

**“To Answer or Not to Answer”: A Case Study on the Emergence
of the Stone-Campbell Movement Amongst the Baptist
Churches of Kentucky in the 1820s**

Rodrick Durst

Academic Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs

Professor of Historical Theology

Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

201 Seminary Drive

Mill Valley, CA 94941

It was the first Sunday of the month, the day on which the half-time pastor of David’s Fork Baptist Church, Kentucky was to preach.¹ “Bishop Vardeman was of magnificent proportions, being upwards of six feet in stature, weighing three hundred pounds . . . possessing uncommon and undiminished energy and vigor, though [56] years of age.”² His people well knew that Rev. Vardeman was “probably the most effective pulpit orator, and the most successful preacher who ever lived in Kentucky.”³ Vardeman loved these people and had been with them nineteen years. They believed that Rev. Vardeman could preach louder and longer

¹Vardeman also became pastor at Bryant’s Station Baptist Church in 1811. See James Taulman, “Baptists and Disciples of Christ,” *Baptists in Kentucky, 1776-1976* (Middletown, KY: Kentucky Baptist Convention, 1975), 204.

²J. J. Haley, *Debates that Made History: The Story of Alexander Campbell's Debates with Rev. John Walker, Rev. W.L. MacCalla, Mr. Robert Owen, Bishop Purcell and Rev. Nathan L. Rice* (St. Louis, MO: Christian Board of Publication, 1920), 51. Also see Alexander Campbell, *Debate on Christian Baptism between the Rev. W. L. MacCalla, a Presbyterian teacher, and Alexander Campbell: Held at Washington, KY. Commencing on the 15th and Terminating on the 21st. Oct. 1823, in the presence of a very numerous and respectable congregation* (Buffalo, NY: Campbell and Sala, 1824).

³This assertion is found in Spencer’s history and is based on numbers of new churches started or new additions to existing churches. J. H. Spencer, *History of Kentucky Baptists from 1769-1885, Vol.1* (Cincinnati: J. R. Baumes, 1885), 232.

without showing signs of tiring than any other preacher in the Tennessee Valley. Humorous and humble, he had declared, “I aim more for the heart than the head.”⁴

Now as was his preaching practice, Vardeman had finished the first third of the sermon, that portion he reserved for professing believers.⁵ He was turning with urgency to what he did better than perhaps anyone in his generation, exhorting the unprofessed to flee to Christ and avoid the judgment to come. No sooner had he asked, “How shall we be saved if we neglect so great a salvation?” when a tall, none-too-well dressed man slipped through the door and onto a nearby bench. Vardeman recognized him instantly and guessed the reason for the hasty entrance into the meeting. “It’s Rev. Racoon John Smith,” whispered Lucy Vardeman to her neighbor, “and he’s here to cause trouble. He always does.”⁶ Continuing to preach, Vardeman thought to himself, “Smith will want to know why I turned back to the old Baptist dispensation and he will want to know publicly.” As soon as the meeting seemed to pause, Smith rose and interrupted:

“As I desire all things to know what is right, and to do it, I hope that Brother Vardeman will tell me, and this audience, what passage in the Word of God has convinced him that he was wrong. This I beg him to do now, not only for my sake, but for his own good, and that of his people,” asserted Smith.⁷

⁴J. H. Perkins and John Mason Peck, “Rev. Jeremiah Vardeman,” *Annals of the West*, (Pittsburgh, PA: W.S. Haven, 1856), 354. See also *Forty Years of Pioneer Life: Memoir of John M. Peck*, edited from his journals by Rufus Babcock (Carbondale, ILL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 354. Peck's memoir reads "wrote with care a life of Vardeman for Dr. Sprague's Annals" and that he hoped to turn the work into a full-blown biography.

⁵Ibid.

⁶According to Smith's biographer, Creath “saw great promise in Smith.” John Augustus Williams, *Life of Elder John Smith with some account of the Rise and Progress of the Current Reformation* (Cincinnati: R.W. Carroll and Company, 1870). See p. 312 for the conversation at Vardeman's church with Smith in fall 1829.

⁷Williams, 312.

Since 1816, a "reformation movement" had been gaining attention and even momentum in Baptist churches in the Blue Grass region of Kentucky and beyond. This rather denominationally-localized movement was on top of the spiritual tsunami of the Cane Ridge Revival commencing in 1801 and continuing to break out through 1828. The "reformers" called for a return to "the ancient gospel" and a rejection of man-made intrusions such as the *Philadelphia Baptist Confession* 1742. The reform cry of "the Bible-only" as the sole authority for faith and practice caught and captured the ear of many Blue Grass Baptists. Vardeman himself had lent public credibility to the movement and particularly its central figure and thinker, Alexander Campbell. Campbell had accepted an invitation to a seven-day public debate on the issue of pedobaptism with the Presbyterian minister at Lexington, William Latta McCalla (1788-1859). The debate was scheduled for October 15-21, 1823, in the worship house of the Baptist church at Washington, Kentucky. As was custom, each participant selected a moderator. As a member of an associational-recognized Baptist church, Campbell chose the best-known Baptist preacher of the region, Jeremiah Vardeman, as his moderator.⁸

In the eyes of Baptists and many others, Campbell clearly bested his pedobaptist opponent in his use of the Scriptures to defend the Baptist view of believer's baptism. Baptists found a doctrinal champion in the finely educated and sharply articulate Campbell, whose credentials were far superior to those of most of the sparsely educated preachers of their churches.

⁸Haley, 51. William Vaughn was pastor at the Washington Church. Taulman identifies both Vardeman and Vaughn as Baptist preachers who became involved in the Stone-Campbell movement, but then determined to "Remain Baptists," 203-06. Taulman's taxonomy of the movement's effect on Baptist preachers in Kentucky is helpful: "Baptists Who Remained Baptists" and "Baptists Who Became Campbellites." A closer evaluation might arrange a taxonomy of "Baptists Who Were Early Critics of the Reform Movement," "Baptists Who Became Involved Early in the Movement and Then Returned or Remained Baptist," and then the final category of Taulman, "Baptists Who Became Campbellites." In this latter category, Taulman discusses John Smith first. Ibid, 206-07.

Vardeman and others were much impressed with Campbell's interpretation of the Acts 2:38 baptismal text, "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." With crisp diction, Campbell had argued that, "The blood of Christ, then, *really* cleanses us who believe from all sin The water of baptism, then, *formally* washes away our sins. Paul's sins were *really pardoned* when he believed, yet he had no solemn pledge of the fact, no *formal* acquittal."⁹

So taken was Vardeman with his new friend, that he accompanied him to Lexington. Campbell preached there, and then went on to David's Fork to preach in Vardeman's own pulpit. The administration of baptism took on new value for Vardeman. As Campbell relaxed in Vardeman's home in November 1826, Vardeman had declared,

Brother Campbell, I have now incomparably more pleasure in baptizing persons now, than under the old dispensation. I feel that I am now doing them an essential service. The last two persons I immersed, I immersed *for the remission of sins*, and I had more pleasure in doing it than in all the baptisms of my past ministry. I thought there was something in the institution worth the trouble, worth the contending for, . . . really, the old system seemed like fighting for a ceremony.¹⁰

But by fall 1829, Vardeman had decided against Campbell, the movement and against immersion for the remission of sins. And John Smith wanted to know why. And the David's Fork

⁹Errett Gates, *The Early Relation and Separation of Baptists and Disciples*, (Chicago: The Christian Century Company, 1904), 108, 110. About this distinction of *really* and *formally* cleansed, Campbell wrote in retrospect, "In my debate with Mr. McCalla in Kentucky, 1823, on this topic, I contended that it [baptism] was a divine institution designed for putting the legitimate subject of it into actual possession of the remission of sins—that to every believing subject it did formally, and in fact, convey to him the forgiveness of sins. It was with much hesitation I presented this view of the subject at the time, because of its perfect novelty. I was then assured of its truth, and, I think, presented sufficient evidence of its certainty." Alexander Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, vol. V, 121. Campbell also likened this distinction to that of a couple being in love and yet not actually one until wedded. See Alexander Campbell, ed., *The Millennial Harbinger*, 1830, Extra #1, 10.

¹⁰John Rogers, *The Biography of Elder J.T. Johnson* (Cincinnati: Published for the Author, 1861), 24. Rogers acknowledges that he is quoting *The Millennial Harbinger*, vol. 3, 280. Rogers also relates that Vardeman told of an encounter with a Catholic priest to whom Vardeman had asserted, "Baptist preachers could remit sins, officially, to proper subjects, through baptism, etc.; [but] that Catholic priests, without any warrant, assume to remit sins committed after baptism." *Ibid.*, 24.

congregation were becoming curious as to how he would answer Smith's question, or if he would even answer Smith at all?

"You know my brethren," said Vardeman, in reply, "how much I have always loved Brother Smith, for I have known him to be a good man, and one that wants to stand in the truth of God. But to do what he now desires, would only lead us to controversy, and I do not wish to dispute about doctrinal matters with such a man as he."¹¹

Vardeman and Smith had been friends, good friends. When they met at the Cumberland River Baptist Association in July 1810, Vardeman was greatly impressed with Smith's talents and urged him to come north where his talents might be better used. Both had shared the continued revival fruitfulness following the Cane Ridge Camp meeting of 1801 and the preaching of Barton W. Stone. Vardeman may have baptized nearly eight thousand persons in his ministry and Smith had baptized an average of thirty persons a week in his ministry. In 1815, when Smith had lost his two eldest children in a farmhouse fire and then his wife to plague, he found a letter from Jeremiah Vardeman waiting for him at his brother William's house.¹²

We are so sorry to hear of the loss of your beloved Anna and your children Eli and Elvira. The churches of the Elkhorn Association wish in a substantial way to show their sympathy and to encourage your faith. Enclosed find \$55.12 1/2 as their love offering. I urge you to come north to Crab Orchard for the August meeting of Tate's Creek Association.

Upon the spontaneous urging of Vardeman and other friends at that associational meeting, Smith preached and charmed the congregation. Jacob Creath, Sr., the main meeting preacher, affectionately called him a "raccoon" and the name stuck. To capture that success, Vardeman had written with Smith's permission to the four churches that Vardeman had recently vacated to go to the David's Fork church. "Dear Brother Mason [a leading member of the Grassy

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 78.

Lick church], I have the pleasure to inform you that brother John Smith, from Wayne County may be available for gospel ministry in your region. I think it would be to your spiritual interest to obtain his labors at Grassy Lick and the neighboring churches.”¹³ Smith moved north in October 1817 to become pastor of the more Calvinistic church at Lulbegrud, at the more moderate Spencer church and at the two remaining churches in Vardeman’s former quarter-time preaching circuit, Grassy Lick and Bethel.¹⁴ Vardeman’s action on Smith’s behalf was based on more than friendship. Vardeman saw the enormous gifts of extemporaneous communication and humor possessed by Smith.

John Smith had avidly read Alexander Campbell’s newsletter, *The Christian Baptist*, when it appeared in 1823 and its account of the MacCalla debate. After spending three days with Alexander Campbell in 1824, Smith’s mind became convinced, “I am a Campbellite. The church is for Christians only.” He renounced Calvinism openly while preaching at the Spencer church in 1825.¹⁵ When challenged by a zealous Baptist as to how he understood Campbell’s comment that “baptism formally cleanses from sins,” Smith had retorted, “I have this to say: Mr. Campbell said that when he was a Baptist and had no more sense than the rest of you Baptists.”¹⁶ Smith was a formidable debater and maker of verbal barbs. To his second wife Nancy, he bragged, “I have baptized 600 new believers and I have capsized 1,500 Baptists.”¹⁷ In June 1829, his reform

¹³Ibid., 130-31.

¹⁴Ibid., 133.

¹⁵Williams, 137-55.

¹⁶Haley, 53. A contemporary Kentucky Baptist pastor, William Vaughn asserted that after the publication of *The Christian Baptist* [ten copies were distributed at the fifth session of the MacCalla debate in 1823], “Campbellism now began to assume a definite form. All over Northern and central Kentucky Mr. Campbell had his adherents, and they read as devoutly as any Moslem read his Koran, the Christian Baptist.” Thomas M. Vaughn, *Memoirs of Rev. Wm. Vaughn, D.D.* (Louisville: Caperton and Cates, 1878), 161-63.

¹⁷Frank M. Masters, *A History of Kentucky Baptists* (Louisville: Kentucky Baptist Historical Society, 1953), 214.

message split the church at Grassy Lick with 124 members following Smith to establish a Christian Church half way between Mt. Sterling and Grassy Lick.¹⁸ More than any other preacher of the reformed movement, Smith was significantly responsible for many of the 9,580 members lost from Baptist churches between 1829 and 1832.¹⁹

What Brother Vardeman has said only makes it more imperative on him to give me the reason which led him to abandon us. He says *I love the truth*; he must know, then, that whatever passage of scripture condemns me, I will as an honest lover of truth, accept with all my heart. He says *he loves me*; how then can he bear to see me in the wrong, and not enlighten me? Besides, he has a promise that as he turns a brother from the error of his way, will save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.²⁰

After having witnessed the cries and struggles of an unwilling infant at its baptism by a Methodist minister, the powerfully muscled Smith had dragged that same minister into the waters of a creek as if to immerse him. "You think, sir, that it is all right to baptize others by violence, when you have the physical power to do it; but when you yourself are made the unwilling subject, you say it is wrong."²¹ Vardeman worried that Smith might get a grip on him or his church and drag them down into controversy. "Should I answer Smith in front of my church people or not?" pondered Vardeman.

The dilemma of Jeremiah Vardeman and the David's Fork Baptist Church was but a microcosm of what was being experienced in Baptist churches and associations throughout the Tennessee Valley between 1826 and 1832. From a careful study of church discipline amongst Kentucky Baptists, 1781-1860, Edward Humphrey concluded that, "No other single cause ever

¹⁸Williams, 233.

¹⁹Taulman, 222.

²⁰Williams, 313.

²¹Ibid., 234-35.

affected the fellowship of the Baptist churches so deeply as Campbellism.”²² What Baptists view as a doctrinal schism of high consequence, Robert T. Handy categorizes as the emergence, under Campbell’s leadership, of the Disciples of Christ, “to become the largest indigenous evangelical Protestant body in America in the nineteenth century.”²³ Handy correlates Campbell’s 1830 renaming *The Christian Baptist* as *The Millennial Harbinger*, with Campbell’s “flock . . . rapidly moving in an autonomous direction.”²⁴ Handy identifies the Disciples movement as indigenous since it emerges as a self-identified tradition on American soil. From the perspective of Baptist polity and ministry, several aspects of this schism/indigenous emergence event need to be analyzed for understanding and learning from the events and their context.

Emergence of Indigenous Movements Vary in Form from the Contextualized to the Heretical

Baptists will want to categorize carefully any new movement in their midst. Some movements such as the “seeker-sensitive church” or the “simple or cell church” movements may appear so new as to be heretical. However, a more thoughtful examination reveals that they are in fact appropriate versions, biblically-derived and Baptistically-consistent forms of church polity. On the other hand, some emergent doctrinal and/or governance forms may so vary from Baptist doctrine as to preclude the reality of the saving transformation that God brings through grace and the cross of Christ. Such forms must be clearly marked as heretical. The emergence of the Disciples under Campbell and the Christian Churches under Barton Stone did proclaim a

²²James Edward Humphrey, *Baptist Discipline in Kentucky, 1781-1860* (Th.D. Thesis: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1959), 239.

²³Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, 2nd ed. enlarged (NY: Oxford, 1984), 31.

²⁴*Ibid.*

variant salvation order or narrative: 1) faith, 2) repentance, 3) baptism, 4) remission of sins, 5) gift of the Holy Spirit, and 6) eternal life.²⁵ This order was presented as literally Scriptural and as the most "ancient order" based on the Apostle Peter's Acts 2:38 sermon on the day of Pentecost. Certainly, Baptists order their understanding of salvation in a manner in which baptism is neither *essential* nor *instrumental* to salvation. Believer's baptism by immersion means for Baptists that salvation precedes baptism rather than coincides with immersion. What Baptists will want to examine carefully is whether or not such an "innovative order" [Campbell's own description] is too innovative to be the vehicle of God's saving work in Christ. In other words is it that heretic or merely schismatic? I would conclude that it is not so heretical as to prevent saving experience, but neither is it near enough to the Baptist understanding of soteriology to be welcomed effectively within a Baptist fellowship. It is schismatic. My point here is that during revival or awakening periods, extra caution needs to be taken to identify the doctrinal placement of new movements. All that moves or is emergent is not heretical. However, where vitality abounds, virality is never far away.

Revival and Church Planting Movements Bring *Vitality and Virality*

It was easy to get saved in the Blue Grass region of Kentucky in the 1820s. Alexander Campbell himself published the astonishing baptismal numbers accumulated rapidly by Vardeman and Smith alone between 1827 and 1829:

Bishop Jeremiah Vardeman arrived in Cincinnati the Friday before the 4th Lord's day in June and immediately after his arrival began to call upon citizens to "*reform and believe the gospel!*" . . . in three weeks 118 baptized . . . Bishop John Smith of Montgomery county, Ky., who labors abundantly in the proclamation of the ancient gospel, has immersed . . . in a

²⁵Masters, 213. Here Walter Scott, the prominent Campbellite missionary of the period, is quoted as setting this order forth as "restoring the ancient order of the gospel."

little more than 5 months, . . . 603 persons “into the name of the Lord Jesus for the remission of sins.”²⁶

About this awakening movement, John Smith’s biographer writes, “In the close of the year 1827, and extending through the year 1828, there was an immense religious excitement, resulting in numerous additions to various bodies, but especially to the Baptist and Christian congregations.”²⁷ Humphrey reports that as many as 15,000 persons were added these congregations in those years.²⁸ In 1990, Paul Conkin describes this period in the development of church expression in America in his book, *Cane Ridge- America's Pentecost*.²⁹ Note his phrase *America's Pentecost*. Harold Bloom analyzes this same period with a similar assessment. He values this period as holding “the joint prospect of Democraticization and Re-Christianization of America.”³⁰ Bloom asserts that American religion is the product of a period beginning not in 1492 or in 1607, but at the Cane Ridge revival in Kentucky in 1801! This period and place was one of incredible spiritual vitality. However, I would also assert that there is a correlation between the vitality and the virality of spiritual and church planting movements. By *virality*, I mean the capacity for new forms (reforms, malforms and deforms) to arise, which are not faithful with existing nor perhaps affirming of existing forms and polities. The arising of the

²⁶Alexander Campbell, *The Christian Baptist, AC ed. vol. V, 1827-1828* (Brooke City, VA: Bethany; reprint Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1955), 50-51. In a letter printed in the *The Christian Baptist*, vol. VII, 1829 (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1956) dated from Mt. Sterling, KY., April 19, 1828 p. 258 John Smith immersed 79 people between the Grassy Lick and the Mt. Sterling churches in 8 days . . . “amongst which are some of our respectable citizens of the highest standing in civil society, particularly one our most distinguished lawyers.”

²⁷Williams, 25.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge- America's Pentecost* (Madison, WIS: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

³⁰Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 33.

Disciples of Christ form was experienced with dis-ease and destruction by the Baptist churches of the Tennessee Valley.

In the context of describing the *vital* results amongst Baptist for additions and new churches, Baptist leaders also began to note a *viral* [from the Baptist perspective] doctrinal schism in their midst. "In the meantime there were parties being formed in the Baptist churches—preachers and people were taking sides, and the war waxed hotter and hotter. . . . Vardeman and Warder and others [Baptist preachers] began to fear Campbell was going too far, and they began to look back to the 'old dispensation.'"³¹ In Frank Masters useful *History of Kentucky Baptists*, he quotes a memorable observation from A. W. Fortune on the Disciples as an emerging entity:

The story of the origin of the Disciples brings before us one of the strange contradictions of religious history. Here was a movement for union, which led to further division. Here was a movement to reform the Baptist Church according to the order of the New Testament, which resulted in making Baptists more loyal to their traditions and in launching a new communion committed to those reforms.³²

This doctrinal schism was a major reason that Baptist gains during this awakening period were not as substantial as that of the Methodists. In a chapter entitled "Upstart Sects Win America, 1776-1850," sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark demonstrate that between 1776 and 1850, amongst total adherents to Christian faith, the Congregationalists declined from 20.4% of total adherents to 4.0%, Episcopalians declined, from 15.7% to 3.5%, while Baptists grew from 16.9% to 20.5%, but Methodists went from 2.5% to 34.2% of the total adherents to Christian expressions.³³ Avoidance of the Campbellite-induced split in Baptist churches between 1826 and 1832 would have increased that percentage of Baptist adherents significantly. For some, the

³¹Rogers, 25.

³² Frank M. Masters, *A History of Baptists in Kentucky* (Louisville: Kentucky Baptist Historical Society, 1953), 222.

³³ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 54-55.

Campbellite experience might justify the putting out of all revival or awakening fires as the only sure way to avoid any chance of wildfires. A better solution is to be sought in understanding what made the Baptist churches and polity so susceptible to infection by the Campbellite doctrine.

Affirming Scriptural Authority Is a Two-Edged Sword

Baptist are and have always been a Scripture-shaped and governed expression. Humphrey found that, “Separate Baptist aversion to any creed or confession other than the Bible prevented the union of Separate and Regular Baptists on the ground of the Philadelphia Baptist Confession (1742).”³⁴ Humphrey could have also rightly concluded that these Separate Baptists and their associations would have heard the “Bible-only, where Scripture speaks, we speak, where Scripture is silent, we are silent” values of the “reformers” with very friendly ears. The contemporary Baptist historian, John Taylor, in his 1830 *History of the Clear Creek Church; and Campbellism Exposed*, wrote, “The worst heresy is corrupt views of the Scriptures, put into practice; and this was seen in Campbellit[e]s, [more] than any other people with whom we are acquainted. Their endless innovations, stir up endless contentions.”³⁵

What this means is that Scriptural authority informs and encourages Baptist polity and practice when interpreted in accepted ways. However, on the other sharp side of the Scripture sword, Baptist churches can be sharply injured and even divided when Scripture is interpreted in “innovative ways” and used to “reform” or perhaps “malform” Baptists into Christian Baptists. Scripture cuts both ways, so we must be careful in how it is used and we must avoid the

³⁴Humphrey, 25.

³⁵John Taylor, *History of the Clear Creek Church; and Campbellism Exposed* (Frankfurt, KY: A. G. Hodges, 1830), iv. See also his *Baptists on the Frontier: A History of Ten Baptist Churches of Which the Author Has Been Alternately a Member* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), third edition, annotated.

sophomoric tendency to believe whatever appears articulate and scripture-based must therefore be true. Campbell himself warned Vardeman and the other Baptists, during the 1823 debate over pedobaptism, that he was not as orthodox as he appeared.

Baptist Doctrinal Positions Have Unique Viral Vulnerabilities

Jeremiah Vardeman was a moderate Calvinist. J. M. Peck stated, "In doctrine he agreed with Andrew Fuller He was not what is termed a doctrinal preacher, and still less a controversialist."³⁶ The Calvinism of some of the Baptist churches appeared to be an effective doctrinal prophylactic against the rationalism and humanism inherent in the Campbellite view of salvation. The Calvinistic Lulbegrud church brought charges of doctrinal innovation against John Smith, when he was their pastor. Amongst the "Baptist Preachers Who Early Denounced Campbellism" was the full Calvinist, Isaac Denton. Denton influenced John Smith to Christ and the Baptist way, but later denounced Smith as a heretic.³⁷

Moderate Calvinists, such as Vardeman, were less resistant to the apparent bible-centeredness of the reformers. However, even Alexander Campbell himself did not see Vardeman as fully convinced as Smith. Following Campbell's second visit to Kentucky in 1824 and his preaching at Vardeman's church, Campbell noted Vardeman's comment; "We have heard strange things today. My [Vardeman's] advice to you is, 'Search the scriptures to see if these things be so.'"³⁸

What is important here is not that full Calvinism is the doctrinal panacea against all doctrinal innovations, after all, Calvinist Baptists have a history of being susceptible to the anti-

³⁶ Spencer, working from J. M. Peck's research, 239-240.

³⁷See Taulman's taxonomy of Baptist preachers in Kentucky during this period, footnote 8 above.

missions virus. What is important is to identify the “weaker-side” of a doctrinal position and to anticipate how an infection might become embedded there. Studied awareness of the heretical schisms affecting Baptist churches in the past, can provide truth serums for contemporary identification and cure of doctrinal infections. In the Pauline letters and in Baptist history, pastoral leadership is usually the key to early detection of schismatic infection and to the design of scriptural immunization and cure.

Pastoral Leadership Is Historically Critical To Maintenance of Baptist Polity and Practice

Like Vardeman, William Vaughn had been present to hear Campbell debate McCalla. In fact, the debate was in Vaughn’s church house at Washington, Kentucky. It appears that Vaughn may have been swayed toward the “reform” position, as was Vardeman. But also like Vardeman, Vaughn came to realize that position as unacceptably variant from Baptist belief and practice. Apparently, Vaughn either could not tolerate the disarray happening to Baptist churches in Kentucky, or he simply had less aversion to debate than did Vardeman. After having been absent from Bracken Association in another state, Vaughn returned and was elected moderator for the critical September 1830 session. Vaughn led the association to affirm “the Thirty-Nine Articles!! or A new Edition of old errors, extracted from Alexander Campbell’s *Christian Baptist and Millennial Harbinger*,” as had the Beaver Association in 1829 and the Franklin Association in a special called meeting in 1830.³⁹ Masters attributes the “triumphal victory” at the Bracken

³⁸Robert Richardson, ed., *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1868), 119.

³⁹Frank M. Masters, 220. Franklin Association special called meeting approves an anti-Campbellism document containing 39 articles extracted from the *Christian Baptist and Millennial Harbinger*. “If you would protect yourselves as churches, make no compromise with error; mark them that cause division; divest yourselves of the last vestige of Campbellism.” *Ibid.*, 218 Also see *Minutes of the Franklin Association of Baptists, Convened in Frankfort, Kentucky, on the second Friday and Saturday in July, 1830. Frankfort: A. G. Hodges, Printer, 1830. “A new edition of old errors, extracted from Alexander Campbell’s Christian Baptist and Millennial Harbinger.”* 7-15.

meeting to Vaughn. Spencer's history is equally affirming of the leadership role played by Vaughn, "Mr. Vaughn now in his forty-fifth year and, though not so learned as Mr. Campbell, was his superior in acuteness and discrimination and logic. He dissected Mr. Campbell's system with a masterly hand and drew the line between it and the doctrine of Baptists."⁴⁰ Vaughn was not the sole hero for Baptist polity and practice during this crisis and schismatic season, but he was and is a good example of the value of pastoral leadership toward maintenance and affirmation of the Baptist way.

Epilogue: Vardeman and Smith

Pastor Vardeman chose to dismiss his congregation that day without answering the probing questions of his pastoral friend, Rev. John Smith. Within months, Vardeman would also resign the David's Fork church to relocate his large household to the more promising farmland along the Salt River of Missouri. There he continued to preach and gather believers into new churches. In August of 1834, Vardeman presided at a convention to organize a system of domestic missions in that state, which later became the general association of Baptists in Missouri. He continued to serve as a pastor and as a touring preacher until his death at age 67 on May 28, 1842.

By 1832, John Smith also resigned pastoral leadership of the group he led out of the Grassy Lick Baptist church. He then commenced an itinerant evangelistic ministry on behalf of the Stone-Campbell reform movement. It was John Smith who represented Alexander Campbell

⁴⁰ Spencer, 226.

at the 1832 union between Campbellite Disciples of Christ and Barton W. Stone's Christian Church. Rev. John "Raccoon" Smith died at Mexico, Missouri, on February 28, 1868.

Comparative chronology for John Smith and Jeremiah Vardeman

Jeremiah Vardeman	John Smith
<p>1775, July 8 born Wythe County, VA</p> <p>1802 pastors four churches in Lincoln County, KY</p> <p>1804 purchases small farm near Stanford, also makes a preaching tour to Lexington, Maysville, and several other towns</p> <p>1810 David's Fork Church, Fayette County and later two other churches Lulbegrud and Grassy Lick</p> <p>1811 accepts Bryan's station</p> <p>1823 AC debates William McCalla (1788-1859) at Mason City, KY. <i>Christian Baptist</i> distributed. Travels with AC to Lexington and V's church.</p> <p>1827 begins to think S. is too liberal</p> <p>1829 denounces S. Son Ambrose dies. Goes to Cincinnati (252-265)</p> <p>1830 resigns church, takes a farewell ride through KY and TN and arrives to farm in Missouri by October 1830.</p> <p>1834, August, presides at a convention to organize a system of domestic missions in the state which</p>	<p>1784, Oct. 15 born in Sullivan County, East TN, 9th child of 13</p> <p>1792 four months schooling learns to read</p> <p>1799 meets itinerant Baptist preacher Isaac Denton and comes to Christ</p> <p>1810 S attends the Cumberland River and meets Vardeman</p> <p>1815 Jan 7 fire on the farm in Arkansas oldest children killed. In March his wife, Anna dies. He goes north to Wayne County, where letter from Vardeman. V. urges S. to attend the Tate's Creek Association mtg. at Crab Orchard.</p> <p>1816 letter from V. invites S. to preach for the four churches, Lulbegrud, Grassy Lick, Bethel and Spencer in North District association</p> <p>1817 moves north</p> <p>1818 Lulbegrud suspicious of his doctrine when he admits he has doubts about Calvinism</p> <p>1822 breaks with Calvinism while preaching at the Spencer church</p> <p>1823 reads first <i>Christian Baptist</i> and leaves the L. church and begins preaching at the Mt. Sterling</p> <p>1824 A.C. second trip to KY. Speaks at Frankfort to the legislature. Meets A.C. and spends three days with him. His mind now "set free." He is a Campbellite.</p> <p>1827 L. church brings charges against S. at the North District Association</p> <p>1828-29 preaches the reformation doctrine far and wide</p> <p>1832 S. represents A.C. at the union between Campbellites and B.W. Stone's Christian Church. S. begins itinerant evangelism ministry</p>

later became the general association of Baptists in Missouri.	
1842 , May 28, dies at age 67	1868 , Feb. 28 dies at Mexico, MO