The Springfield and Cumberland Presbyteries: Conflict and Secession in the Old Southwest

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The Springfield and Cumberland Presbyteries: Conflict and Secession in the Old Southwest

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Although the Old Side-New Side schism in American Presbyterianism ended in 1758 with the merging of the Synods of New York and Philadelphia, the tension between the two groups never ceased to exist. The issues that would continue to plague the Presbyterian Church in the USA had been identified in that fight, including required ministerial subscription to the Westminster Confession, the location of ecclesiastical authority (synod or presbytery), educational qualifications of ministers, and the use of revivals in evangelism. Even though the New Side gained the upper hand in the General Assembly, when it was formed in 1788, the Old Side ministers were still a factor, especially on the frontier of Kentucky and Tennessee, where they were in the majority until the first decades of the nineteenth century.¹

The growth of American Presbyterianism in the decades following the Revolutionary War is indicated by the organization of new presbyteries and synods. In the south the Synod of Virginia was constituted in 1788, composed of the Presbyteries of Redstone, Hanover, Lexington, and Transylvania. The Presbytery of Transylvania, formed in 1786, included “the district of Kentucky and the settlements on the Cumberland River.” In 1799 the Presbytery of Transylvania was divided into three presbyteries—West Lexington, Washington, and Transylvania—and on October 14, 1802, these three presbyteries were formed into the Synod of Kentucky. At the first meeting of the new synod the Presbytery of Transylvania was split, and the lower part was designated the Presbytery of Cumberland, which included the settlements on the Cumberland River, reaching up to, and including, the Green River section in Kentucky.²

²John Vant Stephens, The Genesis of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (Cincinnati: The Lane Seminary Building, 1941), p. 5.
The revivalist Presbyterian preacher James McGready moved to Kentucky from North Carolina in 1796 to pastor three small churches in Logan County—Red River, Muddy River, and Gasper River. McGready found the three small churches quite dead. Most of the Presbyterian ministers on the frontier were of the Old Side anti-revival heritage and were at least partially blamed for the dismal state of religion found there. The New Side ministers regarded the Old Side as very learned men, but they were cold, formal, and lifeless in their services. They talked a great deal about the “elect of God,” but they did not say much about “the new birth”—the religion of the heart. Such preaching, of course, did but little good.

McGready worked on his little congregations from 1797 to 1799, and in the summer of 1800 the sporadic revivals he had experienced in those earlier years climaxed in all three churches. Other ministers heard of this “great work of God” and came to see. Among them was Barton W. Stone, minister for the Cane Ridge and Concord Presbyterian Churches near Paris, Kentucky, about two hundred miles north of McGready. Stone had known McGready from North Carolina days and was much impressed with what he saw in Logan County. He returned to his churches and planned a revival meeting at Cane Ridge for the following August. The Cane Ridge Camp Meeting of August 1801 is usually regarded as the largest and most incredible of those frontier revival meetings.

The Springfield Presbytery

Barton W. Stone began his academic career at David Caldwell’s academy in Guilford, North Carolina, in 1790, with the desire to become a lawyer. A revival had begun at the school that year under the preaching of James McGready, and for the first time in his life Stone directed his attention toward religion. It was not until the following year, however, that he had a conversion experience under the preaching of William Hodge, under whom he later studied theology. Convinced that he should take the gospel to the frontier, he moved first into Tennessee, and then to Bourbon County, Kentucky, where in 1796 he took charge of the Cane Ridge and Concord congregations. While he was ministering to these churches, the time came for

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his ordination. He had strong misgivings, however, about parts of the Westminster Confession, particularly the doctrine of the trinity. He discussed his problem with two members of the Transylvania Presbytery, James Blythe and Robert Marshall, who advised him that this was not a barrier to his ordination. When asked in the ordination ceremony "Do you receive and adopt the Confession of Faith, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Bible?" he answered, "I do, as far as I see it consistent with the word of God." No objection was made, and he was ordained.5 Stone's education, revivalistic background, and scruples concerning the Westminster Confession place him squarely in the position of the New Side preachers of the eighteenth century.

After Stone's Cane Ridge revival of 1801, things did not go well between the revivalist preachers and the predominately Old Side Synod of Kentucky, formed in 1802. Stone and the other leaders of the revival party were distributed between the Presbytery of Washington in Ohio and the Presbytery of West Lexington in Kentucky.6 When the Synod of Kentucky met in 1803, several petitions came before it concerning the errors of two of the Ohio revivalists Richard McNemar and John Thompson. After examining the records of the Washington Presbytery, the synod decided to put McNemar and Thompson on trial. In response, Stone, Thompson, McNemar, and two other ministers drew up a formal protest and withdrew from the jurisdiction—though not from the communion, they said—of the Synod of Kentucky. They formed themselves into an independent presbytery, which they named the Presbytery of Springfield (Ohio), and soon circulated a pastoral letter in the form of an apology to their congregations and others to explain their actions.7 They insisted that they did not desire or consider themselves to be separated

5Barton Warren Stone and John Rogers, The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Cincinnati: J. A. & U. P. James, 1847; (reprint ed., Joplin, MO: College Press, 1986), pp. 29-30. The Adopting Act of 1729, favored by the New Side clergy, required ministers to "declare their agreement in, and approbation of, the Confession of Faith." However, a qualification allowed a minister who had any scruple with respect to any article or articles of the Confession to state the reservation at the time of his declaration, and if the presbytery or synod judged it to be concerning articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government, he would be admitted to the ministry. See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 269.


from the Presbyterian Church, ministers, or people. Further, they would continue to admit all to communion and would expect the same in return.

We have only withdrawn from the jurisdiction of those bodies with which we stood connected, because we plainly perceived that, while that connection subsisted, we could not enjoy the liberty of reading, studying and explaining the word of God for ourselves, without constant altercation and strife of words to no point.8

They criticized the strict subscription policy on two counts: One, the policy bound them to explanations of the word of God which precluded all further advances after truth, and two, some expressions in the Confession tended to obscure the doctrines of grace which were necessary for revival of true religion. “We bid you adieu,” they wrote to the synod, “until through the providence of God it seem good to your Revd. Body to adopt a more liberal plan respecting human creeds and confessions...”9

Before a year had passed, the number of churches formally associated with the new Springfield Presbytery had grown to fifteen, seven in southern Ohio and eight in northern Kentucky, as well as many of like sentiment in Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, and western Pennsylvania.10 Yet in a short time the Springfield Presbytery itself was dissolved, as Stone and the others became convinced that any human form of government imposed on the church should be abandoned. In the “Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery” Stone and the others willed that that body die and sink into union with all Christians.11 They adopted the generic names Christian and Christian Church in an effort to avoid any divisive paraphernalia whatsoever.

Of the five original leaders of the Springfield Presbytery, only Stone remained after the first few years. Two returned to the Presbyterian Church, unhappy with the unstructured state of the movement; and two were converted to Shakerism, seeing in that sect a more perfect effort to restore the church of the New Testament. Stone, therefore, is usually given chief credit for the doctrinal shape of the movement.

Two emphases can be distinguished in Stone’s theology. First, Stone was greatly affected by the idea of gospel liberty. A theological revolution, like the political revolution that had just been successfully waged, was to

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8 Rogers, Barton W. Stone, pp. 174-175.
9 Thompson, Presbyterianism in the South, p. 158.
10 Ibid., p. 159.
bring a new order of the ages for religion—an order completely discontinuous with all previous history. Liberty meant the privilege of reading and interpreting the scriptures for oneself without the mediation of any creed or clergyman not of one’s own choosing. Stone’s break with the Presbyterians he later described as “the declaration of our independence.”12 Second, and inseparably connected with the first emphasis, was Stone’s complete dedication to the goal of Christian unity. It was by throwing off the shackles of domination by ecclesiastical hierarchies, reading and interpreting the scriptures for oneself, and acting independently on personal conviction of truth that “all would flow together in one body.”13 For Stone the norm of unity was not doctrinal conformity, but possession of the spirit of Jesus. In an 1835 article he wrote:

The scriptures will never keep together in union and fellowship members not in the spirit of the scriptures, which spirit is love, peace, unity, forbearance, and cheerful obedience. This is the spirit of the great Head of the body. I blush for my fellows, who hold up the Bible as the bond of union yet make their opinions of it tests of fellowship; who plead for union of all Christians yet refuse fellowship with such as dissent from their notions. Vain men! Their zeal is not according to knowledge, nor is their spirit that of Christ. Such antisectarian-sectarians are doing more mischief to the cause and advancement of truth, the unity of all Christians, and the salvation of the world than all the skeptics in the world. In fact, they create skeptics.14

Stone was convinced that the attempt to force acceptance of opinions, written or unwritten, was the basic cause of disunion. If individual Christians could be persuaded give up these opinions “as bonds of fellowship,” disunion would cease. All who adhered to Christian truths unmistakably and clearly revealed in scripture should be recognized as Christians without any other test of fellowship.15

Stone was an unassuming, humble man—a man of peace. He did not relish doctrinal controversy and was willing to yield on theological points which he thought not clearly revealed in scripture. He and many of the

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churches in his Christian movement joined forces after 1832 with the religious reformation begun by Thomas and Alexander Campbell, with the result that Stone was largely eclipsed by the more forceful and charismatic Alexander Campbell.

The Cumberland Presbytery

In the fall of 1802, the Transylvania Presbytery was divided into the Presbyteries of Transylvania and Cumberland. In the Cumberland Presbytery there were ten ordained ministers, evenly divided between those of pro- and anti-revival sentiments. The pro-revival ministers were James McGready, William Hodge, William McGee, John Rankin, and Samuel McAdow. The others were Thomas B. Craighead, James Balch, John Bowman, Samuel Donnell, and Terah Templin.16

The revival on the frontier had produced a number of churches without ministers; at least two thirds of the Presbyterian churches in the Transylvania Presbytery in 1801 had no regular preaching services. Falling back on a sixteenth century Scottish practice recommended by the respected leader David Rice, the Presbytery licensed several men as readers and exhorters. In Scotland in the early days of the Scottish Reformation, the use of these unordained men had served to provide instruction in the scriptures where there were no ministers available. This was a means also of training young men who aspired to the ministry until the Scottish universities could develop more adequate theological training programs. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland abolished the offices of reader and exhorter in 1581, but the precedent and a clause in the Form of Government which allowed for licensure of candidates without college or university degrees "in extraordinary cases" was the basis for the use of these offices by the Transylvania and Cumberland Presbyteries in the late 1700s and early 1800s.17

Even before the Cumberland Presbytery was formed, the parent Transylvania Presbytery had in 1801 licensed four readers and exhorters and had received all of them as candidates for the ministry by October 1802. A group of objectors signed a remonstrance against the action, particularly opposed to the candidates' lack of classical learning. In 1803, with the transfer of James Haw from the Transylvania Presbytery, the pro-revival party gained the upper hand in the Cumberland Presbytery. Within a short time the Cumberland Presbytery was responsible for no less than seventeen

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17Barrus, Baughn, and Campbell, Cumberland Presbyterians, pp. 50-51.
licensed exhorters, who are described as “young men burning with zeal and highly acceptable to the new societies.”

The anti-revival minority was not silent, however, and in 1804 drew up a protest and complaint against the actions of Cumberland Presbytery and presented it to the meeting of the predominately anti-revival Synod of Kentucky. Thomas Craighead sent a letter that tended to confuse the Cumberland problems with those of Stone and the Springfield Presbytery, whose ministers had been deposed by the Synod the year before when Stone and the others had withdrawn from the Synod’s jurisdiction. The Synod cited both parties in the Cumberland Presbytery to appear before it at the next annual meeting and, meanwhile, appointed a committee to visit the Presbytery and report back at the next meeting of Synod. In October 1805 the examining committee reported that the records of the Cumberland Presbytery were “extremely defective,” exhibiting numerous irregularities. Reception of the exhorters had in many cases been “disorderly.” The Synod then appointed a commission of ten ministers and six elders with full synodical powers to adjudicate the proceedings of Cumberland Presbytery. While synodical commissions were not unusual, vesting this commission with full synodical powers was without precedent and proved to be a point of contention that would solidify the resolve of the pro-revival Cumberland Presbyterian ministers.

The synodical commission had two basic accusations against the actions of the Cumberland Presbytery. First, those who had been licensed as exhorters, which was understood to be the first step toward eventual ordination, lacked the required educational background. And second, of those licensed or ordained the Presbytery had required only a “partial adoption of the Confession of Faith ... so far only as they ... think it corresponds with the scripture.”

James McGready defended the Presbytery’s actions by insisting that the young men licensed possessed extraordinary talents and were needed in extraordinary circumstances, therefore coming within the exception clause of the 14th chapter of the Form of Government. He justified the partial subscription on the ground that the Confession of Faith was of human composition, and therefore fallible, and that he and the majority of the Presbytery could not in conscience feel themselves bound by it any further than they believed it corresponded with scripture.

18 Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, pp. 146-147.
19 Ibid., p. 147.
20 Ibid., p. 149. See material on the Adopting Act of 1729 in note 5 above.
The Commission examined all those who had been licensed by the Transylvania or Cumberland Presbytery who were then in the Cumberland and suspended twenty-six of them. After the commission’s departure, the revival ministers formed a council through which they continued to function as a group. The young men who had been deposed by the synodical commission were encouraged to continue their efforts, which most did. When the full Synod met in Lexington, Kentucky, in October 1806, two of the older revivalist ministers—Hodge and Rankin—were suspended from the ministry for refusal to submit to the authority of the commission, and the others likely would have been if they had been present. The Synod then proceeded to dissolve the Cumberland Presbytery and consolidate it once again with the Presbytery of Transylvania. The only defector from the ranks of the revivalist ministers was James McGready, who moved out of the Cumberland area when it appeared that the conflict would result in open schism.21

The Council of revival ministers of the now defunct Cumberland Presbytery asserted that neither their doctrine nor practice was heretical and that they had been suspended simply for refusing to acknowledge the authority of the illegal synodical commission. In 1807 and 1808 the Council petitioned the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA for redress; but, since the matter had not been brought up by appeal from the Synod of Kentucky, that body said it could not act. The Synod of Kentucky was instructed to deal with the matter, but it in turn referred the matter to the predominately anti-revival Presbytery of Transylvania. In 1809 the Synod of Kentucky sent letters to the General Assembly explaining the difficulties they had had with the revival ministers, and the Assembly officially endorsed all the Synod’s past actions in the matter.

The Council of revival ministers appointed a delegation to meet and negotiate with the Synod and eventually issued an ultimatum that if the Synod did not accept their propositions (that they be examined by the Synod as a body and not as individuals and that they be allowed to subscribe to the Westminster Confession with the exception of “fatalism”), they would form themselves into a presbytery. This was too much for several of the ministers, however, and all but four were reconciled to the Transylvania Presbytery and the Synod of Kentucky by submitting to the Synod’s authority and accepting the Confession of Faith unconditionally. Of the four left, one, Samuel McAdow, had moved away to Dickson County, Tennessee, and another, William McGee, was wavering as to whether or not to seek reconciliation with the Synod. The two that were left—Samuel King and Finis Ewing—did not make the three ordained ministers necessary for the constitution of a

21 Stephens, *Genesis*, p. 72; Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, p. 150.
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presbytery. Finally, in February 1810, Ewing and King made their way to McAdow's home in Tennessee, and after a short consultation the three constituted the independent Cumberland Presbytery.22

Similarities

There are several strong similarities between the Springfield and Cumberland Presbyteries which make it easy to understand how they could have been confused by distant observers. One common factor was the training that many of the revival preachers received. James McGready, William McGee, Samuel McAdow, William Hodge, and Barton W. Stone all studied under the New Side minister David Caldwell in his academy in Orange County, North Carolina.23 Caldwell had studied under Samuel Davies at Princeton, who in turn had graduated from the log college established by Samuel and John Blair, both graduates of William Tennent's school. The New Side ideas concerning subscription to the Confession, revival methods, and ministerial qualifications were transmitted through this chain to the Tennessee and Kentucky frontiers.

Doubts concerning items in the Confession of Faith were part of the experience of several of the leaders of the two groups. Barton W. Stone was particularly perplexed with the doctrine of the trinity, later moving toward a unitarian position. Samuel McAdow became disturbed over trying to reconcile the biblical teaching that God desires the salvation of all persons with the doctrine of limited atonement. David Caldwell advised him to "use practical texts, and to confine himself to practical discussions in preaching, and let these difficult teachings take care of themselves." Finis Ewing, when revising the Westminster Confession for use by the Cumberland Presbyterians, struck out the term "eternally begotten" used for Christ, explaining that the relational terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are used only because of the different offices assumed by the triune God in the work of redemption. Both groups rejected the doctrine of predestination, or, as it was usually called, fatality.24

22Barrus, Baughn, and Campbell, Cumberland Presbyterians, pp. 68-76; Blake, The Old Log House, pp. 56-58.
23Barrus, Baughn, and Campbell, Cumberland Presbyterians, p. 97; Rogers, Barton Warren Stone, pp. 6-12.
24Rogers, Barton W. Stone, pp. 12-14; David Newell Williams, "The Theology of the Great Revival in the West as Seen Through the Life and Thought of Barton W. Stone" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1979), pp. 76, 120-121, 138-139.
The use of revival methods was common to both groups, including camp meetings, emotionalism, and religious exercises. In the earliest stages each endorsed and supported the activities of the other. In the Apology written by the Springfield Presbytery in 1803, the revivals in the Cumberland area were praised as being filled with "life and power," and the writers expressed the anticipation that Christians of different societies would "lose sight of their creeds, confessions, standards, helps, and all those head speculations which enter not into the religion of the heart." Likewise, there was rejoicing in the Green River and Cumberland settlements when the news of the revivals in northern Kentucky reached them.

And finally, the two groups had similarities in their views of Christian unity. Most of the revivalists believed, like Stone, that division among Christians was the chief cause of infidelity. Finis Ewing, for example, argued against the practice of close communion on the grounds that it demonstrates to the world that the gospel does not even have the power to make Christians love one another. One body of Christians should not close the Lord's table to other Christians, he asserted.

Differences

Yet with all these strong similarities, as well as the geographical and chronological proximity, essential differences existed between the Springfield and Cumberland Presbyteries. From the time that the ministers in northern Kentucky and southern Ohio withdrew to form the independent Presbytery of Springfield in 1803, and the protests concerning irregularities in the Cumberland Presbytery came before the Synod of Kentucky in 1804, the Cumberland group strenuously objected to being classed with the so-called New Light heretics, that is, Stone and the Springfield Presbytery/Christian Church. It is likely that the Synod and General Assembly did, in fact, understand the Springfield and Cumberland groups as belonging to the same movement. Finis Ewing's biographer lamented the confusion and attributed to it part of the blame for the eventual separation of the Cumberland ministers into the independent Cumberland Presbytery in 1809. James McGready repudiated the Springfield group, accusing them of encouraging "the wildest

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26 Stephens, *Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, pp. 31-32.
delusions of the multitude” and propagating “heresies of the most dangerous nature.”

As already mentioned, both groups used revival methods in evangelism. But, as Lefferts Loetscher has pointed out, revivalism had within it the potential for both unity and division. It tended to reduce theology to a core of essential doctrines, centered on conversion and personal holiness, upon which the majority of Christians could readily agree. Yet the fact is that revivalism sparked numerous divisions within religious groups, and much of the energy of the resulting positions was turned toward sectarian apologetics rather than in recognizing common trends and larger unities. While on the surface it may appear that the two groups are indeed similar in that they both were divisions resulting at least partially from the use of revival methods and that both turned their attention to apologetics for their own cause, a closer examination indicates that this is not the case. The Cumberland group did indeed embark on a vigorous campaign to define their reason for being and developed into one of the most vital religious denominations in the country, particularly in the South. Circumstances surrounding their founding, justifications for their continued existence, and the descriptions of their theology as the perfect balance between extremes of Calvinism and Arminianism abound. The Springfield group, on the other hand, existed as an independent presbytery for less than one year, when it was dissolved in the interest of Christian unity. They became individual congregations of Christians, bound by nothing other than their own understanding of the scriptures and fully recognizing as Christians all others who believed in Christ and exhibited such belief in their conduct. While the Cumberlands used the revivals, at least indirectly, for an apologetic purpose, Stone saw them as a means to bring Christians together. For Stone, the revivals served to minimize and slough off the doctrinal intricacies that divided Christians and to show them that they could and should be one. The Cumberland group subscribed to the denominational idea, and they thought that theirs was perhaps the best though not the only group of true Christians. They rejected actually very little of the heritage they received from Presbyterianism. The Springfield group rejected altogether the validity of denominationalism and pursued, however naively, the goal of the unity of all Christians.

Out of the tendency to simplify doctrine came the chief charge against Stone and the New Lights by the Cumberlands—that of heresy. Stone had experienced difficulty with the doctrine of the trinity from his earliest days of

theological study. As the events of the revival took place and his movement took shape, he tended to urge Christians to use only the words of scripture when speaking of God and not to try to produce or understand the intricate definitions of any creed. In response to questions concerning his beliefs from a reader of his *Christian Messenger* he replied, "I have not spent, perhaps, an hour in ten years in thinking about the Trinity."  

Stone’s views concerning the trinity and his idea of Christ and the atonement were branded absurd, unscriptural, and heretical by the Cumberland leadership. When all his disguises are stripped off, one opponent said, he stands convicted of occupying Arian, Socinian, and Pelagian ground. Finis Ewing warned his flock against the Christians, calling them “deceivers who strike at the root of all real religion,” and urged his readers to avoid them as they would the “open enemies of the cross of Christ.” Stone did indeed believe personally that the doctrine of the trinity as taught by the Westminster Confession was an incomprehensible absurdity. He evidently did understand Christ to be a created being who had been made equal with the Father in name and office. For him, the atonement was not expiatory, but a reconciliation brought about when people are conformed to the nature of God, that is, become holy. That state of holiness is a result of one’s salvation through faith, faith being an act of the will and intellect, believing the written word of God. In the case of none of these doctrines, however, did Stone believe that one who held another idea was not a true Christian. These were matters about which the scriptures were not absolutely explicit and therefore could not be made terms of Christian fellowship.

The Cumberland group saw these doctrines in a totally different light. Stone was accused for his Christology of destroying the foundation of the Christian’s hope, denying the Lord that bought him, and asserting infidelity in disguise.  

His doctrine of the atonement, the Cumberland leaders asserted, detracted from the power of the cross and lessened the evil of sin, and his doctrine of faith robbed God of the honor in the conversion of sinners.  

In a sermon predicting the events of the judgment day, Finis Ewing stated that Stone would have “the blood of a thousand souls stained upon him.”

The leaders of the Cumberland group had other criticisms of the Springfield movement. They lashed out at the assertion of the Stone people that they had no creed but the Bible. “What would be thought,” one apologist

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32 Cossitt, *Finis Ewing*, p. 249.
34 Ibid., p. 128.
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asked, “of a political organization that would say ‘The Constitution is our Creed’”?

Would not all other political parties say the same? Most assuredly they would. The party, therefore, that claims the Constitution as its platform, must tell the world what it understands the Constitution to teach. Then, when a church says that the Bible is its creed, have we not a right to ask that church what it understands the Bible to teach on the great and fundamental doctrines of our religion? Away, then, with such a subterfuge on the subject of creeds!35

Furthermore, the Cumberlands insisted, the group had no right to call itself the Christian Church. It was as ridiculous as a political party assuming the name “The Honest Party” as if none of the others were honest. “If the name has any significance, the meaning is that this church—the Christian Church—is the church of Christ and no other is! Who ever heard of such arrogance?”36

Although not given to religious disputing, Stone defended his views of the Godhead in an 1833 article. He firmly believed, he stated, in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and in everything the scriptures speak of them. “Is this not enough? Or must we believe more? We know that boasting orthodoxy believes and teaches more, but we dare not receive such teaching from them, more than from his infallibility at Rome.”37

Stone’s overarching goal was Christian unity. That goal shaped all of his actions and positions. He urged the Cumberland group to drop their Creeds and Confessions, and to come together as members of one body, knit by one spirit. This was his vision for all Christians.38 This emphasis led him to a revolt not simply against one or more specific doctrinal formulations, as was the case with the Cumberlands, but against theology itself.39

Out of similar heritages, locations, and circumstances emerged two very different movements, with deep-seated antagonisms toward each other. Stone’s Christian Church made converts from most religious groups in the areas where it spread, except for the Regular Baptists and Cumberland Presbyterians.40 The Stone groups eventually merged with the Disciple groups led by Alexander Campbell or the Christian Connection of James O’Kelly, seeing in this very act a partial fulfillment of the desire for Christian

36Ibid., pp. 245-246.
unity. The Cumberland Presbytery was strengthened by rapid growth in the South and Southwest, so much so that a Synod was organized in 1813, and a General Assembly in 1829. The assessment of John Carr, a pioneer Methodist in Middle Tennessee, is interesting and appropriate to end this study. Carr knew Stone and greatly respected him. After praising Stone for his humility, modesty, and peaceable character, he opined:

It was a pity, I think, that he, with his party in Kentucky, did not make the same stand that the Cumberland Presbyterians made in this country. If they had stricken out the doctrine of unconditional election and reprobation from the Confession of Faith, or formed a new creed or discipline, and called themselves Kentucky Presbyterians, I think their course would have contributed to the advancement of the gospel. But doubtless Mr. Stone did what he thought was best in the case.41 Carr, like many others, failed to recognize the essential differences which gave the groups such different characters.

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