

# *Philadelphia Presbyterians, Capitalism, and the Morality of Economic Success, 1825-1855*

**I**N A LECTURE TO YOUNG PEOPLE on the Eighth Commandment ("Thou shall not steal") in 1830, a prominent Philadelphia minister pronounced that an essential implication of this part of the Decalogue was the Christian's duty to increase his own and his neighbor's "worldly prosperity." Fulfilling that duty required choosing the right calling and pursuing it diligently. Industry or hard work was the key to success in any business. Young people simply had to look around and "see who are the men of wealth." Virtually all of them "began the world with little—often with nothing but their hands and their industry." Fortunately, the minister concluded, "the same way to wealth" was still "equally open to all."<sup>1</sup>

During the 1840s a Protestant tract circulated among American working men claiming to provide *True Philosophy for the Mechanic*. Written by the editor of a denominational board of publication, the four-page pamphlet related the story of a Mr. Wiggins, a master cabinetmaker, and his blacksmith neighbor, Mr. Sledge. After hearing Wiggins's complaints about economic misfortune and domestic strife, Sledge confessed how he, too, had suffered hard times and how they had sparked him to find a solution. Following his wife's example, he had turned to a "book of philosophy" and began reading it. Ever since, his work and family life had been successful. Wiggins quickly caught on that Sledge's book was none other than the Bible and promptly committed himself to trying its philosophy. Now, there was

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<sup>1</sup> *Christian Advocate* 8 (Nov. 1830), 557-59. This lecture was also published in Ashbel Green, *Lectures on the Shorter Catechism of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: Addressed to Youth* (Philadelphia, 1829).

not "a more quiet, orderly, and prosperous man in all the neighborhood than Mr. Wiggins."<sup>2</sup>

In 1851 the clergyman-president of Washington College hailed the fruits of American technology in an address on *The Progress of the Age*. He proclaimed, "What mighty changes have been wrought in the economy of human industry, by the application of the power of steam! . . . Machines of countless forms, and for a thousand various purposes, impelled by steam, perform like things of life, with magic rapidity and exactness, the processes of production, which once demanded long continued and patient toil." Not only did the "whirl and clatter of machinery" demonstrate man's progress in controlling nature, it alleviated "the curse of labor"; technological improvements, as part of the progressive spirit of the age, had "marvellously lifted from man the weight of that curse which was pronounced upon him when driven from Eden's bliss."<sup>3</sup> Such evidence indicated clearly that "our race, as a whole, has been progressing rapidly toward a millennial state."<sup>4</sup>

The Christian's duty to prosper, self-help as the way to wealth, Christian piety as an asset to temporal success, the ordering and disciplining effects of Christian morality, the material and moral benefits of the machine, technological progress as a sign of the approaching millennium—all these themes were common fare for Protestant ministers in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Here there is no surprise. Historians have long recognized the growing convergence of Protestant and American middle-class values in the mid-nineteenth century, and have demonstrated that evangelical Protestants' ascendancy was due in part "to their willingness to allow their message to be accommodated to the spirit of the culture."<sup>5</sup>

Nowhere was that accommodation more complete, according to recent studies, than in evangelicalism's embrace of emergent capitalism. The prevailing interpretation suggests that the new revivalist

<sup>2</sup> [William M. Engles], *True Philosophy for the Mechanic* ([Philadelphia], n.d.), 1-4. This tract was printed and distributed by the Old School Presbyterian Board of Publication.

<sup>3</sup> George Junkin, *The Progress of the Age* (Philadelphia, 1851), 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>5</sup> George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven, 1970), 230-31.

theology—promoted by such ministers as Charles G. Finney, Lyman Beecher, and Albert Barnes, and embodied in progressive denominations like New School Presbyterianism—emphasized individual human freedom and responsibility in attaining salvation, a view consonant with a market economy predicated on individual acquisitiveness.<sup>6</sup> The moralism of this Arminianized evangelicalism included a work ethic of self-reliance and self-control.<sup>7</sup> Such an ethic proved ideally suited to the needs of middle-class entrepreneurs bent on maintaining moral authority over workers despite fundamental changes in employee-employer social relations.<sup>8</sup> By mid-century, nothing less than a coherent theory of “Christian capitalism” had developed that gave sweeping religious and moral sanction to the existing economic order.<sup>9</sup>

In light of this current scholarship, particularly of the links drawn between the new revivalism and entrepreneurial capitalism, what *may be* surprising about the preceding examples is that they all come from accounts made by men thoroughly opposed to the “new measures” and (in their view) Pelagian theology associated with Finney’s evangelicalism. The three authors—Ashbel Green, William Engles, and George Junkin—were Old School Presbyterian ministers staunchly committed to the theological tenets of traditional Calvinism. Collectively, they are perhaps best known as the accusers in the heresy trials of their fellow Philadelphia pastor, Albert Barnes, during the 1830s.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> James H. Moorhead, “Charles Finney and the Modernization of America,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 62 (1984), 101-5; Clifford E. Clark, Jr., “The Changing Nature of Protestantism in Mid-Nineteenth Century America,” *Journal of American History* 57 (1971), 832-38, 843-46; Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1980), 34-39; and Robert Doherty, “Social Bases for the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-1838: The Philadelphia Case,” *Journal of Social History* 2 (Fall 1968), 76-78.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Faler, “Cultural Aspects of the Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, Shoemakers and Industrial Morality, 1826-1860,” *Labor History* 15 (1974), 367-80; Bruce Laurie, “‘Nothing on Compulsion’: Life Styles of Philadelphia Artisans, 1820-1850,” *ibid.*, 15 (1974), 337-66; and Clark, “Changing Nature of Protestantism,” 840-44.

<sup>8</sup> Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York, 1978), 38-61, 116-41; and Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York, 1978), 297-350.

<sup>9</sup> Wallace, *Rockdale*, 394-97.

<sup>10</sup> Earl A. Pope, “Albert Barnes, *The Way of Salvation*, and Theological Controversy,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 57 (1979), 27-32; and Marsden, *The New School Experience*, 53-58.

Aligned with what scholars have invariably labelled as the "ultra-conservative" wing of Presbyterianism, these men were largely responsible for precipitating the denominational split into formal Old School and New School branches in 1837.<sup>11</sup>

That split, and particularly its causes, have received considerable attention by historians. The most thoroughgoing recent account has argued that theological differences were at the heart of the division.<sup>12</sup> Dogmatic Old Schoolers insisted that the New School party held heretical views on the nature of unregenerate man, original sin, and the imputation of Adam's guilt. Debates on these issues helped reveal other points of disagreement including attitudes toward subscription to the Westminster Confession, Presbyterian polity, voluntary societies, methods of revivalism, and slavery. In general, scholars have depicted the New School as demonstrating a confidence in the dignity, freedom, and ability of man which blended well with the main currents of thought in Jacksonian America.<sup>13</sup> Its revised Calvinism might even have been a conscious doctrinal adjustment to the nation's new market economy.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Old School members have been seen as spokesmen for the old religious and social order, promoting a theology and world view increasingly out of step with the beat of antebellum culture.<sup>15</sup>

Yet in the writings described above, each Old School minister espoused economic views remarkably similar to what historians have associated with New School "progressives" such as Barnes and Henry Ward Beecher. Were these examples mere aberrations from the Old School norm? Was the Old School's hard-line Calvinism paralleled by an equally old-fashioned social perspective? Or were these statements representative of the reaction of Calvinist evangelicals to antebellum capitalism? How did they and their New School opponents look upon the new economic order and what moral advice was given on how to live within it?

<sup>11</sup> Marsden, *The New School Experience*, 59-87.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-67. Marsden's book is the definitive study of this subject. He summarizes the historiography on the Old School-New School division in an appendix, 250-51.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 67-103, 230-44.

<sup>14</sup> Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> For this interpretation of Old School Presbyterians in Philadelphia, see Doherty, "Social Bases for the Presbyterian Schism," 79; and Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 34-35.

By examining the economic views of both Old School and New School Presbyterians within a particular setting—in this case Philadelphia—in the thirty years (1825-1855) when their theological and ecclesiastical cleavage was greatest, it is possible to explore those questions. Such an inquiry also will highlight the economic ethic worked out by members of both schools amid the onset of industrial capitalism in the city of Brotherly Love.

Philadelphia's demographic and economic character changed dramatically in the first half of the nineteenth century. An urban population of less than 70,000 in 1800 grew to over 500,000 by the consolidation of 1854, thanks to heavy in-migration from other parts of the United States and, after 1840, to large-scale foreign immigration from Ireland and Germany.<sup>16</sup> Philadelphia's expanding populace generally found ample job opportunities due to the growth and transformation of the city's manufacturing sector.<sup>17</sup> The port's once vital foreign commerce stagnated in the early part of the century, but the "take-off" of such industries as textiles, machinery, and precious metals compensated for the decline in the export trade. Each industry fed off the strong demand for their goods from domestic markets in eastern Pennsylvania and adjoining states. Rapid industrial growth resulted in the urbanization of most of the county by the 1840s.<sup>18</sup> Thus, well before the Civil War, Philadelphia was familiar with the twin by-products of enterprising capitalism in the 1800s: industrialization and urbanization.

Presbyterianism thrived within that antebellum setting. In a city experiencing impressive population growth, Presbyterian gains were even more impressive. The tenfold rise in Presbyterian membership (from 500 to 5,000) between 1800 and 1830 dwarfed the 133 percent

<sup>16</sup> Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968), 51; Howard Gillette, Jr., "The Emergence of the Modern Metropolis: Philadelphia in the Age of Its Consolidation," in William W. Cutler, III, and Howard Gillette, Jr., *The Divided Metropolis: Social and Spatial Dimensions of Philadelphia, 1800-1975* (Westport, 1980), 3-25. The Consolidation Act of 1854 expanded the city limits of Philadelphia to include the entire county of Philadelphia.

<sup>17</sup> Diane Lindstrom, *Economic Development in the Philadelphia Region, 1810-1850* (New York, 1978), 23-27.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24, 29-40, 91.

increase in the county's population.<sup>19</sup> Communicant growth remained strong in the next quarter century so that total Presbyterian church membership in Philadelphia topped 12,000 in 1855.<sup>20</sup> In addition, since communicants constituted perhaps only a fifth of those attending Presbyterian churches in the mid-nineteenth century, there may have been as many as 60,000 Presbyterian adherents in the city by the Civil War.<sup>21</sup> The denomination's institutional expansion in Philadelphia was equally noteworthy, as its congregations ballooned from a total of four in 1800 to over fifty by the mid-1850s.<sup>22</sup> That growth, along with Presbyterianism's long tradition in the area, helped make Philadelphia the most Presbyterian of any of America's major cities. Little wonder, then, that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church met there almost every year during the antebellum period or that most prominent northern Presbyterian ministers held pastorates in the city at some point in their careers.<sup>23</sup> If, as one historian has suggested, the first half of the nineteenth century was "the greatest age of Presbyterianism in America," the same can be asserted about Presbyterianism in Philadelphia.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> William M. Rice, "Introduction," in William P. White and William H. Scott, *The Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1895), xix. These numbers apply to the congregations affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (hereafter PCUSA). If augmented by the membership growth in congregations belonging to other Presbyterian denominations (Reformed Presbyterian, Associate Presbyterian, Associate Reformed), they would be even more impressive.

<sup>20</sup> This figure is a composite total for Old School and New School congregations in the city. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America . . . 1855* [Old School] (Philadelphia, 1855), 365-68; *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America . . . 1855* [New School] (New York, 1855), 102-4.

<sup>21</sup> Rice, "Introduction," xix.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.; Marion L. Bell, *Crusade in the City: Revivalism in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Lewisburg, 1977), 254. Bell says that there were sixty-two Presbyterian congregations in the city in 1857, but this figure includes churches not affiliated with the PCUSA. My figure is the total of Old School and New School congregations.

<sup>23</sup> Lefferts A. Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism: Archibald Alexander and the Founding of Princeton Seminary* (Westport, 1983), 91, claims that in the early 1800s, Philadelphia "was virtually the capital city of American Presbyterianism." At the same time, Presbyterian prominence in the city had grown. According to Bell, *Crusade in the City*, 44, by the late 1820s "the city was . . . undeniably Presbyterian. Presbyterians had in fact become the important religious presence in Philadelphia."

<sup>24</sup> Marsden, *The New School Experience*, xi.

To what extent Presbyterian success was directly tied to Philadelphia's demographic and economic changes has never been conclusively determined.<sup>25</sup> What is clear is that members of both schools within Presbyterianism were aware of these changes in the years from 1825 to 1855. Presbyterian religious periodicals routinely noted the growth of American manufacturing from the 1820s on, citing increases in the number of factories and their output.<sup>26</sup> The corresponding rise in the number of industrial workers also occasioned comment. As early as 1828 the Presbyterian-dominated Philadelphia City Sunday School Union recognized the expansive working class: "Mechanics . . . form a large part of our community, and are increasing in a more rapid progression than any other class. They will soon, to all appearance, become the vital part of this community—the spring and life of activity."<sup>27</sup>

During the 1830s and 1840s, Presbyterian ministers paid attention to other vital shifts in Philadelphia's business life. In the 1830s, the New School's Albert Barnes and the Old School's Cornelius Cuyler observed that investment opportunities were on the rise, tempting entrepreneurs and workers alike with dreams of instant wealth.<sup>28</sup> In the 1840s, James W. Alexander (Old School) expressed concern about the ill effects of the decline of the old master-apprentice relationship and its replacement by the wage relation of factory owner and workingman.<sup>29</sup> And in 1851, Henry Boardman (Old School) suggested that the pace and scale of the city's commercial activity had increased so much in the past generation that if a businessman who had finished

<sup>25</sup> Works that explore aspects of this question include Bell, *Crusade in the City*, 73-75; and Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 34-52.

<sup>26</sup> Periodic references to the growth of manufacturing can be found in issues of *The Philadelphian*, *The Presbyterian*, *Christian Advocate*, *Philadelphia Christian Observer*, and *The Religious Farmer*. Usually, these notices were short reprints from other periodicals and appeared in the "Literary and Philosophical Intelligence" sections of the journals.

<sup>27</sup> *The Philadelphian* 4 (Jan. 1828), 14. For the Presbyterian role in the city's Sunday School Union, see Anne M. Boylan, "Presbyterians and Sunday Schools in Philadelphia, 1800-1824," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 58 (1980), 304-10.

<sup>28</sup> Albert Barnes, *The Choice of a Profession* (Amherst, 1838); Cornelius Cuyler, *The Signs of the Times: A Series of Discourses Delivered in the Second Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1839), 87-93, 195-96.

<sup>29</sup> James W. Alexander, *The Working Man* (Philadelphia, 1843), 114-19.

his career in 1821 was brought back to work, "he might almost imagine himself in another planet."<sup>30</sup>

Like most evangelical Protestants, Philadelphia's Presbyterians responded to the city's (and nation's) economic development with a mixture of enthusiasm and fear. No one was more enthusiastic than Old School minister George Junkin. As editor of *The Religious Farmer* in the late 1820s, Junkin told his rural readers that they should welcome greater domestic industry because the manufacturer was the farmer's "most sure market."<sup>31</sup> To illustrate industry's other benefits, he reprinted a North Carolina state legislative report that hailed northern manufacturing for "diffusing wealth and prosperity, and improving the moral condition of society."<sup>32</sup> The following two decades of industrial growth heightened Junkin's optimism. At mid-century, he celebrated industry for making life easier and more comfortable through new forms of clothing, housing, and domestic appliances—all democratic improvements that served "to elevate and bless the masses rather than the few."<sup>33</sup>

Junkin's ebullience was balanced by the more tempered views of other Presbyterians who found plenty to worry about in the economic trends of their day. Among the most pressing concerns of Presbyterian leaders was how to keep members of the rapidly increasing working class from "vicious" indulgences. Philadelphia's industrial and commercial expansion was bringing thousands of young, single males to the city to work in factories and merchant houses. Separated from the morally uplifting influences of home and family in the countryside, and confronted by the city's numerous "seductive allurements," these young mechanics and clerks were extremely vulnerable to vice and immorality.<sup>34</sup> If unchecked, their moral transgressions would have

<sup>30</sup> Henry A. Boardman, *The Bible in the Family: or, Hints on Domestic Happiness* (7th ed., Philadelphia, 1853), 183.

<sup>31</sup> *The Religious Farmer* 2 (Jan. 1829), 30.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 1 (Jan. 1828), 45-46.

<sup>33</sup> Junkin, *The Progress of the Age*, 8-10.

<sup>34</sup> *The Philadelphian* 9 (Jan. 1833), 6; William M. Engles, *A Plea For Religion* (Philadelphia, 1833), 21-23; Engles, *The Wages of Unrighteousness. A Sermon Delivered in the Seventh Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, to the Young Men of the Philadelphia Institute* (Philadelphia, 1834), 8-17; Henry A. Boardman, *Piety Essential to Man's Temporal Prosperity: A Sermon Delivered . . . before the Philadelphia Young Men's Society* (Philadelphia, 1834), 5-7; Alexander, *The Working Man*, 117-18; Henry A. Boardman, *Suggestions to Young Men Engaged in Mercantile Business* (Philadelphia, 1851), 7-14.



devastating effects on everything from Philadelphia's social order to its spiritual ardor and economic prosperity.

Prosperity itself was not an unmixed blessing, according to some Presbyterians. Speaking before the Mechanics' and Workingmen's Temperance Society in 1835, Albert Barnes insisted that the prevalence of intemperance in America was due to the nation's prosperity. People simply had too much money to spend on drink and other vices.<sup>35</sup> Cornelius Cuyler expanded the point after the Panic of 1837. He suggested that when American prosperity had seemed limitless: "there was an expansion of grasp, of desire, and of hope, which saw neither end nor limit to the acquisition of this world's goods. Few doubted their ability to obtain their desires, and few were careful to confine their desires within reasonable or moderate bounds."<sup>36</sup> This excessive devotion to material gain did not abate with the depression but instead continued in the 1840s and 1850s, constituting in Barnes's words America's "besetting sin."<sup>37</sup> He and his Old School theological opponents joined voices in those years in repeatedly decrying Americans' unrestrained passion for wealth.<sup>38</sup>

As if the moral vulnerability of the working class and American materialism were not enough to fret about, Philadelphia Presbyterians also found time to bewail the growth of speculation. "An intense eagerness for large and quick profits" had infected the business community, and a get-rich-quick mentality permeated workers of all social ranks. The speculative spirit was troublesome not only because it shifted the object of men's labor from healthful employment and a decent living to amassing wealth, but because it made them impatient with the "true" path to economic success—honest, persistent toil.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Albert Barnes, *The Connexion of Temperance with Republican Freedom* ([Philadelphia], 1835), 6.

<sup>36</sup> Cuyler, *Signs of the Times*, 93.

<sup>37</sup> Albert Barnes, "Vindication of Revivals, and Their Influence on This Country," *American National Preacher* 15 (Jan. 1841), 23.

<sup>38</sup> For Old School examples, see James W. Alexander [Charles Quill], *The American Mechanic* (Philadelphia, 1838), 30; [William M. Engles], *Certain Rich Men* ([Philadelphia], n.d.), 3-11; Henry A. Boardman, *The Bible in the Counting-House: A Course of Lectures to Merchants* (Philadelphia, 1853), 103-4.

<sup>39</sup> Boardman, *The Bible in the Counting-House*, 106-20, 164; Barnes, *The Choice of a Profession*, 11-12; Cuyler, *Signs of the Times*, 195-96; John Mears, *The Bible in the Workshop; or Christianity the Friend of Labor* (New York, 1857), 15-18; Alexander, *The Working Man*, 188-96.

In the process, speculation threatened to turn men into "practical Atheists" by persuading them that their business fortunes were more dependent on their skill at exploiting current economic circumstances than on God's providence.<sup>40</sup>

Shared by members of both parties in the city, these anxieties combined with a general optimism about capitalist progress to form the immediate intellectual and emotional backdrop for Presbyterian moral advice on work and wealth. Between 1825 and 1855, ministers and laymen used sermons, tracts, newspapers, lectures, books, and magazines to offer ethical guidance on economic matters to any and all Philadelphians who would listen or read. They were confident that saints and sinners alike could benefit from heeding common sensical moral wisdom mined from the pages of Scripture and applied to everyday life in nineteenth-century America.<sup>41</sup>

At the heart of any economic counsel Philadelphia Presbyterians provided was the promotion of a set of individual virtues reminiscent of both the Puritan work ethic and Benjamin Franklin's plan of moral perfection. Industry, thrift, frugality, sobriety, honesty, charitableness—these were the qualities that brought distinction to a man in the workplace and readied him for success. Their opposites—idleness, intemperance, prodigality, sloth, extravagance—led to economic ruin and poverty.

Labor historians Paul Faler and Bruce Laurie have seen these work values as part of a "new industrial morality" for America's laboring people. Arising alongside the growth of manufacturing in the Northeast in the first half of the nineteenth century, this morality was avidly supported by middle-class Arminian evangelicals as part of their moral reformism.<sup>42</sup> In Philadelphia, Laurie says, New School Presbyterians and Methodists led the way in indoctrinating artisans

<sup>40</sup> Boardman, *The Bible in the Counting-House*, 137-38; Mears, *The Bible in the Workshop*, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Both schools of Presbyterians were strongly influenced by Scottish Common Sense Realism. See Mark A. Noll, "The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (1985), 149-75; and Noll, "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought," *American Quarterly* 37 (1985), 216-38.

<sup>42</sup> Faler, "Cultural Aspects of the Industrial Revolution," 367-71; Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 35-39.

with the importance of work and self-discipline.<sup>43</sup> Men like Albert Barnes “lauded the sober, hard-working middle class” and lashed out at whatever “abetted idleness and profligacy.”<sup>44</sup>

But so, too, did Old School Presbyterians. And while Barnes revived images of Cincinnatus, the virtuous yeoman farmer, to illustrate the nobility of work to his urban audiences, conservative Calvinist Thomas Beveridge appealed to the far more relevant example of Jesus Christ, the ancient artisan, whose toil as a carpenter until age thirty “ennobled labour” forever.<sup>45</sup> Beveridge and other Old School sympathizers left little doubt about what the Bible enjoined regarding work: “The Scriptures give no tolerance to idleness, no countenance to carelessness respecting our worldly concerns. Industry was the duty and happiness of man in a state of innocence.”<sup>46</sup> They left equally little doubt about the rewards of obedience: “The sleep of the labouring man is sweet—the bread of industry is pleasant and healthful, while the idle are dull, discontented, devoured by care, and sinful lusts, wearied by time, and oppressed by the load of existence.”<sup>47</sup>

To industry were to be added frugality and economy. Saving and thrift, said Ashbel Green, were the surest means to increasing one’s property. Wise economy of personal resources rather than rapid gains held the greatest promise for long-term success.<sup>48</sup> This did not imply a parsimonious lifestyle, for miserliness was as much to be avoided as prodigality.<sup>49</sup> Instead, the ideal that Calvinist Presbyterians set out

<sup>43</sup> Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 36-52.

<sup>44</sup> The first quote is from Doherty, “Social Bases for the Presbyterian Schism,” 77, and the second is from Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Barnes, *The Choice of a Profession*, 11-12; Albert Barnes, “The Hinderances to Revivals There,” *American National Preacher* 15 (March 1841), 51-58; Thomas Beveridge, *A Sermon on the Duties of Heads of Families* (3rd ed., Philadelphia, 1830), 5. Beveridge was pastor of the First Associate Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia from 1827 to 1835. The Associate Presbyterians were a small Calvinist denomination sympathetic to the Old School side in the PCUSA split. For a New School work that argues for the legitimacy of work on the basis of Christ’s example and the rest of the Bible, see Mears, *The Bible in the Workshop*, 19-50.

<sup>46</sup> Beveridge, *Duties of Heads of Families*, 4. Cf. Boardman, *The Bible in the Family*, 256-79.

<sup>47</sup> Beveridge, *Duties of Heads of Families*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> *Christian Advocate* 8 (Nov. 1830), 559.

<sup>49</sup> *The Religious Farmer* 2 (Dec. 1828), 14; Alexander, *The Working Man*, 57-58, 184-85.

was one of respectable, middle-class enjoyment of God's providential blessings:

To provide for a household, is not to heap up riches without using them. There is nothing more foolish than to deny ourselves every thing comfortable for the present, that we may guard against want in the future. A kind Providence is a better security than all the property you may collect, or the precautions you may adopt. . . . Should we not . . . freely use what Providence bestows, trusting that while we are *Diligent in business and fervent in spirit*, he will never fail nor forsake us?<sup>50</sup>

Where Old Schoolers implored a more rigid self-denial was in the use of strong drink. While assuming a variety of positions on the question of total abstinence, ministers Cornelius Cuyler, John McDowell, Thomas Hunt, Ashbel Green, Thomas McAuley, George Junkin, James Alexander, William Engles, Henry Boardman, and William Neill were all active temperance advocates in Philadelphia in the 1830s.<sup>51</sup> Their reform efforts were joined by such Old School laymen as Robert Ralston, Alexander Henry, and Matthew Newkirk—prominent members of Second Presbyterian Church and Central Presbyterian Church and wealthy representatives of the city's commercial and manufacturing sectors.<sup>52</sup> Collectively, they saw temperance as a "Christian duty" incumbent upon men of every occupation and social rank. Masters were responsible for setting an example of "rigid temperance" and encouraged to dismiss employees who spent their leisure hours drinking since "to say that a man is often seen hanging about the tavern porch, under whatever pretence of business, is to say that his work is neglected, his habits declining, and

<sup>50</sup> Beveridge, *Duties of Heads of Families*, 5-6. Cf. *Christian Advocate* 7 (Nov. 1829), 488.

<sup>51</sup> Othniel A. Pendleton, Jr., "Temperance and the Evangelical Churches," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 25 (1947), 24-40; *Christian Advocate* 7 (Oct. 1829), 428; D.X. Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin* (Philadelphia, 1871), 98, 134-35; Boardman, *Piety Essential to Man's Temporal Prosperity*, 21-22; William P. White, "A Historic Nineteenth-Century Character," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 10 (1920), 165-69; Engles, *Wages of Unrighteousness*, 8-15; William Neill, "Temperance: Its Necessity and Obligation," in Joseph H. Jones, ed., *Autobiography of William Neill, D.D., with a Selection from his Sermons* (Philadelphia, 1861), 167-79.

<sup>52</sup> Pendleton, "Temperance and the Evangelical Churches," 27, 34. All three were members of Second Presbyterian Church but Henry and Newkirk switched to Central Presbyterian after it was established in 1832.

his company detestable.”<sup>53</sup> For their part, young laborers were to realize early in life the benefits of sobriety and thereby avoid the almost inevitable consequences of drink: poverty, disease, crime, intemperate children, heart-broken wives, early death, and everlasting torment in hell.<sup>54</sup>

Honesty and benevolence rounded out the set of economic virtues most often extolled by Old School men. Great commercial magnates as well as lowly domestic servants were to practice “inflexible integrity” in their business dealings. Anything less violated God’s law and led eventually to financial and personal ruin.<sup>55</sup> All men were likewise to practice charity to the poor and needy. Whether possessing little or much, the “good worker” took selfless acts of kindness and exercised an individual Christian stewardship aimed at relieving human suffering.<sup>56</sup>

Whether sitting in the pews of Albert Barnes’s First Presbyterian Church or in those of one of the city’s Old School congregations, Philadelphians heard ministers and lay leaders celebrate similar work values. To be sure, some differences in emphasis or tone existed between New Schoolers and their opponents. Both sides, for example, implored their listeners to be industrious, but conservatives usually framed this admonition in the context of duty to employer and family, while their New School counterparts spoke more often of industriousness as a key to preserving republican virtue and as an asset for building a favorable reputation.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, each school preached charity to the needy, but Old Schoolers talked of the poor as an inevitable part of the hierarchical (and legitimate) social order, while Barnes and his colleagues saw the “*lower stratum* of society” as an obstacle to revivals. From the New Schoolers’ perspective, a narrowing

<sup>53</sup> Alexander, *The Working Man*, 178-80.

<sup>54</sup> Alexander, *The American Mechanic*, 12-15.

<sup>55</sup> Boardman, *The Bible in the Family*, 157-58; Boardman, *The Bible in the Counting-House*, 25, 84-92.

<sup>56</sup> *Christian Advocate* 8 (Dec. 1830), 613-14; Alexander, *The Working Man*, 258; [Stephen Colwell], *New Themes for the Protestant Clergy* (Philadelphia, 1851), 163-90.

<sup>57</sup> *Christian Advocate* 9 (Jan. 1831), 5-6; Alexander, *The Working Man*, 233-37; Barnes, *Connexion of Temperance with Republican Freedom*, 11, 17; Albert Barnes, *The Desire of Reputation: An Address before the Mercantile Library Company of Philadelphia, December 3, 1851* (Philadelphia, 1851), 9-11.

of the gap between rich and poor might lead to a greater harvest of souls.<sup>58</sup> These differences are important and should not be overlooked. If Robert Doherty is correct in asserting that the two schools had distinct social bases, such differences may have stemmed from efforts to appeal to different audiences.<sup>59</sup> Yet, when looking at the big picture, these disparities are overshadowed by the sweeping convergence of Old School and New School thought, not only on work values but on economic ethics in general.

How was this convergence possible in light of the two parties' strong ideological differences on other matters? One aid to understanding may be the realization that these economic virtues and attitudes toward work were hardly new to Presbyterians in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. From at least 1800 on (and perhaps much sooner than that), Presbyterian and other Reformed ministers had emphasized the importance of industry and frugality in averting national decay and ruin; hard work and sensible economy had to overcome idleness, luxury, and extravagance for the republic to survive.<sup>60</sup> When Old School and New School ministers echoed these themes in the 1830s and 1840s, therefore, they were merely testifying to the two schools' common Presbyterian heritage and inheritance.

Moreover, members of both schools operated out of a single set of intellectual assumptions concerning how to think about economic life. Those assumptions were rooted in the republicanism and Common Sense philosophy that permeated America in the early nineteenth century. From republicanism, Presbyterians derived the notion that

<sup>58</sup> Alexander, *The American Mechanic*, 146-47; Alexander, *The Working Man*, 123-25, 197-201, 220-22; James W. Alexander, et al., *The Man of Business, Considered in His Various Relations* (New York, 1857), 3-5, 23, 30-31, 36-37; Barnes, "Hinderances to Revivals," 51; Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 146. See [Colwell], *New Themes for the Protestant Clergy*, 173-76, for a critique of Protestant views on poverty.

<sup>59</sup> Doherty, "Social Bases for the Presbyterian Schism," 69-79, argues that New School Presbyterians were "a relatively homogeneous group of well-to-do middle-class entrepreneurs who were not old family Philadelphians." In contrast, the Old School had a higher percentage of artisans and laborers. For a critique of this interpretation, see Ira R. Harkavy, "Reference Group Theory and Group Conflict and Cohesion in Advanced Capitalist Societies: Presbyterians, Workers, and Jews in Philadelphia, 1790-1968" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1979), 271-81.

<sup>60</sup> Fred Hood, *Reformed America: The Middle and Southern States, 1783-1837* (University, 1980), 40-42.

the structures of American society were virtuous, regardless of how often individual or group action failed to uphold those structures. Common Sense philosophy prompted them to believe that economics was a sphere of life in which it was more necessary to work out a set of common sense principles than a full-fledged theology. Consequently, what proceeded from Presbyterians of both schools in the antebellum era were piecemeal Christian responses to developments in an economic order assumed to be essentially sound. Neither Old Schoolers nor New offered or even saw the need for any rigorous theological analysis of the foundations of American economic life.

If there was anything new in the Presbyterians' message after 1825, it was the bolder association of traditional economic virtues with individual economic success rather than simply with the national welfare. Whereas in the eighteenth century private interest and public good had often been depicted as in conflict, by the mid-1820s what was good for the individual was also good for the nation and vice versa. Most likely, both New School and Old School ministers learned to apply the ties between virtue and success and vice and poverty to the individual through the moral philosophy courses they took in college or seminary. Whether at Princeton, Union, Jefferson, or some other institution of higher learning, these men had been taught to believe that the universe operated according to a divinely established moral law. God's governance through that law extended to all spheres of human activity, including the economic, and was evidenced best by the pre-established harmony between virtue and happiness.<sup>61</sup> As Old School pastor and professor Archibald Alexander put it in his own textbook on moral philosophy, by the "laws of nature, virtuous conduct is generally productive of pleasure and peace of mind; and immoral conduct is generally a source of misery."<sup>62</sup> Alexander and other academic moral philosophers trained this generation of Presbyterian pastors to think that God's moral ordering of the universe

<sup>61</sup> Donald H. Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience: The Shaping of the American National Ethic* (Philadelphia, 1972), 89-99. Among those ministers for whom biographical information is readily available, virtually all attended college and most graduated. A minority attended seminary while many of the older pastors had studied theology privately with another minister.

<sup>62</sup> Archibald Alexander, *Outlines of Moral Science* (New York, 1852), 254.

included making *both* individual success and social prosperity dependent upon virtue.<sup>63</sup>

That ministers of each party learned that lesson well is evident in how Philadelphia Presbyterians interpreted the depression of the late 1830s. For all their other disagreements, Albert Barnes and Cornelius Cuyler saw eye-to-eye on why America was beset with an economic crisis. Widespread individual moral failure had provoked divine judgment on the whole nation in the form of financial panic and economic hardship. Barnes emphasized the idleness and intemperance of workers as contributing factors. Cuyler highlighted Americans' covetousness and prodigality: "Let us . . . think of this evil which we are suffering as a divine infliction upon us for the ardour with which we have loved, and the eagerness with which we pursued the world."<sup>64</sup> For both men, however, the bottom line was the same: vice had reaped its just reward—individual and national calamity.

In arguing that current American sins led to divine punishment, Presbyterian ministers asserted that God acted on the basis of His moral law to direct people to Him. Their statements suggested that the United States was not at the mercy of an arbitrary, inscrutable divine providence. Instead, God's intervention in American history was rational and even predictable from a human point of view, if men were attuned to His natural laws. Fred Hood and James Turner have recently examined how that largely mechanistic conception of God's actions robbed the divine of much of its former mystery and awe.<sup>65</sup> Equally important is what it implied about human responsibility and control over the temporal fortunes of individuals and nations. If personal success and national prosperity depended upon human virtue, then men were on their own to determine their earthly fate within the bounds of the moral law.

Adopting that wide view of human autonomy in an era of bur-

<sup>63</sup> Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience*, 99-107. For a contemporary example in sermonic literature, see Joel Parker, *Invitations to True Happiness, and Motives for Becoming a Christian* (New York, 1844), 66-97.

<sup>64</sup> Laurie, "Life Styles of Philadelphia Artisans," 355-56, 365-66, discusses Barnes and other New School Presbyterians who interpreted the depression in these terms. Cuyler, *Signs of the Times*, 97-102, 274-75, 289, 304-5 (quote from 102).

<sup>65</sup> Hood, *Reformed America*, 33, 44-47; James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore, 1985), 34, 82-113.



geoning democracy, individual self-reliance, and capitalist expansion would hardly have been shocking, even for American Calvinists. Yet, the truth is that Philadelphia Presbyterians recoiled from that conclusion in favor of a continued insistence that God alone ultimately controlled the earthly as well as heavenly lot of human beings. Even while subscribing to the newer view of divine providence, Presbyterians of both schools maintained their belief that God was sovereign over worldly wealth and free to bestow or withhold it as He saw fit.

The surprising point here is not that only staunch Old Schoolers but that Albert Barnes also could be heard saying, "In temporal things, we say that riches, and health, are given according to his good pleasure."<sup>66</sup> As recent historians have correctly suggested, Barnes placed the responsibility for finding and practicing a calling squarely on human shoulders,<sup>67</sup> but so, too, did Ashbel Green and James Alexander.<sup>68</sup> None of them, however, concluded that people governed their own earthly fortunes. Barnes readily admitted that "men make great changes themselves, and do much to effect their own destiny," but he was clear about who ultimately directs the course of human lives: "We deem our dwellings fixed, and think we could draw on a map the great outlines of our course. Yet who knows what a day may bring forth? And could our fancied chart be laid beside the *real* one how faint would be the resemblance!"<sup>69</sup>

For Barnes and other Philadelphia Presbyterians, believing that God reigned over man's temporal affairs provided a means for explaining why human reality in economic matters did not always conform with human expectation. Given God's sovereignty and mysterious providence, there was an explanation for why the wicked sometimes prospered and the righteous sometimes suffered, economically and otherwise. As New School pastor Daniel Carroll described it, "The most unlikely, and, to all appearance, the most undeserving"

<sup>66</sup> Albert Barnes, *A Discourse on the Sovereignty of God, Delivered at Morris-Town, N.J., June 21, 1829* (Cortland Village, [N.J.], 1829), 9. This address was given shortly before Barnes came to Philadelphia. I have found no evidence that Barnes shifted from this position later in his career.

<sup>67</sup> Doherty, "Social Bases for the Presbyterian Schism," 77; Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 36.

<sup>68</sup> *Christian Advocate* 8 (Nov. 1830), 557; Alexander, *The American Mechanic*, 106-8.

<sup>69</sup> Barnes, *Discourse on the Sovereignty of God*, 7.

were often crowned with “the richest blessings of a bountiful Providence,” while others more deserving were denied these temporal blessings and forced to endure poverty and affliction.<sup>70</sup> These aberrant cases did not disprove natural law; they merely indicated that the links between virtue and prosperity and vice and poverty were *generally but not absolutely* true. Furthermore, they served as reminders of God’s overruling authority, for even the prosperity of the unrighteous was “the direct result of God’s sovereign providence.”<sup>71</sup>

Thus, God’s unyielding control over the things of this world stood alongside middle-class work values and the moral law in the economic ethic of antebellum Philadelphia Presbyterians. While anxious to hold men accountable for working hard and saving earnestly, both New School and Old School devotees were reluctant to sacrifice the traditional Calvinist emphasis on divine sovereignty. As a result, their economic perspective was fraught with the same kind of tension between human responsibility and divine prerogative as permeated their various understandings of human salvation.

Nowhere was that tension more evident than in the argument that men were responsible to practice the virtues which brought success but any success achieved was to be understood as wholly the gift of God. If a man acquired wealth through diligent, frugal, laborious effort, “It was [still] God that did all this.”<sup>72</sup> Apparently, not all lay Presbyterians found that mystery easy to accept. At least that is the impression Ashbel Green left in one charity sermon:

But in regard to their *worldly substance*, perhaps gradually acquired, and in the acquisition of which their contrivance and management, their laborious efforts and persevering industry, have been constantly exerted, they are not so sensible of the truth. They do not at least, so deeply and constantly realize that whatever they possess in this way, cometh as truly of God as if he had given it to them by the most remarkable and extraordinary dispensation of providence.<sup>73</sup>

Much else in what Old School and New School Presbyterians said on the morality of economic success was similarly tension-riddled.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel L. Carroll, *Sermons and Addresses on Various Subjects* (Philadelphia, 1846), 282.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>72</sup> *Christian Advocate* 12 (Aug. 1834), 340.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 338-39.

Probably all Presbyterian ministers at one time or another preached on the biblical admonition to be content in all things, including one's present economic lot. To envy and covet the wealth of others was idolatrous and an implicit denial of God's authority over worldly affairs. On the other hand, laypersons were told that contentment did not mean inactivity or passive acceptance of the status quo. Rather, they must try to improve their social and economic circumstances even while accepting their current condition graciously.<sup>74</sup> The task set before them, then, was to exhibit economic ambition and economic satisfaction simultaneously.

Underlying that ambiguous if not contradictory message were conflicting Presbyterian convictions about the moral legitimacy of economic gain and the immoral zeal with which antebellum Americans were seeking it. Neither Old School nor New School pastors questioned the moral integrity of wealth acquired through honest means. Henry Boardman stated plainly: "I look with no disfavor upon legitimate accumulation. I greatly honour the man who secures, by honest means, a competent or opulent estate, and employs it in doing good."<sup>75</sup> Ministers as well as laypeople were entitled to have material goods beyond the simplest "necessaries of life," according to New School sympathizer Ezra Stiles Ely. Owner of a sizable estate himself, Ely refuted the notion that Christians, and especially clergymen, were obligated by scriptural authority or Christian values to avoid all luxuries. On the contrary, he said, buying luxury goods helped ensure the continued employment of thousands of artisans who produced them and thereby fulfilled the Christian duty to aid one's neighbor.<sup>76</sup> Albert Barnes similarly blessed the amassed possessions of the well-off, insisting that the economically successful were not required by Christianity to deny themselves the "ordinary comforts" attached to their social rank.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> For examples of the admonition to be content economically, see *Christian Advocate* 9 (June 1831), 281-85; Carroll, *Sermons and Addresses*, 274-75; William Neill, "Self-Denial A Christian Duty," in Jones, ed., *Autobiography of William Neill*, 89-102. For examples of the admonition to be seeking economic improvement, see *Christian Advocate* 8 (Nov. 1830), 557-60, and 9 (Jan. 1831), 1-6; Barnes, *The Desire of Reputation*, 3-27.

<sup>75</sup> Boardman, *The Bible in the Counting-House*, 288.

<sup>76</sup> *The Philadelphian* 7 (Dec. 1831), 195, 202-3, 206.

<sup>77</sup> Albert Barnes, *The Rule of Christianity, in Regard to Conformity to the World* (Philadelphia, 1833), 38-39.

These endorsements of material acquisition were at least partially countermanded by laments over America's insatiable thirst for wealth. As noted earlier, concern with the nation's growing materialism was widespread among Philadelphia Presbyterians throughout the second quarter of the nineteenth century. If, as one historian has remarked, Albert Barnes's sermons and lectures may be read as "celebrations of acquisitive man," many of them may also be read as jeremiads calling the republic's citizens back from their all-consuming pursuit of money.<sup>78</sup> In one memorable passage reflecting his eastern bias, Barnes acerbically described those who had succumbed to mammon:

This passion [for wealth] goads on our countrymen, and they forget all other things. They forsake the homes of their fathers; they wander away from the place of schools and churches to the wilderness of the west; they go from the sound of the Sabbath-bell, and they forget the Sabbath, and the Bible, and the place of prayer; they leave the places where their fathers sleep in their graves, and they forget the religion which sustained and comforted them. They go for gold, and they wander over the prairie, they fell the forest, they ascend the stream in pursuit of it, and they trample down the law of the Sabbath, and soon, too, forget the laws of honesty and fairdealing, in the insatiable love of gain.<sup>79</sup>

When Presbyterians aimed to strike a balance in their message between the value and vanity of economic advance, they usually resorted to the injunction that Christians were to have a "holy superiority" to the world's possessions even while being free to enjoy any happiness they afforded.<sup>80</sup> The believer was to have "a spirit and temper *above* the things" that influenced others. If a Christian was blessed with wealth, he was to make sure that his "affections" were not "supremely fixed on it."<sup>81</sup> A healthy detachment from material goods, in other words, was the proper Christian attitude toward the things of this world.

Presbyterian leaders of both schools recognized that refusing to be preoccupied with temporal gains took a large dose of divine grace in a society absorbed with economic prosperity. Only true religion could

<sup>78</sup> Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 36.

<sup>79</sup> Barnes, "Vindication of Revivals," 23.

<sup>80</sup> *Christian Advocate* 7 (Oct. 1829), 487-88.

<sup>81</sup> Barnes, *Rule of Christianity*, 46-48.

keep a man from getting caught up in the frenzied pace and enticing allurements of the modern business community. A genuine conversion and the practice of Christian piety were necessary to steel a person against the seductive temptation of a life aimed solely at worldly indulgence.<sup>82</sup>

Alongside their case for Christian piety as a defense against selfish materialism, Presbyterians ironically juxtaposed arguments promoting piety as an essential asset to achieving economic success. Typical was Ashbel Green's claim that "true religion has no tendency to diminish, but on the contrary, a direct tendency to increase, the stock of present fruition."<sup>83</sup> In a city afflicted with capitalist fever, these evangelical Protestants were not about to suggest that Christianity was an obstacle to earning a good living. On the contrary, any hint that godliness among young men would "interfere with their secular business, and defeat their worldly anticipations" was quickly denied.<sup>84</sup>

Among the most avid promoters of this idea was Henry Boardman. Educated at Yale College and Princeton Seminary, Boardman assumed the pastorate of Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church in 1833 at age twenty-five. He spent the next forty-three years ministering to that large Old School congregation located in the midst of the city's rapidly expanding business sector (12th and Walnut). Boardman publicly advocated the theme, "Piety Essential to Man's Temporal Prosperity" for the first time in a sermon before the Philadelphia Young Men's Society in 1834.<sup>85</sup> Taking as his text 1 Timothy 4:8, "Godliness is profitable unto all things," he set out to show that "the best interests of every young man for the present life, will be greatly promoted by personal piety." In his view, Christian faith aided the temporal pursuits of young men by clarifying what was worthy in

<sup>82</sup> Alexander, *The American Mechanic*, 27, 30, 275-86; Henry Boardman, *The Vanity of a Life of Fashionable Pleasure* (Philadelphia, 1839), 31-41; [Thomas Brainerd], *Influence of Theatres. A Lecture* (Philadelphia, 1840), 5-10; William Ramsey, *Church Debts; Their Origin, Evils, and Cure* (Philadelphia, 1851), 79-86.

<sup>83</sup> *Christian Advocate* 7 (Oct. 1829), 488. Cf. *The Philadelphian* 9 (Jan. 1833), 6.

<sup>84</sup> Boardman, *Piety Essential to Man's Temporal Prosperity*, 8.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. This society was founded in 1833 to provide "rational and useful recreation for leisure hours, and, generally, to promote the moral and intellectual improvement of young men in this city." It also aimed to "cultivate correct religious feelings" among young men. Ibid., 5-7.

life and producing "the most valuable qualities for the management of business."<sup>86</sup> In the 1840s, Boardman outlined the benefits of personal religion for the professional careers of doctors and lawyers, and then in the early 1850s, did the same for the city's merchants.<sup>87</sup> Overall, he evangelized thousands of Philadelphians with the word that Christian piety would enhance rather than undermine their chances for a happy, successful life.

Here again, Presbyterians sounded a mixed message. A life of Christian discipline kept a person from conforming to America's current passion for wealth, but at the same time it heightened his likelihood of reaping large earthly rewards. Such a message was not a crass gospel of success. Yet it did reflect how extensively emergent capitalism was shaping the proclamation of Christianity in antebellum Philadelphia.

A final ingredient in what Presbyterians said on the morality of economic success was their denial that wealth was a sure sign of individual salvation or God's blessing. Recent arguments that Albert Barnes preached that "success in one's calling was a sign of regeneration" are not borne out by the evidence. Neither Barnes nor any other Presbyterian minister equated material prosperity with Christian fruitfulness.<sup>88</sup> Instead, they claimed that the "highest degree of worldly prosperity" did not prove the "favor of God."<sup>89</sup> Daniel Carroll typified Presbyterian opinion on how temporal riches provided no assurance of spiritual health: "When you have actually reached the highest pinnacle to which your worldly aspirations can carry you, you have no security that you can stand there a moment! Your very *success* may prove your [spiritual] *ruin*!"<sup>90</sup>

Still, like the other parts of their economic ethic, the Presbyterians' witness on this point was not without its inconsistencies. The tension here lay not in the rhetoric itself but in an apparent conflict between

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 7-18.

<sup>87</sup> Henry Boardman, *The Claims of Religion upon Medical Men* (Philadelphia, 1844); Boardman, *The Importance of Religion to the Legal Profession* (Philadelphia, 1849); Boardman, *The Bible in the Counting-House*.

<sup>88</sup> Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 36. Cf. Doherty, "Social Bases for the Presbyterian Schism," 77.

<sup>89</sup> Cuyler, *Signs of the Times*, 107. Cf. *Christian Advocate* 9 (June 1831), 284.

<sup>90</sup> Carroll, *Sermons and Addresses*, 276.

what was said and what was practiced. For all the disclaimers of automatic parallels between man's economic and spiritual estates, Presbyterian ministers and congregations acted as though prominence in the business world was the primary prerequisite for leadership in the church. That, at least, was the claim of Philadelphia industrialist and Old School layman, Stephen Colwell. He sharply criticized the churches for treating their wealthy members as a spiritual elite, regardless of whether they were "real disciples of Christ." In Colwell's mind, "the spirit of business" had invaded Protestantism to the point that financial contribution rather than spiritual devotion dictated who were the men of influence.<sup>91</sup> Churchly behavior, in this case, belied the testimony of ministers against associating material blessings with divine pleasure.

From this survey of Presbyterian ethical thought in antebellum Philadelphia, four major conclusions are possible. The first and most obvious is that despite their important theological differences and formal ecclesiastical separation, Old School and New School Presbyterians in the city promoted a virtually identical set of moral precepts for Americans to follow within the economic realm. Certain subtle variations in emphasis did exist. Nevertheless, the two schools' thinking was sufficiently close that it is entirely legitimate to speak of a single Presbyterian economic ethic in the years from 1825 to 1855. That is not to suggest that all Presbyterians supported or opposed the same economic theories and policies. Preferences on issues such as protective tariffs or internal improvements cut across both Presbyterian and Old School-New School boundaries. But members of both schools offered remarkably similar wisdom on the morality of economic success.

Second, in Philadelphia at least, New School men were not so radically accommodating and Old School men were not so thoroughly tradition-bound in their economic views as recent historians have

<sup>91</sup> [Colwell], *New Themes for the Protestant Clergy*, 128-31. On Colwell, see Milton C. Sernett, "Stephen Colwell and the 'New Themes' Controversy," typescript manuscript, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia; and Bruce Morgan, "Stephen Colwell: Social Prophet Before the Social Gospel," in Hugh T. Kerr, ed., *Sons of the Prophets: Leaders in Protestantism from Princeton Seminary* (Princeton, 1963), 123-47.

implied. Instead, both groups sought to endorse, support, and protect the market economy without sacrificing the distinctions or integrity of their religious faiths. Sometimes they succeeded; sometimes they failed. But in either case, they could be Arminian proponents of the new revivalism or stalwart advocates of five-point Calvinism. One did not have to be a disciple of Finney to champion burgeoning capitalism or the new industrial morality. Nor did one have to believe in the imputation of Adam's guilt to question material acquisitiveness. Rather, the ideologies of both Presbyterian schools encouraged men and women to attach themselves to emergent capitalism in a wholehearted but tempered manner.

Why theological disagreement did not in this case translate into more divergent economic perspectives is puzzling. Given the respective progressive and traditional characters of their theologies, New School Presbyterianism and Old School Presbyterianism would appear to have been ripe for holding vastly different views on the new economic order. That kind of divergence, of course, is what previous historians have assumed and postulated. Uncovering a high degree of convergence in what Presbyterians actually said, then, comes as a striking surprise. How is their agreement to be explained? While any full explication will have to await additional investigation into the intellectual and social character of Philadelphia Presbyterianism, a partial answer lies in a recognition of the common intellectual heritage of the two schools. On the one hand, they both drank at the waters of republicanism and Common Sense philosophy. On the other hand, the collective wisdom on economic morality offered by Presbyterian greats—the John Calvins, John Knoxes, John Witherspoons, Samuel Stanhope Smiths—filtered down to both parties. Since the main issues (with the possible exception of slavery) that divided the two sides did not call any of their heritage into question, both Old Schoolers and New Schoolers could perpetuate their collective heritage even after splitting denominationally.

The fact that they did perpetuate that tradition points to a third major conclusion. Rather than manifesting an innovative or novel character, mid-nineteenth-century Presbyterian moral thought was decidedly “conservative” in that its main emphases were carryovers from the early republic. As Donald Meyer has suggested, Presbyterians and other evangelicals in antebellum America were not looking to create a new morality, but only “to find new ways to justify and



sustain basic ethical values in an emerging capitalist economy."<sup>92</sup> In their view, industry, frugality, thrift, temperance, honesty, and charitableness had always been and would always be the appropriate values for the workplace. And they were sure that these values were equally relevant for the seaman, the merchant clerk, the mechanic, the lawyer, the minister, and every other calling. Likewise, God's sovereignty over temporal affairs was a constant, even if men now saw the divine governing more indirectly through the operation of His moral law. That law, fully expounded by 1800, made clear the innate connections between virtue and prosperity and vice and misery, and provided the means for three different generations of Presbyterians to explain the Panics of 1819, 1837, and 1873 precisely the same way.<sup>93</sup>

Presbyterian borrowing from the past during the second quarter of the nineteenth century did not mean, however, that their thought was immune from the changing social and economic realities of antebellum Philadelphia. On the contrary, the tensions that riddled the Presbyterian economic ethic derived largely from the pressures exerted by the new economic order. Capitalist emphasis on self-determination and individual freedom pushed Presbyterians towards affording men and women more (if not ultimate) responsibility for their worldly fortunes. Similarly, the age's absorption with upward mobility and material prosperity encouraged Presbyterians to posture themselves as the friends of economic gain. It also led them to sell Christianity as a business asset for aspiring merchants and industrialists. Meanwhile, the market economy's rewarding of the wealthy with power and prestige carried over into the distribution of influence within Presbyterian congregations. At the same time, the economic fluctuation between prosperity and depression reminded Presbyterians of the temporal quality of worldly riches. And the speculative spirit and exorbitant lust for wealth that consumed so many Americans sparked a renewed emphasis on the virtue of godly contentment. All in all, then, Presbyterians were both powerfully drawn and occasionally repulsed by emergent capitalism. In a very real sense, they were

<sup>92</sup> Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience*, 109.

<sup>93</sup> Hood, *Reformed America*, 40-42; Charles D. Cashdollar, "Ruin and Revival: The Attitude of the Presbyterian Churches Toward the Panic of 1873," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 50 (1972), 229-44.

torn between embracing it fully and keeping it at arm's length. For the time being they tried to tread a middle road. But the development of the Gospel of Wealth on the one hand and the Social Gospel on the other in the postbellum era suggests that Presbyterians could only live with that tension so long.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> For Presbyterian economic views in the late nineteenth century, see Gary Scott Smith, *The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America 1870-1915* (Grand Rapids, 1985), 126-40.