

Gardiner Spring and the Presbyterian Old and New Schools

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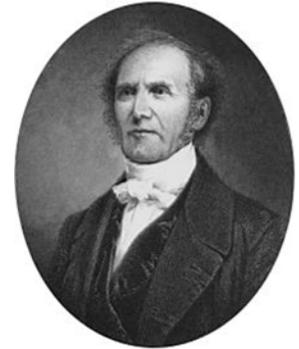
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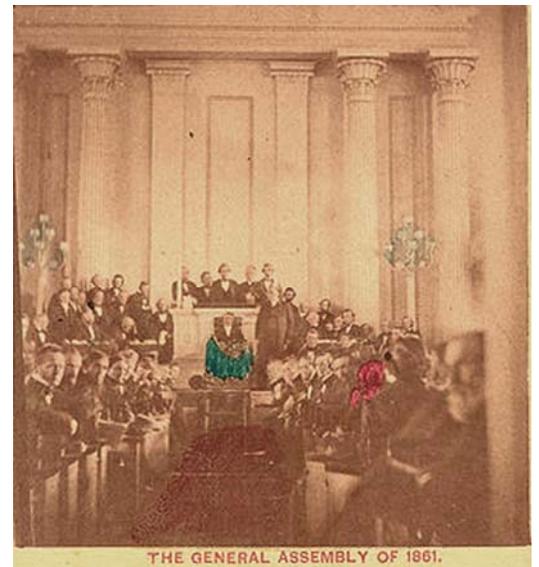
The Old School/New School tensions which led to the Presbyterian schism of 1837-1838 were related to and paralleled Gardiner Spring's long career as the pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City.¹ Samuel Miller, son and biographer of Samuel Miller D.D., LL.D., wrote that the beginning of the Hopkinsian controversy was "closely connected with the Rev. Gardiner Spring's settlement in the Brick Church." Miller continued:

For half a century had this controversy been carried on in New England, and it had before now shown itself in the Presbyterian Church; but from about the date of Mr. Spring's settlement, it assumed among Presbyterians fresh importance and gradually . . . divided them into the New and Old School parties.²

Spring was involved in and deeply affected by the developing controversy. When the Old School/New School schism occurred, to the surprise of many who remembered his earlier advocacy of Hopkinsianism, he chose the Old School which was critical of Hopkinsianism, instead of the New School. Although he opposed the division of the denomination, he took an active role in the Old School church and served as moderator of its 1843 General Assembly. More famously, he fathered the "Gardiner Spring's Resolutions" in the 1861 General Assembly which, in the early days of the Civil War, committed the members of the Assembly to support the Federal government. In 1869 the aged Spring pled on the floor of the Old School General Assembly that there be no delay in voting to reunite with the New School.

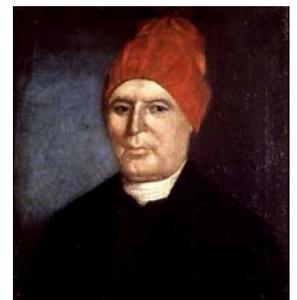


Rev. Dr. Gardiner Spring, c. 1830s



Spring as a Hopkinsian in the Presbytery of New York

Hopkinsianism was developed by followers of Jonathan Edwards and derived its name from Edwards' disciple Samuel Hopkins, whose *System of Doctrines* and other writings became widely influential in New England.³ In its various forms Hopkinsianism agreed with the essential doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith, including its stress upon the depravity of humans and their utter inability to turn to God apart from God's sovereign grace. It modified, however, Westminster's doctrines of the nature of human inability, the imputation of the guilt of Adam's first sin to his posterity, and the atonement.⁴



Rev. Samuel Hopkins

1 – Gardiner Springs Monograph/by William Hoyt. Used with permission , Presbyterian Heritage Center.

Son of leading Hopkinsian Samuel Spring,⁵ Spring may well have been suspect among the anti-Hopkinsian old Calvinists in the Presbytery of New York even before they examined him for ordination, in August of 1810. If so, he did nothing in his trial sermon to allay any anxieties they may have felt about him. Instead, he wrote in his memoirs that he disturbed the presbytery by boldly stating the views he “THEN entertained upon the subject of human ability.” He added, “But for the strenuous efforts of the late Dr. [Samuel] Miller, who told the Presbytery that if they condemned *Mr. Spring* for those views, they must condemn *him*, so far as I could learn, they would have refused to ordain me.” Nevertheless, the records of the Presbytery of New York show Spring taking an active role in its work. He attended its meetings regularly, served on various committees and was elected its moderator in 1812.⁶ He maintained close relations with other Hopkinsians within the Presbyterian Church and his earlier associates in the Congregational Church, but also counted moderate and strict old Calvinists among his friends.⁷

However, strict old Calvinist, Ezra Stiles Ely, a fellow member of presbytery, found Spring’s Hopkinsian leanings troubling. In 1811 he published *A Contrast between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism*, which was aimed at Spring. In it he compared the doctrinal views of leading Hopkinsian thinkers to those of Calvin, traditional Calvinists and such Calvinistic standards as the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, and the Heidelberg Catechism, with the intention of showing that Hopkinsianism was not genuine Calvinism. He frequently cited the writings of Gardiner Spring’s father, Samuel Spring, to illustrate the alleged errors of Hopkinsianism.⁸ In 1811 Gardiner had no paper trail.⁹

Spring did not respond directly to Ely’s *A Contrast*. He wrote in his memoirs, “I had no other way of quieting the alarm created by ‘The [sic] Contrast,’ than by preaching ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’” He continued, “I endeavored to exhibit the fundamental doctrines of grace as the great means of bringing the benighted and lost out of darkness into God’s marvelous light.”¹⁰ Thus in keeping with the Hopkinsian tradition, he viewed doctrine in the light of the evangelistic mission of the church.¹¹

In his first substantive work, *Essays on the Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character*, Spring made clear the Hopkinsian character of his theology, stressing the importance of the Hopkinsian distinction between natural ability and moral inability, which Ely had attacked in *A Contrast*.¹² Natural ability consists in the possession of the faculties of understanding, conscience, will and affections, which “constitute a moral agent, and make any being capable of choosing or refusing, acting right or wrong as he pleases.” By possessing these faculties of the mind a being “possesses all that is necessary to the exercise of holy and unholy affections.” Moral inability, on the other hand, consists in “the *total depravity* of the carnal heart. It consists in an insuperable aversion to holiness.” Inasmuch as the sinner’s aversion to holiness is total, it is a genuine and complete inability. Yet it is also moral because it “is capable of being compared with law; and therefore bears relation to praise and blame.” The doctrine of natural ability and moral inability demonstrate that the sinner is responsible for his refusal to repent, and clears God of the charge of condemning the sinner for failing to do what he lacks the ability to do. The claim that man lacks the natural ability to obey God “is a libel on his righteousness.” But “if all the inability of the sinner consists in his aversion to holiness . . . then God will be glorious in sending him to hell. He ought to go there”¹³ The practical reason for Spring’s insistence on the distinction between natural ability and moral inability was his belief that it facilitated evangelism. It is difficult for a preacher to urge the unconverted to repent and believe if he thinks they lack the ability to do so.¹⁴

Regarding imputation, old Calvinists were committed to the Westminster Confession’s

doctrine that the first parents' sin of eating the forbidden fruit resulted in two dire consequences: (1) the guilt of their sin was imputed, and (2) their corrupted nature was conveyed "to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation." Hopkinsian Timothy Dwight rejected Westminster's doctrine that the guilt of the first parents' initial sin was imputed to their posterity, reasoning "that it is impossible for the guilt of any person's act to be transferred to any other person" But he accepted its doctrine that their corrupted nature was conveyed to their posterity. Thus he concluded that all become sinners and are guilty on their own account.¹⁵

Spring's position was essentially the same as Dwight's. Early in his ministry several old Calvinists in the Presbytery of New York submitted written questions to him, one of which read: "Is the *guilt* of this first transgression imputed to or laid to the account of in law, of all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation?" Spring responded, "The *guilt of this first transgression* is not *transferred* to his posterity, so that, if they had continued perfectly holy . . . they would have been damned for his sin; but it is *imputed*, so that they are, by reason of their connection with him as their federal head and representative, ORIGINALLY in a state of *sin and righteous condemnation*."¹⁶

Also contested by old Calvinists and Hopkinsians, was the nature of the atonement and the extent of its benefits. Old Calvinists held the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, according to which God's justice was satisfied by the imputation of the guilt of sinners to Christ, who bore the penalty of their sin in his death on the cross. Many Hopkinsians, however, adopted the governmental doctrine of the atonement, which viewed God's justice in relation to his rule over the universe. Christ suffering was not an expiation of the guilt of sinners, since their guilt could not be imputed to him, but rather a public display of God's hatred of sin and a manifestation of his justice. Christ's death, therefore, made it possible for God to forgive sinners, while at the same time upholding the authority of his law. Regarding the extent of the atonement, strict old Calvinists held that Christ died for the elect only, whereas Hopkinsians insisted "he died for the world, although . . . only the elect were effectively benefited."¹⁷

Spring's comments on the nature of the atonement during his early years in the ministry were scant and sometimes ambiguous. His view of the extent of the atonement was, however, clearly Hopkinsian. In a carefully crafted answer to the old Calvinist questioners from his presbytery, he wrote that "Christ made an atonement for the sins of the *whole world*; but designed the redemption or final deliverance from sin and hell of his own people . . . and none else." But in describing his early preaching in his memoirs, he wrote that he had stressed "the all-sufficiency of the great atonement . . . and the unembarrassed offer of pardon and life to all 'that have ears to hear.'"¹⁸

Despite their reservations about Hopkinsianism, moderate old Calvinists believed they should cooperate with Hopkinsians in the work of the church. The 1817 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church admonished the 1816 Synod of Philadelphia for instructing its presbyteries to "call to an account all such ministers as may be suspected to embrace any of the opinions usually called Hopkinsian." The Assembly also admonished the Synod for a passage in its pastoral letter that could be "construed as expressing an opinion unfavorable to revivals of religion" Although strict old Calvinists protested the Assembly's actions, an uneasy peace existed in the denomination for more than a decade.¹⁹

Years of Controversy: 1830-1838

The Old and New Schools began forming as distinct parties in the Presbyterian Church about

1829 or 1830. The constituents of the Old School were old Calvinists. They stood for strict adherence to the theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and to the Presbyterian form of church government. Nineteenth century old Calvinism was to a large degree an extension of the predominantly Scotch Irish, Old Side tradition of the eighteenth century. This tradition had been strengthened by immigration from Ireland and a post Revolutionary War conservative reaction within American Presbyterianism.²⁰

The New School arose as a result of cooperative efforts between Presbyterians and Congregationalists as they ministered to people streaming from the east into central and western New York State and the Western Reserve (now northeastern Ohio).²¹ The Plan of Union, approved in 1801 by the Congregational General Association of Connecticut and the Presbyterian General Assembly, was designed to facilitate those efforts.²² The New England heritage in the Presbyterian Church was strengthened by the resulting renewed contact with New England Congregationalism, and the entrance of large numbers of former Congregationalists into its membership and ministry. The New School was composed mainly of the New England related churches of New York State; the Old School of the Scotch Irish churches of Pennsylvania.²³

Both schools, however, should be viewed in the context of larger movements in American Protestantism in the late 1820s and the 1830s. New School Presbyterianism emerged as an integral part of the evangelical awakening.²⁴ Old School opposition to the New School was part of an effort by churchly, authoritarian elements to “push back the advancing wave of a democratic, unchurchly, and emotional sectarianism that was threatening to overwhelm them.” Thus during the years that the Presbyterian Old School was battling the New School, conservatives in the Episcopal, Lutheran, and Reformed churches were combating movements in their denominations they found threatening.²⁵

During the 1820s Presbyterianism experienced exponential growth in western New York State where the terms of the Plan of Union were resulting in the mingling of Presbyterian and Congregational polity and doctrinal tendencies. The Old School feared that this modified Presbyterianism would soon dominate the entire denomination. Their fears were increased by the success of the nondenominational American Education Society in educating ministers, and American Home Missionary Society in developing new churches. The New School worked through those agencies. The Old School believed that they would facilitate the New School’s gaining control of the Presbyterian Church.²⁶

Old School doctrinal concerns were intensified by the development of the “New Haven Theology,” by Nathaniel W. Taylor and his associates at Yale Divinity School.²⁷ The New Haven theology went beyond Hopkinsianism in restating Westminster’s doctrines of original sin and regeneration. Taylor modified the doctrine of original sin, declaring in a sermon he preached in 1828 that the depravity of man is not to be attributed to his nature, but “*is man’s own act, consisting of some object, rather than God, as his chief good . . .*” He also modified the doctrine of regeneration insisting that it, too, is man’s own act, which takes place when a person chooses God as his chief good, rather than the world. Taylor did give a nod to traditional Calvinism by affirming, “*such is their nature, that they will sin and only sin in all the appropriate circumstances of their being,*” and that men cannot choose God as their chief good without the intervention of the Holy Spirit.²⁸ Gardiner Spring and other Hopkinsians, as well as the old Calvinists, believed that Taylor had distorted essential doctrines of Calvinism.²⁹

In 1829 Albert Barnes preached his famous “The Way of Salvation” sermon. Barnes’ theology as expressed in that sermon was in line with Hopkinsian theology which was tolerated

by moderate old Calvinists. Strict old Calvinists, however, believed that Barnes had been influenced by Nathaniel Taylor's doctrinal innovations, which caused them to view his theology with alarm.³⁰ Barnes was charged with heresy. His orthodoxy was contested in the Presbytery of Philadelphia and the Synod of Philadelphia. To the dismay of the old Calvinists, he was acquitted by the 1836 General Assembly.³¹

Subscription to the Westminster Confession was a key issue in this time of conflict about doctrine. The New School followed the tradition of New England which required candidates for the ministry to accept only those doctrines in the Westminster Confession that "are essential and necessary" to the system. They contended that the demand for strict subscription substituted the authority of a human instrument for that of the word of God, and that Presbyterians had historically permitted a broad interpretation of subscription. The Old School, on the other hand, insisted that none of Westminster's doctrines should be questioned. They charged that by ordaining ministers who "accept our standards merely for the substance of doctrine" New School presbyteries were "concealing and conniving at error . . ." Moderate old Calvinists Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge accepted strict subscription to Westminster for themselves as professors at Princeton Theological Seminary, but opposed requiring it of the entire church.³²

Old School fears about doctrine brought concerns about polity to the fore. Old Schoolers charged that lax enforcement of Presbyterian polity in New School judicatories made it impossible to obtain "a plain and sufficient sentence" against ministers charged with error. Further, they were distressed by the widespread disarray in the denomination caused by the intermingling of Congregational with Presbyterian forms of church government.³³

By the 1830s not only the New School, but much of the Old School, believed that revivals were an essential means of advancing the work of the church. Troubling to many, however, were the "new measures" which Presbyterian evangelist Charles G. Finney had introduced in his revivals in the 1820s. The new measures included such things as preachers castigating their hearers, praying for the "unconverted" by name in the services, inviting those seeking salvation to come forward to the "anxious bench," hastily admitting converts to church membership, denouncing "cold" ministers, and permitting women to exhort and lead in prayer in "promiscuous assemblies" (i.e., which included both men and women).³⁴

The Old School "Testimony and Memorial" of 1837 charged that the new measures were not only disorderly, but had filled many churches with "rash, ignorant and unconverted persons . . ." Moderate old Calvinist Samuel Miller asserted that the linking of the new measures to the doctrine that sinners could convert themselves "'appears to be adapted to destroy souls wholesale!'"³⁵ The New School was not of one mind about the new measures. A number of New School ministers used them in their churches, while others opposed them. Lyman Beecher, however, represented those New Schoolers who had reservations about the new measures, but had decided to tolerate them, at least as used by Finney, on the ground that, hopefully, they would do more good than harm.³⁶

Some interpreters insist that slavery was a primary cause of the Presbyterian schism because the emergence of the abolitionist movement in the 1830s coincided with the increasing hostilities between the Old and New schools. This view is challenged by scholars who contend that the controversy was not about slavery, but about doctrinal differences which had been troubling Presbyterians for decades.³⁷

James H. Moorhead, however, suggests viewing the slavery issue from another angle. While he agrees that the struggle over slavery as such was not a major factor, he argues that it must be seen against the background of conservatives' fears in a time of rapid economic and

social change that the very foundations of American society were being undermined. Sharing these fears, Old School leaders linked the disorders in the Presbyterian Church with “the wide spread and ever restless spirit of radicalism, manifest in both church and state” Moorhead reasons that inasmuch as fear of and anger directed against the abolitionists increased the ferment afflicting American society, the conflict over slavery contributed to the anxieties experienced by Old School Presbyterians and thus played a role in the disruption of the denomination.³⁸

The controversy culminated in May of 1837³⁹ when the Old School dominated General Assembly abrogated the Plan of Union and next ruled that synods and presbyteries formed under the Plan were no longer part of the Presbyterian Church. The latter provision resulted in the excising of 4 synods and 28 presbyteries, with their 509 ministers and 60,000 communicants. Further, the 1837 Assembly recommended that the American Home Missionary Society and the American Education Society should no longer operate in any of the denomination’s churches. When the commissioners from the excised presbyteries were refused enrollment at the 1838 General Assembly they, with other New School ministers present, withdrew to form their own General Assembly. There were now two Protestant bodies claiming to be the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.⁴⁰

Spring and the Controversy

The years of controversy were difficult for Spring who often found himself on middle ground regarding the issues troubling the church. Regarding doctrine, he was a member of the 1831 General Assembly’s committee on the Albert Barnes case which proposed resolutions recognizing “unguarded and objectionable passages” in Barnes’ “The Way of Salvation” sermon, but rejecting judicial action against him, in the light of the explanations he had given of these passages.⁴¹ Spring opposed the continuing efforts of the Old School to depose Barnes from the ministry.⁴²

While the theological views of many New School ministers were close to his own, Spring believed that “the errors of the New Haven theology had begun to infect the Presbyterian Church” He dated the beginning of Nathaniel W. Taylor’s “novel and unscriptural” speculations, with his 1829 review of Spring’s “A Dissertation on the Means of Regeneration”. Taylor had used his lengthy “Review of Spring on the Means of Regeneration,” to introduce his own unusual doctrine of regeneration. The essence of Taylor’s doctrine was that the Holy Spirit suspends the principle of selfishness in the mind so that the person, moved by morally neutral self-love, can choose God instead of the world as his chief good.⁴³ Spring was appalled because he believed that regeneration takes place not as a result of human choice, but by the Holy Spirit’s transformation of the soul from a state of sin to a state of holiness. He charged that Taylor agreed with the fourth and fifth century heretic Pelagius in making “depraved man the author of his own salvation”⁴⁴

Taylor’s doctrine of human depravity also troubled Spring. In 1833 Spring published *A Dissertation on Native Depravity*, in which he attacked the New Haven view of the moral and spiritual state of infants. He stated that the New Haven theologians taught that the newborn “have no moral corruption of nature or propensity to evil,” and that the purpose of his work was to oppose those false views by showing that “INFANTS ARE SINNERS.” He used Scripture, theology, and his observation of infants to make his case in this long, and sometimes confusing, discourse.⁴⁵ In a scathing rebuttal Taylor argued that Spring’s views were closer to

those of New Haven than to those of the Presbyterian Old School, and implied that Spring's attack on the New Haven theology was motivated by a desire to deflect suspicion from his own theology.⁴⁶ Spring, however, viewed Taylor's denial of the depravity of the newborn as additional evidence of the Pelagian character of his theology. Taylor may have believed that there was little difference between New Haven's theology and Spring's. Spring believed there was a world of difference between the two.

Throughout his ministry Spring opposed requiring ministers to strictly subscribe to the teachings of the Westminster Confession. In his memoirs he wrote: "I only ask that they [ministers] 'sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, as containing *the system of doctrine* contained in the Holy Scriptures Few, in this age of inquiry, believe *every word of it.*"⁴⁷

Although Spring opposed Charles G. Finney's new measures, he invited Finney to preach in the Brick Church, in July of 1828 when he was visiting in the city. He was startled by Finney's assertion in his sermon, "The Prayer of Faith," that "there is such a thing as the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man . . . and that it is *always* answered by the *specified* blessing prayed for."⁴⁸ An entire chapter entitled "Fanaticism in Revivals" is included in Spring's memoirs. In it he charged that the new measures were being used by Satan to corrupt genuine revivals in order to discredit them in the minds of good men. He linked the new measures to the heretical theology that teaches revivals "are *got up* by man's device, and not *brought down* by the Spirit of God. . . ." The "principal advocate of these new measures and these Pelagian errors," he charged, "was the Rev. Charles G. Finney."⁴⁹

Regarding polity, in 1831 Spring experienced the New School's growing political power after having been nominated to serve as moderator of the General Assembly. He was defeated by Nathan S. S. Beman, who became the first New School moderator. While Spring and Beman were awaiting the vote, Beman, who had spent the winter in the south, remarked to Spring that he had been told "an effort would be made to make him Moderator; and, that there were 'eight votes he had lost, from the absence of members from Virginia.'" Old Calvinist Ashbel Green questioned the appropriateness of such politicking.⁵⁰

Spring claimed, in this same 1831 Assembly, that the Plan of Union did not authorize presbyteries sending committee men to sit in the General Assembly.⁵¹ Although he agreed with the Old School in opposing deviations from Presbyterian polity, he did not share their degree of anxiety about the issue. His name is absent from the list of Old School protestors in the 1831 Assembly against irregularities in polity in the Plan of Union synods. Further, he opposed taking strong action against churches and ministers that erred in polity.⁵²

Spring followed the Old School line by transferring his and the Brick Church's support from the American Home Missionary Society to the Presbyterian Board of Domestic Missions. He continued to approve of the work of the American Home Missionary Society, but supported the Presbyterian Board because it operated under the standards of the Presbyterian Church, thereby providing a strong bulwark "against the incursions of error from the New Haven school."⁵³

Spring's stance in the Old School/New School struggle was typified by a resolution that he, unsuccessfully, attempted to present at the April 1837 meeting of the Presbytery of New York opposing sending delegates to an Old School called pre-Assembly convention. His resolution acknowledged errors in doctrine and irregularities in polity in the church, but opposed the proposed convention on the ground that its intent appeared to be:

to mature measures to be brought before the next General Assembly, that shall result in the deposition of ministers, whose theological views, though at variance with the standards of the church, are not of such variance as to exclude them from the sacred office. Or, should this be found impracticable, Presbytery have reason to believe that the Convention will propose a division of the church. The Presbytery are free to confess, they are not prepared for either part of this alternative.

His resolution concluded that Presbytery resolve:

1. That it is inexpedient to appoint Commissioners to the proposed Convention.
2. That it is expedient to concur in the recommendation inviting the churches to a day of fasting and prayer to Almighty God for wisdom from above in the present crisis⁵⁴

Even after the Draconian actions of the 1837 General Assembly, Spring hoped that the unity of the church could be preserved. At the meeting of the Synod of New York the following October, “A series of resolutions were introduced by Dr. Spring which he supposed would harmonize the Presbyterian Church in its present disturbed condition.” Spring’s resolutions were indefinitely postponed.⁵⁵

At its October 1838 meeting the Presbytery of New York addressed the issue of whether to adhere to the Old School or the New School General Assembly. Spring made the following motion at that meeting:

1. Resolved. That this Presbytery approve of the course of its Commissioners to the General Assembly of 1838, in their continuing to sit in that body, as it was regularly organized in the 7th Presbyterian Church in the city of Philadelphia, on the 7th day of May, last” The motion passed by a vote of 22 to 6.
- “Resolved 2. That this Presbytery (without expressing any opinion on the measures adopted by the General Assembly of 1837) continues to adhere to the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, represented by the General Assembly of 1837 & by its successor in 1838, of which latter Assembly the Rev. William S. Plummer was moderator.

The implied disapproval of the 1837 General Assembly’s actions in the parenthetical words was unacceptable to many commissioners. An amendment to delete them passed with 17 aye votes. Spring and 6 other commissioners voted nay; there were 3 abstentions. Spring’s 2nd resolution, now excluding the parenthetical words, was passed, also by a vote of 17 to 7. Three commissioners, including Spring, abstained.⁵⁶

Spring’s explanation to Presbytery of his abstention was described in an article in the *New York Observer*: “Dr. Spring preferred his resolution as he introduced it. He thought it important to retain the words stricken out, and was not prepared to adopt the resolution as amended, although very decided in his determination to abide by it.”⁵⁷ Thus Spring committed to the Old School, but not without strongly implying that he disapproved of the drastic actions of the 1837 General Assembly.

Having chosen the Old School, Spring entered fully into its life. He served on several boards of the Old School General Assembly and was elected its moderator in 1843. Among his

fellow ministers in the Old School church, he valued especially the moderate Old Calvinist professors at Princeton Seminary.⁵⁸

Despite his differences with the ultra old Calvinists, the Old School was in at least two ways a natural fit for Spring. First, his committing to the Old School denomination permitted him to stay with his presbytery. Second, as a man of the east by inheritance, physical location, and in his social and political conservatism, he would have been predisposed toward the Old School in this struggle which was, in part, a contest between the established east and the newer west.⁵⁹

Spring continued to believe, however, that the Draconian actions of the Old School dominated 1837 and 1838 General Assemblies had been unwarranted. He expressed his views on the subject in an address he delivered in 1856 at the closing of the old Brick Church building on Beekman Street. He said, “The great schism in the Presbyterian Church in the United States, which issued in the excision of so many churches in Western New York, was one in which this church took no part, and which it endeavored to prevent.” He acknowledged there were errors in doctrine and polity, but said:

It was our judgment there was a constitutional remedy for them and that it ought to have been adopted. We had no confidence in the men who were leaders of the New School party, and believed their aims were to secure exclusive power; but we could not believe that the mass of their followers were not true to our standards, and could never be persuaded that such a wholesale excision, without any previous trial, was consistent with sound Presbyterianism.

He next explained why he and the Brick Church had chosen the Old School:

We were crowded to the wall, and called on to decide whether our allotment should be cast with the New School who, had abandoned themselves to leaders with whom we had no sort of sympathy, or with the Old School, with whom our doctrinal views and views of church order were in unison, while we disapproved of their excising acts.⁶⁰

“We were crowded to the wall” surely expressed Spring’s feelings since his desire had been to remain in an undivided church, not to have to choose between the New and Old Schools. His lack of sympathy for leaders of the New School doubtless was deeply rooted, especially in light of his defeat for the post of moderator of the 1831 General Assembly by the political maneuvering of New School candidate, Nathan S.S. Beman.⁶¹ Initially puzzling, however, is his statement “our doctrinal views and views of church order were in unison with the Old School.” His views of church order were in unison with those of the Old School, but at the time of the schism his theological views as an Hopkinsian would have been closer to those of the New School than of the Old.⁶² Yet his abhorrence of the New Haven theology made the difference between Hopkinsianism and old Calvinism seem small to him. He later wrote: “If I must choose between old Calvinism and New Haven theology, give me old Calvinism. Old-fashioned Calvinists and old-fashioned Hopkinsians are not far apart; the more closely they are united in opposing modern errors, the better.”⁶³

A striking thing about this address - delivered in 1856 when relations between the Old and New Schools were still strained - was Spring’s strongly expressed hope that the two denominations would be reunited:

There are hundreds of as good men and sound Presbyterians in the excinded (sic) churches as are to be found among ourselves; and when time, that great healer, shall have purged them of the unhallowed leaven, and fostered a more fraternal spirit in both these branches of the great Presbyterian family in this land, we doubt not they will once more become united and harmonious.⁶⁴

A decade later, when reunion was being seriously considered, Spring wrote that reunion should not take place as long as there were “any serious elements of strife” between the Old and New Schools. He added that would occur in “a few years at most . . . [when] the principle actors in this separation will have passed away . . . [and] a more conciliatory generation will occupy the place of their fathers.”⁶⁵

Three years later the Presbytery of New York sent Spring, now 84 and almost blind, as a commissioner to the 1869 Old School General Assembly.⁶⁶ He addressed the Assembly during the debate on the subject of reunion with the New School, insisting that any delay in the reunion of the two assemblies would be “flying in the face of the prayers of God’s people.” He added, “If you postpone this union another year . . . I shall probably not see it, but shall die a member of a divided church.” Both Assemblies did, however, vote to reunite, and Spring officiated with the two moderators at the joint communion service which was held in the Brick Church, on Friday, May 28, 1869.⁶⁷

Thus while Spring inadvertently played a role in initiating the controversy that led to the division of the denomination when he entered the Presbyterian ministry, he was able to play a role in its reunion after the end of his active career.

Notes

1. Spring was born in 1785 and graduated as valedictorian of the class of 1805 at Yale. During the next 5 years he was admitted to the bar, earned his masters at Yale, married Susan Barney of New Haven and, after experiencing a call to the ministry, studied at Andover Theological Seminary in the academic year 1809-10. See Gardiner Spring, *Personal Reminiscences of the Life and Times of the Author* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1866), 1:35-36. In 1810 he was ordained and installed as the minister of the Brick Church where he continued as the active minister until 1864, and to bear the title of its minister until his death in 1873. See Shepherd Knapp, *History of the Brick Presbyterian Church in the City of New York* (New York: Trustees of the Brick Presbyterian Church, 1909), 315-16, 516.

2. Samuel Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller, D.D., LL.D., Second Professor in the Theological Seminary, at Princeton, N.J.* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1869), 1:298-99. The number of Hopkinsians in the Presbyterian Church was small during Spring’s early years in the ministry. See Samuel J. Baird, *A History of the New School* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1868), 235-36.

3. While the term “Hopkinsian” was used in the Presbyterian Church during those years, other names assigned have been: “the New England Theology“, “the New Divinity,” and “Edwardeanism.” See the accounts of the New England Theology in Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian University Press, 10 – Gardiner Springs Monograph/by William Hoyt. Used with permission , Presbyterian Heritage Center.

1981), and Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1907).

4. Earl A. Pope, *New England Calvinism and the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), 348.

5. Samuel Spring was pastor of the North Congregational Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts. For an account of Samuel Spring's early life and ministerial career, see William Russell Hoyt, III, *The Religious Thought of Gardiner Spring with Particular Reference to His Doctrine of Sin and Salvation* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1962), 3-8. (The author of this article, also the author of the work cited, no longer uses the name William Russell Hoyt, III.) Gardiner Spring's mother, Hannah Hopkins Spring, was descended from several generations of Puritan ministers and was a great-niece of Jonathan Edwards. See Spring, *Life*, 1:35-36.

6. Spring, *Life*, 1:102-03. See also "The Records of the Presbytery of New York" (Unpublished records, housed in the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia), 1:39-42, 78, and passim.)

7. Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 68-69. Not harmonious, however, were Spring's relations with the old Calvinists in the nondenominational Young Men's Missionary Society of New York. The society's refusal to accept Spring's protégé, Samuel Hanson Cox, as one of its missionaries because of his theological views led Spring, Cox and others to withdraw from it to form the New York Evangelical Missionary Society of Young Men. See Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 52-53.

8. Ezra Stiles Ely, *A Contrast Between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism* (New York: S. Whiting and Co., 1811). See Miller, *Samuel Miller*, 1:298.

9. Spring, however, was to publish extensively. See Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 484-91. Cf. Knapp, *Brick Church*, 169n.

10. Spring, *Life*, 1:129. See the account of Spring's early evangelistic preaching in Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 26-30. The membership of the Brick Church increased from 324 in 1811, to 626 in 1818. See "Records of the Synod of New York and New Jersey" (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society), 287, 427. In the early 1800s the number attending church generally exceeded the official membership.

11. George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 75. Spring's theology of sin and of salvation is the subject of Parts II and III of Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*.

12. Gardiner Spring, *Essays on the Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character*, (New York: Dodge & Sayre, 1813). Spring's purpose in writing *Distinguishing Traits* was to enable his readers to distinguish between true Christian hope which culminates in eternal salvation, and false hope which culminates in damnation. See *ibid.*, v. *Distinguishing Traits* was in the tradition of Jonathan Edwards' *Religious Affections*, in which Edwards, writing during the First Great Awakening, undertook to make clear the difference between genuine and counterfeit religious experience. See Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959). Spring had read with care Edwards' writings on revivals while a student at Andover Seminary. See Spring, *Life*, 1:160-61.

13. *Distinguishing Traits*, 37n, 39n, 41-42n. Spring alluded to but did not successfully counter Ely's argument, which Ely put in the mouth of a supposed Arminian, that "'it is as unjust to require a moral as a natural impossibility If a man is destitute of ability to love, which is a moral inability, you cannot reasonably require him to love, any more than you could command

with propriety an impotent man, labouring under a natural inability, to walk.” *Contrast*, 163, quoted in Pope, *New England Calvinism*, 43; see Spring, *Distinguishing Traits*, 40n.

14. Spring, *Life*, 1:136-37.

15. Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter VI, section 3, *Book of Confessions* (Louisville, Kentucky: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA), 1991), 6.033; Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 133-35.

16. Spring, *Life*, 1:132. During his student years Spring had listened with great interest to Yale president Dwight's doctrinal lectures. See *ibid.*, 1:79.

17. Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 241-44. See also Pope, *New England Calvinism*, 42. An old Calvinist critic argued that according to the governmental theory the sufferings of Christ would demonstrate that God hated perfect righteousness, not sin. See “Some Thoughts on the Atonement,” *The Christian Advocate* 10 (1832), 250, cited in Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 244, n.56

18. Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 245, n.58; Spring, *Life*, 1:129-30,133.

19. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America . . . A. D. 1789 to A. D. 1820 Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, [1847]), 653-54. The Assembly's reproof of the 1816 Synod of Philadelphia was prepared by a committee chaired by moderate old Calvinist Samuel Miller, which had been appointed to examine its records. See *ibid.*, 637; Pope, *New England Calvinism*, 51. A copy of the Synod of Philadelphia's “Pastoral Letter,” written by Ezra Styles Ely, may be seen in Samuel J. Baird, *A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church from its Origin in America to the Present Time* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 645.

20. Robert Hastings Nichols, edited and completed by James Hastings Nichols, *Presbyterianism in New York State: History of the Synod and Its Predecessors* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 110.

21. Nichols, *New York*, 116; Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church. A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church Since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 4.

22. Nichols, *New York*, 78-83; *General Assembly Minutes*(1801), 224-25. The Plan of Union was further developed by the two bodies in 1808. See *ibid.* (1808), 404, and Nichols, *New York*, 83-86. The Plan authorized congregations and ministers from the two denominations to work together in founding churches. Congregations could call either a Presbyterian or Congregational minister, were free to be governed according to the polity of either denomination, and could choose to send delegates to either a Congregational association or presbytery meeting. This last provision resulted in un-ordained delegates from union churches having the same right to speak and vote in presbytery, and even in the General Assembly, as ordained ruling elders in the Presbyterian Church. See Nichols, *New York*, 81, 85.

23. Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 4-5; Nichols, *New York*, 117.

24. The New School's emphasis on revivalism, personal evangelical faith, moral reform and interdenominational cooperation, placed it in the mainstream of the evangelical awakening. See Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*, x-xi, 20.

25. Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 5. See also Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*, 73.

26. Nichols, *New York*, 115-17. Presbyterians and Congregationalists provided the bulk of the leaders and members of these nondenominational societies. See Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*, 19-20.

27. Pope, *New England Calvinism*, 62-64. Cf. H. Shelton Smith, *Changing Conceptions of Original Sin* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 86-109.

28. Nathaniel W. Taylor, *Concio ad Clerum: A Sermon Delivered in the Chapel of Yale College, September 10, 1828* (New Haven: Hezekiah Howe, 1828), 8, 13, quoted in Smith, *Changing Conceptions*, 106. See also Pope, *New England Calvinism*, 88-90, 106.

29. Robert Ellis Thompson, *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1900), 105.

30. Pope, *New England Calvinism*, 199-200. Cf. *ibid.*, 175-79. See excerpts of Barnes' sermon in Maurice W. Armstrong, Lefferts A. Loetscher and Charles A. Anderson, eds., *The Presbyterian Enterprise: Sources of American Presbyterian History* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 146-49.

31. Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*, 61-62. Also tried for heresy were Lyman Beecher and George Duffield, as well as lesser known New School ministers. See *ibid.*, 55-57.

32. *Ibid.*, 67- 68; "Testimony and Memorial," *Presbyterian Enterprise*, 153; Pope, *New England Calvinism*, 113-14.

33. "Testimony and Memorial," *Presbyterian Enterprise*, 153-56.

34. Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*, 76-77; Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned Over District* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1950), 173-84. Traditionally revivals had been "conducted chiefly by settled pastors within the structure of parish activities, were accompanied by careful doctrinal instruction, and generally were restrained and orderly . . ." Nichols, *New York*, 99.

35. "Testimony and Memorial," *Presbyterian Enterprise*, 155; Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*, 76, 78-79.

36. Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*, 77-79. See also Spring, *Life*, 1:230-38.

37. Pope, *New England Calvinism*, 357-58. Cf. Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*, 93-103, 250-51. Slavery did, however, impact the nature of the division. The Old School won the support of Presbyterians of the South by agreeing to remain silent on the subject of slavery, which gave the Old School the votes needed to dictate the time and terms of the separation of the church. See Marsden, *op.cit.*, 98-99.

38. James H. Moorhead, "The 'Restless Spirit of Radicalism': Old School Fears and the Schism of 1837," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 78 (Spring 2000): 28b-31b. The words in the title, 'the Restless Spirit of Radicalism,' is quoted from the letter circulated by the Old School dominated 1837 General Assembly to all Presbyterian congregations, explaining its actions. See *ibid.*, 31a.

39. The turmoil within the 1837 Presbyterian General Assembly took place in the context of the financial Panic of 1837. "Bankruptcy and unemployment rates soared" and by May of 1837 banks all over the country were closing. See Allen Weinstein and David Rubel, *The Story of America. Freedom and Crisis from Settlement to Superpower* (New York: Agincourt Press Production, 2002), 184. The General Assembly convened in the Central Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia on May 18, 1837. *General Assembly Minutes* (1837), 411. The author is not aware of a study or studies that examine what impact the 1837 financial Panic may have had on the 1837 General Assembly.

40. General Assembly Minutes, 1837, 437-47; Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*, 63-66. Three fourths of the ministers and churches excised were in New York State. See Nichols, *New York*, 131.

41. *General Assembly Minutes* (1831, 325, 329). The resolutions were adopted by the Assembly.

42. Spring reported that he had written Dr. George Junkin, president of Lafayette College, requiring him to erase his name from the list of those recommending the college, because of “the course Dr. Junkin pursued in his prosecution of the Rev. Mr. Barnes.” *New York Evangelist*, 13 February 1836, 27. See also Spring, *Life*, 2:51-53.

43. Spring, *Life*, 2:44, 2:23. Taylor’s “Review of Spring on the Means of Regeneration,” appeared in the four installments in *The Quarterly Christian Spectator* for 1829. See Hoyt, *Spring’s Religious Thought*, 351-56.

44. Spring, *Life*, 2:25. Cf. *ibid.*, 2:26-31, and Hoyt, *Spring’s Religious Thought*, 356-360.

45. Gardiner Spring, *A Dissertation on Native Depravity* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt, 1833), 4, 6, cited and quoted in Hoyt, *Spring’s Religious Thought*, 145-46. See also *ibid.*, 147-56. Spring had prepared a discourse on the subject which he delivered “to a large congregation . . .” At the suggestion of evangelist Asahel Nettleton, he revised and enlarged it for publication. Later he took the battle to the home base of the New Haven theology, delivering his discourse in the chapel of Yale College. See Spring, *Life*, 2:31-33.

46. Nathaniel W. Taylor, “Spring on Native Depravity,” *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, (June 1833), 314-32, cited in Hoyt, *Spring’s Religious Thought*, 156-60.

47. Spring, *Life*, 2:21. See also *ibid.*, 1:113, 2:54 and Baird, *History of the New School*, 249-50.

48. Spring, *Life*, 1:226. Interestingly, Finney supporter and Brick Church member Anson Phelps wrote in his diary that Finney’s sermon “gave Great Satisfaction to Doct. Spring . . .” Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 180. For an account of the relation of “the prayer of faith” to the new measures, see Cross, *Burned Over District*, 178-80.

49. Spring, *Life*, 1:217-18, 221. See *ibid.*, 1:215-38. Spring incurred the ire of Finney supporter Lewis Tappan, who asked in a March 16, 1832 letter to Finney: “Would it be murdering souls to draw away half of Dr. Spring’s congregation?” Tappan was responding to Finney’s reservation about converting the Chatham Street Theater into a church for his use because it was “contiguous to Dr. Spring, Mr. Rice, and other important Presbyterian clergymen.” Hardman, *Finney*, 249.

50. Baird, *New School*, 361-62.

51. *Ibid.*, 271-72. “Committee men” were un-ordained officers in Plan of Union churches.

52. See *General Assembly Minutes* (1831), 334-36, and Gardiner Spring, “Memorial of God’s Goodness,” *Brick Church Memorial* (New York: M. W. Dodd, Publisher, 1861), 28-29. Spring’s opposition to deviations from Presbyterian polity did, however, result in the straining of his relations with his former good friend, the famous preacher, reformer and educator, Lyman Beecher. In a January 8, 1833 letter to a Dr. Wisner, Beecher complained that “Dr. Spring, you know, obtained a censure by Synod of the Third Presbytery [of New York] for receiving me by letter.” Barbara M. Cross, ed., *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 2:213. The Synod of New York, on Oct. 19, 1832, took the action Beecher referred to in his letter. See “Minutes of the Synod of New York,” 1823 to 1836 (Unpublished records, housed in Presbyterian Historical Society), 276. In Spring’s view since Beecher had come from another denomination, the Congregational, Presbytery should have examined him to insure that his doctrinal views were acceptable, instead of receiving him by

14 – Gardiner Springs Monograph/by William Hoyt. Used with permission, Presbyterian Heritage Center.

letter. Beecher was the father of several famous children, including Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

53. Spring, *Life*, 1:271. Spring also recommended that the denomination work through the Presbyterian Board of Education, instead of the American Education Society. He continued, however, to support the non-denominational American Bible Society and American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. See Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 71, n.57

54. Spring, *Life*, 2:53-55. The session of the Brick Church supported Spring in his efforts to prevent the division. See *ibid.*, 2:51. Presbytery voted to send delegates to the pre-Assembly convention without permitting Spring to present his resolution. See "Records of Presbytery of New York," 5:137-38. (This was the 1837 "Testimony and Memorial" convention, named for the paper it adopted protesting the New School's alleged lapses in doctrine, polity, and discipline. See Armstrong, et. al., *Presbyterian Enterprise*, 153-56.)

55. "Minutes of the Synod of New York," [Old School], 1837-1869 (Unpublished records, Presbyterian Historical Society), 1:16-17. The author has not found a copy of Spring's resolutions.

56. "Records of the Presbytery of New York," 5:220-22. Spring's motion was intended to commit Presbytery to the Old School General Assembly.

57. *New York Observer*, 20 October, 1838, 166. Spring later wrote, "We submitted to that we did not approve, and hoped for the best." *Life*, 2:56.

58. Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 77-79. The Princeton theologians believed, as did Spring, that the ultra Old Schools' harsh rhetoric and actions threatened the integrity and unity of the Presbyterian Church. See Pope, *New England Calvinism*, 232-33, 36-38, 43-51. A threat, however, by Old School leaders that they would establish another seminary unless the Princeton professors cooperated, caused the latter to back the passage of the excising acts in the 1837 General Assembly. See Thompson, *History of the Presbyterian Churches*, 113-14.

59. Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 73, 424-47. Cf. Spring, *Life*, 1:237. Spring's political conservatism led him to accuse the abolitionists of undermining the authority of the Federal government by their refusal to obey the pro-slavery Fugitive Slave Law. See Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 438-41. It also led him to condemn the slave owning Southern states' secession from the Union, on the ground that it was rebellion against the human authority which God had ordained, and to father the "Gardiner Springs Resolutions" which committed the members of the 1861 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church to support the Federal Union. See *ibid.*, 106-08.

60. Spring, "Memorial of God's Goodness," *Brick Church Memorial*, 28-29.

61. Further, he believed that New School leaders were seeking to gain control of Princeton Seminary and the denomination's invested funds. See Spring, *Life*, 2:44.

62. Spring's publications show, however, that by the time he gave this address, in 1856, he had shifted theologically toward old Calvinism, although he reasserted his Hopkinsian views in his final publications. See Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 74, n.64-65. It should be noted, however, that New School theology was not to be identified with Hopkinsianism or other forms of the New England theology. New School leader George Duffield wrote that while New School theological expressions were closer to those of New England than to those of the Scottish theology of the Old School, they were not to be identified with either. New School theological expressions, he explained, "are those mainly of common sense, and less technical and scholastic than either of the theologies just named." George Duffield, "Doctrines of the New School Presbyterian Church," *The Bibliotheca Sacra and Biblical Repository*, 20 (1863), 575, quoted

and cited in Hoyt, *Spring's Religious Thought*, 60-61.

63. Spring, *Life*, 1:271.

64.

Spring, "Memorial," *Brick Church*, 29.

65. Spring, *Life*, 2:58.

66. *General Assembly Minutes* (1869) [Old School], 886-87; Knapp, *Brick Church*, 316-17.

67. Melancthon W. Jacobus, "The Assemblies of 1869," *The Presbyterian Reunion: A Memorial Volume, 1837-1871* [sic] (New York: DeWitt C. Dent & Company, 1870), 349, 360. Spring voiced his zeal for reunion even in his vote for it. "Gardiner Spring, D. D., voted *yea*, except on that part of the Report postponing the decision of this subject to an adjourned meeting in November next." *General Assembly Minutes* (1869), [Old School], 914. See Lewis G. Vander Velde, *The Presbyterian Churches and the Federal Union: 1861-1869* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 479-522, and passim, for an extensive account of reunion efforts and issues relevant to the subject, and Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*, 221-29 for a discussion of doctrinal issues debated.

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