THE RULE OF EXPRESS TERMS AND THE LIMITS OF FELLOWSHIP IN THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT: T. W. BRENTS, A TEST CASE

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by

Kevin James Gilbert

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APPROVAL SHEET

THE RULE OF EXPRESS TERMS AND THE LIMITS OF FELLOWSHIP

IN THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT:

T. W. BRENTS, A TEST CASE

Kevin James Gilbert

Read and Approved by:

Craig A. Blaising (Chairperson)

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Date May 14, 2004

To God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

and to Barbara, Benjamin, and Annelise,

whose grace, love, and encouragement

are my strength

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BF *The Works of Benjamin Franklin* (CD-ROM)

BWS *The Works of Barton W. Stone* (CD-ROM)

CSR *Christian Scholars' Review*

EDT *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*

GA *Gospel Advocate*

GPS T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 17th ed.

JETS *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

JWM *The Works of J. W. McGarvey* (CD-ROM)

MEL *The Works of Moses E. Lard* (CD-ROM)

MH *Millennial Harbinger* (CD-ROM)

RQ *Restoration Quarterly*

SCM The Stone-Campbell Movement

WAC *The Works of Alexander Campbell* (CD-ROM)

PREFACE

This work may be complete, but the gratitude owed to so many for so much may never be fully expressed. Dr. Craig A. Blaising, my supervisor, helped me to see my biases, overcome them, and think objectively. Dr. David L. Puckett exercised the gifts of immense patience and grace as I slowly plodded through the maze of historical roadblocks and detours. Dr. Gregory A. Wills shared expertise in American church history which honed key fine points of the study. Without the insights, direction, and encouragements of this committee, the project would have been far less fruitful.

The church at Wahiawa, Hawaii, has been an undeserved blessing, a source of constant encouragement and prayer. A special thanks to friends Brenda Walker and Jill Sprott for proofreading assistance.

My parents, and my sister and brother-in-law, have taken care of each other, and taken care of me, often when I have needed care the most. How much I would not have accomplished had they not been there to help with the kids, pay a bill that was too big, or pray for what only they knew was needed. Their help and support will never be forgotten.

No words can express the thanks I owe to my wife, Barbara, and to my children, Benjamin and Annelise. The Lord is glorified in them. For they have given more of themselves to me than a hundred men could ever deserve. I look forward to the excitement that faces us as we enter into a new day together, expectant.

Kevin James Gilbert

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2004

CHAPTER 1

THE DOCTRINE OF LIMITED FOREKNOWLEDGE AND CHRISTIAN UNITY

Introduction

Since the early nineteenth century, the Stone-Campbell movement (SCM) has included Christians who believed that God's foreknowledge was limited, as well as those who believed that God's foreknowledge was absolute. As such, the history of the SCM provides one example of a fellowship whose people held different views of foreknowledge and remained united. This study sought the fundamental reason that unity was maintained. Today, several significant Christian fellowships wrestle with the same challenges. Because those who believe that God does not know some future things are arguably unorthodox, the orthodox who believe God has absolute foreknowledge search for adequate responses. Often, they consider excluding the unorthodox from their communities of faith in some way. These contemporary challenges and a divinely-sanctioned concern for Christian unity served as the initial impetus for this research. The historical example of the SCM may hold some contemporary worth for those involved in the dialogue, especially for those who value historical precedent. T. W. Brents developed the SCM's most comprehensive doctrine of limited foreknowledge, so, the study focused on him as the key representative of a larger number of SCM adherents who also held the doctrine.

Statement of the Problem

Today, many evangelicals agree that the doctrine of limited foreknowledge "must not be accepted within evangelicalism."[1] A significant, vocal number of Christian academics, authors, and pastors have lobbied for the exclusion of people who hold this "novel understanding of God" from their faith-communities.[2] Some of that lobbying has not been entirely successful. The Baptist General Conference, for example, has energetically discussed the question. It concluded that the doctrine fits within the boundaries of its historic confession. Men, like Gregory Boyd, who hold the doctrine, continue to be employed in its seminaries. However, because it is historically committed to certain levels of Christian liberty and congregational autonomy, it also concluded to leave ministerial ordination in the hands of its regional conferences. At last count, approximately half of the regions had decided to exclude from ministerial ordination any who confess this doctrine, for they believe the doctrine of limited foreknowledge transgresses the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy.[3]

Other groups have succeeded in modifying their confessions. In 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention approved a rewritten article on God for its summary of beliefs, the Baptist Faith and Message. The new article more clearly reflects the classical doctrine of absolute foreknowledge. While questions of church membership are left in the hands of its autonomous congregations (as its polity is understood by this author), a person must agree with the denomination's confession in order to hold a denominational

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[1]Bruce A. Ware, review of *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, by John Sanders, *JETS* 43, no. 2 (2000): 342; John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997).

[2]Ronald Ross Layne, Jr., "Exodus 32:7-14 in Richard Rice's Argument for the Openness of God" (Th.M. thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998), 2.

[3]See Baptist General Conference documents [on-line]; accessed 6 March 2001; available from http://www.bgcworld.org/4know; Internet.

office–e.g., one who confesses a doctrine of limited foreknowledge would be excluded from the faculty of its seminaries.[4]

Still, other groups continue the discussion. In the Evangelical Theological Society, the level of dialogue has increased over the past few years. In 2001, the Society's fifty-third annual meeting was devoted to the theme of "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries," and the discussion of whether or not the doctrine of limited foreknowledge fit within those boundaries became the focus.[5] Many want the Society's doctrinal statement redrawn to exclude such doctrines of divine self-limitation. The conversation continues in the Society's journal.[6] Further, at its annual meeting in 2003, the Society considered removing two full members on the premise that their doctrine of limited foreknowledge implicitly violates the inerrancy clause in the Society's doctrinal basis.[7] These are only a few examples of a dialogue which permeates evangelicalism in America.

The dispute has focused primarily on the affirmation that God reveals himself in Scripture as possessing limited foreknowledge, not the absolute foreknowledge that has been accepted as orthodoxy. Opponents of the doctrine of limited foreknowledge deny that it is congruent with Scripture and that it coheres logically. Others have called for the exclusion of those who hold the doctrine on historical grounds, arguing that it is an

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[4]See Southern Baptist Theological Seminary publications [on-line]; accessed 6 March 2001; available from http://www.sbts.edu/webelieve.html and http://www.sbts.edu/wwb/baptfin.html#God; Internet.

[5]Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, CO, 14-16 November 2000, and related documents [on-line]; accessed 6 March 2001; available from http://www.etsjets.org; Internet.

[6]E.g., Ron Highfield, "Divine Self-Limitation in Open Theism," *JETS* 45, no. 2 (2002): 299.

[7]See documents available from The Evangelical Theological Society [on-line]; accessed 25 August 2003; available from http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/2003-challenge.html; Internet. The measures did not receive enough votes to remove those men from membership.

innovative theology devoid of continuity with the orthodox Christian tradition.[8] This study focuses on a historical question, particularly, the history of interpretation in the SCM. Those participating in this discussion from a historical standpoint, therefore, may exhibit the most interest in this study of the SCM, beginning in the nineteenth-century. It was an evangelical fellowship which addressed the challenge to unity, without division or exclusion, when faced with the problem presented by the unorthodox doctrine of limited foreknowledge.

Division and exclusion were resisted by the SCM from the beginning, and unity was its watchword. This distinctly American, nineteenth-century reform movement took its name from two of its earliest key figures: Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell. They pursued the Christian unity their Lord desired, and they claimed the Bible alone as their means of achieving it. Three distinct contemporary fellowships emerged from the SCM: the Churches of Christ, the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Some of the movement's adherents held a doctrine of limited foreknowledge, while others held a doctrine of absolute foreknowledge; this created a situation which seems very similar to the contemporary dispute.[9] One of the movement's namesakes, Alexander Campbell, confessed a classical understanding of absolute foreknowledge:

> Known to God alone is the future destiny of the entire universe, and of every atom of it. To him alone the past, the present and the future of every creature is as fully

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[8]Geisler uses "neotheism" (Norman Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man: Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997], passim); Layne uses "novelty" (Ronald Ross Layne, "Exodus 32:7 in Richard Rice's Argument for the Openness of God," 2); Mohler asserts that evangelicalism is "now marked by theological . . . pluralism . . . concerning the doctrine of God," R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "The Eclipse of God at the Century's End: Evangelicals Attempt Theology without Theism," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 1, no. 1 [1997]: 9).

[9]Regarding SCM's perception of itself as "evangelical," see, e.g., Thomas Campbell, "A Declaration and Address," in *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's* Declaration and Address, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollman, ATLA Monograph Series (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2000), 6. See also Alexander Campbell, "Preface" *Millennial Harbinger* 1 (1837): 3, in *Millennial Harbinger* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996). Cf. Jesse R. Kellems, *Alexander Campbell and the Disciples: Lectures Delivered in Brite College of the Bible, Texas Christian University, April and May, 1925* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930), 21, 154, in *WAC* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1997).

> known as any present object ever is, or was, or can hereafter be, to us. Foreknown to God alone, and to him whom he inspires, is the future condition of any person or thing, within the entire area of creation. To God alone the past, the present, and the future of every atom in creation is always equally present.[10]

Interestingly, Campbell had also expressed this position about fifteen years earlier, at roughly the same time he was commending a book by Alexander Hall in which Hall presented a doctrine of limited foreknowledge as necessary to refute Universalism.[11]

The other namesake of the movement, Barton W. Stone, had also held the classical doctrine of absolute foreknowledge at one time. However, he eventually concluded that "the foreknowledge of God" in Scripture was not the absolute knowledge of all future things, it was simply "the knowledge [of future things which God] made known by Moses and the prophets hundreds of years before" they happened.[12] These examples from Stone, Campbell, and Hall point to the earliest coexistence of alternative doctrines of foreknowledge within the SCM in the early 1840's.

Within the SCM, that coexistence-in-tension continued throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, throughout the twentieth, and it continues today. This study seeks specifically to discover a reason the SCM remained unified in spite of their differences on the doctrine of divine foreknowledge, while other fellowships sought to exclude Christians for such unorthodox teaching.

Thesis

T. W. Brents, a major theological figure in the nineteenth century SCM, advocated a doctrine of limited foreknowledge. Although Brents was opposed by

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[10]A. Campbell, "Prophecy, No. 4" *MH* 4, no. 1 (1861): 18-19.

[11]See chapter 3 for the details of Hall's doctrine of limited foreknowledge. Hall published his doctrine at about the same time Campbell expressed his classical doctrine, and within months of Hall's publication, Campbell had reviewed and commended it. Alexander Hall, *Universalism Against Itself* (St. Clairsville, OH: Heaton and Gressinger, 1846); A. Campbell, "Calvinism and Arminianism," *MH* 3, no. 6 (1846): 325; the review of Hall was in T. M. Allen and A. Campbell, "New Publication," *MH* 4, no. 2 (1847): 120.

[12]B. W. Stone, "The Christian Expositor," *Christian Messenger* 12, no. 6 (1842):171, in *BWS* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996); this is notably similar in Franklin below.

classical theists in the SCM, the issue of divine foreknowledge did not become a cause of division. This dissertation will argue that a probable reason why it did not lead to schism was that both sides subjected the issue to the rule of express terms.

Brents was not the only one who held this doctrine; he is used here as a representative of those who held the doctrine because he articulated it most thoroughly in print. The movement possessed other prominent preachers, elders, and academics who published their agreement with Brents's position. For example, among them were R. B. Trimble, J. M. Kidwell, W. C. Huffman, Washington Bacon, W. D. Carnes–President of Burritt College (a role Brents would occupy after him)–and Jacob Creath, Jr.[13] Creath, for example, said of Brents's view, "I arrive at the same conclusion as our talented brother on every topic."[14] However, these men did not systematically articulate their views on the subject in print as Brents did in his tracts, the *Gospel Advocate*, and primarily in his book, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*.[15] While Alexander Hall, prior to Brents, had expressed similar views in his book, *Universalism Against Itself*, he did so much less systematically, thoroughly, and coherently than did Brents, making Hall's work far less accessible.[16] While Brents professed the problematic doctrine at the center of this study, the rule of express terms seems to have been a significant reason for the SCM's forbearance of him and his doctrine.

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[13]Although the source does not note it, this must be Jacob Creath, Jr., for his uncle and co-laborer with him in the SCM, Jacob Creath, Sr., had died March 14, 1854, two months after Thomas Campbell died, and some twenty years before the publication of Brents's *GPS*. Cf. Robert Richardson, *The Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* vol. 2 (n.p.: WV, 1898), 606, in *WAC*.

[14]T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 17th ed. [*GPS*] (reprint. Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 537-39. It was first published in Cincinnati: Bosworth, Chase, and Hall, 1874.

[15]Ibid., chapters 1-5.

[16]Hall, *Universalism Against Itself*.

The Rule of Express Terms

For the SCM historian, the language of "express statement," "express terms," "approved precedent," and the like would be immediately recognized and understood. These are phrases which have appeared in SCM literature from the beginning, and which continue to be discussed, appropriately, under the rubric of hermeneutics. However, the rule of express terms (the rule) was more than an interpretive guideline; it was the touchstone of a method which reached into multiple areas of practical theology to achieve Christian unity.

Defining the rule. Applied to the Bible, the adjective phrase *express terms*, by definition, referred to the direct or explicit teaching of the Bible in its own terms, *not* what men perceived to be the implications of those terms. A synonymous adverbial phrase was also used to refer to that which had been *expressly taught* in the Bible. In practice, the rule limited the kind or manner of teaching which these SCM leaders agreed could be legitimately bound on Christians, or used as terms of Christian communion. It was not the creeds, the inferences of dogmatics, the systems or time-honored interpretations; those things to which Christians were obliged, those things which determined association in a community of Christ, and those things alone, were the express terms of the Scriptures. In sum, the rule exalted the express terms of Scripture above all other spiritual authority, and subordinated inferences and deductions from Scripture to a useful, but non-binding role.

The rule's function. The rule found expression throughout SCM literature almost always in relationship to questions of communion, viz., including someone in a Christian community. For example, Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*–a "founding document" of the movement–associated the rule with the functions of governing Christian confession, practice, and communion. Christians were obliged to

confess and practice only that which was "expressly exhibited upon the sacred page."[17] Only that which was "expressly taught, and enjoined upon them, in the word of God" could be legitimately "required as terms of communion."[18]

In theory, at least, anything having God's approval which was expressly stated in Scripture could be believed, confessed, or practiced without severance of communion; doctrines which were not expressly stated in the Bible, but which were arrived at by a process of inference, were valuable, but were not to be used as grounds for establishing communion or exclusion. The application of the rule suggested that men should be free to confess any of God's written revelation as true, to his glory, even if they did not fully understand how it might be harmonized with other texts which seem to suggest something different, perhaps even contrary. It also encouraged men to value the confession of God's expressly revealed relationship to them more than they valued the creation of a propositional statement to be debated or used as a test of orthodoxy.[19]

The rule's development. Thomas Campbell and his son, Alexander, were two of the movement's most influential early voices. They had been trained in the Reformed hermeneutics of Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism. Yet, they departed from some of its principles at key points early in the nineteenth century. Still, according to Casey, the SCM developed a quasi-Reformed hermeneutical tack from the beginning.[20] The leaders of the early SCM sought to glean truth from Scripture alone as did the Protestant

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[17]T. Campbell, "Declaration and Address," 5-6, 18-19.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid. These ideas of confession and debate are not mutually exclusive; however, such theological debate has often resulted in the crystallization of the one side's inferential conclusion as "orthodoxy"and the other side's as "heresy." The SCM's leaders sought to oppose inferential doctrines as tests of fellowship because they saw them grounded on the sandy soil of human thought. Cf. John Mark Hicks, "An Introduction to the Doctrine of God," paper presented at the annual Christian Scholars Conference, Nashville, TN, 18 July 1996 [on-line]; accessed 20 January 2001; available from http://www.hugsr.edu/hicks/GOD-EXCR.htm; Internet.

[20]Michael Casey, "The Origins of Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ, Part 1: The Reformed Tradition," *RQ* 31, no. 2 (1989).

reformers before them.[21] To the leaders of the SCM, that practice implied the rejection of all creeds as tests of faithfulness.[22] In time, they developed more specific rules of interpretation which were also related to the Reformed tradition. The early hermeneutics of the SCM were syntheses of principles created by combining selected elements of the Reformed tradition with Enlightenment philosophy to form a method suitable to promote their agenda for unity. Their rules and methods were not products of the Bible alone, but of the Bible and the wisdom God had given them through their unique experiences.[23]

The rule's phrase, *express terms*, may have been found in various sources.[24] Campbell appears to have thought that the practice of relying on the express terms of the Bible was scriptural.[25] The practice also predated the SCM in other groups, such as the Sectarians, Anabaptists, and Arminians before the Campbells.[26] Athearn thought the expression might have been influenced by the language of Locke.[27] Casey also understood Campbell to have followed Locke in some respects; however, he thought Campbell adopted the rule of express terms, primarily, to counter the Reformed doctrine of "necessary consequence."[28] To the authors of the Westminster confession, the doctrine of necessary consequence allowed human conclusions deduced from Scripture, not

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[21]E.g., T. Campbell, "A Declaration and Address," 18-20.

[22]Ibid.

[23]See Casey, "The Origins of Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ, Part 1." That they did not develop their rules from the Bible alone is not necessarily a bad thing, though it is somewhat ironic.

[24]The rule of express terms has a history prior to the Campbells, but it transcends the boundaries of this project.

[25]T. Campbell, "Declaration and Address," 27, 38-39. He referenced Prov 30:6, "Do not add to his words, or else he will rebuke you, and you will be found a liar"; cf. 1 Cor 2:13. Campbell was not found to have quoted or alluded to 1 Cor 4:6, which was curious: "not to exceed what is written."

[26]Casey, "The Origins of Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ, Part 1," 88-89.

[27]Clarence A. Athearn, *The Religious Education of Alexander Campbell* (n.p.: n.d.), in *WAC*; cf. Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: the Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 12, 26, 31-32, 51, 226.

[28]Casey, "The Origins of Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ, Part 1," 88-89.

expressly stated in Scripture, to be considered divine truths as equally authoritative and binding as the express terms of Scripture.[29] In contrast, the rule of express terms allowed *nothing* to be as equally authoritative and binding as the express terms of Scripture, and had the pragmatic value of making necessary consequences unnecessary.

Adopting the rule was a pragmatic choice which seemed to have been motivated by negative spiritual experiences. As such, it may be seen as a protective boundary. Some of the motives for erecting that boundary were articulated by Moses Lard, editor of a famed theological journal in the SCM called *Lard's Quarterly*. He wrote,

> In answering these questions [of salvation and sanctification], we allowed nothing to philosophy, nothing to reason, nothing to tradition. Everything was placed on the basis of authority. Hence we ignored the metaphysics of Calvin on the one hand, and shunned the shallow discussions of free will on the other. We looked on these opposing issues as the fruitful sources of a huge bundle of traditions having no other effect than to render null the word of God. These traditions were the gospel of the day. They were the standard by which everything was tried. Even the decisions of the Bible bowed before them, and were either explained wholly away or made to harmonize with them. He only was enrolled as a saint who gave heart room to these traditions, while he was written down as worse than a heathen who did not. They domineered over the popular mind, and held it in a bondage fearful to think of. We saw that, unless the spell in which these traditions held the world could be broken, the case of the world was hopeless. Against this spell but one recourse was left to us. There still lingered in the hearts of many a conventional, if not a real, respect for the Bible. Our first duty was to exalt and strengthen this respect. This was no easy task; for men heard with languid ears our plea for the Bible and that alone, while their souls were yet drowsy from the effect of tradition. Still, as we had but the one alternative left, our duty was to exhaust that.[30]

To Lard, an essential to fulfilling that "duty" to plea for the Bible alone was the renunciation of "all human creeds" as the "deductions of unaided human reason" and the prime movers of the "bundles of traditions," which, Lard surmised, "consequently tend only to make void the truth."[31] Instead, Lard argued that Christians should adopt the practice of interpreting the Bible with this precommitment: "That the terms of the Bible,

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[29]See Jack B. Rogers, *Scriptures in the Westminster Confession: A Problem of Historical Interpretation in American Presbyterianism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 334; quoted in Casey, "The Origins of Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ, Part 1," 87.

[30]Moses E. Lard, "Our Present Position and Future Duties," *Lard's Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1867): 344, in *MEL* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996).

[31]Ibid.

like the terms of any other ancient book, are to be taken in their simple natural sense; and that they are not terms bearing a mystic double meaning."[32] In other words, he had determined to "plead for the old Gospel in the words of the Apostles."[33]

The rule advocated reliance on the words of the apostles in order to deny any spiritual authority to speculation. During the Lexington union meetings of Stone's "Christians" and Campbell's "Disciples," the SCM's renowned Elder John Smith honed the definition of "express terms" to mean the relative exclusion of speculation from authoritative theological discourse to speak solely "in the words of the Scriptures."[34] Stone agreed, saying that he and his people had also

> taken the Bible, and the Bible alone, as our rule of faith and practice. . . . I perfectly accord with Brother Smith that . . . speculations should never be taken into the pulpit; but that when compelled to speak of [theological themes] at all, we should do so in the words of inspiration.[35]

Alexander Campbell desired that those words of inspiration have primacy, and that desire for the inspired word was equated with a desire for "pure speech." In his obituary of Campbell, Moses Lard equated pure speech with "the identical words of the Bible." He explained it this way:

> The whole force of [Campbell's] mind was now directed to the word of God. This he was studying with intense thought. Its meaning was gradually opening to him. Among the first things which struck him was the great and imperious necessity for a *pure speech*. By this is meant the expression of revealed thought in the identical words of the Bible.[36]

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[32]Ibid.

[33]Moses E. Lard, "Human Creeds as Tests of Truth Make Void the Word of God," *Lard's Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1863): 84, in *MEL*.

[34]John A. Williams, *The Life of Elder John Smith* (Cincinnati: R. W. Carroll, 1870), 452, quoted in William Garrett West, *Barton Warren Stone: Early American Advocate of Christian Unity* (n.p.: 1954), 148, in *BWS*.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Moses E. Lard, "Alexander Campbell," *Lard's Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (1866): 268, in *MEL*.

This rule received broad acceptance.[37] It may be found in Baptist literature published in Stone's *Christian Messenger* in a numbered list submitted by a pseudonymous "Old Baptist Preacher."[38] In his second letter to Bishop McIlvaine, J. W. McGarvey also revealed his penchant for the express terms of Scripture, affirming that spiritual discourse was authoritative only so far as it was limited to them.[39] He shared an interesting anecdote about the Campbells' first challenge to follow this method, and the rhythmic motto which was eventually associated with it. He said that Alexander Campbell had

> reflected but little on [the movement's] splendid motto, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak, and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent," till he exclaimed [to Thomas Campbell], "Well, father, if we are to be governed by this rule, then we must give up infant baptism." Not one in the society had yet seen this inevitable consequence [of relying on the express terms of Scripture].[40]

McGarvey lauded the momentum given by the Campbells to this approach to Scripture.[41] And that momentum carried the rule into the mind of Brents.

Brents inherited this unique rule of express terms, and he seemed to receive it gladly. Like his predecessors, he confessed a desire to speak doctrinally "as the oracles of God speak," by which he meant God's thoughts "*only* as He has revealed them to us" in Scripture.[42] Stone had affirmed his belief that "salvation is after baptism" because "the scriptures expressly declare it."[43] Brents believed in divine repentance because the Scriptures declared that "the Lord repented of the evil which he thought he would do unto

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[37]Thomas H. Olbricht, "Hermeneutics and the *Declaration and Address*," in *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 243-55, passim.

[38]"To the Religious Public," *Christian Messenger* 3, no. 9 (1829): 224-26, in *BWS*.

[39]J. W. McGarvey, *Letters to Bishop McIlvaine* (n.p., n.d.), 4-7, in *JWM* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996).

[40]J. W. McGarvey, *Centennial Convention Report* (n.p., n.d.), 382, in *JWM*.

[41]Ibid.

[42]*GPS*, iv, 75.

[43]Barton W. Stone, "Reply to Eld. J. Rogers," *Christian Messenger* 12, no. 6 (April, 1842): 181, in *BWS*.

his people" (Exod 32:14); Brents added, "We accept it as true, feeling sure that no valid objection can be brought against it."[44] He also rejected arguments for divine condescension and linguistic accommodation because, in his view, they made illegitimate attempts to get around the plain and obvious meaning of the text.[45] Like Stone and Campbell, Brents thought slavish reliance on express terms of biblical revelation should be the dominant principle in interpretation, and the final arbiter in confession and communion. Although he argued passionately in writing for his doctrine of limited foreknowledge, Brents recognized that some of its implications were inferential and speculative. As such, it was not something to bind on another, used as a test of faithfulness, or taken into the pulpit. Brents applied the rule: he claimed never to have proclaimed his doctrine of limited foreknowledge from the pulpit.[46]

The rule applied. Applied to confession, for example, the rule would have encouraged the equal confession of Scriptures that form a paradox. A man could confess that God declares the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10), affirming foreordination, immutability, and prescience, as much as he could confess that God relents from some of his declarations (Jonah 4:10), affirming contingency, mutability, and nescience. Though these texts considered together are mysterious, or exist in tension, the rule would encourage the confession of both, because God's *declaring* and *relenting* are both express terms of Scripture. As such, the rule functioned to create larger roles for antinomy, oxymoron, and mystery than did the traditional, detailed attempts to systematize theology.[47]

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[44]*GPS*, 83.

[45]Ibid., 79-80.

[46]*GPS*, 87. Further, he was never discovered to have demanded acceptance of his view as a prerequisite to fellowship.

[47]Hicks encourages a similar approach today, and includes Sanders's, *The God Who Risks*, as one example of those "detailed attempts" with which his approach contrasts. Though Hicks's approach does not make explicit reference to the rule of express terms, the approach he promotes calls for a revival of

Applied to the practical theology of the church, the rule specifically asked spiritual authorities to practice forbearance, allow men the freedom to differ in their opinions, and yet, be *included* in their communities if they could and would assent to the positively and explicitly stated teachings of Scripture. The SCM leaders who promoted this approach most passionately believed that it could create the unity they desired so strongly, prevent church strife, and maintain communal peace, for express Scripture alone was the ultimate arbiter, not human understandings. That meant, among other things, that the approach asked Christians of all fellowships to see the church as a community called to unity in the God revealed in Scripture, which, in their view, might not necessarily be the God of the creeds.[48]

Applied to inferential doctrines, such as those in the creeds, it did not suggest that they should be rejected, only subordinated to the express statements of Scripture, and relegated to a pedagogical, non-binding role. Because of their belief in the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and because of the potential for human error and abuse of power, the SCM's leaders thought that even the most valuable inferences should have no place in the church's confession. Such inferences could not be used to define orthodoxy, or exclude from fellowship or the ministry of the church someone who dissented from them. In theory, the approach permitted *no* inferential understanding to gain the ascendency as a doctrine which defined faithfulness. As such, the rule may be distinguished from traditional dogmatics by its goal. In the early experiences of the Campbells' and Stone, the more traditional approaches had resulted in inferences being exalted to a place of equal or near equal spiritual authority with Scripture. The rule of express terms resulted in the reduction of the authority of human conclusions, and located the authority for faith

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essentially all the important aspects this study found to be included in the the SCM's nineteenth-century approach. See Hicks, "An Introduction to the Doctrine of God"; cf. idem, *Yet Will I Trust Him* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999).

[48]Cf. Hicks, "An Introduction to the Doctrine of God."

as a whole, and questions of communion in particular, entirely in the power and veracity of God's explicitly revealed words.[49]

The rule's affinities. Though it differs from traditional approaches, it does not seem to have been–and does not seem to be today–an extremist position with no corroboration outside the SCM. It was created and developed to combat certain Reformed presuppositions which were viewed as stumbling blocks to the SCM's agenda. However, SCM scholars have generally accepted that it maintained clear affinities with elements of the Reformed tradition. Also, Farley, a contemporary Reformed theologian, has highlighted some aspects of the Reformed tradition which appear to have affinities with the SCM's rule of express terms. He acknowledges that the church universal, though desiring to uphold the *maior Dei gloria*, is often faced with impenetrable mysteries. In those cases, the Reformed tradition often allowed those mysteries to remain mysteries. Instead of choosing between scriptural affirmations, emphasizing one over another, or making the acceptance of one and rejection of the other terms of communion or definitive of orthodoxy, Reformed theologians often encouraged the affirmation of both. Though this happened often, it did not happen always. Farley points out that the older Reformed position had clearly "emphasized God's divine determination over his self-limitation."[50] However, he does not think such distinction and subordination were necessary. On the contrary, he maintains that "Reformed theology need not choose between the two. It need only affirm both, which is precisely what the Scriptures do."[51]

Summary of the Rule

The circle of the rule of express terms began with Scripture and ended with Scripture. Yet, it was much more than a hermeneutical rule; it was the touchstone of a

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[49]T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*.

[50]Benjamin Wirt Farley, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 46.

[51]Ibid.

fundamentally ecclesiological method. It impacted the areas of hermeneutics, homiletics, ecclesiology, and dogmatics, to name a few. It governed confession and practice; it governed admission to or expulsion from the community; and it placed creeds and other inferential doctrines under the footstool of the express terms of the Bible. If it did nothing else, it effectively promoted the SCM's unity agenda.

For the purposes of this study, this rule of express terms is offered as a likely key to the SCM's forbearance of the doctrine of limited foreknowledge and maintenance of unity. The evidence will reveal classical theists in the SCM who believed God's foreknowledge encompassed all future events. Yet it also will reveal that, while they affirmed express statements of Scripture that seemed to positively support absolute divine prescience, they also acknowledged the inferential nature of their own conclusions, and that some express statements of Scripture seemed to support divine nescience. While they openly disagreed with those who confessed those nescience texts without qualification, they did not call them heretics or call for excluding them from their churches. In some places, they acknowledged that the harmony of those divergent texts might forever remain a mystery. These phenomena composed one example of the SCM's attempt to fulfill their unique agenda for Christian unity on the Scriptures alone. They believed their program for unity was divine, and believed that God would be glorified by their practice, in spite of such internal confessional tensions. Specifically with regard to the question of the unorthodox view of God's foresight which Brents's called "limited foreknowledge," the study suggests that a likely reason the SCM's classical theists practiced forbearance with the view and those who held it (and vice versa) is that they remained committed to the rule and applied it to this question of God's providence.

Recent Discussion of T. W. Brents

T. W. Brents, relatively speaking, has escaped detailed scholarly attention. The reasons are unknown. However, an informal conversation in the Fall of 2000 with John Mark Hicks, professor of Christian doctrine at two SCM-related schools (Lipscomb

University and Harding University Graduate School of Religion), unveiled two interesting speculations.[52] Perhaps Brents's relatively semi-pelagian soteriology made him a distasteful object of research.[53] Or perhaps SCM adherents reared on amillennial eschatology deliberately avoided Brents because of his premillennial eschatology--a doctrine which was at the center of years of painful divisiveness in the movement.[54] In any event, a void exists in the scholarly attention given to Brents, particularly regarding his view of limited foreknowledge. However, he has been mentioned repeatedly in some of the movement's more popular journals and the lectures conducted at some of its vocational preacher training schools, which are similar to what other Christian groups call their "Bible Colleges."[55] Brents likely appealed more to the staff, faculty, and students associated with these schools because their greater stress on human obedience, like Brents's, often leaned more toward semi-pelagianism.

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[52]John Mark Hicks, interview by the author, 25 October 2000, Nashville, notes, author's private collection, Wahiawa, Hawaii.

[53]The heretical doctrine known as semi-pelagianism did not deny the necessity of divine Grace for the salvation of sinners, but it did affirm that the first steps towards salvation were taken by the human will and that divine Grace supervened only afterward, cf. F. L. Cross, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1258. It is referred to as a "leaning" in Brents, and the SCM in general, because their statements only seem to imply semi-pelagianism; no statement has been found which expressly affirmed that divine Grace supervened only after the first human steps. Brents's and others' overly anthropological, often imbalanced attempts to answer the human question, "What must I do to be saved," regularly resulted in an exaggerated emphasis on human obedience, which in many cases minimized the role of divine grace and seemed semi-pelagian.

[54]T. W. Brents, "The Millennium," in *Gospel Sermons* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1891), 324-52. The belief that Christ would return prior to a thousand-year glorious reign on the earth was held by many other SCM leaders in addition to those mentioned here. Like the peaceful coexistence within the SCM of those who held a doctrine of limited foreknowledge with those who held the classical doctrine of foreknowledge, premillennialism was held by many who peacefully coexisted with others who held a postmillennial view, that it was man's duty to bring about that glorious 1,000 years on the earth, after which Christ would return. However, the early twentieth century saw painful division in the Churches of Christ over millennial views.

[55]E.g., Guy N. Woods, "Q&A: Does God Change His Mind?" *GA* 120, no. 35 (August 31, 1978): 547; idem, "Foreknowledge of God," *GA* 125, no. 12 (June 16, 1983): 354, 363; idem, "Questions and Answers: God's Omniscience and Omnipresence," *GA* 130, no. 2 (February 1998): 34-35; Dabney Phillips, "Lessons from Thomas Wesley Brents," *GA* 126, no. 19 (October 4, 1984): 588; Curtis A. Cates, ed., *Living in Trust: a Study of the Bible Doctrine of Prayer*, Memphis School of Preaching Lectures 27 (Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 1993).

Some scholarly attention has been given generally to the subject of omniscience within the SCM, but none has been found which addressed it in direct relationship to Brents or the question of forbearance.[56] The most related and helpful piece of scholarship was Randall Bailey's Th.M. thesis, which is a late-1970's statistical analysis of beliefs about foreknowledge among ministers in the Church of Christ and faculty in its affiliated schools.[57] Bailey held a doctrine of limited foreknowledge that was very much like Brents's, identified two other prominent SCM leaders in the twentieth century who also held the doctrine (Gus Nichols and Rex A. Turner, Sr.), and referred specifically to Brents as the key figure who had promoted the doctrine.[58] Others have made related contributions. Hicks has identified contemporary needs within the Churches of Christ for renewed reflection on the doctrine of God and theological method, but not specifically in relation to Brents or to the question of inclusion. He affirmed that some of the future is open, but called for an approach to divine providence today where paradox and mystery play larger roles than they do in more detailed attempts, like Sanders's, to systematize open theism.[59] In personal conversation, he has affirmed the need for work on Brents, and his scholarship has emphasized the need among churches of Christ for an approach to

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[56]F. Furman Kearly, "Non-moral Attributes of God: His Omniscience," *Freed-Hardeman University Lectures* 61 (Hendersonville, TN: Freed-Hardeman University, 1997), 296-307; Randall C. Bailey, "Predestination, Foreknowledge of God," *Sound Doctrine* 5, no. 1 (1980): 11. Ron Highfield of SCM-related Pepperdine University has published several essays recently opposing the concept of divine self-limitation; however, they were discovered only after the research phase of this dissertation had already closed and writing begun, so they receive no detailed consideration. See Ron Highfield, "Divine Self-Limitation in Open Theism," *JETS* 45, no. 2 (2002): 299; idem, "Divine Self-Limitation in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Appraisal," *CSR* 32, no. 1 (2002): n.p. (manuscript); idem, "The Problem with the 'Problem of Evil': a Response to Gregory Boyd's Open Theist Solution," *RQ*, forthcoming. Highfield is a classical theist.

[57]Randall C. Bailey, "A Study of Predestination and the Foreknowledge of God as Perceived by Bible Teachers of Christian Colleges, Bible Teachers of Preacher Training Schools, and Gospel Preachers of the Churches of Christ in the United States," (Th.M. thesis, Southern Christian University, 1979).

[58]Those who thought Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge was on the right track, like Bailey, et al., did not accept all of Brents's arguments, but they did agree that God's foreknowledge was "limited."

[59]E.g., Hicks, "An Introduction to the Doctrine of God"; idem, *Yet Will I Trust Him*; Sanders, *The God Who Risks*.

theology proper, and providence in particular, which promotes elements similar to those found in the nineteenth century approach surrounding the rule of express terms, viz., allowing more room for mystery and paradox.[60]

To summarize, in light of the current debates about open theism, this newly-assembled information about how the problem of limited foreknowledge and forbearance has been addressed in this nineteenth century American evangelical tradition has the potential to benefit those involved in contemplating the similar challenges today. Regarding the phenomenon of peaceful coexistence of both views within evangelical Stone-Campbell churches, there was a great deal of potential for research. The importance of it for SCM churches was heightened by the level of theological uncertainty and secular pressures, described by Hicks, which weaken the church.[61] In such a weakened state, the potential for the current disputes about open theism to be mimicked by SCM churches might increase. This research in particular contributes to filling the void of historical theological scholarship in the SCM regarding T. W. Brents and the doctrine of God. It does so by focusing particularly on Brents's doctrine of limited divine foreknowledge and the SCM's maintenance of unity in spite of it. Without arguing that the SCM was correct in theory or in practice, the research is presented to offer a likely reason why unity was maintained amid diversity of beliefs about divine foreknowledge.

Sources

This study was pursued because sources sufficient to answer the questions relevant to this research seemed adequate and were readily available. Some, however, were certainly more difficult to find than others, and the value of some significant resources was diminished by their poor documentation.

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[60]Hicks, interview by the author.

[61]Hicks, "An Introduction to the Doctrine of God."

Regarding primary sources, new reprints of T. W. Brents's *GPS* are still available from publishers and book stores associated with Stone-Campbell related churches, and major Internet booksellers like Amazon. Brents's pamphlets and journal articles exist in both paper and microform editions of the *Gospel Advocate*. Text editions of Brents's works and those of other relevant SCM figures were obtained, while photocopies of the relevant microforms, journals, and original books were collected. The Beaman Library of David Lipscomb University and the Phillips Memorial Library of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, both in Nashville, were most helpful. Additionally, these institutions provided generous supplemental support from a distance: the Disciples of Christ Historical Society; the Center for Restoration Studies, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas; and the library of Southern Christian University, Montgomery, Alabama. Bound versions of Alexander Campbell's journals, the *Christian Baptist*, and the entire forty-volume *Millennial Harbinger*, with an index, were possessed by the Boyce Library of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, enabling thorough in-residence research. These primary research sources were supplemented by the collected works of Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, Moses Lard, J. W. McGarvey, and Benjamin Franklin, which were published on CD-ROM and obtained from Faith and Facts, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana. The accuracy of the CD-ROM editions was maintained by scanning with a fixed photo-reproduction process into Adobe Acrobat format rather than relying on text conversion. The pages appear just as they appeared in the original books, journals, pamphlets, and letters. The CD-ROM editions were especially valuable because of their electronic search capabilities. All of these primary documents contained the data necessary to form and defend the thesis. Related secondary sources also have been obtained from the locations above. They were further supplemented by helpful Internet resources from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library; the Restoration Movement pages of Hans Rollman, Memorial University of Newfoundland; the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement Resources of James McMillan, University of Illinois; and others.

Finally, relatives of Brents--from Kentucky and Tennessee in the East, to Colorado, Texas, and Arkansas in the West--were located, contacted, and queried for information, some of which was quite helpful.

The greatest challenge related to sources concerned chapter 2, which was designed to be a theological biography of Brents that would lead to a better understanding of potential external influences on the development of his doctrine of limited foreknowledge. One of the most significant resources for this chapter was John B. Cowden's privately-published biography of Brents; it was the most comprehensive witness to Brents's life, though his choice of title betrays his bias: *Dr. T. W. Brents: Superman and Master Builder of the Christian Church and the Church of Christ, Prophet of God*.[62] Cowden grew up on a Tennessee farm adjacent to Brents's; his father, Dr. John Cowden, and Brents were close friends; and the younger Cowden confessed that his father was the primary source of the biography.[63] So, the book is largely the compiled recollections of a neighbor, fellow church-member, and close, family friend. This certainly gives the book a unique value. However, because it is largely an anecdotal, oral history put into print, and is virtually undocumented, confirmation of its claims was extremely difficult. Other, more abbreviated sources possessed similar qualities; they included hand-written notes, published and unpublished essays by family members, and letters from family members. Related resources were assembled that did possess better documentation; however, their references often were to Cowden or similarly undocumented sources. Facing this reality, the greatest challenge of the project was to confirm and document as much of the related, previously undocumented biographical information as possible. It was a task which called for persistence, and required more time in research on that chapter than any other, with comparatively little success. Relying

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[62]John B. Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents: Superman and Master Builder of the Christian Church and Church of Christ, Prophet of God* (Nashville: by the author, 1961).

[63]Cowden, "Dedication" in *Dr. T. W. Brents*, front matter.

on unpublished church records, public records, family genealogies, personal testimonies of living relatives, and the like, the research has documented more of Brents's life. However, it was unable to achieve the level of documentation for which it had initially aimed.

CHAPTER 2

BRENTS'S THEOLOGICAL HISTORY

Introduction

"Learning something about a man's theology comes best having learned something about the man." Such sentiment has been expressed repeatedly in theological education. With the assumption of that lesson's validity, this chapter is presented as a theological biography of the T. W. Brents whose doctrine is at the center of this study. It supports two aspects of the thesis. First, it warrants this claim: T. W. Brents was a major theological figure in the SCM. Second, it partially supports the claim that he *developed* a doctrine of limited foreknowledge. Brents claimed to have derived his doctrine from the Bible alone, unaware of any other source that could have encouraged his conclusions. So, the information necessary to criticize that claim and demonstrate potential influences on his theological development is presented. Goodspeed certainly observed significant development. In his biographical notes on "Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. and M.D.," he wrote this: "As a physician, a professor, or a minister of the gospel, he has few equals and fewer superiors."[1] However, this estimation of Brents was not shared by everyone. How accurate or exaggerated was it? Was he the superhuman spiritual hero the lips of his friends, family, and admirers confessed him to be? Or was he more the sincere-but-severely-mistaken theologian sketched by the pens of those who opposed his doctrine of limited foreknowledge? This chapter provides some answers to questions like these.

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[1]"Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. and M.D.," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886] [on-line]; accessed 10 February 2003; available from http://freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~pearidger/history/gdspmarsbio.shtml; Internet.

Brents's Impact: A Movement-Made Superman

T. W. Brents's life began in humble, but adventurous surroundings. He was born, reared, and spent most of his life in, Marshall County, Tennessee. There, he based his itinerant preaching, teaching, writing and debating ministry.[2] Through that ministry, in part, he became representative of a conservative segment of the SCM as a doctrinal theologian. One of his two books, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (*GPS*), solidified that status nationally.[3] The book itself became a doctrinal norm for some elements of the early Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, and the *a capella* Churches of Christ.[4]

Hughes categorized the book as a systematic theology of sorts among the Churches of Christ, which is true; however, the influence of the book and the author was not limited to this *a capella* segment of the movement, which was the primary concern of Hughes's comments.[5] Brents remained influential in the Christian Church as well. This group and the Churches of Christ were first distinguished as separate bodies in the census of 1906. The Christian Church was the church of SCM preacher John B. Cowden, who, in 1961, privately published the most extensive biography of Brents known to date. At

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[2]When he was born in 1822, Marshall County had not yet been formed. The Brents's property was on a Lincoln County parcel which later would be incorporated into Marshall County (in 1836). Brents spent four years in Spencer (Van Buren County) when he served as President of Burritt College. Cf. "Marshall County" in *The Goodspeed History of Tennessee* [1886] [on-line]; accessed 13 February 2003; available from http://www.freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~pearidger/history/gdspmars.shtml; Internet. See also John B. Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents: Superman and Master Builder of the Christian Church and the Church of Christ, Prophet of God* (Nashville: Author, 1961), 13.

[3]T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 17th ed. [*GPS*] (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth, 1987). The first edition was published in Cincinnati, Ohio, by Bosworth, Chase, and Hall in 1874.

[4]People in the earlier stages of the movement used the descriptive terms, "Disciples" or "Christians" to refer to themselves, though their opponents called them "Campbellites." By the U.S. census of 1906, two distinct church groups were recognized: the Church of Christ (*a capella*), and the Christian Church. During the 1960's internal restructuring of the latter, the more conservative elements departed the fellowship and became known as the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, while the restructured body distinguished itself as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). These two, and the *a capella* Churches of Christ, are the three main fellowships which emerged from the SCM.

[5]Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: the Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 173.

the time, Cowden's Christian Church was still organizationally one.[6] His love for it was displayed in the bequeathing of his entire theological library to one of its institutions, the Phillips Memorial Library in Nashville (now operated by the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, near Vanderbilt University).[7] Cowden thought that Brents was "one of the two men . . . most responsible for building [that] library."[8] The other was Alexander Campbell. In coming to this conclusion, Cowden refers not to an estate gift, endowment, or the like, from either Brents or Campbell, but to their ministries as foundational to the SCM and its churches which built the library and remain the basis of its existence. The formal distinction between the more theologically progressive Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the more conservative, independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, did not formally occur until 1968. So, while not indicating that Brents was more influential in the Christian Church, Cowden's view of Brents does suggest that the power of Brents's name and his *GPS* among the SCM's adherents was not limited to the Churches of Christ.

His Innermost Circle

As heroes or heroines often are, Brents was described by his closest circle of relatives, neighbors, fellow preachers, church members, and close friends as almost superhuman.[9] Much of the biographical material related to Brents seems to border on the

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[6]See note 4 regarding the 1960's restructure.

[7]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 9.

[8]Ibid., front matter and 9.

[9]Positively, family, friends, loved ones, and assorted sympathizers may be culturally or theologically conditioned to cover flaws in a beloved individual (especially in certain Judeo-Christian contexts; see, e.g., 1 Pet 4:8; Prov 10:12). However, misappropriation of this biblical value to justify the overlooking or ignoring of flaws has the potential to lead to the sins of lying or misrepresentation, or to the dysfunction of denial. Further, some cultures' norms make the expression of anger or disagreement appropriate when done privately with the beloved among family or friends, but inappropriate in more public circles (whether or not the beloved is present). See P. Stearns, "Suppressing Unpleasant Emotions: The Development of a Twentieth-Century American Style," in *Social History and Issues in Human Consciousness*, ed. A. Barnes & P. Stearns (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 249; cf. Carl Ratner, "Activity as a Key Concept for Cultural Psychology," *Culture & Psychology* 2 (1996): 407-34 [on-line]; accessed 12 June 2003; available from http://www.humboldt1.com/~cr2/jaan.htm; Internet.

legendary, as should be apparent when encountered in the data. The title of Cowden's biography serves as one example: *Dr. T. W. Brents: Superman and Master Builder of the Christian Church and the Church of Christ, Prophet of God.* That Cowden had a high view of Brents seems doubtless, to say the least. Further, Cowden identified his father, Dr. John Cowden, as the primary source of biographical material.[10] The elder Cowden was born, reared, lived his life, and nurtured his family on a Marshall County farm adjoining Brents's property.[11] Not only was he a close friend and neighbor, he was also a fellow churchman and a professional medical associate who had studied medicine under Brents.[12] By those who loved an honored Brents, like the Cowdens, much of Brents's reputation may have been created.

In any event, to Cowden it was plain: Brents was a superhuman minister whom propriety should exalt to a stature equaling that of Alexander Campbell. In Cowden's estimation, Brents was the one man most responsible for the existence of the SCM's southern and western churches and their institutions, accomplishing in the South and West "what Alexander Campbell did in the North and East."[13] Cowden also placed Brents in the company of noteworthy SCM leaders, T. B. Larimore and J. L. Haddock. While Larimore was viewed to be the South and West's most beloved evangelist and Haddock the regions' most effective, Cowden named Brents the South and West's premier theologian.[14] When Cowden referred to him as a "master builder"of his faith-group and as "a prophet of God," he had in view Brents's influence in solidifying some of

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[10]A rough chronological order is intended, and the essay begins with Cowden's 1961 book because his father, Dr. John Cowden, was a contemporary of Brents and the primary source of the biography.

[11]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 9.

[12]Ibid., 9, 152, and "Dedication," front matter; "John Cowden, M.D.," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886] [on-line]; accessed 10 February 2003; available from http://freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~pearidger/history/gdspmarsbio.shtml; Internet.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, front matter.

the doctrinal norms that were steadily becoming distinctive identifiers of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.

G. W. Bills was another contemporary of Brents and a fellow member of Marshall County's Christian Church who contributed to Brents's place in history. Bills had roomed with Brents during a course of lectures at the Reformed Medical College in Macon, Georgia; he was also a neighbor of Brents, a fellow physician, and one of the men who eulogized Brents in print.[15] His contribution to Brents's heroic persona included the following. In a portrayal of Brents as a man who manifested uncommon spiritual courage and skill, Bills wrote this: "In our early days, a Universalist was challenging the clergy at large. No one, save Dr. Brents, would meet him. Brother Brents completely routed him, so much so that he quit his speech before his time was half out."[16] According to Bills, even the Methodist scholar and Brents's seven-time opponent in debate, Jacob Ditzler, spoke of Brents in positive superlatives. Ditzler was reputed to have judged him to be "the fairest man he ever debated" because "Brents would not misrepresent an opponent."[17] Bills also believed that Brents performed "a valuable service for churches in [their Marshall County] community," particularly the church in Lewisburg. He credited Brents with the deliverance of their churches from a schismatic named J. R. Collinsworth.[18] In a separate historical record of this Collinsworth conflict, J. W. Grant portrayed Brents as the hero who had saved the Lewisburg church by helping it successfully resist divisive forces.[19] Brents's defense against these forces did not prevent

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[15]G. W. Bills, "T. W. Brents," *GA* 47, no. 39 (September 28, 1905): 618; for more information on Bills and his relationship with T. W. Brents, see "Dr. G. W. Bills," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[16]Bills, "T. W. Brents." This may have been the debate which Brents mentions in *GPS*, the preparation for which he said "forced" him to his doctrine of limited foreknowledge. See *GPS*, 87.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid.

[19]J. W. Grant, "A Sketch of the Reformation in Tennessee," Tennessee State Historical Society Collection, Tennessee State Library, Nashville, TN; typed copy by J. Edward Mosely, Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville, TN, 63. The divisive forces Grant mentions are likely associated with the

all damage, however, for the Wilson Hill church was not so delivered. This church once "had a prosperous existence, but was greatly injured by the J. R. Collinsworth defection," noted Goodspeed.[20] Interestingly, the injury to Wilson Hill was not mentioned by Bills or Grant. In any event, Bills summed up Brents's life with the following words: "He has done a great work, which will live, though he be dead."[21]

Brents's son-in-law, Victor W. Dorris, thought that Brents's work *should* continue to live. Writing the brief biography of Brents which appeared in Brown's *Churches of Christ*, Dorris opined that it was only "fitting" that a minister like Brents was "accorded a permanent and somewhat extended notice" in that 1904 book.[22] He also portrayed his father-in-law as a gifted Christian personality who rejuvenated many congregations with "strong, clear sermons on vital features of the [SCM's] great plea," viz., its primitivist plea.[23] As a "busy author," according to Dorris, Brents "soon found himself called upon to defend truth in many debates."[24] That truth included, in addition to universally accepted Christian orthodoxies, those distinct interpretations of lesser issues which he and his supporters *perceived* to be truth. That category included such things as the inseparability of obedience from saving faith–namely regarding immersion baptism as a necessary prerequisite to salvation. It also included the fundamentally Arminian-Wesleyan view that salvation was available to everyone who freely chose faith in Christ in contrast to Reformed theology's view that a fixed number of people had been

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Collinsworth which Bills mentioned above.

[20]"Marshall County," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886] [on-line]; accessed 13 February 2003; available from http://www.freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~pearidger/history/gdspmars.shtml; Internet.

[21]Bills, "T. W. Brents.

[22]Victor W. Dorris, "T. W. Brents," in *Churches of Christ* (1904), ed. John T. Brown, 455 [on-line]; accessed 1 February 2001; available from http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/jtbrown/coc/COC1341.htm; Internet.

[23]Ibid., 456.

[24]Ibid.

divinely elected to salvation without foresight of faith. Brents and other SCM adherents would likely disavow the designations Arminian or Wesleyan and affirm their understanding as biblical. Regardless of this denial, they wielded this particular doctrine most often as did Wesleyans, Arminians, and Brents–in opposition to the Reformed doctrines of reprobation and election which they found unpalatable.

These are just two examples of the "truth" Dorris likely had in mind. Among other SCM distinctives referred to as truth, these doctrines were representative of the SCM's unique restorationist theologies which were undergoing crystallization into dogma at the time. Since SCM adherents were persuaded to positively view these doctrines as biblical truths worthy of restoration, since Brents emerged as one of those who led their restoration, and since Dorris was the son-in-law of this commanding preacher, it comes as no surprise that Dorris placed Brents on a pedestal with the era's best exegetes, communicators, and logicians. He attempted to further bolster this conclusion by mentioning that others felt similarly. As an example, he quoted approvingly the *American Christian Review*'s estimation of the value of Brents's *GPS*. To that paper, Brents's work had "cleared away the perplexities and confusion that have kept thousands out of the kingdom of God, and are now keeping thousands, who honestly desire to be Christians, out of Christ."[25] Those perplexities referred to by this SCM journal were the perceived Reformed doctrines Brents attempted to combat in *GPS*. Grant viewed Brents's effectiveness similarly, and attributed this trenchancy to God's giving him a "large brain" and "strong reasoning powers."[26] Whether or not this estimation was uncritically accepted by people who were further from Brents in relationship and chronology is hard to tell. It is certain, however, that the near-mythical view of Brents communicated by family and close friends was also shared by others who seem to have been more distant from Brents in time or relationship.

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[25]Ibid.

[26]J. W. Grant, "A Sketch of the Reformation in Tennessee," 63.

His Own Generation

In the same generation, others who intently followed Brents's work, but did so from a greater distance geographically and relationally, also composed high estimations of the man. These testimonies seem more credible since they are more likely to have arisen from experience, and without the potential blinders of genetic or geographical kinship. Of course, theological or ecclesiastical kinship likely remained a significant blinder to unbiased evaluation. J. M. Barnes, a regular contributor to the *Gospel Advocate*, praised Brents's theological journalism. He viewed it as flowing from the pen of "a great man," and as resulting in a pathway that "the brethren follow . . . with great delight."[27] The only negative comment Barnes had about Brents stemmed from his disposition against colleges of any sort, including Christian colleges, all of which Barnes thought to be dens of iniquity. Since Brents was fund-raising for Burritt College, Barnes thought him to be less pious and zealous than he was clear and forceful.[28] Yet Barnes, another Marshall County resident and a leader in the Cane Creek church, did not hold back praise from Brents when he thought it was due.[29] Commenting on Brents's debates with Jacob Ditzler, Barnes said that the "shot and shell [Brents] has been firing for a time have been very damaging to Ditzler and Methodism," for they "have been thrown from no small gun."[30] According to David Lipscomb, the SCM at the time reputed this Methodist scholar to be a man with "much display of learning" who possessed a "whole library of lexicons and authorities in different languages," and who was "at home in a dozen of" them.[31] Considering the entire spectrum of SCM leaders available at the time, that Brents

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[27]J. M. Barnes, "Away Up in Tennessee," *GA* 19, no. 23 (June 7, 1877): 356.

[28]Ibid.

[29]"Marshall County," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[30]Barnes, "Away Up in Tennessee," 339.

[31]David Lipscomb, *The Life and Sermons of Jesse L. Sewell*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1954), 112-13.

was chosen to debate this respected preacher--not once, but seven times--says something about Brents's contemporaries' estimation of him.[32]

George Gowan, commenting on the movement's response to Brents's debate with the Missionary Baptist, Elder Pennington, said this: "It is needless to state that the cause of truth was in safe hands with Dr. Brents at the helm. The brethren with one voice were lavish in their praises of his presentation and defense of our plea."[33] Gowan thought it imprudent to devote journal space to introducing Brents, for he surmised that Brents was too well known among the *Advocate*'s readers to need an introduction.[34] However, he did think it appropriate to say "that in the sphere of religious polemics, especially upon the controverted points between our brethren and the denominations, [Brents] has not an equal . . . in the church."[35] Gowan, who had attended the debate and reported on it to the *Advocate*, perceived Brents's war of words to have created "ruins of [Pennington's] magnificent Baptist edifice, whose every foundation stone had been wrenched from its place."[36] Less dramatic comments on Brents the debater proceeded from J. M. Kidwell and E. G. Sewell. Kidwell, who reported on the Brents-Moody Debate, said that "Brents' brethren are abundantly satisfied with his defense of the truth."[37] Sewell, reporting on Brents's debate with primitive Baptist E. D. Herod, thought Brents's arguments to be so powerful that his first speech was "amply sufficient to sustain his proposition without another word being said."[38] In his 1897 longhand account entitled, "Sketch of the Reformation in Tennessee," J. W. Grant viewed Brents's fame as a debater as one which

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[32]Ibid.

[33]George Gowan, "The Petersburg Debate," *GA* 27, no. 31 (August 5, 1885): 490.

[34]George Gowan, "The Petersburg Debate--No. 2," *GA* 27, no. 32 (August 12, 1885): 509.

[35]Ibid.

[36]George Gowan, "Petersburg Debate--No. 9," *GA* 27, no. 42 (October 21, 1995): 663.

[37]J. M. Kidwell, "Brents-Moody Debate," *GA* 29, no. 6 (February 9, 1887): 97.

[38]E. G. Sewell, "First Day of the Franklin Debate," *GA* 29, no. 14 (April 6, 1887): 215.

"cannot be augmented by my feeble pen."[39] Brents's work, however, was not limited to religious controversy and doctrinaire journalism; it also involved the mentoring of other preachers and Christians through the less-formal discussions which took place in the hospitality of his home.

A. M. Growden, another of Brents's generation who had seen him at work, said of the visitors to whom Brents opened his home, if they followed Brents's discourses carefully, they "would leave the house with some bigger ideas of God and man . . . [and feeling] that they had come close to one of the church's mighty advocates."[40] M. C. Kurfees perceived Brents's mentoring of preachers to have included "a high ideal for preachers. 'Your best always' alone would satisfy him."[41] This ideal Brents could credibly expect of other preachers, for he expected it of himself. According to Kurfees, Brents's dominant characteristic was "the thoroughness . . . with which he desired to do whatever he undertook . . . influenced by the inspired rule: 'whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.'"[42] This quality contributed to Brents's development into the "distinguished man and preacher . . . [who was] by no means ordinary," and likely to the development of those he mentored.[43] Kurfees believed that, because this characteristic was foundational to Brents's personality, it would have enabled him to excel in any field. To further support his opinion, Kurfees reported that one Dr. Hardison had said, "If Brents had continued . . . in the lines of medicine, he would have ranked with the foremost scholars" in that profession.[44] However, Brents felt called to minister as a reformer in a movement he viewed as necessary to the greater glory of God and the

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[39]J. W. Grant, "A Sketch of the Reformation in Tennessee," 63.

[40]A. M. Growden, "T. W. Brents," *GA* 47, no. 34 (August 24, 1905): 539.

[41]M. C. Kurfees, "The Life of Dr. T. W. Brents," *GA* 47, no. 36 (September 7, 1905): 564.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid.

unity of God's children. Growden was reputed to have unhesitatingly pronounced Brents "the most invincible logician, the greatest Scriptural reasoner, and the most merciless debater I ever heard."[45] This contrasted with the more subdued, but harmonious estimation of the *Christian Record,* which referred to Brents simply as "one of our strong men."[46]

The Next Generation and Beyond

Brents continued to be viewed as such a theological strong man even in the minds of the more distant voices of those beyond his own generation. In 1930, twenty-five years after Brents's death, H. Leo Boles wrote that Brents was "no ordinary man," but "an extraordinary Christian influence."[47] He was the recipient of unusual personal gifts which had been joined in "a mighty mold" and employed to serve "his generation well."[48] Included in that mold were gifts such as vigor and zeal, which produced a "diligent and untiring man" who passionately fulfilled his responsibilities.[49] Toward the middle of the twentieth century, John Cliett Goodpasture noted that popular opinion had nominated Brents to the position of "the greatest scriptural reasoner of his era."[50] This journalistic approbation was continued into the 1970's by Herman Norton and E. Claude Gardener. In his book, *Tennessee Christians*, Norton briefly described Brents as "an

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[45]Quoted in H. Leo Boles, "Biographical Sketches: Dr. T. W. Brents," *GA* 72, no. 5 (January 30, 1930): 109.

[46]Review of *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, by T. W. Brents, *Christian Record* (July 1874): 329. More such comments about Brents from among those chronologically close to him may be found in the following articles: W. L. Butler, "Review of Dr. Brents on the Foreknowledge of God," *GA* 18, no. 49 (December 14, 1876): 1207-11; Jacob Creath,"Dr. Brents's *Gospel Plan of Salvation*," *GA* 16, no. 38 (September 24, 1874): n.p.; E. A. Elam, review of *Gospel Sermons*, by Dr. T. W. Brents, *GA* 33, no. 48 (December 3, 1891): 768; A.M. Growden, "T. W. Brents," *GA* 47, no. 34 (August 24, 1905): 539.

[47]Boles, "Biographical Sketches: Dr. T. W. Brents," 101, 109.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid.

[50]John Cliett Goodpasture, "T. W. Brents," *Minister's Monthly* 3, no. 5 (January 1958): 1.

effective leader" in Tennessee.[51] Gardener noted that Brents's portrait joins others in prominent places on the walls of Chapel Hall in Tennessee's Freed-Hardeman University, which is "a means of honoring those pioneers who have contributed greatly to the spread of the gospel, and because we are the happy recipients of their fruitful labors."[52] Beyond the sampling of published praises above, this university's practice suggested an even broader high view of Brents which extended into the hearts and unpublished thoughts of others, e.g., in the faculty, staff, and students who established the policies which governed these walls of honor, those who decided Brents should be honored as such a great contributing pioneer, and perhaps even the documents or student papers related to or inspired by those walls.[53]

One receptacle of such unpublished thinking about Brents was discovered in the archives of Abilene Christian University's Center for Restoration Studies. It was written by James E. Hawkins, who recently came out of retirement to minister in Canadian Churches of Christ once again. He entitled it "Master of All," to correspond with Hawkins's estimation of Brents as a master of numerous avocations: medicine, education, and business, in addition to Christian journalism and polemics.[54] Though it was not dated, Hawkins recalled composing it while in graduate school at ACU, circa 1963.[55] In his recollection, his research was done for a course called "Leaders of the Restoration," which was taught by J. W. Robertson. Hawkins's bibliography revealed no knowledge of

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[51]Herman Norton, *Tennessee Christians* (Nashville: Reed and Co., 1971), 140.

[52]E. Claude Gardener, "Restoration Leaders," *GA* (October 20, 1977): 663.

[53]More such comments from modern writers in the Churches of Christ may be found in other twentieth century articles, e.g., Danny F. Cottrell, "T. W. Brents: Restoration Scholar," *GA* 110, no. 10 (March 7,1968): 150-51; Dabney Phillips, "Lessons from Thomas Wesley Brents," *GA* 126, no. 19 (October 4, 1984): 588.

[54]James E. Hawkins, "T. W. Brents, Master of All," Center for Restoration Studies Collection, Abilene Christian University Library, n.d.

[55]James E. Hawkins of Delta, British Columbia, interview by author, 18 February 2003, notes, author's personal collection.

Cowden's book, and the author confessed that he had never heard of it.[56] Since Cowden's privately-published biography would have had a very limited distribution and readership, the independence of Hawkins's research from Cowden's book seems plausible. As such, it suggests at least two possibilities. First, it seems to reveal the existence of a high view of Brents which is similar to, but independent of Cowden and others close to Brents. Second, it suggests that Brents was in some respects "officially" considered by the SCM's Abilene Christian University to be one of the "Leaders of the Restoration," who was an appropriate figure for research in the course by the same name taken by Hawkins. This bolsters the viability of the notion that Brents's influence within the SCM reached beyond the grave well into the latter half of the twentieth century.[57]

As recently as 1993, Brents was quoted as an authority in the published annual lectures of the Memphis School of Preaching–a conservative Bible college affiliated with the *a capella* Churches of Christ. In his argument for a position much like Brents's, viz., that God in fact does change his mind, Gary McDade first concluded that God's grant of an additional fifteen years of life to Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:9-7; 2 Chr 32:24; Isa 38:4-6) was biblical evidence that God both "answers prayer" and "changes his mind" to do so.[58] To bolster his claim, McDade turned to the history of interpretation in the SCM, and cited Brents as an authority on the subject, quoting his 1874 statement in *GPS*, that God's "decree concerning Hezekiah's death . . . was changed."[59] In the same collection of lectures, Gary Colley, Glen Hitchcock, and Dub McClish all argued that God is in some respects mutable, viz., that he may be moved to change his mind by the petitions of his creatures. Though they make no direct mention of Brents, these ministers of the

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[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid. Hawkins based his essay almost entirely on *Gospel Advocate* articles.

[58]Gary McDade, "Examples in Prayer: Jabez and Hezekiah" in *Living in Trust: a Study of the Bible Doctrine of Prayer*, ed. Curtis Cates, Memphis School of Preaching Lectures 27 (Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 1993), 208.

[59]Ibid. The Brents citation is from his *GPS*, 10.

Churches of Christ in the late twentieth century–over a century after Brents published *GPS*–continued to reflect Brents's position on the mutability of God's will. The continued use of Brents as an authority, in addition to the continued publication of *GPS*–now in its seventeenth edition (1987) with new copies still in stock at book stores related to the SCM–underscored not only the significance of Brents's influence in the movement, but also its longevity.

The People's Communicator

The reasons for Brents's notable influence are becoming more clear. He became renowned as a preacher who was a faithful and aggressive promoter of the movement's unique agenda and body of doctrine–a quality which is valued considerably among idealistic groups like those emerging from the SCM. Yet Brents's notoriety may not have been due entirely to his faithfulness to the SCM's major, identity-defining doctrines. In part, his influence also may have grown because he couched those doctrines in what was received as a popular writing style accessible to the masses of people.

Some disciples thought a lack of literary craftsmanship characterized Brents's *GPS*.[60] However, some of his peers attributed his effectiveness to being easily understood and avidly read by "the common people."[61] His style of composition was perceived to supplement the other abilities his cohorts in the SCM perceived him to possess, namely, those of a strong logician and exegete of Scripture. Together, these gifts were thought to have enabled Brents to express himself so clearly in the vernacular of his audience that no one "could fail to understand him."[62] When the *Gospel Advocate* published Brents's letters, its readers asked for more. The potential of his style was recognized by the editors of the *Gospel Advocate* early on. So, when Brents wrote to the editors, David Lipscomb

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[60]"Book Table," *Christian Standard* (February 20, 1874): 141.

[61]*GA* 16, no. 19, (May 7, 1874): 451-52.

[62]Boles, quoted in Hawkins, "T. W. Brents, Master of All," 18.

and Tolbert Fanning, to request that the *Advocate* create a department wholly devoted to the proclamation of the gospel, Fanning and Lipscomb agreed, and knew just the man for the job–T. W. Brents.[63]

This new journalistic department was added to the next volume of the *Advocate* with Brents as its editor, and in 1868, Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger* noticed Brents as a part of the *Advocate*'s editorial staff (some 12 years before he published *GPS*).[64] The *Advocate* printed his essays in their widely-circulated journal for years. At the same time, Brents's reputation grew as he engaged opponents in debate, and was perceived by his friends to be undefeated. If such a victorious controversialist also wrote with a popular journalistic flair, it should come as no surprise that in 1874, his massive *Gospel Plan of Salvation* began a publication run that has yet to cease. Jacob Creath, Jr., had predicted that it would ascend to a high standing and remain long among the fundamental literature of the SCM; his prediction seems to have been accurate.[65]

Brents's teachings were not original; they were not the beginning of the movement's unique doctrinal conventions. Virtually all doctrines one could find in Brents's *GPS* could be found elsewhere. They had been held by the SCM leaders who came before Brents, and Brents himself had likely been instructed by them. The doctrine which Brents articulated in *GPS* was already normative for the movement. The *Christian Standard* said it this way: *GPS* was a "fair, full, clear and skillful presentation of the old facts and arguments with which our leading minds are familiar."[66] However, to many people, his articulation of that normative doctrine was new, and in a style that was vastly

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[63]David Lipscomb, "Bros. Fanning and Lipscomb,"*GA* 8, no. 52 (December 25, 1866): 824.

[64]Brents was listed as an editor of the *Gospel Advocate* in an untitled notice appearing in *MH* 39, no. 1 (1868): 49-50.

[65]Quoted in *GPS*, 538.

[66]"Book Table," *Christian Standard*, 141.

well-received and more accessible to many SCM readers.[67] In a man who was reported to be largely self-taught during his younger years, and who had not seen an English grammar until the age of twenty-one, doctrine and style had merged to complement one another in such a way that both, together, achieved a popularity that neither would have attained alone.[68] He was the people's communicator. He said what many believed, and did so in a way they liked. Regarding the articulation of SCM doctrine, in other words, Brents's predecessors had said it, but Brents said it best.

The best of what he said found its way into his first and greatest of two books, *GPS*.[69] According to Brents, the book was "the result of [his] study for fifteen years."[70] One of Brents's grandsons reported that the famous twentieth-century Protestant figure, Harry Emerson Fosdick, had referred to *GPS* as "the best book I have ever read."[71] However, for all the approbation he received as an artisan whose medium was Victorian English, Brents's popularity was also partially due to his promotion of the doctrine many in the SCM had come to know and love as "sound doctrine," and that, in styles of speech and composition they readily received. That segment of the SCM exalted him because of it. Religious controversy has always attracted a following, as have the perceived

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[67]Though Alexander Hall's *Universalism Against Itself* (St. Clairsville, Ohio: Wheaton and Gressinger, 1846) contained a similar doctrine of limited foreknowledge, Hall never attained the stature or influence of Brents; he did not articulate his doctrine as clearly or comprehensively, and his book was not discovered to have been as widely received. Though Alexander Campbell had initially praised Hall's book, later conflict which involved Campbell caused some to question Hall's Christian character, and Campbell to cease reading his publications. Further, Hall had produced some work that Alexander Campbell had noted as not being representative of the movement. While the rift between Campbell and Hall was eventually bridged, it does not seem that Hall ever produced anything else of significant theological value. Hall's doctrine of foreknowledge is discussed further below.

[68]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 14.

[69]The other was *Gospel Sermons* (Nashville: *Gospel Advocate*, 1894).

[70]"Book Table," *Christian Standard*, 141.

[71]Quoted in Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 12. This family-member's recollection of a comment allegedly made by Fosdick during a television interview may be true. However, the research has not been able to confirm it. The fact that Fosdick never mentioned *GPS* or Brents in his autobiography among the countless books and personalities he deliberately mentioned as having the greatest impact on his life, raises doubt; the facts seem inconsistent with the claim that Fosdick attached such a superlative to *GPS*. Cf. Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956).

champions of such controversy, in the SCM and other faith groups. Brents was a champion of the primitivist, restorationist teachings which were among the most important to the SCM in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. Because the SCM has always produced adherents who loved to hear what they believed presented and defended well, and likely because fans love a winner, many came to greatly admire Brents.

He was categorized among the greatest of debaters, a man who rose to prominence when "the fight was on" against the perceived champions of "error"; to his admirers he could not fail, and they saw in him victory after victory made possible by an unequaled "heroic courage."[72] To many, he was their Samson. *The Christian Evangelist* thought Brents to be a "strong thinker" who was "mighty in the Scriptures."[73] To that paper, he was also

> worthy of special notice and praise . . . [because he possessed a trait] unusual in a controversialist, that the author when treating of controverted doctrines, while he is perfectly candid and uncompromising in his statement of his own positions, presents the opposite teaching with perfect fairness and fullness, and accords to all disputants, with the utmost cordiality and courtesy, that sincerity and conscientiousness which he claims for himself. [74]

Not surprisingly, this perception is from an SCM paper friendly to Brents, as are most such comments in the record. Notwithstanding, courage and confidence were watchwords often applied to the former physician. According to Kidwell, during Brents's preliminary negotiations to debate J. B. Moody, Brents had suggested that the debate be advertised in the *Gospel Advocate*, and in the *Gleaner*, for four consecutive weeks prior to the debate. As Kidwell reported it, Moody ignored the suggestion, set a date for the debate of Tuesday, January 18, 1887, without Brents's knowledge, and advertised the

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[72]Boles, "Biographical Sketches: Dr. T. W. Brents."

[73]"Literary," *The Christian Evangelist* (February 4, 1892): n.p.

[74]Ibid.

debate in the *Gleaner* just days before the debate was to take place.[75] According to Kidwell, although Brents was not informed of the date, time, or place of the debate until Saturday, January 15, Brents accepted. Kidwell thought that accepting on such short notice, and nonetheless making a powerful defense of his propositions in the debate, demonstrated Brents's courage and confidence.[76] The likely biased witness to Brents's debating prowess aided his ascent to such a high stature in the hearts of his theologically like-minded brothers and sisters, especially those who enjoyed polemic spectacles.

The Gospel Plan of Salvation

However, this perceived greatness–and certainly its longevity–was likely more the result of his famed book, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*. The longevity of his influence alone calls into question Cowden's 1961 conclusion, that Brents was "almost forgotten and without honor in his own country."[77] Abilene Christian University's consideration of Brents as a restoration leader in the 1963 graduate course taken by Hawkins, and this author's parallel experience at Southern Christian University in the early 1990's, support a conclusion that is just the opposite: that Brents is not forgotten, at least in the minds of the theological faculty and students in SCM graduate ministry programs. This is also underscored by the continued manifestation of Brents's theology, and the direct quotation of his *GPS* among lecturers in a SCM Bible college as late as 1993.

However, though some historical data and experience seem to controvert Cowden's claim (that Brents was all but forgotten and without honor), to be fair to Cowden, one should acknowledge the following possibility. As a lifelong congregational

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[75]Kidwell, "Brents-Moody Debate," 94. If Moody did as Kidwell asserts, or anything like it, the reasons remain unknown. Moody's testimony to the events, which may be much different, has not been discovered.

[76]Ibid.

[77]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, front matter and 9.

minister, Cowden may have had in mind a Brents who was largely forgotten and without honor among the Christian Church's laity as he knew it. So, what may look from one perspective like an unwarranted claim, may be no more than a vague articulation. In any event, even if it is largely among professional ministers, theologians, and historians, Brents does continue to be remembered, and appropriately honored as one of the movement's influential personalities. That place is largely due to the impact of his writing, and more particularly, the impact of his *GPS* upon the movement.

H. Leo Boles considered Brents's first book, *GPS*, "very thorough," particularly in the ways it treated "the establishment of the church and its identity" and "the conditions of pardon and work of the Holy Spirit."[78] Boles thought that the book "has probably done more to help young preachers get a clear understanding of . . . the Bible than any other book written in modern times."[79] He quoted M. C. Kurfees, who identified Brents's book as one of the "two books, more than all others combined, that helped me . . . to a knowledge of the word of God."[80] Wm. B. Wilson concluded that Brents's *GPS* was "recognized as one of the best publications we have among us . . . powerful in argument, calculated to thoroughly instruct, [and] carrying conviction to the most skeptical."[81] E. Roth prized *GPS* "very highly," and thought it a "book that is calculated to do much good."[82] Gowan judged it as having "no equal among us as a clear and logical exponent of primitive Christianity, and as a defense of the truth against sectarian theologies, doctrines, and dogmas."[83]

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[78]Boles, "Biographical Sketches: Dr. T. W. Brents," 101.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Wm. B. Wilson, "Bro. Brents' Book," *GA* 21, no. 7 (February 13, 1879): 101.

[82]E. Roth, "Correspondence," *GA* 21, no. 12 (March 20, 1879): 182.

[83]George Gowan, "Book Reviews: *Gospel Sermons*," *GA* 33, no. 48 (December 3, 1891): 768.

Regarding the book's style, Gowan saw Brents's writing as "so clear, so logical, so scriptural in his methods, and yet so simple withal, that the judgment generally yields ready assent to his appeals, his arguments, or his theories. He usually satisfies the mind because he is nearly always correct."[84] Kurfees said this of *GPS*: "As a storehouse of fact couched in lucid statement and reinforced by cogent reasoning, it was a great book then . . . and yet."[85] To Kurfees, Brents was also unique as a "prominent figure in the controversial arena," for he "always, in the estimation of impartial and competent judges, carr[ied] the banner of truth to victory."[86] G. W. Bills admired Brents for his "steady and unyielding faith" which "never expressed a doubt about anything in the word of God."[87] He "was a rare specimen of manhood" whose "death removes another of the many landmarks" of the SCM.[88] Bills adduced that Brents was "always true to the cause, and was always ready to defend it."[89] Bills, who roomed with Brents at the Reformed Medical College in Macon, Georgia, added this: "Like other men, [Brents] had his faults, but he was always ready to defend the cause of Christ."[90] The *Christian Standard* thought Brents's *GPS* would be especially interesting and valuable to all those interested in an alternative to, or a critique of, Calvinism. The *Standard* was confident that Brents had "studied that system of doctrines thoroughly and deal[t] with it faithfully."[91]

Especially meritorious, in its view, was the book's "fair, full, clear, and skillful presentation of the old facts and arguments with which all our leading minds [we]re

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[84]Ibid.

[85]M. C. Kurfees, "The Life of Dr. T. W. Brents," *GA* 47, no. 36 (September 7, 1905): 564.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Bills, "T. W. Brents," 618.

[88]Ibid.

[89]Ibid.

[90]Ibid.

[91]"Book Table," *Christian Standard*, 141.

familiar."[92] And for Brents's "ability and skill with which, as a dialectician, he has conducted his argument throughout," the *Standard* thought he was "entitled to much credit."[93] While the *Standard* offered praise where it thought praise was due, they published their major disagreement beside it: "On one point, however, we feel impelled to express more than mere dissent. The chapter on Foreknowledge is, to us, decidedly objectionable."[94] W. L. Butler proceeded similarly. Although he held Brents and his book in high esteem, he did not accept Brents's conclusions on foreknowledge.[95]

Brents's second book, which never mentioned his doctrine of limited foreknowledge, was a collection of edited homilies entitled simply, *Gospel Sermons*, which did not acquire the popularity or the longevity in print as did *GPS*.[96] However, when *Gospel Sermons* was first released, it benefitted from the renown which had developed since the publication of his *GPS* some sixteen years earlier. George Gowan, reviewing *Gospel Sermons* in the *Gospel Advocate*, wrote that "the bare mention of the name of its author is enough to make everyone want to see this volume of his sermons."[97] Considering the aim of this project, most striking about this volume of sermons is its freedom from Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge. This fact serves to support two things. First, it serves to warrant the sincerity of Brents's claim that, while he had "long entertained these views" about the "bearing of foreknowledge upon the free agency and accountability of man," he "never preached them from the pulpit."[98] As a man confessedly devoted to speaking as do the oracles of God, the omission of this doctrine

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[92]Ibid.

[93]Ibid.

[94]Ibid.

[95]"Review of Dr. Brents on Foreknowledge of God," 1207.

[96]Unlike *GPS*, no twentieth century publishers were found to have reproduced updated editions of this book of homilies, and copies of it could not be found for sale in any book stores.

[97]Gowan, "Book Reviews: *Gospel Sermons*," 768.

[98]*GPS*, 86.

from the pulpit by design demonstrates the likelihood that it was of relatively minor importance, as an inference, in relation to the express statements of the core gospel.[99] Secondly, as such, it highlights a likely reason that he never pushed his doctrine as one worthy of contention in the SCM, or prerequisite to fellowship with Christians who disagreed with him on the issue.

Summarizing Their Superman

Even those who criticized Brents honored him. Those who had no criticism for him honored him even more. Such varied perceptions indicated that Brents certainly had a profound impact on the SCM. While many reports seemed to paint a sincere and likely accurate portrait of the man, some contained elements which seemed legendary. As such, they coalesced in a surprising parallel with Cowden's feeling, expressed in the title of his book, that Brents was a *superman*. What this might indicate about the human psyche at work behind such reports is beyond the scope of this work and remains to be pursued by some further research. However, if Engle's theory is viable, then "in the last analysis, Superman is nothing so much as an American boy's fantasy of a messiah."[100] As the unity movement divided uncontrollably before their eyes, perhaps it needed a tangible messiah, a super hero who could provide their escape--even the temporary escape of fantasy--from the harsh realities of their ideal's human failure. If this was so, then the Alexander Campbell of the South and West, their superman and master builder, T. W. Brents, would be a suitable candidate. In any event, those superhuman perceptions of Brents seem, at least, to fit within the possibilities of Turner's "frontier thesis," which

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[99]*GPS*, iv.

[100]Gary Engle, "What Makes Superman So Darned American?" in *Ourselves Among Others: Readings from Home and Abroad*, 4th ed., Carol J. Verburg, ed. (New York: St. Martins, 2000), 436.

envisioned the American frontier as both "symbol and myth."[101] Or perhaps the legendary aspects were motivated by some yet-undefined cultural influences at work.

Cultural and Theological Influences

This study speaks of the influences it describes in terms of potential. It cannot prove with certainty how much influence they had on Brents. It assumes as valid, however, that external factors can and do influence human conclusions. Reformed and Arminian theologians, as well secular behaviorists, would disagree on the processes involved; however, all agree that outside agents effect human behavior.[102] This assumption warrants a look at such external factors available to influence Brents.

Formative Cultural Influences

Geographical and cultural factors certainly existed during Brents's formative years which had the potential to work upon him to influence his conclusions, especially his rejection of traditionally-defined absolute foreknowledge, and to develop an alternative in its place. The first is the rugged individualism which often accompanied pioneers on the American frontier. The pragmatics of survival required of pioneer families on the cutting edge of westward expansion made the provision of necessities (food, shelter, and clothing) exponentially more difficult than it was in an established

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[101]Frederick Jackson Turner is noted by Garrett as the first American historian to present the "frontier thesis." It envisioned the American frontier as both a "symbol and myth" that nurtured the emerging religious mindset which gave rise to a new order of Christian institutions. Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1981; rev. ed., 1994), 53. Turner's thesis has been significantly modified by Nathan O. Hatch (*The Democratization of American Christianity* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989]), to include other influences on American Christianity, such as the anti-creedal spirit of Jeffersonian populism.

[102]Cf. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 199; cf. also Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 905. Behaviorists would posit that Brents (& his doctrine) was the sum total of all the factors which acted upon him during his life; this is not entirely inconsistent with Christian faith, from the vantage points of the determinist or the libertarian. Certainly, secular behaviorism, classical theism, and relational theology are not to be confused. However, a Reformed theologian might explain those factors in terms of God's sovereign will, perhaps as agents to accomplish his ends. A relational theologian, on the other hand, might explain those factors as a variety of factors, some perhaps divinely determined and some not. They all agree, however, that external forces effect human behavior.

civic center. Basic survival took precedence over more cultured living, and succeeding at it was a significant accomplishment. The first white settlers of what is now Marshall County, Tennessee, did not arrive until the early part of the nineteenth century, and Brents's parents were among them.[103] At nine members, the Brents family was large. It included T. W.'s parents, Thomas and Jane (McWhorter) Brents, T. W., and six elder brothers and sisters: William, Matilda, Lucinda Jane, Mary, Elizabeth, and James.[104] As with most pioneers, the Brents family lacked most of the necessities and advantages but filled the lack with hard, meaningful work.[105] At the time, that part of Tennessee remained an undeveloped wilderness in which towering trees hovered over briar underbrush interlaced with the dense cane from which the nearby Cane Creek received its name.[106] From this terrain they had to clear enough land to farm and construct a house, neither of which could be considered an easy affair.[107] The dwelling was likely not much more than a poled shelter in keeping with the time and context.[108] The Brents family labored at farming, but that did not keep its members from getting involved in community labors as well. T. W.'s father, Thomas Brents, defended his neighbors and family as a soldier in the War of 1812, and was with Andrew Jackson at the battle of New Orleans. Further, he was appointed as Lincoln County Road Overseer in 1815, thus beginning a positive contribution to the community through his role in the development of county

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[103]"Tennessee: Settlement Patterns," *Encyclopedia Britannica* [CD-ROM], 2001; Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 13-14; "Marshall County" in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[104]Pauline Phillips Church, *The Joshua Tree* (Middleton, TN: by the author, 1980), 21. This is a genealogy, courtesy of Jean Brents. Yvonne Brents Henson produced a revised edition in 2001. Cf. Pauline Phillips Church and Yvonne Brents Henson, *The Joshua Tree*, revised ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: by the author, 2001).

[105]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 13.

[106]Ibid., 14; cf. "Marshall County" in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[107]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 13-14.

[108]Ibid.

infrastructure.[109] T. W. maintained another kind of infrastructure, serving the iron needs of the community in his early years in grueling work as one of its few blacksmiths.[110] The hard-working and relatively self-sufficient pioneer spirit necessary to survive and excel in this demanding wilderness life appears to have characterized the Brents family as much as it characterized early Tennesseans at large. The pioneers' self-reliance helped to shape many aspects of frontier Tennessee culture; they brought with them music, crafts, and legends, as well as religious and educational institutions that helped to soften the harshness of frontier life by reshaping it into a primitive representation of the communities they left behind.[111]

In concert with the pioneer spirit's focus on necessity, education in this early Tennessee culture was rudimentary at best. Like the houses, the schools were the most basic of poled shelters. The earth provided the flooring, and the seats were slabs of wood.[112] The colloquialism known as "the three R's--reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic"--described what the community thought were the three subjects sufficient to educate its people.[113] Brents learned whatever of these basics he could in these rudimentary school houses. His first wife, Angeline Scott, continued to teach him after they were married.[114] Even so, Brents did not see an English grammar before his twenty-first birthday. His reception of this grammar in his twenty-first year (1844) seems to mark the beginning of

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[109]Church and Henson, *The Joshua Tree*, revised ed., 36.

[110]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 15.

[111]"Tennessee: Cultural Life," *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

[112]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 14.

[113]"Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. and M.D.," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886][online]; accessed 10February 2003; available from http://freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~pearidger/history/gdspmarsbio.shtml; Internet.

[114]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 14.

his most serious learning, which was his self-education.[115] From that time forward, Brents's academic development remained "largely a matter of getting text books."[116] The apparent success of his scholarly attainments seems to have been grounded in a personal thirst for knowledge, what observers viewed as a vigorous mind, and a devotion to reading and retention from which he refused to be distracted.[117] That he remained motivated to accomplish this in the frontier environment, and there, in the light of cooking fires, candles and oil lamps, seems especially noteworthy.[118] Even in medicine he was largely self taught. He learned what he could on his own, took courses when he could in Tennessee's Eclectic Medical College, Memphis, and its Medical School in Nashville, and eventually graduated from the Reformed Medical College in Macon, Georgia.[119]

Formative Theological Influences

Brents's theological education appeared to be even less formal than his education in the liberal arts and medicine. Of Brents's youth, Cowden said that "there is a blank in his history."[120] However, while certain specifics may be lacking, Cowden's own sources, and others like Goodspeed, add noticeable detail to that blank. Whether T. W. and his siblings received any formal catechesis in some version of Christianity during their youth is unknown. However, Goodspeed noted that, though T. W.'s parents were not known to be actively professing Christians, they did incline "to the Methodist

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[115]Ibid.

[116]Ibid., 15.

[117]Dorris, "T. W. Brents," 455.

[118]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 14.

[119]Bills, "T. W. Brents," 618; "Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. and M.D.," in *Goospeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[120]Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents*, 16.

Episcopal faith."[121] What he intended by his contrast between "not known to be professing Christians" yet "inclined toward the Methodist Episcopal faith" remains curiously ambivalent. However, children may accept or reject family inclination to one degree or another, but they cannot avoid its influence. With an inclination to Methodism in his primary social group, and the Christian name Wesley, it seems likely, at the least, that the young T. W. received at some exposure to the more common tenets of Wesleyan-Arminian theology.[122] Furthermore, the Methodist Episcopal Church South was organized in the early part of the century, was relatively well established before the appearance of the SCM's "Christian" churches, and provided the only major religious alternative in Lewisburg and most of Marshall County to the Reformed doctrine of the Presbyterian church.[123]

Cowden's "blank" regarding the development of the young Brents is also filled in a bit more by the following religious experiences. Dorris, the son-in-law with whom he lived in 1904, claimed that Brents frequently related

> that the first distinct godly impression made upon his mind, when but eight or ten years old, was by a pious and prayerful woman whose husband was dissipated, profane, and abusive, even to severity. When her tormentor had fallen to sleep, after leaving bleeding marks of his brutality upon her person, she would call her own little boy and the subject of this sketch [Brents] to sit by her side while she read some comforting chapter of Scripture . . . and would offer such fervent prayers as to make a deep impression and create an early desire to be a good man.[124]

Other than his assumption that being a "good man" was possible, what further details of theological anthropology he implied in his use of "good man" cannot be ascertained. Yet

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[121]Goodspeed, "Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. and M.D.," *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[122]Of course this is speculative, but giving him the name "Wesley" may indicate *something*. "Christian name" is employed here in the sense that it was used in the popular Episcopal tradition in which this author was reared. The name of a significant Christian figure was formally given to the infant at his or her Christening. E.g., this writer was named Kevin at birth, and James at his Christening, because the apostle James had powerful Christian significance to his parents. It is possible, however remotely, that T. W.'s parents gave him the name "Wesley" because John Wesley had powerful Christian significance to them.

[123]"Marshall County" in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[124]Dorris, "T. W. Brents," 455.

his assumptions about potential human goodness and his witness of such domestic brutality could have contributed to motivating his aversion to the Reformed notion that God may have predestined the beating of his friend's mother.

Though certainly not as striking as his exposure to this episode of domestic violence, Brents's acquisition of a liberal education and his personal study habits indicate that he willingly exposed himself to extra-biblical sources which also had the potential to influence his theological conclusions most directly. For example, in a discussion of Christian baptism, Brents referenced "eighty nine scholarly extracts," cited "thirty-four lexicographers, seventy scholarly works, thirty four examples of the use of the word in ancient literature, and thirty eight ancient translations of the Scriptures."[125] Finally, another potential influence was a unique theological "error" perceived by the *Christian Standard* to have existed in Brents's region.[126] The *Standard* did not name that theology; however, since their comments were made in response to Brents's *GPS*, it was most probably Calvinism. The "error" of that theology is debatable, but it was *perceived* to be erroneous by Brents and the editors of the *Standard.* Setting aside for a moment the question of its error, the fact that Brents perceived it to be mistaken made it an external reality which could have influenced his course, e.g., if he felt called to "correct error."

The contextual realities above were historically verifiable things to which Brents was exposed. Whether they influenced Brents, or the amount of influence they had on upon him, are questions the study will revisit in chapter 5. Here, the goal has been to demonstrate their existence as external forces with which Brents had intimate contact. The four examples which follow are just as real as those contexts above. However, no verifiable evidence has been discovered that indicates Brents had personal exposure to them as he did with those above prior to his authoring of *GPS.* They are included here to add further detail to the admittedly-limited theological landscape which the study has

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[125]Hawkins, "T. W. Brents, Master of All," 22.

[126]"Book Table," *Christian Standard*, 141.

attempted to capture above, for they invite further critique of Brents's claim that he developed his doctrine from the Bible alone. The value of doing so may be justified by analogy from the now famous Courier and Ives print of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination. The print portrays Lincoln's left hand grasping the Union flag as his assassin fires the fatal shot from behind. However, historians and museum curators disagree with one another about whether the President actually grasped the flag, or whether the printmaker, on the sole subjective authority of artistic license, simply depicted him grasping this standard of the Union for its symbolic effect. Even if the president did not grasp the flag, Courier and Ives' depiction of him so doing has become a historical reality without which Lincoln's history would be less complete. In the same manner, it seems that Brents's theological history would be less complete without sketching the existence of similar doctrines of foreknowledge present in America at the time, regardless of whether or not he grasped them.

The doctrines referred to above are those which were held by the Socinians, Adam Clarke, Alexander Hall, and Lorenzo Dow McCabe. The goal is not to discuss them in detail, but to indicate that doctrines of limited divine foreknowledge, and the public discussion of those doctrines, predated Brents's doctrine, and in some form, existed and were being discussed in the same geographical region of America in which Brents lived. As such, they existed as potential influences. McCabe was developing his doctrine at Ohio Wesleyan University at roughly the same time Brents was developing his, though McCabe published his book some four or five years after Brents's *GPS*. Alexander Hall, a preacher associated with the SCM, published his views of limited foreknowledge in 1846, nearly thirty years before Brents's *GPS*. Adam Clarke, another Wesleyan, expressed his views in a commentary on Acts published in the late eighteenth century. And the Socinians' doctrine was the oldest, developed statement of limited

foreknowledge considered.[127] It was advocated during the Reformation, and likely existed in the American Unitarian church.

Though the Socinians are most well-known for their Unitarian (anti-Trinitarian) doctrine with its concomitant denial of Christ's deity, their positions on religious liberty also aroused intellectual foment in Europe. Their notions of freedom were condemned by both Catholics and Protestants alike as their most dangerous doctrines.[128] Though the Counter Reformation resulted in effectively exiling Socinians (and Protestants of all sorts) from Poland, many Socinian values lived on and were further developed by John Locke, Pierre Bayle, et al.[129] Such influential philosophical trends of the Enlightenment, through their influence on philosopher-statesmen like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, and perhaps filtered through their Deism, contributed to the political formation of the United States, particularly in the area of human liberty.[130] Such influence may be seen, for example, in the Declaration of Independence, of which Jefferson was a signatory. In the Declaration, human liberty was affirmed to be an inalienable right with which man was endowed by his creator, and which was self-evident in the laws of nature and of nature's God.[131]

The Socinians affirmed this libertarian freedom to be incompatible with the traditional theological understanding of divine omniscience which understood God as knowing, absolutely, all future events. Because the Socinians could not reconcile their conception of human freedom with the traditional understanding of absolute foreknowledge, they concluded that God's foreknowledge must not be as absolute as it

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[127]More ancient versions are reputed to predate the Socinians, but researching them was beyond the bounds of this study.

[128]Marian Hillar, "From Polish Socinians to the American Constitution," *A Journal from the Radical Reformation* 4, no. 3 (1994): 30. Hillar is director of The Center For Socinian Studies.

[129]Ibid.

[130]Ibid., 45-46.

[131]U. S. Declaration of Independence, Introduction.

had been traditionally conceived. They had argued as follows: as "the omnipotence of God is his ability to do whatever is possible, so his omniscience is his knowledge of everything knowable. But as free acts are in their nature uncertain, as they may or may not be, they cannot be known before they occur."[132] Therefore, future free acts may be relatively predictable, but they are not knowable, even to God. This doctrine, of course, received no warm welcome from either Catholics or Protestants. It struck at a valued confession on both sides of Christianity, for before the Socinians, the doctrine that divine foreknowledge included all future events was not significantly questioned.[133] It comes as no surprise, then, that during the Counter Reformation, these notions of freedom and foreknowledge were violently opposed by Catholic and Protestant churches alike.[134]

Because such violent opposition was less likely in eighteenth-century England and nineteenth century America, perhaps the more orthodox Wesleyans, Clarke and McCabe, grasped the opportunity to develop this alternative understanding. Clarke developed his doctrines only a generation after John Wesley's work gave birth to Methodism. And though the details of Clarke's position on divine foreknowledge have been debated, he seems to have pointedly argued against the traditional conception of absolute divine foreknowledge in a brief section of his commentary on Acts 2:47. Brents notes this section of Clarke's commentary and quotes it in its entirety in his *GPS*. Though Brents claims that he became aware of Clarke's position only after his chapter on foreknowledge in *GPS* was complete, he clearly interprets Clarke to share his position on divine foreknowledge. In sum, Clarke said: "I conclude that God, although omniscient, is not obliged, in consequence of this [viz., God's design of some things as contingent], *to know all that he can know*, no more [*sic*] than he is obliged, because he is *omnipotent,* to

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[132]Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 1:400-01.

[133]Cf. Gregory A. Boyd, *Trinity and Process: A Critical Evaluation and Reconstruction of Hartshorne's Di-Polar Theism Towards a Trinitarian Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Long,, 1992), 296.

[134]Hillar, "From Polish Socinians to the American Constitution," 45.

do all that he can do."[135] Clarke redefined omniscience in a way he thought was more biblical than the traditional view. God still knows all things. However, instead of knowing all things as absolutely certain, he knows that which he has designed to be contingent as contingent. Though Brents employed the phrase "limited foreknowledge" in a manner parallel to Clarke's use of contingent, he and the second generation Wesleyan scholar seemed to agree on foreknowledge.

The other Wesleyan scholar, Lorenzo Dow McCabe, was a nineteenth century professor of philosophy at Ohio Wesleyan University. In 1878 he published the first (and most thorough) of two books detailing his doctrine of divine foreknowledge and its relation to human freedom. Though this first of McCabe's books appeared four years after the publication of Brents's *GPS*, McCabe had begun reflection and dialogue on its substance some thirty years before.[136] That means his serious consideration of the subject had begun in approximately 1848, some six years before Brents first came to his conclusions regarding divine omniscience.[137] Prior to Brents's conclusions, and separated from him by only one state, noteworthy academic consideration of the subject was already underway in the minds and dialogues of McCabe and his associates at the institution of Ohio Wesleyan.

Finally, another Ohio Christian, this one associated with the SCM, had published a book in 1846 entitled *Universalism Against Itself.* His name was Alexander Hall. And though his caliber of scholarship did not approach that of McCabe and his style was certainly unique if not fanciful, he did draw principally the same conclusions about foreknowledge and human freedom as did Brents, McCabe, Clarke, and the

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[135]Adam Clarke, *John-Acts*, in *Clarke's Commentary* (n.p.: n.d.), 5b:403-05, in *Master Christian Library* [CD-ROM] (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1997); quoted in *GPS*, 86.

[136]Lorenzo Dow McCabe, *The Foreknowledge of God and Cognate Themes in Theology and Philosophy* (Delaware, OH: Author, 1878; reprint, Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1887), iii.

[137]*GPS*, 87. At the time of publication in 1874, Brents said of his conclusions that he "was forced to them . . . some twenty years ago," viz., ca. 1854. McCabe mentioned that he had begun considering the subject some thirty years before his 1878 book, or 1848.

Socinians.[138] Perhaps most significantly, because Hall was associated with the SCM, a greater likelihood exists that his book and its conclusions would have come in contact with Brents. The facts–that Hall published his book before Brents came to his conclusions, that Hall's book was being read and discussed in Brents's fellowship, and that it was being reviewed in that fellowship's journals–indicate that Hall's doctrine, perhaps more than any of the other three, was most accessible to Brents. The *Christian Standard* was familiar with Hall, and did not reserve its opinion that Brents had adopted Hall's arguments.[139] The potential for Hall to have been an influence upon Brents seems clear.

Certainly, any level of influence these factors had upon Brents's theological conclusions cannot be demonstrated with precision. However, the learned self-sufficiency of his pioneer upbringing and close family ties to Arminianism, as well as the cultural-theological experiences in a county where two theological choices dominated, were certainly as real as his personal experience with a friends battered mother. Further, that views of divine foreknowledge and human freedom nearly the same as his own existed prior to Brents's *GPS,* and that they were being discussed–not only in his region of the country, but in his own fellowship specifically–are realities just as certain. While their existence alone cannot demonstrate with certainty any influence upon his doctrine's development, their existence and its potential for influence cannot be discounted.

In sum, external theological factors existed which had the capacity to impact Brents's theological development. Some were more accessible than others. And some may have had a more subconscious than conscious influence upon him, if they can be said to have influenced him at all. These external factors, however, were not the only realities available to exert developmental power upon him; internal factors existed as well. Brents had consciously devoted himself to the SCM and its unique agenda, and within

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[138]Hall, *Universalism Against Itself,* 381-423.

[139]"Book Table," *Christian Standard,* 141.

those boundaries, exercised a passion for an even narrower theological agenda. The reality of such internal, passionate, theological concerns had the potential to exert a governing influence upon his theological conclusions.

Governing Theological Concerns

Within the SCM's broader agenda, Brents had his own clear, narrower theological agenda which he passionately pursued: evangelism. Yet, he seemed to be so attached to what he believed it to be and how it should be approached that his conceptions of evangelism may have governed, or even limited, his theological development. It seems strange suggesting that a passion for evangelism could be connected to the limitation of Christian theological development. However, a consideration of what Brents understood evangelism to be and how he went about it should remove any strange feelings. First, however, note his zeal for the salvation of sinners.

Hawkins viewed Brents as bearing "a great burden upon his soul for the salvation of those who were lost in sin."[140] This feeling was expressed poignantly in a letter Brents wrote to the editors of the *Gospel Advocate* in 1866, petitioning them to begin a department devoted wholly to "the presentation of the gospel to sinners" because it was "a subject of too much importance to be ignored by our papers. Although it may have been very thoroughly discussed in the *Harbinger* and *Advocate* years ago, your readers are made up, in the main, of the rising generation, and are not posted on these matters."[141] At the outset, such a zeal hardly seems objectionable. But as Brents continued, it became clear that the "evangelism" he had in mind was more akin to proselytizing, and some of the "sinners" whom he categorized as in need of salvation were not infidels, but believers who were members of other denominations. He makes this clear in another reason he gives for wanting this department in the *Gospel Advocate*. He said, "We wish to hand our

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[140]Hawkins, "T. W. Brents, Master of All," 14.

[141]T. W. Brents, "Bros. Fanning and Lipscomb," *GA* 8, no. 52 (December 25, 1866): 822-23.

papers to our neighbors, that they may be *converted from sectarianism* . . . to Christianity" [emphasis added].[142] As noted earlier, Fanning and Lipscomb agreed with Brents's suggestion for a new department in the *Gospel Advocate* which would be devoted to evangelism, and Brents would be its editor.

However, some Christians may have been surprised, and understandably so, to seek out this new evangelistic department in the *Gospel Advocate,* only to find detailed attempts to refute the major Reformed doctrines (election, reprobation, predestination, etc.).[143] Of course, if detailed attempts to refute Reformed doctrines can be legitimately categorized as "the presentation of the gospel"–the stated design of the department–this may be understandable. However, such categorization would be debatable at best. Otherwise, this research found only *one* essay in the department written by Brents that approached the fulfillment of the department's stated design. It was entitled, "The Gospel Plan of Salvation," and was essentially a preview of his book, *GPS*, which was due to be published within a year.[144] Unfortunately, even this lone essay strayed from the presentation of the gospel to sinners. It started with man, was dominated by anthropology throughout (a weighty stress on the necessity of human obedience), was nearly free of Christology, and was unable to keep away from controversy with Reformed "errors." As understood by Brents, evangelism largely meant opposition to Calvinism.

Given this conception of evangelism, it is understandable why, in a book entitled, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, he used more than one hundred of its first pages attempting to refute Calvinism. Brents's zeal for evangelism, as he understood it, was inseparable from a zealous anti-Calvinism. He saw Calvinism as a hindrance to Christianity, again,

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[142]Ibid.

[143]T. W. Brents, "Predestination, Election and Reprobation," *GA* 14, no. 7 (February 15, 1872): 147-71; idem, "Predestination, Election and Reprobation, Continued," *GA* 14, no. 8 (February 22, 1872): 173-97. At least a portion of one of these essays was published in tract form; see the review of *Hereditary Total Depravity*, by T. W. Brents, *Christian Standard* (April 30,1870): 14.

[144]T. W. Brents,"The Gospel Plan of Salvation," *GA* 15, no. 19 (May 8, 1873): 433-45.

as he understood it, thinking it made the necessary responses to the gospel impossible; therefore, from his perspective, he had to expose and correct it.[145] Of particular concern to Brents was his feeling that the influence of its doctrine of predestination (with which he also lumped simple foreknowledge) hindered sinners. He believed it severely crippled sinners' motivation to even attempt to listen to, let alone respond to, the gospel. To Brents, the doctrine of absolute foreknowledge created the obstacle of fatalism in sinners, viz., it led them to believe that they must accept their destiny, with no hope for change. For Brents, if absolute foreknowledge could be removed, fatalism would no longer be an obstacle, and sinners would be motivated to hear the gospel. Therefore, Brents's passion for evangelism was inseparable from a thoroughgoing opposition to the doctrine of absolute foreknowledge.[146]

Considering Brents's fiery passion for evangelism as he understood it, and for what he thought was necessary to its accomplishment, viz., the removal of Calvinistic doctrines of predestination, the potential those things had to become governing theological concerns is clear. If absolute predestination had to go, then he needed an alternative. The dominant Arminian alternative, absolute simple foreknowledge, was not a candidate, because Brents believed it resulted in the same, unalterably fixed future as predestination. Therefore, in his mind, a doctrine of limited foreknowledge had to be considered. How much his passionate opposition to Calvinism, and to its doctrine of absolute predestination specifically, "governed" his theological development and assisted him in opting for a doctrine of limited foreknowledge, we may never know. The goal has been to demonstrate the potential for those passionate theological concerns to have a governing role in his development. And that potential seems to be clear.

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[145] *GPS*, 72-73.

[146] *GPS*, 13.

Conclusion

To summarize, then, this chapter sought primarily to establish T. W. Brents as a major theological figure in the SCM, and secondarily, to briefly sketch extant cultural and theological contexts available to influence his development. The greater portion of this chapter documented the testimonies of SCM leaders from Brents's time into the twentieth century. That witness came from leaders connected to each of the three fellowships which emerged from the SCM. Those testimonies strongly supported that portion of the thesis which affirms Brents's eminence as a theological figure in the movement's history. The second aim of this chapter was to describe several cultural variables which were available to influence Brents's theological development directly or indirectly, for the purpose of informing a critique of Brents's claim, viz., that he developed his doctrine of limited foreknowledge from the Bible alone, independent of other sources. The study has surveyed those which seemed to be most prominent, and in enough detail to sufficiently inform a critique of Brents's claim. All in all, then, having presented something about the man and his making in this brief theological-biography, learning something more about the man's theology, specifically his doctrine of limited foreknowledge and its development, should be more fruitful.

CHAPTER 3

BRENTS'S DOCTRINE OF LIMITED FOREKNOWLEDGE

This chapter supports the clause of the study's thesis which affirms that Brents developed a doctrine of limited foreknowledge. His doctrine was a paradox, both simple and complex. The doctrine as a doctrine was rather simple. He articulated it primarily in a small chapter that made up roughly two percent of his book, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*. However, the brevity of his treatment complicated it, for it was not as comprehensive as it could have been, and what appeared to be obvious questions or objections remained unanswered. He further complicated his doctrine by claiming to have developed it from the Bible alone, free from any external sources from which he could take encouragement. If he sincerely believed that his mind was a blank slate on which only the Bible was written, or if he was actually blind to the developmental impact of culture, education, and other experiences, then perhaps his judgment about Christian doctrine deserves to be more closely criticized. To facilitate such criticism, the study presents a description of Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge. This includes Brents's reasons for rejecting the dominant classical views of exhaustive simple foreknowledge and absolute predestination. This is preceded by a further examination of selected contextual realities which potentially influenced his doctrine's development. These differ from those in chapter 2, which were largely limited to his formative years.

In some ways, Brents may have needed an alternative to the classical views of foreknowledge. He was an itinerant evangelist who was reputed to have a fervent passion for lost souls. However, he thought Calvinism's doctrine of predestination and Arminianism's doctrine of foreknowledge both encouraged a fatalistic indifference to the

gospel, hindering man's reception of it, and so, hindering Brents's evangelistic work.[1] Brents reasoned this way. Calvinists had affirmed that God unconditionally predestined all things by his sheer grace or good pleasure, without any foresight of human obedience or disobedience; God perfectly foreknew the future because he had foreordained it.[2] Arminians had affirmed that God conditionally predestined all things based on his foresight of human obedience or disobedience; God had foreordained the future because he had perfect foreknowledge of what free men would do.[3] The Calvinists canonized unconditional predestination and the Arminians remonstrated with a predestination conditioned on God's foresight of human free decisions. Yet both affirmed a classical understanding of divine omniscience: regardless of how, God foreknew every bit of the future perfectly.

Since God's foreknowledge could not be wrong, Brents reasoned that both doctrines resulted in the same unalterable, prefixed future. If that future is prefixed and immutable, then no man could believe or behave in any way that would change it–even by responding to the gospel.[4] And if even that could not make a difference, there was no reason to try. Though the Calvinistic and Arminian doctrines of foreknowledge were

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[1]As he understood them. Brents's thrust was primarily against the classical conception of divine foreknowledge as unlimited, which he uncritically labeled "Calvinist," whether he perceived it to portray God's foreknowledge as grounded in his exhaustive predetermination (Calvinist), or his predestination as grounded in his exhaustive foreknowledge of future free choices (Arminian).

[2]See, e.g., Canons of Dort, First Head, articles seven through ten in *Historic Creeds and Confessions*, ed. Rick Brannon, electronic edition (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997); chapter 3, sections 1 and 2, "Westminster Confession of Faith" [on-line]; accessed 12 December 2002; available from http://www.ccel.org/creeds/westminster-confession.txt; Internet. See also question 12, "Larger Catechism" [on-line]; accessed 12 December 2002; available from http://www.ccel.org/creeds/westminster-larger-cat. html; Internet.

[3]See Article 1, "The Five Arminian Articles of Remonstrance" [on-line]; accessed 12 December 2002; available from http://www16.brinkster.com/arminian; Internet. See also section I, On Predestination, articles one through six, in Simon Episcopius, "The Remonstrant Confession of Faith" [on-line]; accessed 12 December 2002; available from http://www.gospelcom.net/chi/HERITAGE/Issuenos/chl050.shtml; Internet.

[4]T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 17th ed. (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 74-75. *GPS* was originally published in 1874 (Cincinnati: Bosworth, Chase, and Hall).

distinct, Brents believed that they both arrived at the same unalterable future, and this theological determinism he saw as the taproot of fatalistic indifference to the gospel.[5] Brents, the evangelist, wanted to liberate people from this indifference so that they would be more apt to respond to the good news. To do that, he felt he needed to negate the traditional doctrines of foreknowledge and replace them with a viable, biblical alternative. For Brents, limited divine foreknowledge was not an option, it seemed to be *a necessity* he "was forced to . . . while preparing for a debate with a Universalist."[6]

Brents's Claim of Independent Development

The search for this alternative doctrine's source creates an interesting challenge. In his *GPS*, Brents asserted that his conclusions regarding limited foreknowledge developed independently, namely, from his study of Scripture alone without any awareness of outside suggestion or influence. Near the end of his chapter entitled "The Foreknowledge of God," he claimed that, during his development of his doctrine of limited foreknowledge, he was "not aware of a single authority, save the Bible, from which [he] might derive the slightest encouragement."[7] He did reveal that he had become aware of at least one of those authorities after he had come to his conclusions, and only shortly before his book went to press. He specifically mentioned the commentary of Adam Clarke on Acts 2:47.[8] His casual claim created a tension which, positively, motivated more critical attention to his theological conclusions. For Christians and churches of different persuasions have often claimed to "stand on Scripture alone" and to

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[5]The original five articles of remonstrance are vague at best, and decidedly inconsistent with regard to the implications of foreknowledge and the possibility of alternative futures. Episcopius's "Remonstrant Confession of Faith" is little better. See also Reformed theologian, Loraine Boettner, "God's Foreknowledge" [on-line]; accessed 27 November 2002; available from http://www.heritageonline.org/Publications/Foreknowledge.html; Internet.

[6]*GPS*, 87.

[7]*GPS*, 84.

[8]Ibid.; see Adam Clarke, *John-Acts*, in *Clarke's Commentary* (n.p.: n.d.), 5b:403-05, in *Master Christian Library* [CD-ROM] (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1997). Brents understood Clarke to share his view of foreknowledge; however, according to John Sanders, this has been a subject of debate.

"recognize no traditional authorities."[9] Yet those who do this often may be the least free from outside influences, for they are not "even conscious of what traditions have molded their understanding of Scripture."[10] The sections below create an awareness of some of the traditions which *were* available to mold Brents's understanding of Scripture. They include key principles gleaned from Reformed theology, alternative views of foreknowledge which existed at the time, and even the implicit theology of early American politics. Through education, social interaction, and daily living, Brents likely came in contact with many of these things which had the potential to influence his thinking.

Potential Influences Outside and Inside the Stone-Campbell Movement

Chapter 2 described the potentially formative cultural and theological contexts in which Brents was reared, as well as the man who emerged from them as he was portrayed by those who knew him. Such portrayals were often exaggerated or skewed by preference or bias. Take the overdone depictions away, however, and there still remains a man of significant education and experience. He was a pioneer frontiersman, Christian theologian, evangelist, debater, journalist, medical doctor, college professor and administrator, banker, businessman, and an avid reader, especially of theological literature. Such vocational and avocational breadth suggests an acquired skill. In the theological realm, many of the unique positions of the SCM may have been learned, like those associated with hermeneutics. Others, may have been bequeathed as an inheritance, and received rather uncritically, such as the assumption of libertarian freedom, or the SCM's unique emphasis on Christian unity. In either event, both inheriting or learning involve contact with external forces which have the power to influence.

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[9]J. Van Engen, "Tradition," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* [*EDT*], ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984): 1106.

[10]Ibid.

The influence of visionary ecclesiology. The SCM's rule of express terms had a significant influence upon its approach to biblical interpretation; however, as seen above, it was not limited to hermeneutics. Its governing role in hermeneutics was inseparably wed to the movement's conception of Christian unity and its desire to create it.[11] In that wedding, the rule mandated what teachings could be bound on Christians (only express statements of Scripture), and in so doing, served in the primary role of determining who would be admitted to Christian communion. As early as Thomas Campbell's 1809 *Declaration and Address* to the multi-denominational Christian Association of Washington County, Pennsylvania, the express statements of Scripture were envisioned to hold the key to a united Christendom. That unity would be produced by considering anyone a Christian and admitting him to fellowship, who confessed and lived according to the express terms of Scripture; beyond those terms, nothing more would be required. This contrasted with his earlier Reformed doctrine of necessary consequence which made certain deductions from Scripture equal to the express statements themselves. As such, they could be bound as prerequisites to the communion of the church. The elder Campbell eventually grew to disagree. He composed an antithesis to the Westminster Confession, 1.6, which, ironically, reflected the literary form of that section. It became the third proposition of his *Declaration and Address*. In it, he affirmed that unity can be obtained when nothing is

> inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God. Nor ought anything to be admitted, as of Divine obligation, in their Church constitution and managements, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles upon the New Testament Church; either in express terms or by approved precedent.[12]

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[11]"Visionary" is used in the neutral sense of idealistic, neither as an expression of praise nor as a pejorative.

[12]Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* (1809), ed. F. D. Kirshner (St. Louis: Bethany, 1955), 45. The style of this proposition is very similar to the Westminster Confession 1.6. See also Michael Casey, "The Origins of Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ, Part 1: The Reformed Tradition," *RQ* 31, no. 2 (1989): 83, 89.

He added in his sixth proposition,

> that although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession.[13]

These statements embody changes in Campbell's Reformed theology--changes that would become integral to the SCM, particularly with regard to its stances on biblical authority, the authority of inference, and unity. It had rejected the doctrine of necessary consequence, and promoted a unity which, in theory, relied on the express terms of Scripture alone as the ultimate doorkeeper of the church in this world.[14]

Thomas Campbell's stances on interpretation and unity, further developed in both the younger Campbell's early journal, *The Christian Baptist*, and his later *Millennial Harbinger*, indicate the confessed passion for revelation present in both Campbells. They perceived that Christian disunity was created and sustained by an aggregation of theological statements. To them, an impure mixture of Scripture and human speculation had produced those statements, which were then exalted to a place of authority equal to the Bible, and venerated in the form of creeds. In their minds, the means to heal Christian disunity was twofold: refusing to use the creeds as tests of fellowship, and relying instead on the express statements of revelation as sufficient. To them, those creeds had veiled the true God with human opinions rather than allowing God's self-revelation in Scripture to stand unadorned. In a strong way, then, their desire for ultimate reliance on the express terms of Scripture was motivated by their agenda for Christian unity. Campbell's desire for "pure speech" joined his zeal for unity to result in this hermeneutical-ecclesiological

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[13]Thomas Campbell, *A Declaration and Address*, in *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's* Declaration and Address, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollman, ATLA Monograph Series (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2000), 19.

[14]Cf. Westminster Confession 1.6.

approach. "To [Campbell] it seemed clear that purity of speech was a necessary condition of purity of thought, and purity of thought a necessary antecedent of union. On it, therefore, he insisted with great warmth."[15] The goal was church unity, and the rule of express terms seemed to have been a key means to that goal.

Stone demonstrated similar thinking, believing that the existence of church controversies proved that the basis of unity cannot be speculative subjects. According to Williams's record of the Lexington meeting which united the "Christians" with the "Disciples," Stone first agreed with a leading figure from Campbell's group, elder John Smith, that authoritative speech should be limited to the "words of the Scriptures"; he then continued:

> after we had given up all creeds and taken the Bible, and the Bible alone, as our rule of faith and practice, we met with so much opposition, that by force of circumstances, I was led to deliver some speculative discourses upon those subjects. But I never preached a sermon of that kind that once feasted my heart; I always felt a barrenness of soul afterwards. I perfectly accord with Brother Smith that those speculations should never be taken into the pulpit; but that when compelled to speak of them at all, we should do so in the words of inspiration. . . . I have not one objection to the ground laid down by him [viz., the "words of the Scriptures alone"] as the true scriptural basis of union among the people of God; and I am willing to give him, now and here, my hand.[16]

Williams commented that the "atmosphere was charged with emotional feeling as Stone is said to have offered to Smith his hand of 'brotherly love, and it was grasped by a hand full of the honest pledges of fellowship, and the union was virtually accomplished!'"[17]

Such union, for primitivists like the Campbells and Stone, could not stand upon the creeds of their contemporary Protestantism, which were, to them, still creating and sustaining disunity. They did not, however, deny the usefulness of creeds, and would not condemn those who confessed them. T. Campbell esteemed those "doctrinal exhibitions

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[15]Moses E. Lard, "Alexander Campbell," *Lard's Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (April, 1866): 268, in *MEL* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996).

[16]John A. Williams, *The Life of Elder John Smith* (Cincinnati: R. W. Carroll, 1870), 454, quoted in William Garrett West, *Barton Warren Stone: Early American Advocate of Christian Unity* (n.p.: 1954), 148, in *BWS* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996).

[17]Ibid.

of the great system of Divine truths, and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors, [to] be highly expedient, and the more full and explicit they be for those purposes, the better."[18] He even considered those who, by great effort of faith and spirit, conceived and believed them, to be the spiritual "fathers" in Christendom. However, as the church on this side of Christ's return never can be composed entirely of the spiritually mature, he thought the well-reasoned articulations of those fathers should not be employed as the gatekeepers of the kingdom of heaven. He said, because even great confessional articulations such

> as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion; unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the Church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; whereas the Church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.[19]

Like Campbell, Stone did not expect men to give up all their opinions; that would be asking for the impossible. Personally, he sought to avoid the formulation of theological statements or models that added to or subtracted from the exact words of the Bible; however, he would not reject those who advocated such formulations, as long as they were not factious about them and did not seek to bind them on others in an attempt to "lord it over God's heritage."[20] He only asked them to participate in the nobility of Christian unity by holding them as "private property"; this would allow the public property of the faith once delivered–the "Bible alone *in heart* believed, and in the spirit obeyed"–to serve as "the means of Christian union."[21]

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[18]T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, 46.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., 10.

[21]Barton W. Stone, quoted in William Garrett West, *Barton Warren Stone and Christian Unity*, Footnotes to Disciple History No. 3 (n.p., 1954), 9, in *BWS*.

Moses Lard also believed similar assumptions were the basis for unity, and revealed them in this commendation of a speech by Baptist, T. Armitage:

> In regard to the speech of Dr. Armitage, I wish to commend it to the very careful reading of my brethren. It is much in advance of what we usually get from the Baptists. Its principles will generally be found sound and well stated. Altogether it is an excellent document. I am delighted to see it, and to commend it. For some of its principles, we, as a people, have been long contending. We are glad to know that they are at last at work in the great-heart of the Baptist people. With that people and our own lie the hopes of the world.[22]

The speech was part of a union meeting which also included Presbyterians and Episcopalians who gathered to speak on unity in the context of the nineteenth century's broader Christian union movement. The following key excerpts from that speech are some of those with which Lard agreed and which specifically relate to this section.

Armitage contended that "the only way in which we Christians can be united is to agree that we will mutually obey whatever is positively enjoined in the New Testament, and insist on nothing beyond that."[23] To Armitage, this meant that each Christian should "appeal to the Bible only"--a practice that would enable each "to ask for no concession from his brethren."[24] He believed that, if this rule was followed wholeheartedly, opinions would "then give place to Christian faith; convenience, and preference, and expediency, to divine authority. . . . If we should only ask that each other's tastes and preferences should yield to God's word, we would soon begin to respect each other's views of it, and to grow into real unity."[25] In reflecting on the unity meeting in general, and on Armitage's speech in particular, Lard directly stated his own views of the means to unity. He focused specifically on what he believed were nine core Scriptures and gave his

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[22]Moses E. Lard, "Comments and Reflections on the Foregoing," *Lard's Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1865): 84, 88-89, in *MEL*.

[23]T. Armitage, "Christian Unity: Real and Unreal," *Lard's Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1865): 75, in *MEL*.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid.

personal exposition of each. Knowing that his comments might be interpreted by some as the establishment of "Lard's Creed," he immediately added this clarification:

> Here now are nine great doctrinal items, reaching from the one book to the one God, on which we must be one–one in mind, in heart, in fact, before anything like a formal, practical union need be thought of. Of course, I do not mean to claim anything for the mere form in which I have worded these items. The verbal dress in which I set them forth is nothing. No one is required to accept this. The items themselves undressed, that is . . . uninspired human speech [removed], are the things which are material and necessary. On these no compromise can be made; nor can even one of them be dispensed with. They are all necessary, and if not all equally necessary, still are they all so much so, that all must be counted in in [*sic*] settling the basis of union.[26]

Approximately two years later, Lard again noted that the "last result of speculation is opinion," but he did not condemn opinion, or label opinionated humans as heretics. He did, however, offer this caution, that "when we substitute [opinion] for the faith of Christ, and require our brethren to receive the former as a bond of union . . . we become heresiarchs."[27] In Lard's view, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, and obeys him according to his word, is my brother; and he may speculate as much as he chooses, provided he does not force his speculations on me. I am at liberty to choose or reject, as may suit my taste or inclination."[28] He concluded,

> Hence, we plead for the old Gospel in the words of the Apostles, and urge the union of all true believers upon the Scriptures alone; holding nothing for which we have not a thus saith the Lord; and requiring no test of fellowship but a sincere belief in, and a cordial obedience to, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a generous confidence in the truth that it will prevail.[29]

J. W. McGarvey tied the rule of express terms to the movement's agenda for Christian unity as well.[30] And to this particular uniting of hermeneutics and ecclesiology, Brents also gave his allegiance in word and deed. He stressed unity because he believed

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[26]Moses E. Lard, "Comments and Reflections on the Foregoing," 88.

[27]Moses E. Lard, "Ecce Homo," *Lard's Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1867): 210, in *MEL*.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Moses E. Lard, "Human Creeds as Tests of Truth Make Void the Word of God," *Lard's Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1863): 84, in *MEL*.

[30]J. W. McGarvey, *Letters to Bishop McIlvaine* (n.p., n.d.), 4-7, in *JWM* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996).

Jesus's "people should be one people, and no divisions among them."[31] He affirmed this because he believed "the Saviour . . . considered *unity among* His people as of the utmost importance."[32] "The Lord's people are not one," Brents said, because the "sources of much of the faith that is in the world" were "Disciplines, Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, etc.," and not the Jesus known through "*the words of His apostles.*"[33] To Brents, those divisions could be healed, and greater unity achieved, as people expect no more of each other than "to comprehend the mind and purposes of God, *only* as He has revealed them."[34] This unique, goal-oriented partnership of hermeneutics and ecclesiology he sought to apply, in theory, during his lifelong devotion to theological journalism, debate, itinerant preaching, and Christian higher education. Most importantly, however, the boundaries of this rule of express terms were broad enough to allow his replacement of the doctrine of God's absolute prescience with a doctrine of limited prescience. Because he could point to Scriptures which expressly portrayed God as one who changed his mind or did not know some future things (e.g., Gen 18:20-21; 22:12), Brents believed that those portrayals could be confessed at face value.

The influence of conditional soteriology. Garrison's overstatement of Cocceius's influence on the movement seemed most incredible regarding the SCM's early soteriology, which rejected, in theory, absolute foreordination in all its forms.[35] Cocceius and others may have been motivated to soften a perceived harshness in older Calvinism, but they did not abandon absolute predestination as did the SCM. Additionally, federal theology's conception of covenant did not condition salvation on

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[31]*GPS*, 138.

[32]Ibid., 139.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., 75.

[35]Winfred Ernest Garrison, *Alexander Campbell's Theology: Its Sources and Historical Setting* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Co., 1909), 129, in *WAC* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1997).

human activity in any respect, as Garrison seemed to suggest. The consensus reached at Dort was united with federal theology by the middle of the seventeenth century and manifested in the Westminster Confession.[36] In contrast, from Campbell onward, the SCM's conception of covenant included a bilateral relationship "between God and man which attached much importance to human activity in salvation."[37] If this kind of covenant was an agreement in which God and man freely fulfill significant responsibilities prerequisite to man's salvation, then "a divine, irresistible decree is not a covenant."[38] This soteriological conditionalism was a departure from federal theology's conception of covenant, not the appropriation of it.

Garrison also seemed to misappropriate federal theology to directly support a conditionalism which skirted the Pelagian extreme of justification by works. On the one hand, he saw federalism upholding the sovereignty of God by distinguishing between divine and human covenants: "the covenant between God and man is not in all respects the same as a covenant between men, in which case the stipulations would be agreed upon by common consent. Here Cocceius guards against any infringement of the sovereignty of God."[39] Yet Garrison drew this conclusion, which seemed to be an unwarranted extrapolation: "Since God is the supreme ruler, it is in his power to formulate the conditions of the covenant and to offer it to men to be accepted or rejected."[40] Cocceius and federal theology did speak of a covenant as "an agreement

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[36]Benjamin Wirt Farley, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 169.

[37]Garrison, *Alexander Campbell's Theology*, 130, 134-35; cf. Thomas H. Olbricht, "The Bible as Revelation" *RQ* 8, no. 4 (1965): 211-232; idem, "Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ," *RQ* 37, no. 1 (1995) [on-line]; accessed 12 December 2002; available from http://www.restorationquarterly.org/Volume_037/rq03701olbricht.htm; Internet. See also Roy B. Ward, "The Restoration Principle: A Critical Analysis," *RQ* 8, No. 4 (1965) [on-line]; accessed 12 December 2002; available from http://www.restorationquarterly.org/Volume_008/rq00804ward.htm; Internet.

[38]Garrison, *Alexander Campbell's Theology*, 135.

[39]Ibid., 136.

[40]Ibid.

between God and man a sinner."[41] However, according to John Murray, that agreement was with an elect sinner, and any conditions of salvation were met by Christ, not by the sinner.[42] Garrison's conception of conditionalism might describe the relationship of God and Adam under federal theology's covenant of works, which existed prior to Adam's fall. When Adam sinned, however, that dispensation closed. Since that time, the covenant of grace has existed. In it, salvation is of sheer grace, with any conditions necessary for salvation met, not by men, but by Christ alone. Further, within this doctrine of the covenant of grace, God offers salvation through Christ to all who believe. Since this doctrine also affirms that none can believe without the special grace of God, this covenant is made only with believers, or the elect who were known by God before the foundation of the world. It is true that the elect are called to live in trustful obedience to God through the faith revealed in Scripture; however, while the elect are called to obey, all faithful obedience is a gift of God as well. In federal theology salvation remained of sheer grace, not conditioned on man's meeting of any conditions whatsoever. It, therefore, seems an unlikely candidate to be a direct source of the SCM's conditionalism.

It follows that Campbell's conception of conditional salvation would not seem to be derived directly from Reformed covenant theology. Regardless, he did develop the notion of a covenant of salvation. It was a bilateral covenant between God and man, in which even a non-elect sinner could freely choose to become one of the elect through faithful submission to God's conditions of pardon. This position, in turn, would come to characterize the SCM in general, and Brents in particular.[43] The movements of Campbell's "Disciples" and Stone's "Christians"

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[41]Johannes Cocceius, quoted in John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace* (London: Tyndale, 1954) [on-line]; accessed 18 December 2002; available from http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/etc/printer-friendly.asp?ID=229; Internet.

[42]Murray, *The Covenant of Grace.*

[43]Cf. Casey, "The Origins of Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ, Part 1."

> Both opposed the doctrine of predestination and sovereign, irresistible grace, as ending to discourage human effort and nullify the influence of the appeal of the Gospel to men's acceptance. . . . Both were practical movements, laying stress on the conditions which man must meet to put himself in right relations with God. They aimed to relieve penitent sinners of the uncertainty and agony of "waiting" and "seeking," and gave prominence to the answer to the question, "What shall we do?"–the terms of admission into the kingdom of God.[44]

In this conception of covenant, both contingency and human freedom were real, so an individual's free acceptance or rejection of certain divine conditions could actually impact his destiny. Campbell felt so strongly about what he called the "most perfect free agency and responsibility" of humans that he categorized them as necessary to the definition of "Christianity" itself.[45] Stone, like Campbell, also moved from his early Reformed soteriology to a similar position on free agency and conditionalism.[46]

This unique brand of conditional, bilateral, salvific covenant between God and man developed into a keystone of SCM soteriology. Those pioneers of the movement would likely give their reason as being that their doctrine was the most biblical. However, they also may have been motivated to adopt it because it was an alternative to Calvinism's absolute foreordination that seemed to be consistent with their assumptions about human freedom. Adherents of the SCM often expressed a marked distaste for Calvinism for reasons and in terms similar to those historically expressed by Arminians. They felt it made a mockery of human freedom, removed responsibility for sin from man and placed it with God, and determined the exclusion of some from salvation without the

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[44]Garrison, *Alexander Campbell's Theology*, 153; cf. A. Campbell, *The Memoirs of Elder Thomas Campbell* (Cincinnati: H. S. Bosworth, 1861), 201, in *WAC*; idem, *The Christian System* (n.p.:1835), 20, in *WAC*; cf. also Barton W. Stone, "Dialogue Continued from Page 100," *Christian Messenger* 6, no. 5 (1832): 129-33, in *BWS*; Cf. John A. Gano, "Christian Liberty," *Christian Messenger* 6, no. 2 (1832): 44-47, in *BWS*.

[45]Alexander Campbell and N. L. Rice, *A Debate Between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. L. RICE, on 'The Action, Subject, Design and Administrator of Christian Baptism; also, on the Character of Spiritual Influence in Conversion and Sanctification, and on the Expediency and Tendency of Ecclesiastic Creeds, as Terms of Union and Communion* (Lexington, KY: A. T. Skillman & Son, 1844), 322-23, in *WAC*.

[46]Barton W. Stone, "Dialogue Continued from Page 100," *Christian Messenger* 6, no. 5 (1832): 129-33, in *BWS*; Cf. John A. Gano, "Christian Liberty," *Christian Messenger* 6, no. 2 (1832): 44-47, in *BWS*.

warrant of–and even in opposition to–express scriptural terms. Like the SCM generation before him, Brents agreed. He felt that the notions of universal atonement, human freedom, and conditional salvation he valued were disparaged by Calvinism's doctrine of absolute foreordination. Additionally, to Brents, the traditional alternative doctrine of absolute simple foreknowledge had the same results. However, understanding God's foreknowledge to be limited became, to Brents, the only doctrine that could embrace libertarian freedom, universal atonement, and conditional salvation, and also remain consistent.[47]

The influence of attitudes toward foreknowledge. The SCM pioneers' desire for "pure speech" led them to a rather negative attitude toward doctrines which they perceived had relied more on philosophical abstraction and speculation than they did biblical terminology. Foreknowledge was one such doctrine. Its traditional expressions were viewed as speculative statements which predicated of God qualities which were not found to be expressly stated on the pages of the Bible. As such, they were viewed as rather unimportant, nonessential, and impractical. That people who hold something as unimportant or impractical would tend to neglect it, remove it from their possessions, or expend little effort in its defense, seems axiomatic. That axiom would seem to apply as well to abstract things, like teachings, and in particular, like the classical doctrines of foreknowledge. Since that doctrine did come to be perceived as impractical or nonessential even by the SCM's classical theists, it follows that they would have little motivation to defend it, or vigorously oppose alternatives like Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge. Such an attitude toward foreknowledge could have even encouraged Brents's development of an alternative. A. Campbell certainly displayed such an attitude.

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[47]See also Campbell and Rice, *A Debate*. Though they disagreed on the conditions, both Campbell and his opponent, N. L. Rice, agreed on conditionality, further illustrating the influence of conditionality inside and outside the SCM.

Commenting on Daniel Webster's confession of classical doctrines, for instance, Campbell expressed disdain for the traditional expressions of doctrine. In his view, it transcended the linguistic boundaries of Scripture as follows:

> Mr. Webster said, "I believe in the doctrines of foreknowledge and predestination." He should have said, 'I *assent* to these doctrines, because no man *believes*, nor can *believe*, mathematics, metaphysics, the philosophy, or *doctrines* of men or of demons. These forms of expression are wholly uncanonical, philosophical, and, at best purely metaphysical or speculative. An impure and uncanonical nomenclature is of Rome, of Babylon, or of Constantinople–not of Moses, of Paul, of Peter, or of Jesus Christ.[48]

Further, discussions of the fine points of prescience, to Campbell, were unprofitable and wasteful of Christian energies. His position manifests itself in this statement:

> How weak and foolish are the theoretic debates and disquisitions of theological schools on the practical difference between '*fore-knowledge* and *fore-ordination*.' If the Creator foresaw or foreknew the last man as clearly as the first man, before he had pronounced the first fiat, what avails the practical or the theoretical difference between '*fore knowledge* [*sic*] and *fore-ordination*'? The seeking of one grain of wheat in a bushel of chaff, is not a very profitable operation. Rather let us 'give all diligence to make our calling and election sure,' than waste our time and our energies on such foolish and untaught questions and debates.[49]

While Campbell personally assented to a classical view of foreknowledge, his combined passions for unity and for the pure speech which he believed would lead to it moved him to categorize the varied views of foreknowledge as nonessential to salvation and sanctification. Campbell articulated his classical view of foreknowledge as exhaustive in this excerpt from an essay on prophecy:

> Known to God alone is the future destiny of the entire universe, and of every atom of it. To him alone the past, the present and the future of every creature is as fully known as any present object ever is, or was, or can hereafter be, to us. Foreknown to God alone, and to him whom he inspires, is the future condition of any person or thing, within the entire area of creation. To God alone the past, the present, and the future of every atom in creation is always equally present.[50]

However, Campbell commented on an essay by J. Henshall entitled "Calvinism and Arminianism" in which Henshall specifically addressed predestination and

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[48]A. Campbell, "Daniel Webster's Confession of Faith," *MH* 3, no. 2 (1860): 95, n. §.

[49]A. Campbell, "Moses, the Oldest of Prophets," *MH* 5, no. 4 (1862): 168.

[50]A. Campbell, "Prophecy, No. 4" *MH* 4, no. 1 (1861): 18-19.

foreknowledge. In those comments, Campbell explicitly stated his view of those doctrines and placed the traditional articulations of predestination and foreknowledge into the category of speculation. In the same response, he also said, "I do not think that we are required either from the Book of God or our position as a Christian community, to take any ground upon sundry speculative questions on which religious parties have been pleased to place their communion tables. This kind of warfare belongs not at all to us."[51] Campbell's co-editor, W. K. Pendelton, held a classical Arminian view of foreknowledge as well, and joined Campbell in viewing it as a nonessential. "We do not expect and ought not . . . to claim, that, in a region [of theological discourse] so purely speculative as this, the special solution of any one mind should be made the faith or opinion of others."[52] Lard included the doctrine of foreknowledge in the category of difficult "cases where the great and learned of earth have paused and declined to risk even an opinion."[53]

These attitudes toward foreknowledge served not only to discourage the binding of one form or another as *the* orthodox position and to encourage the development of alternative explanations, they also served to encourage the free discussion of different opinions. Campbell's *Harbinger* regularly published innovative understandings of foreknowledge, like Duncan's, as well as opposition to alternative views, like Lynd's refutation of Clarke's doctrine.[54] Such journalistic labors were part and parcel of Campbell's labor to dissipate any temptations to dogmatism on one of the various understandings of foreknowledge or the other. As long as too much energy was not spent on them, and they used the language of Scripture, he considered any of them worthy of

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[51]A. Campbell, "Calvinism and Arminianism," *MH* 3, no. 6 (1846): 322-29; 325; 327. See this also for an interpretation that differs from Brents's exposition of the David/Keilah narrative.

[52]W. K. Pendleton, "Foreknowledge and Free Will," *MH* 36, no. 8 (1865): 375.

[53]Moses E. Lard, "Preaching," *Lard's Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1865): 327, in *MEL*.

[54]E.g., Alexander Campbell, "John M. Duncan on Foreknowledge," *MH* 4, no. 11 (1840): 486-91; S. W. Lynd, "The Omniscience of God," *MH* 3, no. 8 (1860): 423-25.

candid consideration; he asked only that others would join him in refusing such dogmatism on the subject as well. Stone was one of those who did just that.

Stone's early publications also exude a classical Reformed stance on the doctrine of foreknowledge.[55] Later publications, however, demonstrated that he had developed and redefined his understanding of divine foreknowledge. By 1842, "the foreknowledge of God," as Stone understood Scripture to reveal it, was not the absolute knowledge of all future things that will ever occur; it was simply "the knowledge [of future things which God had] made known by Moses and the prophets hundreds of years before" they happened.[56] Language very similar to this is found in Benjamin Franklin, who also held a classical understanding at one time.[57]

Around 1852, Franklin's publications demonstrated that he held a rather classical Arminian view of foreknowledge. "The prescience of God," he said, "is great and wonderful beyond all human comprehension, with the idea before the mind, that he looks down through the long cycles of time, and foresees every voluntary act of all the myriads of free agents in the universe."[58] Additionally, he affirmed that "nothing is hid from the omniscient one. In this sense there is neither foreknowledge nor after-knowledge with God."[59] Also, God was not the cause of that which he foresaw, and therefore, he remained guiltless. Franklin said,

> Man may be entirely free, and act freely, and the Lord may see before what he will do, and foretell it. This foreseeing, or foretelling, what a man will do is not the

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[55]B. W. Stone, "An Orthodox Sermon," *Christian Messenger* 7, no. 3 (1833): 78, in *BWS*; idem, "Remarks on the Confession of Faith" in *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone*, ed., John Rogers (Cincinnati: J. A. and U. P. Jones, 1847): 235, 237, in *BWS*.

[56]B. W. Stone, "The Christian Expositor," *Christian Messenger* 12, no. 6 (1842):171, in *BWS*; this is notably similar in Franklin below.

[57]A Bible-Christian, "To the Editor," and Stone, "A Reply to A Bible-Christian," *Christian Messenger* 2, no. 10 (1828): 229ff, in *BWS*.

[58]James Matthews and Benjamin Franklin, *Predestination and the Foreknowledge of God: A Discussion* (Cincinnati: Jethro Jackson, 1852), 219, in *BF* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1998).

[59]Benjamin Franklin, *The Gospel Preacher* (n.p., n.d.), 257, in *BF*.

> cause of his doing it; he would do just as he does, if the Lord had not foretold, or foreseen, what he would do at all. The Lord foreseeing, or foretelling, what a man will do is not the cause of his doing it, and has no control over his doing it.[60]

Further, Franklin affirmed the exhaustive foreknowledge of the Son incarnate. James Matthews, his debate opponent, had "already quoted Scripture to prove that there were some things which the Savior of the world--He in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily, *did not know*, in the common acceptation of the word know."[61] Franklin responded:

> This I do not believe. Those who said to him, "Thou knowest all things," spoke correctly. You may ask me then, how I get along with the passage quoted [Mark 13:32] that he knew not the day nor the hour of the judgment. There is not the least difficulty in this, unless you are bound down to my friend's forced construction of the word "know." Trinitarians have a thousand times explained all this, as my friend should have known. It was not for the Son to *make known* the period of judgment.[62]

Though these more classical affirmations permeated Franklin's publications in the early 1850s, by his debate with Joel Hume circa 1854, Franklin had modified his understanding of foreknowledge to suggest that God's certain knowledge of future events makes them unavoidable. Franklin said,

> The gentleman [Hume] says, he does not believe that God foreordained that Adam should sin; but he says, 'God knew Adam would sin.' If God knew that he would sin, could he have avoided it? Could that which God knew would be, fail to come to pass? Will my friend answer to these matters? Can sinners now avoid sin? Or will they be punished, for sins which they never had it in their power to avoid? I wish to show this audience what kind of free agency he believes in.[63]

This suggested that Franklin was among those who had begun to move away from the traditional Arminian view of foreknowledge, and to move toward the view that God's certain knowledge of some future events may not be exhaustive. In this case, the latter seemed necessary to preserve his conception of human freedom as libertarian, the moral

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[60]Ibid., 178.

[61]Matthews and Franklin, *Predestination and the Foreknowledge of God*, 129.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Joel Hume and Benjamin Franklin, *Total Hereditary Depravity* (Mt. Vernon, IN: Larkin Desouchet, 1854), 45, in *BF*.

accountability he thought depended on such freedom, and to avoid what he thought would make God the author of sin.

Franklin eventually suggested a definition of divine foreknowledge that was quite similar to Stone's, phrasing it as "*before-approve*." He illustrated his meaning with the notion of prophecy, saying that "the things predicted by the prophets are precisely what is in the Bible called the Foreknowledge of God."[64] He confidently suggested that no one can "show that anything else is called the Foreknowledge of God in the Bible."[65] At the same time, he rejected the Westminster Confession's definition of foreknowledge.[66] Like Hall, Brents, and others, Franklin had come to believe the question of foreknowledge was crucial. In the end, Franklin concluded that Christian heralds had but two choices: reject classical absolute foreknowledge, or "preach Universalism."[67]

The most extensive expression of limited foreknowledge discovered in the SCM, both similar to and prior to Brents's, also stressed human liberty in relation to responsibility. It was penned by Alexander Hall, a preacher, and the editor a monthly journal called the *Gospel Proclamation*. He was a restorationist with a high view of Scripture, though like many among his SCM contemporaries, his soteriology had leaned toward Pelagius: he had once asserted "the eternal destiny of man to be suspended on his own conduct!"[68] Though Hall had associated himself with the SCM, by 1849 Alexander Campbell had begun assert that some of Hall's work was not representative of the

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[64]Matthews and Franklin, *Predestination and the Foreknowledge of God*, 131.

[65]Ibid., 132.

[66]Ibid., 131.

[67]Ibid. Sadly, others in the SCM practiced the sophistry of associating Reformed omnideterminism with Universalism prior to Brents's doing so. To paraphrase Baptist Jeremiah Jeter, "Such a practice has no place in Christian discourse."

[68]Alexander Hall, *Universalism Against Itself* (St. Clairsville, OH: Heaton and Gressinger, 1846), 345. This seems to imply a bit more for human merit than did the more simple conditional soteriology of other SCM leaders.

movement's churches.[69] Further, Hall had been involved in some ecclesiastical strife, and the *Harbinger* had described his intellectual abilities and moral conduct as greatly lacking; the course of events which undergirded the *Harbinger*'s description contributed to a falling out between Hall and Alexander Campbell.[70] Other SCM literature slighted Hall's theology as well.[71] While the breach with Campbell was later healed, the name of Alexander Hall faded from the SCM's major journals.[72] However, regardless of his intellectual, moral or theological history, Hall had published a polemic tome entitled *Universalism Against Itself*, which had the potential to influence the SCM's conception of foreknowledge, and Brents's conception specifically.[73] Printed in 1846, nearly 10 years before Brents came to his conclusions and nearly thirty years prior to the publication of his *GPS*, Hall's book contained a doctrine of foreknowledge substantially similar to Brents's which could have encouraged Brents's understanding of omniscience.[74] Hall's refutation of Universalism hinged significantly on his doctrine of limited foreknowledge. Even so, the more classical A. Campbell wrote that Hall's book was "a very clear, ample, and satisfactory refutation of that species of skepticism usually called Universalism."[75]

At the time Hall wrote, views of limited foreknowledge seemed to have been prevalent enough to be assigned the familiar epithet of "limitarianism" by their

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[69]A. Hall, "The Gospel Proclamation," *MH Extra* 4, no. 4 (1847): 8; R. R. "Prospectus of the Gospel Proclamation," *MH* 4, no. 9 (1847): 536; "Retaliatory Discipline," *MH* 6, no. 11 (1849): 633.

[70]"A Case of Discipline," *MH* 6, no. 7 (1849): 383-405; "Retaliatory Discipline," 626-44; A. Campbell, "Alexander Hall's Extra Proclamation," *MH* 7, no. 5 (1850): 207; idem, "Brother Alexander Hall," *MH* 7, no. 8 (1850): 480.

[71]"Book Table," *Christian Standard* (May 2, 1874): 141.

[72]"A Case of Discipline," *MH* 6, no. 7 (1849): 383-405; "Retaliatory Discipline," 626-44; A. Campbell, "Alexander Hall's Extra Proclamation," *MH* 7, no. 5 (1850): 207; idem, "Brother Alexander Hall," *MH* 7, no. 8 (1850): 480.

[73]Hall, *Universalism Against Itself*, passim.

[74]Hall published in 1846; Brents wrote in 1874 that he came to his conclusions "some twenty years ago," *GPS*, 87.

[75]T. M. Allen and A. Campbell, "New Publication," *MH* 4, no. 2 (1847): 120.

detractors.[76] Based on the AV's translation of Psalm 78:41, Hall and those with like views of foreknowledge, were accused of committing the same sin as did Israel in the wilderness when they "limited the holy one of Israel."[77] While Hall claimed that he did not profess to understand "every thing, connected with the incomprehensible Jehovah," he did present some amazingly self-assured conclusions, e.g., "if sin came into existence contrary to the will of God, as we see must have been the fact, then no other conclusion can follow, only that he could not prevent it."[78] He elaborated as follows, revealing both his assumption of libertarian freedom and his doctrine of God's limited (or qualified) attributes:

> But I know it is urged that all things are possible with God. This however is not true, without being qualified; for it is "impossible for God to lie," [Heb. 6.18.] and "*He cannot deny himself.*" [2 Tim: 2.13.] Upon the same principle, it would be impossible for God to make man a moral agent, and to make him a machine at the same time, and thus only, can we account for the fact, that it was impossible for God to prevent the exercise of sin.[79]

Hall affirmed that conditionality was attached to many divine promises even when it was not expressed.[80] To apply this affirmation to his rejection of some Universalists' interpretation of Genesis 22:18, Hall invoked a hermeneutic rule which he asserted was necessary to maintain the Bible's consistency and divinity: "That rule is this: that a condition being expressed in any part of the bible [*sic*] with respect to any promise or threat, that condition must be understood as implied, in all other places where that promise or threat is recorded, [even] if not there expressed!"[81] Several pages of supporting argument followed, consisting mostly of Hall's interpretation of selected

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[76]Hall, *Universalism Against Itself*, 318.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Ibid., 336.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid., 5-6.

[81]Ibid., 6.

Scriptures he perceived to demonstrate the necessity of this rule.[82] This course of action seemed required to support his case for free will, for which, unlike Brents, Hall attempted to make a biblical case: "there is not a chapter in the Bible," said Hall, "but that holds man as a voluntary, responsible agent, –praise worthy, or blame worthy as his conduct is good or bad!"[83] Free will and contingency were, to Hall, necessary to real human moral agency and responsibility. As would be expected, he opposed Universalism's pancausality and his opponent's assertion that human freedom is a "chimera."[84]

Hall devoted his ninth chapter to the attributes of God, and composed it in the form of a polemic dialogue with a Universalist opponent (whether or not it is the record of an actual discussion cannot be ascertained).[85] Alpha, the Universalist, affirmed that the main doctrine upon which their positions would stand or fall was "*the foreknowledge of God*"; and his position declared "that foreknowledge does, and must imply foreordination." Alpha further clarified his meaning by adding "that whenever God foreknew a thing would take place, he that instant decreed it," and asserted that divine foreknowledge did not necessarily imply causality.[86]

Hall presented nearly the exact position of willful divine ignorance that Brents would come to articulate in *GPS* nearly thirty years later. Not "that God could not have known that man would sin, had he been disposed to know it; this is not my ground," said

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[82]Ibid., 6-10.

[83]Ibid., 356. After attempting to create a dilemma for his opponent, Hall presented Scripture as evidence for his case (Deut 30:19; Exod 17:9; 2 Sam 24:12; Prov 1:28-29; Isa 65:12; Heb 11:24-25; 1 Cor 11:2; 1 Cor 9:1; Matt 10:8; and Ezra 7:13), along with brief commentary and argumentation, and concluded for libertarian freedom: "From the foregoing testimonies we discover that man has a volition,–the power of *choosing* or *refusing*."

[84]Ibid., 346.

[85]Ibid., 316-423.

[86]Ibid., 381; cf., 318-23. Interestingly, this Universalist seems unique in that his definition of omniscience placed God's foreknowledge before his immutable decree; this makes his conception of prescience and foreordination seem more like those of classical Arminianism. He had grounded God's decree in his foreknowledge, in contrast to foreordination, which grounded God's foreknowledge in his decree.

Hall. "My position is, that it was not necessary for him to know it, and he had power enough to keep from it."[87] Hall defended this by attempting to argue from an analogy between God's omnipotence and omniscience. The affirmation that God is all-powerful means that he possesses all power, not that he uses all power at all times; Hall saw the affirmation that God is all-knowing in a similar way, "not the knowing of every thing, but simply the infinite ability to know every thing. . . . God can *do* what he pleases, and God can *know* what he pleases."[88] This made perfect sense to Hall: men should not affirm that the Almighty has absolute control over his omnipotence, "whilst over the attribute of knowledge he cannot exercise the least control."[89] Brents would come to argue similarly.

Other potential influences. The unique political culture of the early United States had the potential to influence Brents as well. The Union was in many respects a social experiment begun by people escaping religious and political tyranny. As they formed their new republic, they sought to prevent such persecution from becoming a characteristic of their new home, and institutionalized human freedom and tolerance. Yet the emerging political philosophy was not free from theological influence. It was molded in some respects by deistic statesmen like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who had been influenced by the Enlightenment generally and Locke specifically. Alexander Campbell, who was highly esteemed by Brents, also had valued Locke.[90] And Locke was reputed by Socinians to have developed and perfected their principles of freedom and

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[87]Ibid.

[88]Ibid., 399; Hall attempted to support his affirmation with four texts: Jer 7:31; Gen 18:20; Gen 6:6-7; Exod 23:14; however, he did not seem to realize that, even if these texts demonstrated that God did not know some things, they did not support Hall's premise of voluntary ignorance, viz., that the reason God did not know when he had the power to know is that he opted for ignorance in those particular cases.

[89]Ibid., 400.

[90]Clarence A. Athearn, *The Religious Education of Alexander Campbell* (n.p.: n.d.), in *WAC*; cf. Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: the Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 12, 26, 31-32, 51, 226; cf. also Casey, "The Origins of Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ, Part 1," 88-89.

toleration.[91] As stated in chapter 2, the Socinians could not reconcile their conception of human freedom with either traditional understanding of absolute foreknowledge. So, they concluded that God's foreknowledge must be limited, and their doctrine of human freedom became the ground for their doctrine of limited foreknowledge. They had argued as follows: as "the omnipotence of God is his ability to do whatever is possible, so his omniscience is his knowledge of everything knowable. However, as free acts are in their nature uncertain, as they may or may not be, they cannot be known before they occur."[92] While America's founders did not specifically institutionalize a doctrine of divine foreknowledge, they did institutionalize a theological doctrine of human self-determination; human liberty was as much a self-evident divine gift as was life itself. The Declaration expressed it like this: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men . . . are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life [and] Liberty."[93] With human self-determinism and the political tolerance it implied institutionalized in the founding principles of the country, and with the Locke-influenced Alexander Campbell proclaiming that human free agency inheres in the definition of Christianity, one is tempted to wonder, not *whether* the climate of American political liberty influenced Brents directly or through Campbell, but *how much*.[94]

Human freedom had been highly valued in the Wesleyan-Methodist tradition as well, and men in this tradition soon began to reject the traditional understanding of foreknowledge as absolute. Most prominent among them was Lorenzo Dow McCabe, a professor at Ohio Wesleyan University, who was developing his doctrine of limited foreknowledge at roughly the same time as Hall and Brents were developing theirs. No

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[91]Marian Hillar, "From the Polish Socinians to the American Constitution," *A Journal from the Radical Reformation: a Testimony to Biblical Unitarianism* 4, no. 3 (1994): 22-57 [on-line]; accessed 23 December 2002; available from http://www.socinian.org/polish_socinians.html, and http://www.socinian.org/polish_socinians2.html; Internet.

[92]Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 1:400-01.

[93]U. S. Declaration of Independence, Introduction.

[94]Campbell and Rice, *A Debate*, 322-23.

direct dependence of one doctrine of limited foreknowledge on another could be established. However, McCabe developed his comprehensive doctrine of divine nescience in the same state of Ohio where Hall had published his, and just one state removed from Brents's Tennessee home. This, along with the publication of McCabe's first work on foreknowledge within five years of Brents's publication of *GPS*, makes these coincidences even more curious.[95] In any event, though there was no direct connection established between these authors, their doctrines of foreknowledge corresponded with one another.[96]

The cultural realities in which Brents was reared, the existence of other doctrines of divine nescience, and the traditions to which Brents had been exposed in his fellowship, all composed the context in which Brents did theology. Whether, or how much this context influenced his doctrinal conclusions will likely remain debatable. Two things are certain, however. He did do theology in that context, and in that context he developed his doctrine of limited foreknowledge.

Brents on Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

In his *Gospel Plan of Salvation*, Brents devoted the fourth chapter's brief fourteen pages to "The Foreknowledge of God." Additionally, short, related statements of varied significance appeared in his first three chapters on predestination, election, reprobation, and the examination of Calvinistic proofs. The book as a whole in its original form filled over six-hundred pages. That Brents did not intend to compose a comprehensive doctrine of foreknowledge should be apparent from the contrast of his brief treatment of foreknowledge with the size of the book as a whole. His primary intentions for the book were fairly clear: to persuade people to reject Calvinism and

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[95]Lorenzo Dow McCabe, *The Foreknowledge of God* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1887); the book was first published in 1879, cf. "Lorenzo Dow McCabe, D.D., LL. D.," *Western Christian Advocate* (June 23, 1897): 772.

[96]McCabe published a second volume a few years later, entitled *Divine Nescience of Future Contingencies: A Necessity* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1882).

replace it with what Brents's believed to be the gospel plan of salvation. He saw his views as a needed alternative to Calvinism. On the one hand, he believed his doctrine to enable ministers to fully offer salvation by grace to all men (not just the foreordained elect); those men, in turn, could know with certainty they were of God's elect when they believed the gospel of Christ, and obeyed him in repentance, confession, and baptism.

Obedience to the ordinance of immersion baptism as part of the plan of salvation had been a norm of the movement since its early years. Believers' baptism was preached as the visible symbol which, for those who obeyed it, represented that distinct moment in time when God placed them among the elect. It became popular among those Christians who were dissatisfied with what they felt were the vagaries and uncertainties of the traditions they knew: the mourners bench, praying through, or passively waiting for an experience of God's grace to suggest to them, without any tangible certainty, that they might be among the elect.[97] In the soteriology which came to prevail in the SCM, when a man's faith and repentance converged in baptism, he could at that very moment be certain he was no longer lost, but saved. The SCM saw the New Testament's baptismal Scriptures as identifying the ordinance as a line of demarcation, a door of sorts through which a believer entered into Christ and enabled him to know with certainty that he was saved. Since the alternative traditions and their perceived uncertainty were often associated with Calvinism, Brents saw the dismantling of those doctrines as necessary to the accomplishment of his goals. His greatest effort would be applied to the removal of what he perceived to be their bulwark: absolute predestination. If absolute predestination could be felled, Brents believed that the rest of Calvinism would, of necessity, fall with it.[98] He also seemed to know that, to do so, he would have to articulate what he believed to be a more biblical understanding, so that a void would not be left where the Reformed doctrines once stood. Further, it had to be a Bible-based doctrine that would appeal to

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[97]Campbell and Rice, *A Debate*, 322-23.

[98]*GPS*, 13.

people who had soured on the classical traditions in some way, but who still revered the Bible. Brents set out to do this, in part, with his doctrine of limited foreknowledge.

He began with a few significant assumptions. Without argument, he presumed that men can know God, but only as he has revealed himself in the Bible. There could be no other manifestation of God than that revealed in Scripture, for it was God's "full and perfect revelation of himself."[99] Humans could know God only through this revelation. Such knowledge of God was the only knowledge of God justifiable for Brents. In keeping with the SCM's rule of express statement, this was exactly the type of knowledge that dispensed with what he perceived to be untrustworthy human opinions based on "supposed attributes of God."[100] The latter he associated with the Calvinism and Universalism he opposed. Brents also assumed a linear view of time, in which all of human history was potentially available for God to know (should he choose to know).

> In the morning of the first day, God could have looked down the stream of time and have seen the secret intentions of every heart that would ever be subjected to His law, but in infinite mercy, He saw fit to *avoid* a knowledge of every thing *incompatible with the freedom of the human will* and the system of government devised by him for man."[101]

Perhaps his most significant assumption was human libertarian freedom, which he thought was so self evident or axiomatic, apparently, that it needed no detailed argument. So significant was human freedom to Brents that at one point he asserted that "God did not know, before making man, just how wicked he would be, simply because such foreknowledge would have been incompatible with the free-agency and responsibility of man."[102] Whether or not he was conscious of it, this was essentially the same argument made by the Socinians before him. One may suggest that Brents's biblical arguments implied such freedom, which were then augmented by his statements

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[99]Ibid., 501.

[100]Ibid., 75.

[101]Ibid., 77.

[102]Ibid., 77.

about the genuineness of God, particularly, the genuineness of the conditional covenants Brents thought Scripture revealed. Yet, Brents never argued for free agency outright–biblically or philosophically. The closest he came to it was quoting some of Adam Clarke's philosophical musings which addressed both divine foreknowledge and human freedom, and claiming that they represented views which he had "long entertained."[103]

However, in the excerpt of Clarke he quoted, Clarke also did little more than assume human freedom and deny divine omnideterminism because, to him, affirming otherwise would be both blasphemy and absurdity. Speckled with inflammatory language, Clarke's essay ultimately did little more than assert that libertarian freedom was necessary to human moral responsibility, and that omnideterminism would certainly, though fairly, make God the sole responsible agent of all evil and sin.[104] Brents did assert that, for man to "be responsible, man must be free," that the "great scheme of salvation conceived by Infinite Wisdom contemplated human responsibility based on freedom of will," and that it was impossible "to harmonize the *free-agency* of man and the *unlimited foreknowledge* of God."[105] However, he neither argued in greater depth for libertarian free will, nor specifically addressed arguments for alternative views of human freedom. In sum, while he did inquire "*whether or not God eternally foreknew every thing that has ever come to pass*," he neither asked whether or not God had created man with real freedom, addressed with any depth the relationship between divine foreknowledge and human liberty, nor presented detailed biblical or philosophical arguments for the human contra-causal freedom he advocated.[106]

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[103]Ibid., 86.

[104]Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, 5b:403-05; also quoted in *GPS*, 86.

[105]*GPS*, 77, 75.

[106]Ibid., 75.

Brents imagined himself relying on the Bible alone; yet he was likely influenced, at least subconsciously, by the encouragement which came from contemporaries in and out of the SCM who either shared or refused to strongly oppose his views, the era's socio-political climate, and the movement's distinct theology. The latter was comprised of its distinct hermeneutics, the accompanying ecclesiological agenda for unity, and its unique species of soteriological conditionalism. His ready acceptance of these things likely helped him to conclude that the supplanting of Calvinistic soteriology was necessary to his work. For Brents, that primarily involved not only the debunking of absolute predestination, but also the redefinition of divine foreknowledge itself.

Regarding his understanding of divine foreknowledge as "limited," Brents added a qualifier: he believed that God was *capable* of knowing all future events. "For we know He did foretell many things long before they came to pass. The Psalmist says, 'Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is *infinite*,' Ps cxlvii:5."[107] He did believe, however, that something may be or can be unknown by him whose understanding is infinite.[108] Just as omnipotence allows some things the omnipotent one can not do (e.g., God cannot lie, because of his nature; or cannot create hills without a low place between them, because it is a definitional or logical impossibility), he thought omniscience also may allow some things the omniscient one does not know. God had the power to avoid foreknowledge of everything incompatible with his attributes, creation, and scheme of salvation, Brents thought.[109] He understood God to possess the *power* to know all things, but also the power and freedom to choose *not* to know some things. God, to Brents, had actually exercised that power and freedom. Specifically, God had limited the exercise of his ability to know in a manner and to an extent compatible with

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[107]Ibid., 76.

[108]Ibid.

[109]Ibid., 76-77.

his divine economy, which, to Brents, included the moral accountability of man based on human free agency.

Brents also lobbied for the acceptance of a significant distinction between conceptions of omniscience, one as "to know all things," the other as "to know *and foreknow* all things." He affirmed that God has knowledge of every "thing," defined a "thing" as something which has existence, and concluded that such knowledge is quite different from knowledge of a future thing, which is knowledge of "a thing *before it is a thing*, or when it has no existence."[110] For Brents, to say that "God knows all things" was the biblical definition of omniscience; that definition, however, did not necessarily include the knowledge of all *future* things. This he attempted to establish from Scripture, invoking statements related to omniscience made by, and made about, Jesus.[111] On the one hand, the disciples said Jesus knew all things (John 16:30 and 21:17). To Brents, however, the confession that Jesus knew all things did not mean that He *fore*knew all things, because Mark 13:32 described a knowledge of the future held by God the Father and not by Jesus. Brents saw the Mark passage as manifesting some future "thing that is certain [Jesus] did *not* know; hence the fact that Jesus *knew* all things did not imply that He *foreknew* every thing."[112] If such a statement did mean he foreknew everything, Brents thought consistency would demand that it meant "the disciples to whom John wrote [also] had unlimited foreknowledge," for the phrase "you know all things" was used with reference to them as well (1 John 2:20).[113] Based on the foregoing, Brents thought that his affirmation of divine omniscience, thus explained, was both valid and biblical, even though he excluded from his definition of omniscience the absolute knowledge of some *future* things before those things existed. In essence, he defined

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[110]Ibid., 83.

[111]Ibid.

[112]Ibid., 83-84.

[113]Ibid., 84.

God's omniscience as the knowledge of all things it is logically possible for him to know, and excluded divine foreknowledge of free human decisions from the category of such logically knowable things. In Brents's mind, the foregoing arguments were enough for him to draw the following conclusion, which essentially summarized his position:

> We shall continue to believe that our heavenly Father had power to limit the exercise of His knowledge to an extent compatible with the free-agency and accountability of man and the scheme of salvation devised for him, until we are shown a more excellent way. This being so, neither Calvinism nor Universalism can be sustained by their long-cherished hobby, unlimited "foreknowledge."[114]

Further, Brents believed that the Bible revealed that God sometimes changed his mind, and concluded that a divine economy with such divine volitional mutability made unlimited foreknowledge impossible within that economy. On the one hand, he reasoned that if God foreknew all things with absolute certainty, a change of mind would be impossible because it would falsify his foreknowledge and prove him to have been mistaken and imperfect, which God cannot be. On the other hand, if God foreknew all things, does not change his mind, and caused Scripture to be written which positively affirmed that he had changed his mind, then he would be deceptive or insincere, which God cannot be. The solution to these apparent impossibilities existed, for Brents, in what he believed were Scriptural portrayals of God really changing his mind, or repenting. If Scripture revealed that God did change his mind, it would negate the doctrine of absolute foreknowledge, and the apparent impossibilities would go away. So, he set out to demonstrate that the Bible revealed a theology of very real divine repentance.

Brents's attempt at a biblical argument for divine repentance began with Exodus 32:10-14. He reasoned that God actually intended to destroy Israel at Sinai for their idolatrous worship of the golden calf. However, Moses "reminds the Lord of His deliverance of this people, and what His enemies would say of His motives" should he

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[114]Ibid., 84.

destroy the Israelites.[115] To Brents, Moses's intercession was "too powerful to be resisted" by God; so, Moses's "speech prevailed," and "the Lord repented."[116] Brents took the text at face value–God repented–and suggested that any other conclusion would mean that the Lord was deceptive or pretentious.[117] In Brents's understanding, God had expressly stated that he had "repented of the evil which he thought to do unto His people, and *did not do that which he thought he would do*."[118] To Brents, the only alternative to taking this literally seemed absurd: "But if He eternally foreknew every thing that comes to pass, it follows that He foreknew that He would not do this evil to His people; hence, *He knew He would not do that which He thought He would do*."[119] Brents refused to see how this could be true, for if it was, it seemed to portray God as insincere or deceptive. His approach's emphasis on the express statements of Scripture, or a text's face value, comes to the surface here. Though he believed that men may engage in such insincere or deceptive communication, they should not

> cast such an imputation upon the God we adore. The inspired Word is the *measure of our faith*; hence, when it says God thought He would do a thing, we accept it as *true*, feeling sure that no valid objection can be brought against it. The Book of God, to be worthy of its Author, must be harmonious in all its teaching.[120]

So, since the Scriptures expressly stated that God repented, he believed they should be accepted, confessed, and allowed to coexist in harmony with other Scriptures which expressly stated that God was changeless, even though such harmony might be mysterious or inexplicable by humans. To Brents, this was preferable to subordinating one text (as metaphor) to another (as literal) based on a preconception of what God's

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[115]Ibid., 82-83.

[116]Ibid.

[117]Ibid., 83.

[118]Ibid.

[119]Ibid.

[120]Ibid.

attributes should be, even if doing so was comforting or produced the satisfaction of systematic harmony.

Brents did do some harmonizing of his own–though, he claimed, not with Scripture. He did it with with the classical systems of prescience. Calvinism had grounded God's absolute foreknowledge in his eternal predetermination, but Arminianism distinguished itself by grounding his predestination in his simple foreknowledge of free human choices. Brents, however, placed both doctrines in the same category. He reasoned much as did A. Campbell, that they both resulted in the same unalterable destiny, so their distinctions were fundamentally meaningless.[121] To Brents, therefore, what God foreknows must come to pass "because God is perfect and does not err."[122] So, the question of whether God absolutely foreknows because he eternally predestined the future, or because he had an eternal prevision of it, seemed inconsequential. Divine absolute simple foreknowledge and divine absolute predestination ended with exactly the same result. Brents said, "as the final destiny of every person must be exactly as foreseen by God, it follows that such foreknowledge amounted to an immutable decree."[123]

For example, he claimed that if God foreknew "that Cain would kill his brother," whether he predetermined it or simply foresaw it, "then there was no possibility left to Cain to avoid the deed."[124] For, "had there been such possibility," Brents said, then "Cain might have availed himself of it, and failed to do that which God foreknew he would do, thereby falsifying the foreknowledge of God."[125] Brents concluded that, whether one chose to travel the route of absolute simple foreknowledge, or absolute immutable decree,

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[121]A. Campbell, "Moses: the Oldest of Prophets," 168.

[122]*GPS*, 83. On linear foreknowledge, see *GPS*, 77, e.g., God's ability to "look down the stream of time."

[123]Ibid., 74.

[124]Ibid, 74.

[125]Ibid.

he would arrive at the same place, namely, at a "destiny which man had no power to avert."[126] By focusing on what he saw as indistinguishable results, Brents was able to place all views of unlimited divine prescience in the same category and make one case against absolute divine foreknowledge *per se*, regardless of the particular strain. Having assumed free-will, redefined omniscience, and categorized all views of absolute foreknowledge together in terms of their results, Brents inquired whether or not the Bible justified such a doctrine of absolute foreknowledge.[127]

Biblical grounds for rejecting unlimited divine foreknowledge. In Brents's view, both Calvinists and Universalists shared an essential agreement, namely, "*that God, from all eternity, foreknew everything that has, or ever will, come to pass*; therefore, He foreknew just who and how many would be saved, and who, if any, would be lost."[128] If God possessed such perfect foreknowledge, his infallible will or prescience could not be resisted. Yet Brents believed that commandments like those in the decalogue, when considered in light of the sincerity of God and the perspicuity of Scripture, led to the inescapable conclusion that God can be resisted.[129] He understood the doctrines of absolute foreknowledge to imply that no one can "successfully resist that which God has unchangeably ordained"; in contrast, he understood Romans to explicitly state that humans can resist the ordinances of God (Rom 13:1-2).[130] Brents not only believed the resistance revealed by God through Paul to be possible, but also to be condemned by God. Furthermore, since "God is not the author of sin" (like the resistance which Paul condemned), he could not have predestined that resistance. Because of these things, Brents concluded that neither version of absolute foreknowledge was as biblically

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[126]Ibid.

[127]Ibid., 75.

[128]Ibid., 74.

[129]Ibid., 8.

[130]Ibid., 9.

supportable as his doctrine of limited foreknowledge.[131] His argument proceeded in this manner: (1) God can be resisted (Rom 13:1-2); (2) His decrees often appear to be conditional and thus, depending on their acceptance or rejection, subject to change (Nineveh, Jonah 3:4-10; Hezekiah, 2 Kgs 20:1, 5-6; David at Keilah, 1 Sam 23:11-13); and (3) "hence, circumstances, and not immutable decrees, controlled" these events.[132] He thought other "examples might be given" to support his thesis, but to him, these were "enough to show that God has issued decrees that have never come to pass, nor never [*sic*] will come to pass. . . . Circumstances have ever varied God's dealings with man."[133]

In Brents's mind, if unlimited divine foreknowledge obtained, then God cannot be resisted; and if God's decrees were absolute, eternal, and solely of his will–as he understood the Westminster Confession to define them–then they were not conditioned on human faith or the lack thereof. To Brents, if this doctrine of absolute decrees was true, then he perceived Scripture to reveal that God had said things which he knew to be contrary to fact. For example, "when He told David that Saul would come to Keilah," he was "telling him that events should happen which He had unchangeably ordained to be otherwise" because Saul did not come to Keilah, and God had known from eternity that he would not come to Keilah.[134] "How such a theory is to be harmonized with the word of the Lord, we know not," Brents said.[135] He considered the divine repentance text of the flood narrative (Gen 6:5-6) to constitute a similar example. He concluded that, "if the Lord fore-ordained everything that comes to pass, then He fore-ordained everything that the antediluvians did: why, then, should He grieve over their wickedness, when every act was but the consummation of His own immutable and eternal decree? Really, it would

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[131]Ibid.

[132]Ibid., 10-11.

[133]"Circumstances" like those in Jeremiah 18:7-10; *GPS*, 10-11.

[134]*GPS*, 11.

[135]Ibid.

seem like God grieving over his own folly."[136] Brents also wondered how God could say that something "never came into [his] mind" when everything had been foreordained by Him (Jer 7:31 and 19:5).[137] Noting the Jews' offering of their children as burnt sacrifices to Molech (Jer 14 and 32), Brents said,

> Let it be remembered that Calvinism assumes that God eternally and immutably fore-ordained every thing that comes to pass. It did come to pass that the Jews did these things; therefore it follows that God fore-ordained that they should do them; and yet He says it never came into his mind that they should do them.[138]

Brents saw the divine foreordination of that which never entered the mind of God to be an impossibility.[139] He saw a dilemma: either God contradicted himself, or the form of predestination he combated contradicted Scripture. Since Brents assumed the validity of this dilemma, and since a self-contradicting God would not be an option for Brents or his opponents who held a doctrine of absolute foreknowledge, Brents thought his doctrine of limited foreknowledge should be considered a reasonable solution.

Romans 9:20-23 and Jeremiah 18:1-10 were also viewed as providing a biblical solution to the "problem" of absolute predestination. Brents admitted that the divine sovereignty communicated in the parable of the potter and the clay "shows that God had the power to bless and prosper a nation, or to pluck up and destroy it."[140] However, he concluded that "the figure also shows that He will exercise His power in the salvation or

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[136]Ibid.

[137]Ibid., 12.

[138]Ibid., 82.

[139]Brents seems to have based his argument here on a text with a debatable meaning. It did not necessarily mean that the Jewish child sacrifices were completely surprising to God, that they had never entered his heart or thoughts, as Brents seems to understand it. The text could be understood to reveal that God never entertained the idea of *commanding* such atrocities.

[140]*GPS*, 62.

destruction of nations, as they obey or rebel against Him, and not according to eternal decrees."[141] Further, Brents perceived that when

> the lump of clay marred in the hand of the potter, so that it would not make a vessel unto honor, as first contemplated, he worked it over and made of the *same lump* another vessel as it pleased him. The theory (of immutable foreordination) will not allow the purposes of God to fail; on the contrary, they insist that his vessels always come out just as He designed them. If so, the clay never mars in his hand, and hence, there is not fitness in the parable.[142]

In Brents's mind, absolute divine foreknowledge not only evacuated meaning from parables like this, it contradicted numerous other orthodoxies, was logically incoherent, and impugned the holy nature of God himself. He said,

> If the doctrine [of unlimited foreknowledge] be true, the whole theory of sin, accountability, rewards, and punishments, in harmony with justice and mercy, is to us utterly incomprehensible. Every act of man is but carrying out the immutable purposes of Jehovah; and when He gives a man a law, He does it expressly that he may violate it, so as to furnish a pretext for the punishment previously ordained for him. . . . Such a theory is at war with the Bible–with all reason and common sense–as well as a reproach upon the character of our Heavenly Father."[143]

Brents did consider and respond to attempts to refute apparent scriptural limitations on divine foreknowledge with arguments that affirmed that God, in those instances, had accommodated his language. Brents began by admitting that such accommodation of speech was a reasonable and valid means of communication which deserved consideration. His examination of accommodation, as he perceived his opponents to have argued it from the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative, focused primarily on Genesis 18:21: "I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know."[144] While Brents allowed that such accommodation was a possibility, and even accepted the practice, he insisted that even accommodated words have meaning. Accommodated language must

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[141]Ibid., 59.

[142]Ibid., 62.

[143]Ibid., 12.

[144]Quoted in *GPS*, 79.

communicate accurately the same message as the language for which it is substituted–that is, if a particular argument for accommodation is to have validity, Brents asserted. To him, valid accommodation would not justify disingenuousness or deception on the part of God. Therefore, he rejected arguments for accommodation in Genesis 18:21, reasoning as follows.

If the language in Genesis 18:21 was accommodated at all, it was accommodated not to God, but to Abraham. As Abraham was the party addressed, the language used must have been adapted to his comprehension in such a way, and with such words as would accurately convey the thoughts God intended to communicate. In other words, for the argument that this case exemplified divine accommodation to be valid, it must be demonstrated that God used words that would best embody the thought he intended to communicate to Abraham. Otherwise, if God used words to convey one thought when he designed to communicate another, God would be deceptive, and this can not be. Quoting first Genesis 18:21–"I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know"– Brents then related it to unlimited divine foreknowledge, saying, "if He meant that He had *always seen* and *always known* the things spoken of, we insist that the language used not only failed to be accommodated to the thought [God intended to communicate], but was calculated to make a false impression upon all before whom it might come."[145]

For Brents, the claim that God's speech in Genesis 18:21 was a linguistic condescension, an accommodation to human cognition, implied that God was the author of confusion, or at least one who deliberately left false impressions. As such, that claim failed Brents's test of validity. To him, it could not support accommodation at all, for it held that the language spoken by God communicated a message which was different from the message intended by God. To Brents, those who argued for linguistic accommodation in this case had misunderstood or misused an otherwise valid linguistic device to defend

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[145]*GPS.*, 79.

their conception of absolute foreknowledge against an express statement of Scripture. This example from Genesis 18 should suffice to illustrate Brents's response to the argument for accommodation. However, Brents perceived other divine statements to be parallel biblical examples. He used them in an attempt to further illustrate that language means something, and that arguments from accommodation in the cases considered were invalid, for they present God as either failing to communicate, creating confusion, or contradicting his nature (e.g., he cannot lie, Titus 1:2; he is not the author of confusion, 1 Cor 14:33). The answer resounding in his mind was not to create a rhetorical fallacy from accommodation to circumvent or subordinate texts like Genesis 18:21 to absolutist texts; it was to give up doctrines of unlimited divine foreknowledge and confess the express statements of Scripture *qua* Scripture.

Philosophical grounds for rejecting unlimited divine foreknowledge. While Brents placed all theories of unlimited foreknowledge together, he primarily focused his attention on the doctrine expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646: "God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass."[146] He took pains to clarify what he thought was in dispute and what he thought was not, sketching his perception of "the extent of the doctrine in this controversy. It is not that God has from all eternity ordained, but that he has unchangeably ordained, not *some things*, but *whatsoever* comes to pass–everything."[147] His extended reference to Adam Clarke represented his most lengthy list of philosophical reasons for denying doctrines of absolute predestination and simple foreknowledge. Although Brents claimed that he had already thoroughly formed his own positions before he became familiar with Clarke's position, and although he noted that Clarke offered "not a single scriptural quotation or reference in proof of the

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[146]Quoted in *GPS*, 85.

[147]*GPS*, 9.

positions taken," Brents found Clarke "simply irresistible" and representative of the views Brents had "long entertained."[148] Therefore, Brents represented his own position by quoting an extended passage from Clarke's commentary.

Where Brents would have used the phrase "limited foreknowledge," Clarke preferred "contingent foreknowledge," though the terminology is used synonymously. Since the idea of divine self-limitation today is disconcerting to some, perhaps similar contexts in his day motivated Clarke to abstain from the language of limitation on practical grounds, and to use "contingent" instead. As he defined them, contingent things were "such things as the infinite wisdom of God has thought proper to poise on the possibility of *being* or *not being*, leaving to the will of intelligent beings to turn the scale"; they were "such possibilities, amid the succession of events, as the infinite wisdom of God has left to the will of intelligent beings to determine, whether any such event shall take place or not."[149]

Since Clarke is quoted by Brents as representative of his doctrine, Clarke's argument is Brents's argument. Therefore, Brents's rational argument against absolute foreknowledge is fundamentally an appeal to consistency. If the Westminster Confession was true, thought Brents, then for man to err would be impossible, because "whatever he does, is in keeping with and brought about by God's foreordination and decree, and therefore can not be wrong."[150] Yet Brents believed, and seemed to assume that most of his audience believed, that man really *does* engage in real wrongdoing, and that the Scriptures *are* consistent. He believed, therefore, that to maintain consistency, exhaustive foreordination must be rejected. His argument was essentially this: if God has forbidden things which come to pass, then God has not unchangeably foreordained all things. God has forbidden things which come to pass (e.g., Exod 20:13-16; Rom 13:1-2, etc.).

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[148]*GPS*, 86.

[149]Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, 5b:403-05; quoted in *GPS*, 85.

[150]*GPS*, 8.

Therefore, "it can not be true that he has unchangeably foreordained them."[151] He added, for God to ordain something as certain, then absolutely forbid it, "is an inconsistency entirely incompatible with His divine character, especially when we add to it the thought that He threatens the guilty with endless punishment."[152]

Brents also attempted to argue against exhaustive divine prescience by appealing to a sense of moral justice he believed his audience would have understood and readily accepted as an attribute of God. In the unlimited versions of prescience, if a man kills his neighbor, for example, God has unchangeably ordained it to be so; however, God then curses the man for doing exactly what God foreordained he should do. For Brents, no reasonable man can believe this for long.[153] His appeal to a particular sense of God's infinite justice–which he either hoped or assumed his audience would share–seemed to serve as the bridge between his philosophical arguments for rejecting predestination and his biblical arguments for the same.

Brents's aversion to absolute foreknowledge (whether Reformed or Universalist predestination, or Arminian simple foreknowledge) resulted in the articulation of this doctrine of limited foreknowledge as an integral part of his *GPS*. Not only did he believe that unlimited foreknowledge was unscriptural, like the Socinians before him, he was motivated to reject it in large part because he thought it was incompatible with the free-agency and moral accountability of man–again, something he assumed as axiomatic from the start. Yet, his high estimation of human freedom was not his sole reason for rejecting the classical views of omniscience.

Like Adam Clarke, he thought omniscience needed to be redefined, transformed from meaning that "God knows all past, present, and future things," to meaning "God knows all things which are in accordance with his nature, divine economy, and logically

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[151]Ibid.

[152]Ibid.

[153]Ibid.

possible to know." The absolute foreknowledge of contingent things–those things dependent on human free choices or the choices themselves–was excluded from the latter. To Brents, God was able to know those things, but he had either chosen not to know them, or chosen to create a world in which he could not know them. In Brents's mind, his definition was as legitimate as the traditional understanding, in which omnipotence meant that "God is able to do all things which are in accordance with his nature, divine economy, and logically possible to do." Further, Brents's scruples held that, if absolute foreknowledge or foreordination obtained, then an inescapable, logical conclusion followed: God was the author of sin. Brents also thought some express biblical statements positively revealed a God whose knowledge was, in part, contingent on circumstances, and that those texts should be taken at face value, not understood as accommodated language. Brents understood divine repentance texts, as well as texts which suggested that God can be resisted by humans, to support his position also: the changing of God's mind regarding an event made the doctrine of God's immutable foreordination or certain prevision of that event impossible. In any event, Brents had articulated a doctrine of limited foreknowledge. It was brief, and so, it was complicated by its failure to address many challenging implications. Yet, he had made what he and several of his peers believed to be an earnest and sufficient attempt to argue broadly, biblically, and reasonably for his doctrine, and against the classical alternatives.

Implications and Conclusions

This chapter supported the study's claim that T. W. Brents developed a doctrine of limited foreknowledge. The information this research discovered strongly suggested that the existence of such a non-traditional view of foreknowledge in the SCM did not originate with Brents. However, it suggested just as strongly that Brents developed and articulated what became the SCM's most comprehensive statement on limited divine foreknowledge in the nineteenth century. His doctrine of limited foreknowledge had assumed libertarian or contra-causal human freedom as axiomatic. He equated

Calvinistic absolute divine predestination and Arminian absolute divine foreknowledge together in terms of their result, which he argued was, in both doctrines, an absolutely fixed future. In such a case, he argued, man really has no free will and can neither believe nor act in any way which will change his destiny. Thinking this to conflict with the Bible's representations of divine knowledge and foreknowledge, and to conflict with the universality of God's desire that all men be saved (and really could be saved, e.g., have their destiny altered), he argued for the rejection of absolute foreknowledge per se. He offered his alternative understanding of God's foreknowledge as limited, which he believed to be the most plausible, consistent and biblical view.

Biblically, Brents focused on texts which seemed to suggest God was in some respects nescient, his foreknowledge was limited, or which indicated he changed his mind (and so, implied a future that was at least partially undetermined). He attempted to refute arguments from linguistic accommodation which he knew his opponents would use to resist his literal understanding of those texts. Rationally, he relied heavily on Adam Clarke, and on an assumption of human libertarian freedom as if it was self-evident. Otherwise, his rational argument was fundamentally an appeal to consistency. The doctrine of absolute foreknowledge, he suggested, made God the author of evil in general, and the author of each man's individual sins, since men only do that which God declared that they should do; so, the doctrine should be rejected as absurd and blasphemous. These are Brents's arguments for his doctrine of limited foreknowledge, and against absolute foreknowledge. What did the SCM's other leaders think of them? Considering their responses is the goal of chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESPONSES TO BRENTS'S DOCTRINE OF LIMITED FOREKNOWLEDGE

Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge, described in chapter 3, evoked varied and numerous responses from Christian leaders of his day, just as similar doctrines do today. That such responses will eventually desist, or that the question of divine foreknowledge will be answered with a consensus for one view or another, seems unlikely, especially in a culture which has institutionalized religious freedom and tolerance. The question is too important to Christians for them to simply acquiesce in violation of their consciences. However, because doctrines of divine self-limitation have been discussed in the history of the church, the record of responses to such theories possesses inherent historical value for the contemporary discussion. Such responses to T. W. Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge are the focus of this chapter. It supports several aspects of the study's thesis. First, it demonstrates the broader acceptance of the doctrine of limited foreknowledge throughout the SCM, justifying the focus on Brents as a representative sample of that larger population. Second, it shows the existence of a population of classical theists within the SCM who rejected his view. And third, it reveals the forbearance these diverse groups had for one another, and one another's doctrine.

Several factors underscore the importance of articulating these historical responses to Brents's doctrine from leaders in the SCM. First, tradition and the history of interpretation bears a significant, though often subconscious, influence in the SCM, though many in the movement would consciously deny it. This influence is particularly

strong in those who venerate particular preachers or schools representing their cherished historical orthodoxies, and who believe they follow the Bible alone.[1] Second, that influence plays an important role in the way the movement's churches determine who will be considered faithful and accepted into their churches. In addition to the movement's three distinct denominations, it also contains a variety of sects which often identify themselves by means of unique traditions (which, of course, they believe are true Bible doctrines), in contrast to the movement's other groups who are distinguished by different traditions.[2] Harrell was correct when he noted that these distinct SCM groups formed as they developed a "nebulous sort of group consciousness by identifying" with outstanding preachers or schools or journals which upheld their tradition.[3] Those men, schools, or journals became "institutions" the groups identified with "faithfulness"; so, association with one of those institutions became a litmus test of sorts to judge a person's doctrinal "soundness."[4] In a context like this, any historical responses to Brents's theory of divine self-limitation which called for the exclusion of divine limited foreknowledge as false doctrine, or especially the absence of such responses, should stand out in bold relief. Finally, the phenomena documented herein represent developments in a significant

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[1]Like other free churches who confidently affirm that they "stand on Scripture alone and recognize no traditional authorities . . . ," segments of the movement often are the "least free" from the influences of history and tradition, for they are not "even conscious of what traditions have molded their understanding of Scripture." See J. Van Engen, "Tradition," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984): 1106. SCM historian Richard Hughes suggested the following as a reason for its adherents' denial of historical development: if primitivists took seriously their history and identity, it might detract from their identification with the first Christian age, and mark them as simply another Christian aligned with a sect or denomination. See Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: the Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 14.

[2]E.g., one group is distinguished by mandating the use of only one cup in communion, in contrast to those who use multiple cups. Several other distinct, contrasting groups exist. They often have their own publications and directories of churches which do not include those who differ from them; they also discourage–informally if not formally–association with believers not of their group, and the use of unsanctioned publications and publishing houses.

[3]David Edwin Harrell, *The Quest for a Christian America* (Nashville: the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966), 9.

[4]The implicit creedalism of this non-creedal fellowship would be a humorous irony if it had not been the source of so much division.

evangelical Christian tradition in America, which is related in many respects to Christians with Calvinist roots, and others grounded in Arminian soil. It may be helpful to others as they attempt to articulate appropriate responses to the problem of divine self-limitation and the question of its forbearance today. Therefore, how the SCM responded to Brents's doctrine of limited divine foreknowledge should be valuable.

Interpretation is a goal of chapter 5; the nature of this chapter, like those before it, remains descriptive. Its primary goal is to demonstrate the varied responses to Brents's theology within the SCM. The chapter flows as follows. First, the chapter considers a vast general acceptance of Brents's theology immediately after the publication of his *Gospel Plan of Salvation* in 1874. Second, it documents the acceptance of the doctrine of limited foreknowledge by those believing it to be the most scripturally sound view, as well as the rejection of it by those who thought it biblically unsound, throughout approximately two generations following *GPS*'s publication. Third, the testimonies of those who responded to it as a logical view are noted, where "logical" is used to mean "sensible," without direct reference to Scripture. The acceptance of the doctrine of limited foreknowledge as the most logical view, as well as its rejection as such, is demonstrated. Fourth, the chapter documents significant writings which displayed similarities with Brents's doctrine, but remained inexplicit, or ambiguous, regarding the doctrine of limited foreknowledge. Finally, the chapter briefly notes that the doctrine was still active in the Churches of Christ in the late modern and early postmodern eras, from 1950 to the present. In the period which extended from the nineteenth century to our time, the evidence discovered pictured the SCM as maintaining unity in spite of this issue, while manifesting responses to the doctrine of limited foreknowledge which included ambiguousness, rejection, and acceptance.

General Acceptance

From the time *GPS* was published in 1874 through much of the twentieth century, many SCM leaders considered Brents's work to be exemplary. In the realm of

theological literature, they thought it a model of quality. This study's discovery that many of those leaders (discussed below) thought it to represent the SCM's distinct doctrine at the time was most significant. Contemporary SCM historian Richard Hughes's comments may indicate that he tended to agree. He noted that Brents's book "came to serve as a kind of systematic theology for Churches of Christ, both reflecting the historic orthodoxy of the tradition and defining its orthodoxy for generations to come."[5] What Hughes identified as the movement's orthodoxy doubtless included its Pelagian-leaning anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology. But it also could have included the movement's normative positions in theology proper–as sketchy or secondary as they might have been–which would have included the divine attribute of omniscience. The following responses to Brents's work in general, and to the way he addressed the problem of divine foreknowledge in particular, cannot confirm that his position on foreknowledge was normative, but it did suggest at least a significant breadth of acceptance.

Some of Brents's contemporaries believed that his theology represented the movement at large. *The Christian Examiner* viewed Brents's theology as among the best of the fellowship.[6] It also added the following important statement. Speaking of the SCM collectively, it specifically valued Brents's work as a representative of "our religious teaching."[7] Its conclusion acquires more legitimacy when combined with the similar opinion of the *Christian*. This periodical was then edited by J. H. Garrison, a man reputed to have had some of the most lasting influence in the movement as a promoter of liberalism.[8] Garrison's *Christian*, like the *Examiner*, concluded that Brents had

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[5]Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 173. The study argued earlier that the same was true of Christian Church during the first half of the twentieth century.

[6]The *Examiner* is quoted in the 3rd edition of *GPS*, and also in the 17th. T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* [*GPS*], (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 534.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Another was W. T. Moore. At the time, this "liberalism" was not properly what would become theological liberalism as defined by the modernist-fundamentalist controversy, e.g., departing from such fundamentals as the divinity of Christ or the historicity of the Resurrection. It was an epithet applied

articulated the identity-defining theological positions which "distinguish us from other religionists."[9]

Responses to Brents's teachings from the movement's leading preachers also supported the conclusion that Brents's doctrine was representative of the larger movement. Jacob Creath was an elder contemporary of Brents who, like the *Examiner*, viewed Brents's theology highly. He had been an early partner of Alexander Campbell, and one who was esteemed by those who knew him. John F. Rowe, who had been integral in the establishment of the *Christian Standard*, referred to Creath as "the Iron Duke" and "the John Knox" of the movement.[10] As a revered conservative pioneer in the SCM, his judgment of Brents's book to be "a prize work" bears noteworthy significance.[11] Creath thought Brents had composed so powerful a theology in such a superior literary style that he predicted its ascension to a place of high standing in the fundamental literature of the "current Reformation," as he called it.[12] His prediction proved to be correct. Most significantly, Creath appears to have taken the same position as Brents on divine foreknowledge, for he confessed that he had arrived at the very "same conclusions" as Brents "on every topic."[13]

J. M. Kidwell also generally received Brents's theology with approbation, and specifically valued his treatise on foreknowledge. Kidwell was a frequent contributor to

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by those more restrictive primitivists to others who would not resist missionary societies and musical instruments in worship as "unscriptural innovations." By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Garrison had accepted higher criticism as legitimate. See Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 4 vols. (Germantown, TN: Religious Book Service, 1950-1994), 2:253-56.

[9]Quoted in *GPS*, 535.

[10]Quoted in West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 1:259, 115-16; 2:31. Whether or not these comments applied to the senior or junior Creath was not ascertained, and is complicated by the fact that they often ministered together.

[11]Quoted in *GPS*, 538; Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1990), 144, 287, 289; Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 41-44.

[12]Quoted in *GPS*, 538.

[13]Ibid.

the *Gospel Advocate* and had reported to the *Advocate* on the Brents-Moody debate.[14] He was reputed to have indirectly influenced Horace Busby, who was a renowned evangelist associated with the rapid initial growth of the church in Abilene, Texas, and Abilene Christian College: Kidwell was reported to have played a part in the conversion of Horace's mother, Frances.[15] He said, "Every one" was simply delighted with Brents's book.[16] Though he waxed a bit hyperbolic with his "every one," he seemed to have captured the sentiments of those significant numbers gladly receiving Brents's work. That Kidwell thought Brents's first four chapters alone were "richly worth as many times the price of the book" is most significant, however, since the fourth chapter contained Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge.[17]

Since Brents's work on foreknowledge had targeted the determinism of both Calvinism and Universalism, the comments of a former Universalist drew special interest. W. C. Huffman had turned to Universalism in reaction to the religious divisions he had perceived and experienced in the nineteenth century South. However, through personal study of the Bible, he eventually shunned Universalism for a more evangelical faith and became a primitivist preacher. He ministered to churches associated with the movement in Tennessee for the remainder of his life. At one point, he served as an agent of sorts for the *Apostolic Times*--a centrist publication edited by Moses E. Lard, J. W. McGarvey, and others.[18] Since Huffman's death in 1880 occurred only six years after Brents published his theology, he was in his more mature years when he commented on it. This former

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[14]J. M. Kidwell, "Brents-Moody Debate," *GA* 29 (1887): 94; idem, "The 'Bombshell' and the 'Consternation' Produced by It," *GA* 29 (1887): 119.

[15]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 4:73.

[16]Quoted in *GPS*, 537.

[17]Quoted in *GPS*, 537.

[18]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 2:76-77.

Universalist, now a preacher aligned with the SCM, said that Brents's work was "more universally approved than any book published among our brethren for many years."[19]

Finally, a brief look at David Adams's comments will serve to conclude this section's examination of SCM leaders. Adams was reported to be one of the most influential advocates of the SCM's primitive Christianity in Alabama. In his opinion, "the unbiased mind will naturally, easily, and almost if not quite, unavoidably yield to the same conclusions" as Brents.[20] He added that "many hitherto perplexed questions will forever be set at rest" to such unprejudiced personalities.[21]

Responses to Brents's theology from the movement's leading journals also support the conclusion that Brents's doctrine was generally representative of a larger segment of the movement than previously thought. Since the *Christian Quarterly,* edited by W. T. Moore, would publish J. P. Lacroix's concise doctrine of limited foreknowledge in 1876, to find that it had lauded Brents's work two years earlier was not entirely surprising.[22] The *Quarterly* saw Brents's work as characterized by "great plainness, . . . marked ability," and quickly recommended its contents as "worthy to be studied–not simply read then laid aside, but carefully and earnestly studied."[23] It urged the movement's "young preachers and Sunday-School teachers" to read and follow Brents because, in its opinion, he had settled "*all* disputed questions [emphasis added]."[24] Since the extant doctrines of divine foreknowledge had been characterized by disputed

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[19]Quoted in *GPS*, 537.

[20]Quoted in *GPS*, 538; see also West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:164; J. M. Barnes, "Dr. David Adams," *GA* 50 (August 13, 1908): 515.

[21]Quoted in *GPS*, 538.

[22]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 2:256-57; J. P. Lacroix, "About God and Creation," *Christian Quarterly* (April 1876): 304, in *MEL* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996).

[23]Quoted in *GPS*, 533.

[24]Ibid.

questions, it seems reasonable to conclude that the *Quarterly* likely thought Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge had settled them.

The Evangelist likely thought that Brents's work had settled such questions as well. At the time, Barton W. Johnson edited this journal. He had been among the top graduates of his class at Campbell's Bethany College, and had been a teacher at both Bethany and Eureka College. At the time he edited *The Evangelist*, he served as President of Oskaloosa College. Though he was not perceived to be as influential as Garrison or Moore, he was associated with those important leaders.[25] Under Johnson's editorial leadership, *The Evangelist* commended Brents's work "for its correctness."[26]

Before considering the comments of *The Southern Christian Weekly*, it seems necessary to dwell briefly on context. Brents had viewed an important part of his evangelistic work to be preparing spiritual soil–removing metaphorical rocks, thorns, and other hindrances to the effectiveness of gospel seed-sowing. In his view, the versions of Calvinistic doctrines which he combated were such hindrances. *The Southern Christian Weekly* noted this and thought Brents to have succeeded at this calling to prepare spiritual soil. In its opinion, Brents's "work will, no doubt, prove of incalculable value in clearing away erroneous doctrines which now form one of the chief hinderances [*sic*] to many in receiving and obeying the Gospel."[27] The *Weekly* noted Westminster predestination specifically, against which Brents had offered his alternative doctrine of limited foreknowledge.

The American Christian Review expressed similar conclusions. The *Review* was begun and edited by an SCM theologian who was a namesake of the eighteenth century American statesman, Benjamin Franklin. In 1856, Franklin began the *Review* with contributing editors that included Moses E. Lard, Isaac Errett, Elijah Goodwin, C. L.

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[25]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 2:255.

[26]Quoted in *GPS*, 535.

[27]Ibid., 533-34.

Loos, and John Rogers.[28] Some disciples, who grew to view it as legalistic, dogmatic, sectarian, and backward, would eventually establish the *Christian Standard* to compete with it.[29] However, the *Review* was reputed to be the most powerful periodical among the SCM's adherents for many years.[30] From this influential perch, it declared that the younger ministers moving into the vanguard of the SCM "can do no better than to obtain [Brents's *GPS*], and not only *read* it, but study it."[31] The *Review*, like the *Southern Christian Weekly*, also concluded that Brents had succeeded in preparing spiritual soil for evangelism, as they understood it. He had "cleared away the perplexities and confusion that have kept thousands out of the kingdom of God, and are now keeping thousands, who honestly desire to be Christians, out of Christ."[32] Brents's work, to the *Review*, had "met, traced out, and explained the greatest difficulties," which included those difficulties traditionally associated with divine foreknowledge and human freedom.[33]

Several other notable Christian leaders of the late 1800s were enraptured with Brents's work generally. Ira J. Chase was "just delighted with it" and Washington Bacon thought "too highly of it," adding that his "estimation of it" could not be exaggerated, for Brents's work "most completely" filled "a vacuum in the literature of this reformation."[34] Dr. J. T. Barclay's comments were similar. This church-planter, and the choice of the American Christian Missionary Society to lead its first mission work (they sent Barclay and his family to Jerusalem), said that he was "really delighted with the work," and also

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[28]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 1:106. The *Review* was later sold to Daniel Sommer, who changed its name to the *Octographic Review*, cf. West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 2:302.

[29]Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 81, 177.

[30]Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1981; rev. ed., 1994; 3rd printing, 1997), 322; also West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 1:106.

[31]Quoted in *GPS*, 534.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid.

chose the word "vacuum" to describe the void which he felt Brents's work filled: to him, it "most happily supplies a vacuum in our literature long and seriously felt."[35]

The president of Burritt College in Spencer, Tennessee–Brents's good friend and associate in Christian education, W. D. Carnes–felt that all ministers should take advantage of Brents's vacuum-filling theology. "Every young preacher should at once supply himself with a copy of The Gospel Plan of Salvation [*sic*]," Carnes said.[36] Those preachers should "not only read, but study and digest its arguments," for its "array of arguments . . . and authorities may be relied upon as correct."[37] Other leaders saw the value of Brents's work as necessitating its distribution to a much broader audience. E. R. Osborne, for example, wanted it "in the hands of every man and woman" because, he thought, it would produce a much-needed "shaking among dry bones."[38] For Osborne, it presented a clearer view of the whole of Christianity "than any book in the English language" other than the Bible.[39]

The comments of R. B. Trimble serve to further underscore Brents's theology as representative of the movement. Trimble was known to have conducted evangelistic meetings with Brents after the Civil War, and also for having a positive influence on the African-American preacher, S. W. Womack. Trimble expressed that he had received "perfect satisfaction" from Brents's work, and believed it "to be THE BOOK of the brotherhood."[40]

Such broad acceptance as these men perceived Brents's *GPS* to have obtained as the theology representative of the movement did not, however, mean universal

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[35]Ibid., 538; see also West, *In Search of the Ancient Order*, 1:134, and Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 289.

[36]Quoted in *GPS*, 539.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid., 537; see also West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 4:240.

acceptance. The *Christian Record* and the *Watch Tower* commended the larger part of *GPS*, but openly dissented from Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge. They did so rather mildly, however. *The Watch Tower*, for example, said only that "the chapter on the 'Foreknowledge of God'" contained "some statements liable to just criticism," without specifying what they were.[41]

The *Apostolic Times* was another paper "dissenting from the chapter on foreknowledge."[42] Its nature as a strong, sometimes reactionary periodical made it one of the most significant of these mild dissenters. The journal was established shortly after *Lard's Quarterly* ceased. It was reported to have come into existence, among other reasons, to provide a voice for those holding the middle ground between missionary society supporters who also supported instrumental music in worship, and those who opposed both the missionary society and the instrument. The *Times,* claiming to represent a large population of the movement, supported the missionary society, but vociferously opposed the use of musical instruments in worship. Another SCM journalist thought its editorial staff included a powerhouse of giftedness in the persons of Moses E. Lard, Robert Graham, Winthrop E. Hopson, Lanceford B. Wilkes, and J. W. McGarvey.[43] Considering the combined talent of these men, the *Millennial Harbinger*'s W. K. Pendleton concluded that "no paper among us has a more imposing Corps of Editors. They are brethren of high talent, large experience, approved 'soundness,' and deep devotion to the cause."[44] Pendleton also thought the first issue of the *Times* bristled with "the apprehension of hostile spirits" working to influence its direction, likely in a

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[41]*Apostolic Times* and *Watch Tower* quoted in *GPS*, 534, 536; Review of *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, by T. W. Brents, *Christian Record* (July 1874): 330.

[42]*GPS*, 534.

[43]W. K. Pendleton, "Prospectus for the 'Apostolic Times,'" *MH* 39, no. 12 (1868): 713; West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 2:77-78.

[44]W. K. Pendleton, "The Apostolic Times," *MH* 40, no. 5 (1869): 294-95; West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 2:79.

reactionary way.[45] However one understands Pendleton, these last words *combined* with his estimation of the editors to indicate that the *Times* was a journal which would not shrink from speaking its mind strongly. This alone makes the mildness of its dissent from Brents's doctrine of foreknowledge the more striking. Yet Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge did receive more specific opposition, as well as more detailed acceptance.

Acceptance as the Most Biblical View

Several other journals and leaders more specifically stated that they accepted Brents's work because they thought it was the most biblical. *The Bible Index*, for example, was impressed that Brents did not rely on human logic to establish his conclusions, "but rather upon the supreme and final authority of the Holy Scriptures, to which he makes constant reference."[46] Though this created tension with the views of others who thought Brents to be unmatched as a logician, reasoner, and polemic, to the *Index*, Brents's theology was that of a biblicist *par excellence*. In the *Index*'s view, Brents's doctrine of divine nescience had "utterly demolished" what the *Index* conceived to be Calvinistic predestination.[47] The paper also thought Brents's work did it with an uncommon respect for the "*very words* of the Scriptures," and a disregard for the consequences to which such a course would lead, viz., the resistance he and his conclusions would likely receive because they differed from widely accepted orthodoxy.[48] The *Christian Quarterly* thought Brents had solved all disputed problems related to foreknowledge by relying "chiefly on the word of God."[49] And the influential Alabama pioneer, David Adams, concluded that Brents did not draw "the speculative conclusions

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[45]Pendleton, "The Apostolic Times."

[46]Quoted in *GPS*, 535.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid., 533.

of an ingenious writer" but relied on "an exhaustive accumulation of scriptural evidences adroitly linked together."[50]

Rather abruptly, the discussion of foreknowledge abated for a while in the SCM, almost disappearing until after Brents's death in 1905. Brents was eulogized as a hero throughout the SCM's periodicals throughout the following year. Then, interestingly, the journalistic conversation about foreknowledge began again in 1907—this time, with the editors of the *Gospel Advocate* Brents had once edited advocating the traditional view of absolute simple foreknowledge. In response to the editorial support absolute foreknowledge received, letters of dissent began pouring in to the editors, who subsequently published them. In the letters, several men expressed their acceptance of the doctrine of limited foreknowledge based on their understanding of biblical texts from Jonah, Genesis, and Jeremiah. G. Dallas Smith was one such respondent.

Before an unexpected death would end his ministry in 1920, Smith had been a well-respected leader. He had written for the *Advocate*, authored two well-received books, and ministered to local congregations, his last one being in Cleburne, Texas.[51] He also mediated between some of the SCM's leading men at the time, who were feeling the early friction of what would eventually become a great divide over eschatology. His mediation attempted to allay tensions between R. H. Boll, who was front-page editor at the time, and other *Advocate* staff, over Boll's premillennial views. Smith arranged a meeting between Boll, the other staff, and the *Advocate*'s owners, at which a temporary peace was attained.[52] Smith also supported Christian higher education. He had visited the construction site of the first building of what is today Freed-Hardeman University in

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[50]Quoted in *GPS*, 538; West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:164; J. M. Barnes, "Dr. David Adams," *GA* 50 (August 13, 1908): 515.

[51]R. H. Boll, review of *Lectures on the Bible*, by G. Dallas Smith, *Word and Work* 12, no. 12 (December 1919): 357; idem, "G. Dallas Smith," *Word and Work* 13, no. 12 (December 1920): 380; G. Dallas Smith, "The Cleburne Church and Missions," *Word and Work* 12, no. 12 (December 1919): 357.

[52]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:400.

Henderson, Tennessee, and praised the work.[53] Abilene Christian College, in Smith's home state of Texas, had also thought highly enough of him to invite him to present five lectures on the Bible at the College's 1919 lectures; Smith accepted the invitation.[54]

Smith participated regularly in the *Gospel Advocate*'s discussion of foreknowledge, which spanned nearly a year and a half. In his view, he believed Christians needed to be more biblical than theoretical when discussing foreknowledge. He noted that, while the absolute foreknowledge position seemed to jibe with the traditional understanding of "God's attributes, it also seems . . . to contradict some of the plainest statements in God's word."[55] He thought that consistency for primitivists, given the validity of his assertion, would be to accept those plain statements of the Bible over the tradition. As an example, he cited God's declaration to Jonah that Nineveh would be overthrown in forty days. He thought, if the absolute foreknowledge position was true, then this narrative became perplexing. If God knew from the beginning, or at the time he spoke to Jonah, "that he was not going to overthrow Nineveh" then "why did he say he was going to overthrow Nineveh?" Smith asked.[56] John A. Hughes, who stood with Smith on the issue, thought the notion that God said he was going to overthrow Nineveh, when he knew otherwise, simply could not be true.[57] In the judgment of both of these men, for God to declare that he would overthrow Nineveh in forty days when he knew he would not, would make him a manipulative or duplicitous God, and such behavior in their God was incomprehensible to them. They followed the tack of Brents instead: God's declaration that he would overthrow Nineveh in forty days was his true intention,

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[53]G. Dallas Smith, "West Tennessee Notes," *GA* 51 (January, 1909): 29, quoted in West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:258.

[54]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 4:71.

[55]G. Dallas Smith in E. A. Elam, "Symposium on the Foreknowledge of God," *GA* 49, no. 22 (May 30, 1907): 337.

[56]Smith in Elam, "Symposium on the Foreknowledge of God," 337.

[57]John A. Hughes, "The Foreknowledge of God," *GA* 49, no. 22 (May 30, 1907): 338.

though it was contingent on the Ninevites' response to Jonah's preaching. While the conditional nature of God's declaration is not expressed as explicitly as the declaration itself, it is implied in Jonah's commission to preach to the Ninevites, which even Jonah believed could possibly result in repentance or rejection.[58] And if God's declared overthrow was truly contingent on the future responses of the Ninevites, then that future overthrow was neither absolutely predestined nor absolutely foreknown by God. When the Ninevites repented at Jonah's message, they freely chose one of two options that were really available to them at the time. And because they repented, God changed his mind about his original intention to overthrow the city had they not repented. To Smith and Hughes, these things demonstrated that God was nescient of at least some of the future.[59]

V. I. Stirman, also like Brents, saw a distinction between the exhaustive divine knowledge he thought was revealed in Scripture and the absolute foreknowledge of all future events. In words that paralleled Brents's nearly exactly, he wrote, "it is one thing to know all things, quite another to foreknow all things."[60] Stirman thought Genesis 22:12 was enough to support his position. When God kept Abraham from slaying Isaac, and said, "'Now I know that thou fearest God,'" God provided suitable revelation to convince Stirman that "God deprived himself of knowing what man would do until his will speaks out in action."[61]

When *Advocate* editor, E. A. Elam spoke out, citing a host of biblical texts in support of exhaustive foreknowledge, John Hughes cried, "foul." Hughes claimed to have considered all the Scriptures which Elam had referenced, and concluded that Elam

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[58]Jonah 4:1-2.

[59]Cf. *GPS*, 10, 83.

[60]V. I. Stirman, "The Foreknowledge of God," *GA* 49, no. 22 (May 30, 1907): 338; cf. *GPS*, 75-77; cf. *GPS*, 83.

[61]Ibid.; cf *GPS*, 80.

had misappropriated every one of them.[62] To Hughes, they actually taught no more than God's exhaustive knowledge of the present. He said, "In all the Scriptures cited by you [Elam], I fail to see the foreknowledge of God in any one of them. They refer to the thing as it actually existed at the time, and not to something that would exist."[63] Hughes continued by revealing a personal confession that followed the thought of Brents.

> I do not believe that God knows to-day [*sic*] what a man will say, think, or intend in his heart to-morrow or next week. I believe that God knows a thing when it happens, a word when it is spoken, and a thought when the mind conceives it, and not before. I believe that God knew the great scheme of redemption from the beginning to the end–that is, he knew that all people who would submit to and live the gospel would be saved, and that all who rejected the gospel would be lost; but I do not believe that God saw and knew each individual that would obey and disobey. Neither do I believe that anything of the kind can be established from the Scriptures.[64]

To Hughes's mind, absolute foreknowledge could not be reconciled with revelation for at least two reasons: because he believed some Scriptures taught divine nescience of some future contingents; and because it seemed to seal the destiny of each individual. However, Hughes believed the Bible taught that personal salvation or damnation were not so sealed; they were two of those contingents, one or the other obtaining as a person freely accepted or rejected God's grace.[65]

Many people would freely accept anything at the time F. B. Srygley made the following comments on Jeremiah: the United States was in the midst of its Great Depression's five-year economic collapse; Japan had invaded Manchuria, China; and the zealous Foy E. Wallace was directing the war against premillennialism from his editorial command post at the *Gospel Advocate*. This was the same Wallace who had vehemently rejected the pacifism of David Lipscomb and who greatly influenced the Churches of

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[62]Elam included these references: Heb 4:13; Job 22:6; 2 Chr 16:9; Job 31:4; Ps 33:13-15; Prov 15:3; 1 Sam 2:3; Ps 44:21. See Elam, "A Card from Brother Burnett," *GA* 49, no. 14 (April 4, 1907): front page; idem, "Symposium on the Foreknowledge of God."

[63]J. Hughes, "The Foreknowledge of God," 338.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Ibid.

Christ to reject premillennialism as a heresy.[66] Srygley co-edited the *Advocate*'s regular "Contending for the Faith" feature. In it, he openly wrote that there were some things God did not know. F. W. Woodward perceived Srygley's statements to sympathize with the view Brents had espoused regarding the means of God's ignorance: God chose not to know certain things that existed and were available for him to know. After recalling the Israelites' sacrifice of their children as burnt offerings in the valley of Hinnom, Srygley quoted Jeremiah 19:5 and made these comments: "Here is a clear-cut statement of the Lord in which there are activities of men which came up of which the Lord did not know. He had the power to know. He could have known, but he did not."[67]

R. L. Whiteside was another conservative *Gospel Advocate* editor who had also authored an influential commentary on Romans. He denied that the biblical conception of the "foreknowledge of God" meant God's exhaustive foreknowledge of the future. Following in the tradition of Barton W. Stone and Benjamin Franklin before him, Whiteside affirmed that foreknowledge was to be understood as meaning only "the knowledge of God made known beforehand," e.g., Old Testament prophecies.[68] It did not "mean that God recognized, or knew, the Jews before they were born; but he knew, or recognized them as his before the present dispensation."[69] Also like Brents, Whiteside was motivated very strongly by his feeling that human free agency was a key biblical doctrine. He wrote,

> What God before made known to man or what God now makes known to man can have no force against the freedom of man's will. In fact, the whole of God's

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[66]See, e.g., Richard Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 163-66.

[67]F. B. Srygley, "The Foreknowledge of God," *GA* 73, no. 47 (1931): 1436.

[68]R. L. Whiteside, "Foreknowledge of God and Free Will of Man," *GA* 76, no. 50 (December 13, 1934): 1195; his view was not new or unique, but continued in the tradition of Franklin and Stone before him. See James Matthews and Benjamin Franklin, *Predestination and the Foreknowledge of God* (Cincinnati: Jethro Jackson, 1852), 131, in *BF* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996); B. W. Stone, "The Christian Expositor," *Christian Messenger* 12, no. 6 (1842):171; A Bible-Christian, "To the Editor" and Stone, "A Reply to A Bible-Christian," *Christian Messenger* 2, no. 10 (1828): 229ff, in *BWS* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996).

[69]Whiteside, "Foreknowledge of God and Free Will of Man," 1195.

> revelation is based on man's freedom of will; for if he had no freedom of will, no ability to decide his own course, there would have been no need of any revelation. From the beginning of the Bible to the end man's freedom to choose and his ability to decide are constantly kept before him. No theory should be allowed to interfere with our own feeling of responsibility.[70]

However, the doctrine's acceptance as the most biblical view was certainly not universal. Other similarly passionate biblicists argued that Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge was biblically lacking.

Rejection as Biblically Defective

Brents's doctrine included the position that divine foreknowledge of a future event made it certain to be performed. In response, Isaac Errett's *Christian Standard* thought that conclusion was absurd. The *Standard* understood Brents's argument to flow like this: if God foreknew any acts of evil, he was the author of them; God is not the author of evil; therefore, God did not foreknow any acts of evil. The *Standard* denied the first premise, arguing that it did not agree with Scripture. To the contrary, the Bible revealed that "God did know and foretell the wickedness of Pharaoh, King of Egypt."[71] Brents's logic, as the *Standard* understood it, would inevitably lead to the following absurdity: because God did foreknow the wickedness of Pharaoh,

> Pharaoh was not free, acted under a divine necessity, and was destroyed for acts which he could not help, and for which he had no responsibility! Our Lord foreknew that Judas would betray him. Judas, then, could not help betraying him–acted under necessity, and had no responsibility and no guilt! God foreknew that the Jews would reject Jesus and have him put to death; for he was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," and the Jews did what God's "counsel determined before to be done." Hence, the chief priests and elders who delivered him up, according to predictions previously made concerning them, had no freedom of action, and were not guilty in the matter.[72]

To the *Standard*, of course, affixing such guiltlessness to the aforementioned culprits was irreconcilable with Scripture. Brents's reasoning was perceived to set him

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[70]Ibid.

[71]"Book Table," *Christian Standard*, (May 2, 1874): 141.

[72]Ibid.

on a course to an inevitable dilemma between two blasphemous horns: "Either God did not know of a single wicked action that men were to perform," in which case, the Scriptures are mistaken at every point they said he did; "or, foreknowing it, the actor *had* to do it, to fulfill the decrees of God, and it was God's act, not his," in which case God not only authored the wicked act, but also punished those whose sin it was not in their power to avoid.[73] Since it could reconcile neither of these alternatives with Scripture, the *Standard* concluded that Brents's doctrine had to be "manifestly wrong."[74] Though other journals rejected Brents's doctrine, the *Standard* was the only paper found to argue against Brents's position with any detail. Further, the data indicated no attempts by Brents to respond to this critique, nor did it find that Brents ever entered into any polemic dialogue on the subject, orally or in writing. Other rejections of the alleged biblical nature of Brents's doctrine were a long time coming, though no explicit reason was discovered. In any event, open challenges to the doctrine of limited foreknowledge were not found to appear again in an SCM journal until they found their way on to the *Advocate*'s pages after Brents's death. When they did appear, they were met with a barrage of responses that sparked a lengthy written discussion.

Editor E. A. Elam had become the focal personality of the *Advocate*'s renewed discussion of foreknowledge. He was certainly familiar with Brents's work, for he had written a review of Brents's book of homilies.[75] Elam had been queried as to whether or not he believed that God foreknows all things before they come to pass. In response, he cited several Scriptures and drew the following conclusion: "The Scriptures are sufficient to show that God knows . . . and that he foreknows all things"; for him not "to foreknow

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[73]Ibid.

[74]Ibid.

[75]E. A. Elam, review of *Gospel Sermons*, by Dr. T. W. Brents, *GA* 33, no. 48 (December 3, 1891): 768.

is inconsistent with God's attributes."[76] People should not be surprised, Elam suggested, that "some deny that God foreknows all things; some there be who deny the existence of God; and some, that Jesus of Nazareth is his Son."[77] Elam also opposed the doctrine of limited foreknowledge by arguing that, in the cases of all Scriptures which seem to suggest divine ignorance, God was in reality condescending to finite human cognizance, and accommodating his speech to a human way of speaking. For example, take the case of Sodom's "cry" in Genesis 18:21, where the text, to supporters of the doctrine of divine nescience suggested that God would not know the extent of Sodom's sin with certainty until he experienced it first-hand. Elam concluded that "God used this language to accommodate himself to man's way of thinking and speaking," and that the same must be true of all similar instances in Scripture which might suggest divine nescience.[78] If this was not the case, he argued, and Brents's view was correct, then "God must work by experiment," which left open the possibility that he may "slip between now and the end and heaven may prove a failure."[79] "With this view of God," Elam continued, "none can tell that there will be a new heaven and a new earth at all."[80] So, for Elam, concluding for a doctrine of limited foreknowledge in the case of Sodom was "absurd."[81]

J. T. Showalter approved of Elam's position on foreknowledge. Showalter was a bivocational preacher, farming and ministering in Pulaski County, Virginia, during the

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[76]Elam, "A Card from Brother Burnett"; see also idem, "Symposium on the Foreknowledge of God." Again, the texts he referenced were Heb 4:13; Job 22:6; 2 Chr 16:9; Job 31:4; Ps 33:13-15; Prov 15:3; 1 Sam 2:3; Ps 44:21.

[77]Ibid.

[78]E. A. Elam, "Symposium on the Foreknowledge of God," 337.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Ibid.

late 1800s and early 1900s.[82] He had baptized William Wesley Otey, who became a heroic figure to those who opposed missionary societies and instrumental music in worship, most notably through his 1908 Louisville, Kentucky debate with J. B. Briney.[83] The Showalter name would attain greater prominence in the SCM through Showalter's son, G. H. P. Showalter.[84] In any event, the elder Showalter commended Elam's affirmation of the absolute, simple foreknowledge of God as the biblical view, and joined him in concluding that such foreknowledge does not detract from human freedom in choosing or rejecting salvation.[85] "Foreknowledge is one thing," he said, "and the principle upon which God justifies or condemns, is another." [86] Showalter also stood with Elam against limited foreknowledge on eschatological grounds, believing it reduced the hope of heaven to an uncertain wish which may not come true in the end. "Sure enough," he said, "if God did not know the end from the beginning, he might yet fail in his purposes."[87]

In sum, from conservatives to liberals, from renowned editors with vast regional influence to more obscure congregational elders and preachers, representatives from across the SCM's theological spectrum weighed in on both sides of the issue of divine nescience. Some still maintained that Brents's view was the most biblical. Others

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[82]See "The Lovell Genealogy" [on-line]; accessed 7 December 2002; available from http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Hollow/5203/Lovell.html; Internet. See also "Pulaski County Marriage Records" [on-line]; accessed 7 December 2002; available from http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/va/pulaski/vitals/marriages/marr2.txt; Internet. Finally, see *Chataigne's 1888-89 Virginia Business Directory* [on-line]; accessed 7 December 2002; available from http://www.ls.net/~newriver/va/pula1888.htm; Internet.

[83]See Cecil Willis, "William Wesley Otey - March 14,1867-November 1, 1961 (1)" *Truth Magazine* 6, no. 3 (December 1961): 23-24 [on-line]; accessed 7 December 2002; available from http://www.truthmagazine. com/archives/volume6/TM006031.html; Internet.

[84]See Willis, "William Wesley Otey"; cf. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 147, 175, 209; West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:passim; 4:passim.

[85]J. T. Showalter, quoted in E. A. Elam, "The Foreknowledge of God, Again," *GA* 49, no. 33 (August 15, 1907): front page.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Ibid.

continued to maintain that it was biblically defective. However, the doctrine of limited foreknowledge was not only approached from a biblical perspective. The movement's adherents also approached it from the standpoint of common sense, accepting or rejecting Brents's doctrine based on his argument's appeal as more or less logical.

Acceptance as the Most Logical View

"Most logical view" is used to mean the stance which appeared most reasonable to the minds of the people surveyed, and which was expressed without direct reference to Scripture. Each of the following men approached the problem in his own unique way. Some were more detailed than others. Some brought up related concepts, such as divine timelessness. Significantly, however, they all thought that the doctrine of limited foreknowledge made the most sense. The most articulate of them was J. P. Lacroix, who wrote in W. T. Moore's *Christian Quarterly*. Lacroix was found to be the first to publish a logical articulation of a doctrine of limited foreknowledge, after the publication of Brents's *GPS*, which paralleled Brents's view. In one concise paragraph, Lacroix posed and answered this question: "What do we mean by God's omniscience?"

> We can only mean that he knows all that is a possible object of knowledge. He knows all that *is*, and *as* it is. He knows all the past and all the present, and all that is causally involved in the present state of the universe. He knows all that is the truth; the false he knows as false, the true as true. He knows things *as* they *are*; for example, if my final moral destiny is as yet uncertain and unfixed, then he knows it as uncertain and undetermined. But does not this view subject God's knowledge to the limitations of time? Yes; for it is so limited. God's knowledge is as really limited by time as ours. Before he created the world he knew that it did *not* exist; after he had created it, he knew that it *did* exist. If God ever has a new thought, he then knows something which he did not know before; otherwise it were not a new thought. God's knowledge is, therefore, constantly being modified and increased. Whenever a planet or a sparrow ceases to be, then the knowledge of it as an actuality passes out of the storehouse of God's knowledge of actualities. Whenever a new planet becomes a reality, then God's knowledge of realities is increased by so much. All of which amounts to this: God's knowledge is a knowledge of truth–it embraces the past as past, the present as actual, the future as contingent. But are not all the events and acts of the future locked up and involved in actually existing chains of causation? And if so, does not an exhaustive knowledge of the present embrace all that ever will be? Yes; if they are so locked up, but they are *not*; the intuition of creatural [*sic*] freedom denies it and intuition is demonstration. The true expression

> of God's omniscience is, therefore, this: God knows all that has been, all that is, and all that is *necessarily going to be*.[88]

His style differed from Brents's; however, his argument–as far as it goes–was substantially the same in every aspect. The study has not uncovered a more detailed doctrine of limited foreknowledge articulated after the publication of *GPS* that reflected Brents's doctrine any more than this. There were others, however, who leaned substantially in Brents's direction. R. A. Cooke was one.

Many participants in the *Gospel Advocate*'s dialogue about foreknowledge made strenuous attempts to exude graciousness through a deliberate tentativeness in their conclusions. Cooke, however, expressed his views more assertively. Though he seemed to be a relatively obscure personality in the movement, he is not without his place. Along with R. B. Trimble and John McCoy, Cooke was reported to have been involved in the conversion of W. L. Butler.[89] Butler would become a preacher, and would go on to found the journal *The Apostolic Church* which later merged with *The Apostolic Guide*; he would also be remembered as the most influential preacher in the development of M. C. Kurfees.[90] Butler himself would resist Elam on the pages of the *Advocate* in 1901, though he opposed Christian colleges, not doctrines of classical foreknowledge.[91] On this subject, his former mentor, Cooke, did oppose Elam. Cooke confidently affirmed that

> there were things in the past that [God] did not know till they occurred, and there will be things in the future he does not now know and cannot till they are determined by some other agent. Before any one can know anything in the future he

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[88]J. P. Lacroix, "About God and Creation," *Christian Quarterly* (April 1876): 304, in *MEL*; although this electronic version does not indicate the author, Elaine Philpott–a researcher with the Disciples of Christ Historical Society–indicated that the bound volume has it as Lacroix (Elaine Philpott, Nashville, to the author, Wahiawa, 5 September, 2002, electronic mail, the author's private collection, Wahiawa, Hawaii). See also *GPS*, 83, where Brents distinguishes omniscience from absolute foreknowledge: the former is *knowing* all things which are existing objects of knowledge, the latter is knowing a thing before it has existence, or before it is a proper object of knowledge.

[89]"Last Name Index" in *Ligon's Portraiture of Gospel Preachers* [on-line]; accessed 11 December 2002; available from http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/dligon/Ligon3.htm; Internet. See also West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:172.

[90]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:172.

[91]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:236.

> must have it so fixed that it cannot be any other way, or know someone else has it so fixed or made sure. In the nature of things that which is not certainly fixed cannot be certainly known. That which may be one way or another or not at all is *unknowable*. All that God has determined of the future he knows. That which he has left to some other agents to determine he may know when they determine, and not sooner. . . . Remember the premises from which this conclusion is drawn . . . . They are the *sovereignty* of man over his will and actions and the *unknowableness* of that which is contingent on the will and actions of such a sovereign.[92]

To A. F. Hall, an elder from Lone Star, California, divine timelessness and the idea of exhaustive divine foreknowledge were incomprehensible. He added that, since "God gave man free moral agency to think and act, he cannot know what man is going to think or do before the mind acts."[93] J. A. Jenkins felt similarly, but he expressed himself more from his position of conditional salvation. He wrote,

> I cannot see how salvation can be conditional if God foreknew all things. In other words, if God knows all things [including every detail of the future], he knows whether I will be saved or not. If he knows I will be lost, what can I do to change that which God knew to be a fact? On the other hand, if God knew that I will be saved, what could I do to change that which God knew to be a fact into a falsehood?[94]

In the same vein, V. I. Stirman thought that if God foreknew the individual wicked acts of people, then they would do only "what they could not avoid, or what God knew from the first they would do."[95] This was unacceptable to his sense of human freedom. However, he felt that it was also incompatible with his sense of divine justice. God punishes people for wickedness, but punishing people for sins which could not be avoided would be "certainly unjust."[96] Stirman concluded that such foreknowledge could not be an attribute of the just God Christians claim to serve.

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[92]R. A. Cooke, "sI [*sic*] the Foreknowledge of God Equal to Foreordination?" *GA* 35, no. 18 (May 4, 1893): 277.

[93]A. F. Hall, quoted in E. A. Elam, "Symposium on the Foreknowledge of God, *GA* 49, no. 22 (May 30, 1907): 337.

[94]J. A. Jenkins, quoted in Elam, "Symposium on the Foreknowledge of God.

[95]V. I. Stirman, "The Foreknowledge of God, *GA* 49, no. 22 (May 30, 1907): 338.

[96]Ibid.

The foregoing testimonies served to suggest that the doctrine of limited foreknowledge appealed most to the common sense of these men. However, that audience was not so convinced that divine foreknowledge of a choice negated human freedom. In any event, the doctrine of limited foreknowledge seemed to make perfect sense to the authors above because it appealed to their valued precommitments. Yet others who equally valued reason, libertarian free agency, and conditional salvation, did not believe Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge was the most logical view.

Rejection as Logically Defective

Brents's most detailed philosophical argument consisted of quoting and agreeing with a large passage of Adam Clarke's commentary on Acts.[97] Therefore, a consideration of the response to Clarke's doctrine by Baptist divine, S. W. Lynd, seemed relevant.[98] Lynd's essay, published in Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger*, first focused on Clarke's attempted analogy between omnipotence and omniscience, viz., as God is omnipotent but does not of necessity do all things, so God is omniscient but does not of necessity know all things. In Lynd's judgment,

> As plausible as this may appear, it is founded upon a palpable error in definition; and hence, the reasoning which he applies to one attribute will not apply to the other. Omnipotence is the power which God possesses to do all things, but Omniscience is not the mere power to know all things. It is the knowledge of all things.[99]

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[97]*GPS*, 84-86; Adam Clarke, *John-Acts,* 5b:403-05, in *Master Christian Library* [CD-ROM] (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1997). Brents understood Clarke to share his view of foreknowledge; however, according to John Sanders, Clarke's position on foreknowledge has been a subject of debate.

[98]Though Campbell published Lynd's essay in his *Millennial Harbinger*, he did not comment on the essay. Therefore, the extent to which he explicitly agreed or disagreed with Lynd remains unknown. Though Campbell did have a penchant for the more traditionally orthodox views of God's attributes, and may have stood with Lynd against Clarke, he did affirm contingency. See, e.g., A. Campbell's comments on J. Buchanan, "Chance," *MH* 1, no. 10 (1851): 615-621; however, Campbell also affirmed a distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, and a contingency which was compatible with free agency and exhaustive foreknowledge, see, e.g., A. Campbell, "John M. Duncan on Foreknowledge," *MH* 4, no. 10 (1840): 487-491.

[99]S. W. Lynd, "The Omniscience of God," *MH* 3, no. 8 (1860): 423.

Since Brents claimed to agree with Clarke's position, how Lynd responded to Clarke's doctrine is a relevant response that may be applied to Brents's doctrine. Lynd did not understand Clarke to mean that God's knowledge was dependent upon his disposition to know or to not know.[100] He understood Clarke to have argued that some divine foreknowledge is logically impossible because "some events are contingent; and may occur in one way or another," and so the results cannot be "known even to God himself."[101] Lynd understood Clarke to affirm that God does not choose to be ignorant of contingent future events; such divine nescience is necessary. In this he seemed to correctly grasp Clarke. Yet Lynd concluded that Clarke really intended "to deny positively that God is omniscient," and had attempted to redefine omniscience in order "to justify this denial."[102] Lynd also asserted that an exhaustive divine knowledge of the future did not infringe upon human freedom, as both Clarke and Brents had reasoned. Such future events were known, he asserted, through God's perfect knowledge of mankind's free moral volitions, which worked together in a chain of causal events to bring that future about.

In sum, contra Clarke, and therefore, contra Brents, Lynd affirmed the traditional definitions of absolute foreknowledge and perfection, asserted the compatibility of human free agency with absolute prescience, claimed the latter was necessary to the nature of God, and rejected the analogy between omnipotence and omniscience as flawed at the level of definition.[103] The persuasive effect this essay had on the *Harbinger*'s reading audience, or the impact of its implications on the larger debate, are unknown. No other reference to Lynd was found within the limitations of this research. However, others did

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[100]Brents's differed from Clarke here, but whether he knew it or not remains to be discovered.

[101]Lynd, "The Omniscience of God," 423.

[102]Ibid.

[103]Ibid., 425.

think similarly of Clarke, and take a similar position against him, and by extension, against Brents.

Isaac Errett's *Christian Standard* had even less patience for Clarke than did Lynd. Though Errett found opposition from some in the SCM for some of his practices, he was generally well respected.[104] The *Standard* was an SCM journal established by men who affirmed devotion to the SCM's agenda for restoring primitive Christianity. They had begun, however, to feel that journals like Franklin's *American Christian Review* had become too legalistic and that an alternative was needed.[105] Further, some of the *Standard*'s financial backers, including Union General and later President, James A. Garfield, were purportedly upset that Franklin would not publish their advocacy for the Union during the Civil War.[106] In any event, the *Standard* grew to become an influential paper in the SCM, especially as a strong defender of the Bible's inspiration and authority against those promoting higher criticism.[107] It continues to be published today. Of Clarke's views on foreknowledge, and of Brents's, the *Standard* said, "We have long been aware that Adam Clarke, among his numerous vagaries, indulged in [Brents's] style of argument. Alex. Hall, in Universalism against Itself, took the same position. But it only shows, in Dr. Clarke's case, what his Commentary shows not unfrequently, that 'great men are not always wise.'"[108] Further, the *Standard* felt "impelled to express more than mere dissent" with Brents's position on foreknowledge, and remarked that his

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[104]Errett was opposed by some because he had composed bylaws and a summary of faith for his congregation, and published them both in the *MH*. Some objected that it was a "creed"—something opposed by a large segment of the movement from the beginning. He also had the abbreviation for "Reverend" preceding his name on the placard above his church study; elements of the SCM have been generally opposed to such titular clerical designations as lacking scriptural authority.

[105]Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 81, 177; see also West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 2:29-34.

[106]Ibid.

[107]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:28-33.

[108]"Book Table," *Christian Standard* (May 2, 1874):141.

> chapter on Foreknowledge is, to us, decidedly objectionable. Presenting the Calvinistic argument that divine foreknowledge necessarily involves foreordination, and admitting the conclusion as legitimate, our author seeks to escape from the difficulty by disputing the premises, and if not positively affirming that God did not foreknow all events, at least cautiously avowing his conviction that God was voluntarily ignorant of much that was to occur in the history of the human race.[109]

The *Standard* correctly understood Brents to hold that God's foreknowledge of any human action made the performance of that action certain, removed man's freedom of choice in the matter, and made that action on man's part a necessity. However, the *Standard* saw this as a logically defective position that ended in theological absurdity:

> It follows, then, that if God knew *any* acts if wickedness, he is himself the author of them, and the actors sinned under necessity, and had no responsibility in the matter. Hence, it must be assumed that *God was and ever has been ignorant of all and every particular of the future wickedness of men,* and entered on the creation of man and the government of the race without the slightest idea of what was coming; and the provisions of redemption and of a Redeemer--and indeed all the measures for the government of the race--were afterthoughts, to meet contingencies to which he had been wilfully blind, and to provide against future contingencies to which he continued to remain equally blind, not being able to tell, in his voluntary and persistent ignorance of the race, whether he was successfully providing for such contingencies or not![110]

Some elements of the Standard's analysis may be objectionable. However, it had correctly grasped Brents: his doctrine led to the conclusion that "*God was and ever has been ignorant of all and every particular of the future wickedness of men.*"

However, the *Standard* was not finished. It argued that, given Brents's premises, God was as equally ignorant of good actions as well as evil. If the foreknowledge of God destroyed

> voluntary human agency, it is just as true respecting *good* actions as *bad* ones, that if God foreknew any act of obedience to be performed by any man, said act is performed of necessity, and has no virtue in it. Either, then, the acts of God's obedient children are all acts of necessity, as destitute of virtue as the acts of the wicked are of crime, or *God did not know a single thing, good or bad, that was to occur in the history of the human race*, and commenced governing the world in utter ignorance of all that was coming.[111]

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[109]Ibid.

[110]Ibid.

[111]Ibid.

These perceived implications of Brents's doctrine were understood to mean that all prophecies of good and evil, concerning individuals and nations, even concerning the parousia and ultimate victory of Christ, were simply possibilities with no certainty in which to hope, since God did not have any idea of what was to come.[112] The *Standard* thought that the only way to escape this conclusion, ultimately, would be to reject Brents's theory.[113]

Errett's *Christian Standard* did not stand alone against this aspect of Brents's doctrine. Moses E. Lard also rejected the notion that "foreknowledge necessarily implies an act of unalterable pre-fixture . . . of every fact of human life."[114] However, he made this assertion without argument. Lard likely had Brents's doctrine in mind since his *Apostolic Times* had reviewed *GPS* a year before he published these remarks. The *Times* had dissented from his doctrine of foreknowledge; the grounds of that dissent, however, were not discovered.[115] Further, Brents was already renowned in the fellowship as a debater, and as an editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, in which he published essays that would become chapters in his *GPS*. In any event, Lard agreed with Brents on libertarian freedom, but disagreed with his conclusion that it was incompatible with exhaustive divine prescience.

Several pens attacked the particular doctrine of voluntary divine ignorance which posited that God chooses not to know things otherwise available for him to know. Volitional nescience existed as at least one of the means of God's self-limitation in Brents's doctrine. S. W. Lynd rejected it as incompatible with the divine nature. He said,

> If there are some things which God does not choose to do, still, his power is perfect. It does not diminish his omnipotence. But if there are some things, which God can

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[112]Ibid.

[113]Ibid.

[114]Moses Lard, *Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans* (n.p.: 1875), 285, in *MEL*.

[115]Quoted in *GPS*, 534; West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 2:79.

> know and does not choose to know, *i.e.*, does not in fact know, he is imperfect in knowledge, and of course, is not omniscient.[116]

However, as helpful as it would have been for him to do so, Lynd does not further detail his reasons for its rejection beyond this. The *Christian Record* goes a small step further.

The *Record* valued most of Brents's theology, but leveled forceful criticism against his version of voluntary ignorance. Such nescience seemed incomprehensible to the *Record*'s editors. The proposition, that God's decisions not to know some things based on their unworthiness to be known, must be predicated on his knowledge of those things, and the proposition is internally contradictory. The *Record* concluded that Brents's doctrine contained some things

> on the 'Foreknowledge of God' that we are not prepared to accept. If we understand brother Brents, he has adopted the theory set forth in Alexander Hall's book entitled "Universalism Against Itself"; that is, that God could have known all things from the beginning if he had desired to do so, but such knowledge being inconsistent with man's moral agency, (in his opinion) he chooses not to know all things. In a word, if it is proper for God to know all of any given thing, he lets in the light, and knows it; and if not proper for him to know it he shuts off the light and knows it not. But we ask, how is God to decide in any given case whether he ought to know it or not, until he does know it, and examine it?[117]

F. B. Srygley came to the same conclusion. Srygley was previously understood to have argued for a doctrine of voluntary ignorance much like Brents's: God chose not to know some things which were real objects of knowledge.[118] Whether he continued to hold to limited foreknowledge was not born out by the data. However, he did come to deny that the means of divine nescience was God's volition. To him, the notion of God's voluntary ignorance was nonsensical, and in denying it, he denied Brents's position. Srygley said,

> I am unable to see how God could choose not to know a thing before he knew what it was. He would not know what choice to make until he knew what it was. I had rather just admit that I do not understand it than to occupy that position. I am sure

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[116]Lynd, "The Omniscience of God, 423-424.

[117]Review of *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, by T. W. Brents, *Christian Record* (July 1874): 329-330.

[118]F. B. Srygley, "The Foreknowledge of God."

> the trouble is that some of the brethren feel that if they admit God knows who will be lost and who will be saved, it would be equal to admitting that he had foreordained who should be saved and who should be lost. I do not know that such a conclusion follows. . . . It seems from this contention that God does not choose to know much, if anything, about the activities of man. . . . I fear that this idea that God chooses to know nothing about the activities of men places God too far away from his children.[119]

In contrast to their fellows who thought Brents's doctrine was the most logical view, these men thought it logically defective. To them, it predicated imperfection to God, unnecessarily affirmed that foreknowledge had the same results as foreordination, had him gambling with eternity, and posited a flawed mechanism for divine ignorance, namely, that God chose not to know what was otherwise knowable. In any event, across the boundary of a new century and a spectrum of theological personalities, significant, educated, and respected voices continued to differ on the question of foreknowledge. Yet there were other important voices who addressed various aspects of divine providence, but who were not found to have issued statements which explicitly affirmed or denied the doctrine of limited foreknowledge.

Ambiguity Regarding the Doctrine

The writings of J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton considered for this study resulted in an ambiguity about whether or not their understandings of omniscience were more classical or more like Brents's. This is neither intended to suggest a deliberate lack of clarity on the part of these SCM leaders, nor an ineptitude of any sort in their theological scholarship. The articles, books, and curricula these men composed were most often exegetical rather than systematic or topical, and they did not intend to treat every issue exhaustively. The writings obtained for this study, at times, seemed to imply divine self-limitation of some sort; at other times, however, they seem to reflect a more

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[119]Srygley, "The Foreknowledge of God," 1436. Note that Srygley did not recant his assertion that God does not know some future human events; he argued only against the mechanism, viz., that God chose not to know a thing which was otherwise knowable because God knew that thing was somehow unfit to be known by him.

classical understanding of God. This created a tension regarding what they believed about the doctrine of limited foreknowledge.

McGarvey studied at Campbell's Bethany College and graduated with honors in the year 1850. By 1862, he preached for the large Main Street Church in Lexington, Kentucky, and published his *Commentary on Acts*, providing a milestone which marked the beginning of the movement's interest in producing scholarly commentaries.[120] That same year, when he was in his early thirties, he addressed the American Christian Missionary Society and was described by observers as intellectually great.[121] From the time he arrived in Lexington, Robert Milligan, President of the College of the Bible (now Lexington Theological Seminary), persisted in calling McGarvey to teach in the school. By 1866, McGarvey had resigned the position with the Main Street Church to teach full-time in the College. To this ministry he would primarily devote the remainder of his life.[122] His name became a prominent and permanent fixture in the SCM, though he was less well received by the Disciples than the Churches of Christ because he opposed the dabbling of the former in modern higher criticism.[123]

While McGarvey was never discovered to have explicitly endorsed or rejected Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge, his writings contain conclusions which parallel Brents's doctrine. McGarvey's view certainly allowed for a partial foreordination as did Brents's. He thought the absolute predestination of the old creeds to be false in the extreme.[124] Yet he did allow for some foreordination as his discussion of divine providence in the Joseph narrative reveals. He viewed "every one of" the events leading to Joseph's sale into Egyptian slavery and Jacob's subsequent preservation as "causes"

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[120]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 1:304; 2:129.

[121]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 1:299.

[122]Ibid., 305.

[123]West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 3:50.

[124]Ibid., 334.

intended by God to bring about that which he had predetermined.[125] He explained further that each one of those causes was

> a link in the long chain by which God, having determined that these Hebrews should dwell in Egypt for four hundred years, after predicting it two-hundred years before, draws them down to where He wants them to be. And what are the links in this chain? Some of them are desperately wicked deeds; some of them good deeds.[126]

It is evident, in McGarvey's view, that God had foreordained the event, "dwelling in Egypt," but not the individual details of it. To accomplish his ends, God "draws" them by these chain-links. Some of these links are desperately wicked deeds which God did not foreordain. Yet, God "touched the chain" of these causal links when necessary to guide them and the events they set in motion toward the accomplishment of his will.[127] This suggests that McGarvey also leaned toward what Brents would have viewed as a combination of divine wisdom, power, and freedom in ruling a race of free humans to bring about his desired ends--what contemporary limitarians call God's resourcefulness. McGarvey perceived God to allow men to go about in their libertarian freedom. However, when the instigators of these "causal links" abused their freedom and acted wickedly, God intervened to set his plans back on course.[128]

McGarvey went on to apply his understanding of this chain-touching guidance and further explained his perception of how God exercises his providence. He said, "It extends down to the modes by which God overrules our own acts, both good and bad, and those of our friends, and brings us out at the end of our lives shaped and molded as he

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[125]J. W. McGarvey, *McGarvey's Sermons*, (Louisville: n.p., 1893; repr. Delight, AR: Gospel Light, 1975), 220-221.

[126]Ibid., 221.

[127]Ibid., 222.

[128]Ibid.

desires we shall be."[129] In the case of Joseph he noted just two instances of this sort.[130] Yet he concluded that this element of providence is so important in them that the "man who studies the story of Joseph and does not see this in it, has failed to see one of its great purposes."[131] These acts are not a man's *own* in the sense that he is either completely autonomous of God's sustenance or uninfluenced by environment.[132] Rather, they are acts he performs, in large part, of his own free choice. Because he has contributed volitional value to them, they in that respect belong to him and may be called "his acts." And because they belong to him, they are acts for which he is responsible. However, though man is in possession of this freedom to act and truly possess the act, that "God overrules" human acts by certain "modes" when necessary to the accomplishment of his ends, indicated that McGarvey believed two things. First, God foreordains some things which are certain, thus, they are not contingent on the choices of free creatures. Second, human libertarian freedom is substantial but not absolute, for it may be "overruled" by God to accomplish his will for his glory and our blessedness.

Using the analogy of a weaving machine, McGarvey attempted to illustrate the workings of what seems to be a synthesis of limited divine foreordination and limited human freedom at work in God's deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt. The weaving machine was designed to produce a patterned tapestry. The pattern which the machine produced on the tapestry was created only as the machine was controlled by "a pattern hanging up on one side with many holes through it."[133] This pattern "was ruling the work

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[129]Ibid.

[130]Ibid.

[131]Ibid.

[132]McGarvey likely would have affirmed the doctrine of concurrence.

[133]Ibid., 245.

of that intricate machinery, and leading to that result."[134] As man had planned and directed the pattern and the operation of the weaving machine to produce the desired tapestry, so God planned and directed the Hebrew people to Egypt. As the engineer had designed the weaving machine to be set free within certain boundaries to accomplish its creator's will, so God had similarly designed the Hebrews. As the machine's engineer intervenes, overruling its operation when necessary to adjust or replace parts that have gone astray from their design, so God intervened, overruling the Hebrews when necessary to adjust or replace people who had gone astray from God's design to draw them to Egypt.[135] McGarvey thought the Joseph narrative was "an illustration of the providence of God, by which He can bring about His purposes" in the context of limited divine foreordination and limited human freedom, by intervening "here and there" in the course of free human events.[136]

McGarvey also understood James 5:16ff, in a manner similar to both Brents and Alexander Hall before him, to teach that God's granting of petitions was conditional. To McGarvey, the teaching of James revealed preconditions to effectual prayers (e.g., righteousness).[137] Further, McGarvey thought the Bible revealed a God who can be moved by human petitions, and may change his mind in order to grant them. McGarvey saw a problem with the Christianity of his day which the James passage solved. The problem was this: while the doctrine of prayer was most "frequently emphasized in the Bible," he thought it suffered from modernistic skepticism which grew out of Christian spiritual blindness.[138] To McGarvey, this blindness was created by Christian leaders

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[134]Ibid.

[135]Ibid., 245-46.

[136]Ibid., 221.

[137]Ibid., 323.

[138]McGarvey, *McGarvey's Sermons*, 315.

teaching, wrongly, that God "is an unchanging God."[139] McGarvey believed that this teaching had misappropriated the Bible doctrine of God's changeless nature, and erroneously applied it to his activity in a manner that limited God's ability to freely act in response to prayer. To McGarvey, this was the doctrine which limited God, for it "set limits to God's ability to act without doing miracles."[140] To McGarvey, therefore, having arrived at this theological "short-sightedness," he believed that many of his contemporaries had missed this truth about God: "He can alter things to suit our wishes and petitions."[141] If God was "changeless" as in the traditional teachings which McGarvey thought to be mistaken, then God "might as well be made of ice."[142] However, Christians should not "think of God as a mere abstraction," McGarvey said; "He is a *living* God; a God who has friends, and loves His friends; and this is the reason He will do something for them when they cry to Him."[143]

McGarvey's doctrine of providence thus far has contrasted with an exhaustively predetermined future and suggested a resourceful and relational God who is somewhat open to the desires of his children. He understood God to answer prayer, even to the extent of changing his mind or bringing about things that would not have obtained if the petitioner had not prayed. Whether or not he considered the implications for consistency in relation to the traditional Arminian view of simple foreknowledge is unknown. However, his conclusions suggested that he saw the future as full of alternative possibilities. Because of human faith or faithlessness, action or inaction, God's response to prayer may be different from what it might have been had the petitioner made different choices. For McGarvey, a human response to a divinely-revealed condition could set a

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[139]Ibid.

[140]Ibid.

[141]Ibid.

[142]Ibid., 324.

[143]Ibid.

course in one direction from among a plurality of real possibilities which existed before that response.

At the turn of the twentieth century, McGarvey cooperated with Philip Y. Pendleton in producing Sunday School curriculum for Standard Publishing, and as a coauthor for at least two books.[144] In their commentary on Romans, they manifested an understanding of God as resourceful, particularly with regard to the future election and restoration of the nation of Israel as certain. This did not mean, to them, that specific individuals were elected without regard to their faith; it meant the election of the nation as nation. The following two aspects of their conclusions about Israel's future restoration were significant for two reasons. First, they affirmed that what God foreknows cannot fail to obtain. Second, they qualified the chronology of the restoration by affirming that God is free to leave the future time of its fulfillment open, and quoted Godet as being in agreement:

> Here is the second proof that God did not cast off his people. It is in the nature of an axiom, a statement which is so palpably true that it needs no corroboration. God's foreknowledge can not fail, therefore that nation which in the eternity before the world he knew to be his own nation, can not ultimately fail to become his nation. . . . Says Godet, "In all others salvation is the affair of individuals, but here the notion of salvation is attached to the nation itself; not that the liberty of individuals is in the least compromised by the collective designation. The Israelites contemporary with Jesus might reject him; an indefinite series of generations may for ages perpetuate this fact of national unbelief. God is under no pressure; time can stretch out as long as he pleases. *He will add, if need be, ages to ages,* until there come at length the generation disposed to open their eyes and freely welcome their Messiah," [emphasis added].[145]

Thus qualified, McGarvey seemed to view God's foreknowledge of Israel "in the eternity before the world" as God's predetermination of a chosen nation as nation, not a predetermination of its individual citizens or all future details. More significantly,

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[144]Pendleton's Sunday School lessons included geographical notes by J. W. McGarvey, see e.g., Philip Y. Pendleton, *International Sunday-School Lessons for 1902*, Standard Eclectic Commentary (Cincinnati: Standard, 1901); books co-authored with J. W. McGarvey included *The Fourfold Gospel* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1914), and *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans*, The Standard Bible Commentary, vol. 3 (Cincinnati: Standard, 1916). All are in *JWM* [CD-ROM] (Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 1996).

[145]McGarvey and Pendleton, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans*, 444, in *JWM*.

however, is the flexibility to which McGarvey and Pendleton allude in God's governance. The patient God may add ages to ages as needed to draw Israelites into that nation through a faith freely chosen. The ability to add ages to ages "if need be" not only suggests a resourceful God, but also a future of possibilities in contrast to one that is exhaustively predetermined or foreknown. Pendleton and McGarvey also affirmed divine self-limitation by divine vow. In the context of comments on Romans 9-11, they said: "Calvinism denies to God the possibility of making a covenant, or giving a promise, for each of these is a forfeiture of freedom, a limitation of liberty. According to Calvinism, God is absolutely free; according to the Scripture, he is free save where he has pledged himself to man in the gospel."[146]

In the final analysis, McGarvey and Pendleton seemed to have understood the biblical narrative to demonstrate a divine resourcefulness which included partial divine determinism; limited but substantial human freedom; bilateral covenant relationships in which both parties had freely-chosen limitations and responsibilities; and covenant relationships in which God could be moved by human behavior and petition to change his mind about some things. Their teachings did contain expressions that indicated they thought divine self-limitation was biblical, and that the future was in some details open. However, this research found neither McGarvey nor Pendleton to have explicitly affirmed or denied a doctrine of limited foreknowledge generally, or Brents's doctrine specifically.

The Doctrine's Continued Life

The doctrine of limited foreknowledge was still active in Churches of Christ during the later twentieth century. One example of an SCM leader who held this doctrine during that era was Randall C. Bailey. Bailey earned his Ph.D. in Old Testament from Drew University, served as professor of Old Testament at Southern Christian University, was an elder at the Vaughn Park Church of Christ in Montgomery, Alabama, and was

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[146]Ibid., 397.

heavily involved in evangelistic and academic mission work in Ukraine. Though he rejected Brents's analogy between omniscience and omnipotence as faulty, he thought the doctrine of divine nescience was "by far, the most consistent position."[147] His scholarship also identified two other prominent church leaders, Gus Nichols and Rex A. Turner, Sr., who had also "adopted Brents's position, with modifications."[148]

Nichols, most widely known as a query editor for the *Gospel Advocate* at the middle of the century, was highly respected among the conservatives in the movement, particularly in his home state of Alabama. In that state he was converted to Christ, farmed, and successfully pursued ministerial education at a time when it was scarce in his region. Though he traveled to conduct evangelistic meetings, he ministered primarily in Alabama his entire life, through writing, radio, and as the preacher for the church in Jasper. As of December 2002, he and his wife were the only two people yet to have been awarded the privilege of a place in the Walker County cemetery's Circle of Honor, a plot reserved for figures recognized as dignitaries for their lifelong service to the County's people.[149] In 1950, Nichols affirmed a doctrine of voluntary divine ignorance much as did Brents: God chose to know only certain realities "fit" to be known by him. Nichols wrote that God knew "all things which he saw fit to know–he was able to foresee all he wished to foresee."[150]

More recently, another Alabama figure who held this view was Rex A. Turner, Sr. This preacher, educator, and Christian journalist used his gifts for more than sixty

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[147]Randall C. Bailey, "Predestination, The Foreknowledge of God, and Man's Free Will," *Sound Doctrine* 5, no. 1 (1980): 13.

[148]Randall C. Bailey, "A Study of Predestination and the Foreknowledge of God as Perceived by Bible Teachers of Christian Colleges, Bible Teachers of Preacher Training Schools, and Gospel Preachers of the Churches of Christ in the United States," Th.M. thesis, Southern Christian University, 1979, 121-22.

[149]Scott Harp, ed., "Gus Nichols" [on-line]; accessed 9 December 2002; available from http://www.fcoc.com/history/nichols,g.htm; Internet.

[150]Gus Nichols, "Questions Answered," *GA* 92 (February 2, 1950): 69, quoted in Bailey, "A Study of Predestination and the Foreknowledge of God," 122.

years in some form of ministry. For five years he edited the *Gospel Advocate Annual Lesson Commentary*.[151] He was a cofounder of three academic institutions in Montgomery: Faulkner University (formerly Montgomery Bible College), Alabama Christian Academy, and Southern Christian University (formerly Alabama Christian School of Religion). He served as president of the latter, and is the namesake of its Turner School of Theology. According to Bailey, Turner believed "that God's foreknowledge is limited by man's free will."[152]

Contemporary leaders who reject doctrines of limited foreknowledge were also found in Churches of Christ. They include diverse voices, like Wayne Jackson and Ron Highfield. Jackson is a contemporary leader in conservative Churches of Christ and editor of the *Christian Courier*. He concluded that, "In the final analysis, it seems quite unnecessary to deny the full foreknowledge of God."[153] He also rejected the assumption in Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge that God's exhaustive foreknowledge would annihilate human freedom and make sin a necessity. This "is a faulty conclusion that does not accord with the evidence," Jackson said.[154] The "fact that God knows what one will do does not mean that he removes the person's free will and forces him to act in a particular way."[155] His essay never attempted to reason why.

Jackson thought his rejection of the doctrine of limited foreknowledge to be well grounded in the law of non-contradiction as well. As he applied it to Scripture, any contradictions regarding the changing of God's mind are only apparent. His use of this rule led him to subordinate one class of biblical teachings to another. In his opinion, the

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[151]"Rex A. Turner, Sr.," *Christian Chronicle* 58, no. 3 (March 2001) [on-line]; accessed 9 December 2002; available from http://www.christianchronicle.org/0103/p03a4.html; Internet.

[152]Bailey, "A Study of Predestination and the Foreknowledge of God," 122.

[153]Wayne Jackson, "Does God Limit His Own Foreknowledge?" *Christian Courier* (July 19, 2000) [on-line]; accessed 1 November 2002; available from http://66.33.75.203//questions/gods ForeknowledgeQuestion.htm; Internet.

[154]Ibid.

[155]Ibid.

doctrine of God's absolute immutability was more authoritative than doctrines affirming divine mutability. He affirmed the former was the "literal" teaching of Scripture, and biblical texts believed to support immutability assumed a governing role. Texts which appeared to indicate that God changed his mind, repented, or did not know, were subordinated to the controlling power of the governing texts. A text from this second class may appear to teach that God changes his mind. However, it must be understood figuratively as an "anthropopathism," he said; in no way should it be understood "in any *literal* sense."[156]

Ron Highfield, Associate Professor of Religion at SCM-related Pepperdine University, also recommended the rejection of any divine self-limitation on both philosophical and theological grounds. Highfield is perhaps the most scholarly and articulate of writers from the Churches of Christ to ever take up the subject with fervor. In his various essays rejecting divine self-limitation, he offered several reasons for its rejection.[157] He concluded that self-limitation is a semantic facade for what is necessarily an eternal limitation of the divine being.[158] In contrast to these limitations, he affirmed that God is truly limited in no way, and to affirm that he is would diminish the doctrine of God and rob "us of the God in whom we can trust absolutely."[159]

Highfield rejected the version of free will associated with theologies of self-limitation as well.[160] In its place he opted for a doctrine of compatibilism he thought to

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[156]Wayne Jackson, "Does God Change His Mind?" *Christian Courier* (September 10, 2002) [on-line]; accessed 1 November 2002; available from http://66.33.75.203//questions/changingMind Question.htm; Internet.

[157]Ron Highfield, "Divine Self-Limitation in Open Theism," *JETS* 45, no. 2 (2002): 299; idem, "Divine Self-Limitation in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Appraisal," *CSR* 32, no. 1 (2002): manuscript; idem, "The Problem with the 'Problem of Evil': a Response to Gregory Boyd's Open Theist Solution," *RQ*, forthcoming.

[158]Highfield, *CSR* manuscript, 36.

[159]Highfield, "Divine Self-Limitation in Open Theism," 299.

[160]Ibid. Highfield also rejected the suggestions that creaturely existence and divine selection necessitate limitation.

be rooted in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the doctrine of divine concurrence which he believed necessarily followed from it.[161] He also rejected the suggestion that negations necessarily imply limitations on God.[162] He argued that some are apophatic and actually serve to prevent the human conceptual limitation of God, e.g., God "is not a mortal," (1 Sam 15:29) or "God cannot die." These negations do not limit God, but in fact negate the limits represented by the words "mortal" and "die."[163] In Highfield's judgment, a failure to comprehend this has led to the faulty supposition that the language of the Bible and orthodox theology has always included an implicit acceptance of divine limitation. In Highfield's judgment, theologies which affirm divine self-limitation do not speak apophatically, but impose on God "true limitations."[164]

Implications and Conclusions

The research has demonstrated both the acceptance and the rejection of Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge among different SCM leaders throughout more than a century of the movement's history. Significant personalities indicated that they had come to the same or similar conclusions regarding divine nescience, and others opined that his doctrine represented the doctrine of the SCM. Brents's book as a whole became–and remained–a popular "systematic theology" of sorts in the movement's more conservative circles. This was not because Brents had revealed anything substantially new. It was because he had articulated beliefs already cherished by the movement in a polemic literary style which had broad appeal. A number of the movement's renowned pioneers openly agreed with his doctrine of divine nescience. For the most part, those who disagreed with Brents's doctrine respected the man and praised the remainder of his

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[161]Highfield, "Divine Self-Limitation in Open Theism," 299.

[162]Ibid.

[163]Ibid., 287.

[164]Ibid., 287-88.

theology. The tone of their rejections of his doctrine of foreknowledge ranged from mild to forceful. And to support their rejections, they offered both biblical and rational arguments. In all events, their rejection of the doctrine was clear. The movement clearly included parties on both sides of the issue. With this conceptual division between them on a doctrine about God himself, how they avoided ecclesiastical division and exclusion remains an intriguing question. Chapter five attempts to combine the results of the research in a succinct attempt to show that the rule of express terms is a likely answer that very problem.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETING BRENTS'S DOCTRINE OF LIMITED FOREKNOWLEDGE AND ITS FORBEARANCE

T. W. Brents, a significant leader in the SCM, developed a doctrine of limited foreknowledge with which his fellow classical theists exercised forbearance. A key reason for this forbearance seems to have been the advocacy by both sides of the rule of express terms. Brents attempted to bolster his doctrine of limited foreknowledge by asserting that it came simply from the Bible alone, without any encouragement from other sources. However, the development of his doctrine, and the doctrine itself, were really more complicated than he confessed. This created a rather profound irony, in that his self-conscious simple biblicism pointed to his doctrine's inferential nature and to his unconscious naivete. The latter may have kept him from seeing the complexities of his doctrine and some of its less than flattering implications.

Interpreting Brents's Theological Development

At the time this portion of the thesis was formulated–that Brents "developed a doctrine of limited foreknowledge"–it did not seem that one small, secondary sentence would become so important to the entire project. It did, however ironically. For, as he was concluding the chapter on foreknowledge in his *GPS*, he wrote this: "When we wrote the foregoing, we were not aware of a single authority, save the Bible, from which we might derive the slightest encouragement."[1] His statement raised questions about his doctrinal development. Was it even possible to develop a doctrine independent of any

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[1]T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 17th ed., (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 84. The book was originally published in Cincinnati by Bosworth, Chase and Hall in 1874.

encouraging source but the Bible? Or, even more, was it even possible for a person like Brents to possess such a fundamental unawareness of the things that had molded or encouraged his theological understandings? If the data of chapter 2 is correct, then Brents read voraciously, studied thoroughly, and came to his conclusions on foreknowledge while preparing for a debate with a Universalist.[2] Could this T. W. Brents not be aware of the books, articles, or debates in which the subject was discussed by Stone, Campbell, Franklin, and Hall, to name a few? His observers had described him as so passionate, diligent, and scholarly about his work, his claim to be unaware of even the slightest discussion of limited divine foreknowledge truly baffles the mind. Yet, positively, it motivated the research which gathered and assembled the data necessary to trace his development. He developed as a man, and he developed his doctrine of limited foreknowledge, within various cultural and theological contexts. This study described those contexts in chapters 2 and 3, which assembled sufficient evidence needed to criticize his claim. This section is devoted to that critique. It argues that the cultural and theological contexts in which Brents was reared manifested external factors which seem to have been significant enough to encourage the development of his doctrine of limited foreknowledge–contrary to his denial of encouragement from extra-biblical sources.

Given human life as we know it, a man cannot develop a doctrine from the Bible alone without any influence from any other source–it is impossible. From a behaviorist standpoint, Brents's conclusions on foreknowledge were the sum total of all the influencing factors which acted upon him during his life, whether or not he was conscious of them. This does not conflict entirely with Christian theology, regardless of whether one stands on a more determinist or libertarian footing. For example, a Reformed theologian might explain external influencing factors in terms of God's sovereign will,

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[2]E.g., in preparation for a discussion of baptism that he made reference to "eighty nine scholarly extracts . . . thirty four lexicographers, seventy scholarly works, thirty four examples of the use of the word in ancient literature, and thirty eight ancient translations of the Scriptures," James E. Hawkins, "T. W. Brents, Master of All," Center for Restoration Studies Collection, Abilene Christian University Library, n.d.

perhaps as agents to accomplish his ends. While Brents perceived himself to freely choose his doctrine from the Bible alone among other possibilities, the external influence of the divine will really provided the impetus. A relational theologian, on the other hand, might explain those external influencing factors as a combination of some things God determined and some not. In that case, while Brents remained an autonomous being within boundaries and retained the freedom to choose, those external factors still would have exerted influence upon him in such a way to truly impact any result. Certainly, people should not confuse secular behaviorism, classical theism, and relational theology. However, they all agree that external factors can and do influence human behavioral outcomes.[3] In the end, all of Brents's experiences had participated in some way and to some degree in his spiritual formation. Therefore, whether Brents was conscious of them or not, they were influences which impacted who he became. Some sources specifically encouraged him to develop his doctrine of limited foreknowledge in the contexts of nineteenth century America and the SCM. He may have been unaware of them, but for him to have developed his doctrine without some encouragement from them remains an impossibility.

Brents's Biblicism

That impossibility, combined with Brent's confessed unawareness of encouraging extrabiblical sources, created a recipe for what had the potential to be an unhealthy variety of biblicism, especially if possessed by an influential Christian leader. Being a biblicist is a good thing. However, in the same way that many good things can be misused or abused, a person's biblicism may have negative effects if combined with certain undesirable characteristics. Brents's confessed unawareness of external factors itself is one of those undesirable characteristics. It indicates a naivete which is more likely to result in theological bondage to those external factors than liberation from them.

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[3]Cf. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 199; cf. also Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 905.

Van Engen affirmed that those who claim to "stand on Scripture alone and recognize no traditional authorities," are often the "least free" from them.[4] This happens because they are not "even conscious of what traditions have molded their understanding of Scripture."[5] Brents's unawareness of the various factors which could have shaped his doctrinal development, therefore, may indicate the presence of an unhealthy biblicism. At least, it could have motivated him to portray his doctrine as coming from the Bible alone, when, in fact, it was a synthesis of biblical principles and philosophical assumptions. In any event, while discernment and an understanding of one's contexts should characterize Christian leaders, Brents confessed that he was unaware of any authorities but the Bible that had the potential to mold his convictions.[6]

The study has shown that Brents possessed a unique theological history. It contained elements which were certainly encouraging to his point of view. Assuming the validity of Van Engen's thesis, it follows that Brents's unawareness of those elements might indicate that they had more influence on him than if he had recognized them. Ironically, one of those external factors themselves may have motivated his denial of their influence. Brents's thinking was in harmony with the movement's "profoundly primitivist identification with first-century Christianity," and that primitivism likely encouraged him to ignore or even reject his own history and development.[7] For if primitivists "took seriously their history and identity, it might detract from their identification with the first Christian age, and mark them as simply another" sect or denomination–things with which Brents did not desire to be associated.[8] He wanted to be known as someone who stood on Scripture alone. In either event, his confessed

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[4]J. Van Engen, "Tradition," in *EDT*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984): 1106.

[5]Ibid.

[6]E.g., 1 Chr 12:32; Esth 1:13-22; Mat 16:1-4; Luke 12:54-56; Titus 1:9; Heb 5:14.

[7]Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: the Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 14.

[8]Ibid.

unawareness of any source of encouragement but the Bible suggests at least a naivete that could have nurtured an unhealthy biblicism. However, external factors other than his primitivism exerted influential force upon him.

Extrabiblical Influences

Brents's life story also included other significant, extrabiblical factors which could have contributed to his theological development in general, and several would have encouraged the development of his doctrine of limited foreknowledge in particular--whether or not he was aware of them. From the time he was a young man, those factors composed the several contexts in which Brents's was reared. In those contexts Brents formulated his views of the world, life, theology, and his place in it all. Chapter 2 revealed that his formation began on what was then still an obscure Tennessee frontier, and his life concluded with a ministerial reputation that was nationally renowned. In between, the external factors of his cultural and theological contexts, as well as more specific personal experiences, contributed to the making of the man he would become--and to the doctrine of limited foreknowledge that would come from him. The relevant information from the previous chapters is placed into the following four categories, and discussed in terms of his pioneer upbringing, his predisposition to Arminian values, the impact of prevailing SCM attitudes toward inferences, and other doctrines of limited foreknowledge in existence at the time.

Pioneering theology. Brents's pioneer upbringing in the wilderness of what was then Tennessee's western frontier most likely instilled in him values that would become quite helpful to the unique challenges of his ministerial vocation, and especially its exercise in the context of the SCM. Those values, axiomatic in the pioneer spirit, included individualism, freedom, and a sense of calling. The pragmatics of frontier survival for anyone often demanded the rugged individualism necessary to function and survive in the natural wilderness, with minimal supplies or support structures, and at

times, even alone if necessary. These demands had no reason to make exceptions for Brents. The fact that Brents not only survived, but thrived, seems to indicate that he assimilated the qualities of self-sufficiency, individualism, and self-determination quite well. His self-education supports this. From his humble pioneer childhood where the "three R's" were thought to to be sufficient education for a farmer, he pursued what was largely self-education, and pursued it through medical school, the practice of medicine, and eventually into teaching medicine and chairing a department in a medical college. His pursuit of, and relative success in, numerous avocations for which he had little to no formal training, also supports the suggestion that he acquired the trait of self-sufficiency. They included banking, debating, preaching, and the writing ministry which would ultimately bring him the most notoriety. The external factors of Brents's early pioneer life seem to have called him to rise above them, motivating him to meet the challenge, and influencing him to become the proverbial self-sufficient and self-determining man who appeared "to pull himself up by his own bootstraps."

The self-sufficient pioneer seems to have had a sense of calling as well. So strong was Brents's calling to ministry that he left medicine in order to devote himself fully to his new vocation. His specific ministerial calling was likely encouraged by the other two pioneer values, freedom (self-determinism) and individualism. Having survived and thrived the often life-threatening dangers of America's Western frontier likely undergirded the individual confidence he needed to confront the potential dangers of an abstract theological frontier. Having a strong sense of confidence and individual self-sufficiency instilled in him, how much easier it must have been for him to oppose a valued orthodoxy he perceived to have been mistaken, and supplant it with his own understanding of limited foreknowledge, knowing that ostracism might result. The pioneer sense of freedom which accompanied that confidence likely dovetailed with the SCM's proclamation of freedom from creeds, its implicit doctrine of the Bible's perspicuity, and a rule which mandated reliance on the very words of Scripture, to

encourage his development of a doctrine of foreknowledge which differed from the accepted norm. Later generations did come to refer to men like Campbell and Brents as the movement's theological "pioneers," and in so doing, recognized the analogy between nineteenth century America's geographical and spiritual frontiers, and the pioneers who blazed new trails through each.[9]

Brents's pioneering mindset seems to fit nicely into Turner's "frontier thesis," for Brents pioneer upbringing seems to have solidified in him the three major traits Turner identified in a pioneering spirit: individualism, freedom, and a sense of destiny (or calling).[10] Thought Turner's frontier thesis provides only one limited explanation, it did envision the American frontier as both a "symbol and myth" which nurtured an emerging religious mindset, and gave rise to a new order of Christian institutions.[11] Chapter 2 demonstrated that Brents himself became a symbol or a myth in some respects. And his doctrine of limited foreknowledge was certainly a relatively new teaching which departed from that of the dominant religious institutions and seems to have been nurtured by the realities of frontier living.

Exposure to Arminian values. That frontier life developed with a fundamental lack of exposure to diverse Christian interpretations, and those very conditions seem to have created an advantage for Arminian viewpoints to be exposed more–and exposed more positively–to Brents. The research revealed that only two doctrinal systems existed in Lewisburg and most of Marshall County during Brents's formative years. Calvinism was represented in the Presbyterian church, and Arminianism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. On the surface that seems quite balanced. However, the scale seemed to

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[9]Leroy Garrett is only one example among many of those who have used the term "pioneer" in this way; see, e.g., his book, *The Stone-Campbell Movement* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1981; rev. ed., 1994), 53.

[10]Quoted in Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 52-53.

[11]Ibid., 52. Hatch's work, for example, might suggest that the characteristics of Jeffersonian populism contributed to the anti-creedalism of the SCM. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

be weighted significantly to the Arminian side, for Brents's parents had a conscious preference for Methodism. With the Methodist and Presbyterian churches dominating, and a predisposition to Methodism in his primary social group, it seems likely that Brents would receive more positive exposure to the Arminian positions than he would to those of Calvinism. Therefore, it seems reasonably likely that Brents, at a young age, began to develop Arminian propensities on such topics as foreknowledge and free will.

Brents was likely encouraged in his conception of libertarian freedom by American political culture as well. That culture had been informed by Enlightenment philosophy, and indirectly by Socinian theology through Unitarianism, particularly in the areas of human liberty and tolerance. The Socinians' strong affirmation of human freedom, and their inability to reconcile it with absolute divine foreknowledge or predestination, moved them to deny that free acts can be either absolutely predestined or foreknown.[12] While it did not institutionalize a doctrine of divine providence, the U. S. Declaration of Independence did institutionalized human liberty as a creation of God on the same par with life itself, and to which he had given humans an inalienable right.[13] From this sprang a society which had in its founding documents approved a theo-political doctrine of human self-determination and concomitant toleration. Early American political culture certainly provided fertile soil for the establishment of the SCM's unique platform, on which Brents firmly stood. It promoted the New Testament as the church's "constitution," unity through direct reliance on that constitution, forbearance in matters the constitution did not expressly address, and liberty of conscience.[14] Brents had been reared amid the excitement and promise of a culture composed of two societies–the American nation and the Stone-Campbell fellowship–both of which were born of escape

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[12]Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 1:400-01.

[13]The Declaration of Independence, Preamble.

[14]"The New Testament is . . . a constitution for the . . . government of the New Testament church," Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, in *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's* Declaration and Address, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollman, ATLA Monograph Series (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2000), 18.

from religious intolerance, and nursed on the foment of revolutions which sought freedom. It seems safe to say that no culture any more than this one could have encouraged the ease with which Brents accepted human free will as self-evident in Scripture and creation.

American culture also encouraged the exercise of that liberty. While the memories of European religious persecutions were still sharp, the nation had emerged from them through its people's pursuit of liberty–especially the freedoms of conscience and worship. With new legal protections provided by the American experience, the institutions and dogmas of established churches became less threatening and easier to distrust or resist.[15] As some people developed their independent American spirit, their willingness to question established norms, even long-standing Christian orthodoxies, likely grew also, encouraging the birth of alternative religious teachings and institutions, especially on the frontier. No matter how established churches or doctrines were, the American experiment was creating a culture where the freedom to challenge established norms existed. As such, this culture provided significant encouragement, both for Brents's understanding of human freedom, and for his development of an alternative doctrine of foreknowledge, whether or not he recognized it.

Brents likely had been exposed also to the Arminian conception of a salvation that involved human decision. If his parents or the local Methodist-Episcopal church had not exposed him to it, the SCM certainly did. Brents would come to fully accept the movement's conditional soteriology, and he would receive at least implicit encouragement from it to reject absolute foreknowledge of any kind. The SCM's doctrine of salvation was developed largely in opposition to Reformed foreordination, and grew to incorporate Alexander Campbell's conception of a relational, bi-lateral

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[15]Cf. Marian Hillar, "From the Polish Socinians to the American Constitution," *A Journal from the Radical Reformation: a Testimony to Biblical Unitarianism* 4, no. 3 (1994): 22-57 [on-line]; accessed 23 December 2002; available from http://www.socinian.org/polish_socinians.html, and http://www.socinian. org/polish_socinians2.html; Internet.

covenant between God and man in which both God and man had real responsibilities to fulfill. Libertarian human freedom was necessary in this soteriology. The SCM opposed dogmatic Calvinism because the movement perceived Reformed determinism to make a mockery of human freedom and those bi-lateral relationships. Brents would also come to affirm conditional salvation, the human freedom which it needed to function, and an ardent opposition to Reformed predestination. However, he saw the notion of absolute simple foreknowledge which Campbell and others espoused to be no better. To Brents, it resulted in the same fixed future as absolute predestination. If God's knowledge is perfect, and God foreknows everything, then man can not do other than what God has seen, and man is not free. Because he reasoned this way, and he valued his doctrine of conditional salvation and the human freedom on which it depended, his strong commitment to that soteriology likely encouraged Brents to deny absolute divine foreknowledge and opt for the limited view.

Attitudes toward Inferences

The SCM's attitudes toward inferential doctrine seemed to have implicitly encouraged the developing of new theological ideas, generally, and Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge specifically. Early in the movement, its clear agenda for unity had been set. Inferential doctrines, particularly those manifested in the dominant creeds and systems, were perceived to be the causes of all divisions in Christendom. Therefore, the means to restore unity was to rely only on the express terms of Scripture. The creeds and inferential doctrines were useful for their educational value, but they were formally non-binding, and could not be used as terms of communion. Campbell and others published a variety of views on foreknowledge and other doctrines they considered inferential, demonstrating their sincerity about such doctrines' usefulness. The practice, in effect, seemed to encourage an attitude of ambivalence toward such teachings–as long as they were not forced upon others. In one respect, though, Alexander Campbell removed any ambivalence about one use of inferential doctrines: his communion table would not be

placed on them. In sum, the SCM's prevailing attitudes toward inferences positively stressed their educational value, but more so, emphasized their non-binding nature and their authority as subordinate to the Bible's express terms. Since both the classical doctrines of foreknowledge were viewed to be inferential, it seems likely that these attitudes toward inferences would encourage Brents to question those traditional orthodoxies and develop alternative theological views without fear of ostracism, for the peer support and ecclesiastical liberty necessary to explore alternative understandings was inherent in those attitudes. Brents likely would have been most encouraged regarding his doctrine of limited foreknowledge, however, by an awareness of others in the SCM who held similar views.

Existing Doctrines of Limited Foreknowledge

Though Brents claimed to be unaware of any authority other than the Bible that could encourage him in his doctrine of limited foreknowledge, the possibility that he had been influenced in some way by some existing doctrines of limited foreknowledge remains. He even may have come in contact with similar views of foreknowledge inside or outside the SCM, and simply forgotten about them. In any event, Brents was a well-read and widely-traveled itinerant preacher and debater, a man whom Cowden referred to as the Alexander Campbell of the South and West. To think that he was unaware of any musings whatsoever on limited foreknowledge, inside or outside his SCM circles, remains puzzling. Others in the movement, even some of its first-generation pioneers, were coming to similar conclusions as Brents at approximately the same time. By 1842, the former Cumberland Presbyterian, Barton W. Stone, had abandoned the classical understanding for a more limited view; Alexander Hall published his doctrine of limited foreknowledge in his 1846 book, which was subsequently commended by classical theist Alexander Campbell in his *Millennial Harbinger*; and by 1852, Benjamin Franklin had abandoned the doctrine of absolute foreknowledge as well. Outside the SCM, the Socinian rejection of absolute foreknowledge likely lived on in most Unitarian churches;

and the American Wesleyan tradition produced Lorenzo Dow McCabe, who developed his doctrine of necessary divine nescience at Ohio Wesleyan. While these things cannot explicitly be connected to Brents in a causal manner, they do indicate that doctrinal development on foreknowledge similar to Brents's was taking place at roughly the same time, and in the same region of the country.

Governing Theological Concerns

Chapter 2 identified evangelism as a governing theological concern for Brents: because he understood evangelism to be rooted in a conditional soteriology which needed libertarian human freedom to function, both versions of absolute foreknowledge had to be removed. To him, the good news was unlimited atonement in Christ which anyone could obtain by the obedience of a faith freely chosen. This did not jibe with Calvinism's doctrines, so naturally, he opposed them. He focused specifically on absolute predestination, believing that if it could be felled, the rest of the system would necessarily fall with it. Surprisingly, he placed absolute simple foreknowledge in the same category and opposed it as well. For he saw it resulting in the same unalterably prefixed future which destroyed man's ability to freely choose the gospel, and leading to a fatalism that discouraged man's motivation to listen to the gospel in the first place. Brents needed an alternative to both classical views to justify his doctrine of conditional salvation, maintain its consistency, and preserve human libertarian freedom. In essence, his conception of evangelism depended on libertarian free will; and to maintain libertarian free will, both conceptions of absolute foreknowledge had to be replaced by a doctrine of limited foreknowledge.[16]

This dynamic of free-will salvation appears to have been a natural motivating factor for Brents's doctrine of limited foreknowledge. However, it was also more than that. It indicated a shift away from the earlier SCM paradigm. Not only did Brents

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[16]No direct connection with Socinianism was established; however, Brents's argument is essentially the same, though, at times, not phrased as well.

believe that Calvinism was a hindrance to evangelism, he thought Calvinists and other Christians outside of his circle needed to be evangelized. When he wrote to the *Advocate* to persuade them to add a department devoted wholly to "the presentation of the gospel to sinners," he gave this as one of his reasons: "We wish to hand our papers to our neighbors, that they may be converted from sectarianism . . . to Christianity."[17] Believers in other fellowships now needed to be converted. However, this was not envisioned in the earlier movement.

The earlier vision may be seen in these few examples. The Christian Association of Washington County, Pennsylvania, to which Thomas Campbell presented his *Declaration and Address*, was composed of people from several different denominations who gathered to promote Christian unity and cooperation in gospel ministry; they did not shed their denominational identities. The foreword to the first edition of the *Declaration* said this: "AT [*sic*] a meeting held at Buffaloe [*sic*], August 17, 1809, consisting of persons from different religious denominations . . . it was unanimously agreed upon . . . to form themselves into a religious association."[18] Barton W. Stone did not ask men to give up their creeds or confessions; he only asked them to participate in Christian unity by holding them as "private property."[19] And Moses Lard rejoiced to learn that a group of Baptists shared a devotion to Scripture that paralleled that of his fellowship, which devotion was "at work in the great-heart of the Baptist people. With that people and our own," he said, "lie the hopes of the world."[20] Lard indicated no need for Baptists to be converted. Brents appears to have no longer agreed. When the shift in thinking began, or what motivated it, are questions for future research. It is noted here to illustrate the

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[17]T. W. Brents, "Bros. Fanning and Lipscomb," *GA* 8, no. 52 (December 25, 1866): 822-23.

[18]T. Campbell, "Declaration and Address," in *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 4.

[19]Barton W. Stone, quoted in William Garrett West, *Barton Warren Stone and Christian Unity*, Footnotes to Disciple History No. 3 (n.p., 1954), 9, in *BWS*.

[20]Moses E. Lard, "Comments and Reflections on the Foregoing," *Lard's Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1865): 84, 88-89, in *MEL*.

potential governing power his unique theological concern for evangelism may have had upon him. So powerful was his notion of human freedom, so influential was his conception of conditional salvation, that he was willing to express a need to convert those who differed from him, and that in contrast to some of the founding principles of the movement. Perhaps his own words are telling. In stating that he wanted to distribute the *Advocate* to his neighbors, he did not indicate that his purpose was to see them converted to *Christ*, but to see them converted "from sectarianism . . . to Christianity" (of course, as he understood it).[21] In other words, his focus was perhaps less evangelism and more the proselytization of his neighbors from one system to another. If his theological concerns exerted enough force on him to move him so far away from the earlier principles of the movement he loved, if they were powerful enough to move him to redefine evangelism as proselytizing without even being aware of it, then they may have exerted enough force to blind him to flaws in his doctrine of limited foreknowledge.

Blindness in Brents?

These governing theological concerns seem to have caused at least some blindness in Brents. Chapter 2 reported a plethora of testimonies to him as an invincible logician, and the like. However, one argument for limited divine foreknowledge seems rather adolescent. He asserted that God's limited foreknowledge was not necessary, but a volitional ignorance. God, who always chooses the right thing, willingly chose not to know some things. Of course, this begs the question: "How could anyone know that *not* knowing something was the right choice if they had no knowledge of that thing in the first place?" Brents's affirmations to this effect have in view not only future contingent things (which relational theists assert are by definition not knowable), but a present *reality* the knowledge of which God chooses to avoid. In preparing this argument, it seems that he did not follow his affirmations' implications through to what appears to be their

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[21]T. W. Brents, "Bros. Fanning and Lipscomb," *GA* 8, no. 52 (December 25, 1866): 822-23.

incomprehensible end: *God chose not to know a reality* he knew *was best not to know.* Not only is it internally inconsistent, but Brents offers no suggestions as to the ground of God's choice not to know that reality.[22] His governing theological concerns may have blinded this "invincible logician" to what seems to be a readily apparent contradiction in his reasoning.

Summary of Brents's Theological Development

T. W. Brents claimed that he developed his doctrine of limited foreknowledge, unaware of any authority but the Bible from which he might draw "the slightest encouragement."[23] He was a devoted biblicist, which is a commendable quality in anyone. But his biblicism seems to have been tainted by his lack of consciousness of the traditions, experiences, and other forces that molded his understanding of Scripture.

He had a cultural and theological history that could not be separated from whom he had become. The pioneering mind he developed on the Tennessee frontier likely gave him the courage he needed to stand alone on the theological frontier. His Methodist-Episcopal parents, as well as his nation, likely helped him to value human freedom and conditionalism in a way distinct from those whom he would later come to oppose. And the values of unity, forbearance, Scripture, and the theological method his SCM had passed on to him likely influenced the way he read Scripture, as well as created the context of freedom and security needed to develop such a bold doctrine of limited foreknowledge. All of these factors had the potential to work together for good. Yet he did not seem to be aware of them. And not being aware of them, he was more likely to be enslaved to them. The potential in Brents for an unhealthy biblicism, combined with what might be a blindness caused by his governing theological concerns, encourages a

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[22]E.g., *GPS*, 77-78.

[23]*GPS*, 84.

closer, more cautious scrutiny of his theology. In this unawareness, he may have drawn some other conclusions which might, in retrospect, be regrettable.

Maintaining Unity in Theological Diversity

In spite of the foregoing, Brents and his fellows were self-consciously committed to a simple biclicism which appears to have been a key feature in maintaining unity. The evangelical fellowship known as the Stone-Campbell movement began addressing the challenge of Christian unity in concert with the doctrine of limited foreknowledge early in the nineteenth century. T. W. Brents was not the only SCM leader who held the doctrine, but he did articulate it the most systematically in print. Focusing on his doctrine, this study sought the fundamental reason that unity was maintained when other Christian groups excluded the doctrine and those who held it from their fellowships. The SCM resisted division and exclusion from the beginning, and unity was its watchword. However, factions in the movement began bickering and squabbling in the mid-nineteenth century. It has since divided into three denominations, and those denominations have various factions within them. The fact that unity has been maintained with regard to the doctrine of limited foreknowledge in this context of constant bickering makes the situation that much more intriguing.

The Rule of Express Terms

Nevertheless, T. W. Brents clearly did articulate a doctrine of limited foreknowledge which departed clearly from the doctrine of foreknowledge held by his fellow classical theists. Yet, they did exercise forbearance with one another. A likely reason seems to have been their commitment to a simple biblicism generally, and particularly in the way they tried to work theologically with rule of express terms. The rule was the touchstone of a method which governed behavior in several areas of the church's life in order to produce and maintain Christian unity. The leaders of the SCM who promoted this approach believed that it could restore, create, and sustain the unity

they felt their Lord desired so strongly. Further, they felt it could prevent church strife, for the express terms of Scripture alone were the standard and judge, not human opinions or interpretations. Human inferences, particularly in the form of the creeds, they believed to be the causes of the division experienced in Christendom at the time. Among other things, the rule asked Christians to see the church as a community called to unity in the God revealed in Scripture, which might not be necessarily the God revealed in the creeds, or conceived in their own understandings.[24]

A summary of the definition of the rule presented in chapter 1 is as follows. The rule affirmed that Christians were obliged to confess and practice only that which was "expressly exhibited upon the sacred page."[25] And only that which was "expressly taught, and enjoined upon them, in the word of God" could be legitimately "required as terms of communion."[26] It denied the Reformed doctrine of necessary consequence which gave some inferential doctrines an authority equal to Scripture. In contrast, the rule of express terms placed all creeds and other inferential doctrines under the footstool of the explicit terms of the Bible.

The Rule in Theory

The rule of express terms was designed and adopted specifically as a means to establish Christian unity where it had been lacking, and to prevent future division. In his *Declaration and Address*, Thomas Campbell expressed his understanding that such unity was of God's grand and divine design. He said,

> That it is the grand design, and native tendency, of our holy religion, to reconcile and unite men to God, and to each other, in truth and love, to the glory of God, and

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[24]Cf. John Mark Hicks, "An Introduction to the Doctrine of God," paper presented at the annual Christian Scholars Conference, Nashville, TN, 18 July 1996 [on-line]; accessed 20 January 2001; available from http://www. hugsr.edu/hicks/GOD-EXCR.htm; Internet.

[25]T. Campbell, "Declaration and Address," in *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 5-6, 18-19.

[26]Ibid.

> their own present and eternal good, will not, we presume, be denied, by any of the genuine subjects of christianity [*sic*].[27]

He invoked Jesus' prayer for unity (John 17:20-23) to encourage his audience that "the prayers of Christ himself" were with them.[28] Campbell and those with him received this grand design of reconciliation as their own, and they set out to advocate it. Campbell said,

> The cause that we advocate is not our own peculiar, nor the cause of any party, considered as such; it is a common cause, the cause of Christ and our brethren of all denominations. All that we presume, then, is to do, what we humbly conceive to be *our* duty, in connexion [*sic*] with our brethren; to each of whom it equally belongs, as to us, to exert themselves for this blessed purpose. . . . Which will forever put an end to our hapless divisions, and restore the church to its primitive unity."[29]

Then, after presenting a list of thirteen detailed propositions in which the rule of express terms appears and takes on its meaning, Campbell identified the propositions' specific purpose to be the furtherance of their agenda for unity. In his words,

> From the nature and construction of these propositions, it will evidently appear, that they are laid out in a designed subserviency to the declared end of our association; and are exibited for the express purpose or performing a duty of previous necessity–a duty loudly called for in existing circumstances at the hand of every one, that would desire to promote the interests of Zion. . . . To prepare tho [*sic*] way for a permanent scriptural unity amongst christians [*sic*].[30]

Their agenda turned toward unity and away from division. Those thirteen propositions had as their design the promotion of that goal. And in that design, it seems that a dominant means of achieving unity stood as the rule of express terms. The reasoning for it likely went something like this.

T. Campbell perceived "that division among christians [*sic*] is a horrid evil," which was caused by a neglect of God's word and the introduction of opinions, inferences, creeds, and confessions as authorities in the church. He put it this way:

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[27]T. Campbell, "Declaration and Address," in *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 8.

[28]Ibid., 11.

[29]Ibid., 12.

[30]Ibid., 20-21.

> That, (in some instances,) a partial neglect of the expressly revealed will of God; and, (in others,) an assumed authority for making the approbation of human opinions, and human inventions, a term of communion, by introducing them into the constitution, faith, or worship, of the church; are, and have been, the immediate, obvious, and universally acknowledged causes, of all the corruptions and divisions that have ever taken place in the church of God.[31]

The "assumed authority for making the approbation of human opinions" terms of communion likely alluded to the Reformed doctrine of necessary consequence.[32] If it, human opinions, human inventions, and a neglect of the expressly revealed will of God are the causes of division (disunity), then it follows, that the removal of those causes will eliminate the resulting division. In other words, unity comes when the authority of necessary consequences, inferences, opinions, human inventions, and neglect of the expressly revealed will of God are removed. Positively stated, unity comes from recognizing the express terms of Scripture as the only binding authority.

T. Campbell thought it followed, anyway. And he encapsulated the rule of express terms in nearly every one of his *Declaration*'s thirteen propositions. Not only did he positively affirm the rule of express terms, he explicitly closed the door on inferences with a negation. Consider propositions 3 and 6, for example. The first is 3, which affirmed that unity can be obtained when nothing is

> inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is *expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God.* Nor ought anything to be admitted, as of Divine obligation, in their Church constitution and managements, but what is *expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles* upon the New Testament Church; *either in express terms or by approved precedent* [emphasis added].[33]

The negation of inferences, and effectual neutering of the doctrine of necessary consequence, appeared in proposition 6:

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[31]Ibid., 20.

[32]Westminster Confession 1.6. "Casey . . . thought Campbell adopted the rule of express terms, primarily, to counter the Reformed doctrine of 'necessary consequence,'" from chapter 1, p. 9. Michael Casey, "The Origins of Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ, Part 1: The Reformed Tradition," *RQ* 31, no. 2 (1989): 87-89.

[33]Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* (1809), ed. F. D. Kirshner (St. Louis: Bethany, 1955), 45. The style of this proposition is very similar to the Westminster Confession 1.6. See also Casey, "The Origins of the Hermeneutics of the Churches of Christ, Part 1," 83, 89.

> that although *inferences and deductions* from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they *not formally binding* upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their *faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God.* Therefore, *no such deductions can be made terms of communion,* but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that *no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession* [emphasis added].[34]

In theory, then, the rule of express terms was deliberately designed to be the means of fulfilling their agenda: creating and sustaining unity, as well as destroying and preventing division. It sought to accomplish its goal, positively, by mandating the express terms of Scripture as the sole binding authority in matters of faith, obligation, and communion; and it sought to accomplish its goal, negatively, by disavowing the doctrine of necessary consequence, and preventing inferences, deductions, or opinions, from having any binding authority whatsoever. Those who heard Campbell were likely stirred by his impassioned rhetoric. It seemed quite simple–maybe even simplistic or idealistic–considering the complexities of the human psyche and interpersonal relationships. If it sounded as good to the SCM leaders as it appears to have sounded, maybe it looked just as good, or perhaps better, on paper. A house looks good on paper, too, but it cannot be occupied. Those who accepted the rule needed to demonstrate it in and out of their pulpits. They did.

Several different fellowships joined this unity movement. The most dramatic demonstration took place in Lexington, Kentucky. Barton W. Stone shared with Thomas and Alexander Campbell a passion for unity, and the belief that the basis of unity could not be inferences, opinions, or speculative subjects. According to Williams's record of the Lexington meeting, between Stone's "Christians" and the Campbells' "Disciples," elder John Smith spoke on the basis for unity, and was followed by Stone. Referring to a portion of Smith's speech, Stone agreed with him, that authoritative speech should be limited to the "words of the Scriptures"; then he said:

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[34]T. Campbell, "A Declaration and Address," in *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 19.

> after we had given up all creeds and taken the Bible, and the Bible alone, as our rule of faith and practice, we met with so much opposition, that by force of circumstances, I was led to deliver some speculative discourses upon those subjects. But I never preached a sermon of that kind that once feasted my heart; I always felt a barrenness of soul afterwards. I perfectly accord with Brother Smith that those speculations should never be taken into the pulpit; but that when compelled to speak of them at all, we should do so in the words of inspiration. . . . I have not one objection to the ground laid down by him [viz., the "words of the Scriptures alone"] as the true scriptural basis of union among the people of God; and I am willing to give him, now and here, my hand.[35]

Williams commented that the "atmosphere was charged with emotional feeling as Stone is said to have offered to Smith his hand of 'brotherly love, and it was grasped by a hand full of the honest pledges of fellowship, and the union was virtually accomplished!'"[36]

The rule of express terms sounded good. Maybe it looked even better on paper. It worked on the ground, as the union between the "Disciples" and the "Christians" demonstrated. And the rule could work again to maintain unity between limitarians and absolutists, and keep Brents and his limitarians from splitting with the absolutists at the *Christian Standard*, for example. In fact, it did seem work again.

The Rule in the SCM's Classical Theists

Because of their agenda for unity, the SCM's classical theists seemed clearly committed to the rule as the means to achieve it. That meant two very important things. First, inferential doctrines were considered valuable and needed for the growth of the church, *but they were allowed no formal, binding authority*. So, if their version of foreknowledge was inferential, they would not even want to bind it on Brents. The second very important thing was this: if Brents was confessing the express statements of Scripture--regardless of whether or not they thought he was mistaken in his interpretations of them--they had no grounds for excluding him. They may have believed that Brents's understanding was severely lacking, and even viewed him as the weaker brother with

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[35]John A. Williams, *The Life of Elder John Smith* (Cincinnati: R. W. Carroll, 1870), 452, quoted in William Garrett West, *Barton Warren Stone: Early American Advocate of Christian Unity* (n.p.: 1954), 148, in *BWS*.

[36]Ibid.

whom they had to exercise forbearance. But they had no grounds to suggest his exclusion, and were never discovered to have suggested it, a likely reason being that they valued the rule of express terms.

Thomas Campbell is one example. Though he was a classical theist reared in the Reformed tradition, he *wrote* the rule. His son Alexander is another example. On several occasions he confessed a classical understanding of absolute foreknowledge, such as this one for instance:

> Known to God alone is the future destiny of the entire universe, and of every atom of it. To him alone the past, the present and the future of every creature is as fully known as any present object ever is, or was, or can hereafter be, to us. Foreknown to God alone, and to him whom he inspires, is the future condition of any person or thing, within the entire area of creation. To God alone the past, the present, and the future of every atom in creation is always equally present.[37]

Yet, his forbearance for his brothers who held a doctrine of limited foreknowledge may be inferred from his positive review of Alexander Hall's book, *Universalism Against Itself.* In it, Hall presented a doctrine of limited foreknowledge which is major issue in his argument against Universalism. Because foreknowledge has such a prominent role in the book, it seems reasonable to infer that Campbell's commendation took Hall's doctrine of limited foreknowledge into account.[38]

Fairly regularly, SCM leaders would openly place all doctrines of divine foreknowledge in the category of inference or speculation, which, according to the rule, had no binding authority. A. Campbell was one who openly categorized doctrines of omniscience as inferential. Speaking in the context of a discussion of Calvinism and Arminianism which directly addressed foreknowledge, Campbell said, "I do not think that we are required, either from the Book of God or our position as a Christian community, to

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[37]A. Campbell, "Prophecy, No. 4" *MH* 4, no. 1 (1861): 18-19.

[38]See chapter three for the details of Hall's doctrine of limited foreknowledge, which was a crucial part of his argument against Universalism. He published his book at at a time when Campbell was clearly expressing his classical doctrine. Yet within months of Hall's publication, Campbell had reviewed the book and commended it. Alexander Hall, *Universalism Against Itself* (St. Clairsville, OH: Heaton and Gressinger, 1846); A. Campbell, "Calvinism and Arminianism," *MH* 3, no. 6 (1846): 325; the review of Hall was in T. M. Allen and A. Campbell, "New Publication," *MH* 4, no. 2 (1847): 120.

take any ground upon sundry speculative questions on which religious parties have been pleased to place their communion tables. This kind of warfare belongs not at all to us."[39] W. K. Pendelton, another classical theist, applied the rule in the same way: "We do not expect and ought not . . . to claim, that, in a region [of theological discourse] so purely speculative as this, the special solution of any one mind should be made the faith or opinion of others."[40]

As a final example, take E. A. Elam. If he is representative of any number of classical theists, then they appear to have kept a sense of humor about these things—perhaps an example to follow. Elam was an editor of the *Gospel Advocate* at the time, and the discussion of foreknowledge in his department had been going on for two years. In what seemed to be a literary way of throwing his hands up on the foreknowledge question, he wrote: "I have said about all I know on the subject, *and perhaps more*, because some old book I have somewhere seen says God's ways are 'past finding out. . . .' To me it sounds strange for finite man to attempt to tell what God did not and does not now foreknow [emphasis added]" (or, for that matter, what God did and must now foreknow).[41] In any event, through two years of discussion in the *Advocate* spanning 1907 and 1908, and in the SCM history which predated and postdated it, neither the label "heretic" nor anything like it was ever found to be used by those on either side of the issue, and not one from either group was ever found to call for the exclusion of the others or their doctrine. For the limitarians, like Brents, appeared to be committed to the rule as well.

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[39]A. Campbell, "Calvinism and Arminianism," *MH* 3, no. 6 (1846): 325-327. See this also for an interpretation that differs from Brents's exposition of the David/Keilah narrative.

[40]W. K. Pendleton, "Foreknowledge and Free Will," *MH* 36, no. 8 (1865): 375.

[41]E. A. Elam, "The Foreknowledge of God, Again," *GA* 50, no 10 (March 5, 1908): 145.

The Rule in Brents

Brents accepted and practiced the rule of express terms as much as did his classical siblings. Like his predecessors earlier in the movement, he confessed a desire to speak doctrinally "as the oracles of God speak," by which he meant God's thoughts "*only* as He has revealed them to us" in Scripture.[42] Applying the rule of express terms likely empowered Brents to believe that God changes his mind, because the Scriptures said, "the Lord repented," (Exod 32:14). Brents added, "We accept it as true, feeling sure that no valid objection can be brought against it."[43] He seemed to believe that slavish reliance on express terms of biblical revelation should be the dominant principle in interpretation, confession and communion. Although Brents argued passionately in writing for his doctrine of limited foreknowledge, he recognized its inferential nature; so, he refused to bind it on another, use it as a test of faithfulness, or take into the pulpit.[44] In the final analysis, Brents followed the rule of express terms.

Brents stressed unity because, like the Campbells and Stone before him, he believed the Bible taught that Jesus's "people should be one people, and no divisions among them."[45] He affirmed this because he believed "the Saviour . . . considered *unity among* His people as of the utmost importance."[46] Yet, Brents saw the divisions in Christendom. "The Lord's people are not one," he believed, because the "sources of much of the faith that is in the world" are "Disciplines, Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, etc.," and not the Jesus known through "*the words of His apostles*."[47] Division, to Brents, was caused by the same things Thomas Campbell believed to be the cause. However,

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[42]*GPS*, iv, 75.

[43]Ibid., 83.

[44]Ibid., 87.

[45]Ibid., 138.

[46]Ibid., 139.

[47]Ibid.

those divisions could be healed, and greater unity achieved, Brents believed, as people expect no more of each other than "to comprehend the mind and purposes of God, *only* as He has revealed them."[48]

Conclusion

T. W. Brents had developed, and published in a very widely circulated book, a doctrine of limited foreknowledge. His classical theist siblings practiced a forbearance with him and his doctrine, seemingly enabled by adherence to the rule of express terms. Brents's friend and mentor of sorts, Alexander Campbell, and many others similarly trained, were firmly grounded in the orthodox doctrine of absolute omniscience–God knows everything, past, present, and future.[49] Brents, the younger Creath, and others, adopted unorthodox views. And those on both sides expressed deep conviction regarding their unique understandings. However, no matter how zealously they may have believed and argued for them, they refused to demand that others give assent to their opinions as a prerequisite to communion, or entitlement to the name "Christian."[50] For both groups generally affirmed that significant portions of their interpretations were inferential. Campbell, exemplifying the movements classical theists, thought that spending too much time discussing the fine points of doctrines like omniscience transcended the SCM's commitment to discussing "Bible things in Bible words."[51] Omniscience, to him, was one of those curious topics, the meticulous discussion of which should be left "to those who

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[48]Ibid., 75.

[49]Ibid., 74-87, 533-39; Alexander Campbell, "Providence, General and Special," *MH* 5 (1855), 601-607; idem, "Chance: Observations on the Terms Chance, Accident, Lucky, Unlucky," *MH* 1 (1851), 615-21; see also Barton W. Stone, "An Orthodox Sermon," *Christian Messenger* 7 (1833): 77-84, and idem, "An Orthodox Sermon, Continued," *Christian Messenger* 7 (1833): 118-120, in *BWS*, for samples of Stone's earlier staunch Calvinism.

[50]Cf. Propositions 6-10 in Thomas Campbell, *A Declaration and Address* [on-line]; accessed 21 January 2003; available from http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/tcampbell/da/DA-1ST.HTM#Page6; Internet.

[51]Alexander Campbell, "John M. Duncan on Foreknowledge," *MH* 4 (1840), 486-91. On the limited authority of inference in contemporary evangelical theology, see, e.g., Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 83.

prefer being wise above what is written."[52] In the same way, some of Brents's statements, representing the unorthodox camp, expressed similar sentiments. In one example, Brents suggested that men could be, and should be satisfied with comprehending "the mind and purposes of God, *only* as He has revealed them to us."[53] Since each group perceived both doctrines of foreknowledge--the limited and the classical--to be largely inferential, they seemed willing to stand together on the express affirmations of Scripture, rather than demand conformity to one interpretation or the other.[54] Therefore, in keeping with that early keystone in the movement's praxis, this commitment to the express statements of Scripture seems to have been a key feature of a theological method that kept the fellowship in unity.[55]

Harrell offers some profound insight. "The movement typically existed for long periods when considerable differences in practice and belief were tolerated. Divisions became formal only when leaders on the conflicting sides implicitly or explicitly decided that they no longer had the same understanding of the restoration plea, that they were no longer of the same mind."[56] If Harrell is correct, then division has come perhaps most often when someone decides to push an issue, or, no longer follow the rule of express terms. It had happened, for example, with Foy E. Wallace and the premillennialist controversy in churches of Christ. However, in the case of Brents's doctrine of limited

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[52]A. Campbell, "John M. Duncan on Foreknowledge."

[53]*GPS*, 75.

[54]In their nineteenth century vernacular, the adjective "express" and the adverb "expressly" were used to communicate that upon which they sought to rely--the explicit terms of Scripture itself which were not implied or left to human inference.

[55]Cf. Hicks, "An Introduction to the Doctrine of God."

[56]Ibid.

foreknowledge, it appears that the SCM's commitment to the rule of express terms prevented the fracturing that would later beset the movement on other issues.[57]

[57]Today, SCM leaders on each side of the issue of divine foreknowledge, like their predecessors, do not seek to exclude each other confessionally. Current SCM teachers, such as Randall Bailey, John Mark Hicks, Ron Highfield, and Wayne Jackson, state that the doctrine should not be made a test of fellowship. Highfield put it best: "Most theologians, preachers and teachers that hold the 'limited foreknowledge' position do not make it their day in and day out theme. It is one among other of their opinions," and they do not force "everyone in the church to take sides." If they ever do, "then will come the crisis. Error will become heresy," he said. Ron Highfield, Malibu, to the author, Wahiawa, 2 November 2002, electronic mail, the author's private collection, Wahiawa, Hawaii. Cf. Randall C. Bailey of Montgomery, interview by the author, 22 September 2002, notes, the author's private collection, Wahiawa, Hawaii; John Mark Hicks of Nashville, interview by the author, notes, the author's private collection, Wahiawa, Hawaii. Wayne Jackson, Stockton, to the author, Wahiawa, 2 November 2002, electronic mail, the author's private collection, Wahiawa, Hawaii.

APPENDIX

A CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF BRENTS'S LIFE

1823 Brents was born February 10, 1823.[1] Boles gives his place of birth as Lincoln County, Tennessee.[2] Cowden gives it as "Southern Marshall County, Tenn." The apparent contradiction is resolved by noting that Brents's birthplace was in Lincoln County at the time, and Marshall county did not yet exist; Marshall County was formed out of that region of Lincoln County sometime after Brents's birth.[3]

1841 T. W.'s eighteenth year; his father, Thomas Brents, died, June 12;[4] T. W. Married Angeline Scott.[5]

1842 His mother, Jane (McWhorter) Brents, died in December.[6]

1844 He acquired his first English grammar.[7]

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[1]E.g., Cowden, Boles, Dorris, Goodspeed. This is affirmed also by Christie Brown, Brents's "first cousin, six times removed," (Christie Brown, Arkansas, to the author, Wahiawa, 4 May 2002, electronic mail, the author's private collection, Wahiawa, Hawaii).

[2]H. Leo Boles, "Biographical Sketches: Dr. T. W. Brents," *GA* 72, no. 5 (January 30, 1930): 109; also the birth date in a nineteenth century longhand record of the Flatt Creek Christian church entitled, "Names of ministers of the Gospel of various congregations," Disciples of Christ Historical Society archives.

[3]"Marshall County"in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886] [on-line]; accessed 10 February 2003; available from http://freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~pearidger/history/gdspmars.shtml; Internet.

[4]Pauline Phillips Church and Yvonne Brents Henson, *The Joshua Tree*, revised ed., (Colorado Springs, CO: by the author), 36.

[5]"Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. and M.D.," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886] [on-line]; accessed 10 February 2003; available from http://freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~pearidger/history/gdspmarsbio.shtml; Internet.

[6]Church and Henson, *The Joshua Tree*, revised ed., 36.

[7]"Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. and M.D.," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886]; John B. Cowden, *Dr. T. W. Brents: Superman and Master Builder of the Christian Church and the Church of Christ, Prophet of God* (Nashville: by the author, 1961), 14.

1850 He was called to Ministry, 26-27 years of age.[8]

1854 As Brents prepared for a debate with a Universalist in approximately 1854, he first came to his conclusion that God's foreknowledge was "limited."[9]

1855 He roomed with G. W. Bills at & graduated from the Reform Medical College of Georgia , Macon (after having taught himself medicine and taken courses at the Eclectic Medical College, Memphis, TN, and the Medical School of Nashville).[10]

1856 Brents voted for the last time.[11]

1857 His wife, Angeline, died; Brents remarried late the same year to Mrs. Elizabeth (Taylor) Brown.[12]

1866 He was involved in fruitful evangelistic work and church planting.[13]

1867 Brents became an editor of the *Gospel Advocate* responsible for a department designed to be devoted solely to the proclamation of the gospel.[14]

1870 He published a *Christian Record* article and a pamphlet, both entitled "Hereditary Total Depravity."[15]

1872 He published two-part *GA* article entitled "Predestination, Election, Reprobation."[16]

1873 Brents debated Jacob Ditzler twice this year. He had hoped to publish *GPS* this year. Perhaps the delay was due to his preoccupation with Ditzler. Or perhaps it had something to do with the "*panic* of 1873" which "destroyed the hopes of the Cumberland & Ohio Railroad." This *panic*, employed by Goodspeed as the term

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[8]Ibid.

[9]T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 17th ed. (Reprint, Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 87.

[10]G. W. Bills, "T. W. Brents," *GA* 47, no. 39 (September 28, 1905): 618; "Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. And M.D.," in *Goospeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[11]"Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. and M.D.," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[12]Ibid.

[13]T. W. Brents, "At Home, Near Richmond, Tenn., Feb. 21st, 1866," *GA* 8, no. 9 (February 27, 1866): 137.

[14]Brents was listed as an editor of the *Gospel Advocate* in an untitled notice appearing *Millennial Harbinger* 39, no. 1 (1868): 49-50.

[15]T. W. Brents, "Hereditary Total Depravity," *Christian Record* (May 1870): 237.

[16]T. W. Brents, "Predestination, Election and Reprobation," *GA* 14, no. 7 (February 15,1872): 147-71; *idem* "Predestination, Election and Reprobation, Continued," *GA* 14, no. 8 (February 22, 1872): 173-97. See also Brents, *GPS*, iii.

was used with reference to finance and commerce, referred to that year's period of numerous business failures, reduced values, and loss of public confidence caused by heavy commercial insolvencies in New York and elsewhere. These economic tragedies and related public insecurity may have contributed to the delay of *GPS* by forcing a temporary redirection of Brents's energies, by a reduction in publishing ventures based on economic considerations, or by some combination of the two; however, this is just speculation.[17]

1874 Brents published his most significant book, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*. He also "moved to Burritt [Tennessee] to educate his children in Burritt College" where he would serve as President, etc.[18]

1882 He involved himself in banking: "The Bank of Lewisburg was organized November 7. . . . J. N. Sullivan was the first president, and T. W. Brents the first cashier. R. S. Montgomery was the second cashier." These may be firsts and seconds in a hierarchical-ordinal sense rather than a chronological-ordinal sense, e.g., as in first place and second place winners of the same competition. However, the source is ambiguous.[19]

1887 He debated Moody in January, and Herod from March 29-April 1.[20]

1891 He published *Gospel Sermons*.[21]

1904 Brents, now in his "declining years," lived with one of his daughters, Mrs. Victor W. Dorris, in Georgetown, Kentucky.[22]

1905 T. W. Brents died June 27, 1905, in Lewisburg, TN. He was buried on June 30 in the Lone Oak cemetery, the city cemetery of Lewisburg.[23]

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[17]T. W. Brents, "Postponed," *GA* 15, no. 47 (November 27, 1873): 1141; "Marshall County" in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886]; *Encyclopedia Americana* , 1954 ed., s.v. "panic"; "Debates Held By T. W. Brents," TMs (photocopy), p. 1, author's private collection, Wahiawa, Hawaii.

[18]Brents, *GPS*, copyright page; "Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. and M.D.," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[19] "Thomas Wesley Brents, D.D. and M.D.," in *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* [1886].

[20]J. M. Kidwell, "Brents-Moody Debate," *GA* 29, no. 6 (February 9, 1887): 94. "Debates Held by T. W. Brents"; Brents's debate with E. D. Herod (Primitive Baptist) was held in Franklin, Kentucky, on propositions related to unconditional salvation. T. W. Brents and E. D. Herod, *A Theological Debate* (Cincinnati, OH: Guide Printing & Publishing, 1887).

[21]T. W. Brents, *Gospel Sermons* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1891).

[22]Victor W. Dorris, "T. W. Brents" in John T. Brown, ed., *Churches of Christ* (1904), 455 [on-line]; accessed 1 February 2001; available from http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/jtbrown/coc/COC1341.htm; Internet.

[23]Some secondary sources give the date of his death as June 29. The earlier date seems more likely, allowing more weight to the family genealogy, and to the gravestone as a primary resource. The Henson genealogy and Brents's gravestone give the date of his death as 27 June, 1905: "Thomas Wesley Brents" [on-line]; accessed 26 June 2003; available from http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~yhenson/HTML/fam01115.html; Internet. Also, "Dr. Thomas Wesley Brents" [on-line]; accessed 26 June

Undated Debate with Timothy Frogg (or Frogge). This may be the Universalist Bills said that Brents met in debate; and the the debate may be the one Brents mentions in *GPS*, his preparation for which "forced" him to his views of limited foreknowledge?;[24]

Undated Five additional debates with Jacob Ditzler (Methodist).[25]

2003; available from http://www.therestorationmovement.com/brents,tw.htm; Internet. Kurfees, et al., have it as June 29: M. C. Kurfees, "The Life of Dr. T. W. Brents," *GA* 47, no. 36 (September 7, 1905): 564; cf. Boles, "Biographical Sketches: Dr. T. W. Brents," 109; cf. John Cliett Goodpasture, "Dr. T. W. Brents," *Minister's Monthly* 3, no. 5 (1958): 1; E. Claude Gardner, "Restoration Leaders: T. W. Brents," *GA* 119, no. 42 (October 20, 1977): 663.

[24]"Debates Held by T. W. Brents"; alternate spelling, "Frogge," appears in the following: William Rufus Brents, "William Rufus Brents," Tms (photocopy), p. 4, courtesy of Sam Brents, Albany, KY; Pauline Phillips Church, *The Joshua Tree* (Middleton, TN: by the author, 1980), 37. cf., Church and Henson, *The Joshua Tree*, revised ed.; and *GPS*, 87.

[25]"Debates Held by T. W. Brents."

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ABSTRACT

THE RULE OF EXPRESS TERMS AND THE LIMITS OF FELLOWSHIP IN THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT: T. W. BRENTS, A TEST CASE

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This study argues that a key to continued unity in the Stone-Campbell movement in the face of T. W. Brents's unorthodox doctrine of limited foreknowledge was likely a consistent application of the rule of express terms. It focuses on the nineteenth century figure, T. W. Brents, who was found to have composed the movement's most comprehensive doctrine of limited foreknowledge. He serves as a representative of SCM leaders who confessed the doctrine in contrast with other key personalities who advocated a more classical doctrine.

The rule of express terms is described, as is its development and adoption into the movement as a means to fulfill the movement's agenda for unity. In theory, with particular regard to the boundaries of fellowship, it allowed ultimate spiritual authority to the express (explicit) terms of the Bible alone. It denied all but educational authority to human inferences or opinions. Most significantly, it negated the Reformed doctrine of necessary consequence. The theological history of Brents is sketched, to include factors available to influence the development of his doctrine of limited foreknowledge. Responses to his doctrine, both pro and con, are examined. The historical sources are united by a common thread of silence: no calls for the limitation of fellowship over this doctrine were discovered. Finally, the data are interpreted to demonstrate the likelihood of the thesis. The rule of express terms seems to be a key to continued unity in the movement amid theological diversity regarding the doctrine of divine foreknowledge.

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