# 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. Melanchthon 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.

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[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: Blackstaft, 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

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[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 Stavely (1743-1825)—Ireland's "Cameronian Apostle" and leading United Irishman.[19] In 1801, Stavely 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 ascendency 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

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[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 Stavely 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. Staveley 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

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[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. Melanchthon 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 Synod[33] 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

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[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 conservativism 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)

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[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 ascendency 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

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[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 junto 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

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[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

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[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

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[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

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[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

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[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]

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[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," (רהָצְיִהַ-ינֵבְ) 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

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[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.

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[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.