7/37
Column 15 is a vote approving the list of doctrinal errors from the memorialists (Old Schoolers) (DE) 6/7/37
Column 16 is a motion to table concerning 3rd presbytery of Philadelphia and the Presbytery of Wilmington (MT) 6/7/37
Column 17 is a vote to dissolve the Third Presbytery of Philadelphia (Ex/3PP) 6/7/37
Column 18 is a Protest (Prst) about citing the inferior judicatories and exscinding the Synod of the Western Reserve 6/8/37
Column 19 is a motion to table any overture on slavery (Sl/T) 6/8/37
Column 20 is a protest against erroneous doctrines having been passed (Prst) 6/8/37
Column 21 is a protest against the vote to dissolve the 3rd Philadelphia Presbytery (Prst) 6/8/37
Column 22 is a protest against actions concerning the American Education Society and the American Home Missionary Society (Prst) 6/8/37
Column 23 is a vote to send a letter to all the churches of the world about what went on at this assembly (L/WC) 6/8/37
Column 24 is a protest about removing the Synods of Utica, Geneva, and Genesee from the church (Prst) 6/8/37
Columns 25 and 26 are the final protests.

Actions by date, May 18 to June 8, 1837 (numbers equate to table column)

Tuesday, May 23 - votes 1, 2
Friday, May 26 - votes 3, 4
Tuesday, May 30 - vote 5
Thursday, June 1 - votes 6, 7, 8
Friday, June 2 - vote 9
Monday, June 5 - votes 10, 11
Tuesday, June 6 - vote 12
Wednesday, June 7 - votes 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
Thursday, June 8 - votes 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24
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<tr>
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<td>m</td>
<td>Londonderry</td>
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<tr>
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<td>m</td>
<td>Newburyport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burnap, Bliss</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Champlain</td>
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<td>Columbia</td>
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<tr>
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| Name                  | Office | Presbytery     | 1-PQ | 2-PQ | 3-PQ | 4-SC/ | 5-Sc/P | 6-PQ/ | 7-SWR/ | 8-BT | 9-NSV | 10-OK/ | 12-M/T | 13-IBFM | 14-Psr | 15-DE | 16-M/T | 17-Ex/ | 18-Prs | 19-SL/T | 20-Psr | 21-Psr | 22-L-WC | 23-Psr | 24-Psr | 25-Psr | 26-Psr |
|-----------------------|--------|----------------|------|------|------|-------|--------|-------|--------|------|-------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|---------|--------|-------|--------|
| Miller, John          | e      | West Hanover   | Y    | Y    | N    | N     | N      | N     | Y      | A     |       |        |        |         |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Anderson, Samuel C.   | e      | West Hanover   | Y    | Y    | N    | Y     | A      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      |        |         |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Plumer, William S.    | m      | East Hanover   | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | N      | Y       | Y      |        |        |        |         |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Dunn, John            | e      | East Hanover   | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      |        |         |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Graham, Samuel L. D.D.| m      | Roanoke        | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | N     | Y     |        |        |         |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Caruthers, Eli W.     | m      | Orange         | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | Y      | Y       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| McQueen, Archibald    | m      | Fayetteville   | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | N     | Y     | Y      | Y      | Y       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Potter, Henry         | e      | Fayetteville   | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | N     | Y     | Y      | Y      | Y       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Pharr, Walter S.      | m      | Concord        | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | Y      | N       | Y      | Y     |        |         |         |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Andrews, George       | e      | Concord        | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | N     | Y     | Y      | Y      | N       | Y      | Y     |        |         |         |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Watts, Albertus L.    | m      | Morganton      | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y     | Y      | Y      | Y       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Painter, George       | m      | Abingdon       | N    | N    | N    | N     | N      | N     | N      | N     | Y     | N      | N      | N       | Y      | A     | N      |        |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Brown, Thomas         | m      | Union          | N    | N    | N    | N     | N      | N     | N      | N     | Y     | N      | N      | N       |        |       | Y      |        |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| McCorkle, Francis A.  | m      | French Broad   | N    | N    | N    | N     | N      | N     | N      | N     | N     | N      | N      | N       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| McSween, John         | e      | French Broad   | N    | N    | N    | N     | N      | N     | N      | N     | N     | N      | N      | N       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Cunningham, John W.   | m      | Holston        | Y    | N    | N    | N     | N      | N     | N      | N     | N     | N      | N      | N       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Brown, Duncan D.D.    | m      | West Tennessee | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | Y      | Y       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Conkey, Zebina        | e      | West Tennessee | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y     | Y      | Y      | Y       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Galbraith, James      | m      | Nashville      | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | N      | Y       | Y      | Y     | Y      |        |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Patton, John          | e      | Nashville      | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | Y      | Y       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Sloss, James L.       | m      | North Alabama  | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | N      | Y       | Y      | Y     | N      |        |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Leatch, William       | e      | North Alabama  | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | N      | Y       | Y      | Y     | Y      |        |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Hodge, Samuel         | m      | Western District| Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | N      | Y       | Y      | Y     | Y      |        |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Greer, James          | e      | Western District| Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | N     | Y     | Y      | Y      | Y       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Ross, Anthony W.      | m      | South Carolina | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | N      | Y       | Y      | Y     | Y      |        |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Simpson, John W. Dr.  | e      | South Carolina | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | N      | Y       | Y      | Y     | Y      |        |         |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| Thornwell, James H.   | m      | Bethel         | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | N     | Y     | Y      | Y      | Y       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
| (9th day) Witherspoon, John D.D. | m | Harmony | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y     | Y      | Y     | Y      | Y     | N     | Y      | Y      | Y       |        |       |        |         |        |         |        |       |         |        |       |         |        |
|----------------------|--------|------------|------|------|------|---------|------------|-----------|----------|------|-------|-------|---------|-------|--------|--------|------|-------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Coit, John C.        | e      | Harmony    | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | Y       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Leland, Aaron W. D.D. | m      | Charleston Union | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| White, Elipha        | m      | Charleston Union | N    | N    | Y    | N       | N          | Y         | N        | N    | N     | Y     | N       | Y     | N      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Pratt, Horace S.     | m      | Georgia    | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Howard, Charles W.   | m      | Hopewell   | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | N          | Y         | N        | N    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| M'Dowell, James (9th day) | e      | Hopewell   | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Goulding, Thomas D.D. | m      | Flint River | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Witherspoon, Thomas S. (5th day) | m      | South Alabama | Y    | Y    | N    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Morgan, Nicholson R. | m      | Tuscaloosa  | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Johnston, David      | e      | Tuscaloosa  | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Van Court, John H.   | m      | Mississippi | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | Y       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Brotherton, Robert   | m      | Clinton     | Y    | Y    | Y    | N       | Y          | N         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Banks, Alexander R.  | m      | Arkansas    | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Smylie, James        | m      | Louisiana   | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
| Smylie, Nathaniel    | e      | Louisiana   | Y    | Y    | Y    | Y       | Y          | Y         | Y        | Y    | Y     | Y     | N       | Y     | Y      | Y       | Y    | Y     | Y        | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      | Y      | Y       | Y      |
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