

The Education and Supply of Ministers in American Presbyterian History

by Barry Waugh

After Jesus sent out the seventy he commented, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”¹ In the history of American Presbyterianism fulfillment of the Lord’s words was exemplified by difficulty sustaining a sufficient supply of well-educated ministers. In May 1709, the year following the death of the colonial missionary and father of American Presbyterianism, Francis Makemie, a letter from the Presbytery was sent to Sir Edmund Harrison in London seeking two-hundred pounds per year “for the Encouragement of Ministers in these parts.” The letter commented further that the funds were needed to finance the addition of two or three ministers to the seven clergy of the Presbytery.² The presbyters were hopeful that seven or eight new churches could be established with monetary help from England.³ The seriousness of the situation was such that “the Desires of sundry places [are] crying unto us for Ministers to deal forth the word of Life unto them.”⁴ By 1718, the year after the Synod was established, there were twenty-three ministers and three “Probationers,” but despite the increase in the number of clergy and multiple presbyteries there were “still many Vacancies.”⁵ Whether or not Harrison contributed from his resources to help colonial Presbyterians is not noted in the minutes, but the Synod continued to grow adding new churches despite having a limited number of pastors to serve them. Notwithstanding the shortage of preachers, the Synod reminded its congregations that all ministers needed to be thoroughly examined when entering a presbytery for ministry and those coming from “the north of Ireland,” no matter how well “certified,” must not be considered exceptions to the rule. Ireland was singled-out due to the number of Scots-Irish Presbyterians entering the American colonies. These foreign ministers could not be installed pastors in a church until they preached before presbytery, served a six-month probationary period within the presbytery, and then were specifically approved for work within the presbytery.⁶

The desire to faithfully maintain the purity and peace of the Presbyterian Church grew out of the Synod’s general difficulties with some of the foreign clergy transferred to the colonies. A case illustrating the problem is that of Samuel Hemphill who emigrated to the colonies from the Presbytery of Strabane, Ireland, and became the subject of the first heresy trial in American Presbyterian history. He had been admitted to the Synod based on certification from the Presbytery of Strabane and was then recommended by the American colonial Synod “to the Regards and Assistance of which so ever of our Presbyteries his Abode shall be fixed among.”⁷ But by 1735,

¹ Luke 10:1, 2; English Standard Version has seventy two were sent out commenting that some manuscripts have 70.

² Guy S. Klett, ed., *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1706-1788* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1976), 1709-73, the method of page notation means the minutes for the year 1709 on page 73; approval of the letter by the Presbytery is on page 7, and page 73 provides a transcription of its text; the first presbytery for American Presbyterianism was organized in 1706 and known simply as “the Presbytery,” see Klett’s preface.

³ Klett, 1709-73.

⁴ Klett, 1709-73.

⁵ Klett, 1718-90; just as the first presbytery was known as “the Presbytery,” the first synod was “the Synod,” see Klett’s preface.

⁶ Klett, 1735-132.

⁷ Klett, 1734-121; Hemphill had been admitted by Synod and then he selected a presbytery.

Hemphill was found to hold false doctrine when he was tried before the Synod and his guilt was compounded by contemptuous and disrespectful behavior before his fellow presbyters. The judicatory “found him unqualified for any future Exercise of his Ministry within our Bounds.”⁸ The shortage of ministers for Presbyterian congregations in the colonies was at least partially due to the denomination’s proper concern to have educated ministers committed to the Westminster Standards; more ministers could be found if the academic and theological standards were reduced, but concern for the spiritual well being of congregants would not allow for inadequate education. The tension between filling vacant pulpits and maintaining educational rigor would continue to contribute to the shortage of clergy.⁹

In 1744 the single Synod divided into the Synod of Philadelphia, which is known as the Old Side, and the Synod of New York, which was designated the New Side. The division resulted from differences among the ministers over the doctrine and methodology of the Great Awakening, ministerial education at the Tennents’ “Log College,” and the meaning of subscription to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. In 1729 the Synod had adopted the *Westminster Confession* and its catechisms as essential and necessary doctrine to which all ministers had to subscribe, or as the act says, they had to “declare their agreement.”¹⁰ When the Synod of New York first met in September 1745 its commissioners gathered from its three constituent presbyteries of New York, New Brunswick, and New-Castle.¹¹ Included on its docket were petitions for supplies, dealing with a charlatan minister, debate over itinerant preachers, and the need for more ministers.¹² The minutes go on to mention that the best way to alleviate the shortage of preachers was through candidates acquiring their educations in the College of New Jersey, established in 1746, which was the successor of the Tennents’ Log College. It was believed that the College of New Jersey could provide “a sufficient supply” of ministers.¹³ But the New Side’s efforts to centralize and institutionalize its educational program were only partially successful because the shortage of ministers continued. One problem was young men would go to the college intending to become ministers, but then they would change their minds and turn to another profession.

The other portion of the division of 1744, the Old Side, the Synod of Philadelphia, continued its parallel ministry in the colonies while also struggling with a scarcity of qualified pastors. Finding pastors was particularly difficult for the “back Inhabitants” of North Carolina and Virginia, which is evidenced by their repeated requests for supplies to serve their rural and often isolated congregations.¹⁴ Colonial Virginia in 1749 was served by two missionaries with each ministering a term of eight weeks in remote areas. Presbyterians were at a disadvantage in the

⁸ Klett, 1735-130; on the Hemphill case see, William S. Barker, “The Samuel Hemphill Case (1735) and the Historic Method of Subscribing to the Westminster Standards,” in *Word to the World* (Fearn: Mentor Imprint, Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 229-57; see also, Morton H. Smith, “Subscription to the Westminster Standards in the Presbyterian Church in America,” *Mid America Journal of Theology* 9 (Spring 1993): 53-56; and David W. Hall’s, *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995).

⁹ Regarding qualified clergy see, Klett, 1735-132, 1737-150, 1743-184, etc.

¹⁰ The Presbyterian Church in America Historical Center website has a copy of the Adopting Act of 1729 under the heading of Historical Documents in American Presbyterian History.

¹¹ Klett, 1745-263.

¹² Klett, 1751-277, 1752-281, 1755-297, 310.

¹³ Klett, 1758-329; the college founded in Princeton has enjoyed several formal and informal names, College of New Jersey, Princeton College, Nassau Hall, and eventually Princeton University. The college was chartered in 1746 and its first class of six men was graduated in 1748.

¹⁴ Klett, 1744-197, 1747-216, 1753-238, 1755-243, 1756-249, 1757-255.

colony because they were considered dissenters from the official church, the Church of England.¹⁵ Not only did Presbyterian ministers have to deal with the rugged situations of the “back inhabitants,” but they also had to deal with obtaining permission to minister as dissenters and thus contend with organized opposition. The Old Side’s concern for an educated clergy led it to pursue its own educational program while the New Side was progressing towards developing the College of New Jersey. Early on, the Synod of Philadelphia sought the assistance of Yale by sending a letter to its president, Thomas Clap.¹⁶ The Synod of Philadelphia related to him how the Tennents had “set up a school,” the Log College, where some “were educated and afterwards admitted to the Ministry without sufficient Qualifications.” The Old Side expressed its continued desire to establish a college even though it had previously failed in its efforts.¹⁷ The appeal to Yale for support did not bring enough help, and once again, the road to Old Side ministerial education found a dead-end and a new route was needed.

Pastoral shortages continued and a committee of the Old Side met to consider a program for educating young men to supply the increasing number of vacancies in the churches. The committee proposed that its synod had to support the efforts if success was to be achieved, so the Synod of Philadelphia agreed to the four-point plan that had been recommended by the committee. First, the school had to be open to all people so their children could be educated “gratis” in the languages, philosophy and divinity; secondly, the congregations must be asked to contribute annually to the school; thirdly, the funds must then be used to support a master and a tutor and any remaining funds should be used to buy books and other “necessaries” for the benefit of the school; and finally, the trustees must audit the school finances and oversee the school master.¹⁸ The school, which goes unnamed in the minutes, had a report delivered to the synod meeting the following year.¹⁹ By 1748, the synod had to pay the debts of the school and assess the congregations for the funds as well as charge the students for their education.²⁰ The financial situation of the school meant that the Synod of Philadelphia often had to supplement its program or allow the master to charge additional fees to his students.²¹ By 1753, the committee responsible for overseeing the school reported that they were “well pleased with the proficiency of the Scholars & Care of the Master.”²² The school struggled through the years the Sides were separated, but it also enjoyed some cooperation with German schools, and taught some “Dutch children in the English Tongue gratis.”²³ Despite teaming with the German schools, the funds for paying the Old Side school’s master came up short again in 1757, but the synod agreed to continue the institute into the next academic year.²⁴

One difficulty faced by present day Presbyterians as they try to understand the ministerial shortage problem of the colonial Presbyterian Church is comprehending the immense obstacles facing the church as it fought to provide qualified ministers. Just as the sheep of these congregations lived hard lives, the Presbyterian Church struggled to spread the Gospel in a

¹⁵ Klett, 1749-221.

¹⁶ Klett, 1746-211-14.

¹⁷ Klett, 1746-211.

¹⁸ Klett, 1744-197-98.

¹⁹ Klett, 1745-200.

²⁰ Klett, 1748-217, 219.

²¹ Klett, 1749-221.

²² Klett, 1753-237.

²³ Klett, 1757-257.

²⁴ Klett, 1756-252, 1757-258, 1758-261.

massive, hostile, and topographically diverse colonial situation. Many churches were in remote areas where just staying alive in harsh weather with the threats of dangerous animals and the possibility of Indian attacks were challenging enough. Financial remunerations for ministers were often limited, if there were any funds at all, and if there was a salary, it was sometimes late in coming.²⁵ Some pastors served more than one congregation, often three or more, and this multiple service involved considerable danger during travel. The minister would ride to his congregations on a horse, or in some cases walk from one pulpit to the next; the work was arduous and the dangers very often wore-down the best of men and their wives. One minister's wife, whose husband was away from home supplying pulpits, was cooking in her cabin when she heard the cow's bell ringing faintly as it wandered into the surrounding woods. The wife had to remove her pot from the fire, tie her toddler to the bed post so the child would not stumble into the fire, and then retrieve the four-legged family dairy as quickly as possible for the good of her household. Colonial ministry was not only hazardous for the husband but also the wife and children and one may wonder how many ministers abandoned rural or remote churches because their families had simply had enough. One needs only to wander through old church cemeteries reading inscriptions to see how young some ministers were when they or theirs passed away. These difficulties contributed not only to arduous ministries, but they made central, institutional education difficult to achieve. A substantial number of colonial ministers were tutored by other ministers who provided educations of varying doctrinal quality. Standardized confessional curriculum and instructors were essential for education, but the factors mitigating against achieving the goal, including the difficulties of frontier life, were numerous.

The reunion of the Old and New Sides in 1758 into the Synod of New York and Philadelphia brought the resources of both bodies together for a united educational program. Half of the Old Side's twenty-two ministers were present at the reunion, while the New Side had thirty one of its seventy-two pastors in attendance.²⁶ Their theological differences did not disappear when reunited, but they were at least committed to maintaining a unified connectional church once again. One of the first actions of the reunited church was to ordain John Griffith as an exceptional case because he lacked "School Learning usually required" for ministry, but his ability to speak Welsh uniquely qualified him for a much needed ministry among his transplanted countrymen.²⁷ Despite the desire to maintain high academic standards, it was not extraordinary for candidates to be ordained for reasons deemed extraordinary. As the colonies expanded and new immigrants pressed deeper into the continent, the ministerial shortage problem grew.

The great Number of Vacancies in the Bounds of this Synod is owing—partly to the new settlements lately made in various Parts of this Continent—partly to the Death of Sundry Ministers belonging to this Synod—But principally to the *Small Number of Youth educated for the ministry*, so vastly disproportionate to the Numerous vacancies: and unless Some effectual Measures can be taken for the Education of proper Persons for the sacred Character,

²⁵ A survey of the minutes of the General Assembly, as well as scans of the minutes of many presbyteries and synods will find ministers making appeals for back-wages. The judicatories often would remind the congregation or congregations that called the minister of the duty to fulfill the financial aspects of a call. Whether the reminders from the courts achieved their ends was not always recorded. It may be in some cases that beleaguered ministers exhausted their options seeking back wages and just gave up.

²⁶ Klett, Synod of Philadelphia minutes, 1758-259; Synod of New York and Philadelphia minutes, 1758-339-40.

²⁷ Klett, 1758-344, 345.

the Churches of Christ in these Parts must continue in the most destitute Circumstances, wandering Shepard less & forlorn, thro this Wilderness, Thousands perishing for lack of Knowledge, the Children of God hungry & unfed, & the rising Age growing up in a State little better than that of Heathenism, with Regard to the public Ministrations of the Gospel.²⁸

For the ensuing years the Synod of New York and Philadelphia repeatedly had to appoint supplies to various churches in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey.²⁹ The shortage of ministers was an unwanted way of life for colonial Presbyterians.

Shortages continued and in 1767 the Carolinas and Virginia came before the Synod of New York and Philadelphia for help. Seven congregations in the area of what is now Charlotte, North Carolina, proposed to the synod that any one or all of the ministers, “Spencer, Lewis, McWhorter, and James Caldwell,” who would accept a call to any single congregation for half-time duties with half pay could serve the other half of the time supplying the remaining churches for the balance of the salary. Each of these four ministers was questioned concerning their interest in the call but “each of them returned a Negative answer.”³⁰ Were the negative responses due to a lack of concern or indolence, or were they simply reluctant to take on a difficult ministry among a scattered group of churches while earning little remuneration? Presbyterians faced a considerable shortage of shepherds because supplies were also sought for “Orange and Culpepper Counties, the South Branch of Potomac in Virginia, and from the long Canes, Cathys Settlement, Indian Creek and Duncans Creek in North Carolina.” But these were not the only congregations in need because additional requests for supplies came from “Williamsburg, & Places adjacent. Hanover & Cub Creek in Virginia, Newburn, Edenton, Fourth Creek, upper Hico, Haw River, Goshen, in the forks of Catawba, The South Fork of Catawba, The Forks of Yadkin & Salisbury in North Carolina. . . Little River in South Carolina, and Briar Creek in Georgia.”³¹ The Synod of New York and Philadelphia also found its efforts to remedy the shortage problem complicated by the different language groups the Presbyterians encountered in their work; ministers were needed to shepherd congregations that included speakers of Dutch, German, Welsh, and in eastern North Carolina, Gallic. Current Presbyterians speak of ministries to diverse cultures and languages, but American Presbyterianism in the eighteenth century worked with the peoples of their land.

Zooming-in from the greater Presbyterian Church in the colonies to South Carolina, the first meeting of the Presbytery of South Carolina convened at the Waxhaws Church, April 12, 1785. Two ministers and three probationers were received by transfer from Orange Presbytery.³² Later that year, the Presbytery of South Carolina ordained and installed three ministers for calls within its bounds, but it also had to reduce its ranks because of discipline applied to one minister who was “cut off” from presbytery “for contumacy.”³³ The first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America convened in 1789 and it received the report of South Carolina Presbytery which listed eleven ministers and three probationers serving forty-

²⁸ Klett, 1758-328; italics added for emphasis; the quality of the writing quoted from the minutes seem to contradict a high educational standard, but minutes were often composed with multiple abbreviations, incomplete words, and cryptic bits used as an informal shorthand by a clerk trying to keep up with events.

²⁹ Klett, 1759-349; 1760-356, 360, 369; 1761-369, 371, etc.

³⁰ Klett, 1767-439.

³¹ Klett, 1767-439.

³² Klett, 1787-618.

³³ Klett, 1787-618.

four churches.³⁴ By 1796, the Presbytery of South Carolina was able to report that it had nineteen ministers and five probationers, but its small number of churches and limited finances contributed to its inability to send commissioners to general assembly meetings.³⁵ The next year South Carolina Presbytery had twenty ministers serving thirty-one churches and fifteen vacant pulpits.³⁶ By 1802, South Carolina Presbytery had grown sufficiently to be divided in two.³⁷ Despite an inadequate number of ministers, the church grew as the state of South Carolina developed.

In many areas, educated pastoral oversight of the churches continued to be a problem for existing churches and the missionary efforts of the denomination. In one case, the minister David Rice proposed to the General Assembly a reduction in educational requirements for ministers. Rice labored in Transylvania Presbytery in Kentucky, which had an abundance of rural and remote churches. Even though the General Assembly sympathized with Rice's plight, it was unwilling to reduce educational requirements.

[W]ere our opinion on this subject different from what it is, we cannot lawfully and conscientiously depart from our present standards, till they be changed in an orderly manner, by the consent of a majority of the Presbyteries which compose the body of the General Assembly.³⁸

If men are sincerely desirous of promoting the glory of God, let them first bestow the necessary pains and time to acquire the requisite qualifications for feeding and leading the flock of Christ; let them be regularly initiated into the priesthood, and not hasten to offer unhallowed fire on God's altar. If they are sincerely desirous of doing good, then do it in that sphere in which they appear destined by providence to move.³⁹

As the General Assembly affirmed the importance of a well-educated clergy, it went on to allow for "assistants" like the "helps or catechists of the primitive church."⁴⁰ These aides to ministers were, as required by the General Assembly, to be under proper restrictions, fully supervised, and their teaching had to be limited to the young. One might think that the ordained minister should be given the task of training up the young because of the importance of grounding children in the faith, but the assembly believed the pastor should minister to the adults. The General Assembly advised its presbytery that great caution must be used if a presbytery finds itself needing such minimally educated help because youthful zeal may lead to pride and error.⁴¹ The Presbyterian Church found itself often short on clergy, but at least till 1804, the denomination held to its standards and required qualified ministers to be educated with the caveat they could use catechists for training the young. Returning to South Carolina, in later years shortages of ministers were often compensated for by encouraging and licensing ruling elders to supply pulpits of poor and small churches.

³⁴ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from its Organization 1789 to 1820 Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, [n.d.]), 20.

³⁵ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1796-112, 107.

³⁶ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1797-120.

³⁷ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1798-137, 159; 1799-166, 186; 1800-210; 1802-243.

³⁸ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1804-300.

³⁹ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1804-300, 301.

⁴⁰ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1804-301.

⁴¹ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1804-301.

Ashbel Green, who had been encouraged by correspondence with Samuel Miller concerning the ministerial shortage situation and the need for clergy education, stated in a letter to the 1805 meeting of the General Assembly that, “Give us ministers,” was the call of the missionary fields and the abundant vacancies in the denomination. Empty pulpits were not only problems for small rural congregations but also for some larger city churches as well.⁴² Expressing the sentiments of some in the church, Green commented further that, “if the number of our clergy were doubled, it would not exceed the demand which exists for their labors, provided they should be well furnished for their work.”⁴³ Green’s analysis deduced two particular problems that had to be resolved. The first problem involved adequate financial remuneration for the ministry. The second difficulty was the need for the presbyteries to be more vigilant in seeking young men to enter the ministry and then provide them with the necessary education.⁴⁴ With regard to the education of the candidates, Green called for funds to be supplied through the congregations, presbyteries, the young men’s own efforts, and by gifts from wealthy Christians.⁴⁵ But where David Rice had called for a relaxation of the educational requirements, Green affirmed the continued importance of well-educated ministers. He called for better oversight of candidates and encouraged more liberal giving of funds to support the educational needs of young ministerial students. This letter from Green may have been an early influence on the presbyters stimulating thought regarding establishment of a denominational seminary, which would be fulfilled in 1812 when the Presbyterian theological seminary at Princeton was opened.

As the nation progressed through the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Presbyterians in South Carolina worked to reduce their ministerial shortage. The two South Carolina presbyteries reported a total of twenty-five ministers and fifty-four churches in their bounds in 1808; eighteen ministers and forty-eight churches in 1810; and by the following year these two presbyteries were united into the South Carolina Presbytery with nine ministers and twenty-five churches.⁴⁶ The single Synod of South Carolina and Georgia was formed in 1813 with the presbyteries of South Carolina, Hopewell, and Harmony.⁴⁷ The following year the South Carolina Presbytery reported ten ministers and twenty-five churches, and then the statistics for the next year gave a similar minister-to-church ratio with nine ministers and twenty-seven churches.⁴⁸ From 1815 through 1820, the ratio of ministers to churches was only about one third.⁴⁹ Only twelve ministers served thirty-five churches in 1828, which was the worst report, while the 1822 statistics gave the best figures for the period with fifteen ministers serving twenty-five congregations.⁵⁰

⁴² *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1805-341 to 343; Green’s letter occupies most of page 341 and all of pages 342 and 343; the Samuel Miller influence is mentioned by R. A. Harrison in his, *Princetonians 1776-1783: A Biographical Dictionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 409.

⁴³ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1805-341; “well furnished,” that is, qualified and well educated.

⁴⁴ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1805-342, 343.

⁴⁵ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1805-343.

⁴⁶ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1808-410; 1810-460; 1811-488; the number of South Carolina presbyteries has varied. The variation in the judicatories reflects the variation in the effectiveness of the Presbyterians in the state as well as their work in the face of growing Baptist and Methodist efforts particularly in the antebellum years.

⁴⁷ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1813-527.

⁴⁸ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1813-575.

⁴⁹ *Minutes, 1789-1820*, 1815-603; 1816-635; there was no report to the General Assembly in 1817-668, 1818-696, 1819-719, 1820-743.

⁵⁰ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from A.D. 1821 to A.D. 1835 Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, n.d.), 1821-4 (no report);

During the same fifteen year period, the General Assembly continued its practice of maintaining high educational requirements for its ministers and in 1826 it attempted to revise the *Form of Government*, 14:6, to raise the minimum period of ministerial divinity training from two to three years. The committee handling the revision commented in its report.

It is believed by the committee, that since the formation of the constitution of the Presbyterian church in the year 1788, a change has taken place in the state of the church and society in our country at large, which may render proper a change in the period during which candidates for the gospel ministry should be required to study, previously to their licensure to preach the gospel. Candidates for the gospel ministry now are in general younger than such candidates for the gospel ministry were 30 years ago; there are more facilities for education; and the diffusion of knowledge and increase of mental improvement, seem to demand a correspondent increase of ministerial furniture, in those who preach the gospel. For these reasons the committee submit that in their apprehension the article of the constitution which directs, that the period of two years of previous study shall be indispensable to license, may advantageously be increased to the period of three years, except in extraordinary cases.⁵¹

Because this revision involved a constitutional standard, it had to be sent down to the presbyteries for approval. When the votes from the presbyteries were counted the following year, the revision was defeated.⁵² So, despite continued efforts to provide a well-educated clergy, the tight vote indicates that there were differences of opinion over how much education was enough.

During the Civil War in 1862 in the Union, in response to ideas presented during the Old School General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (P.C.U.S.A.), Charles Hodge published an article in the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* titled, “Are there too many Ministers?”⁵³ This might seem an odd inquiry, which was exactly how Hodge approached it commenting, “Until recently this question would have sounded strangely in the ears of Presbyterians.”⁵⁴ He stated further, “Since when has the harvest ceased to be great, and the laborers few?”⁵⁵ He observed that those in the P.C.U.S.A. who said there were too many ministers had a sadly mistaken notion of the uniqueness of the church and its ministry. The church is not the military—just because the military stops recruiting because it has enough soldiers does not mean the church stops recruiting because it *thinks* it has too many ministers.⁵⁶ Complaining, said Hodge, that there are too many ministers is essentially accusing the Holy Spirit of incompetence and denying divine providence. The church does not call ministers, the Holy Spirit calls ministers.⁵⁷ Hodge goes on to admit that those contending in favor of an overabundance of ministers are correct if they mean some clergy should not have been ordained in the first place

1822-65 (15 ministers, 25 churches); 1823-95 (14, 31); 1824-127 (15, 34); 1825-160 (16, 34); 1826-193 (15, 35); 1827-223 (15, 35); 1828-250 (12, 35); 1829-277 (11, 32) [the actual number of ministers listed in 1829 was “1,” but it is believed that this was an error since the 1828 number was 12 and the 1830 count was 11]; 1830-311 (11, 29); 1831-348 (13, 29); 1832-384 (13, 29); 1833-417 (15, 32); 1834-460 (14, 35); 1835-492 (no report).

⁵¹ *Minutes 1821-1835*, 1826-190.

⁵² *Minutes 1821-1835*, 1827-218.

⁵³ 34 (January): 133-146.

⁵⁴ Hodge, 133.

⁵⁵ Hodge, 133.

⁵⁶ Hodge, 134.

⁵⁷ Hodge, 135, 137.

because they did not have the gifts needed. The number of ministers was distorted by incompetent and undedicated clergy adding to the total. He added further that the church did not do an adequate job of assessing their gifts and calling, but the errors of presbyteries do not negate the duty of church courts to discern those who *are* called and see that they have opportunities to minister.⁵⁸ Three-hundred ministers were without call in the P.C.U.S.A. in 1862, and this seeded the idea of there being too many clergy, but Hodge noted that the lack of a call could be due to many vacant pulpits being unable to financially support a minister. The Princetonian contended that it is the church's duty to see that those without a call be given the opportunity to exercise their God-given gifts.⁵⁹ To support his case he turned to the General Assembly minutes of 1861 and found there were nine hundred seventeen more churches than ministers in the denomination, which led him to the obvious conclusion that it is preposterous to think there could be too many ministers.⁶⁰ What is more, he examined the greater ministry of the Presbyterian Church and the work of world missions perceiving that ministers without calls could be given calls, but the continued problem of adequate financial support inhibited the church from putting all its pastors to work.⁶¹ Hodge contended that the Presbyterian Church could have put some ministers to work by having them preach to the economically deprived and the denomination should find funds to pay for such ministries.⁶² The final pages reiterate the accusation that the reason it *appears* there are too many ministers is because the church does an inadequate job of finding calls for ministers without calls, which is aggravated by the limited funds available to the denomination for supporting the work of ministers.⁶³ Hodge concluded.

Let those who feel for unemployed ministers not raise the standard of rebellion against God, nor reject the proffered gifts of the Spirit, nor strive to impede the progress of the church, but devote their energy to enable her to carry into effect the ordinance of Christ, that they who preach the gospel shall live by the gospel. Then, should we have too many ministers, the proper remedy will be the deposition of those who refuse to work, and not arresting the increase of faithful laborers.⁶⁴

With the end of the Civil War, the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America met in Macon, Georgia. The 1865 meeting was moderated by George Howe and there were several significant items docketed. The commissioners needed to change the denomination's name, which was resolved by a substantial vote in favor of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, P.C.U.S., but more importantly for the present study there was an appeal for more ministers. Moderator Howe had published in 1836 a discourse appealing for more ministers, and as he hefted the gavel he found himself facing the ministerial shortage problem nearly thirty years later.⁶⁵ The report of one committee stated that there is an "increasing need of ministers of the Gospel to enter

⁵⁸ Hodge, 137-38.

⁵⁹ Hodge, 138-139.

⁶⁰ Hodge, 140.

⁶¹ Hodge, 141.

⁶² Hodge, 142-43.

⁶³ Hodge, 142-146.

⁶⁴ Hodge, 146.

⁶⁵ His discourse was originally published in the pamphlet, *An Appeal to the Young Men of the Presbyterian Church in the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia* ([n.p.], 1836), but it was republished in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 4 (2008), 52-71.

upon the labors of our vast field.” Due to the war, the shortage was particularly severe because of the dead and incapacitated men who could not complete their studies and enter the ministry. This was further complicated by the economic and social disorder in the Confederate states during the war which made it highly difficult for seminary classes to be conducted regularly. Essentially, there was a four-year void in the history of ministerial preparation for Presbyterians of the former Confederacy.⁶⁶ Likewise in the Union, ministerial candidates had died and been maimed, but its casualties of war did not have as great an influence on ministerial supply. The P.C.U.S. report continued by noting that the severe post-war poverty of the masses made it nearly impossible for candidates to raise funds for education.⁶⁷ Despite the great shortage, the General Assembly had a reminder for its members.

Presbyteries should relax none of their vigilance in selecting those upon whom the charities of the church are to be bestowed. Let them be very careful on this particular point. The experience of the past shows the necessity for double vigilance here. One unworthy subject receiving aid from the funds of the church may do an injury to the cause that scores of worthy recipients will not be able to repair.⁶⁸

The final paragraph of the report called for the raising up of ministerial candidates, and it encouraged the churches to, “Pray ye the Lord of the Harvest, that He would send forth laborers into His harvest.”⁶⁹ To reinforce this call, the Assembly appointed the last Thursday in February to be “observed in special prayer,” and the Sabbath before that day would be “a day of special instruction from the pulpit on the subject.”⁷⁰ The recovery of the former states of the Confederacy following the war was not only political, social, and economic but also a recovery of the Presbyterian Church as fields of labor for ministers were waiting for youth to mature and fill the void left by the casualties of war.

In conclusion, “the harvest is great, but the laborers are few,” is the Scripture that opened this article and it is one of the texts often used to encourage candidates for the ministry. It is intriguing that educationally well-trained ministers are not universally accepted by the church in general because society places considerable emphasis on the importance of education for other callings. How many would step into an airliner if they knew that the crew had a total of a few hundred hours flight experience flying a helicopter? Would one trust a cardiac physician for bypass surgery whose medical curriculum did not include specialized training? Would parents send children to schools knowing that the teachers failed to complete their own educations? The answer to all three questions is, hopefully, *no*, but well-meaning Christians and clergy are willing to place the souls of their families into the hands of those who are not appropriately trained for the ministerial task. Yes, “the harvest is great, but the laborers are few,” reflects the likely perpetual truth of the situation facing the church from generation to generation, but this *need* for ministers does not *necessitate* placing flocks under the care of those who are inadequately prepared. A Presbyterian minister must have knowledge of the Bible and the Westminster Standards to be appropriately equipped for shepherding—the complexities and massiveness of the Word of God is

⁶⁶ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States: with an Appendix*, vol. 1 (Augusta: Printed at the Constitutionalist Job Office, 1865), 366.

⁶⁷ *Minutes P.C.U.S.*, 367.

⁶⁸ *Minutes P.C.U.S.*, 367.

⁶⁹ *Minutes P.C.U.S.*, 367.

⁷⁰ *Minutes P.C.U.S.*, 368.

systematized, organized, and explained by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and its associated catechisms. When the Old Side and the New Side were divided into two Presbyterian churches they both continued to suffer from a shortage of ministers, so the New Side's ridding itself of the Old Side's tighter educational requirements did not alleviate the shortage problem. The Old Side worked to establish an educational program while maintaining appropriate academic requirements, but it too continued to have a scarcity of ministers. It may be that Luke 10:2 states a perpetual fact, that is, the harvest will *always* be so great that no matter how many laborers are available they will never be enough to reap the abundant harvest. Though such a thought might be discouraging, it should rather provide hope because each new minister's preaching is assured that God will call his own to enjoy the benefits of his grace.