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SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN CONSERVATIVES AND ECCLESIASTICAL DIVISION: THE FORMATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, 1926-1973

David Petersen
University of Kentucky, davidwilliampetersen@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN CONSERVATIVES AND ECCLESIASTICAL DIVISION: THE FORMATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, 1926-1973

Beginning with the fundamentalist controversy of the 1920's, the Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) was consistently divided by numerous disagreements over reunion with the Northern Presbyterian Church, racial policies, changing theological views, and resolutions on current social controversies. Led by groups such as the *Southern Presbyterian Journal*, Concerned Presbyterians, Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship, and Presbyterian Churchmen United, conservatives attempted to redirect the direction of the PCUS; however, their efforts failed. Disgruntled by a liberal-moderate coalition that held power, many conservatives withdrew and created the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) in 1973, the first major division of a Southern denomination. The PCA was not solely founded because of racial disagreements or any single cultural debate; rather decades' long theological disagreements regarding the church's role in society fueled separation along with several sharp social controversies. This departure also expedited reunion (1983) between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian denominations that formed the present Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PC(USA)). Like many other historic Protestant denominations, the PC(USA) has seen a decline in membership, but the PCA and other small Presbyterian denominations have been growing numerically thereby guaranteeing the continued presence of Presbyterianism in America.

KEYWORDS: Presbyterians, New South, Denominations, Presbyterian Church in America, Southern Protestants.

_____David Petersen _____

_____11/4/2009_____

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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, 1926-1973

By

David Petersen

_____ Dr. Shearer Bowman _____
Director of Thesis

_____ Dr. David Hamilton _____
Director of Graduate Studies

_____ 11/4/2009 _____

THESIS

David Petersen

The Graduate School
University of Kentucky

2009

SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN CONSERVATIVES AND
ECCLESIASTICAL DIVISION: THE FORMATION OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, 1926-1973

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

David Petersen

Miami, Florida

Director: Dr. Shearer Bowman, Associate Professor of History

Lexington, Kentucky

2009

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the aid of the following people, this thesis would not have been possible. Dr. Shearer Bowman of the University of Kentucky's Department of History served as chair of the thesis, and never tired of questions about Southern religious history. Thanks are given to Wayne Sparkman, the head of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) Historical Center, for his gracious assistance with this research. Anyone researching the PCA or its predecessor denominations is virtually obligated to visit this important, and well operated, archive. The University of Kentucky Special Collections Library' staff provided help with the Samuel M. Wilson papers. Thanks are extended to the Rev. Sean Lucas, senior minister at The First Presbyterian Church of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and the Rev. John P. Sartelle, senior minister at Tates Creek Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Kentucky, for their comments and insight about the PCA.

Appreciation is given to my parents, John and Linda Petersen, who provided enormous support during this project and endured endless discussions about Presbyterians; my sister Lynnae served as a welcome distraction.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the Almighty God who Presbyterians past and present worship. The church belongs to Him alone, and exists for His glory. To fellow PCA members, this is our story; may we learn from it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FILES.....	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: THE SOCIAL GOSPEL, FUNDAMENTALISTS AND EARLY DIVISIONS.....	11
CHAPTER THREE: THE CONTROVERSY WIDENS: RACE AND REUNION	39
CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONSERVATIVES UNITE AND DEPART.....	66
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	99
GLOSSARY.....	108
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	111
VITA.....	118

LIST OF FILES

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Exactly 112 years after the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS or Southern Presbyterian Church) formed in 1861, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was officially born at its first General Assembly in Birmingham, Alabama on December 7, 1973. Consisting of approximately 260 churches with 40,000 members that split from the roughly 900,000 member PCUS, the new denomination boldly released a statement saying that the PCUS no longer held to its historical principles and was in error.¹ For many conservative dissenters in the PCUS, their dream of a Presbyterian denomination where their views would reign supreme had come true. The longstanding ecclesiastical war, stemming from the 1920's, was substantially finished. Widely publicized, the controversy and subsequent schism caused reporter Margaret Shannon to remark that "the times that try men's souls in Dixie have also affected the church." Both sides experienced the pain of separation; each was convinced that their way represented the "true" Presbyterian Church.²

As the *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South* remarked, "the reasons for the creation of this denomination [PCA] are not easily summarized."³ Few historians have studied the controversy and much of the available information is confessionally based.⁴

¹ "A Message to All Churches of Jesus Christ Throughout the World From the General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church, December 7, 1973." The denomination was at first known as the National Presbyterian Church, but was forced to change its name the following to the Presbyterian Church in America because of legal problems with the National Presbyterian Church of Washington, DC (UPCUSA).

² Margaret Shannon, "A Church Divided" *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine* (28 October 1973, pp. 6-7, 26, 29-30), p. 6.

³ Richard Horner and Louis Weeks, "Presbyterian Church in America," In: *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South* (Second Edition), Eds. Samuel S. Hill and Charles Lippy (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), pp. 614-615.

⁴ Bryan V. Hillis, *Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed? American Religious Schisms in the 1970's*. (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Co., 1991) includes an essay on the 1973 Southern Presbyterian split and argues that theological differences were primarily responsible. This thirty page essay along with Rick Nutt, "The Tie That No Longer Binds: The Origins of the Presbyterian Church in

This paper makes a dual argument. First, the origins of the PCA are rooted in conservative PCUS dissent that extended back to the 1920's fundamentalist movement. The decision to separate was not based on immediate problems in 1973. Given the four decades of controversy within the church, it is inconceivable that a single cultural or social issue such as race or abortion could solely cause secession. Theological debates, on the other hand, continued through the decades and provide one solution to the eventual schism. The PCUS experienced extensive infighting between two theologically opposed factions: conservatives who held to a literal interpretation of the Bible, believed the church's primary mission was to evangelize, and advocated strict doctrinal standards; and liberals or progressives, who supported social and racial justice over evangelism, additional methods to interpret the Bible, and lax doctrinal standards.⁵ The numerous cultural and social debates aided the separation between the groups. Both factions, however, contained proponents of a national versus sectional denomination; they simply disagreed over whom to affiliate with.

This dichotomy should not be understood as to separate the entire PCUS into two parties- conservatives and liberals. The vast majority of the denomination, in fact, did not identify with either faction. In describing the Northern Presbyterian Church, historian William Weston discusses a category known as "denominational loyalists," those who identified primarily with the denomination instead of an interdenominational agency like

America" In: *The Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology* Eds. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), pp. 236-256; constitute the only recent academic studies that survey, albeit briefly, the controversy. For denominational studies see: John R. Richards, *The Historical Birth of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Liberty Hill, SC: The Liberty Press, 1987), Frank J. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: The Continuing Church Movement* (Manassas, VA: Reformed Educational Foundation, 1985), and Morton H. Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim: The Decline of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., As Reflected in its Assembly Actions* (Jackson, MS: Premier Printing Co., Published by The Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church, Faithful to the Scriptures and the Reformed Faith, 1973).

⁵ The liberal faction still applied stringent polity standards despite flexible doctrinal standards.

many evangelicals.⁶ D.G. Hart also argues for a “confessionalist” position for those who believed in liturgical worship, creeds, and were not concerned about the relevance of their faith.⁷ Princeton theologian J. Gresham Machen, Hart argues, would identify with this position. Suffice to say, denominational members were not split among two camps, but among many.

Additionally, the actions of the General Assembly of the PCUS in approving abortion for “socio-economic reasons,” opposing the Vietnam War, supporting integration, and advocating ecumenical activities prove that Southern white Protestantism is not monolithically conservative as Samuel Hill, Kenneth Bailey, and John Eighmy originally argued.⁸ In other words, the Southern white Protestant church was not entirely in “cultural captivity.” As progressives in the PCUS led the denomination in a new direction, conservatives fought for control, subsequently failed in their reform efforts, and finally left to form a new Presbyterian denomination. This paper is principally concerned with conservative efforts to change the PCUS’s supposed progressive direction.

⁶ William J. Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism: Competition in a Protestant House* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

⁷ D.G. Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002). See also: D. G. Hart, “The Tie That Divides: Presbyterian Ecumenism, Fundamentalism, and the History of Twentieth-Century American Protestantism” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 60: 1998, pp. 85-107.

⁸ Kenneth K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), Samuel S. Hill, Jr., *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1966), Samuel S. Hill Jr., Ed. *Religion in the Solid South* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1972), John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1972). In a reprint entitled: *Southern Church in Crisis Revisited* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1999), Hill writes that he “offered a too-general undifferentiated account of the prevailing popular theology (xvi).” Religious historian J. Wayne Flynt does acknowledge a progressive influence in the Southern church in: “‘Feeding the Hungry and Ministering to the Brokenhearted’: Southern Presbyterians and the Social Gospel, 1900-1920” In: *Religion in the South* Ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1985), pp. 83-137; but he is primarily concerned with the social gospel during the progressive era and does not explore events following the Second World War. See also: *Keith Harper, The Quality of Mercy: Southern Baptists and Social Christianity, 1890-1920* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1996) for proof that the social gospel did not leave the South unaffected.

It would be unwise to view the 1973 PCA separation as only a Presbyterian phenomenon. The 1970's witness turmoil across American Protestant churches as the Episcopal Church, Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, and the Southern Baptist Convention experienced sharp controversies that divided their denominations. As the 1960's radically changed American culture, so the 1970's altered the American religious landscape. Churches now competed in an increasingly secular environment. Even the South, long known as the "Bible Belt" was undergoing an enormous transformation from a rural segregated society to the "Sun Belt" of urbanization, industrialization, and relative prosperity. The dramatic cultural changes did not fail to impact the Southern church.⁹

To understand the ecclesiastical controversies in the mid-twentieth century and the eventual conservative schism, one must examine the historical background of divisions within American Presbyterianism.¹⁰ Immigrants from Scotland and Ireland constituted the core of the new American Presbyterian church. In 1706, they formed the first American presbytery; by 1789, the synods of New York and Philadelphia existed and the first General Assembly was held in 1789. By 1837, however, two clearly defined factions emerged in the Presbyterian Church: an "Old School" side that stressed strict Calvinism, formal liturgy, a tendency to stay within the denomination, and the "spirituality of the church." The "New School" side promoted a softer form of Calvinism, advocated revivals and interdenominational movements such as missionary associations, and had a comparatively strong anti-slavery sentiment as sectional tensions began.

⁹ Ernest Trice Thompson, *The Changing South and the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1950). Thompson examined the vast social, political, and cultural changes underway in the South while addressing what he believes the church's response should be. Principally, he examined the changing demographics from rural life to urban and suburban culture.

¹⁰ James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Richmond, VA: Westminster Press, 1996); D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 2007).

Although the 1837 division does not garner much attention, especially compared to the 1861 schism over the Civil War, this controversy was, in many aspects, far more important than the sectional controversy of 1861. While some, like C.C. Goen, claim that the 1837 division was instigated by sectional conflict, theological controversies appear to have been at the root of this split.¹¹ Presbyterians were primarily divided over one question: what was the role of the church in society? It would not be the last time this question divided American Presbyterians.

At the 1837 General Assembly, the Old School proponents, constituting a small majority, essentially excommunicated New School adherents, principally the Synod of New York, by proclaiming that associations with Congregationalists and interdenominational mission boards constituted a grave danger. Outraged at these actions, New School members stormed out of the General Assembly and immediately constituted a New School assembly. While there were Southern New School proponents, the vast majority resided in the North. Old School adherents, on the other hand, virtually monopolized the Southern states, Philadelphia, and Princeton Theological Seminary. With this seemingly obvious sectional breakdown, C.C. Goen argues that the 1837 separation was the first North/South separation before the Civil War.¹² Divided doctrinally, the controversies would continue throughout the history of the Presbyterianism in America.

The antebellum period witnessed the growth of a peculiar theology unique to the Southern Old School Presbyterian Church. Developed from the idea of the “spirituality of

¹¹ C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985). For instance, New School proponents were increasingly hesitant about the Calvinist insistence on predestination, original sin, and the total depravity of humans. They generally stressed man’s ability to reach out and grasp salvation; man, to them, apparently had the inherent ability to be good.

¹² *Ibid.*, 68.

the church” as propagated by Southern theologian James Henley Thornwell, these Presbyterians questioned any involvement of the church in questioning societal or secular issues such as slavery or politics.¹³ Such theology was quickly adopted by many Southern churchmen who sought a religious rationale to oppose Northern ideology and abolitionism. This dualistic theology would later be extensively criticized by those who believed that the church’s mission was not just spiritual.

If the 1837 squabble divided Presbyterians, the Civil War further intensified animosity between sections. As Goen recounts, the three major Protestant denominations (Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian) split over slavery prior to the Civil War. The New School Presbyterians divided in 1857 over a slavery resolution while their Old School brethren did not break fellowship until 1861, when the Gardiner Springs Resolution passed requiring loyalty to the Federal government. Presbyterian historian Morton H. Smith, however, takes a different view of the 1861 split. He believes, as some church pronouncements said, that Southern Presbyterians broke fellowship with their Northern counterparts over doctrinal issues, particularly relating to the church’s relationship to the state.¹⁴ Southern Presbyterians complained that Northerners had equated devotion to God with allegiance to the Union government. Of course, Southerners did not explain why they backed the Confederate government. Throughout the war, both branches of Presbyterianism strongly supported their respective governments. In 1862, Southern Old and New School Presbyterians reunited on largely Old School terms as this party

¹³ See particularly: John B. Adger and John L. Girardeau Eds., *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, 4 vols (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1881). The fourth volume, consisting of Thornwell’s writings regarding the church and society, is the most relevant to this study.

¹⁴ Morton Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim*, p. 9.

dominated Southern Presbyterianism.¹⁵ No doubt, political expediency also aided in their decision to consolidate their churches. The united church was known as the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. After the war (1866), the official title became the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS).¹⁶

After the Civil War ended, as Charles Reagan Wilson explains, Southerners were faced with a moral dilemma. God's cause had failed; in desperation, Southerners attributed political failure to their own spiritual failure, which had caused God to revoke his blessing from the South. The subsequent glorification of the Civil War South became known as the "lost cause." Like most other Southern Protestants, many PCUS members participated in lost cause rituals. As Wilson and Gaines Foster note, Southern identity was never stronger than in the post Civil War period.¹⁷

In 1869, a pivotal event occurred in the Northern Presbyterian Church when the Old School and New School factions reunited to form the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.¹⁸ The union was largely conciliatory to the New School position, and Old School Calvinism noticeably diminished in the Northern church following this merger. The next year, a proposal was sent to the PCUS offering an invitation of reunion. The Southerners, however, spurned the offer and accused their Northern brethren of doctrinal problems; resentment from the Civil War also influenced relations. The PCUS was more concerned with the theological implications implicit in the Old School and New School merger than

¹⁵ George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970). Harold M Parker, Jr., *The United Synod of the South: The Southern New School Presbyterian Church* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988).

¹⁶ Harold M Parker, Jr. *Studies in Southern Presbyterian History* (Gunnison, CO: B & B Printers, 1979).

¹⁷ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1983); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁸ Note the distinction between this denomination (1789-1958) and the current PC(USA), 1983 - present.

they were with reuniting with Northern brethren. Although reunion talks would not substantially occur again until the 1930's, the topic was often mentioned in press and discussions.

Interestingly, in 1875, the PCUS disavowed its former statements supporting the Confederacy on the grounds that the denomination had erred by becoming involved in political affairs. The “spirituality of the church” was thus affirmed to be the guiding principle of the denomination. Following the Civil War, Southern Presbyterians were poor both in ministers and finances. The first goal was to rebuild the denominational infrastructure. As Daniel Stowell recounts, the PCUS successfully reorganized and became a powerful Southern institution.¹⁹ Until the 1920's the denomination retained its Old School theology and refrained from criticizing most controversial cultural issues. The church increasingly became a part of Southern culture, thus partially proving Eighmy's notion that, at least during this period, the church was essentially captive to its culture. When controversies arose that asserted Southern culture had erred, the church would be in a poor position to adequately address the situation.

The new PCUS had a standard Presbyterian system of government with a few variants. The session, consisting of elders and pastors, led each congregation, while the presbytery consisting of representatives from each church governed a regional district such as North Alabama. Ruling elders were often found in each church; these men were not ordained ministers, but were certified lay leaders. The PCUS had the synod level of government with jurisdiction over larger areas such as Appalachia or Virginia. The synod had its roots in earlier times when ministers could not feasibly assemble at more distant

¹⁹ Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

locations for national meetings. Finally, the General Assembly was the highest voice in the PCUS and consisted of elected ministers and ruling elders.

The PCUS also contained some distinguishing polity from other Presbyterian denominations. The Southern church continued to require ministerial exams in theology and church government, thereby expressing the importance it attached to theology and Calvinism in particular.²⁰ Additionally, the PCUS still maintained minister and ruling elder parity.²¹ Such a requirement was unique to the Southern church. This last requirement became extremely important throughout the twentieth century. Ruling elders generally voted more conservatively on issues than ordained ministers thus helping maintain the conservative bent of the PCUS for a longer period than their Northern counterparts. Ministers, with their required education, frequently had broader experiences and were more willing to experiment with theology and develop ecumenical relationships.

In general, the PCUS held to a traditional reformed theological system that was held by most Old School American Presbyterians, at least until the mid-twentieth century. Reformed theology stresses the preeminence of God over man, the depravity of humans, the election of the chosen, and the necessity of God's initiating the conversion experience. Marsden claims that there are three facets to reformed theology: doctrinalism, culturalism, and pietism.²² Many Presbyterians identify with a stringent doctrinal position. In other words, holding and believing the correct theology becomes the basis of one's faith.

²⁰ Morton Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim*, p. 18.

²¹ R.A. Lapsley, "Has the Southern Presbyterian Church Any Distinctive Principles?" Quoted in: Morton Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim*, p. 19.

²² George M. Marsden, "Introduction: Reformed and American," in *Southern Reformed Theology*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), pp. 1-12.

The doctrine of unconditional election is by far the most unique point of reformed theology. Such a doctrine, emphasizing God's grace over human works, would seem to go against any elitism, but Presbyterians have struggled with this issue since the formation of American Presbyterianism. Certainly in the twentieth century, for most regions, Presbyterians have been viewed as a church of the elite. Typically, well educated people attend their churches, and their ministers are also required to obtain a seminary education. Such a policy has greatly curtailed Presbyterian expansion, particularly compared to Methodists or Baptists.

Many commentators have probed the deep divisions within twentieth century white Protestantism. Yet, there is a prevailing belief that most American Protestant denominations were unified before the fundamentalist movement of the 1920's. While the fundamentalist controversy certainly created tension, it is vital to understand that church controversy existed in the Presbyterian Church (and others) from its inception. Still, compared to the twentieth century, church issues in the PCUS after the Civil War were relatively quiet until the 1920's. With the advent of fundamentalism, reaction to evolution, the social gospel, and the emergence of new theological systems, the harmony that existed would be strained to the breaking point.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SOCIAL GOSPEL, FUNDAMENTALISTS, AND EARLY DIVISIONS

“I am inclined to hold the Federal Council chiefly responsible
for all of this unhallowed agitation.” (Samuel Wilson)

By the early 1920’s, the Southern Presbyterian Church experienced ecclesiastical disturbances regarding the church’s mission despite its regional nature and generally harmonious history. This chapter examines the rise of several controversies that plagued the PCUS throughout much of the twentieth century. Several themes will be addressed including: the social gospel, fundamentalism, reunion with the Northern Presbyterian Church, ecumenism through the Federal Council of Churches (later National Council of Churches), and the threat of communism.

In 1907, Walter Rauschenbusch, professor at Rochester Theological Seminary, published his influential book, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. His assertion of Christianity’s importance in the social sphere, that is the practical and temporal components of the faith, greatly influenced many in the Northern Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). Rauschenbusch stressed the church’s role in alleviating problems related to industrialization and urbanization.¹ This philosophy, soon known as the “social gospel,” was intricately tied to the surging Progressive movement. Rauschenbusch’s work moved Northern churches towards practicing their Christianity in the social sphere in areas such as: the alleviation of poverty, better housing, adequate food, and other troubling community matters.

While the vast majority of this movement was concentrated in the North because of the region’s industrial strength and urban centers, the social gospel and Progressive

¹ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), xi-xii.

movements did not fail to reach the South.² In the PCUS, the social gospel gradually infiltrated the denomination; however, during the pre Second World War period, only the seminaries, denominational officials, and a few pastors were extensively influenced by the movement.³ The vast majority of Southerners were either unaware of or ambivalent toward the social gospel. Some believe, as Keith Harper asserts, that Southern Christians were already practicing social Christianity through the funding of orphanages, providing food, and aiding widows.⁴ The few Southern conservatives aware of the social gospel roundly denounced the movement for seeking corporate rather than individual redemption.⁵

In partial response to social gospel trends, the growing acceptance of evolution, and liberal theology, the “fundamentalist” movement began. Initially, the movement was defined by twelve volumes known as *The Fundamentals*, published between 1910 and 1915.⁶ More specifically, in 1910, the PCUSA’s General Assembly affirmed five beliefs that they considered essential. These were:

Inerrancy of the Scriptures
The virgin birth and the deity of Jesus
Substitutionary atonement through God’s grace and human faith
The bodily resurrection of Jesus
The authenticity of Christ’s miracles⁷

² William Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001).

³ This disputes J. Wayne Flynt’s assertion that there was a substantial social gospel movement in the PCUS during these decades. It is unarguable that the PCUS (and other Southern denominations) practiced their faith through charity work. The larger question, however, is if that constitutes the social gospel. This author would respectfully argue that it does not.

⁴ Keith Harper, *The Quality of Mercy: Southern Baptists and Social Christianity, 1890-1920* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1996).

⁵ See: Barry Hankins, *God’s Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1996).

⁶ A. C. Dixon and R. H. Torrey Eds. *The Fundamentals* (12 Vols.) (Chicago: Testimony Publishing, 1910-1915).

⁷ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (1910), pp. 272-273.

In the following decades, however, fundamentalism would extend well beyond the holding of these five tenants of faith to include six-day creationism, prohibition, and the relatively new dispensational theological system. An exact definition of fundamentalism almost defies explanation, even if one restricts the focus to a single decade. For example, the five major fundamental points, as stated above, could be agreed upon by many Presbyterians who would not consider themselves fundamentalists.⁸ These church members often united under the fundamentalist banner in the face of liberal opposition, but many conservatives did not support fundamentalists' opinions on prohibition and evolution. Indeed, as theologian Sean Lucas remarks, the fundamentalists were strongly united in what they opposed (modernism), but less than united in what they supported (beyond the basic doctrines of Christianity).⁹ What remains clear is that the fundamentalist movement exerted a powerful force on Northern Presbyterians, Northern Baptists, and subsequent conservative groups that splintered from these denominations.¹⁰

The 1925 Scopes Trial was a watershed for the fundamentalist movement.¹¹ Ridiculed by the press and subsequently routed in mainline denominations, many fundamentalists departed from major religious organizations. For now, the days of actively engaging the culture (ala William B. Riley and William Jennings Bryan) were gone. Separatism was an extremely important issue for fundamentalists. Many separated because they believed in maintaining doctrinal purity. While fundamentalists were

⁸ J. Gresham Machen, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, was an example of a staunch Presbyterian conservative who cooperated with fundamentalists because of the five core issues, but disagreed with the fundamentalist's emphasis on prohibition and dispensationalism.

⁹ Sean Michael Lucas, Private Email to the Author, 11 March 2008.

¹⁰ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) remains the classic work on American fundamentalism.

¹¹ Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

noticeably quiet on the religious scene until after World War Two, they most certainly were not dead. As Joel Carpenter explains, fundamentalists in this period expanded their own networks and institutions.¹² When they burst on the scene in post war America, they surprised many by their organization. Yet, this emphasis on separatism and doctrinal purity would have profound consequences for the movement in the following decades. The first generation had an evident mission in separating, but would this carry over to their successors?¹³

Fundamentalism in the South, however, differed from the movement in the North in several aspects. Southern churches, at this time, were predominantly conservative. Hence, there were fewer controversies for fundamentalists to champion. The fundamentalist movement in the South also did not take place until well after the Northern controversies. William Glass argues that early fundamentalists did not find many sympathizers in the South because most Southerners believed that their denominations were orthodox; some were also suspicious of the fundamentalists' inter-denominational focus.¹⁴ Presbyterian fundamentalists often preferred to work within existing denominational structures and did not stress separatism, but rather doctrinal purity. Not until a generation later did many Southerners fully embrace fundamentalism. Additionally, fundamentalists' emphasis on building networks and establishing institutions such as Bob Jones University, aided their acceptance by Southerners who, by

¹² Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹³ I am indebted to Perry Miller's symbolism for these observations. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 1-15.

¹⁴ William Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950*; R. Milton Winter, "Presbyterians and Separatist Evangelicals: A Continuing Dilemma" *Perspectives*, January 2007, Published Online: <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/perspectives/jan07/presbyterians-evangelicals.pdf> Accessed 1 August 2008. Winter, a longstanding Southern Presbyterian minister, takes a personal look at the evolving crisis in the Southern Presbyterian Church throughout the twentieth century.

the 1960's, were alarmed at mainline denominational actions.¹⁵ Religious trends in the South, it appeared, simply moved a generation slower than Northern events.

Several events, which can be traced to fundamentalist influences, created controversy in the PCUS and set conservative opposition in motion. Serious debate first began in 1926 concerning the teachings of Hay Watson Smith, a PCUS minister. Smith, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary (New York) and a former minister in two Congregational churches, was known for his comparatively liberal theological views. In 1911, Smith took a temporary position at the Second Presbyterian Church of Little Rock, Arkansas. After a year, the satisfied congregation issued a permanent call. Because Smith was not an official PCUS minister, he was required to apply for membership in the Arkansas Presbytery of the PCUS. At the presbytery's meeting, Smith spoke of his personal beliefs. Among the controversial beliefs he held were: the rejection of the Bible as absolutely inerrant in all matters, acceptance of evolution, rejection of the Calvinist doctrine of humans' total depravity, and openness to other modes of Baptism.¹⁶ Despite these positions, which conflicted with current Southern Presbyterian confessional standards, the Arkansas Presbytery confirmed his ministerial position in 1912.¹⁷ Clearly the presbytery was not alarmed at Smith's stances. During the next decade, Smith's church grew rapidly and became one of the largest Presbyterian churches in Arkansas. Although there were some minor protests by conservatives, Smith ably defended himself and the matter received scant attention outside the Arkansas Presbytery.

¹⁵ Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* is the best source for Second World War era fundamentalist activities. See also: Mark Taylor Dalhouse, *An Island in the Lake of Fire: Bob Jones University, Fundamentalism, and the Separatist Movement* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

¹⁶ Sean Michael Lucas, " "Our Church Will Be on Trial": W.M. McPheeters and the Beginnings of Conservative Dissent in the Presbyterian Church in the United States" *Journal of Presbyterian History*: Spring/Summer 2006, pp. 52-66.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

The rise of the fundamentalist movement, however, resurrected the issue in the early 1920's. In 1925, the Scopes Trial further alienated factions within the PCUS. For the next decade, debates occasionally surfaced in the denomination regarding evolution. Several conservatives argued that Smith's views were outside PCUS standards.¹⁸ Smith responded openly and clearly proclaimed his views on these issues. He asserted that while he believed in evolution, he did not regard it as forsaking the Christian message. Indeed, he actively worked against an Arkansas initiative that prohibited the teaching of evolution in public schools.¹⁹ Smith advocated modern theology and claimed that an insistence on Calvinism had hurt the church's witness. Now awakened to the dangers of evolution, conservatives charged Smith with errant views in front of the Arkansas Presbytery; the presbytery, however, demurred and said that while Smith's views were not representative of the denomination, they were not outside the bounds of orthodoxy.²⁰

In 1929, the Augusta (GA) Presbytery asked the PCUS General Assembly to investigate Smith's stated view on evolution. William McPheeters, a venerable Old Testament theologian from Columbia Theological Seminary, quickly organized opposition to Smith. McPheeters introduced a substitute motion calling for the Arkansas Presbytery "to investigate the rumors that are abroad as to the soundness in the faith of Rev. Hay Watson Smith."²¹ The resolution was deliberately broad, and perhaps because

¹⁸ Minutes of the Arkansas Presbytery, April 1930, as quoted in: William McPheeters, "Facts Revealed by the Records In The So-called Investigation Of The Rumors Abroad Concerning the Soundness in Faith of Rev. Dr. Hay Watson Smith" Decatur, GA: Privately Printed, Introduction dated 27 March 1934, p. 106. Copy held at the University of Kentucky Special Collections Library, Wilson Collection, 50W2, Presbyterian files.

¹⁹ Gene Vinzant, "The Case of Hay Watson Smith: Evolution and Heresy in the Presbyterian Church" *The Ozark Historical Review*: Vol. 30: Spring 2001, pp. 57-70.

²⁰ Minutes of the Arkansas Presbytery, April 1930, as quoted in: William McPheeters, "Facts Revealed by the Records In The So-called Investigation Of The Rumors Abroad Concerning the Soundness in Faith of Rev. Dr. Hay Watson Smith" pp. 104-106.

²¹ Sean Michael Lucas, "Our Church Will Be on Trial" p. 55.

of the great respect McPheeters had, the General Assembly passed the motion. As Sean Lucas notes, McPheeters wanted to prosecute Smith for his deviant theological views.²² McPheeters did not challenge the validity of Smith's ordination per se, but asserted that Smith violated his ordination vows by preaching views that were contrary to historic Presbyterianism.

The broad nature of McPheeter's resolution, however, doomed conservative opposition. When the Arkansas Presbytery met in April 1930, the body merely assented to Smith's views and refused to try him. The presbytery, no doubt, was reluctant to try the minister of a large, influential church. Several Arkansas Presbytery ministers dissented and protested the presbytery's refusal to directly question Smith. One minister, Reverend James E. McJunkin, would correspond with McPheeters during the following year to head opposition. McJunkin's church, however, intervened and dismissed him for his involvement in the Smith case.²³ Reverend Algernon Killough subsequently became McPheeter's new leader in Arkansas, but the conservative opposition did little.

McPheeters never directly interviewed Smith, instead waging a long distance campaign from his office in Decatur, Georgia. During this time, he published several pamphlets attacking Smith and the Arkansas Presbytery. One of McPheeters' lengthy discourses shows how conservatives believed that a deviation from confessional standards would result in the destruction of their denomination.²⁴ The current crisis over evolution and presbytery standards convinced McPheeters that the Southern Presbyterian Church was at

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 56; McJunkin was pastor of Graham Memorial Presbyterian Church in Forrest City, Arkansas.

²⁴ William McPheeters, "Facts Revealed by the Records In The So-called Investigation Of The Rumors Abroad Concerning the Soundness in Faith of Rev. Dr. Hay Watson Smith."

a crisis. If the PCUS refused to discipline its errant ministers, the entire body might fall into heresy.

The pamphlet, “Facts Revealed by the Records in the So-called Investigation of the Rumors Abroad Concerning...Dr. Hay Watson Smith” gives an extensive overview of the controversy from the conservative point of view. McPheeters went far beyond the immediate issue of Smith’s beliefs and into the broader category of general denominational practices. The principal problem, McPheeters argued, was not Smith himself, for he had clearly stated his beliefs and divergences from confessional standards.²⁵ Rather, the Arkansas Presbytery primarily stood at fault because they had ordained him knowing of these beliefs. While American Presbyterians, with the passage of the 1729 Adopting Act by the (Philadelphia) Synod (this was prior to General Assemblies), had long allowed minor scruples with the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), McPheeters insisted that Smith’s views were well beyond reasonable exceptions.²⁶

McPheeters feared that if Smith’s theological beliefs were allowed in the PCUS, the result would be a total focus on the temporal versus eternal. He remarked,

Who can be unaware of the fact that the Church’s thought today is man centered and not God-centered. Who can fail to recognize the fact that the Church’s main concern is with man’s present interests rather than with his eternal interests; with his ethical rather than his spiritual interests; ignoring the fact that it is the latter that ultimately ground and safeguard the former.²⁷

²⁵ These standards were primarily vested in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the PCUS Book of Church Order.

²⁶ Guy S. Klett Ed., *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1706-1788* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1976), pp. 103-104. The extent of allowed scruples under the “Adopting Act” continues to be debated.

²⁷ William McPheeters, “Facts Revealed by the Records In The So-called Investigation Of The Rumors Abroad Concerning the Soundness in Faith of Rev. Dr. Hay Watson Smith” p. 102.

The theological teacher saw Smith's views as a clear threat to the central purpose of the church- humans' relationship with God and the salvation of souls.

Responding to McPheeters proposed case against the Arkansas Presbytery, Samuel Wilson of Lexington, Kentucky, remarked that there was almost no precedent in ecclesiastical or secular law for a trial of the Arkansas Presbytery for not adhering to instruction. A noted lawyer, judge, and historian, Wilson frequently served as ruling elder for the First Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Kentucky. Although he supported conservatives, Wilson did not actively participate in the Smith case. Apparently he had some reservations about it. He wrote:

Frankly, I cannot say I am not troubled with doubts of my own, concerning some of the cardinal doctrines of our Confession, but I have not yet reached the point of renouncing them, and I keenly sympathize with your laudable zeal in defence [sic] of the faith...I could wish your position had a better chance for complete and authoritative vindication.²⁸

Wilson certainly sympathized enough to send several lengthy letters to McPheeters that outlined legal procedures for the proposed trial. He refused to sponsor such a resolution at General Assembly, but indicated his support by other methods.²⁹ In another letter, he claimed to be a moderate in the ongoing debates.³⁰ Still, for most purposes, Wilson should be classified as a conservative.

The Smith case represented an interesting situation in the PCUS. Some scholars, like Sean Lucas, claim that this represented an early intrusion of fundamentalism into the PCUS.³¹ During this period, fundamentalists were most prominent in Northern

²⁸ Letter to Dr. W. M. McPheeters from Judge Samuel Wilson, 14 April 1934. Held at the University of Kentucky's Special Collections, Judge Samuel Wilson Collection, 50W2, Presbyterian files. All subsequent entries marked "Wilson Collection" are found in this location.

²⁹ Letter to W. M. McPheeters from Judge Samuel Wilson, 23 April 1934, Wilson Collection.

³⁰ Letter from Samuel Wilson to J. Gresham Machen, 22 May 1934, Wilson Collection.

³¹ Sean Michael Lucas, "Our Church Will Be on Trial", p. 52.

denominations, which endured far greater doctrinal disputes than Southern churches. The question, as noted at the beginning of the chapter, is what constitutes a fundamentalist? Anti-evolution is certainly one tenant of fundamentalism, but it is only one element. The venerable McPheeters, as a seminary professor, would hardly be identified with many recognized fundamentalists, such as the famous Northern Presbyterian William Jennings Bryan. Wilson was certainly not a fundamentalist, for he ardently opposed prohibition³² One, however, could say that McPheeters was simply holding to an Old School Presbyterian heritage, a belief system that was quickly coming under attack from denominational and seminary leaders. Still, it is hardly arguable that fundamentalism succeeded in polarizing the debates.

Although McPheeters soon died, the standard he helped raise was by no means dead. His nephew Thomas [Tom] McPheeters Glasgow and others would continue to fight progressive forces in the denomination. At stake was whether a minister or elected denominational official could teach from a different perspective than the PCUS confessions. Smith and his supporters consistently advocated a variety of opinions and denominational tolerance while conservatives insisted that strict adherence to confessional standards must be maintained. This formed the essence of the major division that would engulf the PCUS for forty years.

In 1933, an issue came before the General Assembly that would have underlying consequences for decades. Several commissioners proposed a “Committee on Social and Moral Questions.” Samuel Wilson led the opposition and temporarily defeated the measure; however, he was not present the following year when commissioners finally

³² Letter from Wilson to the Board of Deacons of the First Presbyterian Church of Lexington, Kentucky, 24 April 1933, Wilson Collection.

approved the permanent committee. After the 1933 Assembly, Wilson wrote an article in a seminary journal clarifying his opposition to the committee.³³ His opinions reflected an older Southern Presbyterian theological bent and a resistance to ecclesiastical involvement in modern social issues. Wilson chiefly criticized the proposed committee for the following reasons: the extremely broad scope of the committee as social and moral questions encompassed numerous issues, the lack of precedent for such a committee, the emphasis on societal versus individual reform, and the supposed ignoring of the “spirituality of the church.”

In his critique of the seemingly limitless power of the committee, Wilson was concerned about the proposed committee turning into a “moral police.” Personally, he opposed prohibition and believed that such issues concerned Christian liberty.³⁴ Wilson also accused the planned committee for heavily emphasizing societal morals over the individual. In traditional theological rhetoric, he noted that problematic societal issues were variable as to the community and needed to be addressed at the individual level. Furthermore, Wilson argued that the church’s mission was spiritual, not one of general moral reform (although that could be a consequence of individual conversion). He closed by asserting that the church (PCUS) did not need modern devices or new agencies, but a “new baptism of the Spirit from on high, a closer alliance with the imperishable endowments of the past.”³⁵ With the exception of his opinion on prohibition, many of these beliefs represented conservative Southern Presbyterian ideology for decades.

³³ Samuel M. Wilson, “The Proposed Assembly’s Committee on Social and Moral Questions is Inexpedient, Unwise, and Unconstitutional” *Union Seminary Review* Vol. 45 (Richmond VA: Union Theological Seminary, April 1934), pp. 188-198.

³⁴ Letter from Wilson to the Board of Deacons of the First Presbyterian Church of Lexington, Kentucky, 24 April 1933, Wilson Collection.

³⁵ Samuel Wilson, “The Proposed Assembly’s Committee on Social and Moral Questions is Inexpedient, Unwise, and Unconstitutional,” p. 197.

At the same time the General Assembly debated the Committee on Moral and Social Reform, commissioners also divided over the PCUS's relationship to the Federal Council of Churches.³⁶ Formed in 1908, the Federal Council represented most American mainline denominations.³⁷ Conservatives, however, protested that the council was primarily concerned with social and political issues, and was therefore ideologically aligned with Rauschenbusch's social gospel theology. Reverend William Crowe, pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, chaired the committee on the Federal Council question.³⁸ Along with the Reverend R. A. White of Mooresville, North Carolina, he opposed reentering the council. Nevertheless, the majority of the committee and the assembly voted to rejoin in 1934. Conservatives continually criticized the Federal Council for social gospel ideology during the following decades.

Conservatives, like Wilson, argued that there was a distinct relationship between the Federal Council debate and the proposed Committee on Social and Moral Questions. To them, the Federal Council represented the ultimate in the social gospel movement. Wilson asserted, "I am inclined to hold the Federal Council chiefly responsible for all of this unhallowed agitation over the spurious Social Gospel which is disturbing our church."³⁹ Conservatives feared losing their denominational identity and heritage. Interestingly, Wilson had a culprit to blame for the Federal Council question- and it was not the progressive faction of the PCUS. The Methodist Church (North), claimed Wilson, was the chief backer of the Federal Council of Churches and the denomination "has been

³⁶ In 1950, this body became known as the National Council of Churches (NCC).

³⁷ The Southern Baptist Convention was the largest denomination to not join the FCC.

³⁸ Letter from Samuel Wilson to Rev. William Crowe, 19 April 1934, Wilson Collection.

³⁹ Letter from Wilson to Rev. William Crowe, 19 April 1934, Wilson Collection.

diligently striving to inundate both the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches.”⁴⁰

Wilson was not criticizing the Methodist church on its Arminian theology, but rather its view of the church’s relationship to society.

Yet another debate involved the political leaning of the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) and some PCUS officials. In letters and pamphlets of PCUS conservatives during this time, the theme of communism is prevalent, particularly in denouncing the FCC. Conservatives charged that some ministers and leaders of the PCUS sympathized with communism. The intense, almost paranoia, suspicion of communists in secular society after 1917 certainly did not pass through the churches unnoticed. W. Calvin Wells, a layman of the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi, and state chairman of the Mississippi Democratic Party in 1925, had some particularly irate comments about the situation. He wrote, “It appears to me that many of our Ministers really desire that the Southern Presbyterian Church should commit itself to some new form of government- Socialistic, Communistic, or Bolshevist.”⁴¹ J. B. Hutton, pastor of First Presbyterian of Jackson, and several men of the church were extremely active in denouncing certain political developments. Such opposition also affected any changes in church government. Most Southerners were deeply suspicious of centralization. Like Wilson, Wells believed that the church’s business should be centered in the spiritual realm. He continued, “I deny the right of any Church Court from the General Assembly on down, to direct me what the form of our Civil Government shall be and how I shall vote as a citizen of the United States and of the State of Mississippi on questions dealing

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Letter from W. Calvin Wells to Samuel Wilson, 14 April 1934, Wilson Collection.

with Civil Government.”⁴² In essence, Wells viewed the General Assembly, like the federal government, as a threat to personal liberty. Many conservative PCUS churches were noted for their opposition to denominational activities.⁴³

The next controversy occurred over Union Theological Seminary Professor Ernest Trice Thompson’s writings.⁴⁴ A prolific writer and book review editor of the *Union Seminary Review*, Thompson strongly advocated modern social views, progressive reforms, and modern theology in the PCUS. He undoubtedly was the most influential twentieth-century Southern Presbyterian. Conservatives frequently criticized his beliefs, but few ever attacked him personally; Thompson was generally liked by many ministers. In fact, several conservatives were his personal friends although they disagreed in theology.⁴⁵ In September 1940, Tom Glasgow, an elder at Myers Park Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, published a pamphlet entitled “Shall The Southern Presbyterian Church Abandon It’s Historic Position” [sic]. Sent to all PCUS ministers, the pamphlet exposed the differences between Thompson and a sizeable conservative faction.⁴⁶ Glasgow structured the pamphlet by quoting Thompson and then offering a rebuttal based on the “historic” PCUS stance.⁴⁷ He asserted that Thompson, by his own

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ The First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi, made a variety of declarations about certain issues.

⁴⁴ Thompson is the subject of an excellent dissertation: Peter Hairston Hobbie, “Ernest Trice Thompson: Prophet for a Changing South” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1987).

⁴⁵ Kennedy Smartt, *I Am Reminded: An Autobiographical, Anecdotal History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (No Publisher Listed, 1994), 33-34.

⁴⁶ Tom Glasgow, “Shall The Southern Presbyterian Church Abandon It’s Historic Position: A Plea for Common Honesty Exposing The Attack of Dr. Ernest Trice Thompson, Of Union Theological Seminary, Upon The Standards Of The Presbyterian Church in the United States” (Privately Printed: Charlotte, N.C.). Not dated, but letters from Glasgow to Samuel Wilson reveal the pamphlet was distributed in September 1940.

⁴⁷ Glasgow was the president of Glasgow-Stewart & Co., an automobile supplies distributor. Crucially, Glasgow was not a minister. As a layman, he had little fear of counterattacks from denominational officials; a minister, on the other hand, might lose his job. It is extremely doubtful that any minister would have provoked such a controversy. While some sympathized with Glasgow’s cause, ministers generally

admission, had strayed from denominational confessional standards, and should therefore be dismissed as professor.

Glasgow principally attacked Thompson's interpretations of the Bible from a theological perspective. For example, he criticized Thompson's pacifistic interpretation of Jesus driving the money changers from the temple. Glasgow, a former captain in the army, asserted that pacifists in the church caused some of the country's problems. Ever the literalist, he believed that the Bible should be read factually, exactly as it was written. Thompson, on the other hand, favored additional methods, including interpreting Scripture from an allegorical or symbolic view. The central problem, Glasgow remarked, was not Thompson's personal views; rather, the true question was what intellectual and theological liberty a denominational employee had in an official capacity. He asserted that Thompson, as a representative of the PCUS, had a responsibility to teach strictly from the denomination's official view despite his personal beliefs.⁴⁸

Ultimately, the denomination refused to discipline Thompson.⁴⁹ Glasgow's cries, however, were not unheard. At least one synod and three presbyteries asked the General Assembly to investigate the matter. The assembly, citing the Presbyterian nature of government, referred the problem back to the presbyteries. Thompson's presbytery of East Hanover, Virginia, responded by electing him moderator, and the entire faculty at Union Theological Seminary reaffirmed their ordination vows in support of Thompson. In a postscript, Glasgow commented that "I must congratulate Ben R. Lacy [President of

preferred to not become involved in such denominational quarrels. Glasgow himself stressed the importance of the conservative opposition being driven by laymen.

⁴⁸ Tom Glasgow, "Shall The Southern Presbyterian Church Abandon It's Historic Position: A Plea For Common Honesty."

⁴⁹ Glasgow admitted that he did not have a good chance of securing a prosecution. See the letter from Glasgow to J.B. Hutton (Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi), 13 August 1940, Wilson Collection.

Union Theological Seminary] on his ecclesiastical machine. I knew it was good, but it is even better than I thought.”⁵⁰ The actions of the seminary faculty are indeed interesting because criticism from a small conservative group had garnered a response from an entire seminary. The faculty’s response was not without its critics. Former PCUS moderator (1939) and Union Theological Seminary professor Dr. Edward Mack privately criticized Thompson in a letter to Glasgow as being “evasive, slippery, and delusive to the n’t degree [sic].” Mack further added that he would not merely “whitewash his [Thompson] feet when he should stand by himself.” Mack, however, was old and “would not become involved in an ecclesiastical war.”⁵¹ Although Glasgow had some support from a conservative/fundamentalist wing in the denomination, he never had any serious assistance that would threaten Thompson or the seminary. Still, as a layman, Glasgow had created quite a controversy. The singular matter of Thompson’s beliefs faded in later years, but the broader movement of conservatives criticizing perceived departures from confessional standards never died.

Like the Smith case, the Thompson debate demonstrated that the PCUS General Assembly was unwilling to enforce strict confessional guidelines on its ministers or seminary professors. Conservatives became alarmed by these developments as they gloomily predicted that the Southern Presbyterian Church was rapidly becoming like the more liberal Northern Presbyterians. Some predicted that in five years the PCUS would be nearly identical to the Northern church in theology and practice.⁵² While conservatives were alarmed at these internal theological problems, another far more important issue was rising in the PCUS- reunion with the Northern Presbyterian Church. If the Southern

⁵⁰ Letter from Glasgow to Wilson, 5 September 1940, Wilson Collection.

⁵¹ Letter from Glasgow to Wilson, 6 August 1940, Wilson Collection.

⁵² Letter from Glasgow to Wilson, 5 September 1940, Wilson Collection.

church was becoming more like its Northern counterpart, then what possible reason could remain for a separate existence?

If one reads the literature produced by PCUS conservatives prior to World War Two, the undeniable focus and attention is avoiding, at all costs, reunion with their Northern brethren. Although talk of reunion had existed since the Civil War, little was ever done. The PCUS had occasionally offered to enter into a “federal union” with the Northern church, whereby each denomination would be completely sovereign but cooperate with the other in missions and other activities. The Northern General Assembly, however, rejected any reunion scheme outside of organic union. By 1939, a plan of reunion was in progress through committees in both denominations. Many Southern Presbyterians were suspicious. Hard feelings still existed from the Civil War; the denominations held differing opinions in regard to racial policy, and the Northern church was over double the size of the PCUS. In addition, the Southern church allowed for greater local autonomy compared to the PCUSA method of governing with an enormous (and unwieldy) assembly and powerful central boards. Finally, after the mid 1930’s, the Northern church became even more doctrinally suspect. The last point probably received the most attention in conservative discussion.

Excluding long-standing sectional quarrels, conservatives had disapproved of the PCUSA when over 1200 ministers signed the “Auburn Affirmation” of 1923, which asserted the “Five Fundamentals” the Northern Assembly had adopted in 1910 were not essential ministerial ordination standards. By the early 1930’s, the PCUSA was in what church historian Bradley Longfield called “the fundamentalist controversy.”⁵³ Despite

⁵³ Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, & Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

the given label, the controversy is better seen as the triumph of moderates in the church; while both progressive and conservative groups sparred with each other and attempted to win over the vast middle of the assembly, by the 1930's the center was far more sympathetic to the progressive wing of the denomination.⁵⁴ J. Gresham Machen, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, headed the conservative faction.⁵⁵ It must be noted, though, that Machen did not regard himself as a fundamentalist; he wrote that “fundamentalism [is] a term that I dislike intensely.”⁵⁶ While Machen strongly agreed with the five essential points that Northern Presbyterians endorsed in 1910, he protested the fundamentalist movement's emphasis on prohibition, anti-evolutionism, and dispensationalist theology. At this point, however, he put aside his comparatively minor differences and allied with fundamentalists in the denomination for the sake of a united conservative front. Despite this association, historian D. G Hart asserts that Machen is best classified as an “Old School Presbyterian” or “confessionalist.”⁵⁷ Machen chiefly objected to modern theology. In his widely publicized and still read book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, he asserted that Christian liberalism is actually an entirely different religion from orthodox Christianity.⁵⁸ This attitude widened the breach between the two sides as Machen emphatically denied a middle ground between a liberal and traditional

⁵⁴ This theory is asserted in: William Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism: Competition in a Protestant House* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

⁵⁵ The best biography of Machen is: D.G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995). Interestingly, Machen did not condemn evolution like William Jennings Bryan. Machen actually refused to testify as an “expert witness” at the Scopes Trial.

⁵⁶ Letter from J. Gresham Machen to Samuel M. Wilson, 25 May 1934, Wilson Collection.

⁵⁷ D. G. Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

⁵⁸ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1923).

view of Scripture.⁵⁹ By the 1920's, it was clear that one side was going to control the denomination at the other party's expense. In the mid 1930's, it became ever more apparent that liberals had the upper hand in the General Assembly.

In 1929, Machen resigned his post at Princeton in protest over the reorganization of the seminary, including trustees who had signed the Auburn Affirmation. Four years later, Machen and a few of his colleagues formed the Independent Board of Foreign Missions to protest the General Assembly's missions policies. After refusing to back down, Machen was defrocked by the General Assembly in 1936. While William Weston remarks that this action represented a victory for the vast center of the denomination, it became clear that this "vast center" was quite sympathetic to modern theology; the PCUSA's theological direction was now clear. Outraged at these actions, Machen and his followers left in 1936 to form the Presbyterian Church of America. The young denomination soon changed its name to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) because of a potential lawsuit from the PCUSA. After Machen died unexpectedly in January 1937, the denomination split. The two factions exemplified the rift in the era's conservative Presbyterianism. The "Old School Presbyterians," who refused to back prohibition and strict six-day creationism, remained in the OPC. The fundamentalists, however, found they could not walk with conservatives who tolerated alcohol, disavowed dispensationalism, and were open to other ideas of creation. While these two parties had united in opposition to the liberal faction, working together in a separate denomination proved too divisive.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Letter from J. Gresham Machen to Samuel Wilson, 25 May 1934, Wilson Collection. Machen disagreed with Wilson's proclaimed status of a moderate.

⁶⁰ The fact that fundamentalists have been willing to work with other conservative factions to achieve desired goals is a topic that has not been extensively researched.

The minority fundamentalist faction left in 1937 and formed the Bible Presbyterian Church. Led by Carl McIntire and J. Oliver Buswell, this group asserted that prohibition was the only proper ecclesiastical stance, advocated dispensationalist theology, and promoted separation from liberals and ecumenists. They were fundamentalists who happened to be Presbyterians. While they had been willing to work with Machen and other Old School Presbyterians, they now endeavored to form a fundamentalist Presbyterian denomination. Carl McIntire, pastor of the large Bible Presbyterian Church of Collingswood (New Jersey), was one of the most influential American fundamentalists.⁶¹ Ordained in the PCUSA, McIntire left with other conservatives in 1936. His church also voted to leave and became involved in the most prominent property case of the division.⁶² After losing the court case in 1938, McIntire and most of his congregation moved to a tent in the center of Collingswood for several years before building a new church. As pastor of the largest church in the new Bible Presbyterian denomination, the charismatic and obstreperous McIntire exerted an enormous amount of influence. The denomination would later become mired in problems between the domineering McIntire and others who desired a broader, more refined relationship with other religious organizations.

The remaining group (majority) in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church consisted primarily of Old School Presbyterians. The OPC, while still upholding a principle of separation, did not take it to such an extreme as the Bible Presbyterians did. They stressed Calvin and general reformed theology versus fundamentalism. In social issues,

⁶¹ McIntire's influence in fundamentalism has not been substantially explored.

⁶² To this author's knowledge, only two churches that left in 1936 retained their property. In contrast to the PCUS, the PCUSA's policies were quite clear- the presbytery owned the property. In North Dakota, a judge ruled that the denomination could not present any case for holding the property because the vote to leave was unanimous. Most votes to depart, however, had a dissenting faction.

they generally were moderate, advocating a position of temperance versus prohibition and promoting intellectual scholarship. The entire experience of the original 1936 secession and the subsequent schism was not lost on Southern Presbyterians. After witnessing Machen's treatment, conservatives grew increasingly concerned about their place in any united Presbyterian Church.⁶³ In fact, Machen had visited the South and was friends with several Southern Presbyterians. Conservative presbyteries, such as Central Mississippi, often turned to the OPC to find suitable ministerial candidates rather than their own denominational seminaries. Since the OPC was primarily a Northern denomination, the Central Mississippi Presbytery provided an outlet for Southerners who concurred with OPC doctrine. This issue would surface in later years as PCUS loyalists claimed that their denomination was being infiltrated by Northern fundamentalists.⁶⁴

Southern Presbyterian concerns during the 1930's were not centered only on the 1936 schism. Many looked back to the 1906 union between the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and Northern Presbyterian Church (PCUSA).⁶⁵ The reunion was, for many reasons, a disaster for Cumberland churches. Scholars estimate that only a third of Cumberland members entered the union. Many stayed within the "continuing" Cumberland Presbyterian Church and others simply left the general Presbyterian communion.⁶⁶ Ministers and presbyteries of the Cumberland denomination had only

⁶³ PCUS progressives also saw the incident as proof that conservatives were united only in opposition. A PCUS secession would therefore yield more tiny Presbyterian denominations.

⁶⁴ William G. McAtee, *Dreams Where Have You Gone: Clues for Unity and Hope* (Louisville, KY: Witherspoon Press, 2006), pp. 80-82.

⁶⁵ There has been little written on this union. It is undeniable that the influx of Cumberland ministers strengthened New School elements in the PCUSA and contributed to a relaxation of reformed theological standards. Since the former Cumberland denomination had churches in the South, some Southern cities now saw both Northern and Southern Presbyterian churches having to coexist. This helped further reunion negotiations.

⁶⁶ Kate H. Steele, "My Personal Experiences With Church Union" *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 16 June 1954, pp. 6-7.

approved the reunion by a narrow (simple majority) margin, but despite such opposition, all institutions and church property belonged to the PCUSA unless the individual congregation was unanimous (that is, there was no PCUSA church in existence). Even if only one member of a church wished to unite, the PCUSA padlocked the church doors to other members. Very few churches managed unanimous votes to control their property. Sharp accusations and bitterness continued for decades as former Cumberland Presbyterians discovered that their original institutions, now under PCUSA control, did not receive promised aid.⁶⁷ Many Southern Presbyterians saw in this union all the components they did not want- controversy, schism, powerful centralized denominational authority, and the trampling of the layman. With the PCUSA almost triple the size of the Southern church, many Southerners feared being swallowed along with their unique heritage.

During this time, various pamphlets were published opposing and proposing reunion. Dunbar Ogden, in his booklet “Reunion of the Presbyterian Churches, U.S.A. and U.S.,” argued that organic union was required for cooperation and unity in Christ.⁶⁸ Ogden, the moderator of the Asheville (NC) Presbytery, asserted that the reasons why the PCUS was founded were no longer valid. The Civil War was long past and it was time for a united Presbyterian denomination in America. On the other side, in a pamphlet entitled “A Letter From Ruling Elders to the Ruling Elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States,” sixteen ruling elders representing every PCUS synod explained why

⁶⁷ In 1956, the PCUSA General Assembly officially apologized for its actions in the 1906 reunion. The Cumberland controversy marked the first post-Civil War Presbyterian controversy, but it would be far from the last. Whatever apologies the Northern Presbyterians had in 1956 apparently did not extend to the OPC churches, who lost their property in 1936. Property disputes continue to cause dissension within the modern PC(USA).

⁶⁸ Dunbar Hunt Ogden, “Reunion of the Presbyterian Churches, U.S.A. and U.S.,” (Privately Published, not dated), Wilson Collection. Appears to have been distributed sometime in 1939 prior to the 1940 General Assembly.

they could not pursue reunion negotiations.⁶⁹ First, they vehemently disagreed with the PCUSA on doctrinal matters. As proof of doctrinal corruptness in the PCUSA, they cited the Auburn Affirmation of 1923. These elders were greatly concerned with union negotiations between the PCUSA and the Protestant Episcopal Church (North). Such a union, conservatives argued, would destroy the unique identity of Presbyterianism. Additionally, they noted such problems as differences in government, discipline (particularly after the Machen controversy), property rights, and the always problematic “race question.”⁷⁰

A few points from this pamphlet are of particular interest. PCUS conservatives believed that the PCUS’s property policy allowed for local control. An organic union, however, would permit the new central denomination to own the property. The PCUSA’s polity also worried many Southerners. A highly centralized denominational headquarters with powerful boards governed denominational action. The Northern Assembly, frequently consisting of over eight hundred commissioners, was simply too unwieldy to effectively govern; the assembly, with rare exceptions, approved whatever the boards wished. In contrast, the PCUS Assembly consisted of approximately 450 voting members. With Southerners suspicious towards centralization (holdover from the Civil War), the Northern Presbyterian system provided little comfort.

In the 1930’s, the racial question was present, but most PCUS members were steeped in Southern traditionalism. With reunion negotiations, however, some PCUS conservatives were worried. They asserted that Southerners should deal with the race question because they lived with blacks and could best solve any problems. In many of

⁶⁹ “A Letter From Ruling Elders to the Ruling Elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States,” signed by sixteen ruling elders, (Privately Printed: Not Dated), Wilson Collection.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

these early pamphlets, race is not a central theme in opposition to reunion, but rather a subtle yet powerful background issue. The Southern conservative mantra was local control. The pamphlet remarked that these sixteen laymen had “the kindest Christian feeling and affection for our friends of another race...”⁷¹ Such feelings, however, could not override the doctrine of the spirituality of the church. Disapproving of ecclesiastical political action, these laymen strongly opposed PCUSA support for a federal anti-lynching bill in 1938.⁷²

Another pamphlet, “The African as a Worker,” published by the PCUS denominational press during this time, casts doubt that conservative PCUS whites had much affection for blacks. Like other Southern literature of the period, the pamphlet claimed that Africans were lazy because “The African, in his original environment, has not known how to work.”⁷³ The author later remarked that through becoming a Christian the African can learn the principles of work and become successful. Assuaging white Southerners, the pamphlet assures its readers that despite such success the African could never achieve equal status with whites. The parallels between this 1930’s era opinion and the old Southern pro-slavery arguments are striking. The white Christian Anglo-Saxon is superior. Even when both hold the same faith, blacks are inherently inferior because of their heritage and genetic traits. Still, Southern whites believed that Christianity would help Africans remain in their place and prepare for a better life in the next world. In a strange sense, they assumed that blacks would go to heaven, apparently with them. Perhaps they believed that heaven was segregated as well.

⁷¹ Ibid., 6.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ C. Stegell, “The African as a Worker,” (Presbyterian Church in the United States Press, not dated), Wilson Collection.

In 1939, the PCUS General Assembly asked the presbyteries whether the Permanent Committee on Cooperation and Union should be continued. Essentially, the question was a referendum on continuing reunion negotiations. The presbytery responses are recorded in the 1940 Assembly minutes and are instructive in viewing regional attitudes toward reunion.⁷⁴ The responses varied between Louisville (KY) presbytery's expressing a strong desire for organic union and the Central Mississippi presbytery's giving a detailed explanation against union and for the abolishment of the Permanent Committee. Most presbyteries fell between these two extremes and merely expressed a desire to continue or discontinue negotiations. Samuel Wilson, a commissioner to the 1940 Assembly, counted 35 presbyteries that favored union negotiations, 33 that opposed, 17 that were in doubt, and 3 that did not report. With the requirement that two-thirds of presbyteries approve any union, proponents clearly did not have enough support.⁷⁵

Among the most interesting features of the presbytery reports is the geographic distribution of answers. The answers both support and challenge preconceived notions. Border state presbyteries voted 23-5 to continue union negotiations.⁷⁶ This is not surprising given that these border presbyteries had extensive contact with PCUSA churches. Additionally, the "western" states of Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Louisiana showed the greatest support for reunion by a 16-3 margin, meaning that almost one-half of reunion support was found in these states. Other Southern presbyteries voted

⁷⁴ Blue Book of the Eightieth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., No publisher listed, 16 May 1940, pp. 62-70, Wilson Collection.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Inclusive of Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky, and West Virginia.

against continuing the committee by a 25-20 vote. Such a vote demonstrated that there was an element of support for reunion negotiations even within the “Deep South.”

There are some surprises in the presbytery’s votes. Louisville Presbytery, for example, advocated “prepar[ing] some definite plan of organic union with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and with any other Presbyterian bodies which may be interested...”⁷⁷ Such a strong sentiment was not echoed by the border St. Louis Presbytery which declared itself “as not being in favor of any further exploration of the presently proposed type of Union with the U.S.A. church.”⁷⁸ Other interesting votes include the Charleston (SC) Presbytery, North Mississippi Presbytery, and several Alabama presbyteries that voted for union. In the case of Alabama and Mississippi, it is possible that a stronger union sentiment existed areas where former Cumberland Presbyterian churches existed. Backing this theory, the majority of Tennessee presbyteries voted for continuing negotiations. Perhaps the PCUSA churches in this area had a moderating influence on local PCUS churches. West Virginia went for union by a wide margin. Almost every region contained proponents of an expanded church.

Additionally, several resolutions were proposed to the 1940 General Assembly that expressed disagreement with the recent decision of the President to install an ambassador at the Vatican. In this regard, the PCUS position differed little from other major Protestant denominations. Ironically, the Presbytery of Louisville, one of the strongest supporters of ecumenicalism and reunion, proposed a resolution that asked the General Assembly to protest the President’s actions because “we believe such action to

⁷⁷ Blue Book of the Eightieth General Assembly, 16 May 1940, Resolution #33, p. 76, Wilson Collection.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 66.

be a violation of a historic position as to the separation of church and state.”⁷⁹ Perhaps this sentiment was due to the large Catholic population in and around Louisville. Given that other resolutions came from conservative presbyteries, it appears that Southern Presbyterians were never totally removed from national and regional politics. The spirituality of the church was, rather, a convenient defense for conservatives who disagreed with liberal ecclesiastical and political positions. Conservatives prized tradition and easily united to oppose most progressive measures.

By 1942, conservatives believed that they had reason to be seriously concerned about the direction of their denomination. With the PCUS Permanent Committee on Social Welfare trending towards what they viewed as the social gospel, and the denomination’s active membership with the Federal Council of Church (later National Council of Churches), conservatives saw the PCUS moving rapidly toward the PCUSA, at least in the ideological sense. Despite the recent failures of reunion proponents, discussion continued between leaders of the Northern and Southern Presbyterian denominations. Conservatives feared their anti-union majority would shrink and determined that they must spread their ideology and theology to save the PCUS. To facilitate this process, in 1942, Dr. L. Nelson Bell and the Reverend Henry Dendy founded the *Southern Presbyterian Journal (SPJ)*.⁸⁰ At this point, separation was not seriously considered. Their emphasis was on reclaiming and renewing the denomination. As Bell wrote, “The JOURNAL [*SPJ*]...will stand for the TRUTH as given us in God’s Word. The paramount issue before the Church, as we see it, is the Inspiration of the

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸⁰ The *Southern Presbyterian Journal* was based out of Weaverville, NC. In 1959, the publication changed its name to the *Presbyterian Journal*, presumably indicating its national versus regional focus. In 1987, the *Presbyterian Journal* ceased, but *World Magazine*, a current periodical and a favorite among modern religious conservatives, continued as a spinoff.

Scriptures...(emphasis original)”⁸¹ Both men were widely respected within the PCUS. Bell, a former medical missionary to China who had just returned in 1939, would become well known as the father-in-law of Billy Graham. As such, he was prominent in promoting evangelical materials and Graham’s revivals. Dendy was an older Southern Presbyterian who had served on several boards and had a wide array with friendships with various leaders throughout the denomination.⁸²

These men were older and consequently retained a conservative Southern culture ideology. Yet, Billy Graham might have been more responsible for destroying that generation’s cultural norms than any other person.⁸³ A new wave of postwar conservatives was coming to power, and many did not see the need of the separation “errand” that their fathers had journeyed on.⁸⁴ Tapping into fundamentalist ideas, Graham brought an interdenominational focus to the South. Denominations would still be distinct and exert much power, but the older days were gone as the evangelicals became a major power force. Furthermore, the rift between fundamentalists and evangelicals would become even more distinct. A once united opposition to liberals was shattered, but in its place, a broader neo-evangelicalism, that saw Graham as its leader, rapidly became popular in the South.

⁸¹ Letter from L. Nelson Bell to Samuel Wilson, 17 April 1942, Wilson Collection.

⁸² Letters between Bell and Wilson (Wilson Collection) indicate that the formative meetings for the *SPJ* were held in March 1942 in Montreat, North Carolina. Wilson was asked to serve on the Board of Directors, but he declined.

⁸³ David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 97.

⁸⁴ Perry Miller, *The Errand into the Wilderness*, pp. 3-5.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CONTROVERSY WIDENS: REUNION AND RACE

“Mississippi is very much worked up over the recent ruling of the Supreme Court regarding segregation...” (*SPJ*-1954)

The Second World War era began with major questions in the Southern Presbyterian Church. Two distinct factions had formed; could they continue to coexist? As the following decades showed, several issues including the continuing reunion question, racial conflicts, and sharp theological debates served to further alienate sides. If there was a “loyalist center,” it became increasingly hard to find as the PCUS polarized around controversial issues. Religion’s response to outside issues can either be that of a “prophet” (like many African-American churches) or that of a reinforcer to traditional societal ethics.¹ It would be a grave mistake to generalize any denomination as taking an absolute position on either side. Indeed, the PCUS showed symptoms of both sides. Progressives frequently spoke out against social problems while conservatives maintained that the church should be primarily concerned with spiritual matters. This chapter discusses the two dominating themes these groups debated in the PCUS: race and reunion.

The arrival of World War Two set critical developments into motion within the PCUS. Driven out of China in 1939 by the arrival of Japanese forces, medical missionary and Southern Presbyterian minister L. Nelson Bell returned to the United States. Alarmed at the direction of the PCUS, Bell organized *The Southern Presbyterian Journal (SPJ)*.² In 1942, another event of wider significance took place in the broader American Protestant world. Frustrated by the general direction of mainline denominations and their

¹ John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*.

² Morton Smith claimed that the General Assembly of 1939 was the last in which conservatives held control. If that is correct, the *SPJ* was started soon after moderates/liberals gained sway.

powerful representative, the National Council of Churches (NCC), many conservatives organized in St. Louis and formed the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) to counter the NCC. While not all evangelical groups joined the NAE, most notably the Southern Baptist Convention, the organization showed that evangelicals exerted an influence throughout a variety of denominations. Furthermore, the NAE also expressed a split with early fundamentalism. Tired of being ridiculed in the press and retreating into their communes, this group of evangelicals, known as “neo-evangelicals,” wanted to influence society. They also supported intellectual scholarship as evidenced by their election of Harold Ockenga, pastor of Park Street Church in Boston, as moderator. Kenneth Keyes, a wealthy South Florida real estate businessman and PCUS ruling elder, represented the PCUS and served a key role in the NAE. Indeed, he appears next to Ockenga in a picture of early NAE leaders.³ Twenty years later, Keyes emerged as one of the principal conservative leaders in the PCUS.

These actions did not go unchallenged by fundamentalists who quickly asserted that neo-evangelicals had forsaken their fundamentalist heritage. Carl McIntire, the obstreperous Bible Presbyterian fundamentalist, railed against evangelical efforts. To counter the NAE, he created the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) which organized fundamentalist groups. McIntire, of course, largely held the power in the ACCC. He and other fundamentalists believed that the NAE wanted to create a middle ground between mainline denominations and fundamentalists. The rigid pastor, however, wanted nothing to do with nuanced theology; to him, it was either black or white.

³ Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, pp. 123-124 (picture insert).

After this point, relations became increasingly strained between evangelicals and fundamentalists.⁴ Although they agreed on basic theology, they had very different ideas about how to practice it. Fundamentalism largely became isolated while evangelicals conversed with the broader mainstream of society and presented a viable challenge to mainline denominations. While fundamentalism did exert an influence in the PCUS, evangelicalism became the far more powerful conservative theological force.⁵ Many conservatives in the PCUS should be classified as evangelicals versus fundamentalists.⁶

The rise of the evangelical movement came at an opportune time for conservatives in the PCUS. After early evolution battles, heresy accusations, and reunion attempts, conservatives jumped at the chance to unite with others of like mind in various denominations. Like earlier fundamentalists, they emphasized an interdenominational approach. The advent of the *Southern Presbyterian Journal* signaled the formation of evangelicals in the PCUS. Perhaps the most important assertion involves linking PCUS conservatives to evangelicalism. This is where the *SPJ* is incredibly helpful. By browsing its pages, one gains an understanding of issues that conservatives considered to be of importance.

In the early years of the *SPJ*, one is inevitably struck by the evangelical focus of the periodical. While some Presbyterian theologians, notably William Childs Robinson, discussed Calvinism, the emphasis was not on Old School Presbyterian theology, but on evangelical issues. The battle lines had changed. Calvinism was of little worth when

⁴ Some, like fundamentalist evangelist Jack Wyrzten, believed that the final break did not come until Billy Graham's New York City crusade in 1957. Graham alienated fundamentalists by cooperating with the mainline establishment in the promotion of his crusade.

⁵ William Glass's work, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South* is the best comprehensive treatment of Southern fundamentalists.

⁶ The evangelicals that did split in 1973 appeared much different from early fundamentalists in their method of engagement. Furthermore, the product of the division (PCA), has not trended near rigid fundamentalism.

divisions were occurring over the inerrancy of Scriptures, deity of Jesus, and the historicity of Biblical miracles. These were indeed issues that evangelicals, from the PCUS and other denominations, could defend in interdenominational fashion. This ecumenical support is clearly shown through the promotion and success of Billy Graham. While there were obvious differences between those who believed in strict Calvinism and broader evangelicals, such a distinction and breakdown is almost impossible to assess during multiple controversies. In the face of opposition, these two groups inevitably united.⁷ Yet, when apart from a common cause, they could divide.

In 1954, two critical issues came before the General Assembly. First, and most important, was a bill regarding reunion with the PCUSA.⁸ Should the Assembly pass the measure, three-quarters of the presbyteries would still have to approve. Secondly, a race resolution was presented regarding the *Brown vs. Board* Supreme Court case.⁹ By all accounts, this would be one of the most pivotal assemblies in the Southern Presbyterian Church's history, and it would meet shortly after the Supreme Court's announced verdict.

Race and reunion became two highly debated topics throughout twentieth century Southern Presbyterianism.¹⁰ A heated discussion took place in 1954 over the proposed racial statement. The resolution in blunt language said that segregation was not acceptable according to Biblical principle. In other words, it was not becoming of a

⁷ For example, conservatives were united in the PCUSA before the 1936 schism. One could argue, however, that the factions were of a milder nature in the Southern church compared to their Northern counterparts.

⁸ Negotiations also included union with the United Presbyterian Church in North America (UPCNA), a more conservative body that originated from Scottish Presbyterian immigrants. When the PCUS-PCUSA reunion failed, the PCUSA united with the UPCNA to form the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) in 1958.

⁹ Meeting in May 1954, the Assembly conducted its business less than a week prior to the court's verdict in *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

¹⁰ Joel Alvis, *Religion and Race: Southern Presbyterians, 1946-1983*, provides a fine overview of the racial controversy.

Christian to be a segregationist. Opponents, like Tom Glasgow and Robert Strong, spoke against the resolution as not being proper for the church at this particular time due to the divisive nature of the question and the principle of the church legislating on matters of race.¹¹ Others, such as Ernest Trice Thompson, believed that the PCUS must take a decisive stand on this issue. When the votes were counted, a majority (239-169) voted to back the resolution. The following year, the Presbytery of Central Mississippi attempted to reverse the General Assembly's decision, but the vote was even more decisive against segregation.¹²

As Joel Alvis amply demonstrated, Southern Presbyterians had long held defining and sometimes self-contradictory views over the race question in the South.¹³ Without question, the slavery issue caused the formation of the Southern Presbyterian Church during the Civil War. Blacks, although they could be Christians, could never be equal to whites. The Anglo-Saxon, therefore, had the duty of instructing blacks in religion and reminding them that eternal blessings waited if they performed their duties on earth. Most Southern Presbyterians agreed with the reassertion of Southern identity as espoused by "the Redeemers" and segregated their churches for decades. Other denominations, such as the Southern Baptists and Methodists, completely separated with blacks forming their own denominations and churches. The PCUS, however, still retained black Presbyterians within its boundaries, albeit in a separate, segregated synod. Granted, black Presbyterians composed less than two percent of the denomination and the concept of a black Presbyterian denomination had failed, but such a policy was unique among Southern

¹¹ "The Minority Report" *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 9 June 1954, pp. 9-10.

¹² John R. Richardson, "The 1955 General Assembly" *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 22 June 1955, pp. 5-6.

¹³ Joel Alvis, *Religion and Race: Southern Presbyterians, 1946-1983*.

Protestant denominations. Even today, there are comparatively few blacks in Presbyterian denominations.

Snedecor Memorial Synod, consisting of all black churches, was formed in 1916 with approximately 1,500 members.¹⁴ The strain of having blacks and white in the same denomination, despite enforced segregation, still weighed on some minds. For example, L. Nelson Bell wrote an editorial discussing the controversial changes to Montreat (PCUS conference center):

Snedecor Memorial is one of the Synods constituting our Church [PCUS]. The writer believes this is a mistake, but it is nevertheless a fact. We believe it a mistake because we believe the progress and development of a Negro Presbyterian Church in the South would be greatly advanced by a **separate** Church. Without such separation there will never be the reaching out into new fields of endeavor of which our Negro leaders are capable, nor will Negroes in the South be reached with Presbyterianism as they should be, when **handicapped** by the white connections, as at present...the fact remains that at the present time Snedecor Memorial is a part of our Southern Presbyterian Church. For that reason provision for the entertainment of representatives from that Synod must be made at Montreat in a way which has not previously existed. [emphasis original]¹⁵

More importantly for future events, PCUS leaders had to deal with black Presbyterians on a consistent basis, something many other denominational leaders did not do. The PCUS was also not the only Presbyterian branch to practice segregation. Just before the Northern Presbyterians united with the Cumberland Presbyterians in 1906, they also agreed to segregate their churches in hopes of drawing Southern Cumberland Presbyterians.¹⁶ For Southern Presbyterians, however, such segregation was merely in following their cultural patterns.

Historians have often commended the 1954 PCUS General Assembly for being the first major Southern denomination to denounce segregation. Coming several years after President Harry Truman desegregated the military (1948), the Koerner report, and at

¹⁴ Ibid, 15.

¹⁵ L. Nelson Bell, "Race Relations and Montreat" *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 15 June 1950, pp. 2.

¹⁶ Alvis, 15. This moment later became a point of embarrassment for the PCUSA.

the same time as *Brown vs. Board*, the PCUS did express denominational sympathy towards blacks. What some have failed to note, however, was that the resolution was non-binding and did nothing except express the General Assembly's opinion. Indeed, the Assembly's opinion was often not indicative of the majority of people that filled Southern Presbyterian pews. PCUS churches that supported segregation did not have to desegregate their churches; the vote did little except alienate some Southern churches. The Synod of Alabama, for example, expressed its grievances with the resolution shortly after the General Assembly. The influential First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi, expressed outrage over the resolution and said that "the General Assembly did err" in making "pronouncements on the subject of racial segregation so phased as to convey the erroneous impression to the public that those voting therefor [sic] spoke the sentiments of the 750,000 Presbyterians of the South."¹⁷ Furthermore, the session of FPC Jackson remarked that they "will not follow the recent advice of the General Assembly urging desegregation." With a non-binding resolution, the General Assembly could do little towards churches that were vitriolic in their opposition to the Supreme Court's ruling. As a letter in the *SPJ* understated, "Mississippi is very much worked up over the recent ruling of the Supreme Court regarding segregation..."¹⁸

Several articles in the *SPJ* and other sources give indication that race was an important matter in the PCUS. These articles and pamphlets defended the South's unique culture. The various authors believed that there were failures, but the system of segregation was not anti-Biblical or morally wrong. The Reverend William Frazer, of

¹⁷ *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 7 July 1954, p. 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Charlotte, North Carolina, wrote one of the earliest pieces in the SPJ on racial views.¹⁹ His article, written in 1950, is particularly instructive for assessing racial attitudes before the tumultuous *Brown vs. Board* decision was announced. In contrast to Bell's article (mentioned below), Frazer's article goes outside the narrow debate about the PCUS conference center. He warned of dire consequences for those who would break the segregation barrier. In addition to claims that God endorses "social separation of the races," Frazer asserted that a failure to maintain segregation would cause: miscegenation, hatred, bloodshed, lesser offspring, and ultimately the weakening of America. He believed that racial integrity and the general harmony of the country could best be upheld by current segregation laws. Additionally, Frazer never saw blacks as equals. He noted that intermarriage with blacks would only hold back a noble race of an advanced country.²⁰

In 1957, an article written by the Reverend Guy T. Gillespie, former President of Belhaven College (Jackson, Mississippi), defended the Southern system of segregation.²¹ Gillespie wrote to counter such assertions as: "white people of the South are so blinded with prejudice" and Southerners "cannot see the race problem in its true perspective."²² The elderly Gillespie claimed that "Southern people, as a rule, do not have any enmity or ill-will in our hearts against Negroes, but only feelings of kindness and genuine

¹⁹ Rev. William H. Frazer, D.D., Litt.D., LL.D., "The Social Separation of the Races" *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 15 July 1950, pp. 6-7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7. Like many others, Frazer believed that God's ban on intermarriage for Israelites and Canaanites (Joshua 23) in the Old Testament applied to biological and not religious principles. For most PCUS conservatives, intermarriage was a frightening thought.

²¹ Reverend Guy T. Gillespie, "A Southern Christian Looks At The Race Problem" *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 5 June 1957, pp. 7-12. Gillespie was a member of Central Mississippi Presbytery. Belhaven College was sponsored by the PCUS, particularly the Mississippi Synod. Sources indicate that Gillespie's arguments were first given at a White Citizens Council meeting; it is believed that Gillespie was a member of the council.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

sympathy.”²³ This, in sum, is what many Southern Presbyterians believed during this period. They had no ill will toward blacks *provided* they did not step outside their boundaries. Still, one wonders how much sympathy he had towards blacks when he remarked that many of their protests were over “[petty] grievances.” Gillespie further asserted that “The evils and injustices which have arisen under the system of segregation have been purely incidental, and have not been due to any fallacy in the principle of segregation, but to the weaknesses and perversities of individual members of both races.”²⁴

Gillespie continued by arguing that the Supreme Court’s decision (*Brown vs. Board*) was based “on the *exparte* opinions of psychologists and sociologists, whose knowledge of this particular problem has been clearly shown to be superficial, and whose close affiliation with Socialist and communistic organizations scarcely qualifies them as safe counselors in formulating the policies which are to shape the education of the children of this great democracy for generations to come.”²⁵ Gillespie essentially lumped integrationists together with communists. Such assertions were common among some Southern Presbyterians; to conservatives, the communists, integrationists, and liberals all represented evil incarnate. While Gillespie may have believed there were communists lurking in Southern progressivism, his deepest opposition to integration stemmed from the possibility of racial intermarriage. Integration and intermarriage, he claimed, went together and should the South’s schools become fully integrated, racial intermarriage would occur and become a grave problem. He then listed four reasons to oppose integration; surprisingly, he utilized little Scripture to defend his points. Gillespie

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 9.

²⁵ Ibid., 8.

employed a pseudo-Biblical argument that intermarriage would be unfair to offspring (mate only with your kind) and that segregation was in keeping with “the purpose and will of God.”²⁶ His major issue, however, was not theological, but involved racial affairs in the context of American and Southern traditions.

In the same *SPJ* issue, L. Nelson Bell discussed desegregation and integration from a moderate conservative standpoint. Bell argued from a “fence sitting” position and claimed that “Desegregation and Integration are not synonymous terms.” He asserted that while “some of the tensions of our day are caused by men who are determined to maintain white supremacy by fear and lawlessness,” integrationists have tied their cause to God and have asserted a moral supremacy. He believed that segregated churches could be “far more Christian in spirit than churches which have deliberately espoused a forced or unnatural integration to show how good they are.”²⁷ In a sense, Bell exemplified a Southerner who found racial problems, but did not know how to address them. Unlike Gillespie, he thought that many black demands, such as the original requests in regards to the Montgomery, Alabama buses, were reasonable. Tensions had emerged that could have been prevented by conferences and discussion. In regards to the church, Bell firmly endorsed the principle of voluntarism that stressed non-forceful methods of integrating society. He still opposed racial intermarriage, believed “[m]any of those concerned about relations with our Christian brethren of the Negro race have let their enthusiasm warp their judgment,” and found a PCUS’s conference center practice of letting young people of various race socially intermingle troublesome.²⁸

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁷ L. Nelson Bell, “Some Needed Distinctions” *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 5 June 1957, pp. 2-3.

²⁸ L. Nelson Bell, “Race Relations and Montreat” *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 15 June 1950, pp. 2.

Racial issues certainly split PCUS members. The turbulent times and a fear of losing their cherished culture inspired a spirited defense from conservatives. Yet race alone did not cause an eventual division in the PCUS; the longstanding reunion controversy created far more discord than any racial resolution could. After lengthy debate, the 1954 General Assembly voted by a 283-169 majority to enact the reunion proposal and send the matter to the presbyteries.²⁹ The vote was surprising to many as reunion resolutions had frequently been defeated at the assembly level in the past. Still, in the optimistic era of the 1950's and with the Methodist reunion of 1939, many believed that the time was right to reunite and forget the late sectional conflict. The *SPJ* issue in May 1954 that covered the General Assembly focused almost exclusively on the reunion issue. The racial resolution was covered on the third page with a few paragraphs. It appeared that the conservatives were far more concerned about the reunion issue than racial problems in their denomination. In sum, this author finds that ecclesiastical reunion made a far greater negative impact than race in the context of denominational unity.³⁰

Reunion opponents quickly gathered support; they realized that they needed only a quarter of the presbyteries plus one to dissent in order to defeat the measure. They immediately began lobbying presbyteries to vote down the reunion plan. Kenneth Keyes noted that he and his wife spent ten weeks traveling to various churches and “speaking almost every night, debating it with the top brass of our church- heads of our seminaries and others that were all for this union.”³¹ Kennedy Smartt, a future leader of the PCA,

²⁹ Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, Vol. III (Richmond, VA: Westminster/John Knox, 1973), p. 573.

³⁰ Alvis, p. 137. Alvis emphasizes the Central Mississippi Presbytery with its strongly conservative views; however, the majority of churches that left did not come from this presbytery.

³¹ “Kenneth Keyes Interview,” Conducted by Georgia Settle, 4 September 1980, p.4. Interview Collection, PCA Archives.

reflected on his experiences with the reunion effort. He was a member of the Atlanta (Georgia) Presbytery and served as assistant to John R. Richardson, *SPJ* board member and PCUS minister, to canvass churches in the presbytery and persuade them against reunion. Union supporters, however, believed they would easily win the Atlanta Presbytery. He writes in whimsical style:

I visited every little country Presbyterian Church at every little crossroad from Lagrange to Monroe, from Roswell to Griffin and from Carrollton to Covington. In those days many of these churches had no resident pastor and only had preaching once or twice a month, and rarely if ever sent a ruling elder to presbytery. But for this [reunion vote] they came. You would have thought that General Sherman was on his way back to Atlanta. The troops were there. I will never forget the troubled expressions on the faces of those who had assumed they would carry Atlanta Presbytery [for reunion]. All these strange faces began to appear, faces that were red and wind burned from plowing in the face of spring winds. These men took their seats with the commissioners. All day long they just sat there, waiting. And finally, about three o'clock in the afternoon we came to the vote for which they had been waiting. 'All those who are opposed to the plan of union please stand.' And they stood. Their suits didn't fit, their neckties looked out of place, and their shirt collars weren't buttoned, but they were Presbyterians and they were there and they voted their convictions. Atlanta Presbytery had voted against the plan of union. It sent shock waves across the denomination.³²

A full scale political fight emerged in the PCUS General Assembly.³³ Perhaps this controversy, more than any other, solidified conservative and liberal factions. This division, however, must not be construed to mean that conservatives were strictly sectionalists and wanted nothing to do with Northern Presbyterians or other groups. On the contrary, PCUS conservatives often expressed sympathy with their conservative brethren in the PCUSA. The subsequent editor of the *SPJ*, Aiken Taylor, corresponded with Northern Presbyterian ministers.³⁴

In May 1955, the final presbyteries voted and the result was clear: the PCUS had soundly rejected reunion. The final vote was 42 presbyteries for union, 43 against union,

³² Kennedy Smartt, *I Am Reminded*, p. 49.

³³ Presbyteries had to report their answer to the 1955 General Assembly.

³⁴ Letter from G. Aiken Taylor to Herbert Mekeel, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Schenectady, New York. Presbyterian Journal Correspondence, PCA Archive.

and 1 tied; the combined presbytery commissioner votes were 2,554 in favor and 2,870 against. Proponents had failed to gain even a simple majority. The *SPJ*, in its 11 May 1955 issue, immediately asserted that the reunion should be closed and titled the front page “Let Us HEAL The Wounds.”³⁵ [emphasis original] The periodical emphasized unity and healing within the denomination. It also printed the official statistics along with the votes in each presbytery.³⁶ The 1955 report showed some different trends versus the responses in 1940. In the first place, the 1940 question was much more ambiguous, offering a middle ground. The 1954 vote, however, required presbyteries to vote either yes or no to the proposal.

Union proponents found their greatest strength in border state presbyteries. If we consider Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Kentucky, and West Virginia as border states, union supporters carried twenty out of twenty-two presbyteries.³⁷ These votes were not often close, as Missouri presbyteries supported the measure by 89% of the vote while Kentucky presbyteries backed the proposal with 86% approval. Border support seemed natural to union proponents. In areas with PCUSA churches, PCUS congregations had frequently interacted with their respective Northern brethren. Midwestern tendencies also seemed reflected as people dropped the Northern and Southern distinction. Oklahoma or Northern Missouri, for example, took on far more Midwestern characteristics than Northern or Southern traits. Simply put, these areas did not see a need for two competing Presbyterian denominations.

³⁵ *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 11 May 1955, pp. 1-5.

³⁶ The following statistics are from the 11 May 1955 issue of the *SPJ*.

³⁷ Virginia is not included as a border state, but the Virginia presbyteries' vote indicated division. The vote was for reunion (4-3 with one tied), reflecting strong opposition in the south and west and support in the north and east.

A numerical analysis yields some interesting information about union support. While supporters were concentrated in border states, these states combined for only 41% of total union votes, but 64% of won presbyteries. This indicates that union supporters had substantial support in contested and opposing presbyteries. Indeed, the total presbyteries (42) that union supporters won only accounted for 64% of all union votes. Over one-third (36%) of all union support was located in presbyteries that opposed reunion. Such evidence indicates that reunion sentiments were not entirely regionalized in the border states. Rather there was support, even in the Deep South, for such a union.³⁸

Union opponents had an interesting distribution of votes as well. Their strong points were the synods of Mississippi and South Carolina. All presbyteries within these two synods voted against reunion; approximately 83% of the commissioner's votes were negative. Strong anti-union sentiment was clearly prevalent in the Deep South. But, one must keep in mind that the synods of Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina only constituted 26% of anti-reunion votes. Clearly, the Deep South could not alone prevent reunion; opponents were also centered in other areas. Appalachia was another strong point, as all four presbyteries there voted against the measure by an approximate 68%-32% margin. Georgia opposed reunion by a roughly 68%-32% vote. Conservatives held a majority of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Florida presbyteries although margins were smaller. The border states, as expected, were anti-unionist's weakest area with only small areas of support.

Some observations should be made about the general distribution of votes, particularly as compared to the 1940 General Assembly. First, the obvious surprises were

³⁸ A case in point is the Presbytery of North Mississippi. Although it voted against union, the 33-15 margin reflected some union support even in the most conservative synod.

gone. St. Louis presbytery overwhelming voted for reunion and no South Carolina or Mississippi Presbytery voted for reunion. Statistically, the highest percentage in favor of union came from Missouri, where 89% of commissioners voted for the measure.³⁹ The highest percentage against reunion came from South Carolina and Mississippi which tied with 83% voting in the negative. The Presbytery of Congaree (South Carolina) provides an example of one presbytery that vehemently opposed reunion. Their minutes of 14 September 1954, show that presbyters defeated the union measure by a 43-5 margin. The presbytery also sent the following overture to the General Assembly:

Whereas, it has become increasingly evident that the members and officers of our church do not desire union with the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.,

Whereas, the Assembly's Committee on Co-operation and Union as now constituted and empowered is a divisive instead of a unifying force,

Whereas, continued agitation for this union can only result in more bitterness and strife and a greater disruption of the work of our Church,

And *whereas* the work for which this committee was formed has been completed as has been shown by the voice of the people,

We do *therefore* overture the General Assembly to dissolve its Committee on Co-operation and Union and to form as soon as practical a Committee on Co-operation.⁴⁰

Louisville (KY) presbytery again led the way for union proponents with a 77-0 vote in favor of reunion. The three remaining black presbyteries also voted for reunion. Such was expected. L. Nelson Bell claimed in the *SPJ*, however, that union opponents won presbyteries that consisted of 30,295 more members than those presbyteries won by

³⁹ It must be remembered that although reunion proponents were quite successful in Missouri, the entire state netted them only 122 votes in favor of union. The opponents sweep of South Carolina, by contrast, gave them 392 votes against reunion. Simply put, opponents were centered where the PCUS was strongest and therefore had more churches with more commissioners. The only vote that mattered, of course, was the number of presbyteries won, but it is interesting that although both sides swept their respective synods, the votes were very different. If one examines the vote by synod, the matter was split, 7-7-2. Opponents clearly won, but reunion supporters recognized that they also had significant support in the church.

⁴⁰ *Minutes of Congaree Presbytery*; 14 September 1954, p. 25. Copy consulted at the PCA Archive in the Presbyterian Church in the United States Miscellany Records. Notice the intent is not to break all communication with the PCUSA, but rather cooperate in some projects while maintaining denominational sovereignty.

union supporters.⁴¹ Alabama presented some different developments. Of the five white presbyteries in the state, two were for union and three were against. Opponents dominated the presbyteries of East Alabama, North Alabama and Tuscaloosa, which voted against the measure by a combined 142-22. Proponents, however, won Birmingham (29-25) and Mobile (24-14) presbyteries.⁴² Divisions existed even in the Deep South. What did seem clear was that formal negotiations for reunion were dead, as conservatives fervently hoped. In the following years, however, the reunion issue would continue to be an enduring controversy that galvanized and polarized a conservative faction.

One of the most contested discussions on this reunion vote involved the role of race, particularly the *Brown vs. Board* decision. Some historians, such as Joel Alvis, have remarked that the timing of the Supreme Court decision influenced some against reunion with the Northern Presbyterian Church because of fears regarding racial integration.⁴³ This may have support because of the sizeable assembly support for reunion versus the presbytery vote. Ernest Trice Thompson cautiously remarked:

What could not be foreseen was the fact that, only a few months before the 1954 General Assembly met, the Supreme Court of the United States would give out its decision outlawing segregation in the public schools. The reaction of the South to this decision was quick- massive resistance became the keyword, and rationality was submerged in a wave of emotionalism. The issue was not often raised in the continuing debates on reunion, but there can be little doubt but that it influenced the final vote. It is doubtful if a three-fourths vote for union could have been secured at any time.⁴⁴

Thompson therefore noted that reunion at the presbytery level was unlikely, even without the racial issue involved. In fact, he cites a pre-Assembly poll that “showed 49

⁴¹ *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, 11 May 1955, p. 3.

⁴² It would be interesting to make a comparative study of where PCA churches came from and see if they came from primarily 1954 reunion opposition centers. There does seem to be some resemblance as PCA strength is strong in Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina.

⁴³ Alvis, p. 60.

⁴⁴ Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (Vol. III), p. 574.

presbyteries favoring union and 35 opposed.”⁴⁵ Given this, one can say that race was a negative factor towards reunion, but it alone did not cause the measure’s defeat. One could also effectively argue that the vote differentials were caused by an Assembly that increasingly did not reflect its constituents’ views.

In one of the few studies done on the failed Presbyterian union, sociologists Sanford M. Dornbusch and Roger D. Irle published “The Failure of Presbyterian Union” in 1959.⁴⁶ The authors examined the failed reunion by two methods: content analysis and ecological analysis. The two methods produced differing conclusions. In their examination of content (journals, books, published statements), the authors found that “doctrinal issues were basic and current social issues of minor importance.”⁴⁷ This finding backs conservative dissenters who claimed the division was strictly about theology and not racial matters. Yet, when the sociologists utilized the ecological method their statistics showed that “the proportion of rural residents and the proportion of Negroes in an area” directly correlated to the reunion issue. Areas that were rural and/or had a high percentage of blacks generally cast their vote against union. They noted that these two predictors were the same used for States’ Rights Democrats.⁴⁸ These reports show that cultural matters such as race and politics also played a role in conservative opposition to union.

The issue then becomes: what was the actual reason for opposition to union? Dornbusch and Irle argued for the ecological method because “current sociological

⁴⁵ Ibid., 572.

⁴⁶ Sanford M. Dornbusch and Roger D. Irle, “The Failure of Presbyterian Union” *The American Journal of Sociology* 64:4 (January 1959), pp. 352-355.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 354.

⁴⁸ See: Dewey Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South: A Political History* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

theory on the nature of ideology notes its often defensive qualities,” and “the secular quality of much religious behavior makes it difficult to accept an explanation based on rigid acceptance of the details of religious doctrine.”⁴⁹ These two arguments are convincing, but the second argument is flawed. It is virtually unarguable that ideology can be defensive. In the conservatives’ case, some of their ideology developed in contesting progressive accusations. The authors’ argument is that this defensive behavior invalidates the assertion that one would put ideological defense before any other.

More problematic is the second argument for the ecological method. In studying religious history, one must understand that individuals are extremely loyal to their theology and beliefs and are often willing to disassociate from organizations (or refrain from associating) to protect their ideological purity. In other words, this paper asserts that theological beliefs have causative power. This causality, however, does not negate the influence of cultural factors on conservative opposition. The treatment of blacks and other Southern social problems certainly had an influence on the church and the proposed reunion, but it is improbable that racism alone would have blocked this union. What seems clear is that most Presbyterian conservatives who supported states’ rights, segregation, and Southern culture opposed reunion.

Over time, racial views in the church further polarized. The Civil Rights movement of the mid-1960’s certainly brought on further debate. It was clear that PCUS conservatives did not practice the “spirituality of the church;” rather, they actively promoted their own brand of political and ecclesiastical conservatism. Most opposed government intervention in race relations by arguing that it was a local matter. In 1957, PCUS progressive Ben Lacy Rose wrote a pamphlet entitled “Racial Segregation in the

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Church.” He effectively argued that the Bible does give guidance on racial problems and that Scriptural principles condemned segregation.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Rose asserted that the historic PCUS position undermined the segregationist position. Just after the Civil War, the PCUS General Assembly adopted a motion saying that integrated churches were actually advantageous. Enforced segregation in the church, said Rose, was a recent innovation.⁵¹ After answering common objections, Rose recognized that there would be committed Christians who disagreed on this issue. Nevertheless, he believed that “one of the greatest services the church could render in the confused racial situation today would be quietly to set her house in order according to the will of God.”⁵²

In August/September 1964, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s (OPC) official magazine, *The Presbyterian Guardian*, featured a controversial issue that addressed civil rights and racism. In the editorial introduction, Robert Nicholas wrote that “the racial struggle...looms over everything else.” Nicholas firmly supported the just-passed Civil Rights legislation of 1964. He approvingly quoted Billy Graham: “we as evangelicals are going to have to give an accounting to God of our stand in the racial crisis...We should have been leading the way to racial justice, but we failed. Let’s confess it, and let’s admit it and let’s do something about it.”⁵³ A very conservative Northern Presbyterian denomination’s official periodical had now endorsed the obeying of Civil Rights

⁵⁰ Ben Lacy Rose, “Racial Segregation in the Church” (Richmond, VA: Outlook Publishers, 1957). Then a faculty member at Union Theological Seminary (Richmond, VA), Rose would later become Union’s president.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 13,23.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵³ Robert E. Nicholas, “This Long Hot Season” *The Presbyterian Guardian*, 33:6, July-August 1964, p. 95. Evidently, this was the periodical’s first treatment of this controversial issue. Even though the OPC was a predominantly Northern denomination, the feedback for the issue indicated deep divisions regarding the racial problem.

legislation and integrating facilities. Some of its readers, however, were remained unconvinced.

In the same issue, C. Herbert Oliver, a black OPC minister and resident of Birmingham, Alabama, sharply criticized the Southern church for its promotion of white supremacy and racism.⁵⁴ Over the decades, he noted that being white became synonymous with being right. Indeed, the Democratic Party of Alabama's key phrase was "White supremacy for the right."⁵⁵ Oliver remarked that "under the doctrine of white supremacy, anybody with a minimum of melanin in his skin is superior to those with whom God was more liberal with melanin."⁵⁶ He further condemned some Southern white churches for arresting and jailing blacks who attempted to enter their sanctuaries. "The church," he claimed, "by word and deed must declare it human folly to trust for security in the color of a man's skin."⁵⁷ Oliver, however, was a conservative and as such decried both white and black racism. He concluded "Some people seem not to know what is going on in our country, while others are fearful that Communists are the cause of the present social revolution."⁵⁸ Oliver saw the enormous implications of the Civil Rights movement and criticized those who dismissed black complaints as being instigated by communists. His work is a rarity because there were few black Presbyterians, and even fewer who wrote about the subject.

Representing the "other side," Morton Smith's article, "The Racial Problem Facing America," featured thoughts from a distinguished "Old School" Southern

⁵⁴ C. Herbert Oliver, "The Church and Social Change" *The Presbyterian Guardian*, 33:6, July-August 1964, pp. 87-94.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

Presbyterian.⁵⁹ Echoing Oliver, Smith expressed a strong desire for open communication between black and white communities. Like other Southern conservatives, he claimed that “the integrationist teaches that we are all brothers, and should thus ignore all eternal differences and mix as one race.” Smith believed that the Bible was addressing spiritual unity, not physical unity. Despite his usage of Biblical text, Smith quickly moved into the modern integration debate. Interestingly, Smith noted that he wished separate black and white churches had never been established after the Civil War. He then revealed his core belief: “As a matter of practical consideration in a culture that has been sharply segregated for so long, it seems the point of wisdom to keep a segregated pattern in the sanctuary when there is joint worship.”⁶⁰ Ultimately, it was cultural patterns and traditions that drove Smith’s ideology. In other words, he asserted that the church should not break from cultural norms.

Smith essentially attributed integrationism to “Northern whites and blacks” and was unable to see that many Southern blacks had valid arguments against current Southern social norms. Smith also dismissed the incidents of black’s being refused seats in some Southern churches. He claimed that “most Southern white congregations would be willing to have Negroes attend, if they were coming for true worship, and would be willing to sit together. This has been the traditional pattern in the South, and it could be continued if it were not for the pressure groups seeking to integrate churches.” He contended “the reason for the coming of the Negro to the church today is not to worship,

⁵⁹ Morton H. Smith, “The Racial Problem Facing America” *The Presbyterian Guardian* 33:8, October 1964, pp. 125-128. Smith, a Professor at Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, Mississippi), would become the first stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church in America. His racial views had obviously not changed by 1973. Smith’s ideology, however, should not be taken as representative of the entire PCA, but rather that of an old Southerner who resented the tumultuous changes in the church.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

but rather to integrate and prove a point. That this is the case is shown by the fact that when offered segregated seating in the church, the Negroes refuse it...If they [blacks] were truly interested in worship, it would seem that they would be willing to sit in any section provided for them.”⁶¹ Blacks should therefore express a “spirit of humility” and “take the lowest seat.” While it is certainly undeniable that blacks attempted to integrate churches, Smith clearly did not have an accurate picture of what blacks themselves were going through. Although one can worship in segregated seating, it is humiliating and condescending. As one Presbyterian minister remarked, PCUS churches should have let blacks sit where they wanted; it likely would have limited the controversy.⁶² When staunch opposition was raised, it merely gave integrationists further cause for activity.

Smith then championed the old conservative accusation that integrationists were influenced by the Communists. He believed that the integrationists’ attempts to level racial differences correlated to Marxist ideology that stressed “common uniformity.”⁶³ Civil disobedience, Smith thought, threatened law and order in society and would therefore encourage Communists. National politics had certainly affected the church. To many Southerners, Communists and integrationists were lumped on the side of spiritual evil. Unlike others such as Gillespie, however, Smith made a surprising admission. He remarked that although he “personally fe[lt] that the intermarriage of persons of two races is something most undesirable, he must admit that he is not able to find any clear teaching of the Scripture that would condemn individual intermarriage as such...”⁶⁴

Other statements including underhanded criticism directed at cities and a promotion of

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Personal Interview with Reverend John Sartelle, Tates Creek Presbyterian Church, Lexington, Kentucky, 12 May 2008.

⁶³ Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 127.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

rural and Southern areas, lends credence to the assertion that Smith was really just supporting his own culture. At least he admitted to it.

As the official organ of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, *The Presbyterian Guardian* was read by many conservative Presbyterians who had a wide variety of opinions regarding the racial controversy. Rousas John Rushdoony, OPC pastor and founder of the “Christian Reconstructionism” ideology, voiced one of the strongest criticisms when he claimed that the *Guardian* was “outdoing” the UPCUSA *Presbyterian Life* publication in its social gospel preaching.⁶⁵ He wrote that Oliver’s article was, in fact, racist because it sought to “exalt...humanity as a race and...demand that we identify ourselves with all men as one people.”⁶⁶ Rushdoony appealed strictly to spiritual matters and appeared to ignore any physical concerns that blacks might have. Pastor A. J. House of an Evangelical Presbyterian Church (splinter of the Bible Presbyterian Church) in South Dakota gave another interesting objection to article. He noted that “Brother, it isn’t our job to try to establish a condition of heaven on this present earth even if the majority of so-called Christians have decided to take over and create utopia on earth. There are some things too tough to tackle and this [racism] is one.”⁶⁷ This is a surprising statement, but the theory has a solid foundation. Could premillennialism have contributed to the defense of segregation? Granted, this pastor was from the EPC, a denomination that did

⁶⁵ Rushdoony remains one of the most important twentieth century theologians that have not attracted serious scholarly attention. His most important contribution, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Craig Press: Nutley, NJ, 1973) was sharply criticized for supporting segregation and even denying the holocaust. This work became the foundation of the modern theonomist and Christian Reconstruction movements. Although vaguely defined, both seek to institutionalize Old Testament civil law on modern society. Rushdoony’s son-in-law, Gary North, the late Greg Bahnsen and others have continued espousing his philosophies. The best resource about Rushdoony and his ideology is: Molly Worthen, “The Chalcedon Problem: Rousas John Rushdoony and the Origins of Christian Reconstructionism” *Church History* 77:2 (June 2008), pp. 399-437.

⁶⁶ *Presbyterian Guardian* “Editorials,” October 1964, p. 131.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* The Evangelical Presbyterian Church split from the Bible Presbyterian Church in 1956, primarily over Carl McIntire’s authoritarian practices. The EPC, however, largely retained an emphasis on premillennialism. Seldom, however, is it voiced in this direct manner.

not have a strong Southern base. Yet, the parallels remain fascinating and warrant further study.

Other editorials both condemned and supported Oliver's position. David Moore from Mississippi argued that the periodical should help "pour oil on troubled waters rather than further stir up passions already inflamed by government pressures, communist agitation, and left wing incitements, particularly on issues where there is no concrete biblical guidance." A writer from Stanford, California, however, supported Oliver and argued that "There may be no Christian Gospel if it is only the Social Gospel, but there is certainly no Christian Gospel without a Social Gospel."⁶⁸

Racial arguments also spilled into individual churches. The First Presbyterian Church of Columbus, Mississippi issued a general session letter advising that they disagreed with recent actions of the General Assembly supporting civil rights. Most of the items addressed dealt with the denomination's position on racial matters. Specifically, the session voiced their disapproval with the General Assembly's 1964 mandate that black presbyteries should be integrated into the respective white presbyteries.⁶⁹ The session remarked that they were:

convinced that if it were TRULY the will of Christ that our churches should be racially integrated...then the godly leaders of our Church during the past 100 years would have known about it, and followed it...We consider it [unreadable word] presumptuous and even insulting [to] the integrity and Christianity of our deceased leaders who contributed so greatly to the growth and development of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., to take the position today that they were wrong about God's purposes for the Church and that they ignored the leading of the Holy Spirit in regard to race relations, among other things.⁷⁰

This congregation definitely felt a strong tie to the past and believed that a condemnation of their fathers' position was tantamount to heresy.

⁶⁸ *The Presbyterian Guardian*, October 1964, p. 132.

⁶⁹ Alvis, p. 93.

⁷⁰ "An Open Letter From This Session To You" First Presbyterian Church Columbus, Mississippi. Undated, but presumed 1964-1965, *Presbyterian Journal* folder, PCA Archive.

These conservative opinions, however, were not often displayed in denominational leadership. After endorsing integration in 1954, the PCUS General Assembly continued to support integration and racial reconciliation. A PCUS delegation was present at the 1964 civil rights march on Washington D.C. During this time, the General Assembly dissolved the remaining segregated presbyteries and ordered the responsible white presbyteries to integrate. These actions caused controversy in several Southern presbyteries, particularly Central Mississippi. In fact, the attitude of Central Mississippi Presbytery was so critical of the General Assembly that the denomination ordered a commission to visit the presbytery and diagnose the rationale for the anti-assembly attitude.⁷¹

In 1967, the Northern Presbyterian Church (UPCUSA) affirmed a newly written creed, rooted in the Barthian or “Neo-orthodox” theological tradition, that became known as the Confession of 1967 or simply C-67.⁷² In addition to updating the supposedly outdated Westminster Confession of Faith with its dour doctrine of predestination, the writing committee made racial reconciliation a primary focus of the new creed. Its adoption sparked deep suspicions among conservatives who were outraged that a new creed would be represented in the *Book of Confessions* alongside other classic Presbyterian documents.⁷³

The same year, famed Reformed theologian and OPC minister Cornelius Van Til wrote a scathing critique of the new confession. Van Til charged that “new meanings ha[d] been attached to old familiar words. The whole question, accordingly is one of

⁷¹ *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1970), p. 250.

⁷² The Confession of 1967 was approved at the 1967 UPCUSA General Assembly in Portland, Oregon. An assigned committee, chaired by Princeton theologian Dr. Edward Dowey, wrote the document.

⁷³ For a UPCUSA critique of the Confession of 1967, see: John R. Fry, *The Trivialization of the United Presbyterian Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

reinterpretation...Such is the case, we believe, with the new theology: it is an essentially humanistic theology which disguises itself as an up-to-date Christian theology.”⁷⁴ He continued, “Thus when the new church, with its new creed, speaks to modern man about Creation, the Fall into sin, and Redemption through Christ, it is not speaking of the world of historical fact in the orthodox Christian sense. These theological terms are supposedly mythic and symbolic of a higher dimension of reality. It matters, but it matters only secondarily, whether these events did or did not happen in the factual world of every day history.”⁷⁵ While the PCUS did not adopt C-67, it certainly polarized racial boundaries as conservatives asserted that liberals in the Southern church wanted to mimic the UPCUSA confession. Additionally, Van Til’s charge that these theologians used old words with new interpretations was likely correct. When the historian examines Presbyterian progressives and conservatives, he is frequently struck by the similarity of language, but the vastly different interpretations and practices.

Denominational squabbles were not exclusively focused on reunion and racial problems; the Vietnam War caused several sharp debates in the church.⁷⁶ Presbyterian historian Rick Nutt commented that internal theological disputes and external political events combined to change the PCUS’s social mission.⁷⁷ In particular, he targeted neo-orthodoxy and segregation. By the 1960’s, the stringent old school Calvinism was mostly replaced by milder neo-orthodox creeds. Conservatives largely supported the war since

⁷⁴ Cornelius Van Til, *The Confession of 1967: Its Theological Background and Ecumenical Significance* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1967), p. 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁶ Rick L. Nutt, *Toward Peacemaking: Presbyterians in the South and National Security* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994). This book remains the only substantial study of the topic. See also: Rick Nutt, “For Truth and Liberty: Presbyterians and McCarthyism.” *The Journal of Presbyterian History*, Spring 2000, pp. 51-66. Available online: http://www.history.pcusa.org/pubs/journal/2000_spring/TruthAndLiberty.html Accessed 23 December 2008.

⁷⁷ Rick Nutt, *Toward Peacemaking*, p. 1.

they saw it as a fight against Communism, which they equated with atheism; progressives often viewed the war as unethical. While conservatives were considerably displeased with the liberals' criticism of the war, their chief problem was civil disobedience. They expressed severe grievances with the General Assembly opinion that civil disobedience was justified. Such a position, conservatives argued, was tantamount to encouraging lawlessness. In an anarchic society, Communism might make extensive inroads. Even some moderates like D. L. Adams remarked, "Oh how the Communists must rejoice when they see us preaching hate [criticism of the establishment]... (underline original)"⁷⁸

In reacting to the Vietnam War, the General Assembly at first merely expressed a desire for peace. By 1971, however, opinions had turned. A resolution proposed and adopted by the Standing Committee on Church and Society stated that "...this war cannot be morally justified."⁷⁹ The Assembly adopted a substitute motion toning down the indictment of the United States. The following year a similar situation occurred. The Assembly as an entire body was reluctant to pass judgment on the country, but several committees and many denominational officials did not hesitate to voice their criticisms of the ongoing war.⁸⁰ While many conservatives equated America with God's cause, others argued from a historical background ("spirituality of the church") that the PCUS should not involve itself in political issues; both parties, however, hated the other wing of the denomination. The diverging direction between conservatives and liberals was now clear. The question soon became when, not if, final separation would occur.

⁷⁸ Letter from D. L. Adams (Memphis, Tennessee) to B. I. Anderson, Pastor of Alta Woods Presbyterian Church (Jackson, Mississippi). B. I. Anderson papers, Box 535, PCA Archive. Anderson was a longtime leader in the Central Mississippi Presbytery. Letter not dated, but presumed to be from the early 1960's.

⁷⁹ John E. Richards, *The Historical Birth of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 73.

⁸⁰ Rick Nutt, *Towards Peacemaking*, pp. 87-89.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONSERVATIVES UNITE AND DEPART

They [ministers who will not hold to confessional standards] “are like a cancer and should be removed from the body.” (G. Aiken Taylor)

Now that we have observed conservative responses to denominational actions regarding race and reunion, this chapter will examine the four primary conservative organizations that arose and ultimately gave rise to the PCUS faction that formed the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, already discussed earlier, probably had the greatest and most long lasting impact on the conservative movement. Other groups, however, were also instrumental in the organization of the new denomination. In 1964, William E. “Bill” Hill, former pastor of West End Presbyterian Church (Hopewell, VA), founded the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship (PEF) to sponsor missionaries and local evangelists who supported “evangelical” theology and missions.¹ Ernest Trice Thompson remarked that PEF primarily served small churches in the South.² Conservatives extensively supported mission work and the new PCUS emphasis on social action angered them. Scholars have generally ignored this area of conservative grievances. In reality, missions struck at the core of the denomination by targeting the budget and denominational priorities. Mission work was a central priority of the conservative movement and they frequently argued that the PCUS was not emphasizing missions, but rather social advocacy.

When PEF organized, their goal was aiding PCUS missionaries who supported their theological views. In 1970, however, the newly formed Executive Committee on Overseas Evangelism (ECO), part of PEF, directly sponsored missionaries, an action

¹ The organization continues to this day.

² Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (Vol. III), p. 418.

that brought them into conflict with the PCUS Board of Missions.³ Since PEF and ECOE solicited support from conservative PCUS churches, the denominational board viewed that money as being “stolen” from their agency. Comparisons were made between PEF and J. Gresham Machen’s Board of Independent Missions that initiated his ouster from the Northern Presbyterian Church. The following PCUS General Assembly expressed strong disapproval of ECOE, but did not take any other actions. This allowed conservatives to operate their own independent missions system. In other words, an alternate system for funding missionaries precluded the 1973 separation; many conservatives had already decided that they would not operate within the PCUS structure. These existing alternatives made for a smoother transition to a new denomination.

For the common layperson, Concerned Presbyterians (CP), another conservative organization, probably exerted the greatest influence on PCUS members. Founded in 1964 by a group of conservatives led by Kenneth Keyes, CP sought to counter liberal denominational trends by exposing denominational actions that many PCUS laypeople disagreed with.⁴ Keyes, a previously mentioned member of the NAE, was a wealthy Miami, Florida real estate businessman. Initially, CP sought to merely reform the denomination. In CP’s first bulletin (March 1965), the organization clearly stated (in bold) that “Concerned Presbyterians, Inc., does NOT recommend that anyone withdraw from our beloved Church. Our goal is to reverse the trends that are causing so many members to consider withdrawal.” (emphasis original)⁵ CP’s first issue was sent to

³ Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 23.

⁴ CP lasted until 1976 when it was disbanded and most of its assets given to the *Presbyterian Journal*.

⁵ *The Concerned Presbyterian*, Bulletin No. 1, March 1965, p. 1. This periodical and its correspondence is held in the “Concerned Presbyterians” file at the PCA Historical Center.

50,000 people in the PCUS.⁶ Little did they know that CP would be instrumental in forming another Presbyterian denomination. Dr. Gregg Singer, president of CP in the late 1970's, indicated that the bulletin had 130,000 subscribers before the 1973 division.⁷ Amazingly, CP still had approximately 90,000 subscribers after the split; clearly there were many who were interested but would not leave.⁸ Examining the board of directors, few people of known influence besides Keyes are listed.⁹ With the emphasis on the person in the pew, and with layman leaders, CP was in a perfect position to criticize denominational policy without endangering conservative ministers or churches.

The organization determined to directly oppose liberal goals; in particular, these were: reunion with Northern Presbyterians, support of the "critical view" of the Bible, and continued membership in the National Council of Churches (NCC). One frequent target was a secret liberal group known as the "Fellowship of St. James." Little is actually known about the Fellowship of St. James beyond the fact that Ernest Trice Thompson was a major player in its formation (during the 1930's/1940's) and influence.¹⁰ The Fellowship of Concern, an openly liberal group that actively promoted racial integration, was heavily influenced by the Fellowship of St. James. Conservatives, including CP, accused the group of exerting an undue influence and trying to "take over" the denomination through underhanded appointment schemes.

What appeared clear was that CP had declared war on the liberal wing of the PCUS. Keyes was quoted as saying "We tried to be just as outright and forthright as we

⁶ CP, March 1965, p. 2.

⁷ Interview with Dr. Gregg Singer by Georgia Settle, 6 February 1990, p. 15. Transcript on file at PCA Archive.

⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁹ CP, March 1965, p. 2.

¹⁰ Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 57. Documentation on the Fellowship of St. James is nearly impossible to obtain. Perhaps in the following decades, as archival material is made available, more information will be available.

could. We didn't try to let the liberals get by with anything."¹¹ Previously, such strident opposition had been muted because of conservative ministerial fears. While conservative organizations had existed (*SPJ*), they did not extensively touch the person in the pew and usually focused on one issue (reunion). CP, however, broadly attacked liberals in the church over all kinds of policies. In the first issue, for example, CP denounced the *Presbyterian Survey's* (official PCUS newspaper) answers to denominational participation in the NCC.¹² CP deplored law breaking and riots in the racial controversies, but the organization did not actively promote segregation. Indeed, the location of CP headquarters (Miami, Florida) gave it a broader ministry than a strictly deep South organization. By the mid 1960's, conservatives, it seemed, had stepped up their rhetoric.

Denominational quarrels often became vitriolic as both sides readily attacked the other. The First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, Texas serves as a rather extreme example. In the 22 August 1968 bulletin a notice was given addressing the Concerned Presbyterians recent mailing that some of their members received. The statement, authored by Senior Pastor George Mauze and Associate Pastor Neil H. Thruston, said that:

[CP] proclaims itself to be the divinely ordained light of God shining in the evil darkness of an attempted "takeover" by socialistic liberals... One of the specific targets of this venomous attack, which in addition to being patently false, is in itself heretical, is the so called "Fellowship of Concern." This organization is composed of both ministers and laity who banded together loosely several years ago to provide financial support for clergymen who were experiencing extreme pressuse [sic] in racial situations. Last year, in an attempt to restore unity and peace in the Church, Dr. Marshal C. Dendy, then Moderator of the General Assembly, asked both organizations to disband themselves. This request...was met with immediate compliance by "The Fellowship of Concern" but with flagrant disregard and contumacious beligerence [sic] by "Concerned Presbyterians"; a disregard evidenced by this latest effort to divide and split our own First

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹² CP, March 1965, pp. 3-8.

Church. Needless to say, this “ultra right wing” organization of hatred and agitation represents neither the official position of our General Assembly, nor of our own Session, and most certainly does not represent the positions [sic] of either of your ministers.”¹³

Not surprisingly, First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio did not join the eventual “Continuing Church (PCA)” movement.¹⁴

Some PCUS members also protested CP’s mailing. A few were moderate in tone and expressed a disagreement in methods versus philosophy, but most reflected the fundamental differences in the PCUS. In December 1967, Reverend Peter Jorgensen from North Carolina wrote the editors of *Concerned Presbyterians* with his grievances.¹⁵ Jorgensen asserted that CP’s words are “neither prophetic nor harsh; they are pure deceit.”¹⁶ Claiming that CP (and the *Presbyterian Journal*) had put Presbyterian tradition above divine revelation, Jorgensen chastised them for not working together in the church. He angrily wrote: “I say to hell with articulate tongues and self righteous demands and cries of dismay and witch hunting for rotten apples in our midst. To spend our time thus is to subvert and pervert the goal we all proclaim- winning the unclaimed to our One Lord and Saviour [sic], Jesus Christ.” Clearly, Jorgensen did not see any monumental problem worth addressing in the PCUS. CP’s staff promptly classified him as a “severe critic.”¹⁷ In reply, G. Aiken Taylor, who replaced L. Nelson Bell as editor of the *Presbyterian Journal* in 1959, noted that Jorgensen’s criticism was not original. In fact, “the type [of letter] that comes in most often (among the critical ones) is the letter that

¹³ Bulletin of First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, Texas, 22 August 1968. Such a statement is indicative of the true hatred between two competing visions of what the PCUS should become.

¹⁴ The phrase “Continuing Church” had long been utilized by conservatives. Although many said that they did not regard all of the PCUS as apostate, the implications of this term leave little doubt that conservatives believed the PCUS was a “new” church in the theological and social sense from the immediate post Civil War era PCUS.

¹⁵ Reverend Peter M. Jorgensen of Laurinburg (North Carolina) Presbyterian Church, Letter to the Editors of *The Concerned Presbyterians*, 2 December 1967.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, written on top of letter by unknown person.

deplores criticism of earnest efforts by other Christians...” Taylor argued that conservatives were troubled by those who gave every indication that they were working for something other than the historic confessional position of the PCUS. Such a PCUS minister who refused to hold to that standard is “like a cancer [and] should be removed from the body.”¹⁸ Taylor was never known for his tactfulness in criticizing others.

A few, like Reverend William Murchison of West End Presbyterian Church (Houston, Texas), wrote incredibly irate letters. After receiving the CP bulletin several times, Murchison handwrote the following note to CP: “Will you damn fools take my name off your stupid mailing list. You don’t know which end is up and I have no interest in reading your ‘yellow journal.’ You, in my opinion, are a bunch of heretics. This is my 3rd request!” (emphasis original). On the photocopied address side of the CP bulletin, Murchison further wrote “Bull!” to CP’s statement that its “Primary Mission [is]- Winning the Unsaved” and “Quit sending me this crap!”¹⁹ CP’s secretaries apparently sent copies to its top officials.²⁰ In a reply dated 29 April 1969, CP’s Executive Secretary (presumably Keyes) apologized to Murchison for not having sooner taken his name off the mailing list. He graciously wrote, “We believe that you wrote this note and that you made this recommendation, most unbecoming to a man of the cloth, at a time when probably there might have been some unmanageable problems in your way.”²¹

One can clearly see from these letters that the situation was extremely tense. An aggravating situation (like Murchison’s) quickly turned into letters of hate. Certainly this situation was not unique to the PCUS. During the controversy, when they were outside of

¹⁸ G. Aiken Taylor, Reply to Rev. Peter M. Jorgensen of Laurinburg Presbyterian Church (North Carolina), 21 December 1967; copy held in Concerned Presbyterians file, PCA archive.

¹⁹ William R. Murchison, Letter to Concerned Presbyterians, undated.

²⁰ Writing on top of letter states copies were sent to Mr. Keyes and Dr. Fulton.

²¹ Reply from Concerned Presbyterians to Reverend William R. Murchison, 29 April 1969.

the pulpit, ministers could act in ways similar to a politician. There appeared to be little love between the two sides, yet as McAtee recounted, some conservatives and liberals did maintain friendships because of deep personal ties.²²

In 1969, Presbyterian Churchmen United (PCU), designed primarily for ministers, was the last of the four major organizations formed. Paul Settle, pastor of Second Presbyterian Church (Greenville, South Carolina) presided over the group. PCU was known for its “Declaration of Commitment” that espoused the inerrancy of the Bible, the Reformed faith, and the unity of the church. Smith claimed that 600 ministers signed the declaration.²³ What is even more significant is that of these six hundred men, only one-third (approximately 200) would join the “Continuing Church.” Conservatives certainly had a sizeable percentage of ministers on their side, but just what action these ministers were willing to take was an entirely different question. The “purity of the church” became the defining issue as to whether one could stay in the PCUS and make peace or leave.

Another organization should be mentioned- the Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians (CFOP). Perhaps more than any other, this group represented the conservatives who opposed the current denominational direction but would not depart. Led by prominent St. Louis pastor Andrew “Andy” Jumper, CFOP initially cooperated with CP, PCU, and the *Presbyterian Journal*. Most CFOP members stayed in the PCUS and eventually supported union with the UPCUSA to join Northern and Southern

²² William McAtee, *Dreams Where Have You Gone?*, p. 158.

²³ Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 46.

conservative strength.²⁴ All the organizations agreed on the same basic Biblical principles, but differed on the key question of the “purity of the church.” The Biblical prophet Amos’s question, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” became the critical difference as conservatives argued just how much liberalism they would accept before leaving.²⁵ CFOP became a coalition of moderate conservatives that had no intent of ever leaving the denomination.

When discussing the subsequent split, conservatives frequently mention the 1969 and 1971 General Assemblies as being critical in their decision to leave. In all probability, the 1969 General Assembly (Mobile, Alabama) convinced conservatives that they no longer held power. In addition to other resolutions, the Assembly accepted the formation of “union presbyteries” whereby PCUS and UPCUSA churches would unite together under one presbytery. Conservatives vigorously denounced the measure and called it unconstitutional since UPCUSA ministers would now be allowed to vote in the PCUS General Assembly and presbyteries. William “Bill” McAtee recalled the assembly in his book about union presbyteries. He noted the generally liberal direction of the assembly, particularly among the elected commissioners and the resulting frustration from conservative delegates. This, he believed, was due to the “old guard” failing to expand the PCUS beyond its regional boundaries.²⁶ The 1969 assembly not only hastened conservatives’ plans to leave, but it also marked the first serious starting point (since 1954) for eventual reunion with the UPCUSA.²⁷

²⁴ There has been little written on Northern (UPCUSA) conservatives during this time. There were certainly some as evidenced by later defections, but the most vocal critics appeared to have left with the OPC in 1936.

²⁵ *The Bible*, King James Version, Amos 3:3.

²⁶ A failed union attempt with the Reformed Church in America in 1968 left liberals irritated and anxious to start serious reunion negotiations with the UPCUSA.

²⁷ William McAtee, *Dreams Where Have You Gone?*, pp. 152-159.

Although not mentioned as often, the 1970 General Assembly was noted for one particular piece of legislation- abortion. Although noting that “the decision to terminate a pregnancy should never be made lightly or in haste,” the assembly declared that abortion was acceptable in cases of “physical or mental deformity,” “conception as a result of rape or incest,” and “socio-economic circumstances.”²⁸ The implications of the Assembly’s decision were enormous. Conservatives were particularly irate at the “socio-economic” clause. Morton Smith, a recognized conservative leader, directly cited this instance for his decision to withdraw from the PCUS.²⁹ It is quite interesting that this decision predated the United States Supreme Court’s 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision. Perhaps, by this point, even Southern denominations were leading the culture towards a more progressive future.

The 1971 General Assembly at Massenatta Springs, Virginia, is often cited as the “breaking point” by conservatives. After 1969 and 1970, conservatives had become increasingly angry with the direction of the General Assembly. They determined to unite and field candidates for office in an attempt to change the denomination’s direction. Such a method, it should be noted, was successfully used by fundamentalists in the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979.³⁰ All the major PCUS conservative groups organized and generally agreed to support D. James Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for the moderator position. Other candidates were nominated for various positions instead of the moderator’s selections. By any standard,

²⁸ *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly (1970)*, p. 126. It should be noted that the PCUS was merely following the pattern of other mainline churches. The American Baptist Convention had accepted abortion in 1968 and the UPCUSA did so in 1970 as well.

²⁹ Morton H. Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim*, pp. 63-64. Smith’s work is invaluable for its inclusion of full text primary sources; he later became the first stated clerk of the PCA.

³⁰ The SBC fundamentalists succeeded in their attempt because each pastor could vote. The hierarchical Presbyterian system likely prevented a “grassroots” takeover.

the conservative coalition failed.³¹ Kennedy lost 271-170, and Ruth Graham, the wife of Billy Graham, was defeated by a 219-212 vote for a special commissioner seat.³² The conservatives had support, but could not wrest control of the assembly from a moderate-liberal coalition.

In addition to the conservative's failed attempt to control the assembly, commissioners refused to repeal the previous General Assembly's ruling on abortion. The Assembly also adopted a restructuring plan that would supposedly make the denominational bureaucracy run smoothly. The proposed restructuring, set to begin in June 1973, would reduce the number of synods from sixteen to eight. The plan drew conservative ire because they believed that greater centralization would have a negative impact on any attempt to withdraw. Additionally, one proposed synod that would roughly encompass Mississippi and Alabama was changed because of fears that conservatives would control the synod and simply withdraw as an entire entity.

After their failure at the 1971 General Assembly, conservatives decisively split in July 1971 over what action to take.³³ The *Presbyterian Journal*, Concerned Presbyterians, Presbyterian Churchmen United, and Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship all advocated forming a "Continuing Church," a new Presbyterian denomination that would continue the theological traditions of the old PCUS. A straw poll indicated that the vast majority believed that the PCUS was beyond reforming. In a critical vote, the key conservative delegates voted 15-8 to wait until the PCUS voted on the anticipated 1973 merger plan with the UPCUSA. Conservatives believed that this would afford them the luxury of having an escape clause while avoiding potential litigation. Whether the plan

³¹ Kennedy Smartt, *I Am Reminded*, p. 57.

³² Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 70.

³³ *Ibid.*, 71.

passed or not was irrelevant; it was obvious that a group of conservatives was going to depart the PCUS in 1973.³⁴ The Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians declined to pursue such a course.³⁵ Writing later, former PCUS and now PC(USA) pastor R. Milton Winter said that he opposed separation as a way to resolve conflict.³⁶ Some, at the time, appeared to agree with this line of thinking. Several of the old conservatives who had formed the movement, including L. Nelson Bell, also declined to leave. These men simply could not give up on their beloved denomination. In Bell's case, he may have been afraid what affect his action would have on his son-in-law, Billy Graham. CFOP's defection from conservative ranks intensified the push to leave the denomination, but this split cost dissenters several churches which might have joined.

The four conservative groups that voted to leave the PCUS formed a "Steering Committee" that would work to implement a "Continuing Presbyterian Church." Dr. Donald Patterson, minister of First Presbyterian Church (Jackson, Mississippi) and chair of the committee, made the official announcement:

The groups [PJ, CP, PCU, PEF] have reached a consensus to accept the apparent inevitability of division in the Presbyterian Church US caused by the program of the radical ecumenists, and to move now toward a continuing body of congregations and presbyteries loyal to the Scriptures and the Westminster Standards. This steering committee has been charged with the responsibility of developing and implementing a

³⁴ Ibid. Smith quotes minutes as saying that three who opposed the option then decided to join with the majority.

³⁵ It should be noted that some who refused to leave in 1973, like Andy Jumper, left in 1981 when the Evangelical Presbyterian Church formed from dissenting congregations in the UPCUSA. At that point, reunion was certain and a court decision from the UPCUSA mandated women elders in every congregation.

³⁶ R. Milton Winter, "Presbyterians and Separatist Evangelicals: A Continuing Dilemma" *Perspectives*, January 2007. Published online: www.pcusa.org/oga/perspectives/jan07/presbyterians-evangelicals.pdf . Accessed 12 November 2008. This article raised a furor among conservatives for its loose generalizations regarding evangelicals and fundamentalists. Associate Professor Robert A. J. Gagnon of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (PC(USA)) described several problems in Winter's paper. Published online: <http://www.robgagnon.net/articles/homosexWinterResponse.pdf> . Accessed 12 November 2008. Additionally, at least one presbytery (Newark, NJ), declared that Winters' article should be removed from the PCUSA website because of its controversial nature. "Minutes of the Presbytery of Newark Stated Meeting May 22, 2007" pp. 15-17. Published online: <http://www.pbynewark.org/PDF/NP%20070522%20Minutes.pdf> . Accessed 12 November 2008.

plan for continuation of a Presbyterian Church loyal to the Scriptures and Reformed faith, recognizing that the Sovereign Holy Spirit may be pleased so to revive our Church as to make revisions in the plan necessary.”³⁷

This was announced at “Journal Day” on 11 August 1971.³⁸ Such an announcement caught the attention of the national press. On August 15, the *New York Times* gave a neutral story to the issue.³⁹ The Steering Committee consisted of three representatives from each of the four groups.⁴⁰ From this point forward, the four groups interacted closely. They already had some institutional development. In 1964, conservatives had founded Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) in Jackson, Mississippi, in response to the PCUS’s seminaries’ liberal theological direction.⁴¹ Although the seminary was officially neutral in the denominational conflict, many conservative ministers who eventually came to the PCA received their theological training at RTS. Increasingly, more liberal presbyteries refused to ordain men who received their seminary degree from RTS, thereby adding further to the already tense situation. Throughout the controversy, one major reason conservatives believed that they could not win was because the seminaries were firmly on the liberal side. For their part, liberals maintained that outside agencies like RTS and the OPC were responsible for many of the current denominational problems.⁴² Still, without a doubt, division was inevitable in 1971; it was merely a question of when and how.

³⁷ “An Announcement Made at Asheville, N.C. on August 11, 1971 – by Dr. Donald B. Patterson” John Richards Papers, PCA Archive. Notice the blame is not on liberal PCUS policies per se, but on “radical ecumenists.” From the conservative mouth, it appears that impending reunion was the primary motivating factor for division.

³⁸ Journal Day was a conservative alternative to the PCUS sponsored retreats at their Montreat, North Carolina convention center.

³⁹ “3 Antiliberal Factions Leaving Presbyterian Church in South” *New York Times*, 15 August 1971, p. 36.

⁴⁰ “How The Steering Committee Came To Be,” Continuing Presbyterian Church papers, PCA Archive.

⁴¹ Significantly, three of the four PCUS seminaries were located in border state areas.

⁴² William McAtee lends further support to the assertion that “outside forces” (fundamentalists, evangelicals) were causing disruptions in the PCUS. He notes several letters that his father (a PCUS pastor

The Steering Committee conducted business from 1971 and into 1973.

Logistically, the committee faced a major problem. Organizing conservatives from four different organizations from across the South was no easy task. Some groups had differing opinions as to the method of leaving the PCUS. Overall, this gives evidence that the eventual division in 1973 was no knee-jerk reaction to current political and social views, but rather the result of decades' long denominational disagreements.

Outside of the Steering Committee, but still in close relation, was a small group of former PCUS churches who formed a transitional organization named Vanguard Presbytery. These congregations included Eastern Heights and Hull Memorial Presbyterian Churches from Savannah, Georgia, that had withdrawn from the PCUS in 1966. These were the first PCUS churches to withdraw over perceived liberal denominational direction. On 17 April 1966, Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church unanimously approved a resolution renouncing the jurisdiction of the PCUS. One portion of the resolution reads "Giving support to the removal of Bible reading and prayers by children in the public schools."⁴³ This rationale for exiting the PCUS has not been found in any other PCUS dissenter literature.⁴⁴ After winning a lengthy court battle in January 1970, the churches remained independent until joining the "Continuing Church."⁴⁵ On 7 September 1972, in Savannah, Georgia, they convened their first assembly.⁴⁶ As Frank

in Mississippi) received indicating a strong connection between many in the Synod of Mississippi and the OPC denomination. The OPC, perhaps, saw the Synod as their "ally" in the South (pp. 80-81).

⁴³ "A Resolution Recommended by the Session and Pastor for Adoption by the Congregation of the Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church," 17 April 1966, published online: <http://www.firstpcavillarica.org/Sermon%20Notes/A%20RESOLUTION.htm> , Accessed 12 November 2008. The vote was 122-0.

⁴⁴ While most conservatives opposed attempts to remove the Bible and prayers from the public classroom, this reason did not seem to enter most congregations' reasons for departing from the PCUS.

⁴⁵ PCUS ecclesiastical law was not as explicit that the presbytery owned the property. After this case the denomination rewrote some of their property laws.

⁴⁶ Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church In America*, p. 144

Smith remarked, these congregations served as models for 1973 and convinced some skeptics that congregations could depart and still successfully continue their ministry.⁴⁷

Vanguard Presbytery was a concern to the Steering Committee. Todd Allen, pastor of Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church (Savannah, Georgia), noted that “Aiken Taylor was very concerned that what we did in Savannah was going to either splinter conservatives or else become the new general church. However, I never wanted to be a Carl McIntyre [sic] and was glad to let Vanguard Presbytery serve a catalytic purpose for the birth of the Continuing Presbyterian Church...”⁴⁸ The Steering Committee desperately tried to keep conservative churches so that they could withdraw at the same time and avoid becoming more than one denomination. Solid organizations could then be developed instead of each church going off into independency or small groups. Vanguard was primarily symbolic; at most, the presbytery consisted of fifteen churches, none of whom had major clout. To this analyst, Vanguard appeared to contain some congregations who had independent streaks. Most of the churches, including the two from Savannah, no longer exist.

In February 1973, events greatly speeded the eventual departure of several hundred churches. On February 9-10, leaders of the PCUS and UPCUSA discussed the proposed plan of reunion. The initial plan had been to send the document to both General Assemblies in 1973. With approval all but certain by Northern Presbyterians, the only hindrance was Southern conservatives. These members were represented by committee member Jack Williamson who had agreed to vote for reunion so long as there was an “escape clause” allowing a church to withdraw that did not wish to enter the new united

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Todd Allen quoted in Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 156-157.

Presbyterian denomination. Conservative leaders had high hopes for this plan since liberals knew that they could not pass the measure through the PCUS without some conservative support. A few Northern Presbyterian churches also wanted to depart, but without such a clause there was little chance of saving their property. In 1965, UPCUSA conservatives had formed the Presbyterian Lay Committee to promote their agenda, but they were largely unsuccessful; in fact, ever since Machen's defrocking in 1936, conservatives had held little power in the Northern Presbyterian denomination.⁴⁹ After the churches that formed the OPC withdrew, conservatives in the UPCUSA decided to remain, at least until events began to directly affect their own congregations.

Continued reunion negotiations, however, destroyed the conservatives' plans. At the February 1973 meeting, commissioners decided to scrap the existing plan and present another one, for study only, at the 1974 assemblies. The chief obstacle, it appeared, was the so called "escape clause." The decision, of course, was a bitter blow to conservatives, but they were not the only ones upset. The powerful stated clerk of the UPCUSA and longtime union proponent, Dr. William P. Thompson, angrily criticized Southern union supporters. *The Presbyterian Journal* told the story:

On the last day of the meeting, Dr. [William] Thompson revealed that he had approached Mr. Williamson privately and apologized for the action the committee took. Then he turned to the Southerners and reminded them of the steps taken from the time that conservative dissidents had been invited to appear and state their case. 'I have always believed that politics is the art of the possible,' Dr. Thompson said. 'You insisted that an escape clause was necessary in order to secure a favorable vote. You have now betrayed brethren who trusted your integrity. I now have no further commitment to the escape

⁴⁹ Douglas E. Cowan, *The Remnant Spirit: Conservative Reform in Mainline Protestantism* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publishers, 2003), pp. 71-72. The early leaders of the group included several influential corporate executives, particularly J. Howard Pew, chairman of Sunoco. PCUS dissenters hoped that conservative UPCUSA churches would join them in the new denomination, but this never materialized until isolated defections years later.

clause and I now declare that I will never consent to the inclusion of such a clause in a plan of union.”⁵⁰

What is clear, beyond Thompson’s scathing critique of Southern pro-union members, was that Southern commissioners genuinely feared that conservatives would walk out if given the chance. The conservatives, although not a majority, had certainly stalled reunion negotiations. Southern commissioners likely believed that far fewer PCUS churches would leave on their own than if an escape clause was implemented. Thompson, however, was willing to let a few congregations leave so that an immediate union might consummated between the PCUS and the UPCUSA.

Some conservatives in Southwest Alabama were not even interested in waiting for the committee’s decision. They scheduled a special presbytery meeting on 13 February 1973 to consider departure.⁵¹ This rural area was among the most conservative in the entire denomination. At the meeting, fourteen churches were dismissed along with their ministers. It should be noted that many of these church votes were 5-0, 6-0, etc... indicating the small size of most congregations in this vicinity.⁵² After the presbytery meeting, most of the dismissed ministers assembled and formed a new organization called Warrior Presbytery. The event was significant because it was the first time that a group of churches in a particular area had pulled out together. Twenty-three churches were present in Warrior Presbytery by the end of the year. In the next few months, congregations in Appalachia and the Florida Gulf Coast left and formed their own respective presbyteries.

⁵⁰ Quoted in: “Committee Votes to Scrap Plan of Union” *The Presbyterian Journal*, 21 February 1973, pp. 4-5.

⁵¹ Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 161.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 165.

Shortly after the reunion committee's announcement, the Steering Committee published "A Manual for Separation."⁵³ This seventeen page document describes in full detail the process necessary for churches leaving the PCUS. The committee first wrote: "Last November [1972], the Steering Committee decided that if the vote on union was again postponed it would recommend that all conservative churches separate from the Presbyterian Church US as soon as possible. In keeping with this decision the Steering Committee and the Executive Committees of our four conservative organizations [*PJ*, *CP*, *PCU*, *PEF*] met from 16-17 February 1973, and voted:

1. To Recommend that a new denomination true to God's Word, faithful to historic Presbyterian doctrine and polity and obedient to the Great Commission be formed during 1973.
2. To join with a group of influential churches in issuing a call to all churches whose ministers, sessions or congregations have signed PCU's Declaration of Commitment and other churches interested in separation, inviting them to send representatives to a Convocation of Sessions to discuss the steps to be taken in forming the continuing Church.
3. To adopt a paper entitled "Reaffirmations of 1973" which sets forth in contrast the differences between the doctrine and polity clearly delineated in the Church's constitution and the unconstitutional departures from this doctrine by our church courts...
4. To order the printing and distribution of a 200-page book containing a documented historical study showing the deviations from Presbyterian doctrine and polity from the inception of our Church to date.⁵⁴

The Steering Committee took these actions a week after the announced union failure. The committee had officially declared that a new Presbyterian church would be formed.

Churches would now have to declare where they stood.

The committee's "Manual for Separation" "present[ed] the various procedures which may be used by presbyteries and congregations which may be separating from the

⁵³ "A Manual for Separation" The Steering Committee For A Continuing Presbyterian Church. Montgomery, Alabama. Not dated, but presumed March/April of 1973. Copy held in Steering Committee folder, PCA Archive.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. Original four points were in bold.

Presbyterian Church US to join with other faithful Presbyterians in forming the continuing Church.”⁵⁵ The manual was divided into two sections: for congregations where conservatives controlled the presbytery and for those churches where liberals controlled the presbytery. In conservative controlled presbyteries, the process was relatively simple. Congregations could be dismissed by presbyteries, have a congregational vote and separate, or convince the entire presbytery to withdraw as a unit. The last option did not materialize, even in conservative controlled areas. Frank Smith asserted that a failed motion to withdraw in the Asheville (North Carolina) presbytery doomed this method.⁵⁶ In liberal presbyteries, options were even fewer. Congregations could withdraw by a congregational vote and risk presbytery legal action, or they could ask the presbytery to dismiss them. Attorneys advised against the latter method, even though it worked for West End Presbyterian Church (Hopewell, Virginia) in 1972, since congregations would have fewer options in civil court.⁵⁷ Generally, the sharpest fights took place in presbyteries where liberals controlled. The more conservative PCUS presbyteries usually dismissed those congregations who wished to depart.

The manual continued by encouraging conservative members to withdraw even if their own church wanted to stay with the PCUS; these people might begin new churches. Advice was also given in educating churches that were contemplating departure. Finally, the manual gave examples of sample resolutions and other forms that the session of a church would need. One example is Jackson Street Presbyterian Church’s (Alexandria,

⁵⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁶ Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 76.

⁵⁷ “A Manual for Separation” pp. 4-5. Kennedy Smartt, former pastor of a PCUS church, remarked that the process was dangerous. Despite their differing ideologies, Smartt was a friend of Ernest Trice Thompson, the most powerful man in the Synod of Virginia, who chose to support him. Such support likely ensured the peaceful departure of the congregation.

Louisiana) petition for dismissal. The church stated the typical conservative views of differing with opinion to Scripture, failure of church discipline, and being driven into a “de facto union” having theological differences.⁵⁸

Several emotional debates, including abortion and women’s ordination, accelerated conservatives’ desires for separation. Morton Smith, for instance, said that abortion alone was reason enough to leave the PCUS.⁵⁹ After General Assembly’s approval of abortion in 1970, it is easy to understand conservative grievances and their subsequent departure. Women’s ordination, however, was a much more complex issue. First approved by the Northern Presbyterian Church in 1956 and subsequently in 1964 by the PCUS, women’s ordination had been a problem for conservatives. While there was opposition, and this issue certainly figured in conservative decisions to leave, many did not find women’s ordination to be an absolutely critical denominational standard. This was because conservative churches were not required to ordain women.⁶⁰ It is worth mentioning that many conservative churches spent almost ten years in a denomination that ordained women. Although the modern PCA is well known for its refusal to ordain women, such a reason could not have been the sole rationale for its existence.⁶¹

Many conservative churches had also not been contributing to the PCUS because of opposition to denominational policy. Conservatives saw little reason to fund denominational programs that they could not endorse. Often churches withheld their contributions because they believed other para-church organizations such as PEF better

⁵⁸ “A Manual for Separation,” p. 15

⁵⁹ Morton Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim*, p. 176.

⁶⁰ In 1979, when the UPCUSA ordered all churches to integrate women into positions of leadership, many conservatives withdrew to the RPCES, PCA, and some founded the EPC.

⁶¹ For further information on mainline Presbyterians and women see: Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996).

reflected their beliefs. This is born out by the PCUS stated clerk's 1975 address in which he claimed that the departures had not significantly affected financial giving.⁶² Most conservative churches had probably stopped sending money several years before.⁶³

On 18 May 1973, a Convocation of Sessions met in Atlanta, Georgia, that was scheduled by the Steering Committee. Present were pastors and elders from most of the conservative churches that wished to depart from the PCUS. Smith noted that there were 460 voting delegates present representing 261 churches; over 400 observers were also present.⁶⁴ The following day the delegates voted 349-16 to officially establish a new denomination. Most, but not all, represented churches joined the new denomination in December 1973. The commissioners also adopted a lengthy document known as the "Re-Affirmations of 1973." This document compared "The Church Today [PCUS]" with "The Church Reborn" (the Continuing Presbyterian church).⁶⁵ In essence, the paper listed the areas where conservatives believed the PCUS had erred and answered these discrepancies with what the Continuing Church would believe. The disagreements ranged widely from theological to social issues.

It is a necessity to mention one person, in particular, who exercised a tremendous influence on the Convocation of Sessions, Steering Committee, and other conservative leaders through books, articles, and speeches. Francis Schaeffer, a minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod (which would later merge with the

⁶² *Minutes of the PCUS* (1975), pp. 176-177.

⁶³ This was not always the case. First Presbyterian of Jackson, Mississippi, continued to send money to some PCUS missionaries even after the church had withdrawn. Some churches were still strongly attached to local or missions work. They did not, however, simply give money to the denomination without designation.

⁶⁴ Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 86.

⁶⁵ "Reaffirmation of 1973" as quoted in Morton Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim*, pp. 357-369.

PCA), was by far the most influential philosopher of the movement.⁶⁶ Unlike many evangelicals of the day, Schaeffer was comfortable discussing modern philosophy and theology.⁶⁷ He emphasized absolutes, criticized relativism (with academic precision), and stressed the need for unity within conservative Christianity. Though not specifically directed to PCUS conservatives, Schaeffer's concept of "spiritual adultery" was a critical theoretical concept for their ideology. He argued that apostasy (liberal theology) equaled spiritual adultery- a retreat from God; in other words, conservatives should separate from liberals otherwise they would be doing a grave disservice to their faith.⁶⁸ To conservative Southern Presbyterians who enjoyed battling liberalism from an intellectual context, Schaeffer was close to a godsend. He would speak at both the Second and Ninth PCA General Assemblies.⁶⁹

The decision by the Convocation of Sessions began the major exodus of churches from the PCUS. In June, over half the Central Mississippi Presbytery left, including the powerful First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi. The same happened in south Florida and eastern Alabama. Churches in South Carolina and Georgia also made up sizeable percentages of departing congregations.⁷⁰ A few congregations in Texas, one in Baltimore, Maryland, and one in Louisville, Kentucky, also decided to join the new denomination. The next several months consisted of forming new presbyteries and

⁶⁶ This can be seen by the recommended books listed in the 1973 NPC minutes. Out of 44 books listed (including catechisms, Calvin's Institutes, and the Westminster Confession of Faith), three were authored by Schaeffer- the most for any modern author. For further information see: Jefferson L. Lawrence, "The Role and influence of Francis A. Schaeffer in the Founding and Shaping of the Presbyterian Church in America." (St. Louis, MO: Presbyterian Church in America Historical Center, 2001).

⁶⁷ Schaeffer was the author of over twenty books.

⁶⁸ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 125-129.

⁶⁹ Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).

⁷⁰ *Minutes of the PCUS* (1974), pp. 146-148.

organizing for the upcoming December assembly. On 4 December 1973, commissioners met at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. One hundred and twelve years to the date of the formation of the PCUS, the Presbyterian Church in America was formed.⁷¹ This was not a coincidence. The Steering Committee declined an invitation to hold the assembly at the First Presbyterian Church of Augusta, Georgia, where the PCUS was formed in 1861; the given reason was that the church had not yet left the PCUS (it later did so). By all accounts, the First General Assembly was a joyful event. Commissioners were happy that the struggle was over and that they finally had a separate denomination. According to the minutes, 338 commissioners were present.⁷² Many visitors were present from other denominations including the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Interestingly, Carl McIntire was also present representing the International Council of Christian Churches.⁷³ What reception he received is not known. News of the assembly spread quickly and earned an article in the *New York Times*.⁷⁴

Secondly, a new name was chosen for the denomination at the First General Assembly, the National Presbyterian Church. In his autobiography, Kennedy Smartt revealed the other choices that commissioners were given for the new denomination; significantly, not one proposed name had “Southern” in it. Like the liberal faction, they desired to become a national church. Indeed, this was one rare area where both sides agreed: the regional denomination must become a national one. The new name, however,

⁷¹ Known as the National Presbyterian Church for the first year, this paper uses the subsequent name, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) for clarity.

⁷² *Minutes of the National Presbyterian Church* (1973), p. 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁴ “Southern Conservatives Form National Presbyterian Church” *New York Times*, 6 December 1973, p. 42.

lasted only a year because of threatened legal action for name infringement from the National Presbyterian Church (UPCUSA) in Washington D.C.⁷⁵ The following year, commissioners voted to change the denomination's name to the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

Besides organizing the denomination, the most significant action taken was the approval of a paper known as "A Message to All Churches of Jesus Christ Throughout the World from the General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church."⁷⁶ In essence, this paper defined the reasons and meaning of the new denomination's existence and its congregations' actions in separating from the PCUS. This is the only major statement by the new denomination about the matter. Although several historians have analyzed the document, since it was of prime importance to the commissioners, it is worth closer attention on several points. First, the resolution recognizes the PCA's relation to its parent body. In fact, the document actually quotes the original 1861 document that gave birth to the PCUS. In short, the writers of the 1973 statement saw the First General Assembly as "rebirthing" the Southern Presbyterian Church once again.⁷⁷ The paper remarked that "Change in the Presbyterian Church in the United States came as a gradual thing, and its ascendancy in the denomination, over a long period of time. We confess that it should not have been permitted...A Church that will not exercise discipline will not long be able to maintain pure doctrine or godly practice."⁷⁸ Basically,

⁷⁵ Ironically, both conservative groups (1936, 1973) were forced to change their names because of threatened legal action.

⁷⁶ *Minutes National Presbyterian Church* (1973), pp. 40-42.

⁷⁷ This was at least true in a theological context; from a social context, it was impossible to rebirth the old PCUS.

⁷⁸ *Minutes National Presbyterian Church* (1973), p. 41.

the constitution and official confessions were still orthodox, but the denomination refused to discipline those who taught outside these standards.

The declaration continued: “A diluted theology, a gospel tending towards humanism, an unbiblical view of marriage and divorce, the ordination of women, financing of abortion on socio-economic grounds, and numerous other non-Biblical positions are all traceable to a different view of Scripture from that we hold and that which was held by the Southern Presbyterian forefathers.”⁷⁹ These comments leave little doubt of the writers’ opinions on early Southern Presbyterians. To a denomination that declared itself open to people of all races, the issue of Civil War era Southern Presbyterians who espoused slavery was still a tender issue. Finally, the address said that the Continuing Church expressed their “continued love and concern” to the PCUS. “We sever these ties only with deepest regret and sorrow. We hope our going may in some way recall you to that historic witness which we cherish as our common heritage.”⁸⁰ Morton Smith later indicated it was a “division with tears.” “Our attitude,” he remarked, “has never been in the PCA that of shaking the fists at the mother church and saying ‘you’re all wicked, you’re all apostate.’”⁸¹

The First General Assembly adopted the 1933 Book of Church Order (PCUS), clearly stated that women could not become ordained ministers, and resolved that the

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 42. It is also worthwhile to note that this address and the present PCA have never declared mainline Presbyterian denominations to be “apostate.” Kennedy Smartt and Jack Williamson make note of this fact, but such appears to only be a matter of formality. When reading the literature produced by conservatives throughout the controversy, it is undeniable that they considered the PCUS to be apostate. Indeed, the PCUS had to be apostate for them to have an appropriate reason for forming a new denomination. Still, the reserved language of the document is notable, particularly so when several congregations lost their property.

⁸¹ Interview with Morton Smith by Georgia Settle, March 1985, p. 12. Transcript on file at PCA Archive.

local congregation owned their property.⁸² The assembly also stressed the importance of ruling elders (laymen); at the 1973 assembly, ruling elders outnumbered teaching elders (pastors) by approximately five to three.⁸³ *The Presbyterian Guardian*, an OPC publication, also gives some valuable information on the First General Assembly.⁸⁴ Paul Settle, former PCU head and new director of the PCA's Christian education program, discussed the reasons for leaving. He noted that, "Some denominational loyalists...accuse the dissidents of schism, saying that they are merely struggling for personal power or position, or that they are motivated by racism, or by fear of progress and change."⁸⁵ Settle remarked that "though it would be highly unrealistic, if not actually dishonest, to hold that not one person in the movement toward a new denomination is motivated unworthily, we should be as seriously in error if we refuse to believe that the overwhelming majority of the people in the movement are motivated by sincere love for Jesus Christ and his truth."⁸⁶ Settle proceeded to list such matters as "universalism, anti-Trinitarianism, situational ethics, semi-Pelagianism" that are church heresies, and that the PCUS's official literature "ha[s] advocated premarital sex, adultery, the use of addictive drugs by youth, and abortions for socio-economic reasons. Recently one ordained minister ran for public office on the Communist party ticket; another participated in a wedding of homosexuals. Their presbyteries refused to discipline them."⁸⁷

⁸² *The Presbyterian Guardian*, 43:1, January 1974, p. 10.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁴ *The Presbyterian Guardian* 43:1, January 1974.

⁸⁵ "Why we are leaving" by: Paul Settle, *The Presbyterian Guardian* 43:1, January 1974, pp. 2-3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* In a letter to his congregation at Cedar Bluff, Virginia, in 1973, Reverend John Sartelle commented that there was a Communist minister in the Louisville (Kentucky) presbytery. This is verified by a *Presbyterian Journal* notice on 11 October 1972 that the Reverend Terrence H. Davis of Louisville (KY) was "an elector of the Communist Party." This is definite evidence that conservatives equated a certain type of politics (Communism) with spiritual evil. Though not often discussed, the debate over homosexuality was also in the news since the United Church of Christ first ordained an open homosexual in 1972.

Looking at the statistics from the minutes of the First General Assembly in December 1973, several observations can be made.⁸⁸ First, the vast majority (approximately two-thirds) of departing churches were in the states of Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina, particularly through the central part of the states. Most historians, however, have not probed deeper into the geographical localities and the membership of these departing congregations. For example, if one examines the states in terms of percentage of total people in the new denomination, a surprising result is obtained. Mississippi, for example, contained fully one-third of all churches present at the 1973 General Assembly. Yet, these churches contained approximately 22% of the denomination's membership. Florida's eighteen churches, on the other hand, comprised just over 7% of the new denomination, but the membership in Florida accounted for 14% of the total membership in the PCA. In examining states that had a significant number of churches that departed (over ten), Florida had the highest average church membership at approximately 339; Mississippi only had an average of 109 members per congregation. Each church may have been able to send a commissioner to the new General Assembly, but undoubtedly, some large churches like Granada Presbyterian Church of Coral Gables, Florida, would carry more weight than a commissioner from a rural Mississippi church with ten members.

Yet another sign of church strength is found in the number of churches that have their own pastor. In states such as Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina, virtually all the departing congregations had full time pastors. Mississippi, however, was different. Only

⁸⁸ My analysis is made on those churches represented at the First General Assembly, information from the 1973 National Presbyterian Church minutes. Independent churches present (ten) were ignored because of lack of information. Even if they were included, it is doubtful that these churches would have significantly altered the findings in this study.

half of the departing congregations in that state had a full time minister. In terms of presbyteries, the new Mississippi Valley Presbytery, consisting primarily of congregations that left the Central Mississippi Presbytery of the PCUS, had forty-nine churches, but only twenty-seven ministers. Warrior Presbytery in Southwest Alabama had 9 ministers for its 23 churches.⁸⁹ This discrepancy has often been ignored, but yields important clues as to where the most influential areas would be in the denomination. Rural Mississippi and Alabama might have contained the most churches, but these areas, and consequently their local beliefs, would never have the dominance in the new denomination that areas with powerful churches would. The areas of Jackson (Mississippi), Montgomery (Alabama), and Florida were the strongest in the PCA. Importantly, these were urban areas that were undergoing rapid changes. What racists there were soon found themselves outnumbered by commissioners from the “New South.” As in culture, racist strength in the new Presbyterian denomination slowly but surely lost its strength.

Second, while one can chart geographic strengths of the “Continuing Church,” several perplexing issues arise. Indeed, one question that historians have never answered (and probably never will) is why several churches in Montgomery left, but only one in Birmingham; southwest Alabama saw many churches leave to the new denomination, but not one departed from south Alabama. Upstate South Carolina had approximately twenty congregations align with the PCA, but no congregation did so in coastal South Carolina. In sum, the vast majority of the new denomination’s strength was located in the “Deep South”, but influential churches from other regions played important roles in the formation of the PCA. It is inaccurate for historians to strictly label the departures from

⁸⁹ *Minutes of the National Presbyterian Church* (1973), p. 235.

the PCUS as a racial problem because of the participation of churches in south Florida, Maryland, Texas, and Kentucky. Furthermore, even in staunchly conservative states, the new denomination failed to attract any congregations from several presbyteries. Perhaps this geographic variety is evidence that the primary debates were, at the core, theological instead of social.

Although 40,000 conservative members departed from the PCUS, it would be a grave mistake to assume that the entire conservative faction left the denomination. Furthermore, the decision to stay or leave was often predicated upon one's position, length of service, and influence in the denomination. Many powerful conservatives remained and struggled to change the PCUS's direction. Among these were; Andrew Jumper, L. Nelson Bell (although he soon died), C. Darby Fulton, Robert T. L. Liston, and others.⁹⁰ Many who had spent years with the PCUS could not bear to give up on their denomination. After all, they reasoned, reunion had not yet occurred and the official confessions had not been substantially changed. What this split reflects is the variety of differences between conservatives. The point at which a person left was determined by his/her standards and beliefs.

The rapid departure of 40,000 members caught some denominational officials by surprise. At the 1973 PCUS General Assembly, an "Ad Interim Committee on Unhappiness and Division," commissioned by 1972 PCUS moderator L. Nelson Bell, presented its findings.⁹¹ In addition to finding the obvious current problems, the

⁹⁰ Bell was perhaps the most interesting case. He distanced himself from conservatives after many chose to split in late 1972. Furthermore, Bell was the moderator of the 1972 General Assembly and served in that post until the June 1973 General Assembly. He died two months later. In short, Bell had too much invested in the denomination to depart, and death cut short any actions he may have later taken. The absence of Bell was a blow to conservatives who probably lost several churches over his failure to defect.

⁹¹ The committee stated that their personal views reflected a broad range of theological beliefs. Certainly, the conservative faction was well represented by Andrew Jumper.

committee wanted to investigate whether any progress had been made since a similar 1969 committee had reported. The results, not surprisingly, were sobering. The committee:

wishe[d] to impress most strongly upon the Assembly the very serious nature of present wide spread dissatisfaction across the denomination. This gravity is underscored in a study by the Presbyterian National Sample which indicates that an additional group would reach proportions up to 18% of the clergy, 25% of the membership, and 33% of the missionaries who would be willing to move to a new denomination “if certain conditions are met”. This means that over 200,000 additional members could conceivably withdraw under certain circumstances.⁹²

Obviously, this never materialized but many in the denomination had grievances and the committee warned that the General Assembly was not doing enough to allay those fears. The preeminent problem, the committee reported, was the continuing controversy over potential union with the UPCUSA.⁹³ Although only approximately 40,000 members left, clearly many more were upset by actions of the General Assembly.

An interesting letter from a PCUS minister describes some of the denomination’s fears at the time. The pastor, who was transferring to become the minister at First Presbyterian Church of Sylvania, Georgia, protested “the request of the Committee on National Ministries that I sign a statement that I will not ‘plan to seek to lead the congregation out of the Augusta-Macon Presbytery or the Presbyterian Church in the United States...’” The pastor found such “a demand to be personally repulsive, discriminatory, and unjustifiable.”⁹⁴ Obviously, the PCUS was concerned that certain pastors would influence their congregations to leave.

⁹² “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Unhappiness and Division to the One-Hundred-Fourteenth General Assembly, *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1973), pp. 302-303. Note the increasing percentage from clergy to missionaries.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁹⁴ Letter from the Rev. Oliver N. Hamby to the Committee on National Ministries, 25 May 1973, Concerned Presbyterians file, PCA Archive.

In response to the 1973 PCA General Assembly, the 1974 PCUS General Assembly heard a report in response to the late unpleasantness of division. The report recommended that the PCUS “set aside all desire to engage in retaliatory action, and act in love” despite “the divisive and damaging actions of the leaders of those who have departed from the membership of the PCUS to form the National Presbyterian Church [PCA]...”⁹⁵ The particular language is quite telling; “damaging actions of the leaders of those who have departed” indicates that denominational officials probably believed that most congregants would stay in the PCUS if not for these leaders’ divisive steps. Furthermore the following statement “recommend[ed] that the Presbyterian Church, U.S. welcome back into our fellowship Presbyterian churches and people who wish to return after being carried out by the separating movement.”⁹⁶ To this author’s knowledge, no church that left has ever returned to the PCUS. Still, little hope was given to the separatists. In articles, several commentators noted the disastrous split that befell the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1937 and anticipated a similar dispute would arise among the new denomination.⁹⁷ *The Presbyterian Outlook* even quoted Carl McIntire who expressed grievances with PCUS dissenters.⁹⁸ After all, they reasoned, conservatives were only united when they were in opposition to a common enemy.

The 1974 General Assembly also voted to send a pastoral letter to all PCUS ministers and sessions. The letter warned congregations that organizations such as: “the National Presbyterian Church [PCA], *The Presbyterian Journal*, Concerned Presbyterians, and the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship should be recognized by

⁹⁵ *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1974), p. 198.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁹⁷ C. Grier Davis, “There is Room for Differences,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, 17 September 1973, p. 5.

⁹⁸ “Little Hope Seen for Dissidents,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, 24 September 1973, p. 4.

members of the Presbyterian Church, US as organizations having interests contrary to the health and growth of this denomination.” The letter further asserted that “Rumors, comments and news stories circulated by persons identified with those groups should be acknowledged and understood as coming from sources whose own security and self-interest depend, in some measure, upon encouraging unhappiness and unfaithfulness among our members and our congregations.” The letter closed by noting that the PCUS still regarded the separatists as Christians, yet “we [do not] close our eyes to the unavoidable fact that unhappiness in our Church and its magnification and exploitation are not unrelated to the interests and activities of those who have gone out among us.”⁹⁹ This letter shows the deep personal feelings that ran in the denomination. Both conservatives and liberals blamed the other side for inciting the unpleasantness which caused denominational upheaval.

The following year, the PCUS Stated Clerk, James Andrews, noted that the consequent membership drop had not affected financial giving. He noted, “One is led to observe that the separated brethren (and sisters) had little devotion to the program of the denomination for some years before taking the final step of divorce or desertion.” “The secessionist movement” had apparently not significantly hit the pockets of the denomination, at least not at this point.¹⁰⁰ This supports conservatives who claimed their congregations had ceased giving to PCUS general coffers years before the actual separation.

The rest of the 1970’s witnessed a steady decline in membership in the PCUS (like other mainline denominations), and a strong growth in the PCA culminated by its

⁹⁹ *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1974), p. 199.

¹⁰⁰ “Report of the Stated Clerk to the General Assembly,” *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1975), pp. 176-177.

1982 reunion in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES).¹⁰¹ With the union, many different elements were present in the PCA: the old Southern Presbyterians, fundamentalist oriented Bible Presbyterians, and Reformed Presbyterians. The latter group staunchly backed abolition in the Civil War, much to the annoyance of those who formed the PCUS. In the negotiations, the RPCES gave the PCA control over its seminary and college, two key resources that the PCA did not have. The PCA gained 164 churches and over 20,000 members, particularly in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, two areas that the predominantly Southern based church had not previously reached. In essence, this union represented a uniting of theological and sectional groups.¹⁰² After this date, some Southerners wondered if they had lost control of the PCA. Today, the denomination bears little resemblance to the strong Southern focus of its founders.

The conservative's departure essentially gave PCUS pro-union forces victory. The next decade saw the formation of numerous union presbyteries and intense negotiations over union. Al Freundt, an RTS professor who elected to stay with the PCUS, remarked that "both sides in the case of division are worse off than they were before...I know a lot of my liberal friends didn't think that, and they were glad to see the PCA go, but the PCA, and I think the PCUS, both lost something, a balancing element...And I think they've become more and more unlike each other than they were before."¹⁰³ The division made the PCUS slant even more progressive thereby making union an easier task.

Finally, in 1983, the PCUS finally united with the UPCUSA in Atlanta, Georgia, to form

¹⁰¹ The only substantial book on the RPCES is: George P. Hutchinson, *The History Behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing Co., 1974). This scarce work is also valuable for its discussion on the origins of various branches of Presbyterianism.

¹⁰² Paul Settle, *To God All Praise and Glory*, (Atlanta, GA: PCA Administrative Committee), p. 68.

¹⁰³ Albert H. Freundt as quoted in William McAtee, *Dreams Where Have You Gone?*, p. 88.

the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America PC(USA) with approximately 3.2 million members.¹⁰⁴ For many reunion advocates such as Ernest Trice Thompson, this was the culmination of their mission; the conservatives in the PCUS had been routed and a new modern denomination that was void of sectionalism had at long last been created.

As PCUS and UPCUSA commissioners marched down the streets of Atlanta to form their new denomination, optimism and anticipation were in the air. Then, suddenly, a dark reminder appeared on the street. Carl McIntire, with a small group of his followers, stood and protested the union.¹⁰⁵ The elderly McIntire had lost most of his power and followers, but his influence and legacy lingered on in the Presbyterian world. Perhaps, more than anything else, it indicated the problems that had haunted their predecessor denominations were not going to magically vanish in the new united denomination. Both Northern and Southern Presbyterians had, for several years, been declining in membership (much more so with the UPCUSA). Now united, the new denomination would have to fix this problem. The PCA and the new PC(USA) shared optimism during this period, but both would have significant challenges to face by the beginning of the twenty-first century.

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, there was an “escape clause” in the final plan (1983) although it was difficult and time consuming to meet. Several churches, however, decided to leave under this option and joined the PCA or the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC).

¹⁰⁵ See: Joel Alvis, *Religion and Race* and William McAtee, *Dreams Where Have You Gone?* for more information regarding the 1983 reunion; a scholarly study addressing the reunion is still desperately needed.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that protracted theological and social controversies profoundly affected Southern Presbyterianism. Perhaps the most important question to be asked is: what did the 1973 conservative split really mean in regards to the larger American religious landscape? The division was significant because it was the first time since the 1920's era fundamentalist controversy that a serious split had occurred in a major Protestant denomination. In the South, it was the first substantial split since the sectional crisis caused the formation of the Southern denominations. Furthermore, after the 1973 division, two major Protestant bodies, the Southern Baptist Convention and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, found themselves embroiled in controversy with resulting divisions. Therefore, it is worth asking why Southern Presbyterians split at this time when there was no recent precedent.

The few historians that have examined the 1973 controversy frequently point to the social upheaval (Civil Rights, Vietnam War, role of women) of the 1960's as being the significant factor in dividing the denomination.¹ A news article in 1973 cryptically remarked, "The times that have tried men's souls in Dixie in recent years have not left the churches unscathed."² As this study has documented, such social factors are indeed vital to understanding the tensions in the PCUS; yet these reasons alone do not explain many conservatives' decision to leave in 1973. For example, had the central division been over race, the denomination surely would have divided during the 1960's. Theological arguments were perhaps an even more important source of division. Former Columbia

¹ Rick L. Nutt, *Towards Peacemaking*; Joel Alvis, *Religion and Race*.

² Margaret Shannon, "A Church Divided" *Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine*, 28 October 1973, p. 6.

Theological Seminary president, J. McDowell Richards, and 1973 PCUS moderator, Charles E.S. Kraemer, both asserted that the denominational division was primarily about how the Bible should be interpreted.³ Interpreting against a fixed historical standard and tradition, or viewing the Bible in light of changing societal opinions was the central controversy. Again, however, if one argues that theology was the central source of division, why did these conservatives not break in 1964 when women were ordained or in 1970, when the PCUS General Assembly approved abortion for “socio-economic reasons?”

The most logical conclusion is that dual factors precipitated the 1973 division. First, the seemingly inevitable reunion with the UPCUSA dominated conservative thought. Conservatives also believed that a “de facto” union was already occurring through the instruments of union presbyteries (after 1969). The prospects of union, the failed “escape clause,” and synod reorganization were the primary factors in causing a division specifically in 1973. Secondly, the widespread theological and social upheaval served to rapidly increase tensions within the PCUS. At the end of the 1960’s, conservatives were rapidly losing ground in the denomination and feared that they would be relegated to the sideline. After their failures in 1969 and 1971, most recognized that they would never take back the denomination and resigned themselves to separating from the PCUS. These problems were not simply reactions but rather long running issues within the denomination. The theological and social issues explain why there was a division; the union controversy determined that the division occurred in 1973.

³ J. McDowell Richards quoted in: Margaret Shannon, “A Church Divided,” p. 29; Kraemer quoted in: “Moderator Terms Charges “False,” ” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, 3 September 1973, p. 1.

It is vital to recognize that the PCUS was not the only denomination undergoing massive changes during this period. In 1976, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod underwent a theologically oriented controversy after which a “liberal” faction departed, formed a separate denomination, and eventually united with the present Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.⁴ Such an instance shows that other non-Southern denominations endured conflict. In 1979, fundamentalists won the Southern Baptist Convention’s (SBC) presidency igniting a continuing debate in that denomination.⁵ After losing subsequent elections, many moderates pulled out of the SBC or refused to support denominational programs. Although one might compare Southern Baptist and PCUS conservatives, there were some very real differences. In comparison to the PCUS, SBC conservatives were opposing moderates. The PCUS certainly had more theologically and socially minded liberals than the SBC. Second, no SBC church risked losing its property as each congregation owned its building. Third, the organizational structure of each denomination differed. In the SBC, for instance, conservatives could bring in thousands of pastors to the national meeting to give them the necessary majority. In the PCUS, many congregations disagreed with denominational decisions, but had little recourse since only a few people from each presbytery attended as commissioners. A centralized denomination, like the PCUS, did not always reflect local opinions to the extent that the SBC did.

⁴ Bryan Hillis provides the best documentation of this controversy in: *Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed?*.

⁵ See: Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Bill J. Leonard, *God’s Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns Publishing Co., 1990).

Several years after the PCA departed, an intense controversy erupted within the UPCUSA. In 1975, a denominational court decision denied ordination to a man who personally opposed women's ordination; four years later, the General Assembly mandated that all UPCUSA churches must have women elders.⁶ Interestingly, it was a decision that required action on the part of local churches that initiated this division. The controversial Confession of 1967 or the UPCUSA's acceptance of abortion did not trigger a walkout, but a requirement that affected every church's leaders caused dissension. These actions caused another split with several churches uniting with either the PCA or joining the newly formed Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) in 1981, a denomination that allows women's ordination (congregational option) but does not mandate it and in actuality has very few women pastors. Such a policy appears to trend toward Congregational government. Those conservatives who joined the EPC sought moderation between the UPCUSA's mandate that there must be women elders in every church and the PCA's avowed disapproval of women leaders. Leery of the powerful UPCUSA central denominational authority, conservatives implemented many checks to such a system when they formed their own denominations. This is seen in that all PCA and EPC churches own their property. These denominations seek a balance between centralized and local ecclesiastical government.

The PCA now has a convoluted identity. In 1973, the denomination was undeniably Southern despite its notable efforts to become a national organization. With its 1982 union with the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, the PCA became a national based entity. As former PCA pastor Bob Vincent noted, some

⁶ D. G Hart and John R. Muether, "Turning Points in American Presbyterian History Part 13: Presbyterian Reunion in 1983," *New Horizons*: http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=290 Accessed 29 January 2008.

Southerners wondered if they had lost control of the PCA with the 1982 union.⁷ The denomination has also grown intellectually. A founding minister remembered that some of the PCA founders were not always inclined towards reformed theology (Calvinism).⁸ The past decades, however, have seen an intense reformed theology grow in the PCA versus the broad evangelicalism that brought the denomination about. Perhaps this can be attributed to moving beyond debates about the central questions of Christianity. For example, before the First General Assembly, the Gulf Coast Presbytery actually transferred the ordination of a United Methodist deacon to the new Presbyterian denomination.⁹ The action was subsequently rescinded by the following assembly. The presbytery cared more for his evangelical stance than his position on fine points of reformed theology or denominational polity. Although the PCA's growth in recent years has slowed (but not dropped), membership still exceeds 350,000. This statistic becomes pertinent when one notices that the PCA has not had a significant division in its thirty-five year history.

In 1973, PCUS loyalists predicted a gloomy future for the new denomination. Often referring to the OPC and BPC split in 1937, they insisted that previously united conservatives would disintegrate once given their own denomination. Surprisingly, this has not happened in the PCA even though several controversies had the potential to cause a division. From the beginning, the denomination was divided by charismatics, those who claim that the biblical gift of speaking in tongues is still applicable. A carefully worded

⁷ Bob Vincent's website: <http://www.rbvincent.com/BibleStudies/presbyterians.htm>. Accessed 28 July 2008. Vincent, a former PCA and current EPC pastor, maintains an informative website regarding his own history in the Southern Presbyterian church.

⁸ Personal Interview with the Reverend John Sartelle, Tates Creek Presbyterian Church, Lexington, Kentucky, 12 May 2008.

⁹ Frank Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 184.

statement from the Second General Assembly avoided early problems.¹⁰ A second, more serious problem, concerned theonomy, or as it is more commonly known, Christian Reconstructionism. As taught by its chief propagator, OPC minister Rousas John Rushdoony, theonomy sought to implement Old Testament law into modern society. A few PCA members followed such a path. Led by Joe Morecraft, a founding minister of the PCA, they withdrew to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States, a group that has subsequently splintered. Greg Bahnsen, a professor at RTS and proponent of theonomy, was dismissed by the seminary for his divisive spirit. In a recent *Church History* article, Molly Worthen examined the broad implications of the Christian Reconstruction movement.¹¹ Worthen argued that some have overblown the movement's power and ability to take over civil government. She also argued that Bahnsen's reputation as a scholar was "ill deserved."¹² While Christian Reconstructionism has affected the PCA, it has primarily been a fringe movement.

Yet another small movement is a group of "neo-confederates." Primarily based at the Reverend Steve Wilkens church in Louisiana, these people glorify the old South and blend a Calvinistic theology with Southern ideals such as agrarianism.¹³ Robert Lewis Dabney and Stonewall Jackson are their heroes, to name a few. Although Wilkens' church recently withdrew from the PCA, thus taking much of the movement with it, the issue still disturbs some presbyteries.¹⁴ Some radical conservatives have also promoted a new form of patriarchy that stresses women's subordination to men, homeschooling, and

¹⁰ Charismatics are allowed in the PCA, but they have more frequently found their home in the EPC.

¹¹ Molly Worthen, "The Chalcedon Problem: Rousas John Rushdoony and the Origins of Christian Reconstructionism," *Church History* (77:2, June 2008), pp. 399-437.

¹² *Ibid.*, 430.

¹³ Steve Wilkens is the pastor of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church in Monroe, Louisiana.

¹⁴ Bob Vincent, for example, left the Louisiana Presbytery because of the presbytery's tolerance of Wilkens' positions, many of which might be deemed racist.

“natural” living.¹⁵ Such philosophies are not widespread in the PCA, but remain significant distractions.

In 1983, the UPCUSA and PCUS united in Atlanta, Georgia to form the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PC(USA)). For the first time since 1861, mainline Presbyterians were united across regional boundaries. Most members were quite pleased to be united and have the reunion issue settled. Theological debates, however, soon began to undo some of the unity that was shown in 1983. At first, the theological and polity standards reflected a blend of Northern and Southern influences. For example: women weren’t immediately required to be on church sessions in former Southern churches; the denomination’s headquarters also did not have as much power as the UPCUSA had; and for several years, congregations would have the ability to withdraw from the united denomination.¹⁶ In subsequent decades, church polity seemed to reflect more of a Northern (powerful denominational headquarters) than Southern influence.¹⁷ Reunion itself posed lingering problems as Northern and Southern Presbyterians had to adjust to being in the same church; pre-conceived notions were often challenged and changed.

If the PCA has to contend with some radical conservatives, the PC(USA) has seen controversy sparked by a group of liberal activists. Several major problems loom. First, like other “mainline” denominations, membership continued to decline. After having approximately 4.2 million members during the height of its predecessors (PCUS and UPCUSA), the new united denomination was formed with 3.2 million members in 1983.

¹⁵ It is extremely important to note that most homeschoolers do not subscribe to this new “patriarchy.” One is correct, however, in asserting that all patriarchy proponents are homeschoolers.

¹⁶ McAtee, pp. 171, 280-281. Interestingly, some women in the UPCUSA protested reunion because they believed it would restrict their standing.

¹⁷ For instance, every PC(USA) church is now required to have women elders.

As of 2008, membership had dropped to approximately 2.2 million members.¹⁸

Currently, the preeminent debate in the PC(USA) is homosexuality. Official standards prohibit ordaining those who are openly homosexual; some presbyteries, however, have sidestepped these standards for several years. In several votes, the presbyteries have denied ordination to homosexuals, but those who support the cause have not stopped their work. Conservatives in such organizations as the Presbyterian Coalition and the Presbyterian Layman continue to advocate for their side with limited success.

The debate has caused deep divisions within the PC(USA). In 2006, several churches voted to leave the denomination. Currently, churches continue to trickle out of the PC(USA) with most joining the EPC. According to the Presbyterian Layman's website, fifty churches have departed from the PC(USA) since 2006.¹⁹ The PC(USA) has, on occasion, complained that the EPC is trying to "steal" their churches. Not surprisingly, the EPC vigorously denied the claim. At the 2008 General Assembly, Clifton Kirkpatrick, then Stated Clerk of the denomination, reported that the PC(USA) had lost 57,572 members in 2007.²⁰ With the 2008 PC(USA) General Assembly's rephrasing the Heidleburg Confession so that homosexuality is no longer condemned, a new social creed, and approving money to fight congregational litigation in courts, the prospects for further division are inevitable. Some conservatives remain, arguing that they must reform the denomination. Most of their theological persuasion, however, have

¹⁸ PC(USA) Office of the General Assembly 2007 Statistics: <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/pdf/statistics.pdf>. Accessed 20 January 2009. See: Dean Kelly, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing – A Study of Sociology in Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). Michael Charles Woodham, *Attitudes of Church Members Towards a Commitment to Biblical Absolutes and the Exercise of Social Tolerance as Related to Changes in Church Membership* (Ph.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1996) gives additional information on declining mainline membership.

¹⁹ The Layman Online, http://www.layman.org/Resources/Churches_Leaving_the_PCUSA.aspx "Chart of Churches leaving the PC(USA)," Accessed 20 January 2009.

²⁰ "Stated Clerk Releases 2007 PC(USA) Statistics," <http://www.pcusa.org/ga218/news/ga08003.htm> Accessed 9 July 2008.

left, convinced that the denomination cannot be changed. Whatever opinion one may have of the situation, it is inarguable that the PC(USA), along with many mainline denominations, is in decline and that the denomination shows no sign of growing in the near future.

As the twenty-first century starts, Presbyterianism is alive and well in the United States. Starting in the 1970's, a "decentralization" process reversed some of the mid twentieth century unions. Presbyterians appear to thrive in smaller branches like the PCA and EPC that are evangelically oriented and, in some cases, less bound by tradition. The optimism of the post World War Two era is gone, and many are disgusted with denominational bureaucracy and ecclesiastical infighting. Yet, even with the PC(USA)'s declining membership, the denomination will still wield a significant influence in American Protestantism for decades to come. The PCA, OPC, and EPC will continue to present American Presbyterianism from a more conservative slant. Presbyterians have always endured conflict and schism; this tradition will continue, and so will the history of American Presbyterianism.

GLOSSARY

- ARP** Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, founded in 1782. Majority merged in 1858 to form the UPNA. The Synod of the Carolinas, however, opted not to unite and continues as the modern ARP.
- BPC** Bible Presbyterian Church, formed in 1937 from a division in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Known for its fundamentalist orientation, strong prohibition stance, and prominent leader, Carl McIntire.
- Continuing Church** A term utilized since the 1930's by PCUS conservatives who opposed reunion and sought to continue the tradition of the Southern Presbyterian Church. Conservative churches used this name until the formation of the PCA in 1973.
- CPC** Cumberland Presbyterian Church, formed in 1812 over theological disagreements regarding Calvinism. Most of the denomination merged with the PCUSA in 1906; a minority refused and continue on as the CPC.
- EPC** Evangelical Presbyterian Church (1961-1965), previously known as the Bible Presbyterian Church, Columbus Synod; formed from a division in the BPC over governmental structure, particularly in regards to Carl McIntire. This group sought external relations with several other denominations. Francis Schaeffer was part of this denomination.
- EPC** Evangelical Presbyterian Church, formed in 1981 by conservative churches departing from the UPCUSA because of a denominational ruling requiring women elders in all churches and perceived liberal theology. No relation to the other Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Known as evangelical yet moderate in its theological stances; women ministers are permitted by congregational option.
- OPC** Orthodox Presbyterian Church, formed in 1936 by departing churches from the PCUSA. Led by J. Gresham Machen and Westminster Seminary; known for being one of the most doctrinally stringent denominations in the American Presbyterian tradition.

PCA	Presbyterian Church in America, a conservative denomination formed in 1973 in response to liberal trends in the PCUS. Originally called the National Presbyterian Church for less than a year. Known for its reformed theology and evangelicalism along with conservative social stances.
PCUS	Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern) (1861-1983); formed in 1861 at Augusta, Georgia, when Southern Presbyterians split from their Northern counterparts over the Gardiner Springs Resolution requiring loyalty to the Federal (Union) government.
PCUSA	Original American Presbyterian body founded in 1706 at Philadelphia. Also known as the Northern Presbyterian Church (1861-1958) after Southern churches seceded during Civil War.
PC(USA)	Currently the largest body of Presbyterians. Formed in 1983 from a merger of the Southern (PCUS) and Northern (UPCUSA) Presbyterians.
RPCES	Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, 1965-1982; merged with the PCA in 1982; formed from a merger of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod and Evangelical Presbyterian Church (from Bible Presbyterian Church).
RPCUS	Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States; formed in 1982 with Joe Morecraft, a former PCA pastor, as the principal leader. Known for being heavily influenced by Christian Reconstructionism. In 1990, the denomination split into four groups of which three still continue.
UPNA	United Presbyterian Church in North America, from a union of the Associate Reformed Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Scottish background) in 1858. Originally known for advocating exclusive psalmody; united with the PCUSA in 1958.
UPCUSA	United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, formed by a union of the Presbyterian Church USA (Northern) and the UPNA in 1958.

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VITA

David Petersen

Date and Place of Birth:

24 December 1985. Brunswick, Maine.

Educational Institutions Attended and Degrees Awarded:

College of the Ozarks (2004-2006), Bachelor of Arts in History.

Professional Positions Held:

Library Assistant, Miami Children's Hospital (2008-present).
University of Kentucky History Graduate Student Association Library Liaison
(2007-2008).

Scholastic and Professional Honors:

Nilsen Award for History, College of the Ozarks, 2006.
DAR Award in Colonial American History, College of the Ozarks, 2006.
Associates Work Award, College of the Ozarks, 2006.
Howell European History Award, College of the Ozarks, 2005.