

BAPTISM AND ECUMENISM IN THE THEOLOGY OF WALTER SCOTT

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by  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

BAPTISM AND ECUMENISM IN THE THEOLOGY OF WALTER SCOTT

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## ABSTRACT

### BAPTISM AND ECUMENISM IN THE THEOLOGY OF WALTER SCOTT

This thesis argues that ecumenism and baptism were ever-present emphases in Walter Scott's theology, but that the priority that he placed on each of these emphases shifted over time. Chapter 1 gives a brief survey of Scott's contribution to the Stone-Campbell movement, discusses the current status of scholarship, previews the method of argumentation that will be used, and discuss the current relevance of this study.

Chapter 2 examines the unique cultural and theological contexts in which Walter Scott found himself. It will also place his views on ecumenism and baptism within his overall theological framework.

Chapter 3 argues that Scott's baptismal theology was developed and solidified in his mind due primarily to the primitivism that dominated his thinking.

Chapter 4 will deny that Scott ever denied salvation to the unimmersed and argue that a shift occurred in the primacy that he placed on his theological emphases from primitivist views of soteriology and baptism early to ecumenism late.

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# BAPTISM AND ECUMENISM IN THE THEOLOGY OF WALTER SCOTT

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Stone-Campbell Movement<sup>1</sup> was an influential religious movement in the antebellum American west that has continued to influence the religious profile of the nation in modern times, having produced three major denominations.<sup>2</sup> The movement was also an outgrowth of and contributor to a broader primitivist movement within many denominations.<sup>3</sup>

The Stone-Campbell Movement is so named because of the leadership roles played by Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) and Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) in its founding years. However, scholars have always recognized that the

<sup>1</sup> The Stone-Campbell Movement is also referred to in literature as the Restoration Movement, or the American Restoration Movement. However, modern scholarship prefers the designation “Stone-Campbell Movement” as the label least open to common misunderstandings often associated with the other designations. For a discussion of the preference for this description over the others, see Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: College Press Publishing, 1994), 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> The three denominational progeny of the movement are the Churches of Christ, the independent Christian Churches (also sometimes called Churches of Christ, but distinguished by their widespread use of instrumental music), and the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ).

<sup>3</sup> Christian primitivists see the advent of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism as a corrupting element within Christianity. They see Christianity as pure and uncorrupted in its original state, and therefore seek to re-create original Christianity in modern times. See Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988); Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Richard T. Hughes, *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

movement would never have achieved its influential status without the work of two other individuals: Alexander's father, Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) and Walter Scott (1796-1861).<sup>4</sup> This thesis will examine Scott as a theologian who struggled to balance his desired ecumenism with his staunch primitivism.

One of Walter Scott's greatest contributions to the Stone-Campbell movement was in the area of soteriology. His connection of baptism with the remission of sins changed the evangelistic thrust of the movement. Having been converted from the paedobaptist theology of his Presbyterian heritage, he adopted a strict credobaptist view. He was presented in 1821 with a pamphlet entitled "On Baptism" written by Henry Errett, who labored with a Haldane congregation of Scotch Baptists in New York City. Errett drew a much more direct connection between immersion and the remission of sins than Scott had ever encountered. He taught that the purpose of baptism was the remission of sins and that it was, therefore, necessary to salvation.<sup>5</sup>

Ironically, this was very similar to the conclusion that Alexander Campbell was beginning to reach. Scott and Campbell's first encounter with one another in the winter of 1821-1822 was, therefore, fortuitous. In fact, Scott's relationship with Campbell during this time has been described as "the most powerful force in the

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<sup>4</sup> As with any movement, there are numerous figures that could be mentioned as being indispensable. Indeed, the aforementioned historical surveys of the movements will give valuable information about many such individuals. Therefore, while the designation of certain individuals as more foundational to the movement is always based on inexact standards, it should suffice to say that most modern scholars credit Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott with founding the movement under consideration. For an examination of the various identifications of the movements founders, see endnote #1 in D. Newell Williams, "Bringing A Vision to Life: Walter Scott and the Restored Church," *Discipliana* 56 (1996): 94.

Biographical information on Scott is plentiful and includes: William Baxter, *The Life of Elder Walter Scott: With Sketches of his Fellow-Laborers, William Hayden, Adamson Bentley, John Henry, and Others* (Cincinnati: Bosworth, Chase, & Hall, 1874); William A. Gerrard III, *A Biographical Study of Walter Scott: American Frontier Evangelist* (Joplin, Mo: College Press, 1992); and Dwight E. Stevenson, *Walter Scott: Voice of the Golden Oracle: A Biography* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1946).

<sup>5</sup> Scott quoted the entire pamphlet in his journal, *The Evangelist*. Henry Errett, *The Evangelist* 6 (December 1838): 283-286.

finalizing of Campbell's idea of baptismal design."<sup>6</sup> While they had independently begun to arrive at the same conclusions regarding baptism, a synergy was developed when they began studying the subject of baptism together.

Scott later came to the understanding that Jesus' Messiahship was the central idea of Christianity (an idea he came to call the "Golden Oracle"). His positions on baptism and the "Golden Oracle" were what led to Scott's formulation of "the ancient gospel." In contrast to Campbell's emphasis on restoring the organization and worship of the primitive church ("the ancient order"), Scott believed he had discovered in the Scriptures "a certain, uniform, authorized plan of preaching Jesus, a plan consecrated by the high examples of all the heavens, and the holy apostles and prophets."<sup>7</sup> In other words, Scott believed that the biblical record provided a uniform evangelistic message that was to be seen as the normative message of all Christian evangelists. He called this message the "ancient gospel."

In his early efforts to set "the ancient gospel" apart from the prevailing religious landscape surrounding him, he was very direct and, at times, pejorative in his critiques. He referred to "the various stupid schemes, all different and all wrong, pursued by Roman Catholics, Socinians, Arians, Covenanters, Seceders, Presbyterians, High-Churchmen, Baptists, Independents, and so forth."<sup>8</sup> Of these groups, he also wrote:

The worshipping establishments now in operation throughout Christendom, increased and cemented by their respective voluminous confessions of faith, and their ecclesiastical constitutions, are not churches of Jesus Christ, but the legitimate

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<sup>6</sup> Carl Spain, "Baptism in the Early Restoration Movement," *Restoration Quarterly* 1 (1957): 217.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Scott [pseudo., Philip], "On Teaching Christianity – No. 2," *The Christian Baptist* 1 (3 Nov. 1823): 23.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Scott [pseudo., Philip], "On Teaching Christianity – No. 1," *The Christian Baptist* 1 (1 Sept. 1823): 10-11.

daughters of that Mother of Harlots, the Church of Rome.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, he wrote:

They who bow down to [the idols of modern confessions of faith] shall go down to the grave with a lie in their right hand. The sword of the Lord's mouth is unsheathed against the man of sin, nor will it kiss the scabbard until his enemies are consumed. O Gamaliel! O Socrates! O Satan! Save your sinking disciples whose judgment now of a long time lingers not and their damnation slumbers not!<sup>10</sup>

This condemning language regarding believers who adhere to creedal statements was bolstered by his baptismal theology that specified that one must be immersed as a believer, and that the immersion must be “for the remission of sins.”<sup>11</sup>

However, to characterize Scott's entire life and work by these uncomplimentary statements would be a mistake. Statements like these are almost entirely limited to his early writings. His later writings, particularly in *The Protestant Unionist*, are at least as ecumenical as his early writings are exclusionary. For instance, in an 1845 article entitled “Union of Protestants,” he praised the efforts of the Lutherans and Cumberland Presbyterians to have a “friendly intercourse with each other.” After expressing hopefulness that the union would be realized, he said, “It will be leading the way in a matter which we fondly hope will become general among the evangelical Protestant denominations of our own and other lands.”<sup>12</sup> He then advocated a “*formal* and *visible* recognition of each other as Christians, by the *highest* ecclesiastical bodies of the several Churches.”<sup>13</sup> He followed this plea by giving a sampling of the

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<sup>9</sup> Scott, “Teaching – No. 2,” 23.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Scott, “Sacred Colloquy – No. 4,” *The Evangelist* 1 (2 Apr. 1832): 87-89.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Scott, “Union of Protestants,” *The Protestant Unionist* 1 (8 Jan. 1845): 42.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

denominations that should regard each other as “sister churches” and engage in dialogue with each other:

What should hinder, for instance, and interchange of delegates, and Christian salutations between the General assembly of the Presbyterian Church, Old School or New, or Cumberland, and the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church? And so of others.

Among these we may mention Evangelical Lutherans, German Reformed, Dutch Reformed, the greater portion of the several Presbyterian churches, the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant churches; Congregationalists also, and possibly a number of others, whose names do not now occur to us; all holding confessedly, the great cardinal truths of the Gospel, though differing in minor particulars.<sup>14</sup>

One will surely note the highly creedal nature of most of the churches mentioned here. Yet, Scott no longer referred to them as the “legitimate daughters of the mother of Harlots,” but is advocated their union as furthering the cause of Christ. He no longer referred to their theological constructs and creedal statements as “stupid schemes,” but argued that “the fundamental truths of the Word of God [were] embodied at present in all Confessions of the Protestant faith.”<sup>15</sup> This article was typical of those in his later years.

Furthermore, it is possible to understand the more exclusionary early statements in a more benign way than they appear on the surface. To be sure, they are certainly more exclusionary than his later comments. However, they need not be seen as an outright denial of the salvation of other believers. Their tone can be at least partially understood as both overstatement coming from the zeal and idealism that often accompany newfound convictions and the expression of views that were in their infant stages of development. In other words, it is possible that Scott, upon discovering what he

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

believed to be the path to Christian unity, initially saw those who did not subscribe to his view as being opposed to unity itself. This may have prompted harsh language towards them. However, as his views matured and developed over time, he began to see value and potential in all Protestant groups and, while never abandoning his primitivist convictions, began to place greater emphasis on the common aspects of the faith of all Protestant groups and the cohesion of these commonalities with his primitivist convictions.

Based on the above reasoning, and using Scott's own statements at the various stages of his life as evidence, it will be shown that Scott's pursuit of unity was, in his earlier years, secondary to his pursuit of the restoration of the "ancient gospel," but that this prioritization was largely reversed in his later years, particularly in his writings in *The Protestant Unionist* (1844-1848). Thus, his later writings seem to be much more ecumenically minded than his early ones.

### **Status of Scholarship**

Stone-Campbell scholars have done much biographical work on Scott.<sup>16</sup> His influence on Alexander Campbell's theology and on the advancement of the movement as a whole has been treated.<sup>17</sup> However, the field has woefully neglected Scott's theology in two connected areas. First, little work has been done regarding his theology and its

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<sup>16</sup> See note 4 above.

<sup>17</sup> See L. Edward Hicks, "Rational Religion in the Ohio Western Reserve (1827-1830): Walter Scott and the Restoration Appeal of Baptism for the Remission of Sin," *Restoration Quarterly* 34 (1992): 207-219; Douglas A. Foster, "Churches of Christ and Baptism: An Historical and Theological Overview," *Restoration Quarterly* 43 (2001): 79-94; Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 48-54; Spain, "Baptism," 213-219; Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of the Restoration Movement*, rev. ed. (Abilene: ACU Press, 2003).

development.<sup>18</sup> In particular, there is an absence of research regarding the changes and developments in his attitude towards other believers.

Second, within this void in the scholarship of the movement, the greatest deficiency is found in the lack of attention paid to Scott's writings from 1844-1848 in *The Protestant Unionist*. This publication has been almost entirely neglected. Indeed, one will scarcely find more than a passing acknowledgement of his involvement in that publication which, when examined, sheds valuable insight on Scott's late ecumenical thinking.

Recognizing that Scott's theology in general, and his writings in *The Protestant Unionist* in particular are neglected in current research, I will argue that there was an ever-present tension in Walter Scott's ecclesiology between his baptismal theology and his desire for Christian unity. He believed that a primitivist, rationalistic reading of the Bible, when separated from creeds and clergy, would lead to a uniform understanding of its basic truths and thereby destroy all sectarian division in Christianity, thus creating unity. It was this method of reading the Bible that convinced him that salvation came when believers were immersed "for the remission of sins." However, this alienated many Christians who did not identify with his baptismal theology. Thus, his two guiding principles, unity and primitivism (represented by baptism) were in constant tension. I will further argue that his later writings, particularly those in *The Protestant Unionist*, reveal that primacy between these ideas had shifted from baptism early on to ecumenism in his later life.

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<sup>18</sup> Gerrard and Toulouse have probably compiled the most valuable insights into Scott's theology. See previous citation for Gerrard; Mark G. Toulouse, ed., *Walter Scott: A Nineteenth-Century Evangelical* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

## **Method of Argumentation**

This thesis will be established by examining three lines of research: the context of Walter Scott's thought, his baptismal theology, and his ecumenism. This research will rely heavily on Scott's writings in *The Christian Baptist*, *The Evangelist*, and *The Protestant Unionist*, as well as his book-length works such as *The Gospel Restored*, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, *To Themelion*, and *The Nekrosis*,

## **The Cultural and Theological Context of Walter Scott's Thought**

To speak of Scott's views on baptism outside of the context of his broader theology and cultural context would give an incomplete, and possibly inaccurate, picture of his theology. His theological views were born in the unique cultural context of the nineteenth century American frontier, which highly valued the ideals of freedom and autonomy. When applied to Christianity, these values contributed to a widespread (although not universal) dissatisfaction with the prevailing theological systems and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Philosophically, empirical rationalism was dominant and contributed to a rationalistic hermeneutic which viewed emotion with suspicion. Chapter two will examine these cultural phenomena in more detail as part of the matrix out of which Scott's views developed.

Scott's baptismal views were also but one part in a broader soteriological scheme that he called "the ancient gospel." Chapter two will also place the discussion of Scott's baptismal theology and ecumenism into its proper theological context by examining this broader soteriology.

To summarize his soteriological scheme, Scott devised the "five finger exercise." In his evangelistic work, he would use the five fingers on a hand to illustrate

what he believed to be the key elements in salvation: faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life; the last two elements were often combined, enabling the preacher to count them off on one hand. In this system, Scott included what he believed was man's role in the salvific process (faith, repentance, baptism), as well as God's role (remission of sins, the Holy Spirit, eternal life). This exercise can be understood with more depth by looking at the elaborations that Scott included in his own writings. Chapter two will consult these writings in an effort to establish the theological context for the rest of the study.

The "five finger exercise" was developed largely as a response to both the emotionalistic revivalists and the Calvinists, who both were found on the frontier. It also sought to appeal to those who were frustrated with the ministerial and evangelistic methods of these two groups. In Scott's "ancient gospel" scheme, baptism served as an empirical point of reference whereby the subject would have assurance of his salvation. Chapter two will also examine this broader soteriological scheme as the context of thought in which his views of baptism and ecumenism were held.

### **Walter Scott's baptismal theology**

Scott's baptismal theology was a key factor in his assessment of believers outside of the movement. Upon his rejection of infant sprinkling, he adopted an immersionist, credobaptist stance on baptism. While this made for a friendly initial relationship with the Baptists, his understanding that baptism was "for the remission of sins" put him at odds with many Baptists of his day. He viewed baptism, not faith, as the point at which sin was remitted and the gift of the Holy Spirit was received. He therefore believed that when baptism was not connected with the remission of sins, it was stripped

of its full import. Chapter three will examine his baptismal theology and its influences.

Scott's early career focused much more energy on "the ancient gospel," and therefore baptism, than did his later career (i.e. *The Protestant Unionist*). However, there is no indication that his baptismal theology changed significantly during his career. Therefore, his later ecumenical tone cannot be attributed to a change in baptismal theology. Rather, his early exclusivist tendencies may be attributed to the inherent tension between primitivism and ecumenism and his ongoing struggle with that tension. Chapter three will, therefore, argue that Scott's baptismal theology was developed and solidified in his mind due primarily to the primitivism that dominated his early thinking. His later ecumenical emphasis demonstrates not that his baptismal theology had changed, but that Scott had found greater harmony between it and ecumenism.

### **Walter Scott's ecumenism**

The chief motivating factor for the Stone-Campbell movement was division within Christianity. Particularly, the movement's leaders detested the insistence of their contemporaries on identifying oneself with a particular creed or confession of faith. In the view of the "reformers" (as they referred to themselves), allegiance to Christ was all that should be expected. Thus, the movement began as a unity movement. Walter Scott understood and embraced this ecumenical message from the beginning of his involvement with the Disciples.

Unfortunately, Scott's desire for unity played a secondary role early in his career as an evangelist and editor. It is fairly clear that his language towards other believers in his early writings is biting and, at times pejorative. His language at times seems to deny the Christian identity of other believers, as the above quotations attest.

Some authors have read into this language an actual denial of salvation.<sup>19</sup>

This perceived condemnation of all other believers is connected largely with his writings on baptism. After all, since Christianity at that time consisted of paedobaptists and credobaptists who did not baptize “for the remission of sins”, Scott found few who shared the soteriology that Scott believed was derived directly from the Scriptures. Therefore, the questions must be asked: Did Scott deny salvation to the unimmersed? Did he deny salvation to those who were immersed, but for some reason other than the remission of sins? Chapter four will propose a reading of Scott that answers both questions in the negative. It will show that his strong language can be understood as impassioned frustration with what he saw as departures from genuine and pure (i.e. primitive) Christian teaching. Yet the Christian identity of other believers was never outright denied. The key source for this alternative view is Scott’s written exchange with Samuel W. Lynd, a Baptist, on the subject of baptism.<sup>20</sup> This exchange will be examined and harmonized with some of his more exclusivist statements.

Ecumenism was an ever-present part of Scott’s theology. It was his belief that this unity would be achieved by the widespread acceptance of the rationalistic and primitivist presentation of the gospel that he advocated. However, in later years, his views on the “ancient gospel” became secondary to his desire for union among Christians. The titles that he chose for his two major publications give a small indication of a shift in emphasis: *The Evangelist* (emphasizing soteriology/evangelism) early and *The Protestant Unionist* (emphasizing ecumenism) late. Chapter four will examine this

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Richard T. Hughes, after noting some of Scott’s strong language towards the extant denominations, says, “In his zeal for the primitive order, he un-Christianized them all.” (*Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 50).

<sup>20</sup> This exchange was published in successive issues of *The Evangelist*, spanning from September to December 1833.

shift in primacy.

### **Importance of This Study**

An examination into Scott's theology is of importance to members of the Churches of Christ, independent Christian Churches, and Disciples of Christ. As some members of these churches are renewing efforts to reunite as a fellowship,<sup>21</sup> it is becoming increasingly important to come to as full an understanding as possible about the nature of the Stone-Campbell movement and what its founders taught. This discovery of origins will be incomplete if the discussion is limited to the movement's namesakes. Indeed, Scott's influence on the movement, and specifically on the language and approach of the Churches of Christ,<sup>22</sup> demands that he be examined more closely.

Furthermore, Jeffrey Peterson has said, "leaders in many other churches have begun to take an approach to seeking increased unity that has much in common with Restorationism."<sup>23</sup> Peterson cites the conclusions reached between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on justification by faith,<sup>24</sup> the Lima Report's statements regarding baptism, eucharist, and ministry<sup>25</sup>; the unofficial but substantive dialogue between evangelicals

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<sup>21</sup> For example, the Stone-Campbell Dialogue (<http://www.disciples.org/ccu/Dialogues/StoneCampbell.html>) began in 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Hughes credits Scott as being "the person who stood at the fountainhead of the radical Campbell tradition – and therefore of the Churches of Christ, in many respects" (*Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 48).

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Peterson, "A Christian Affirmation: An Exchange of Views: A Reply To Leroy Garrett," *Christian Studies* 21 (Fall 2006): 75.

<sup>24</sup> See the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* by The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). (online at <http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/ecumenicaldialogue/romancatholic/jddj/>).

<sup>25</sup> "Baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents" and "[Eucharist] should take place at least every Sunday." See the "Lima Report" of the World Council of Churches, published as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), as well as the useful evangelical response by David F. Wright, *Baptism, Eucharist &*

and Catholics on issues including soteriology, scripture, fellowship, and sanctification;<sup>26</sup> and Thomas Oden's recognition of a new popular form of ecumenism oriented in the New Testament and ancient teaching and practice.<sup>27</sup>

Since many churches are seeing value in both ecumenism and primitivism, it will be valuable for them to look at past movements that have embraced these same ideals. The Stone-Campbell movement can inform modern movements about the various pitfalls and summits to which primitivism and ecumenism are prone. Walter Scott experienced both success and disappointment in his life and ministry. An examination into these shifts will give valuable insight into the factors that contributed to both.

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*Ministry (The "Lima Report"): An Evangelical Assessment* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1984).

<sup>26</sup> See the statements "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," *First Things* 43 (May 1994): 15-22; "The Gift of Salvation," *First Things* 79 (January 1998): 20-23; "Your Word Is Truth," *First Things* 125 (August/September 2002): 38-42; "The Communion of Saints," *First Things* 131 (March 2003): 26-33; and "The Call to Holiness," *First Things* 151 (March 2005): 23-26.

<sup>27</sup> See Thomas C. Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), and also Jeffrey Peterson, review of *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity*, by Thomas C. Oden, *The Christian Chronicle*, August 2004, Reviews sec., p. 32.

CHAPTER 2  
THE CULTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF WALTER  
SCOTT'S THOUGHT

Walter Scott's views on baptism and ecumenism were not held in a theological vacuum, but within a cultural and theological context that contributed to their formation. To examine his views separated from these contextual considerations would lead to conclusions that were shallow at best, and inaccurate at worst. Scott's worldview and the appeal of his preaching and writing, were impacted by the two cultures in which he found himself: the culture of the antebellum American frontier with its value placed on autonomy, individualism, and optimism, and the culture of Second Great Awakening Protestant Christianity, characterized by a high view of creedal statements, often-emotionally driven camp meeting revivals, anti-Catholic sentiment, and a healthy dose of Calvinistic preaching. Baptism and ecumenism were key elements of a broader soteriological scheme that Scott had developed as a response to these Protestant phenomena.

**American Frontier Culture**

The Stone-Campbell movement as a whole, and Scott's work in particular, were born into a uniquely American setting. Rational empiricism had shaped much of the thought of late modernity, including that of Scott. The American frontier, where the Stone-Campbell movement was born, provided fertile soil for this approach to flourish.

Individualistic idealism brought settlers to the untamed frontier as they sought a better life for themselves. Stone-Campbell was but one of several movements that emerged “from [a] mixture of religious democracy, philosophical rationalism, and revivalistic emotionalism” and that “sought to walk the uncertain line between rationalism and emotionalism.”<sup>28</sup>

The young nation had found its identity in the ideals of national freedom and autonomy. The rugged frontier family launching out into the unknown in the quest to make a life for themselves was not an uncommon experience. In many ways, it was an optimistic time. The nation, still largely unsettled, held much promise for those willing to go out on their own. Out of this freedom, autonomy, and optimism, a societal assumption developed that the individual need not rely on anything but himself to realize achievement. By the mid-nineteenth century, this autonomous and individualistic spirit had reached the church. The result was that “many leaders of newly emerging Christian movements began to call for concurrent religious autonomy.”<sup>29</sup>

It would not take long before these settlers were themselves viewed by pioneer evangelists as an untamed territory to be conquered.

More than ninety percent of the people on the frontier made no profession of any religion. It seems that as they made their way west they were not only trying to get away from the eastern states where they had not done well financially, but as far away from Europe and its religious tyranny as possible.

Freedom of religion had come to mean freedom *from* religion. The frontier was wild and rugged, attracting those especially of an independent spirit who had little interest in the traditional forms of religion.<sup>30</sup>

The influx of itinerant evangelists seeking to convert these irreligious frontiersmen led to

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<sup>28</sup> Amy Collier Artman, “An Implicit Creed: Walter Scott and the Golden Oracle,” in Toulouse, *Walter Scott*, 38.

<sup>29</sup> Artman, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Garrett, *The Stone Campbell Movement*, 48

what historians now call the Second Great Awakening.

### **The Culture of Protestantism**

The Great Awakening was a period of spiritual enthusiasm that began around 1735 and was led by the preaching of men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. The spiritual fervor was diluted with the horrors of the Revolutionary War, and religion once again began to decline in the 15 years after the war. This set the stage for a new revival movement, the Second Great Awakening, a part of which was the Stone-Campbell movement.

Led by the Methodist circuit riders and the Baptist farmer-preachers, churches began to form all across the frontier. “Camp meeting” revivals were used by all denominations as they tried to meet a growing demand for preaching with a limited supply of preachers. The camp meeting involved families traveling considerable distances to an extended revival meeting, and camping out on the site of the revival until it ended and they could travel home. At times, great masses of people would come, necessitating the cooperation of multiple preachers. Such was the case in August of 1801, when Barton W. Stone was joined by numerous other preachers from various denominations and approximately 25,000 people in Stone’s home of Cane Ridge, Kentucky for what became one of the landmark events of the Second Great Awakening. The Cane Ridge camp meeting is also recognized as the birthplace of the Stone branch of the Stone-Campbell movement.

### **Calvinism**

While revivalism was characteristic of both Arminian and Calvinist churches, Scott’s primary experience (and his primary objection) had been with the Calvinistic

Presbyterian and Baptist churches. The Calvinism Scott observed seemingly advocated by these denominations taught that individuals could not participate in their own salvation. Faith became the result of special operations of the Holy Spirit on an individual. God had predestined some to receive faith and be saved and others to condemnation. Therefore, the best one could do was to respond and hope that they were among the elect. The intensely emotional experiences that followed were viewed as “proof” of that election.<sup>31</sup>

For example, William Amend, Scott’s first convert, in a letter recounting his conversion at one of Scott’s revivals in 1827, reflects on his Calvinistic Presbyterian heritage:

I was at that time a member of that strait sect called Presbyterians, taught many curious things, as election, fore-ordination, &c. that belief in these matters was necessary; that this faith resulted from some secret impulse; and worse, that I could not believe; and finally that I must hope and pray that God would have mercy upon me! In this wilderness I became wearied ...<sup>32</sup>

This statement by Mr. Amend illustrates well the hopelessness and frustration that some felt and that Scott fought against.

Scott’s criticism of Calvinism was acute. For example, in 1836 he wrote:

The Apostles never preached election to unconverted people as the Calvinists do; and the disciples themselves were never spoken to on this matter as persons who had believed, because they were elected, but rather as those who were elected because they had believed. ...<sup>33</sup>

Calvinistic election exhibits the divine sovereignty in a point in which it by no means obtains in Christianity. It is not exhibited in a capricious choice of this, that,

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<sup>31</sup> This is admittedly an oversimplification of Calvinism. However, it was this understanding of Calvinism to which Scott was reacting.

<sup>32</sup> The letter is published by Scott in “On the Restoration of the Ancient Gospel, Letter No. 6,” *The Evangelist* 2 (1833): 160-162.

<sup>33</sup> Walter Scott, *The Gospel Restored, A Discourse* (Cincinnati: Donogh, 1836), Reproduced (Kansas City: Old Paths Book Club, 1949), 280.

and other persons, and passing by others, as Calvinism would and does have it; but in the justification of sinners of all nations on the principle of faith, as will appear by and by, an act of God's sovereignty, which was very displeasing to the Jews.<sup>34</sup>

This criticism held true in his later life as well, as he wrote in his 1853 book

*The Nekrosis*:

This system not only breaks up the antithetical structure of the basis of revealed religion, but strikes into a logical absurdity the connection between that basis and the preached Gospel. ...

If, therefore, Calvinists have ever done any good to individuals, families or nations, they did it, not by force of the logic of their system, but in spite of its absolute want of logic – they did it not by their system, but in spite of it.<sup>35</sup>

Among Scott's chief objections to Calvinism was the intersection of pneumatology and bibliology. Specifically, he differed with them on the respective roles of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures in conversion. He claimed:

... however much Romans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists differ in the detail of religion, with one common error all their schemes begin, viz, that special operations of the Spirit of God are necessary to faith: in other words, that the Holy Scriptures are of themselves insufficient to produce faith of the Gospel.<sup>36</sup>

Scott felt that the Calvinistic teaching regarding the role of the Spirit in conversion led to a lower view of Scripture. In response to this, he taught that "the Holy Scriptures, without any previous or accompanying operation of the Spirit of our God, are appointed of God and of Jesus our Lord, as the all-sufficient means for producing faith even in the greatest of sinners."<sup>37</sup> Thus, for Scott, the Spirit's role in conversion of sinners was indirect (through the scriptures). It was only after conversion, in continuing work of sanctification, that the Spirit took a more direct role. This belief led him to dub the Holy

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Scott, *The Nekrosis, or The Death of Christ* (Cincinnati: Walter Scott, 1853), 26-27.

<sup>36</sup> Walter Scott, "Popular Conversion," *The Evangelist* 1 (2 Dec. 1833): 270-271.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 271.

Spirit a “missionary to the church.”<sup>38</sup>

Scott’s preaching resonated with those who, like Mr. Amend, were disillusioned by their failure to experience the inner signs of grace, which would have served as proof of their election. He offered a way for them to have assurance of their salvation based on an objective assessment of biblical teaching, rather than a subjective emotional experience.

A committed rationalist, Scott’s first published series of articles show his rejection of the methods of revivalists and Calvinists. He believed that he had discovered in Scripture a soteriological scheme that accurately addressed both the human and divine roles in salvation in a rational way. In his view, this evangelistic method solved the problems that he had identified in the methods of the Calvinists.

### **Extreme emotionalism**

Before examining this evangelistic method in more detail, it will be helpful to look more closely at one feature of many camp meeting revivals alluded to above -- extreme emotional outpourings. Cane Ridge was no exception, featuring falling, running, barking, jerking, and various other physical manifestations. Many of the Calvinist revivalist preachers taught that these emotional and physical outpourings were the outward evidence that one could expect when God’s grace was bestowed.<sup>39</sup> Stone-Campbell historian Henry E. Webb described on the religious climate as follows:

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<sup>38</sup> Scott, *The Gospel Restored*, 528; *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit* (Bethany, Va.: Alexander Campbell, 1831), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Emotionalism was neither present in all revivals, nor was it exclusive to Calvinistic denominations. Arminian evangelists would often bring their audiences to the point of overwhelming displays of emotion as well. A major difference came in the meaning that these outpourings had to each group. Scott was not a fan of emotionalism in either the Calvinist or Arminian camps, but his experience and compounded frustration was with the Calvinists.

The convicted sinner was expected to agonize before the Lord at the mourner's bench, where he entreated the Lord to be merciful and save him. Such anguish could continue for several hours before the Lord would respond with some miraculous "assurance of pardon." At this moment, it was held that God bestowed the "gift" of saving faith upon the penitent sinner. The whole process was highly emotional and often quite devoid of substantive content. Skilled practitioners of revivalist arts became very adept at manipulation of frontier crowds and frequently produced spectacular results.<sup>40</sup>

While not opposed to emotion *per se*, Scott took great exception to these practices on two grounds: its hopelessness and its subjective nature.

**Hopelessness.** Scott saw psychological burdens being placed on many by the popular evangelistic methods of the revivalists. Many in that day were disillusioned by their failure to experience such movements of the Holy Spirit, and often concluded that this meant they were simply predestined to condemnation. At the very least, they were excluded from church membership.

Without proof of an emotional religious experience, the individual could not be a candidate for membership in these churches. As a result, memberships were shrinking and those wishing to be included were excluded.<sup>41</sup>

This rejection from church membership often meant the rejection of a life of faith, as "Some felt salvation to be a capricious whim of God and limited only to the 'elect.'<sup>42</sup> William Baxter further notes:

Men even of education and more than ordinary natural ability were known, after seeking the path to God by reading the record he had given to men, to ask in prayer a sign or token of their acceptance; and many, feeling that God had denied to them what he seemed to have granted so lavishly to others, gave up the search in hopeless despair.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity*, 131.

<sup>41</sup> Hicks, "Rational Religion," 212.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Baxter, *Elder Walter Scott*, 92-93.

Scott saw this hopeless despair on the frontier, and became convinced that it was unnecessary and could be avoided by an evangelistic appeal that placed greater value on a rational approach to scripture than it did on emotionalism.

**Subjectiveness.** Scott, ever the rationalist, saw Calvinistic/Revivalistic tradition's greatest fault in its failure to generate an objective assurance in the spiritual lives of many who never seemed to pass through the emotional morphology of conversion. The solution Scott (and others) envisioned required a turn to a more objective standard away from the endless labyrinth of searching out one's inner life to find signs of grace.

One widely accepted Protestant doctrine, especially among the Calvinists, was the belief that all men have within their nature some concept of God, which was placed there by God himself. Having rejected the idea of innate religious knowledge, "Scott and Campbell proposed a more rational religious philosophy which concluded that revealed truth provided the only logical religious experience possible. Religious experience could be acquired only through a knowledge of the biblical record."<sup>44</sup> This created a predictable tension with those who attributed the highest value to religious experiences of an emotional/subjective nature. Furthermore, Scott believed that requiring such experiences for church membership, as was common in the Baptist and Presbyterian churches, among others, was to require more of a person to be considered a Christian than Christ himself did.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hicks, "Rational Religion," 211.

<sup>45</sup> Hicks, "Rational Religion," 211-212. Hicks also notes that Scott quoted from Charles G. Finney's *On Revivals* in his opposition to this method of granting church membership. *The Evangelist* 9 (1841): 141.

## Scott's Soteriology

Colored by the social, philosophical, and theological climate of the time, Scott developed an overall view of soteriology in which he framed his more specific views on baptism and ecumenism.

### The Golden Oracle

In Scott's first published series of articles, entitled "On Teaching Christianity," he set out to reveal "one uniform and universal plan of teaching the christian religion."<sup>46</sup> He was motivated in this endeavor by the normative place that creeds and confessional statements assumed in determining orthodoxy and a candidate's acceptability for both church membership and ministerial roles. This phenomenon, also known as creedalism, was of great concern to him as he saw these as playing a role reserved for the scriptures alone.

He also saw the proliferation creeds and confessions of faith as the primary cause of religious division in his day. He called them the "various stupid schemes, all different and all wrong, pursued by Roman Catholics, Socinians, Arians, Covenanters, Seceders, Presbyterians, High-Churchmen, Baptists, Independents, and so forth."<sup>47</sup>

William Baxter, a contemporary of Scott, commented on the prevalent creedal allegiance of the day:

Conformity to party views was the test of orthodoxy; and to deny the teachings of the Church Standards, whether Creed, Catechism, or Confession of Faith, even though the Bible were silent in such matters, was quite as heretical and dangerous as

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<sup>46</sup> Scott [pseud., Philip], "On Teaching Christianity – No. 1," *The Christian Baptist* 1 (1 Sept. 1823):10. The entire four-part series: "No. 1," *The Christian Baptist* 1 (1 Sept. 1823): 10-11; "No. 2," *The Christian Baptist* 1 (3 Nov. 1823): 23-25; "No. 3," *The Christian Baptist* 1 (5 Jan. 1824): 36-38; "No. 4," *The Christian Baptist* 1 (2 Feb. 1824): 46-48. The spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar of the period will be maintained throughout.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

to deny the clearest and most explicit declarations of Holy Writ. Many of the religious parties regarded each other as the Jews and Samaritans formerly did; and the union of Christians, for which the Savior prayed with almost his dying breath, and when nearly in sight of the cross, was regarded not only as unattainable but even undesirable.<sup>48</sup>

In response to this trend, Scott sought to “attend to the plan of teaching the truth pursued by God – by the Lord Jesus Christ – by the Holy Spirit, in presenting it to all men in the scriptures, and by the apostles and all who first preached it – a plan founded in the very nature of the saving truth itself ...”<sup>49</sup>

This early, more idealistic Scott believed that he could essentially do away with creedalism, thereby bringing about Christian unity and the millennium, by showing a singular evangelistic methodology advocated and used by Christ and his apostles. He believed that he had discovered this methodology in the scriptures. He based his conclusion on three factors, which he elucidated in his second installment of “On Christianity.

First, he saw Christian unity as based on the fact of Jesus’ deity and messiahship. Church doctrines and theological constructs should not, therefore, be considered when determining lines of fellowship. Second, he saw kingdom growth as coming from belief in this fact. Finally, he believed that the creedalism of the various denominations were more reminiscent of Roman Catholicism than of his conception of the primitive Christian church. It was with this in mind that he said:

... the worshipping establishments now in operation throughout christendom, increased and cemented by their respective voluminous confessions of faith, and their ecclesiastical constitutions, are not churches of Jesus Christ, but the legitimate daughters of the Mother of Harlots, the Church of Rome.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Baxter, *Elder Walter Scott*, 22-23.

<sup>49</sup> Scott, “On Teaching Christianity – No. 1,” 10.

In summary, Scott's view in this series of articles was that the Bible presented Jesus as the Messiah, and that confession of belief in this fact was the only requirement for entrance into the church. His personal and observed experience with extant denominations convinced him that they added to this biblical expectation a set of required doctrinal statements unrelated to the messiahship of Jesus (i.e. creeds and confessions of faith). Thus, these denominations were, in his mind, placing doctrinal statements between the sinner and salvation. In that sense, this was no different from placing the Pope between the sinner and salvation in the Roman Catholic Church, in his view the Mother of Harlots predicted in the Book of Revelation.<sup>51</sup> His conclusion: "that this peerless fact, that '*Jesus is the Christ,*' forms the sole bond of union among holy brethren, and is also the means through faith for increasing the body of Christ in the earth."<sup>52</sup> This Christ-centered soteriology he later dubbed "The Golden Oracle."

Christocentrism and anti-creedalism characterized Scott's entire career.<sup>53</sup> However, his later writings reflect a man who had become less idealistic and pejorative while holding the same basic positions. In an 1846 article in *The Protestant Unionist* dealing with the similarities and differences between the Baptists and the "Reformers,"<sup>54</sup> he reiterated his long-held anti-creedal views:

<sup>50</sup> Scott, "On Teaching Christianity – No. 2," 23

<sup>51</sup> This anti-Catholic interpretation of Revelation was maintained throughout his life. In 1845, he authored an article in his strongly anti-Catholic publication *The Protestant Unionist* seeking to prove from Revelation 17 that "[Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots] is considered by sound Protestant interpreters to signify the Christian apostasy as it exists in metropolitan splendor in the city of Rome." Walter Scott, "Protestantism," *The Protestant Unionist* 1 (26 Mar. 1845): 106.

<sup>52</sup> Scott, "On Teaching Christianity – No. 3," 36.

<sup>53</sup> By "Christocentrism," I refer to Scott's placement of Jesus' messiahship at the center of soteriology and ecumenism.

<sup>54</sup> "Reformers" refers here to members of the Stone-Campbell movement. They also called themselves "disciples" and "Christians."

... the great Protestant maxim ... [is] that “the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants.” ... Remember that Christians are imparting to the heathen, our religion in the simplest form of the Bible alone, and that in this unembarrassed shape heaven also originally gave it to us all. ... Had the Bible needed an explanatory symbol in the form either of Creed or Confession, heaven would have accompanied it with the cognate oracle.<sup>55</sup>

He also reiterated his Christocentric theology, but with language far less pejorative, perhaps even congenial:

Our brethren, then, go for the Divinity of Christ as the highest category in Christianity. ... Whosoever therefore believes and confess religiously the divinity of Christ is admitted to our churches. We receive such to the blessings of what Christ does because they believe and confess what Christ is.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, while acknowledging that the Philadelphia Confession of Faith was one difference between the Baptists and the Reformers, yet he specifically pointed out that the similarities are what should be emphasized, and that the differences should hinder union:

... to many [the differences between Baptists and Reformers] will seem eternal barriers to union. But no. Observe, the act of taking differences is but the lower philosophy. The power of tracing resemblances is a higher science, and more noble withal. ...

The Baptists take the Bible with the Philadelphia Confession. We the Bible only. Now truth is magnanimous, and can be generous. We will therefore believe that the Confession is a document among you of little or no intrinsic authority, and that you virtually practise what we preach, that is, you take the Bible for your sole guide in religion. You see then we can apologize for your wrong theory, if you can pardon us for an identical practice – for practically we are one here.<sup>57</sup>

In this same article, he re-emphasized the Christocentric nature of his plea.

However, the tone was once again much more conciliatory than would have been found in his early writings as he acknowledged that the Baptists only allowed believers in Christ into their fellowship. He believed that they had simply misprioritized things, but still

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<sup>55</sup> Walter Scott, “The Religious Herald,” *The Protestant Unionist* 2 (2 Dec. 1846): 206.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

longed for union with them.

You imagine the mass of revelation collected in the Philadelphia Confession to be the creed of Christianity. We know that the *Divinity of Christ* is the creed of our religion. But we can forgive your mistake in confounding this great mystery of godliness with other and inferior revelations, because we know that you admit none to your communion who deny it. Your error is confusion and want of order, not heresy, or a denial of the faith. We forgive you. Love us as brethren.<sup>58</sup>

Still later, in 1852, Scott wrote *To Themelion: The Union of Christians on Christian Principles*. This book shows a great correspondence with his earlier views, once again expressed in more amicable language. The opening chapter expounds on three propositions:

Prop. I. Christianity stands on a basis of reality – an organic truth – a creed – something to be believed in order to salvation.

Prop. II. This Creed is a proposition – the Messiahship and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ – the common faith of Christians.

Prop. III. It is dangerous, therefore, for any man, or any number of men, to fabricate or select another Creed, either for one, or any number, or all of the Churches of God. By doing so, they change the constitutional laws of the kingdom, and usurp the rights of God, who founded the Church himself, and did not leave the settlement of this part of the Christian institution even to his own Son.<sup>59</sup>

Maintaining his Christocentrism throughout, his later reference to credalism as “dangerous” and his appeal to joint fellowship in spite of the Philadelphia Confession are a far cry from his early pejorative references to “stupid schemes” and “the legitimate daughters of the Mother of Harlots, the Church of Rome.”

### **Scott’s “*de facto*” Creed**

In examining Scott’s “no creed but Christ” approach, Amy Artman has observed that, while always denying any adherence to any creed other than the “Golden

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Walter Scott, *To Themelion: The Union of Christians on Christian Principles* (Cincinnati: C.A. Morgan & Co., 1852), 3-4.

Oracle,” Scott had inadvertently developed a “*de facto* creed” in his own teaching.

Scott converted thousands to a Stone-Campbell movement that claimed to be devoid of any creed other than the scriptural creed of the confession of Christ. Yet ... in Scott’s own teaching and preaching he formulated a structure that operated in addition to this confessional statement as a *de facto* creed. This practical structure was the way he communicated what he believed as well as what he expected all Christians to believe. It made up his implicit creed.<sup>60</sup>

Artman notes some elements of this “implicit creed”:

The creed of Jesus Christ and its implicit structure of right belief and response was the means by which the world could be saved. This structure was predicated upon the first principle of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. In addition, the structure included the necessary accompaniments to that confession: repentance, baptism for the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the realization of eternal life.<sup>61</sup>

Artman’s observations are valuable. However, their accuracy is dependent upon two factors: the meaning of her assertion that this *de facto* creed was “what he expected all Christians to believe” and the period of his life that she is referencing.

Indeed, Scott’s convictions were firmly held. As is the nature of firmly held convictions, he also believed that those who differed with him were wrong and therefore should believe as he did. Furthermore, in Scott’s earlier writings, his language is far less conciliatory. However, if Artman means to imply that his *de facto* creed was viewed in the exclusionary way that William Baxter described the extant creedalism of the denominations<sup>62</sup> -- refusing fellowship to those differed with him -- she has joined other Stone-Campbell scholars in what may be an overstatement. This possible overstatement is significant for this discussion because Scott’s ecumenism is directly related to the level of acceptance he extended those who differed with him. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four. Until then, let it suffice to say that Scott’s “implicit creed” was

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<sup>60</sup> Artman, 39-40.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>62</sup> See quote on p. 23.

present in the form of his “five-finger exercise,” but its presence does not necessarily imply the kind of exclusivism that he is often attributed.

### **The Five-Finger Exercise**

Scott’s referred to his soteriological scheme (Artman’s “implicit/*de facto* creed”) as the “ancient gospel.” This was in contrast to the “ancient order,” which Scott credited Alexander Campbell with restoring. While the “ancient gospel” referred to the primitive method and message of salvation, the “ancient order” referred to the worship and organization of the primitive church.

In Scott’s view, Thomas Campbell had restored the Bible as authoritative, Alexander Campbell had restored the “ancient order” ... through his articles in the *Christian Baptist*, and he himself had restored the ancient gospel by means of the five-point plan of salvation.<sup>63</sup>

This “five-point plan of salvation” was a mnemonic tool developed by Scott around 1827 as a memorable way to teach the “ancient gospel.” It was known as the “five-finger exercise.” The modern significance of this exercise to the heirs of Scott’s movement, particularly the Church of Christ, is captured by Richard Hughes: “The notion of a rationally conceived “plan of salvation” has long been central to Church of Christ thought and undoubtedly owes its origin to Scott himself.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the “plan of salvation” most often quoted in the Church of Christ is still one of five points, although the points have been altered somewhat.<sup>65</sup>

These six elements summarize much of Scott’s soteriology. He saw the first

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<sup>63</sup> Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 53.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>65</sup> The most common articulation of the “plan of salvation” in the Church of Christ today is hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized. Clearly, the plan has been made exclusively one of man’s responsibility, removing from Scott’s original articulation the elements involving God’s activity: remission of sins, gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life.

three (faith, repentance, and baptism) as being man's willful participation in his own salvation. The last three elements (remission of sins, gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life) were God's promised rewards for man's actions. More emphasis was placed on faith, as it was the element directly connected with the Golden Oracle, and upon faith all of the other elements were based.

**Faith.** Scott viewed faith as intimately connected with knowledge, but not identical. He defined knowledge as "man's mental acquisition by his own experience."<sup>66</sup> Faith, on the other hand, was "his acquisition by the experience of others."<sup>67</sup> In applying this to knowledge of God's existence, he argued that man in his "natural state" (before the Fall) had (and needed) no faith, for he had first-hand knowledge of God's existence. Modern man, however, being in a "state of respite," know this by faith, as we believe in the testimony of witnesses.<sup>68</sup>

When, therefore, man fell from his natural condition, knowledge yielded to faith, and a state of things, in which man knew there was a God, was bartered away for that out of which he could be delivered only by the principle of believing that there is a God. Instead of enjoying his own experience on this point, he has not to trust to the experience of others, that is, he has to depend on particular revelations granted through the ministrations of particular men, as Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, David Isaiah, Malachi, John the Baptist, and our Lord and Saviour, who declares, that he had seen the Father. Meantime, faith is the only remaining organ of communion with God, found in the constitution of man.<sup>69</sup>

The biblical writers had first-hand experience of Jesus, and recorded their testimony. Since those apostolic times, faith has been based upon their testimony. Since this testimony was available to all, faith was possible with or without the action of the

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<sup>66</sup> Scott, *The Gospel Restored*, 11.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 12.

Holy Spirit. As discussed above, this was a quite different view of pneumatology than that of many preachers of his day.

However, faith was not mere mental or academic acceptance of the validity of another's testimony. It also involves putting trust in that testimony.

Christian faith ... must be an assent to the evidence of the existence of the Messiah, though we do not see him, and a confident reliance on God as one who means what he says, and who will perform what he has promised. Thus true belief engages both the head and heart of a man ... many now have only one half of the true faith, and believe that Christ exists, without having the least confidence in either him, his words, or his institutions.<sup>70</sup>

This faith naturally led to the next step in Scott's plan -- repentance.

**Repentance.** Scott believed that the world was corrupted by sin. As a result, guilt, shame, and death are all a part of the human experience.

In the fall the glory departed; sin usurped the place of righteousness; death, of life; and the sorrows of earth, the pleasures of Eden. By the law of Genus and species, therefore, the race were accounted:

1. Sinners
2. Adjudicated to death.
3. And bereft of the Paradisiacal state.

Hence, since the fatal era of the fall of man, these sore evils have haunted our common humanity; sooner or later they are verified in the experience of every man.<sup>71</sup>

This sin and the human affection for it must be destroyed. This is done by faith and repentance.

As discussed above, Scott defined faith as accepting and trusting in the evidence presented in the scripture about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The thought and reflection demanded in order to trust the testimony of another has transformational

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 287-288.

<sup>71</sup> Walter Scott, *The Messiahship, or Great Demonstration, Written for the Union of Christians, on Christian Principles, as Plead for the Current Reformation* (Cincinnati: H.S. Bosworth, 1859), 36.

power. In fact, it “[has] the power of affecting the mind and of changing its conditions both intellectually and morally, both in regard to its views and its feelings.”<sup>72</sup> This change of mind is “is of but small value unless it gives birth to a change of manners.”<sup>73</sup>

[The Greek word for repentance, *metanoeo*] is understood in its best and most comprehensive meaning when it is understood to signify a renovation of both mind and conduct effected by the objects of our faith deposited in the mind and acting deeply and permanently on both the understanding, will, and affections.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, the mental change affected in faith produces a moral change and therefore expresses itself in outward conduct. This, for Scott, is repentance.

**Baptism.** Much more attention will be given to Scott’s views on baptism in chapter three. However, it is helpful at this point to note that Scott was an immersionist credobaptist who did not consider paedobaptism to be baptism at all. This was not unique in his time, as it was this belief that gave the Baptists their name. What was novel (although not entirely unique) in his teaching was the connection of baptism with the remission of sins.

The common Baptist teaching viewed baptism as both a requirement for church membership and an expression of loyalty subsequent to the remission of sins, which occurred at the point of faith. Scott and the other Stone-Campbell reformers taught that baptism was a transitional step between corruption and salvation, between the world and the church. Like repentance, it was viewed as a natural consequent to faith. Furthermore, it had no salvific value apart from faith.

**Remission of Sins.** Having established man’s primary responsibilities in the

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<sup>72</sup> Scott, *The Gospel Restored*, 316.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 317.

process of salvation (faith, repentance, and baptism), Scott would then look at the gifts provided by God following man's actions. The first of these is the remission of sins.

Scott subscribed to what is now called the penal substitutionary theory of atonement. According to this theory, in Christ death, he bore the sins of all. Faith in Christ's messiahship inherently involved this understanding. The blood of Christ was understood to be symbolic of this atoning death. When a believer is penitent and is baptized, he meets the atoning blood of Christ. That blood cleanses him from his sins. Thus, Scott would claim that "the blood of Christ ... forms the real cause of pardon to all who ever shall be forgiven."<sup>75</sup>

**Gift of the Holy Spirit.** Based largely on Scott's reading of Acts 2:38, Scott believed that, in addition to remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit is also bestowed through baptism. He vehemently opposed the Calvinistic teaching that the Holy Spirit brought the lost to salvation in a direct way. He expounded these views in his 1831 work, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, in which he sought to show, among other things:

...that the Holy Spirit is given to every one who, becomes a member of the body politic of Christ, but to no one in order to make him a member of that body; that he is given to everyone who believes with all his heart, and is baptized; but to no one in order to make him believe and be baptized."<sup>76</sup>

According to Scott, upon reception of the Spirit, the Christian also receives the gifts of the Spirit and is connected through the Spirit both to the church and to Christ.

"Because Jesus Christ is physically absent from the church through His resurrection and ascension, the Spirit makes up for His personal presence and becomes His substitute in

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>76</sup> Scott, *Holy Spirit*, 2-3.

the church.”<sup>77</sup>

Among the activities of the Spirit in the life of a Christian was that of a witness. Of the messiahship of Christ, he wrote, “Its truth and authority rest on an objective or external proof; its wisdom and goodness on its subjective or internal correlation with our spiritual necessities.”<sup>78</sup> While Scott believed that rational acceptance of the messiahship of Christ was the pathway to faith, he also believed that the Spirit offered confirming evidence of messiahship within the Christian’s inner being.

**Eternal Life.** Those who rationally approached the evidence of messiahship, accepted it, and put their trust in it had become people of faith. As a result of this faith, they would naturally repent and be baptized, at which point their sins would be remitted, they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and they would be given eternal life. Thus, while the human element in Scott’s scheme was sequential, the divine response was not. All would happen simultaneously.

Eternal life was granted at baptism by the Christian’s entrance in to God’s temporal kingdom on earth, but would not be experienced in its fullness until Christ’s return, when he ushers in the eternal kingdom. In an 1839 article, he summarized his views of eternal life in four propositions:

1. Eternal life is a matter of promise.
2. Eternal life as promised to man is deposited with Christ in Heaven.
3. Eternal life is the free gift of God.
4. Eternal life, nevertheless, is conditional. The first condition is, that men believe in the Gospel, amend their lives, and be baptized. The second is, that they continue in well doing, or in the keeping of the will of God til death.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Gerrard, *A Biographical Study*, 147.

<sup>78</sup> Scott, *The Messiahship*, 261.

<sup>79</sup> Walter Scott, “Eternal Life: A Discourse of the Gospel,” *The Evangelist* 7 (1 Feb. 1839): 30,

Scott's soteriology was a product of its time and culture, yet it had elements of novelty. As his ecumenism and baptismal theology are examined in more detail, it is imperative that his cultural and theological contexts be considered. Furthermore, these two elements must be understood in the context of his entire theological approach. Theological positions are not developed in a vacuum. Many factors combine to form a student's understanding of God, salvation, the world, and the church. If these factors are not considered, an accurate understanding is unlikely, if not impossible.

### CHAPTER 3

#### WALTER SCOTT'S BAPTISMAL THEOLOGY

Born in 1796 into a family of devout members of the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian), Walter Scott was a subject of paedobaptism. At 16, he was sent to University of Edinburgh to prepare himself to be a Presbyterian minister. A few years after he completed his studies there, his maternal uncle invited him to New York, where he arrived in July 1818. Less than a year passed before he found himself in Pittsburgh, where he met George Forrester, a minister and headmaster of a small school. Forrester employed Scott as a teacher in the school, thus beginning a relationship that would radically alter Scott's understanding of the Christian faith, "particularly his understandings of the church, the bible, and baptism."<sup>80</sup>

Forrester was influenced by the teachings of the Haldane brothers, who were anti-creedal primitivists. Notable for this study is the fact that the Haldanes were credobaptist immersionists, having rejected the paedobaptist teachings of their heritage in the Church of Scotland. Forrester also held these convictions, and exposed Scott to them, as well as the complimentary writings of John Glas and Robert Sandeman. Within a year, Forrester had convinced Scott of the need to reject his Presbyterian paedobaptist

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<sup>80</sup> Mark G. Toulouse, "Scott, Walter (1796-1861)," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, eds. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant, D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 673.

heritage and be immersed. Forrester baptized Scott, and Scott spent the rest of his life teaching credobaptism by immersion as the only authentic form of baptism.

Forrester's death in a drowning accident in 1820 thrust Scott unexpectedly into his first role as leader of a Christian community, as he took over Forrester's duties in the school and church. The course of his life would from that point take a powerful new direction, as he moved throughout the Western Reserve preaching a message that involved baptism as a key element. This chapter will examine the development and content of Scott's baptismal theology in preparation for examining in later chapters the connection between this theology and his level of ecumenism.

### **Credobaptism**

Scott's credobaptist theology was sustained for the rest of his life, and figured prominently into his writings. In *To Themelion*, he had a lengthy repudiation of paedobaptist theology in which he argued that paedobaptist practice could only be found in history, but was totally absent from Scripture. Yet even in history, the origin cannot be traced. He hypothesized that "it had its birth either in the mistaken piety of the brethren, the mistaken policy of their leaders, or both."<sup>81</sup>

In the same treatise, he speculated that infant baptism arose "in order to cleanse [infants] from original sin."<sup>82</sup> He saw this as the "natural" policy for pious churches to adopt if their Calvinistic understanding of original sin was accurate. Since, in his view, the Calvinistic understanding of original sin was not biblical, he also concluded that the

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<sup>81</sup> Scott, *To Themelion*, 82.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 83. The Calvinistic understanding of original sin that Scott opposed was the view that personal guilt is an inherited part of humanity, being traced back to the "original" sin of Adam. At birth, this guilt and the consequent condemnation are present realities, even in the lives of infants. This contributed to the desire to "baptize" infants.

resulting paedobaptism was “an ordinance which can be administered only in violation of the most express constitutional principle.”<sup>83</sup>

One year later, in 1853, Scott again responded to paedobaptist theology in *The Nekrosis*. This time, he was responding to their apologetic arguments which pointed out the inclusion of children in various biblical scenarios – Jewish religious observances, Peter’s address on Pentecost, Jesus’ invitation for the children to approach him, and the baptism of households. He responded by explaining that Christ’s advent made physical age irrelevant. In Christ, faith became the basis of admission into the kingdom. Children are incapable of faith, and are thus excluded from baptism. They are also, however, incapable of sin and are therefore “not excluded from privileges.”<sup>84</sup>

Having thus rejected paedobaptism, he adopted a form of credobaptism which did not view sprinkling as a form of baptism at all, but as an unbiblical substitution for it.<sup>85</sup> He explained this clearly in an 1832 article that focused on burial and birth as biblical figures of baptism which involve being “out of sight” and being brought “into sight.” He concluded that “any actions therefore which do not put the disciple *out of sight* and bring him again *in to sight* ... cannot constitute the literal fact of Baptism. ... Sprinkling is not baptism ...”<sup>86</sup>

He dedicated an entire chapter of his *The Gospel Restored* (1836) to showing “that baptism literally means to immerse. ... That it is to be administered only to penitent

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 83-84.

<sup>84</sup> Scott, *The Nekrosis*, 110-111.

<sup>85</sup> “Some have substituted sprinkling ... for the baptism of remission ...” Walter Scott, “Election – No. 1,” *The Christian Baptist* 6 (2 Mar. 1829): 524.

<sup>86</sup> Walter Scott, “The Churches,” *The Evangelist* 1 (1832): 199-200. See also Walter Scott, “Baptism,” *The Evangelist* 2 (2 Sept. 1833): 193-197 and the lengthy response to Mr. Lynd: Walter Scott, “Mr. Lynd on Baptism,” *The Evangelist* 2 (6 Oct. 1833): 217-228

believers, or to such as believe and reform, and ... That it is to be administered for the remission of past sins.”<sup>87</sup> His credobaptism was an integral part of his theology for his whole life.

### **Association with the Baptists**

The credobaptist conviction initially aligned Scott and other leaders of the Stone-Campbell movement with the Baptists, who were also primitivist credobaptists. Scott’s involvement with the Baptists was initiated by an invitation from Alexander Campbell to attend one of the meetings of the Mahoning Baptist Association in 1826. Having an appreciation for the Association, he accepted their invitation the following year to serve as their evangelist, a role that he filled for the next three years, resulting in more than 3,000 converts into the Stone-Campbell movement.

The Mahoning Association’s gradual falling out with the larger Baptist denomination was directly related to Scott and Campbell’s involvement with it. While most of the Association’s converts were from outside the church, there were a significant number of denominational conversions, including ministers who would, upon conversion, lead their congregations into the movement. Opposition arose and was directed at Campbell, Scott, and the churches associated with their movement. This opposition led to the reformers’ decision in 1829 to discontinue their association with the Baptists, a move about which Campbell was not enthusiastic, but that Scott pushed forward. From that point on, the reformers commonly referred to themselves as Disciples and began moving towards joining with Barton W. Stone’s Christians, a merger which ultimately

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<sup>87</sup> Scott, *The Gospel Restored*, 471.

occurred in 1832.<sup>88</sup>

Among the causes of the Baptist rejection of the Mahoning Association was their growing opposition to the teaching of Campbell and Scott on the purpose of baptism. In particular, Campbell and Scott taught that baptism was not an ordinance for Christians, but was a precursor to salvation. This teaching can be traced back Scott's exposure to a pamphlet entitled "On Baptism" by a Scotch Baptist named Henry Errett.<sup>89</sup>

Errett's pamphlet was written to "ascertain what this immersion signifies, and what are the uses and purposes for which it was appointed."<sup>90</sup> After quoting and commenting on several passages,<sup>91</sup> Errett concluded:

... that *remission of sins* is to be obtained by baptism, that an *escape from the wrath to come* is affected in baptism; that *men are born the children of God* by baptism; that men become *dead to sin and alive to God*, by baptism; that the Church of God is *sanctified and cleansed* by baptism; that men are *regenerated* by baptism; and that the *answer of a good conscience* is obtained by baptism. ...

... baptism was appointed for ends and purposes far more important than those who think of it *only as an ordinance* yet have seen.<sup>92</sup>

Thus Errett introduced to Scott the idea of baptism "for the remission of sins." Scott's teaching on baptism would forever be changed by his exposure to this tract.

### **The Restoration of the Ancient Gospel**

From this encounter with Errett's pamphlet, Scott championed the cause of

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<sup>88</sup> Toulouse, "Scott, Walter (1796-1861)", 675 .

<sup>89</sup> Scott reprinted the entire text of the pamphlet in his publication, *The Evangelist*, in 1838. Errett, "On Baptism," 283.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* The passages quoted are, in the order referenced: Matthew 3:15, 17; Mark 1:4-5; Matthew 3:7; John 3:5; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:2, 11; Galatians 3:26, 28; Ephesians 5:25, 27; Ephesians 4:4, 6; Colossians 2:12, 13; Titus 2:3, 6, 1 Peter 3:21

<sup>92</sup> Errett, "On Baptism," 285-286. Italics are in the original.

baptism for the remission of sins throughout his life. He first played a part in publicizing these beliefs by advising Alexander Campbell in preparation for Campbell's 1823 debate with W. L. McCalla, in which Campbell made the movement's first public proclamation that baptism was for the remission of sins.<sup>93</sup> Campbell would recall the course of events that led to Scott's advisement in an 1838 article in his *Millennial Harbinger*. A debate challenge received on May 17, 1823 prompted him to begin a re-examination of the subject of baptism. He studied his Bible privately, and consulted with his father at great length before Scott's visit a few months later.

During his stay my father informed him, in my presence, of the contemplated debate, and stated at considerable length the views of baptism which we had agreed to offer on the occasion. As it had not been divulged to any other person, I was anxious for the judgment of one whom I so highly esteemed on account of his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and waited for his opinion with much interest. He gave it upon the whole in favor of the views offered; and more than once during his stay recommended the importance of giving such a view in the approaching discussion.<sup>94</sup>

It would take another four years for this doctrine to become a regular part of the movement's preaching. While it had been discussed in theoretical terms by various reformers since the McCalla debate, it was Scott that first began putting it into practice in his evangelistic work. He would later point to a sermon that he preached in New Lisbon, Ohio on November 18, 1827 as the one that "restored the ancient gospel." In other words, it was on that date that Scott first put the "ancient gospel," including baptism for the remission of sins, into practice when William Amend was baptized.<sup>95</sup> This teaching

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<sup>93</sup> Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 50.

<sup>94</sup> Alexander Campbell, "Events of 1823 and 1827," *Millennial Harbinger*, n.s. 2 (Oct. 1838): 468.

<sup>95</sup> Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1974), 1:84.

on baptism quickly became the “linchpin of [Scott’s] religious appeal.”<sup>96</sup>

### **Baptism as a Transitional Ordinance**

In Scott’s “ancient gospel” scheme, baptism holds a central role. He summarized this scheme as consisting of duties and privileges. “The kingdom of God, its privileges and blessings are conditioned by duty. It is duty first and privilege afterward. Duties: 1. Faith. 2. Repentance. 3. Baptism. Privileges: 1. Remission of sins. 2. The Holy Spirit. 3. Eternal life.”<sup>97</sup> Ordered in this way, when preceded by faith and repentance, baptism serves as a transitional ordinance for “the changing of our state from the world to the church.”<sup>98</sup> He would also describe the transition as “from nature to grace,”<sup>99</sup> and “from the world to the New Institution.”<sup>100</sup> To illustrate the transitional nature of baptism, he would emphasize the biblical figures analogous to baptism, namely the figures of death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6), birth (John 3), and marriage (Ephesians 5). He explained these figures as follows:

Now as a man must be dead before he can be raised; so the believer in Christ must be dead to the world and buried in baptism before he can be raised in that ordinance to serve Christ in newness of life. Again, as a man must love his partner before he is married; so the convert believes in Christ and loves him before he is baptized. Lastly, as a child must be begotten before it is born; so a man must be begotten to God before he is born to God, or, which is the same born of water, or baptized.<sup>101</sup>

As a transitional ordinance, Scott viewed baptism as meaningless without its

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<sup>96</sup> Hicks, “Rational Religion,” 209.

<sup>97</sup> Scott, *The Messiahship*, 293.

<sup>98</sup> Scott, *The Gospel Restored*, 443.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 442.

precursors, faith and repentance. He viewed faith as the saving element, with repentance and baptism serving as consequent expressions of faith, albeit essential ones.

Therefore although their sins were pardoned them in baptism, yet we are not allowed to think that they were pardoned for or on account of baptism; but on account of the faith which they had, and which had influenced them thus to accept it. ... We are forgiven then, not because we are baptized, but because we need forgiveness, and are by faith prepared to receive it through the merits of Christ alone.<sup>102</sup>

Therefore, Scott did not view salvation as coming from baptism alone, but from the whole plan involving faith, repentance, and baptism. He relied heavily on Acts 2:38 for this construct. He saw in Acts 2 that the 3000 were brought to faith by Peter's proclamation of the Golden Oracle, but that their forgiveness was yet incomplete, thus prompting their question in v. 38, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter's response indicates that their faith was accepted, but that they still lacked repentance and baptism before forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit would be granted.<sup>103</sup>

While he saw all three elements as necessary for forgiveness, he also saw them as a linear and logical progression in which baptism was the final step prior to forgiveness. Neither faith nor repentance were sufficient to move one from the world to the church. Rather, the transition came upon "obedience flowing from these mental matters." This obedience he defined as "the law of baptism," thus making baptism the sole transitional ordinance<sup>104</sup>

The necessity of all three elements (faith, repentance, and baptism) was a significant part of an exchange that Scott had with Mr. S. W. Lynd, a Baptist. The

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>103</sup> Scott devoted the fifth section of his *The Gospel Restored* to the subject of baptism and relies heavily on Acts 2 throughout. See pp. 413-482.

<sup>104</sup> Scott, *The Gospel Restored*, 440.

exchange was in the form of a series of letters between the two, which were printed in *The Evangelist*. Scott spent one installment of this exchange answering questions submitted to him by Mr. Lynd related to these three elements of salvation. One question was, “If the whole are not obeyed, can a person be forgiven, who is obedient to any one of the three?” Scott answered by appealing to their common understandings. They would both agree that one without faith “cannot be forgiven,” and that a believer that does not repent “must perish.” Scott simply extended this reasoning one step further to the penitent believer who is disobedient to Christ’s command for him to be baptized. He considered the necessity of obedience to be a sufficient answer to this question

To this we reply, that the obedience to Christ, is essential and indispensable in the Christian Religion; for at his second appearance he will not pardon, but destroy those “who obey not the Gospel.” We repeat therefore, the good old way, the true, the holy and the just old-way is, that faith repentance and baptism are necessary to actual *pardon*.<sup>105</sup>

Upon reading Scott’s response to this question, it may appear that he is alleging the impossibility of salvation coming to the penitent, unbaptized believer. His argument, however, was simply that no element of the “ancient gospel” was dispensable. Since God demands all, we must heed to all. His response to the next several questions in this exchange clarifies his meaning and introduces the next aspect of his baptismal theology -- assurance.

### **Baptism and Assurance**

Scott was clearly perturbed by the nature of Mr. Lynd’s next questions. However, his answers were clear. Scott would not entertain a discussion of who *could* be saved. He was only interested in discussing who the Bible assured *would* be saved.

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<sup>105</sup> Walter Scott, “Answer to Mr. Lynd,” *The Evangelist* 3 (7 Apr. 1834): 83.

When Mr. Lynd asked if penitent, unbaptized believers have “*ever* received the forgiveness of their sins” Scott responded with frustration:

What is that to thee, or to me? We know that he, who believes, repents, and is baptized, has forgiveness of his past sins, and this is enough for us both as Christians and servants of the Messiah. Do you beware of “resisting the Holy Spirit” speaking to you, by Peter and the other Apostles.<sup>106</sup>

The next two questions were regarding the possibility of forgiveness being bestowed upon someone who was baptized but neither repented nor believed. Scott’s responses:

You have nothing to do with such a question. Mind what the Son of God has said and the Apostles have taught and practised; forgiveness is consequent on faith, repentance and baptism ... It is nothing to you or me whether it can or no, seeing that with them it is bestowed on all who are baptized.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, Mr. Lynd directly asked the question that impacts this study of Scott: “Can pardon be bestowed without baptism; and is it ever done under the present dispensation?”

Scott’s response:

What have we to do with what *can* be or *may* be? The blessed Father can do and may do and has all right to do what ever he pleases; but we are only sure that he will do what he has said: he may or may not do what we imagine, think, or expect, but the holiness of his character and nature makes it impossible for him but to do what he has said. It is impossible for God to lie, the person who believes, repents and is baptized must be forgiven, God has ordered things thus, and with any thing else we have nothing to do. Truth, you say, is the same in February that it was in January: remember that it is also the same now it was on the Day of Pentecost.<sup>108</sup>

Clearly, these were not a question that Scott had any interest in answering, as he did not see value in finding an answer. A paraphrase of his sentiments could read as follows:

If we *know* that we will be saved upon faith, repentance, and baptism, that should be enough. It matters not whether God *may* choose to save individuals who have not met all of these requirements. He certainly may do whatever he pleases, for he is God. But even if he has bestowed forgiveness on some who have not completed his requirements, we cannot then respond by failing to complete them ourselves. The

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

only way to *know* you are saved is to *know* you have completed all three. So rather than asking whether it may be *possible* to receive salvation apart from God's requirements, we should ask if we are *certain* to receive salvation apart from God's requirements. To this the answer must be negative.

He would not presume to know the mind of God beyond what God revealed in the Scriptures, so his interest was in discerning from the Scriptures how one could have assurance. It was his contention that this assurance was possible only upon faith, repentance, and baptism.

Mr. Lynd was accusing Scott of denying the possibility of salvation to the unbaptized. In other words, he believe that Scott was saying that, just as baptism assures one of salvation, lack of baptism assures one of condemnation. In logical terms this would have made Scott guilty of the fallacy of denying the antecedent.<sup>109</sup> Scott was explaining how this was a misrepresentation of his views.

In baptism, the believer is making a public declaration of faith and repentance, and is accepting God's offer of forgiveness. As a result of this obedience, the believer could have assurance of salvation. The assurance was based on the fact that baptism was immediate and empirical. Scott described it as "puting the believer into the immediate and sensible possession of the remission of all past sins. . . ."<sup>110</sup> This was a particularly appealing factor to conservative Calvinists "who had been puzzled and perplexed by the doctrinal difficulties or by the demand for an emotional experience of salvation."<sup>111</sup> For them, it offered an objective alternative to the subjective emotional appeals of the revivalists.

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<sup>109</sup> The fallacy of denying the antecedent is represented symbolically as  $p \supset q, \sim p, \therefore \sim q$ . In this context,  $p$  = baptism and  $q$  = salvation.

<sup>110</sup> Walter Scott, "Sacred Colloquy – No. 4," *The Evangelist* 1 (2 Apr. 1832): 88.

<sup>111</sup> Winfred Ernest Garrison, *Religion Follows the Frontier* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1931), 126.

In *The Evangelist*, Scott authored a long-running fictional discussion between Mr. Stansbury, a teacher of the “ancient gospel” and therefore representative of Scott’s views, and Mary and John Locke. Scott used this conversational method to teach many aspects of his theology, including various intricacies of his views on baptism. The following exchange is very revealing of Scott’s view of baptism as the key to Christian assurance:<sup>112</sup>

*M.* – Do you, Sir, think these persons who say they enjoy remission apart from immersion are really pardoned because they believe it.

*Mr. S.* – ... we know it to be true ... that professors of Christianity assert they enjoy the remission of their sins apart from baptism, and we know that baptism is for the remission of sins, but whether they are pardoned simply because they believe so, is highly questionable; our belief does not alter the nature of things; truth is not made falsehood, nor falsehood truth by our belief: they have not been baptized for the remission of sins – the Scriptures command they should, and this is all we know of the matter.<sup>113</sup>

It should be noted that Scott did not deny that the class of people under discussion may have obtained forgiveness. He called it “highly questionable.” Once again, his reasoning seems to be that, since the scriptures say that remission occurs at baptism, the only way to know one has received remission of sins is to be baptized. Absent that action, while the forgiveness is God’s to give, there is no assurance that the remission has been granted.

Later in that fictional conversation, Mary asked whether Christ could recognize someone’s faith as remission if that person believed it to be so. The response of Mr. Stansbury/Scott was “we don’t know, because the Scripture does not say so. ... Remission without baptism, and baptism without faith, is like baptism without remission

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<sup>112</sup> Scott used *M.* to abbreviate Mary, and *Mr. S.* to abbreviate Mr. Stansbury.

<sup>113</sup> Scott, “Sacred Colloquy – No. 4,” 87-88.

or faith without baptism, wholly defective.”<sup>114</sup> Again, Scott seems to say that God’s willingness to forgive apart from baptism is a matter of pure speculation, as it is not a part of the revealed teaching of Scripture. Certainty could only be had by acting upon what was known from the scriptures – that remission of sins comes as the result of baptism.

In part 12 of the same conversation, Mr. Stansbury/Scott described this unassured (or, unbaptized) state as the result of an unpurified conscience. Interestingly, though, he said that, even the unassured have experienced cleansing. The heart, tainted by the love of sin, is cleansed by faith in Christ. The life, tainted by the practice of sin, is cleansed by repentance/reformation. The conscience, however, “does not answer or respond to the pure heart and life of the convert” without itself being pardoned. Alluding to 1 Peter 3:21, he identified baptism as “the answer of a good conscience.” When baptism brings this “actual pardon” to the conscience, a person “is clean every whit.”<sup>115</sup> Based on this understanding, he was able to describe the state of the unimmersed as being ones who, “though they do love and practice righteousness as much as the immersed, are nevertheless troubled with a conscience of their former sins.”<sup>116</sup>

His references to the conscience were references to the clear conscience that comes from assurance. Indeed, much of what has been interpreted as being condemning statements from Scott are not statements about salvation at all; they are statements about assurance of salvation. He acknowledged the virtually identical state of the immersed and the unimmersed believers, with the lone exception being the presence of assurance in their lives.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Walter Scott, “Sacred Colloquy – No. 12,” *The Evangelist* 1 (7 Jan. 1833): 11.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 12.

## Baptism and Atonement

Scott saw a connection between baptism and his penal substitutionary theory of the atonement. Scott believed that the crucifixion was the moment on which “the sins of all have been laid on Christ.”<sup>117</sup> That atoning act, symbolized by the blood that Jesus shed, is what makes forgiveness possible.<sup>118</sup> “Baptism was the time, place and ordinance in which God was pleased to impart forgiveness to the truly penitent, yet the blood of Christ was, in reality the procuring cause of remission.”<sup>119</sup> It is in baptism that one meets this atoning blood. Baptism thus becomes “the institution of forgiveness” and the way that the believer is sanctified by the blood of Christ. “Thus the symbol of remission in the true religion is changed from animal *blood* to *water*; while the blood of Christ, between them ... forms the real cause of pardon to all who ever shall be forgiven, from Abel to the resurrection of the dead.”<sup>120</sup>

Scott would often refer to his subjects as being baptized “for the remission of his sins, by the blood of Christ.”<sup>121</sup> It was his practice when administering baptism to say, “For the remission of your sins by the precious blood of Christ, and for the gift of the Holy Spirit; I immerse you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”<sup>122</sup> This connection between baptism and the blood of Christ was also

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<sup>117</sup> Scott, *The Nekrosis*, 57

<sup>118</sup> “... the blood of Christ was, in reality, the procuring cause of remission.” Scott, “The Laver of Regeneration,” 61; “...the blood of Christ ... forms the real cause of pardon to all who ever shall be forgiven.” Scott, *The Gospel Restored*, 290.

<sup>119</sup> Walter Scott, “The Laver of Regeneration,” *The Evangelist* 3 (1832): 60-61.

<sup>120</sup> Walter Scott, “Election – No. 4,” *The Christian Baptist* 7 (5 Oct. 1829): 594-595.

<sup>121</sup> Scott, *The Nekrosis*, 84; cf. p. 58.

<sup>122</sup> Scott, “The Laver of Regeneration,” 60.

made in his references to the ordinance of baptism as the “Christian Laver,” or the “Laver of Regeneration.”<sup>123</sup>

Walter Scott’s baptismal theology largely began as a primitivist response to the Calvinism of his native Presbyterianism. Over time, he became a credobaptist immersionist. Unlike the Baptists, however, he taught that baptism was a precursor/transition to forgiveness of sins rather than an act of obedient proclamation of an already forgiven Christian. His views were controversial and undoubtedly caused many pious believers to take offense at the implicit conclusion that those not baptized for the remission of sins may not be saved. However, Scott refused to make this assertion, preferring to leave those questions to God while encouraging people to act upon what was certain – that the penitent believer has been promised forgiveness upon baptism.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 62.

CHAPTER 4  
WALTER SCOTT'S ECUMENISM

The Stone-Campbell movement was a unity movement. The desire of its founders was to bring union to God's people. They saw primitivism as the only way to do this genuinely. However, of the four men usually credited with founding the movement, Walter Scott is generally thought of as being the least ecumenical of the four. In fact, some have considered him to be a radical, legalistic sectarian.

For example, Richard Hughes has called him "the person who stood at the fountainhead of the radical Campbell tradition." He refers to Scott's thinking as "extreme" and "radicalism" and accuses him of "un-Christianiz[ing]" the various Christian denominations.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, M. Eugene Boring has written:

Scott emphasized the sectarian bent inherent in the approach to the Bible of some First Generation Disciples. He made the thought of the early Alexander Campbell more radical and sectarian. Campbell later mellowed and became more ecumenical, accepting his *de facto* role as the leader of a new denomination, but Scott did not, though he and Campbell remained friends and colleagues.<sup>125</sup>

It is the task of this chapter to show that this characterization of Scott is, in the case of Hughes, at best an overgeneralization based only on his early writings, and at worst an unfair misrepresentation. It will be shown that Boring's claim that Scott never

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<sup>124</sup> See Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 48-54.

<sup>125</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 50.

“mellowed and became more ecumenical” is simply not true when all of the evidence is considered. It will further be shown that, while Scott’s ecumenism evolved during his life, he was at no point the rigid exclusivist that the above picture would suggest and that he was an ardent champion of the union of all Protestant sects, especially late in his life.

### **The 1820s**

As previously mentioned, Scott’s exposure to the Errett pamphlet, “On Baptism,” was significant in the development of his views on baptism. Also important for our discussion is a statement at the end of the pamphlet that leaves in doubt the status of believers who are not baptized.

And if, on reflection, it should appear that these uses and purposes appertain to the one baptism, then it should be considered, how far any can now be known, or recognized, or acknowledged as disciples, as having made the christian profession, as having put on Christ, as having passed from death to life, who have not been baptised as the disciples were.<sup>126</sup>

This questioning of the Christian status of those who were not baptized “as the disciples were” cannot be ignored in a document that was of such significance in Scott’s theological development. Some of Scott’s statements seem to even echo the sentiment expressed in it with one important distinction. The strongest of Scott’s statements were not related to the baptismal positions of those that he criticized, but to their creedalism. Nevertheless, his level of ecumenism early on is seen in these statements.

In his earliest writings, Scott seems hesitant to call teachers in other groups Christian, preferring such descriptions as “those calling themselves teachers of christianity.”<sup>127</sup> He was also much more prone to pejorative references to those teachers whose message differed from his own. He would call their doctrinal constructs “the

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<sup>126</sup> Errett, “On Baptism,” 286.

<sup>127</sup> Scott, “On Teaching Christianity – No. 1,” 10.

various stupid schemes, all different and all wrong, pursued by Roman Catholics, Socinians, Arians, Covenanters, Seceders, Presbyterians, High-Churchmen, Baptists, Independents, and so forth ...”<sup>128</sup> and accuse the teachers of “employing themselves in confirming certain factional dogmas – in making merchandize of the people, or in propagating damnable heresies.”<sup>129</sup> He would further make the offensive claim that:

... the worshipping establishments now in operation throughout christendom, increased and cemented by their respective voluminous confessions of faith, and their ecclesiastical constitutions, are not churches of Jesus Christ, but the legitimate daughters of that Mother of Harlots, the Church of Rome.<sup>130</sup>

He described the fate of those who subscribe to creedal statements as being equivalent to idolatry:

...they who bow down to such idols shall go down to the grave with a lie in their right hand. ... O Gamaliel! O Socrates! O Satan! save your sinking disciples whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not!<sup>131</sup>

These two statements are, to modern readers, among the most shockingly pejorative to come from his pen. Indeed, they were likely intended to be shocking, as Scott was in the infant stages of his own newfound theology and was, consequently, quite idealistic and aggressive in his effort to distinguish his views from those of his contemporaries. Strong statements such as these were the result.

Nevertheless, it is important for the reader to understand exactly what was and was not said in these statements. Written in the context of a series of articles presenting

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Scott, “On Teaching Christianity – No. 2,” 23.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 24.

Scott's "one uniform and universal plan of teaching the christian religion,"<sup>132</sup> these statements were a part of an appeal to religious leaders to stop making their creedal statements the final arbiters of the Christian faith. In these statements, he is trying to call attention to what he thought was a desperate situation created by this creedalism. In Scott's view, by placing creeds between the individual and God, religious leaders were making the same mistake as the Roman Catholic placement of the pope between the individual and God. Scott saw the parallel between the extant creedalism and Roman Catholicism as legitimate and dangerous, for placing anything other than Christ between the individual and God was idolatry. Such a practice elicited from Scott, who was "given to emotional overstatement,"<sup>133</sup> comments which may have been overstatements of his conviction.

### **The 1830s**

A slight change in tone may be evident in Scott's 1830 report to Campbell regarding four congregations (Youngstown, Palmyra, Achor, and Salem) that had left the Mahoning Association for "damnable heresy" coming from Campbell, Scott, and their sympathizers.<sup>134</sup> In his report, Scott mentions 16 individuals in Youngstown who "could not, should not, or would not join the young converts [that resulted from Scott's preaching]."<sup>135</sup> He also mentioned 11–20 in Palmyra who "betook themselves to their old

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<sup>132</sup> Scott, "On Teaching Christianity – No. 1," 10.

<sup>133</sup> Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 16.

<sup>134</sup> Alexander Campbell, introduction to "The Beaver Anathema," *The Christian Baptist* 7 (5 July 1830): 659.

<sup>135</sup> Walter Scott, "The Beaver Anathema," *The Christian Baptist* 7 (5 July 1830): 659.

ways of creeds, monthly gatherings, &c.”<sup>136</sup> It is interesting to note that, while he does not mention the specific reasons of each group for leaving for the Beaver Association, his general references are to their creedalism rather than to their views on baptism, which would have been among the most distinct from the views of Scott and Campbell. In other words, Scott saw these problems as coming from creeds, not from baptismal theology. Nevertheless, he makes a point to characterize these defectors in a charitable light. “Be it observed, however, that nothing said here is to be construed evilly in regard to the sixteen members – I believe them to be misguided christians.”<sup>137</sup>

It was only two years later that Scott wrote his “Sacred Colloquy” series, discussed in chapter three. While hints at a more charitable approach to other Protestant denominations may be found in the intervening years, it is in comparing this series with his early “On Teaching Christianity” series that one begins to see an identifiable shift in his thinking. As noted above, “On Teaching Christianity” uses very strong language to paint an unflattering picture of those who differed with Scott, including accusations of latent idolatry and Catholicism, as well as hesitancy to even use the term “Christian” to refer to believers in the extant denominations. By 1832, in “Sacred Colloquy,” Scott’s posture had shifted so that he refused to speculate about God’s view of those who differed with him. It neither pronounces the salvation nor condemnation of other Protestant believers. He simply says that, without baptism, they have no way to know for sure that they are saved, and therefore, have no ability to have a clean conscience. In part 12 of this series, he also includes an exhortation to his fellow reformers “to honor and to

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

treat with gentleness and affection the pure hearted in all denominations.”<sup>138</sup> Why should they be treated in this way? According to Scott, “Their purification is of God, their errors are from mistaken and wrong christian teaching...”<sup>139</sup> He even seems to realize that this gentleness and affection may not have always been practiced by the reformers: “... may the Lord pity and forgive us if we have injured any such...”<sup>140</sup>

Scott’s hesitation to use the term Christian when referring to his detractors also seems to have diminished considerably by 1833. In his published exchange with Mr. Lynd regarding the purpose of baptism, both sides argued strongly for their positions. Occasionally, offense was taken at characterizations made in the exchange. However, this did not lead Scott to deny Mr. Lynd’s status as a Christian. In fact, well into the discussion, Scott refers to Mr. Lynd as “a scholar, a gentleman, a Christian.”<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, as discussed in chapter three, when Mr. Lynd questioned Scott specifically related to the spiritual status of the unbaptized, Scott once again refused to speculate, but only commented on what he believed was certain from Scripture – assurance comes with baptism.

This shift in thinking seems to still be in place in 1836, when Scott published *The Gospel Restored*. An example from this work of Scott’s views of those who differed with him is seen in the section on baptism. In that section, he interacts with the writings of Philip Doddridge, Lyman Beecher, and John Bunyan. He does so in order to show their error in their presentation of the message of salvation. He believed that they had all

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<sup>138</sup> Scott, “Sacred Colloquy – No. 12,” 12

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Walter Scott, “Reply to Mr. Lynd Continued,” *The Evangelist* 2 (2 Dec. 1833): 267. Again, on p. 268, Scott refers to him as “a scholar and a Christian.”

neglected the biblical teaching on baptism. Nevertheless, he refers to Doddridge as an “excellent and pious author,”<sup>142</sup> to Doddridge and Beecher as men whose “zeal for the conversion of the world is undisputed” and who “are ardent admirers of their Redeemer, and the most zealous of ministers,”<sup>143</sup> and to Bunyan as “a faithful servant of Jesus Christ” and a “holy man and excellent minister.”<sup>144</sup> This conscious effort to be complimentary to his opponents in the midst of strongly opposing their positions is a far cry from the accusations of idolatry and Catholicism that his earliest writings displayed. While the writings were often contentious and polemic in nature, they were done so with more of a brotherly attitude and approach than previously would have been seen.

### **The 1840s**

Scott’s evolution in his Protestant ecumenism becomes most evident in the 1840’s. By this time, Scott had become somewhat disillusioned with the status of his reformation movement. He had begun to see the movement as being characterized by the very sectarianism that he had set out to destroy. As early as 1832 he had chastised the movement’s “bare-bone proclaimers,” who were “theoretical to a hair-breadth, and proclaimers of water rather than of Christ.”<sup>145</sup> By 1840, he was even willing to refer to the movement as a “sect” in a letter to Philip Fall.

When you express your doubts of the matters connected with the recent Reformation, I sympathize with you, for the thing has not been what I hoped it would be by a thousand miles. We are indeed ‘a sect’ differing but little, of anything that is good, from the parties around us. Alas! my soul is grieved every

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<sup>142</sup> Scott, *The Gospel Restored*, 425

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 459.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 470.

<sup>145</sup> Walter Scott, “Sacred Colloquy, No. 7,” *The Evangelist* 1 (6 August 1832): 182.

day.<sup>146</sup>

In an 1847 article, Scott again reflected on the status of the movement. He spoke regretfully about the tendency of many preachers within the “reformation” to have placed more emphasis on the elements of the “ancient gospel” (repentance, baptism, etc.) than on the gospel itself (the Golden Oracle).

But see, reader, it proved to be an easier and more practicable matter for those, who admired this rectified series of elements, to notice and remember them than to preach Christ. The consequence was that many, and some of whom better things were to be expected, overlooked the one for the other, and preached the elements of the gospel instead of the gospel itself. They sometimes preached baptism instead of Christ, and instead of presenting in an enlightened proclamation the Son of God, as God himself has done in the holy Scriptures with his own lips, by his own Spirit, and by the apostles and prophets, they rung the changes upon the first principles as we had arranged them, till society became in a thousand instances disgusted with the clamour.<sup>147</sup>

Apparently, by this time, Scott’s earlier emphasis on the “ancient gospel” had been the seed that eventually grew into the very sectarianism that he opposed

For more than a decade before he began writing *The Protestant Unionist* in 1844, Scott had grown increasingly frustrated with many within his movement trends that he observed within his own movement. It had not converted the world and was no closer to ushering in the millennium than it had been at the beginning. It may not be a coincidence, then, that the publication of *The Protestant Unionist* would adopt a new approach to the task of bringing about Christian unity.

### ***The Protestant Unionist***

In considering *The Protestant Unionist* in relation to Scott’s ecumenism, one cannot neglect a notice of the name of the publication itself, especially as it contrasts with

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<sup>146</sup> Letter from Scott to Philip Fall, dated 4 August 1840, in Philip S. Fall letters in the library of the Kentucky Historical Society, cited in Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 54.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

the names that he had a hand in choosing for previous publications. Scott's first influence in the naming of a periodical was in 1823 with Campbell's *The Christian Baptist*. Campbell's initial desire was to simply call the publication *The Christian*, but Scott convinced him that it would achieve a greater readership among the Baptists, for whom it was primarily intended, if the word "Baptist" was added to the title. Thus, Scott's initial influence on the naming of a periodical actually moved its name away from Campbell's initial, more ecumenical, title towards a more sectarian one.

When Scott decided to begin his own periodical in 1832, he chose the name *The Evangelist*, a name that described his identity and passion. This name reflected his self-perception as one who was among the few who had discerned the "ancient gospel" and whose desire was to convert the rest of the world by its use. The name itself was not sectarian, but neither did it illustrate an emphasis on ecumenism. This is reflective of Scott's ministerial emphasis at the time. He was focused on primitivism, namely restoring the "ancient gospel," as his priority rather than ecumenism.

The name chosen for *The Protestant Unionist* demonstrates that this prioritization had been reversed by the time of its inception. While he did not hold to different theological positions, Scott was now more interested in seeing all Protestant denominations come into union with one another. This more ecumenical emphasis was reflected in the name he chose for his publication.

### **The Nature of Unity**

Assertions of an increased ecumenical emphasis do not rest solely on the naming of his publications, for there is ample evidence of this in Scott's writings within *The Protestant Unionist* as well. In the inaugural issue of the publication, Scott authored

an article entitled “Union” in which Scott focused on Jesus’ prayer in John 17 for the unity of Christians. Scott explained his understanding of the type of unity that Christ was speaking of in this passage. It was not, he argued, unity of faith, for the people for which Christ was praying already had faith. Neither was it “unity of aggregation,” or church membership, for this was, in Scott’s mind, the type of visible, sensible union pursued by the Roman Catholic Church and which had never been perfected. To Scott, the unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17 is “unity of character,” which is “of a higher type; something more obvious to reason than to sense.” Scott defined unity of character as “unity with God and Christ, in holiness of behavior.” Thus, Christ’s prayer was “that we may be like God and his Son.”<sup>148</sup> Thus, Scott believed that the unity that Christ desired was one of holiness, behavior, and character. Variety in church membership was not opposed to the pursuit of this kind of unity.

### **Tolerance**

As issues of *The Protestant Unionist* came out, Scott’s ecumenical vision was further defined as a vision of tolerance and cooperation among Protestants. His initial co-editor, R.H. Forrester described intolerance as the essence of sectarianism in an 1844 article. Scott was not apt to publish material with which he disagreed without offering a response. Since Forrester was his co-editor, and since Scott offered no response, it can be reasonably assumed that the sentiments expressed in this article were shared by Scott.

After beginning by arguing that the denominations are simply the result of man’s natural “attraction of affinity,” which Forrester defines as: “Men of similar

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<sup>148</sup> Walter Scott, “Union,” *The Protestant Unionist* 1 (25 Sept. 1844): 1.

principles, naturally associate and form a party on the basis of those principles.”<sup>149</sup>

Sectarianism occurred when this natural tendency degenerated into a “spirit of party with all its anti-christian attributes of bitterness, hatred, jealousy, rivalry and ambition.”<sup>150</sup>

Forrester further defines sectarianism by listing four of its characteristics:

1. The sectarian is inflated with inordinate conceit in reference to his sect. ... He is also blind to the defects, the errors and delinquencies of his sect. No breath of censure may sully the brightness of her escutcheon. ... In his view, improvement is impossible – reformation an obsolete word. And he, that even hints at such monstrous desecration, incurs his uncompromising hostility – is a heretic.
2. The sectarian is equally blind to the merits of all other sects, than his own. He can see nothing in them that is true or good. Even that, which in his own creed he has admitted to be truth – is no longer truth when found in theirs. Any truth not contained in his own creed, is already marked as base coin, is rejected as spurious without examination.
3. But, while the Sectarian closes his eyes to the merits of all rivals, he detects with eagle glance, their slightest defects. ... Justice to opponents is a virtue, repudiated by him. ... This sectarian injustice causes parties, only separated by a very slight diversity of doctrine or practice, to regard each other with detestation.
4. He is filled with unsanctified ambition. Convinced that his own personal consequence is enhanced by the increased greatness of his church, he is fired with the ambition to augment her numbers, her wealth, and worldly grandeur and influence.<sup>151</sup>

After painting this picture of the sectarian, he concludes: “A just regard for the church to which a person is attached is commendable, but Sectarianism is to be eschewed as repugnant to the spirit of Christianity.”<sup>152</sup>

If this article fairly represents the views of Scott, then it is extremely

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<sup>149</sup> R. H. Forrester, “Sectarianism,” *The Protestant Unionist* 1 (20 Nov 1844): 13.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

informative to our discussion of his shift to an ecumenical emphasis. In *The Protestant Unionist*, he was not interested in destroying the doctrines and theological constructs of the denominations as he had been in the past, although he would offer constructive criticism of them on occasion. Rather, he encouraged church members to continue to hold their current Protestant affiliation, but to be tolerant and appreciative of those with a different Protestant affiliation.

In case Scott's agreement with these principles is doubted, an article that he wrote only six weeks later seems entirely consistent with the views presented by Forrester. In "Union of Protestants" he praises the efforts of Lutherans and Cumberland Presbyterians "to bring about an ecclesiastical correspondence and friendly discourse with each other."<sup>153</sup> In holding them up as examples for other denominational groups to emulate, he advocates "that there should be a *formal* and *visible* recognition of each other as Christians, by the *highest* ecclesiastical bodies of the several Churches."<sup>154</sup> He claims that many denominations could easily do this, as they are in agreement on all but a few minor matters.

Among these we may mention Evangelical Lutherans, German Reformed, Dutch Reformed, the greater portion of the several Presbyterian churches, the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant churches; Congregationalists also, and possibly a number of others, whose names do not now occur to us; all holding, confessedly, the great cardinal truths of the Gospel, though differing in minor particulars.<sup>155</sup>

While still in opposition to the divisive use of creedal statements, he seems now to be agreeable to the idea of the development of a new confession that only incorporates the common doctrines of the Protestant denominations. This solution would

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<sup>153</sup> Walter Scott, "Union of Protestants," *The Protestant Unionist* 1 (8 January 1845): 42.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

enable all denominations to “unite in a common confession of their faith, and thereby manifest, in opposition to the apparent unity of the Roman Catholic Church their true and spiritual unity.”<sup>156</sup>

It is abundantly clear that Scott’s ecumenical approach as expressed in *The Protestant Unionist* was one of tolerance and mutual appreciation. This can further be seen in the praise bestowed on the biblical phrase “forbearing one another in love” as the solution to the sectarian division in Protestantism.

This one short precept, universally obeyed, would set all right, and reduce all to order. It would not at once reconcile all minds, but it would harmonize all hearts. It would not amalgamate all Churches into an external uniformity, but it would combine them all in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. It might not hush the voice of controversy, but it would take from it the harsh dissonance of human passion, and cause it to speak in the mellifluous tones of divine charity.<sup>157</sup>

The principle of forbearance came up again in an 1847 exchange between Scott and J. Du Val, as Scott explains how he can advocate brotherly fellowship with those who he believes to be in error on numerous points.

It is true that Protestants are not agreed on baptism, and that they have creeds, confessions and catechisms, evincive of confirmed partyism . . . but if we consider that in the primitive and model church of Jerusalem there were thousands of Jews all zealous of the law; and in the Gentile churches members who after their conversion still imagined there was divinity in the idol, and still eat with a conscience of this error, we shall see that with a superabundance of error we may still be Christians, and by force of their grand faith rise at last superior to it all. Perfection in Christ is not the work of a moment with any man. And in him who holds the head and loves our blessed and holy Lord and Redeemer a thousand errors and imperfections are to be borne with. If his errors to not make him a bad man, his great faith will finally make him a good one.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Unsigned, “Christian Union,” *The Protestant Unionist* 2 (17 Dec 1845): 5. Unsigned articles can be assumed to have been written by one of the editors (Scott and Forrester). Therefore, there is a good likelihood that this was authored by Scott. Since Scott and Forrester were in agreement on these principles, the views expressed in this article can be reasonably attributed to Scott, whether they are his words or that of his co-editor.

<sup>158</sup> Walter Scott, “Remarks on Elder Du Val,” *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (25 Aug 1847): 150.

Scott's approach to ecumenism was based on the idea of tolerance. Under the umbrella of faith, errors could be forborne in a brotherly spirit. Christianity has always had error in its midst. This error should not be viewed as an excuse for further schism, but as an opportunity for growth.

### **Praise of denominations**

Truly, one of his most evident efforts in the pages of *The Protestant Unionist* is his effort to praise denominational groups in those areas that he felt were praiseworthy without an accompanying rebuke of those areas that he found objectionable. This is certainly not the approach he took in his early years, when denominational bodies were characterized as idolatrous and their schemes were deemed stupid. For example, his first volume of *The Protestant Unionist* features an article paying tribute to "the greatness of the services rendered in this country to religion, education, government and civil liberty by Presbyterians"<sup>159</sup> and another praising no less than thirty "Great Men of Protestantism" in order to show:

that the christian common sense feeling, which makes us claim these famous men for our brethren, should prompt us to claim, as such, all other men, who, like them, love God, and receive according to their own Private judgment the Bible, the whole Bible as the rule of their faith and behavior.<sup>160</sup>

In response to a reader who apparently desired Scott to engage negatively with the doctrines which he found objectionable, he replied that "it would not comport with our views of the best means of doing good, to attempt to effect a general ecclesiastical union, by assailing through he columns of our paper the tenets and practices of every soul from

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<sup>159</sup> Walter Scott, "Tribute to Presbyterians," *The Protestant Unionist* 1 (5 Feb 1845): 58.

<sup>160</sup> Walter Scott, "Great Men of Protestantism," *The Protestant Unionist* 1 (26 Feb 1845): 70.

which we may differ.”<sup>161</sup>

Again, Scott repeated the importance of emphasizing the points of agreement rather than differences in a December 1846 article discussing the possibility of union between the Baptists and those in his movement. The suggestion had been made by a Baptist author that the only way for union to occur was “for those who were once good Baptists, *to return to us*; and those who were baptized without a change of heart, to repent and be baptized in the usual way.”<sup>162</sup> Scott found this to be a divisive approach rather than a unifying one. On this occasion, he uncharacteristically (for this period in his life) engaged in pointing out some of the differences between Baptists and “reformers.” However, he followed that with a statement asserting that noting these differences is shallow, and that union can be achieved in spite of these differences, based on the many similarities that exist between the two groups.

Here then are no less than eight differences between the Baptists and Reformers; and to many they will seem eternal barriers to union. But no. Observe, the act of taking differences is but the lower philosophy. The power of tracing resemblances is a higher science, and more noble withal. Let us see then how much we resemble each other, despite differences.<sup>163</sup>

He then proceeded to show how each of the eight previously discussed points of differences could be approached with an attitude of brotherhood in which neither group had to abandon its convictions, yet they were united in brotherly affection. He concluded this article with the maxim oft quoted by many leaders in the Stone-Campbell movement and that summarizes their approach to ecumenism: “In things essential, unity; in things

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<sup>161</sup> Walter Scott, “Union,” *The Protestant Unionist* 1 (18 June 1845): 110.

<sup>162</sup> Scott, “The Religious Herald”: 206.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

indifferent, liberty; *in all things charity*.”<sup>164</sup>

## Criticism

Scott’s writings in *The Protestant Unionist* were so different from his earlier preaching and writing that he occasionally drew criticism from those within his own movement who interpreted his change in emphasis as a change in theology. For example, in a letter published in the April 28, 1847 issue of *The Protestant Unionist* a reader using the name “Discipulus” writes:

In your present labors with the Protestant World, whether is fled you singularly beautiful rectification of the first principles of the gospel which has wrought such wonders in the last twenty years? I hear not one word any more of “faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection.” Have you given this up? Have you, for the distinction of inviting Protestants to union, on what you style the “great central truth” alone, abandoned the advocacy – the primitive advocacy erected on that truth? I stand in doubt of you, as Paul said of the Gallatians.<sup>165</sup>

Scott’s answer probably did little to satisfy this reader. “To the question of Discipulus. Where is your rectification of the first principles of the kingdom of God that has wrought such wonders in society. I answer it is safe, I trust, in the hearts of our brethren.”<sup>166</sup>

While “Discipulus” was probably unsatisfied by this answer, its brevity and dismissiveness indicate that Scott may have believed that he had served his purpose as those doctrinal matters were concerned and no longer desired to give his energies to them. His answer probably also indicates yet again that his priority had now completely shifted from primitivism to ecumenism.

Again, in June of the same year, a reader by the name of J. Du Val wrote the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Discipulus, Letter published in *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (26 Apr 1847): 82.

<sup>166</sup> Walter Scott, “Answer to Discipulus,” *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (28 Apr 1847): 82.

first of what would be nine letters, accusing Scott of having “lost sight of all the ‘*old landmarks,*’ save one.” He questioned Scott’s focus on the “central truth,” or “foundation idea” (aka the “Golden Oracle”) to the exclusion of “the corresponding *circumferential truth,* appertaining to this grand central truth.”<sup>167</sup>

Responding to another criticism, Scott defended the continuity of his theology with that which he had previously taught. He wrote, “My views of the gospel are now what they were; and they have been before society for twenty years at least.” He also acknowledged that his views of Protestantism were charitable.

But in the case of Evangelical Protestantism, where all are right in principle and only some wrong in ordinance; where some know less and do more, and others do least who affect to know most; where many have their creeds and all have their Bibles; where there are some errors but no idols, many schisms but no heresies; preachers but no popes; the supper and not the mass; the throne of grace and not the confessional; where crosses, christs, crosiers, and asses; miracles, marvels, gibbets and inquisitions; feasts, fasts, lents and lustrations; batchelory and virginity and grand illuminations; where caps and cowls and wigs and miters with beads and bawbles and all the holy trumpery of the apostasy are consigned forever to the Paradise of fools.<sup>168</sup>

Clearly, it was the impression of many within Scott’s reformation movement that he had abandoned his teachings on the “ancient gospel,” including baptism, in favor advocating Protestant union.

### **Baptism as a lesser matter**

Later that same year, Scott wrote an article seeking to explain the basis for Christian union. He employed his advocacy of the “Golden Oracle” principle as the basis, with baptism a requisite and natural accompaniment. It is important to note that this advocacy is identical with his earlier teachings regarding salvation. However, a

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<sup>167</sup> J. Du Val, Letter published in *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (16 June 1847): 110.

<sup>168</sup> Walter Scott, “War! Horrid War!,” *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (28 July 1847): 134.

change is evident in his willingness to accept those with a different understanding of baptism than his – including even those with a paedobaptist understanding.

Upon the solemn affirmation of Christ ... we are shut up to the duty of receiving sinners to the initiatory rite of baptism. And by the authority of Apostolic example we are bound over to receive in good faith each other as brethren, when we have believed and been baptized. The body that would receive a man for believing less, insults Christ. Those who would demand more are presumptuous. ... But do not all Protestants believe this? They do. Therefore, unless the Protestant would, or some parts of it ... hold an article that neutralizes the faith of Jesus, they may all be united.<sup>169</sup>

His claim that “all Protestants believe this” is a startling affirmation in the context of a discussion involving baptism. Scott was still thoroughly credobaptist at this point, and his earlier writings refused to even recognize the sprinkling of infants as baptism at all. Apparently by 1846, the debate about baptism was no longer one that he felt should hinder union with other Protestant groups. In the same context, he referred to the “less important parts in our religion,” meaning those things that are less important than the unifying Golden Oracle principle. It is not a stretch to understand baptism as now being included in this category.

How preposterous it is in a man, when he knows his brother to have received religiously and devoutly into the chambers of his soul the great mystery of godliness, to divorce him from his fellowship and affections, because of some deficiency, in the knowledge of less important parts in our religion? Have we believed in Christ’s divinity? Have we been pardoned by his blood? Yes; then we are brethren, part and parcel of the same Church of God.<sup>170</sup>

This clearly indicates a shift in Scott’s thinking related to what was/was not essential for unity. It is difficult to imagine Scott making these statements in *The Christian Baptist* or *The Evangelist*. While his personal views on baptism, creedalism, and denominationalism remained consistent, his ideas on ecumenism had clearly changed.

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<sup>169</sup> Walter Scott, “The Alliance: On the Structure of our Religion and the Basis of Christian Union,” *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (23 Dec 1846): 10.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

Scott's response to Du Val's criticism further illustrates the change that had taken place in his thinking. He repeats his conviction that faith is what unites individuals to Christ "invisibly," and that "in baptism we individually set to our seal that 'God is true' who pronounced [Jesus] divine."<sup>171</sup> However, he makes it clear that baptismal theology should not prevent believers from worshiping together.

Differences on baptism are unfortunate to individuals, but schism is a mighty sin against God and the kingdom of Heaven; it involves the whole church and the salvation of the world also. The Redeemer declares it would destroy the kingdom of Belzebub itself. Shall we cease to prosecute the greater reformation because we have been unable to reach the less? Shall we refuse to meet at the supper because we cannot meet in baptism.<sup>172</sup>

Thus, Scott held that, while baptism was not unimportant, requiring a uniform understanding of that ordinance would retard the progress of the reformation. Since a unified visible church had now assumed first place in his thinking, and since requiring such uniformity on baptismal theology would hinder, or even prevent, this unity, Scott could not view it as a requirement for unity.

Lest he be misunderstood, however, he published only three weeks later an article reiterating his long-held baptismal theology. In response to an accusation coming from a Presbyterian publication that he advocated baptismal regeneration, he explained himself in thoroughly credobaptist terms that, like his earlier writings, explained baptism as a transitional element in which "we pass from sin to righteousness, from the world to the church."<sup>173</sup> As before, baptism was only effective when the subject was a penitent believer, distinguishing his view from the Roman Catholic doctrine of baptismal

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<sup>171</sup> Walter Scott, "Answer," *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (16 June 1847): 110.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Walter Scott, "'Baptismal Regeneration' and the Pittsburgh Presbyterian Advocate," *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (7 July 1847): 122.

regeneration, with which his Presbyterian critic had inaccurately identified him.

Even in this article, though, he reiterates the new twist on his argument – that “baptism is evangelical and not ecclesiastical, and unites us to Christ and the Kingdom of heaven, and not to a particular church and its members.”<sup>174</sup> Comparing Scott’s answer to Mr. Du Val with this article on baptismal regeneration, it becomes clear once again that his personal understanding of baptism had remained consistent. However, he had to reconcile his baptismal theology with his ecumenical desires. The solution is reflected in these articles – baptism impacts the believer-God relationship, but not necessarily the believer-believer relationship.

Du Val’s fifth letter to Scott focused a significant amount of consideration to the subject of baptism. Du Val argued that baptism is rendered practically useless if purification comes by mere faith, as Scott claimed. He affirmed that “the New Testament demands, as the divine rule, more than faith in the divinity of Christ, in order to the possession and unity of christianity. This is essential, but not alone.”<sup>175</sup> In his response, Scott explains his ecumenical views in practical terms. He sees uniting on the “Golden Oracle” as the first step towards achieving the unity desired by Christ, not the end.

To unite and form the city Church on “*God manifest in the flesh,*” would, in my humble judgment, be at least to assume the true foundation, and heal the breach in the most important particular. It would be at least one move towards a better order of things. The basis would be right. All would be correct here. The churches would no longer be without a foundation truth, as they are at present. They would no longer rest upon an assemblage of articles on all religious subjects, but upon the truth – the foundation truth of Christianity.<sup>176</sup>

Indeed, baptism was important, but it was not foundational in the same way as the

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> J. Du Val, “Union No. V,” *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (1 Sept. 1847): 154.

<sup>176</sup> Walter Scott, “Remarks on Elder Du Val,” *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (1 Sept 1847): 154.

“Golden Oracle.”

## **Babylon**

Among the most direct lines of evidence indicating a shift in Scott’s ecumenism are the references by Scott and one his critics to Babylon. As noted in chapter two, the early Scott was prone to equate the Roman Catholic Church with the Babylonian harlot of the book of Revelation and that Protestant denominations were her “legitimate offspring.” His plea in that time was for Protestants essentially to come out of Babylon by abandoning creedalism, etc. In an 1847 article, Scott’s critic has accused him of abandoning this plea and of believing that Protestants “are now returned from spiritual Babylon.”<sup>177</sup> Scott corrects him, but does not return to his early plea.

The question so often put to me of late. “Are Protestants out of Babylon” ought in our humble judgment to be stated and argued thus, if stated and argued at all. “Is Babylon out of Protestants?” I will not vouch for the affirmative here, although I think that we are out of Babylon, I cannot and will not say that Babylon is wholly out of us.<sup>178</sup>

No longer was Scott’s plea to Protestantism one of antagonism; it was now one of identity. To paraphrase, he did not say, “Come out of Babylon, all ye Protestants,” but “Let us remove the vestiges of Babylon from our midst, fellow Protestants.” This change may be subtle, but it is significant.

## **Heresy, Blasphemy, and Schism**

In Mr. Du Val’s second letter to Scott, his chief concern was that Scott “seem[s] to recognize christianity almost every where, and a *saint*, in every one who would serve God, whether in this way or that.” Du Val differed, and argued that

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<sup>177</sup> Scott, “War! Horrid War!,” 134.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

Protestantism “has ... become, by its own discordant conduct, the most fruitful source of infidelity towards God and Christ, now existing in the world” because of its perpetuation of the sin of schism.<sup>179</sup>

Scott once again reaffirmed his continuity of conviction, noting that “nothing that I write ... is intended by me ... as undervaluing or in any other way invalidating those first principles of Universal Christian Union, on which our own Reformation has been based, and is constructed.”<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, he claimed, “As for fidelity to our former faith I never since the day I began to speak that faith, felt more inseparably attached to it than at this moment.”<sup>181</sup> He then responded to Du Val’s criticisms of Protestantism by agreeing that Protestantism is “defective” and full of sects and schisms. However, he justified his charitable assessment of Protestantism by noting that, in the Scriptures, heresy and blasphemy bring rejection by both the church and God himself. This does not hold true with the “schismatic.”:

... he who is guilty of schism is to be taught and intreated to lay his schism aside, and to be reconciled to fellowship with all his brethren, 1 Cor. 1.c. Sects, schisms and divisions among the disciples of Christ are bad things, very bad indeed, but they are not so bad as heresies, apostacies and blasphemies and are therefore to be more kindly treated as the Apostle directs.

How then would the Protestant Unionist treat this sad case? Why, thus. He would counsel all Protestants to do what almost half a million of us have already done – begin anew – begin at the beginning, and meet each other on the original faith of the gospel – *the divinity of the Messiah*.<sup>182</sup>

This explains how Scott reconciled the tension between primitivism and ecumenism.

While he still believed primitivist principles to be the ultimate key to Christian union, he

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<sup>179</sup> J. Du Val, “Union, No. II,” *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (11 Aug 1847): 142.

<sup>180</sup> Walter Scott, “Observation on Elder Du Val’s Second Epistle,” *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (11 Aug 1847): 142.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

saw those in other groups as brethren in need of encouragement and instruction rather than as enemies in the battle for the gospel.

### **An Admission of Change**

The sixth installment of the correspondence between Du Val and Scott is of monumental importance to this study, for therein is Scott's first admission that his approach had changed. Du Val voiced disagreement with Scott's visible/invisible church dichotomy and accused Scott of advocating salvation by "faith alone" rather than faith and obedience/baptism. Du Val then employed a creative debate strategy by lauding the writings of "one uninspired, but highly intelligent man." This man was identified as "Philip, a conspicuous writer in the Christian Baptist, as early as the year '23 [who] advocated substantially your present ground of union, but not to the same latitude of materials."<sup>183</sup>

Students of Scott will quickly recognize Philip as the pen name used by Scott in *The Christian Baptist*. Du Val thus pits the early writings of Scott against the late writings of Scott. He does so referencing the pejorative passages from "On Teaching Christianity" which have been mentioned repeatedly above. Of Philip, he wrote:

He is strong – striking and Scriptural; as well as exceedingly severe and pungent against these great sectarian rebels against God and Christ, -- who are ever doing their own will instead of God's; but still crying ever and anon – faith! faith! faith! But hear Philip in his scathing exposure: "Thirdly, the worshipping establishments now in operation throughout Christendom, increased and cemented by their respective voluminous confessions of faith, and their ecclesiastical constitutions, are not the churches of Jesus Christ, but the legitimate daughters of that mother of harlots, the church of Rome." Again, if modern confessions of faith had such blessings and such salvation appended to them by such authority, (as the Apostle) their abettors might well boast. But they who bow down to such idols, shall go down to the grave with a lie in their right hand." Are these the characters with

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<sup>183</sup> J. Du Val, "Union, No. VI," *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (15 September 1847): 162.

whom you are now laboring for union?<sup>184</sup>

Up to this point, Scott had tried to show the continuity between his early teachings and his present ones. However, with his own words now being used against him, more concession to the reality of a change was unavoidable. In his response to Du Val, he conceded, “Philip must be let off in this instance on the Apostolic principle of apologizing for early errors. ‘When I was a child I spoke as a child.’”<sup>185</sup> He then explained that his comments in 1823 were written in a religious context that had, in his estimation, changed. He gives the following examples:

When Philip wrote in 1823 the great truth which he wrote upon, namely: that “the Messiah was divine” had not been then presented as the sole creed of our religion; the elements of the kingdom of God had not then been rectified as they have been since that time; no advocacy for immediate obedience had been conceived of, no one had presumed to invite men to the remission of sins; no individual had spoken of the spirit as a spirit of promise; and no reformation was then in existence precisely like that to which the promulgation of these principles has since given birth, for these principles are not of the reformation, but the reformation is of the principles.<sup>186</sup>

Since none of these factors were yet in place in 1823, “it was impossible ... to appreciate Protestantism.”<sup>187</sup> However, those things had now been accomplished, enabling him to look at Protestantism from a different vantage point. Based on this new vantage point, “it is possible that his language would suffer a very considerable modification, although he never could speak of Protestantism, even in its most evangelical forms, as being precisely primitive christianity.”<sup>188</sup> This admission of the reality of a change makes explicit what

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

his writings in *The Protestant Unionist* had only indicated implicitly up to this point – his approach to ecumenism had changed.

### **Scott's view of Protestantism**

Scott was concerned that he be understood as giving neither a wholesale endorsement nor a wholesale condemnation of Protestantism. He believed that Protestantism was involved in healthy self-criticism and that, therefore, “the practice of condemning it in preaching and writing wholesale is dangerous and wicked.”<sup>189</sup> While he would not hesitate to “approve the right and correct the wrong” of Protestantism, neither would he hesitate to expose the strengths and weaknesses of those in his own movement. For example, in an article that was critical of various aspects of Protestantism, he included a paragraph directed at his fellow reformers:

Like other partisans many among us devoting their time to the reading of pamphlets and periodicals more than to God's holy word, have seized upon inferior truths as the center of their religious thoughts. They have other centers to their piety than the quality of their Redeemer. Like the man that glories in election they glory in baptism; or as the man that glories in Universalism so they glory in their power to overthrow it. One boasts in the antiquity of his party, another in the originality of his views. The five points of Calvinism are in vogue with one; the five opposite Arminian points with another; but who, when he glories, glories in the Lord?<sup>190</sup>

To paraphrase Scott's sentiments: “Of course Protestants are wrong on various points, but so are we reformers. When we react in a sectarian way to their errors, we condemn ourselves. There's room for growth all the way around.”

His expressed frustration with the way the “reformation” had played out combines with such statements of criticism to indicate the possibility that Scott's more ecumenical tone was adopted upon the realization that the views which he had advocated

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<sup>189</sup> Walter Scott, “An Editor,” *The Protestant Unionist* 3 (22 Sept 1847): 166.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

in opposition to sectarianism had actually become a sectarian platform in their own right. His reaction to this seems to have been the change of tone under discussion.

The above sampling of excerpts from Scott's writings in make it abundantly clear that the Scott of the 1840s was, in practice, a far cry from the Scott of the 1820s. His early years saw the development of his theological positions and his idealistic but tireless efforts to promote them and set his movement apart from the prevailing religious sentiments of the day. The passage of time saw his idealism turn to pragmatism with the realization that his movement had taken a life of its own and now was working against the unity which it had originally sought to achieve. This pragmatism led to a revision of methodology. Primitivism and ecumenism were ever-present throughout his life. However, their priority in his methodology was reversed, as primitivism was given top priority early on and ecumenism later.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Walter Scott's legacy is significant. The Churches of Christ, the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and the Disciples of Christ all trace their origins back to the Stone-Campbell movement, a movement that would not have had nearly as significant an impact on the American religious climate without the overwhelmingly successful work of their itinerant evangelist. Not only was he successful in his work as an evangelist, but was also influential as an editor and advisor to the movement's most well-known leader, Alexander Campbell. It was Scott who helped Campbell to develop an understanding of baptism as being "for the remission of sins," and it was Scott who made that teaching largely synonymous with the movement. He brought practical impetus to the theoretical and doctrinal views that he shared with the other leaders of the movement.

His success in promoting these views was due in large part to his ability to adapt them to the cultural and theological world that surrounded him. The rugged individualism of the frontier created fertile ground for teachers who, like Scott, proclaimed the ability of individuals to understand and respond to the scriptures without having to rely on an ecclesiastical mediator. Those who were frustrated with sectarian religious division welcomed a message that removed the need for allegiance to creedal statements and pointed them to Christ as the only creed. Those who were disillusioned with the emotionalism characteristic of many revivalists welcomed a rational, common sense approach like that advocated by Scott in his "ancient gospel." Those who failed to

receive an emotional outpouring welcomed an empirical way to find assurance, like Scott's teaching on baptism. Certainly, Scott's success came because of his ability to respond to the longings of many in society.

His teaching on baptism was one of his most unique and appealing teachings. As a transitional ordinance that brings the forgiveness of sins, those whose penitent faith led them to baptism could have assurance that they were saved. Unfortunately, this teaching could easily be misunderstood to also affirm that those penitent believers who have not been baptized are therefore condemned. It was shown in chapter three that this would be taking Scott's teaching farther than he was willing to go. He would maintain that the failure to be baptized may prevent one from having assurance of salvation, but that it did not limit God's ability to save that person. Those who read Scott as denying salvation to the unbaptized have misread his intention.

Some have allowed such a misunderstanding of Scott's teaching on baptism to color their presentation of him. He has been characterized as a sectarian legalist on numerous occasions. This characterization may be understandable when coming from an amateur historian reading Scott's early writings, which are the most readily available. However, when these characterizations come from otherwise respected Stone-Campbell movement scholars, one is compelled to wonder if the source documents, namely *The Protestant Unionist*, have been consulted at all. The evidence for an ecumenical Scott in his later years is overwhelming and evident when the sources are consulted.

It is certainly true that Scott's early writings were more pointed in their criticism of other denominations, even to the point of being offensive at times. However, the most pejorative statements, and the ones most often quoted by those painting an

inaccurate picture of Scott, are taken from his first published series of articles in 1823. This is hardly a strong basis from which to derive a holistic view of his theology. Even the stronger statements in his early writings can easily be read in a less sectarian way than many would suggest. The evidence for Scott's ecumenism becomes increasingly clear as his life progresses. The pejoratives become less and less frequent until, in 1844, he begins to vocally and boldly advocate Protestant union. This newfound ecumenical emphasis was so pronounced that he drew fierce criticism both from within his movement and from other denominational groups. It was an ecumenism based on faith in Christ and tolerance of differing views.

Scott's evolution needs to be recognized and examined even further. A man who has made such significant contributions to evangelical Protestantism in America deserves to be characterized in an accurate way. His writings in *The Protestant Unionist* have been almost entirely neglected in the scholarly material available on Scott. This research is submitted in order to fill a small segment of that scholarly hole, and to redeem the name of Scott from the sectarian label.

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