

Biblical Counseling: A Discipline¹

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The training of a generation of future pastors, missionaries, and laborers in Christ's Church, to counsel the flock of God, that they might disciple the nations, is an overwhelmingly awesome calling!

The primary affection that I am experiencing upon receiving this holy calling is: *thankfulness*. I am so thoroughly thankful that Christ, by his Church, has deemed it fitting and acceptable to entrust to me this sacred study. I am simply so very thankful to receive the position of Biblical Counseling Professor from Christ, and it is my sincere hope and prayer that I may faithfully honor Him and be a loyal servant to His dear sheep. Thus, to those of you who have supported me, prayed for me, encouraged me, counseled me, endured with me, and sacrificed so much, that we might be having this conversation tonight, namely, my wife, Melissa, and my children, as well as my parents: thank you.

Biblical Theology and Biblical Counseling

As we consider "Biblical Counseling: A Discipline," our minds should go back to the memorable year of 1894, when the Reverend Geerhardus Vos, of Princeton Theological Seminary, was inaugurated as its Professor of Biblical Theology. At this point, you may be wondering: what do Biblical Theology, and Biblical Counseling have to do with one another. Apart from the fact that they, of course, are both "Biblical," we can at the very least, assume that they both *aim* to be Biblical.

The title of this inaugural address, "Biblical Counseling: A Discipline", is actually an homage to Dr. Vos' Inaugural Address, where he spoke on the *then* new, theological discipline of Biblical Theology.² Of course, Biblical Theology was not new then, in the same way that Biblical Counseling is not new now as a theological discipline — and yet there was and is an element of "newness" to each of them, respectively. At this juncture, if we are not careful, we will begin sounding like the Apostle John, who speaks of an *old* commandment, which is also a *new* commandment — but I digress.

Biblical Counseling, like Biblical Theology in 1894, is relatively new, in the history of Christendom. After all, Biblical Counseling is only about fifty years old as a discipline. She is but now coming into her third generation of practitioners and professors. And here at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, the one taking up the discipline is quite a young professor —

¹ *The following is an edited text of the inaugural address delivered by Rev. Keith A. Evans, on November 2, 2018, as the first Professor of Biblical Counseling at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.*

² Geerhardus Vos, *Inauguration of the Rev. Geerhardus Vos, Ph.D., D.D., as Professor of Biblical Theology* (New York: A. D. F. Randolph, 1894).

some may even say “boyish.” Thus, we have a younger professor taking up the instruction of a rather recent arrival, in the scope of church history, to seminary curricula.

And yet, Biblical Counseling, like Biblical Theology before her, is almost as old as time itself. She is, after all, the discipline of rightly understanding the Biblical text and rightly applying it to the circumstances of life. Perhaps we are beginning to see the line between Biblical Theology and Biblical Counseling is straighter than initially considered. The application of the text is the logical conclusion of rightly dividing the word of truth.

However, let us return to 1894 for one moment.

Quoting from Dr. Vos’s inaugural address, adapting his thoughts for our immediate purpose in this paper :

Biblical [Counseling] being a recent arrival in seminary curriculum and having been entrusted to my special care and keeping, I consider it my duty to introduce to you this theological science ... This is all the more necessary because of the wide divergence of opinion in various quarters concerning the standing of this newest accession to the circle of sacred studies. Some have lauded [Biblical Counseling] to the skies as the ideal of [practical] theology, [holding discipleship to an idealism she cannot possibly bear] and in such extravagant terms as to reflect seriously upon the character of her sisters of greater age and longer standing [namely Preaching]. Others look upon the new-comer with suspicion, or even openly dispute her right to a place in the theological family, [desiring that she be outsourced right out of the church, out of the seminaries, and into the medical fields, where the care of souls allegedly belongs].³

Therefore, it is in the spirit of Dr. Vos that we must ensure that the Theology of Counseling be Biblical — not only in content, but also in methodology.

One final point as we consider the venerable Geerhardus Vos. The afternoon of his inauguration, he spoke against his discipline, stating that Exegetical Theology was primary, and additionally, that Biblical Theology was a handmaiden to Systematic Theology. In like manner, I hope you will hear me tonight speak against my discipline. That Biblical Counseling, as Practical Theology, is secondary to the importance and primacy of preaching. And yet, might I further suggest that Systematic Theology is the handmaiden to Practical Theology, of which Biblical Counseling is a part?

After all, theological claims are fundamentally practical, and if our theology is not applied and does not reach the average churchgoer, what ultimate good is it? Application of the word of God to the experience of life is the *heart* of the theological task. The Scriptures come to us in the form of application. They are truth *applied*. Surely the Scriptures speak about substitutionary atonement, about adoption, about justification, about election, and about the incarnation, and so forth. But Scripture does so in a way that is applied to life, so that the atonement is brought to bear on your marriage in Ephesians; adoption is brought to bear on your prayer life in the midst of enduring affliction in the Book of Romans; justification is brought to bear on your forgiveness of others in Matthew; election is brought to bear on your patience with your fellow believer in Colossians; the incarnation is applied to the lowliness with which we ought to view ourselves in relation to others in Philippians, and so on. Scripture thus comes to us in the form of application. It comes as *counsel* itself, so that we are admonished, rebuked, corrected, encouraged, supported, sustained, and conformed by it into the image of God in Christ.

³ Ibid. The brackets are mine.

At the same time, the application must not be divorced from the source. Why, ultimately, would we desire the formation of character, apart from the character of God? Why would we teach people to be truthful, apart from the One who is Truth? Why instruct people to be loving, separated from the One who is the embodiment of Love? Why counsel people spiritually, devoid of the Spirit? Why seek Christ-likeness in individuals, absent of Christ? Or in other words, how can we possibly commend holiness without the Holy One? Or most foundational yet: how can we promote godliness, apart from God himself?

Cautions For the Discipline of Biblical Counseling

Having glimpsed the importance of this theological discipline, let us turn our attention to the cautions which we must employ when engaged in the work of Biblical Counseling while instructing in the Seminary and engaging in it in pastoral ministry:

The **first caution** under consideration flows from Judges 17:1-13, where we find an Ephraimite, named Micah, an Israelite named in accord with the true and living God, who worships at a household shrine, instead of going to the place of public worship in Ephraim. Public worship at that time occurred in the Tabernacle in Shiloh, in the very region where Micah lived. Thus, we find the man in the text without excuse, with no appeal to significant difficulty in seeking God as God had prescribed. Instead, Micah comes across a Levite, from the Tribe of Judah no less, from the city of origin of Christ Himself.

Now, instead of looking to the true priest, the One from Judah, the One to be born in Bethlehem, Micah looks to a meager approximation of him. Therefore, Micah makes a priest out of one who should be a servant of the True Priest, the True Priest who would point Micah to reliance upon the Living God, a God who is neither fashioned out of silver or represented by images and who does not dwell in houses made by hands.

If, at this point, we are tempted to conclude our passage as a rather obscure and impenetrable Old Testament passage, we find a New Testament parallel in the Book of Acts Chapter 14, where Paul and Barnabas, messengers of Christ, are worshiped instead of Christ Himself.

The universal point to both of these texts for our purpose in this paper is that discipleship, the one-on-one ministry of the word to individuals, could result in people relying upon the servant rather than the Master. In pointing people to the Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God, counselees could come to depend upon the counselor or the counseling in an unhealthy and Biblically-imbalanced way.

If Biblical counseling is ever known as individual therapy, *though I recoil at the phrase*, then let us never lose sight of the much more important and required Group Therapy, of going to the house of God in public worship. And may our ministry to the sheep never produce dependence upon anyone *other than* the True Priest of Bethlehem in Judah, that Great High Priest, not of the Levitical order, but in the order of Melchizedek, Jesus Christ himself.

The **second caution** for consideration is the all-too-common notion that providing wise and formal counsel to people is reserved for the specialist. Such a distortion of Biblically-based counsel is addressed by Acts 20:17-38. Here, Paul, the consummate specialist in communicating and applying the Word of God, is entrusting the very same ministry to the elders of the Ephesian church.

Paul is commending intimate and earnest care for the church of God which Christ obtained with His own blood. Paul places this care upon the elders of the church, this tearful, personal, house-to-house counseling of the flock in which he himself engaged. Notice how Paul puts it, when he says: “remember that for three years I did not cease to *nouthetically* confront everyone with

tears”⁴ (Acts 20:31), and Paul is commending the same to the elders (Acts 20:32). He specifically entrusts the word of God as the means to build up and sanctify the people of God. Then, to bring it all to bear with full weight and responsibility, Paul says: “In everything, I have shown you that by laboring in this way, *we must support the weak*” (Acts 20:35).

Paul, the specialist of the word of God, sees with tears this responsibility of counseling the word of God personally and from house to house, as being given to more than just the specialist. Biblical Counseling is not just conferred upon the counseling specialist alone. Neither is counseling with the Bible given *just* to the pastor, but it is a ministry bestowed on the Church of Jesus Christ as a whole. Perhaps this point is merely a Biblical advertisement that we all need training at RPTS in applying the word to the people of God.

The **third and final caution** for consideration flows from the previous point Paul was making: it is the Word of God he commends to us, as the means in the counseling dynamic of building up, strengthening the weak, and sanctifying the Church. The caution before us, however, is the reverse of the above. Do we want the counseling department at RPTS, the discipleship and counseling in your churches, and the soul-care of Christ’s people, to be based off of the insights and experience of men? Do we believe the mere observations of science and the meager attempts of secular humanism are enough to try and meet the deepest needs of the *soul*? Or might there be more adequate help available to us?

Paul had great confidence in the Word of God, what it was given for, and how it was to be used in the lives of people. Likewise, the Apostle Peter states:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses to his majesty ... *knowing this first of all*, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:16-21 ESV).⁵

If there is any concern whatsoever about lack of experience and under-qualification of a Biblical Counseling professor, praise the Lord that, “we do not follow cleverly designed” human solutions, nor a man’s personal interpretation of the questions of life like, “who is man, what is his problem, and how do you fix him?” Are we not “eyewitnesses to his majesty” and to the power of Jesus to change lives? Or do we think his hand is slack?

Do we want to counsel in confidence? And upon true authority? On the claim, “Thus saith the Lord?” Or on the ever-changing, shifting opinions of man? Do we want our offer of hope and help, our discipleship and counseling, to be open to everyone’s personal interpretation? Or do we desire the curriculum at RPTS to be based upon the counseling professor’s meager experience, compared to the infinite wisdom of the Most High God? Do we want our promise of holiness and process of growing in greater faithfulness in all circumstances to be based upon the unchanging truth of God?

All of our concerns and reservations aside, I will age; I will finish my doctoral work eventually; I will labor in this field, all by God’s grace. But all of the above is immaterial compared to this one truth. We all have been entrusted with God’s perfect, inspired, inerrant, infallible, unchangeable, authoritative, perspicuous, sufficient, reliable, eternal Word — which grants everything necessary that the man of God may be complete, lacking nothing.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own; emphasis added.

⁵ Emphasis added.

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" — in the public ministry, or in private counseling and discipleship ministry. *That* Word never returns to God void, but accomplishes its purposes, forever useful in transforming people's lives.

May the Lord bless the application of His Word, in the discipline of Biblical Counseling, and specifically at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, for decades upon decades to come.

To God only be the glory.

Gender Blending and Confusion¹

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There are two stories that I think would help us to put a mental framework around this topic of gender blending and confusion. The first one is *Alice in Wonderland*. If you haven't read it, certainly you have seen the movie. Why is it helpful? Because in Wonderland, nothing is what it seems to be. It is an overarching theme in *Alice in Wonderland*. Everything that seems normal is NOT normal. Things are exactly the opposite of what they seem to be in Wonderland. And so more and more, it is Wonderland for your young people today. I'm so old, I'm 70 now. I remember the sixties. The sixties literally were Alice in Wonderland. Everything gets changed. Actually, you can think through that idea now. The sixties and "Alice's Restaurant" was a theme song. You can be anything you want at Alice's Restaurant. Really the whole world has become Alice's Restaurant in that things really are illusory and do not seem to be what they really are. We are all chasing the Mad Hatter! Or worse yet, we have become the Mad Hatter!!

The second story that really helps, most of us know at least generally is The Emperor's New Clothes. You should remember it. A scam artist comes along and convinces the emperor saying, "Hey, I'm going to make you a new set of clothes. You can you take off your old ones". But the emperor is really naked, and nobody really wants to burst his bubble. The artist, however, said, "Oh, yeah, emperor, these are really great clothes. You really look great." Nobody wants to be the one who goes, "You know, you're naked, and you do not really have anything on, and this is really ridiculous." So you remember, he's in a parade, and of course, the little boy is the one who says, "Hey, the emperor has no clothes." And that's where the trouble begins. Today our culture really has no moral clothes, and Christians are the ones who are standing, pointing, and saying, "Hey you are naked in more ways than one. You're naked physically, but you are also naked because you have no defense before the living God."

Today in Western culture, everyone is responding strangely to this whole issue of gender and sexuality. Today a federal judge would say to a man who claims to be a woman born in a man's body that he can change his birth certificate and claim his identity as non-binary. In fact, it's not just male or female – those are not the only choices, you can be whatever you want. The reality is that western culture is on a bad acid trip. We have taken cultural LSD, and we are hallucinating all over the place. As Christians, we have to understand it. We are living in perilous times, and it's not just that Christians are being killed by ISIS or that house church pastors in China are being busted by the federal government for being in a non-registered church, but even you here in America are in for attacks. I keep telling our seminarians: "Some of you are probably going to end up in jail for a hate crime just for preaching through Romans." So we are more and more going to be like the early Christians, who were outsiders to the world and its approval and tolerance. In our country and western culture, the federal government, state governments, and

¹ *The substance of this paper was given at the Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship 2016 Summer Institute entitled "Disordered Desires: Bringing Grace to Modern Sexuality."*

local governments say, “You must swear allegiance to what we say.” This means the LGBTQ agenda for dominance has won the culture war. The moral communists have won.

Friends, this issue is not about political correctness; it is really religious correctness. They would not call it so, but it is a religious issue. Which God are we going to serve? Will it be the triune living God who made men and women in His image, or is it going to be God howsoever the government decides? We are told, we can be Christians, but keep it in the closet. So, gays, lesbians, and others talk about, “We’ve come out of the closet.” Well, guess what? They are out of the closet. The closet is empty, and they want to put us *in* the closet; This is the reality.

Several years ago, we were going to a gay rights parade in San Diego to offer gospel hope. I will not forget what the San Diego detective told us: “Remember you used to be the majority but are now the minority.” We also had another experience when my wife ran a pro-life pregnancy center in San Diego County: CUP, the Center for Unplanned Pregnancy. We were up front with our positions and had a confidentiality statement crafted by a pro-life lawyer. The advertisement in the phonebook stated clearly we were not a medical clinic. We thought for sure there was no way that we could be shut down. Planned Parenthood, however, shut us down, because they sued all the pro-life pregnancy centers in the county. In spite of having the most conservative judge who professed to be a believer, we lost the case! So this is the whole cultural milieu we are in today. It is an antagonistic culture, which is not sufficiently satisfied to say, “Keep quiet,” but if we say the emperor has no clothes, they will try to shut us down.

So where do we start in trying to understand this general shift in the culture and particularly the issue of gender confusion and gender blending? Jesus, of course, points us in the right direction. He always goes back to the beginning, to creation before the Fall. Let us turn our attention to Matthew 19. Now, it’s not about gay and lesbian; it’s not about gender confusion per se, but it is in the context of marriage and family, which after all are the biblical paradigms for this issue of gender. What this paper aims to do is not only to explain the confusion, but particularly how we should counsel someone who comes in and is confused and says, “I’m a man in a woman’s body” or “a woman in a man’s body” or “I’m transgendered” or the next identity du jour. The next term we might hear in this culture could be omnigendered – someone claims they are a little bit of everything. So, how do we deal with this confusion?

Interestingly, in Matthew 19, we have Jesus being tested by religious leaders. He is teaching about divorce, and in verse three we read this: “And the Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause.’” There was a controversy. Some rabbis were saying that the reason for divorce could be any cause (Deuteronomy 24); while other rabbis were saying it has to be a serious thing. So which is it? Jesus, however, answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female.” He didn’t offer them three different options. It’s male and female. This historical paradigm is not just a myth. It’s time and space history, and that’s God’s way of working. “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother, hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate.” They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?’” Notice how they frame their opposition as Moses commanded to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away. It is *not* what Deuteronomy 24 says if you read it carefully. “But Jesus said, ‘It was because of your hardness of heart that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning, it was not so. And I say to you whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery.’”

The disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of a man with his wife, it’s better not to marry.’” They are saying, in effect, “You’ve got to be kidding me. If you’re talking about being that strict, who can meet that standard? So it’s better not to get married.” Jesus said that “not everyone can receive this thing but only those to whom it was given. For there are eunuchs who have been so

from birth.” In other words, Jesus is speaking here of those incapable of sexual relations. “There are eunuchs who have been made so by men,” as Origen and others in church history. “And there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, but let the one who was able to receive this, receive it.” In light of this historic paradigm of male and female genders which Jesus uses to explain the basis of the issue, we need to consider the following perspectives in our approach to counsel those who are struggling with gender blending and confusion.

Gender issues are a subset of a larger issue of identity in general.

Modern people in America do not understand who they are. *It is the bigger issue.* Actually, gender and sexuality are only a subset of this larger issue. The issue is, “Who am I?” Every counseling psychology, whether Christian or non-Christian, secular or not, has a paradigm that answers fundamental questions like Who is man? What's wrong with him? How do you fix it?

I got saved in seminary and then went to Temple University, where I got my undergraduate degree in history, to get a Master's in psychology. I have never forgotten a counseling course that I had. This course was run by a woman, who was not a Christian, but her mother was a Christian. She walked into the class on the first day of the semester and said, “You have a ten-page paper for next week. Who is man? What's wrong? How do you fix him?” The design of the course was rather brilliant. You read the books, saw the films, you studied them, and then you wrote the same paper at the end of the semester. Everybody in the class was a Master's or a Ph.D. student. Panic reigned! “Oh, my word! This is so hard! What do I do? How does this work? Who is man?” And I'm thinking, “Wow, this is a piece of cake. That's not hard – Romans 1, 2, and 3. What's hard about this? Who's man? The image of God. What's wrong? Sin. How do you fix it? Jesus. This is easy.” So, I write my paper, and by the Lord's providence, I got a good grade. We went through the whole course and then I had to write the paper again. So, I go up at the end, and she says, “Let me guess. I'm going to get Romans 1, 2, and 3 again.” Of course, she was right! So I asked if I could write a critique of these different people from a Christian perspective. She allowed me to do so. I've never forgotten that course because even as a non-Christian, she saw that anthropology was the core issue in counseling.

Hence for everybody, whether it is any letter in LGBTQ, or whether it is people who now think that they're animals, identity becomes the issue. The fundamental question of identity is: Am I whom I was born to be? or am I who I demand that I want to be or imagine myself to be? While I was in Brazil, I learned that there is a woman in Brazil who thinks that she is a lion. She is getting plastic surgery to make her look like a lion. When I came back to the United States from Brazil, I heard there is a guy in Arizona who thinks he is a dragon. So what's he doing? He's getting surgery to make him look dragon-like, with horns and stuff. There is a whole subculture of “Furries”, youth who take on an animal persona. They have clubs, networks, and conventions. There are things to note: one, not all are the same except there is the common theme of personified animals. This is species confusion! The lines are blurred between humans and animals. Two, there is a higher incidence of gay, bi-sexual and transgendered among them than in the non-Furries. If you want to study or understand this phenomenon you can easily research it online.

We need to weep over people like this for they are confused, very confused. Now, think about this question. Where do I go in the Bible to get a handle on this issue, because it doesn't seem like there is anything in the Bible that talks about people who think they are dragons or lions. But the point is identity. Am I a lion, a dragon, or am I a person made in the image of God who's in rebellion against God? So for us as believers, this is really straightforward; it is Romans 1, 2, and 3. Romans 1 makes clear what happens when you do not agree with God. You profess

yourself to become wise, but in fact, you make yourself to be a fool. So in a sense, this confusion should not throw us off, even though it is complicated. If the question Who are you? is answered as I think I'm a dragon, then the Bible clearly informs us, No, I am not a dragon. Dragons do not exist. Even if they did they will not be judged by God on that great and fearful, final Day. This argument goes across the board. People used to come in for counseling and say they were several different people because of Multiple Personality Disorder. But the answer is, No, you are not. You are whomever you are as you were born and developed, and there is only one of you. You are either in the first Adam or the second Adam.

I think we all struggle with identity. There are some things that we all do not like about us But, no matter what we think, desire or do, it is not going to change who we are. The sooner a person realizes this truth the better that, "This is who I am and my only hope of change is to become like Jesus instead of who I am, male or female. I have to become like Jesus." It is God's goal for you and me. Because, who is man? What does it mean to be an image bearer of God? Can you un-package that a bit for a counselee? This is important for a counselor to be able to do. If you say to someone that he is an image bearer of God, that should mean a couple of things. Your job is to reflect his character. You all woke up this morning and looked in the mirror. What did you see? Was it you? Yes and no! If your spouse came into the bathroom and went up and started kissing the picture of you in the mirror what would you say? You would say that the image is not you. It really is a reflection of who you are, but it's not you.

Think about this in concrete terms. In the Old Testament, and particularly in the New, what are the three offices of Jesus Christ? Prophet, priest, and king. I would submit to you that this is a good summary of what it means that you are an image of God. You are a worshipper, as a priest. You are to be a worker, as a king. You are a witness to preach or teach and reflect what God has taught you as a prophet. Not everybody is ordained to an office but we function in these three functions or capacities. Are you a good worshiper? This has implications for counseling. Are you teaching people to be a good worshiper? Are you teaching people to be a good servant of God?

Life must also be understood as two basic realities, not this amorphous "We're all god." There is God and then everything else is creation. There is male and female. There are the children of Satan and the children of God, going all the way back to the Garden: the seed of the woman, Jesus, and the seed of the evil one. Life is binary, like it or not! So if a federal judge says it's not binary, it does not change the fact that ***the world really is***; there are two separate realities, divisions, and it goes right through from the seeds in the garden. Remember, God created and explains the world, not human judges! Judges need to remember Psalm 82. Remember, the seed of the woman is going to come and crush the seed of the serpent. Or as Paul picks up in Romans, God will soon crush Satan under your heel, Romans 15:20. So Paul is picking up the theme and in effect saying, "Look, Christ is risen from the dead. You've got His victory, and he's going to defeat the evil one through you, not because you are the savior, but because you belong to the Savior".

We need to begin to think through all of these truths. Jesus says to the Jews, "You are of your father the devil because you want to kill me." Satan's children want to eliminate the children of the Light. Therefore we must see the gender issue as a subset of the larger overall identity issue. Yes, the gender issue is really just a subset of a larger issue that goes back to the Garden. It is Satan's seed playing out. "I'm not going to be whom you declare me to be. I will not accept my body as you have given it to me.." Or applied to the other area of identity in the culture: "I do not like being human; I'd like to be a dog. I refuse to accept God's definition of who I am." This is a demonic way of expressing, "did God really say there are only two complementary sexes?"; "did God really say I'm human, can't I become an animal?" Soon we might have people insisting they are aliens from other planets.

All counseling as involving the issue of the image of God.

Identity is an extension of this perspective. There used to be a phrase out there: “you are what you eat”. Do you know what the Bible’s answer to that is? ***You are whom you worship.*** Look at Psalm 115 and Matthew 6. These are very important passages because they are a key to counseling in general and particularly in these gender issues. What does Psalm 115 say? It contrasts idolatry and true worship.

“Not unto us, Lord, not unto us. But to your name be the glory. For the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness. Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God? Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.’”

So there is God - Jehovah God; we know now from the New Testament He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He’s contrasted in verse 4 to silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths but can’t speak, eyes but do not see; ears can’t hear; noses do not smell; hands but do not feel; feet but do not walk. They do not make a sound in their throat. Pretty understandable; pretty graphic description of an idol. But here’s a very pivotal line. Look at what it says in verse 8. They that make them ***become*** like them; the idol maker them becomes like them, so do all who trust in them. Where does an idol come from? Our mind sees something in creation, we put it together, and we design this idol, make it and then what happens? The ironic thing is that we become stupid and dumb like the idol – an ironic reversal or an idolatrous reversal. The dead idol controls the living creator and becomes his master. It’s really a creaturely thing that comes out of our imagination, pieced together from our experiences and imagination. But those who make them become like them, so do all trust in them. Do you want to be dumb? Make and serve an idol, mental and or physical.

In verse 9, the Psalmist says, “O Israel, trust in the Lord; he’s their help and shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord; he’s their help and shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord; he’s their help and shield. The Lord has remembered us. He will bless us. He will bless the house of Israel. He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great. May the Lord give you increase, you and your children. May you be blessed of the Lord who made Heaven and Earth. The heavens are the Lord’s heavens for the Earth is given to the children of man. The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any who go down into the silence, but we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord.”

Do you see the relationship? You are what you worship. Trace it out. Why do communists kill so many people? They are basically materialists. They do not believe there is a personal God, a moral God. So people are fodder for the State’s grist mill, merely raw material for the idolatrous State. Why is there so much sexual immorality in the Hindu religion historically? Look at the Hindu gods. They are a bunch of perverted gods, a bunch of dirty old gods. The god that you worship dictates who you become because you are made in the image of God and you will reflect Him or the god you serve.

In the New Testament, I think Jesus nails this truth down and makes it even clearer in New Testament terms. In Matthew 6, Jesus speaks about worrying:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where are your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body, so if your eye is healthy your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness? You can’t serve two masters; you either hate the one and love the other, or will be devoted to the one despise the other. You can’t serve God and money.”

What does Jesus say in passages elsewhere? Where do adultery, fornication, murder come from? Out of the heart. Man is heart-driven, and what drives the heart? The Treasure of that heart. Jesus is saying we are what we worship. Our treasure dictates our self-concept and our character. It is the result when the fool has said in his heart there is no God. Therefore, in the area of gender, you become like the god that you serve. It is true for anybody. A person may not be gender-confused, he may not be species confused – or any of these other extreme things – but it comes down to this: you will become like the god that you serve. Psalm 115 shows this truth and Matthew 6 makes it even clearer.

In Ephesians 2, we are told we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but God made us alive in Christ. When you were dead in your trespasses and sins, you were like your father the devil who is a liar and a murderer. The big weapon that Satan uses is lies. Hence, if I think I'm a dragon with all of this power, I do not have to answer a living God. But even if you were a dragon, you would still have to answer to God! This issue is not as complicated as people make it out to be. It involves complicated issues, but it's not as confusing as it might at first seem to be. You need to know that you are an image bearer of God and that God is leading you. In a sense, you can take that clarity and gently shine it on this person who is confused about gender, species, or whatever. It's true even for people who really are not gender confused or species confused or someone who thinks he is an alien or something weird like "I was captured by an alien ship." Our response is always: "No, you're an image bearer of God." We need to help them pray as Moses prayed in Psalm 90 to teach them to number their days that they might have a heart of wisdom. We all are going to die and have to answer to the living God, and we need to realize it. You need to realize it now and so does your gender or species confused friend.

In chapter two of Ephesians, you were dead in your trespasses and your sins; you were made alive together with Christ, united with him. Chapter four then goes on to explain what true holiness is. Paul exhorts us to make sure that we keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Now you are part of the body of Christ. You have to find your identity in terms of where you are in the body. To our question, "What am I supposed to be accomplishing?" Ephesians answers it in chapter 4, verses 17-24:

"Now this I say, and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. They're darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."

Does not this passage offer us a functional definition of the unregenerate or those who are dead in their sins? What is callousness? It's a heavy layer of skin that keeps you from rubbing yourself the wrong way. So when you get a callus, you become insensitive to the irritation. In the same manner, when you are dead in your sin, your heart becomes callous to the reality of God. How do you then live? If you do not know the reality of God, you give yourself up to sensuality. One could say it this way, faith is supra-sensual. Can you see God? You can't see God. Can you hear him, smell him, or taste him? No. Can you feel him in your body? No! So, I tell people, positive or negative, your feelings are not the Holy Spirit. The bottom line is that sensuality is living by your five senses. What I see, and touch, and feel. So if I think I'm a rabbit, or whatever I am living by my senses, and not living by faith in what the Word of God says. As Paul says about the unregenerate in verse 24: "They give themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity." The more you give yourself to sensuality, the more you take on that identity, and the more you would think thoughts like "I'm an animal, transgendered, or whatever," and it becomes a deeper form of sin that we all experience.

We can think we are wonderful people, but that is still sin manifesting in pride. The Bible is clear that apart from Christ we are all sinners. The bottom line is, am I like Jesus? Normally not, but

that is where he is changing me. As I become more like Jesus, I am becoming like I am supposed to be. This my identity – love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, meekness, and self-control. It's my true identity in Christ, and it's where I have got to go and grow. To be honest, every one of us needs a reality check to see whether we are living by faith in the Son of God who is making us conformed to his image or living in a fantasy world.

Gender is but a subset of the image of God.

In Genesis 1, God made man in the image of God. In Genesis 5:3, Adam had a son in his image and likeness. Moses, by the Holy Spirit, deliberately picks up that theme and phrase. Remember when you go to Luke, the genealogy of Jesus goes all the way back to Adam who was the son of God. There is the image bearing all the way back to the beginning. In Romans 5, or 1 Corinthians 15, Paul tells us that there are really only two images: the first Adam and the second Adam. So everyone who is in the first Adam is confused and cursed as to identity. They do not understand being an image bearer of God. If I am in Christ, then I am now part of the man from Heaven, the second Adam, who has laid down his life. *It also follows from this paradigm that Adam and Eve are the norms.* Anything else is a sinful degeneration from that created norm. Gender and sexuality are part of the image of God and are impacted by sin. But the insanity of thinking I am some other gender than what I am is really just a subset of the insanity of thinking I am something other than an image bearer of God who has to answer to God. This type of moral, spiritual insanity has been around since the Fall.

Do not be deceived by the pagan worldview around us.

Underneath all the heat surrounding gender issues, whether it is the male/female identity or whether it's the binary nature of gender or species issues these all are a subset of this whole concept of identity. Who am I living in a covenantal relationship with and whom am I reflecting? Doesn't that seem a lot simpler? It's not easy, and you and I cannot convert people; we cannot even get them to see this as the core issue. But, it is the reality. So, when we step back, whatever the person's sin is, whether it's a gender issue or something else, at the root or at heart it's the same identity issue. Am I going to live in reality, or am I going to live in a dream world? Hold up my head high and whistle a happy tune? Therefore, I'm not afraid to imagine I am whomever I think myself to be. All of this is Eastern thought. All this is going back to the garden: "You'll be like God. Do not worship the real God. You can set your own agenda and do your own thing."

Peter Jones' work is very helpful in this regard. He shows how homosexuality functions as the sexual sacrament of the New Age movement.² It is really what we see with the gay and lesbian movements. The movement thinks, "We gays are going to lead the world into the Age of Aquarius; we're going to lead them into the new world where there are no distinctions. And all these old distinctions that actually create war and issues - they're all going to be obliterated as we are absorbed into the godhead and we express our essential deity." This a lie that leads straight to the pit of hell. How do I go about counseling this issue? It's difficult, but it's not all that esoteric. We have faced it, and yet we think it's different. For me, it's all about going back to the Introduction to Biblical Counseling, the Marriage and Family course, and the Advanced courses which I teach at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh and have taught elsewhere for decades. In all of it, I have tried to be biblical. The Advanced course interestingly, utilizes the Ten Commandments and the Westminster Larger Catechism as

² Peter R. Jones, *The God of Sex: How Spirituality Defines Your Sexuality* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2006), 67-84.

opposed to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), saying that God gave us ten words – that’s sufficient to organize life. And Jesus says it boils down to two commandments. The first four and the second six. All the law and the prophets hang on these two - loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. So, however you want to organize and approach it – low to high or high to low, it all comes down to love God with everything you have, love your neighbor as yourself, and you’ll be fine by the grace of God.³ This gender issue is just an extreme version of trying to avoid who we really are.

Exhortations for Life

You need to live and counsel out of these realities.

You need to live as an image bearer of God being recreated by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. You need that for your own identity, so when somebody comes in, and he thinks he is a furry or an animal, you need to relate to him as God’s image bearer who can be redeemed through Christ.

Obviously, you need to teach your children.

Your children are growing up in a culture that tells them they can be anything they want to be. And they have friends who are kind of weirding out. We need to teach them that while Jimmy may be very nice, Jimmy is confused. Jimmy thinks he’s a fox, but he’s really not a fox. We have to have compassion for him, and we have to love him, but we cannot treat him like a fox. He cannot come to our house and eat our chickens. We need to treat Jimmy as Jimmy. You need to teach your children, and you need to teach your churches the truth of how God views these issues.

You’re probably facing this issue already with people in your youth group. We had a father-son retreat that I spoke at recently, and there was a furry there. The kid was wearing a fox tail and a hat. How do you relate to him? You talk to him and ask about his parents. What’s your name? Where do you come from? Why did you pick a fox as opposed to a cat? You can ask good questions and probe and say, “What’s in it for you?” It’s not all that different unless you’re at the University of California, Irvine; you’re the anteaters. Or if you’re UC Santa Cruz, you’re the banana slugs. My guess is that they picked these mascots because they wanted to be weird or kinky. Nobody is terrorized by a banana slug! We laugh, but most of our sports teams take on mascots. Why? They want the spirit of the animal. Nobody wants to be an aardvark, because who’s afraid of the aardvark, or the armadillo? Pitt Panthers, Penn State Nittany Lions, sure! We have this tendency as humans that we want some of these other qualities to make up for us where we think we lack. So when you think of these issues, it’s not all that confusing. And so we need to speak this truth into the culture and say, “You’re much more special than a fox.”

I experienced some of it at an abortion clinic in Chula Vista. A young guy was really mad at me. He asked why I was there. I said, “Because you are made in the image of God, and you’re important. The same is true for your baby; that’s a human being. Anyways I believe that you’re important. If you abort the baby, that’s a human being made in the image of God. To do that is

³ For a summary of the basics of biblical counseling on sexuality and related issues, see George C. Scipione, “The Biblical Ethics of Transsexual Operations,” *Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine* 4, no. 2:13-22.

to incur guilt.” He retorted, “I do not believe that.” My response: “Well, whether you believe that or not, that’s the reality; and you are more important than you think you are. You’re not an animal. If someone was going to kill you, it would be my job to defend you. The same thing for this or any other unborn baby. You are more significant than you possibly could imagine. When you think about it, you’re cool, aren’t you? You’re not even an angel.” He calmed down but walked away.

As an aside, some people say angels are better and stronger than us. True, but so are elephants! Angels are not the image bearers of God, and Jesus didn’t die for angels! Years ago, I was in Uganda and a Pentecostal pastor asked me why can’t Satan be saved. I was surprised by the question! I responded it is because He didn’t die for Angels. Hebrews 2:16 says he died for the seed of Abraham. To the pastor or the young father who is dealing with children struggling with this issue, tell your young people: “You’re way more important than an angel, and you’re way more important than a fox or anything. You have more dignity than you possibly could possibly imagine. So why do you want to be an aardvark or a fox when you can be an image bearer of the God who created the whole universe and sent Jesus to die for such sinners as you so you can become an adopted son?”

Conclusion

So these are the kinds of themes we can work with people and challenge them in their confusion. The gospel works here. Repentance and faith are the doors into the person and work of Jesus through which the transsexual or the transgender or the trans-species person needs to enter the kingdom. So in a real sense, the transgender and the trans-species person is no different from you or me or any “regular” sinner. You have to give up your old identity, bound as it is to the first Adam, and gain a new identity in Jesus Christ, the second and final Adam.

Obviously, you need real wisdom to apply this to real people in counseling and evangelism. And of course remember to fulfill 2 Timothy 2:25, “the man of God must be gentle, able to exhort those who contradict, so perhaps God may give the gift of repentance unto life.” Remember, you too were dead in your sins and confused. But God had mercy on you in Christ our Lord. I do not know who you thought you were, but now you are in your right mind and you are an adopted child of God. This good news is what you needed. This same gospel is what every gender confused person also needs. Amen!

Wylie & His ‘Two Sons’: The Politico-Theological Contexts of the Preacher and his Sermon

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The window seemed to change in an instant. One moment the night had extinguished every gleam of light except for passing headlights, which careened down a slender highway and eventually faded from memory; the next, and without warning, a world ablaze with the hues of a brilliant autumn morning filled the room where I lay following the accident. Washed in these colors, the gothic spire of La Roche College rose above the landscape like some celestial fixture, alone in magnitude and glory. Across the road, and catching whatever rays it was allowed by the spire, was the bronze dome of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church. I was in Passavant Hospital, named after its founder, Rev. William A. Passavant—a Lutheran. At first, these sights were a welcome respite from the cold fluorescent world of the hospital, but as the scene was reenacted morning after morning, a thought continued to dog and alter my perspective.

From a single window, I could see the supposed glory of the “American experiment.” In these peaceful mornings, I saw that a college which disseminated Roman heresy could continue beside a bastion of Eastern sacrilege—across the road from a Lutheran institution—and all with the protection of the civil magistrate. It struck me that I was living in the triumph of revolutionary ideals that were secured in the early American Republic, but more powerful was the thought that this victory was secured against the hopes of my forebears in the faith. This was not the America which Covenanters had preached, prayed, and fought to secure. But as I reclined in my bed, (with La Roche’s cross in my periphery), I realized that however much I knew of their argument, I knew very little of the context of early American Covenanters. I knew this kind of life — one where religious toleration and ecclesiastical disestablishmentarianism are first principles — and could hardly imagine a world wherein the Covenanter project for America was even tenable, let alone acceptable to many.

Samuel Brown Wylie knew a different world. In 1802, the “first principles” of today were still the abstract dreams of radical republicans, and the uncertainties of their ideal society were felt in every congressional meeting. His was a new world, but how “new” it was had yet to be defined. In this nebulous context, Wylie’s *Two Sons of Oil* offered a clear position — a way forward (or backward) — which, if heeded, promised to turn the infantile United States into a Reformed Republic. However, Wylie’s sermon was not without precedent. The biography of the preacher tells a story, in which a transatlantic journey could not separate him from the context of Covenanter persecution, national rebellion, and fledgling Reformed presbyteries. His was a life in which the *Two Sons of Oil* could easily find a place of influence.

“This is the best presentation of the position of the Covenanter Church that has been written, from which the author departed in 1833,” Glasgow averred — over eighty years after its initial

publication.¹ While it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the content of the *Two Sons*, a question of context is asked. Was Wylie's sermon unprecedented? This paper argues that the Irish and American contexts in 1802 were very much the same, politically, philosophically, and ecclesiastically; naturally giving rise to a sermon such as Wylie's. An examination of Wylie's Ireland, the America of his exile, and the location in which this sermon was preached are conducted below, in order to demonstrate strong continuities on both sides of the Atlantic.

I. Ireland, 1797

The homecoming of Samuel Brown Wylie (1773-1852) was imbued with excitement, such that Irish tremors were registered in London. However, neither the excitement nor the trembling were on account of his return. These were the tense harbingers of conflict, fast approaching. Wylie crossed the Irish Sea in 1797, just in time to watch his fellow Irishmen sprint the warpath. Sprinting they were, and Wylie required six months to close the distance between himself and revolution. Until now, he had been detained in Glasgow, with seven other sons of Ulster,² to complete his undergraduate course; he was returning to see his homeland "in a state of real, though smothered, rebellion."³ With his new credentials, Wylie returned to Antrim on the eve of insurrection—in time to exchange books for bullets.

Though the Glasgow years were docile for Wylie, his homeland endured upheaval at every turn; and in large part, the issue could be expressed through tutelage. Wylie had matriculated under Archibald Arthur, the immediate successor to Thomas Reid,⁴ while Ireland was being trained by Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798), *the* United Irishman. These tutors (*i.e.* Arthur and Tone) were not identical, but neither were they without parallels. Reid had started his own revolution by championing the Scottish Enlightenment; Wolfe Tone instigated one by espousing the Enlightenment theories of the revolutions, American and French. When Wylie returned home, one major difference existed between their courses: martial law. Wolfe Tone had coaxed Ulster into a frenzy, and by 1796, Britain responded in kind with martial occupation.⁵ Britain too had undergone tutelage. The American Revolution taught Cornwallis and George III that insurrection was a serious threat — and that Britain could lose. Britain could not lose Ireland, however. The island must be subdued and, if need be, at the end of a bayonet. Thus, when Wylie crossed the Irish Sea, with his Glasgow diploma in hand, he encountered forces which had also undergone matriculation, and all three were eager and prepared to employ their newly-acquired skills.

When he left the gangplank, Wylie came ashore an island poised for war, but the pestiferous airs of insurrection were not uniquely Irish. In one sense, the decade lent itself to such exigencies. Beneath the substrate of absolute monarchies and martial law was avid and resilient angst, spanning oceans and continents. In 1797, the most notable by-products of this general unrest found expression in the American and French Revolutions. Riots in London, like the American and Parisian demonstrations of the previous decades, were inextricably and ideologically linked to the fervor Wylie encountered in his homeland. In all of these cases, a matured, "narrow

¹ W. Melancthon Glasgow, *History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America* (Baltimore: Hill & Harvey, 1888), 742.

² David A. Wilson & Mark G. Spencer, eds. *Ulster Presbyterians in the Atlantic World* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2016), 59.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵ "Insurrection Act." n.p. [cited 1 October 2018]. Online: http://www.qub.ac.uk/ild/?func=display_bill&id=2515

republicanism”⁶ had been imbibed and costly embargos on this strong spirit failed to suppress its spread. America, England, France, and now Ireland had strong anti-monarchical, anti-aristocratic republicans who quoted Paine and Rousseau while wearing French blues.⁷ Such were signs of the times. Wylie’s republican contemporaries were thoroughly anti-Hobbesian, as they grounded their dream for an autonomous Irish republic upon the quest for civil liberty.⁸ Their utopian state would be classical in its foundation (after Machiavellian readings), but with important footnotes to Thomas Jefferson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Paine, and Samuel Pufendorf.⁹ Thus, a single dream threaded the Sons of Liberty, the French Jacobins, and the United Irishmen. Not only were their ideals linked, but a reciprocal enthusiasm ensured growing momentum. The success of his revolutionary peers overjoyed Tone; the golden age of republicanism was dawning. “This present great era of reform, when unjust governments are falling in every quarter of Europe,” promised an incoming of the Irish Republic and the demise of English repression.¹⁰ Thus, the United Irish dream was born and matured by an international force which promised civil liberty to men and regarded the king as a dangerous relic of primitive despotism. Even Antrim, Wylie’s hometown, found this intercontinental dream in the breasts of her sons, and so ensured that Wylie would meet this spirit of the revolutionary decade.

The dream of the United Irishmen permeated every sphere of life: political, economic, and ecclesiastical. By the time of Wylie’s return, their dream for this latter sphere had become a rallying cry. Tone fought “to unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishmen in place of the denominations of Catholic, Protestant, and Dissenter.”¹¹ Tone’s Society was intentionally ambiguous in its religious subscription, and this paid dividends to the cause; Papists and Protestants filled his ranks to excess. This ecclesiastical platform separated the movement from its predecessors, which flew either Catholic or Protestant banners, and so promised more participants and a surer victory. Secularism, however, had very little to do with this “forward thinking” on Tone’s part. The movement had been characteristically Protestant until Presbyterians espoused the cause of “Catholic emancipation.”¹² The change was narrated by Tone himself: the “Catholic Question” was raised in a secret committee in which Catholic leaders presented their political agendas.

⁶ The terminology is debated, though Alan Ryan succinctly generalizes in a noncontroversial way when he writes: “narrow republican theories—theories that repudiate monarchy because civic liberty is incompatible with monarchy—[stands distinct from] broadly republican theories that accept monarchy as a constitutional possibility.” Alan Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present* (New York: Liveright, 2012) 2:498.

⁷ A. T. Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: The Hidden Origins of the United Irishmen* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1993), 150.

⁸ Ryan, *On Politics*, 2:499.

⁹ Stewart, *Deeper Silence*, 98, 143.

¹⁰ Tone, quoted in S. J. Connolly, *Divided Kingdom: Ireland 1630–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 439.

¹¹ Tone, quoted in *Ibid.*, 494.

¹² Stewart, *Deeper Silence*, 154. “*Catholic Emancipation* I conceive to be, a dispensation of those who profess the Roman Catholic Religion, from the necessity of taking the oaths of Supremacy and Abjuration, and making and subscribing the declaration annexed to them; and an exclusive privilege to men of that communion to sit and vote in the two houses of Parliament, and to fill the highest offices in the empire, without taking those test oaths of their allegiance to the constitution in church and state, which our ancestors thought necessary for the security of both; which test oaths every Protestant in England and Ireland, is now obliged to swear before he can become a senator, or fill any of the higher employments under the government.” Anonymous, *Catholic Emancipation* (London: John Stockdale, 1805), 7.

After deliberation, the United Irishmen unanimously adopted the cause of full religious toleration—all voting members were Ulster Presbyterians.¹³ For the main body of northern Presbyterians, this ecumenism was an addendum to the “New Light” controversies earlier in the century. In the ‘10s and early ‘20s, the confessional wars raged until the victory of the liberal ministers was determined by the vote of Synod. This *mêlée* was a debate over the then-required full subscription to the Westminster formularies, and in 1720, the “New Lights” (a number of them suspected Arians) took the field.¹⁴ Heresy and political insurrection were not entirely heterogeneous, and the Presbyterian support for Tone’s “bridge” over denominational fissures is a case in point. The republicanism then-in-vogue held that aristocracy and the church’s civil charter (regardless of its denomination) were creatures of monarchy, and thus, principally opposite to civic liberty. The Westminster standards represented the theology of a church under the tyranny of a non-republican parliament, and its binding force testified to a primitive infraction on the rights of individual conscience.¹⁵ In this context, it seemed that “Presbyterians” were free to choose between dusty Trinitarian orthodoxy and the Arian revival of late. If Presbyterians could choose such articles of faith, who were they to demand that an Irishman be either Protestant or Catholic?

When Wylie ventured north and returned to his native Antrim, the Presbyterian involvement in the United Irishmen was reaching a climax. The “New Lights” had been early supporters of the cause, and their politico-ecclesiastical leftism demanded as much; however, in ‘97 they were joined by a host of other more conservative Presbyterian bodies. Tone was now drawing upon members from the “dissenting” Presbyterians — Seceders (Burgher and Anti-Burgher), and Reformed Presbyterians. Despite the avowed ecumenism of the movement and its opposition to the attainments of the Covenanted Reformation, these bodies yielded droves of participants to the insurrection. Joining the secret society, Seceders and Covenanters incorporated themselves into an effort which their shepherds repudiated. Seceder ministers had, by this time, resolved that the Confession of Faith bound the churches to broad religious toleration and also resolved that all insurrectionary acts were antithetical to Christianity.¹⁶ Their parishioners were keen on the first conclusion but choked vociferously on the latter. In one sense, the first conviction prepared Seceder laity to embrace Tone’s ecumenism, despite the forceful cries of their ministers; and the “narrow republicanism” which was so popular, to fully identify as United

¹³ Stewart, *Deeper Silence*, 154. To the exclusion of Tone, who was raised an Irish Episcopal. See *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁴ Ian McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 44; Stewart, *Deeper Silence*, 77. “There are many sects—Old Light, New Light, Seceders, etc. The former are the old Scotch Presbyterians, who agree with the Church of England in articles of faith, but oppose [i.e. English] church discipline. The second deny the divinity of Christ, and the last I know nothing about.” Duke of Rutland, quoted in *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁵ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 49. For a case study in this rabid a-confessionalism, the Belfast Presbyterians are illustrative. “When a voluntary declaration concerning the eternal deity of the Son of God was proposed, the Belfast Society refused; although they did not contest the doctrine, they objected to the circumstances [i.e. man-made creed], which they fancifully compared with the Spanish Inquisition.” *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶ In 1796 the General Associate Synod (of Burgher Seceders) gave “permission to all their members to make exception to every thing [*sic*] in the Confession, which, taken by itself, seemed to allow the punishment of good and peaceable subjects on account of their religious opinions and observances.” John M’Kerrow, *History of the Secession Church* (Glasgow: A Fullarton & Co., 1841), 474. By 1804 the Burgher Synod maintained that “a liberty of worshipping God in the way which they judge agreeable to his will, is a right common to all men. They may and often do err, and offend the most High God, by substituting a false worship in the place of that which he requires: but no power on earth may take their right from them.” General Associate Synod, *Narrative & Testimony, Agreed Upon by the General Associate Synod* (Edinburgh: A. Neill & Co., 1804), 195. The magistrate’s dereliction “can never warrant a minority to refuse subjection to any whom the general body set up, in all their lawful commands.” *Ibid.*, 197.

Irishmen. Reformed Presbyterians were more unified — pastors and flock — in support of the cause. Showing themselves averse to the practice of Seceder ministers, Rev. William Gibson (1753-1838)¹⁷ preached at United Irish rallies, as did Rev. James McKinney (1759-1802).¹⁸ More than both, however, was the support of Rev. William Stavelly (1743-1825)—Ireland’s “Cameronian Apostle” and leading United Irishman.¹⁹ In 1801, Stavelly confessed,

That after various solicitations, he had been prevailed upon to take a solemn declaration to co-operate with virtuous Irishmen of every description [*i.e.* denomination] to obtain a redress of grievances; that he had administered said declaration to several persons; that he had sat in a private meeting with said persons, and had along with them contributed a little money, but for what purpose applied he knew not; that he also sat in a Baronial Committee in virtue of having taken foresaid declaration; and that he had in an unthinking manner spoken something of lifting up arms from Loyalists.²⁰

Across the Irish Sea, and suspicious that their brethren were inclined to Tone’s secret society, the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland published their *Seasonable & Necessary Information*. It was sent to Belfast’s *Northern Star* — a bi-weekly publication, established by Presbyterian United Irishmen — and in it, the Scottish Covenanters summoned Irish Reformed Presbyterians to remain aloof from the society, for all of the obvious reasons.²¹ This less-than-subtle warning to those Reformed Presbyterians already subscribed to Tone’s northern journal went largely ignored. The Reformed Presbytery of Ireland had committed to the United Irish cause, for better or worse.

Though he was only home for six months, Wylie’s taste of martial law’s cruelty would leave an indelible impression upon his memory. The United Irish cause, and even the involvement of Reformed Presbyterians in the insurrection, would allude his pen when the atrocities of marital occupation could not. The spring of 1796 introduced Ulster to English tactics in mass suppression, and when Wylie returned the following year, those methods had evolved into frenzied chaos. The ascendancy of the United Irishmen goaded British officers into desperation, which was expressed through new and harsher legislation. In 1796 it was a capital crime to administer any oath, without government sanction. Months later, an act of indemnity granted legal immunity to all extra-court proceedings (including executions) against suspected rebels. And finally, immediately prior to Wyle’s return, *habeas corpus* was suspended, which allowed

¹⁷ Durey, Michael. *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 1997), 143

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁹ “Towards the end of the year 1792, the first Reformed Presbytery was constituted in Ireland. Of this denomination the Rev. William Stavelly was the great Irish apostle.” James Seaton Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (London: Whittaker & Co., 1853), 3:405.

²⁰ Matthew Hutchison, *The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland: Its Origin and History, 1680–1876* (Paisley: J. and R. Parlane, 1893), 236. Hutchison adds, “The meaning of this is not hard to understand. Mr. Stavelly and others of his brethren, with many of their office-bearers and people, had associated themselves with secret societies, with the object of resisting the measures of the Government, even to the extent of taking up arms.” *Ibid.*

²¹ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 102. “The twelve proprietors were opulent Presbyterian merchants in the town, who founded the Journal for the purpose of disseminating the aims of the newly formed Society of United Irishmen, and advocating the revolutionary views that had been so successful in France.” Francis Joseph Bigger, “The Northern Star” in *The Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 1:1 (1894): 33.

for the soldiery to indefinitely detain rebels, based exclusively upon suspicion.²² After his homecoming, these tactics only grew more intolerable. The military occupation became a “licentious” reign of terror, even according to their commanders.²³ Particularly painful for Wylie was the fact that the British strong-arm was especially devastating to Reformed Presbyterians. Rev. James McKinney fled to America when he was warranted for seditious preaching, and by February 1798, half of the presbytery’s ministers would be exiled or imprisoned, with at least one lay-member publicly executed for treason.²⁴ In old age, Wylie himself would describe the condition of his brethren.

Reformed Presbyterians were under the necessity of selecting one of these three consequences, some one of which must unavoidably result from their existing position. *First*, sin, by polluting their consciences in swearing an immoral oath of allegiance to a tyrannical government. *Second*, suffer, by being perhaps shot—on the instant—on the spot—or hanged without trial, at the discretion of a ruffian soldiery; or if trial was allowed, it was a mere mockery, under martial law, and in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, resulted in condemnation. *Third*, to flee and exile themselves from the sepulchers of their fathers.²⁵

This was the excitement, and these were the tremors which welcomed Wylie home. With other Reformed Presbyterians, these exigencies would incite him to choose the third option — voluntary exile. Like thousands of Irishmen, Rev. William Gibson and his family, with John Black (1768-1849), Thomas McAdam, John Reilly (1780-1820), and Samuel B. Wylie, left their homeland instead of facing arrest for supposed involvement with the United Irish cause.²⁶ That October 1797, Wylie left his pupils in Antrim which, in six months’ time, would become a battlefield.²⁷ On battlefields and streets, the uprising of 1798 would claim the lives of many, but before and after the conflict, it continued to alter even more. This reality can be observed in the fact that Wylie and his fellow exiles would never return to live in their homeland, and that each man would become notable in the place of their exile, and because of it. These men would gain notoriety as founding members of a new Reformed Presbytery in the place of their banishment. Thus, as one historian observed, “Among the more unusual by-products of the revolutionary crisis in Ireland we must, therefore, include the Reformed Presbyterian Church of the United States.”²⁸

II. Reformed Presbytery, 1798

On October 18, 1797, Wylie and his émigré cohorts arrived in Delaware, barely escaping Ireland before the rebellion, and arriving in the United States in time to weather a smallpox epidemic. Fleeing the pestilence in Delaware, Black and Wylie secured livings as tutors in Philadelphia, but this failed to disguise their alien status. They were in a new Republic and its topography — geographical, social, and religious — offered confusion at every turn. “They enquired for the city

²² Connolly, *Divided Kingdom*, 472.

²³ See *Ibid.*, 476.

²⁴ Samuel Ferguson, *Brief Biographical Sketches of Some Irish Covenanting Ministers* (Londonderry: James Montgomery, 1897), 55-56.

²⁵ Samuel B. Wylie. *Memoir of Alexander McLeod* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1855), 30.

²⁶ Durey, *Transplanted*, 144. cf. Wm. Melancthon Glasgow, *History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America* (Baltimore: Hill & Harvey, 1888), 440; 522; 653; 741.

²⁷ W. H. Maxwell, *History of the Irish Rebellion in 1798* (London: Baily Brothers, 1845), 204-219.

²⁸ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 78.

of Philadelphia, which was not yet in view, and were told that it lay half a mile distant toward the Delaware River.”²⁹ This incident was a practical reminder of their foreignness in a strange land. Their obscurity afforded them little peace, however. Though the carnage of the 1798 insurrection was an ocean away, these refugees could not escape public association with the rebels. Philadelphia’s *Gazette of the United States* received a list of purported members of the “American Society of United Irishmen,” and among those published December 18, 1798, Black and Wylie were listed.³⁰ The following week Wylie’s repudiation was published by the *Gazette*.³¹ It seems that whatever comforts they left behind were not restored by the Republic, while those troubles which they fled were able to span the Atlantic.

The humble arrival of these refugees would give rise to a seminal moment in Reformed Presbyterian history. With the arrival of his brother-in-law, Gibson, Rev. James McKinney saw the opportunity to ameliorate the “inadequate” condition of the American Covenanters.³² Those Reformed Presbyterians who stood aloof from the Associate Reformed Synod³³ sacrificed the presbyterian structure they once enjoyed and reverted to a society-based subsistence.³⁴ In this state of confusion, McKinney’s arrival in 1793 was a welcome relief to Rev. William King (1747-1798) who was, at that time, the only RP minister in America—forming a commission of the Scottish Reformed Presbytery.³⁵ However, McKinney saw the limitations inherent in this arrangement, and the arrival of Gibson afforded the opportunity to change. The two men, with ruling elders from the now-defunct Reformed Presbytery of 1774, constituted themselves the Reformed Presbytery of America, May 1798 — an independent judicatory.³⁶ Among the first actions taken by this fledgling body was the approval of Alexander McLeod (1774-1833), Thomas Donnelly (1772-1847), Black, and Wylie as students of theology.³⁷ In two years’ time, all four of these men would be ordained as Gospel ministers — with Wylie being the first RP minister ordained on American soil, June 25, 1800.³⁸

By 1800, Ireland’s Presbyterian multiverse had been largely recapitulated in the Republic, and the new Reformed Presbytery ensured an accurate duplication. From 1782 Irish Covenanters were the only immigrants who were unable to transfer membership from the Old World into a

²⁹ Thomas P. Stevenson, “Fifty Years of Covenanter History” Vol. XI. No. 1. of *Our Banner*. (Philadelphia: Christian Statesmen, 1884), 9.

³⁰ Durey, *Transatlantic*, 250.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Wylie, *Memoir of McLeod*, 31.

³³ This revolutionary Synod formed a confederation of “dissenting” Presbyterians (Covenanters and Burgher Seceders), and all of the Covenanter ministers in good standing joined the Associate Reformed Synod (AR), November 1, 1782. RPs in the South, and several northern societies refused the union, and were without a regular presbytery, and enjoyed only a scattered ministry until the reconstitution of the Reformed Presbytery in 1798. The narrative is given in Glasgow, *History*, 73-77.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 77. Carson asserts that the deed of constitution was ratified February 21, 1798, (cf. Carson, *Transplanted*, 19) however Wylie (*Memoir of McLeod*, 31) and the Minutes of Presbytery concur with Glasgow’s date.

³⁷ Reformed Presbytery in America, *Minutes of the Reformed Presbytery in America: From 1798 to 1809*. (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Rogers, 1888), 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

presbytery in the New. Seceders (Antiburgher) had established an independent court in response to the Associate Reformed Synod and welcomed their Irish brethren with a seamless theological transition. Other Seceders (Burgher) found the Associate Reformed Church comfortable enough, and “mainline” Irish Presbyterians were contented with the General Assembly.³⁹ Thus, until 1798, Reformed Presbyterians were without official representation in the Republic. Outside of Reformed Presbyterian circles, few mourned this fact. When the Reformed Presbytery was resurrected from its long slumber, it challenged the status quo of “dissenters” in America and offered an unbending conservatism to beleaguered émigré Presbyterians. This new addition only proved that with the recapitulation of ecclesiastical bodies came the continuation of old disputes. The Associate Reformed Synod had been formed in an attempt to keep Old World debates on the other side of the Atlantic,⁴⁰ and the mainline Presbyterians ignored those fissures for the same reasons, but emigration continued to remind Americans that theological principles transcended oceanic barriers. Consistently, newer “dissenting” immigrants demurred the mainline Presbyterians and preferred either the Associate Reformed, Seceders or the new Reformed Presbytery.⁴¹ Because of this trend, America witnessed polemical firestorms akin to those in Ireland and Scotland — completing the replication of Old World Presbyterianism.

Regardless of the apparent similarities in the Presbyterian tapestry, emigrants did not always enjoy the smoothest of transfers. Thomas Ledlie Birch (†1808), for example, was a prestigious Presbyterian minister in Ireland but was exiled for his involvement in the 1798 uprising.⁴² His fame, however, left him at the docks. When Birch applied for admission to the (mainline) Ohio Presbytery, they refused him entry — though he possessed a letter of transfer from his home presbytery.⁴³ When he appealed his case to General Assembly, the highest court reaffirmed Presbytery’s ruling.⁴⁴ Personal dimensions were unquestionably at play, but subterranean fissures were also disturbing the situation. Birch himself saw this ill-treatment as the bitter fruit of a “new light” (i.e. American) pietism, which placed experiential piety over theological precision. The title of his opening salvo — *Seemingly Experimental Religion* — summarized his reflections. Almost in confirmation of Birch’s charge, the General Assembly officially severed all fraternal relations with their British brethren; in 1801, the Ohio Presbytery declared that a minister who hoped to transfer from those churches “could expect no more recognition ‘than if he had come from the Church of Rome.’”⁴⁵ To his exasperation, Birch discovered that his problems were not confined to the mainline Presbyterians. American Seceders (Antiburgher)

³⁹ Cf. Peter Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians and the Shaping of Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2018) 25-26.

⁴⁰ Cf. William Findley, *Observations on ‘The Two Sons of Oil’* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2007), 215-216.

⁴¹ Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians*, 26.

⁴² Peter Gilmore, *Exiles of ’98: Ulster Presbyterians and the United States* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2018), _.

⁴³ Thomas Ledlie Birch, *Seemingly Experimental Religion, Instructors Unexperienced—Converters Unconverted—Revivals Killing Religion—Missionaries in Need of Teaching; Or, War Against the Gospel by its Friends* (Washington, PA: Published for the Author, 1806), 31.

⁴⁴ Presbyterian Church in the United States, *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, from its Organisation A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820 Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1847), 218.

⁴⁵ Minutes of the Ohio Presbytery, quoted in Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians*, 82.

also refused Birch his desired transfer.⁴⁶ The American market for one of Ireland's popular ministers was poor, no matter which variant of Presbyterianism he chose. This causes of this phenomena appear to be legion, but the most palpable was the ascendancy of nascent progressivism. By 1801, the mainline Presbyterians abandoned the thornier statements in the Westminster Confession, as they related to the civil magistrate,⁴⁷ had sanctioned Isaac Watts' *Paraphrases* and other uninspired compositions for worship,⁴⁸ and her ministers were publically permitting all manner of irregularities (i.e. women preaching, occasional hearing, open communion, etc.) in the flurry of the "Second Great Awakening."⁴⁹ The Associate Synod (AR) had also amended the Confession's statements on civil magistracy by 1799,⁵⁰ and offered offense to conservative Seceders and Covenanters for capitulations in favor of, and against the stated principles of both traditions. To sensitive consciences, the *tertium quid* which the Associate Reformed offered smacked of latitudinarianism.⁵¹ If he was unwilling to settle in a small presbytery, the refugee Covenanter or Seceder was forced to choose which convictions he cherished most, and which he could dispense with, and that determined the communion to which he attached himself. Such a man learned that Irish norms, and the comfort afforded thereby, were not to be found even amongst the majority of "Presbyterians."

The spectrum of Presbyterians which Covenanters faced in the Republic was not monolithic, even if there was a general trajectory away from Old World convictions. And though divisions between them were often theological, they were not exclusively so. American politics divided Presbyterians, just as British policy had incited debates between them in Ireland and Scotland. Mainline Presbyterians were largely Federalists and supported the party through voting, preaching, and fundraising.⁵² However, "dissenting" Presbyterians tended to be "Jeffersonians."⁵³ The entailment of such a division was not always abstract, and disagreements could come to blows. Pittsburgh, of all places, would become the battlefield between politically-divided American Presbyterians in its famous, but ill-named tumult: the "Whiskey Rebellion."

Despite the name it acquired in later years, this angst had not been generated by disgruntled and bawdy alcoholics, who became miffed at an increase in their liquor prices. Historians have compellingly argued that this conflict was the distillation of a contradiction between republican theories: Federalist and Anti-Federalist.⁵⁴ Prior to the events of 1794, these warring American

⁴⁶ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁷ May 16, 1788. General Assembly, PCUSA, *Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, from A.D. 1789, to A.D. 1802.: Inclusive, with a copious index.* (Philadelphia: Jane Aitken, 1803), 4. Cf. *Westminster Confession* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017), 169.

⁴⁸ May 28, 1802. *Minutes*, 249.

⁴⁹ Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians*, 86.

⁵⁰ Associate Reformed Church in America, *The Constitution and Standards of the Associate-Reformed Church in America* (Salem, NY: T. & J. Swords, 1799), 8.

⁵¹ Glasgow, *History*, 74.

⁵² Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians*, 67.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Cf. Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4.

parties competed through elections, papers, journals, and even brawls on the floor of Congress.⁵⁵ The Federalist platform demanded that a strong central government was required if the United States was to survive and compete with the robust monarchies of Europe. As a result, Federalists flirted with an “elective monarchy” and anticipated the evolution of a class system in America, akin to Britain’s.⁵⁶ Their penchant for monarchical and aristocratic forms led them to see Washington’s inauguration as a “coronation” and gave rise to the regal ceremonies for the first “President,” eerily similar to those of George III. Meanwhile, Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and many others demurred the need for a standing Congress, and more so, the kingly and aristocratic accoutrements which characterized Washington’s administration.⁵⁷ These Anti-Federalists saw the federal government as an exigency of foreign policy, not of internal administration. With sympathies to the new Constitution, these still voiced preference to the Article of Confederation and desired to see the United States modeled after the Swiss cantons, and not Poland’s elective monarchy.⁵⁸ The subject of national debt forced the issue, and also measured the radical chasm which divided American republicans. Alexander Hamilton — a leading Federalist—had been tasked to oversee the repayment of debts, which had been the “price of liberty.”⁵⁹ These Revolutionary War claims, and their need to be settled, required the kind of centralized government which the Federalists envisioned; how could a confederation of independent states pay off a shared debt? Hamilton’s plan would, in kind, reflect the blessings and strength of the federal system. Taxation was the key to reducing domestic deficits, and liquor was Hamilton’s subject of choice. Imported beverages were taxed up to 35 cents on the gallon, but the new legislation was also concerned with homebrew.⁶⁰ Hamilton proposed, and Congress passed, a tax on all whiskey, manufactured for private or commercial use. Practically, however, the tax lent itself to a violation, as it was impossible to measure the private consumption of homemade spirits. Hamilton resolved this impracticality with a simple addition: he levied a further tax on anyone who possessed a still.⁶¹ Demanding and collecting this excise would serve economic and political ends: the United States would relieve her floundering economy and demonstrate the resolve and muscle of the new government to her citizens. In short, its success would be a decisive score against republicans, in favor of the Federalist administration — and these stakes generally appreciated. “The fate of the excise law will determine whether the powers of the government of the United States are held by an aristocratic junta or by the body of the people,” wrote one contemporary journalist.⁶²

The tax was more than a proto-temperance law, however. By 1791, whiskey had evolved into a versatile commodity on the frontier. “It was used to celebrate weddings, and bring solace to mourners, but it was also used to pay off debts, the minister’s salary, and the farmer’s rent.”⁶³ Two factors had turned whiskey into backwoods currency: the farmer’s grain could not be

⁵⁵ Cf. Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 95-139.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Carol Berkin, *A Sovereign People: The Crisis of the 1790s and the Birth of American Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² 26 September, 1792 *National Gazette* in Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, 130.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 21.

transported for city commerce and, in remote places, cash money was held by the elites.⁶⁴ This tax was an attempt by the new government to radically change the economic norms of the frontier community, and also invited tax collectors into homes and barns as federal spies, to extract dues or levy fines. Thus, for the pioneering farmer, Hamilton's invasive legislation smacked of the tyranny they overthrew in the previous decade. Unsurprisingly, few frontier magistrates heeded the new legislation — to the exclusion of General John Neville, who made sure that Pittsburgh would pay up.⁶⁵ When collectors demanded the excise, Western Pennsylvania replied with talks of secession and a progression of violence proved their seriousness.⁶⁶ In September, a tax collector had been tarred and feathered, followed by at least two other similar instances in 1792; by 1793, farmers who paid the excise became targets for violence.⁶⁷ The insurrection evolved from barn burnings to skirmishes in 1794. After an exchange of fire, Neville had his house burned and his federal bodyguard captured.⁶⁸ The insolence had reached its zenith, and Washington was no longer willing to negotiate without military support.⁶⁹ These tensions were reported to the governor of Pennsylvania: "I am sorry to inform your Excellency that a civil war has taken place in this country."⁷⁰

Famously, when Washington dispatched General Henry Lee and his 13,000 troops into western Pennsylvania, the rebellion disintegrated. Peace negotiations were a bygone nicety. The western counties now watched as "dragoons galloped across the countryside" in search of rebels, and this sight drained support for the cause.⁷¹ Forced into subjection, the rebels now faced the bitter consequences of their failed insurrection. Arrests were commonplace, loyalty oaths were imposed, the hated excise was enforced, and new legislation prohibited unsanctioned "democratic societies."⁷² Federalists did not emerge unscathed, however. Jefferson publically feigned disbelief at Washington's hubris: "It is wonderful that the President should have permitted himself to be the organ of such an attack on the freedom of discussion, the freedom of writing, printing, and publishing." The "Jeffersonian Revolution" of 1800 would occur, in part, because of the fear generated by Washington's response: should the Federal government be able to send dragoons against its citizens? During Jefferson's first term, "the whiskey excise and all other internal taxes" were repealed.⁷³

Politically charged as it was, the rebellion carried an ethnic dimension as well. Pittsburgh was on its way to becoming the "Belfast of America" by 1794, with over one-third of its population freshly drawn from Ireland.⁷⁴ An Irish accent threaded the war meetings of the insurrection, and

⁶⁴ Joseph S. Moore, *Founding Sins: How a Group of Antislavery Radicals Fought to Put Christ in the Constitution* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 58.

⁶⁵ Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, 67.

⁶⁶ William Findley, *History of the Insurrection in the Four Western Counties of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Samuel Harrison Smith, 1796), 59.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, 193.

⁷⁰ Major General John Gibson, as quoted in Berkin, *A Sovereign People*, 47.

⁷¹ Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, 205.

⁷² Berkin, *A Sovereign People*, 77.

⁷³ Slaughter, *Whiskey Rebellion*, 226.

⁷⁴ Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians*, 8.

its first-hand historian was notorious for his homely expressions — reminiscent of the old country.⁷⁵ Irish rebels tended to settle in the remotest parts of the Republic, and Pittsburgh offered a kind of political independence “that seemed impossible in landlord-dominated Ireland.”⁷⁶ Thus, not only were there a great many Irishmen in the area, but a cohort of expatriated rebels made the Allegheny frontier their hoped-for bastion of republican liberty. As a result, like elsewhere in the Republic, Pittsburgh recapitulated the political and “ethno-religious culture” of Ireland.⁷⁷ At the time of the insurrection, Irish Republicanism and Presbyterianism were exports which found free commerce in the Pittsburgh region, and when the rebellion was underway, these politico-theological ties were inseparable. Even a decade prior to the insurrection, one Pittsburgh Seceder called his band of squatters the “Covenanters,” as they stood in opposition to Washington’s claim to land rights.⁷⁸ When their republicanism was challenged in ‘94, these “Covenanters” were on the frontlines. While mainline Presbyterians (mostly American-born Federalists) urged pacific measures, these Irish Associate Reformed and Seceders became leading figures in the struggle.⁷⁹

When McKinney visited the region in 1795, it would have been a cultural doppelgänger to the home he had left two years before.⁸⁰ The Associate Reformed and Seceders were still flying republican standards, still rehashing old debates, and continued a lower-class kind of existence.⁸¹ Instead of fearing the British hangman, these feared an American court as their fellow Presbyterians faced charges of treason.⁸² These experiences characterized the region. When McKinney arrived, “Associate [i.e. Seceder] and Associate Reformed congregations at times outnumbered mainstream Presbyterian congregations.”⁸³ Together with the imposition of loyalty oaths, threats of recrimination, theological debates, psalm-singing, and an Irish accent, this painted an accurate portrait of Ireland in the American frontier — with one major exception. There was no Reformed Presbytery in 1795. Pittsburgh Covenanters had lost their ministers to the Associate Reformed union and were without preaching, baptism, and communion seasons. Thus, these folks faced insurrection and its bitter consequences without a shepherd, and instead of defecting to a more comfortable situation with the Associate Reformed or Seceders, they adhered to principles. Their plight was like so many others, and McKinney’s peripatetic ministry could only temporarily ameliorate their condition. When he returned from the frontier, he and King emitted an *Act of the Reformed Presbytery in North America for a Public Fast with the Causes thereof*, as a committee of the Scottish Reformed Presbytery. In this fast, they besought the Lord, “that he would pity us in our low estate, think upon us, and assist us while we attempt

⁷⁵ William Findley was often in attendance at these meetings. His accent was a talking-point among fellow congressman, see *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁶ Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians*, 7.

⁷⁷ Gilmore’s study provides a thorough and unprecedented account of this fact. See Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians*.

⁷⁸ Moore, *Founding Sins*, 54.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁰ Glasgow, *History*, 308.

⁸¹ Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians*, 30.

⁸² Moore, *Founding Sins*, 54.

⁸³ Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians*, 26.

to set up his fallen Tabernacle in this western world.”⁸⁴ As we saw before, the reestablishment of the Reformed Presbytery was necessary for McKinney, and the condition of post-insurrection Pittsburgh must have argued as much for him. Thus, once it was constituted, the Presbytery would be required to travel the backwoods in order to minister to her Covenanter societies—and those in the western Alleghenies, not least of all.

III. Pittsburgh, 1802

One Thursday evening in Butler County, a farmer cut another furrow into the soil. He was behind his plow, as he had been the previous day, month, and year. The peaks of the Alleghenies were darkening, and the shadows in the field were long. These events and the purple hues of dusk promised dinner and much-needed rest. The farmer turned the plow once more, probably counting down to his final pass. However, a male voice stopped his work. In the western counties, travelers were seldom seen in the evening, unless they intended harm of some kind. The voice called again, and the farmer approached the road. Through the evening shadows, he could discern a friendly face; fears could be dismissed. The traveler repeated his question: “Ain’t you going to the sacrament?” An odd question for sure. There had never been a Covenanter communion season in these parts, and it was unlikely for one to be this evening. But the friend’s face argued sincerity. Incredulous, the farmer asked, “Where is it?” To this was replied, ‘in the Forks of the Yough.’ The plow was left standing in the furrow, the horses unhitched, and the two friends were soon on their way together.”⁸⁵

After the communion at the Forks, another was held at a farm eight miles south. Though invitations to the first had been disseminated as far as Butler, a second communion season seemed appropriate; after all, these Covenanters had never received the sacrament in these parts. Samuel Scott’s farm was offered for the occasion, with appealing upgrades. At the Forks, they had communed under the canopy of a tree, whereas Scott offered his barn as lodging for communicants.⁸⁶ His generosity was not without precedent, however. He was himself a Covenanter — by conviction and marriage; he was brother-in-law to James Renwick Willson.⁸⁷ Moreover, his experience in Pittsburgh was also typical of Covenanters in the Alleghenies. He refused the Associate Reformed union, weathered the insurrection, and was surviving the post-rebellion years; he knew intimately the dismal condition of Reformed Presbyterians in these parts.

The aftermath of the “excise insurrection” (as Willson called it)⁸⁸ inaugurated a host of difficulties for Scott and others. In the immediate wake of the rebellion, the threat of recrimination was real, and measures taken by the Federal government did not ameliorate fears. During the rebellion, a “test” had been drawn up which was to be signed by all residing in the

⁸⁴ Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, *Act of the Reformed Presbytery in North America for a Public Fast with the Causes thereof* (1795).

⁸⁵ Thomas Sproull, “Reformed Presbyterian Church in America: Historical Sketches, No. VIII” in *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* 9 (1875):322.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Samuel W. McGinness and Mary R. Ford, *McGinness and Scott Families and their Branches. Genealogical Notes.* (Pittsburgh: Murdoch, Kerk, and Co., 1892), 176.

⁸⁸ James Renwick Willson, “Political Danger: A Sermon Preached on January 6, 1825, on the Occasion of a Fast Observed by Several Churches in Newburgh, N.Y., and Its Vicinity” in *Political Danger* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2009), 152.

four western counties.⁸⁹ The final form of this oath was comprehensive in its claims to allegiance.

“I do solemnly promise henceforth to submit to the laws of the United States; and that I will not directly or indirectly oppose the execution of the act for raising a revenue on distilled spirits and stills, and that I will supports as far as the law requires the civil authority in affording the protection due to all officers and other citizens.”⁹⁰

The solemnization of this test and its unequivocal expressions of fidelity to the government of the United States was unpalatable for Covenanters and others. Despite several adjustments, a great majority refused to subscribe it.⁹¹ After the rebellion, General Henry Lee imposed a similar oath, which was to be given to whomever the local magistrates suspected of insurrectionist tendencies.⁹² In this final test, failure to sign the oath of loyalty promised to come at great personal cost, especially as it was well known that Seceders (i.e. James and Samuel McBride) and the Associate Reformed were among the thirty “impenitent rebels” who were to stand trial for high treason.⁹³ Scott and other Covenanters faced these tests knowing that they would either have to cross conscience or risk being numbered among those to be hanged as rebels.

Ecclesiastically, Covenanters were further ostracized as other communions took up the cause of the United States and preached against any who would declaim the Constitution. In the heat of the rebellion, local Associate Reformed ministers emitted a decree demanding that her members subscribe to the oaths.⁹⁴ The mainline Presbyterians—largely Federalists—were brooding over these treasonous days, even eight years after the fact. Rev. Elisha Macurdy preached his famous “War Sermon” which called hundreds of former rebels to repentance, and with some success.⁹⁵ The political position of Scott and other Reformed Presbyterians was clearly out of step with the consensus of Christians, and their lack of ministers could only remind them of this fact.

Thus, when Samuel Wylie and John Black arrived on the Scott farm in 1802, the three men could reminisce over very similar experiences; albeit, experiences which occurred on opposite sides of the Atlantic. The men from Ireland knew the perils of test oaths, recrimination, and insurrection as did Scott. Moreover, all three knew how their peculiar political theology separated them and made them liable to devastating abuse. Indeed, from Scott, the two ministers could have learned much about the condition of Covenanters in the rebellion, but most likely those stories would come from their mutual father-in-law, Andrew Watson.⁹⁶ Their

⁸⁹ Findley, *History*, 129.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁹² “Before the army left the country, the commander in chief [i.e. General Henry Lee] prescribed the form of an oath which he required the justices of the peace to administer to citizens, whom he commanded to appear indiscriminately before the magistrates for that purpose.” *Ibid.*, 322.

⁹³ Moore, *Founding Sins*, 59.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Gilmore, *Irish Presbyterians*, 75.

⁹⁶ September 1801, John Black married Elizabeth Watson, and Samuel Wylie officiated; the following April, Wylie married Margaret Watson (sister to Elizabeth), and in turn, Black officiated. Gilmore, *Exiles of '98*, 140.

wives' father was a business partner to Hugh Henry Brackenridge during the insurrection,⁹⁷ and due to Brackenridge's prominent role in 1794, Black and Wylie would likely know more than most about the actions that were taken by either side. Whatever unique vistas Watson could provide his sons-in-law, at least one conclusion could be distilled: whether in Pittsburgh in 1794 or Ireland in 1797, Covenanters endured pain and difficulties under rebellions which they did not incite, by governments which they could not own, and among Christians with whom they could not join in communion. Unsurprisingly, Black and Wylie deemed a second communion season appropriate, as they too knew the needs of such a haggard and harried people.

Hundreds of Covenanters gathered on the Scott farm as Black preached. Black "was rather below the middle stature: but his intellectual head, his penetrating and lively eye, and his rapid and even restless movement ... marked him out at once as a superior man."⁹⁸ "He was a distinct, plain, fluent speaker, always interesting and often eloquent and powerful."⁹⁹ His complexion was dark, aged, and riven with deep and reflective solemnity. When Black concluded his sermon and quit the pulpit, Wylie would have been a drastic change. His countenance was boyish, rounded; and his manner, unpolished. "Wylie was not an eloquent preacher in the sense in which that phrase is commonly understood. His voice, though strong, was wanting in flexibility, and his manner was perhaps somewhat modified by the necessity he was under of preaching extempore."¹⁰⁰ "He was a person of large frame, well-built, and stately — a man of presence, who could scarcely fail to arrest the eye of a stranger, in the street or elsewhere."¹⁰¹ Thus, the two young preachers were visibly opposites, but in any account of their preaching, their Irish brogue and piercing intellects made them alike. Notwithstanding these differences, and regardless of their shared accent, everyone on the farm would depart knowing that both men were true preachers and true Covenanter preachers at that.

With a sprawling congregation before him, filling Scott's barn and grounds to excess, Wylie announced his text; the sermon was to be taken from Zechariah 4:14. As the young preacher warmed to his subject, the suitability of his text and doctrine must have been palpable. "This chapter is replete with abundant comfort to the returning captives," Wylie said; "in their embarrassing circumstances, they stood in great need of consolation."¹⁰² The condition of Reformed Presbyterians in this part of the Republic certainly argued that they too needed some degree of consolation. "[They] doubted much, whether the temple they were about to erect would ever acquire the respectability of the former one."¹⁰³ Who knew if the new Reformed Presbytery would be lasting and faithful, as those they left in the old world? Wylie had an answer, both for Zechariah's returning exiles and the Covenanter exiles in the Alleghenies: "God would, by his own omnipotent arm, consummate the work, notwithstanding the imbecility of its friends, and the malignant opposition of its enemies."¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Cf. Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Andrew Watson Papers. Historic Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, Online. <https://historicpittsburgh.org/collection/hugh-henry-brackenridge-andrew-watson-papers>

⁹⁸ Sprague, *Annals*, 29.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Wylie, *Two Sons*, 2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Leaving their context, Wylie moves to an exposition of the words and informs us that “Anointed ones,” (רְהֻצִי־יָנֹג) may be read as “Sons of Oil”—making some account for the sermon’s enigmatic title. But who are these sons? If the golden candlestick (in 4:2-3, 12) indicates the church invisible, then Wylie says that the two sons may be Christ and the Spirit of God — Anointed Ones who pour grace like oil upon God’s elect. However, Wylie decides that the visible church is intended, and with good reason. In their immediate context, these words indubitably refer to Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest; “the former in the state and the latter in the church.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, Wylie concludes the two sons are “the two great ordinances of Magistracy and Ministry” as both are “contributing their respective influences to the advancement of civil and religious reformation.”¹⁰⁶ What follows is the young preacher’s theological appraisal of both institutions; how they differ, agree, are concerned in religious matters, are characterized and constituted. In print, the whole sermon is of modest size; nearly one hundred octavo pages in all. However, the substance was not sacrificed on the altar of brevity. In these leaves, one finds a thorough political theology which is distilled from first principles; rebuffed by, and proved after fifteen serious objections; applied to the current circumstances with seven directives; and five entailments are drawn for the individual Christian—for his information, examination, consolation, rebuke, and exhortation.

IV. The Preacher and History

While the foregoing has sought to prove that Wylie’s electric sermon was not unprecedented — as his contexts in Ireland and America were palpably similar — the history is not without application. Wylie’s biography evinces God’s providential rule over the lives of his preachers, and in this governance, the Lord calls each preacher to his sermon. The external circumstances and events which influenced Wylie’s life prepared him to make the “best statement of the position of the Covenanter Church.” For instance, when Wylie fled Ireland, the question of civil magistracy had gained a life-and-death component, and the perils of conscience which one might undergo as a result were articulated above by Wylie. For Covenanters in the Alleghenies, the conscience-ensnaring oaths imposed in the wake of the Whiskey Rebellion also turned the political question into a high-stakes controversy. What should the Covenanter do? Wylie’s answer was the *Two Sons*, and by his life he demonstrated its doctrine. He was an exiled preacher because of the principles espoused in this sermon, and thus, suffered for the cause which he maintained. Providence had made his life a testimony to the doctrine which he preached and had linked him to his congregation through these similar experiences — albeit, across oceans, under different governments, and through unique means.

In part, because of these shared experiences, Wylie was also able to be a spiritual diagnostician. While a politico-theological sermon might seem less than warm, its use in the Alleghenies could yield myriad applications — spiritual and otherwise. Wylie’s sermon could inform consciences regarding what was, or was not, in accord with the Word of God in relation to the United States, and so could pacify the unduly wounded, or awaken the severely hardened, conscience. Fidelity to the cause of Christ in this land would be defined, and thus, Wylie could call men to renewed obedience with direct application to their context in western Pennsylvania. However, these applications are not only pertinent to the pulpit — they reach hospital rooms as well.

From Passavant’s balcony, the valley looked like a postcard. Tufts of fog filled groves and the fall foliage jutted bright oranges and reds. And from my periphery, on my right and left, those two symbols of heresy and sacrilege — LaRoche and Trinity Orthodox — stood undisturbed. On the bench beside me was a reprint of Wylie’s famous sermon—which, for me, had gained some profundity because of these buildings — and as I mindlessly turned those pages for the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 5.

thousandth time, a thought began to consume me. What is the cause of Christ, as it uniquely concerned the United States? Answering this question was the great errand of the *Two Sons*, and the entirety of Wylie's life seemed to be a footnote to his answer.

Covenanter martyr Donald Cargil wrote something that came to mind that autumn day: "let never one think that he is in the right exercise of true religion, that has not a zeal to God's public glory."¹⁰⁷ The context was regarding civil government, and shortly after writing those words, Cargil sealed them with his death. In one sense, Wylie's sermon and life are something of a comment on Cargil's conviction. Every sphere — even the civil sphere — must redound to God's glory, and thus, the pulpit must have freedom and occasion to apply God's Word to the government. Further, Wylie's struggles in Ireland, the plight of Covenanters in Pittsburgh, and the similarities in their experiences demonstrate that this concern must not be, and is not, restricted to preachers. The Christian, in whatever station, must be concerned about Christ's cause in the public or civil realm — even if at great cost to himself. While such a conclusion may seem lackluster, the current temperature in evangelicalism regarding civil magistracy seems to demand its place. The preacher must be free to apply the Word of God to kings, and Christians must be willing to suffer rather than sin should the civil powers rebel against Christ, and demand their subjects to do the same. Cargil suffered martyrdom, Wylie went into exile, and the *Two Sons* maintained an old doctrine despite certain criticism—all out of a zeal for God's public glory. No matter what one may think about the doctrine of the *Two Sons*, each reader is confronted with the question: what is the cause of Christ in my nation, in my day? Wylie gave an answer, and so must the present generation.

¹⁰⁷ John H. Thomson, ed, *Cloud of Witnesses for the Royal Prerogatives of Jesus Christ; Being the Last Speeches and Testimonies of those Who Have Suffered for the Truth in Scotland since the Year 1680*. (Edinburgh: Schenck & M'Farlane, 1871), 7.

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