REV. HORACE HOLLEY: TRANSYLVANIA'S UNITARIAN PRESIDENT, 1818-1827

By William J. McGlothlin*

It was July 31, 1827, on the Gulf of Mexico. The storm, through which the ship *Louisiana* had shuddered on its route from New Orleans to New York, had subsided. At the rail, the ship's captain motioned the crew to let the body drop. It fell away, threw up a splash from the surface, and disappeared. Rev. Horace Holley, third president of Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky, was dead of yellow fever at the age of forty-six. His wife, almost unconscious from the same disease, knew little of his death and burial until she recovered. Then, as the *Louisiana* neared the New York harbor, still shocked and desolate, she wrote:

> O! had he lived to reach his native land,
> And then expired, I would have blessed the strand.
> But where my husband lies I may not lie:
> . . .
> . . . he slumbers in the wave!
> O! I will love the sea, because it is his grave.[1]

It was a melodramatic end to a life of triumph and defeat for Dr. Holley and to a period of miraculous rise and beginning decline for Transylvania University.

The story is not widely known. In Frederick Rudolph's five-hundred page history *The American College and University*, published in 1962, there are only three passing references to Transylvania University, and no mention at all of Horace Holley.[2] Yet Transylvania University had suddenly emerged from obscurity to become, between 1818 and 1827, a regional university of national reputation and significance. It had been formed by the merger of Transylvania Seminary and Kentucky Academy on January 1, 1799.[3] It was the third state university, preceded only by Georgia and North Carolina. It conducted schools of medicine and law before the University of Virginia was founded, although Virginia is often credited with being the first university to break out of the constraints of the classical literary curriculum. In 1821, its en-

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1 Rebecca S. Lee, *Mary Austin Holley, A Biography* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1962), pp. 182-184.

2 Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962).

3 Robert Peter, *Transylvania University, its Origin, Rise, Decline, and Fall*, Filson Club Publications, 1st Series, no. 11 (Louisville, Ky.: J. P. Morton and Co., 1896), p. 71.

rollment of 282 students surpassed that of every other college in the United States, save only Yale and Harvard.[4]

How did it happen, this sudden emergence of what one writer has called "the highest star of the Western Literary firmament?"[5] Why did it end? To understand it at all, we must consider three major elements in the reaction. These were, first, the Rev. Horace Holley; second, Transylvania University itself; and third, the religious denominations of Kentucky, particularly the Calvinist Presbyterians.

Horace Holley was born on February 13, 1781, in the small town of Salisbury in the northwest corner of Connecticut where it adjoins New York and Massachusetts. He was the son of Luther Holley, the fourth of eight children. Luther Holley was a merchant, with generally liberal religious views. He was greatly concerned that his children have educational opportunities if they wanted them. For a time, Horace worked in his father's store, but when he showed interest in study, his father sent him, first to an academy and then to Yale College where he graduated in 1803, "with distinguished honors."[6] While there, he became a favorite of President Timothy Dwight. A thoroughgoing Calvinist, President Dwight had stated his beliefs on man's depravity in his first baccalaureate sermon, where he said: "You will find all men substantially alike, and all naturally ignorant and wicked. You will find every man pleased . . . to indulge, without restraint, and without degree, both appetite and passion."[7] Holley adopted Dwight's beliefs and interests in religion, and, although he went to New York to study law after graduation, he soon returned to Yale to study theology, again with Timothy Dwight. He married Mary Phelps Austin on January 1, 1805.[8]

For the next three years, he was settled in a church at Greenfield Hill, Connecticut, where Timothy Dwight had served before going to Yale, and taught in the Greenfield Academy, on a total salary of $560 a year.[9] He began to search for another location, however, partly because the influence of Dwight still pressed heavily upon Greenfield Hill, but also because he saw Boston as the center of the intellectual life and influence in New England and

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4 James L. Miller, Jr., "Transylvania University As The Nation Saw It: 1818-1828," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 34 (October, 1960), 305-312.
5 Alvin Lewis, *History of Higher Education in Kentucky* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), p. 40.
6 Peter, *Transylvania*, p. 115.
7 Kenneth Silverman, *Timothy Dwight* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 97.
8 Lee, *Mary Austin Holley*, p. 40.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

the United States. After a series of visits to churches throughout New England, he was offered the pastorate of the South End Church by the Society in Hollis Street, a "friendly neighborhood church' in "an unfashionable part of town."[10] The move represented a substantial split with Dwight, since the Hollis Street Church was not Presbyterian, but Unitarian.

The nine years from 1808 to 1817 were great ones in the life of Holley. Membership in the church grew steadily until a new building was needed. It was built on the same plot. Also, he was warmly accepted by fellow clergymen in the city, he became a member of the Board of Overseers of Harvard, and his eloquence grew until he became one of the ablest orators in Boston's history, which has known its share of competent speakers.[11] His reputation transcended Boston. When the trustees of Transylvania University across the mountains in Lexington, Kentucky, looked for a minister with a national reputation who was interested and experienced in college education, they found Horace Holley.

To the dismay of the Hollis Street Church, he made the long trip to visit Lexington and then accepted the post. Shortly before he left Boston, in 1818, James Barker, a parishioner, commissioned Gilbert Stuart, who had painted the famous Washington portrait, to paint Holley's portrait. When it was finished, Stuart looked at it and said, "I don't want to paint him again. I couldn't improve on it." That portrait suggests, if it does not fully show, the character that a former student later attributed to Holley: "Dr. Holley was a man of ordinary size, perfect in symmetry, with a handsome, smiling face, [and] bright eyes, . . ."[12]

As he left Boston, he carried a letter of introduction from John Adams, a Unitarian and former president of the United States, to Thomas Jefferson, also a Unitarian and another former president of the United States. Adams said:

> You will find him frank enough, candid enough, learned enough, and eloquent enough. He is indeed an important character . . . I regret his removal from Boston . . . He is one of the few that give me delight.[13]

Unfortunately, Jefferson was away from Monticello when Holley arrived. The two did not meet until later. They would have had

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10 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
11 See Charles Caldwell, *A Discourse on the Genius and Character of the Rev. Horace Holley, LL.D., Late President of Transylvania University* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little and Wilkins, 1828), pp. 45 ff.
12 Peter, *Transylvania*, p. 110.
13 Lee, *Mary Austin Holley*, p. 102.

much to discuss, since Jefferson was building the University of Virginia at the time.

The second major element in the reaction was Transylvania University; the name, if roughly translated would mean "Backwoods University," because its location was through, or across the woods, away from the centers of influence and culture on the Eastern Seaboard. It had originated as Transylvania Seminary, "the first institution in the State, distinctively one of higher education . . . In purpose and name it was a State institution, but in organization it was really Presbyterian by reason of its cooptative board of trustees being largely of that denomination."[14] It had opened in 1785, with one teacher, in the house of a Mr. Rice.

It continued with little notice until the election of Rev. Harry Toulmin, a Unitarian minister from Lancashire, England, who had been strongly recommended in letters from James Madison and Thomas Jefferson.[15] Even though the charter of the Seminary had contained "no religious test for the trustees, nor for the president, treasurer, clerk, or instructors," the Presbyterians were outraged at Toulmin's appointment and withdrew to form the Kentucky Academy in competition with the Transylvania Seminary, as more in accord with their beliefs.[16] The pattern that was later to damage Transylvania University and destroy Horace Holley had been set.[17]

Rev. Toulmin left Transylvania Seminary after two years, and shortly thereafter the Seminary and the Kentucky Academy merged to form Transylvania University. The State of Kentucky had awarded 6000 acres of land to the Seminary as it had done for each county, to encourage the development of higher education. Transylvania University was to be the capstone. Thomas Speed, Secretary of The Filson Club in 1896, described the plan in the following words: "It was to be a central university, with a seminary in each county of the surrounding state to supply it with students . . . Had the system been adhered to, Transylvania would be one of the leading universities not only of this country but of the whole world."[18]

That hope had not been realized by the time the board of trustees invited Holley to come to Lexington. Students were few, funds

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14 Lewis, *History*, pp. 37-38.
15 Marion Tingling and Godfrey Davies, eds., *The Western Country in 1793: Reports on Kentucky and Virginia by Harry Toulmin* (San Marino, Calif.: Henry E. Huntington Library, 1948), viii.
16 Lewis, *History*, p. 46.
17 "Destroy" is a strong word, but it fits. See John D. Wright, Jr., *Transylvania: Tutor to the West* (Lexington, Ky.: Transylvania University, 1975), p. 98.
18 Peter, *Transylvania*, p. 20.

and faculty were limited, and buildings were inadequate. In nearly twenty years, only twenty-two students had graduated. But the hope remained. It could be realized, the trustees believed, only if they could attract a well-known figure to be president. Such a man, they thought, would lure students, faculty, and money to Transylvania. So they invited Rev. Luther Rice, a prominent Baptist clergyman. He declined. They invited Philip Lindsley, who later became president of the University of Nashville (now Vanderbilt). He declined. On November 25, 1817, they elected, at a salary of $2,250 a year, Rev. Horace Holley, of Boston.[19] He accepted.

The majority of the trustees were greatly encouraged. They had obtained a President of national reputation. By the next summer, they constructed "a large and commodious new college edifice."[20] And most important, the General Assembly reorganized the board of trustees, reducing it to thirteen distinguished citizens, including U.S. senators Henry Clay and William Taylor Barry. As one historian has summarized the situation, "At last the liberal elements had regained control of the university. They were now to build it up, according to their own ideals, as a great educational institution and as a source of economic advantage to the community. They were to try to run it according to their ideal of religious toleration."[21]

The third element in the Transylvania reaction was formed by the religious denominations of Kentucky. It may be hard to remember that the American Revolution was a struggle against the idea of an established church as well as against taxation without representation. Fears that denominations might wish to establish themselves as national churches persisted. The Anglicans had virtually done so in Virginia. At the same time, the denominations had been vigorous in building college after college throughout the states. When they were unable to control colleges with which they had been associated, their customary reaction was to found another one. "Denominationalism," says Rudolph, "more than any other factor, accounted for the founding of eleven colleges in Kentucky before 1865 . . . ."[22] Such fecundity in colleges was not limited to Kentucky. As Rudolph observes: "When Lindsley went to Nashville in 1824 there was no college within two hundred miles; by 1848 there were thirty, nine of them within fifty miles of Nashville.

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19 Lewis, *History*, p. 114.
20 Peter, *History*, p. 114.
21 Niels H. Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky, 1780-1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), p. 158.
22 Rudolph, *American College*, p. 55.

Against this array of embattled sectarians, Lindsley was helpless."[23]

Presbyterians were the best organized, the most vigorous, and the most rigid of the Kentucky denominations. As we have seen, they were instrumental in establishing Transylvania Academy, but they were also instrumental in founding the Kentucky Academy to compete with Transylvania when their control over it was diminished by the appointment of the Rev. Harry Toulmin. They adhered strictly to Calvinism, the Calvinism of Timothy Dwight at Yale and regarded all other theological positions as heresies. The Presbyterian minister, David Rice, in 1805, "listed these heretical positions in the order of their deviation from the absolute truth of Calvinism as Arminianism, Universalism, Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Arianism, Socinianism, Deism, and Atheism . . ."[24] Sonne's study of early liberalism in Kentucky concludes that: "The story of Kentucky Presbyterianism is the story of ruthless destruction of every vestige of independent theological thought which might arise among the clergy, and even among the laity."[25] Yet in the half million population of Kentucky in 1820, there were only about three thousand Presbyterians.[26]

In spite of the efforts of the Presbyterians, religious opinion which they considered heterodox continued to exist. Its most enduring form was Unitarianism, which "was equivalent to Socinianism, which in turn was equivalent to deism, in the Calvinistic categories discussed by David Rice."[27] Presbyterians steadily attacked "infidels," or those who deviated from the strict Calvinist doctrine. They attacked newspaper material as "infidel" when it criticized "the Presbyterians' various attempts to stop the mails on Sunday, to introduce religion into politics, and to retain control of Transylvania University . . . ."[28] regardless of the fact that its charter made it a public university and that its support came from state funds. Public opinion favorable to tolerance and nonsectarian control of the Transylvania University was sufficient, however, to encourage the trustees to seek a president with liberal rather than Calvinistic beliefs in the hope of creating a university to serve all sects and no sect. So they voted for Horace Holley, not unanimously since the Presbyterian members, opposing him to

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23 *Ibid.*, p. 117.
24 Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky*, p. 18.
25 *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
26 *Ibid.*, p. 152.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
28 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

the end, withdrew from the board, which then made the offer unanimous.

The opposition retired to fight again. It could hardly do otherwise unless the Calvinists wholly capitulated. The man the board had chosen was Unitarian, but not sectarian. As he rode from Boston to Lexington, he kept a journal in which he defined his beliefs and reassured himself that he could overcome by calm and toleration the opposition he foresaw. He wrote:

> . . . there is indeed, in my opinion, no good reason for opposition to me, or for jealousy towards my principles or objects, on the grounds of my religious doctrines and mode of instruction. I aim to be liberal without indifference, moderate without coldness, rational without skepticism, evangelical without fanaticism, simple without crudeness, natural without licentiousness, and pious without the spirit of exclusion or intolerance. I see much to admire in all the sects, and something in all that needs correction. . . . With my countrymen generally, and Christians at large, I believe that there is one God, and I profoundly and cordially respect the religion of the land, where it has been my happiness to be born and educated.[29]

The statement was not intended for publication, of course, but it placed a distance between President Holley of Transylvania and President Timothy Dwight of Yale, between the Unitarian and the Calvinist, that was just as great as the thousand miles that lay between the two institutions.

Dr. Holley had been able to traverse the course between Calvinism and Unitarianism. He must have thought it possible for others to do so as well, or, at the very least, to tolerate and respect religious beliefs other than their own. If he did, he misjudged the religious denominations of Kentucky. They were not to be misled by an "infidel" from Boston, no matter how reasonable, calm, and tolerant. In response, the Catholics would found St. Joseph and St. Mary's colleges; the Methodists, Augusta; and the Presbyterians, Centre.[30] All the while attacks on Holley and Transylvania would continue until they were both brought down. The three elements collided in 1818 at Lexington—the Rev. Horace Holley, Transylvania University, and the religious denominations of Kentucky. Their reaction led first to glory—and then to disaster.

In accepting the appointment as President of Transylvania University, Holley wrote to the board of trustees, "I now declare my acceptance of the appointment . . . and embark my fortunes with

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29 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
30 Walter W. Jennings, *Transylvania, Pioneer University of the West* (New York: Pageant Press, 1955), p. 150.

those of the institution . . . I trust that my efforts will be in accordance with my earnest prayer that it may attain to eminent prosperity and be a distinguished ornament to the country, to letters and science, to morals and religion."[31] From the very first, Holley intended to work toward building an institution of national significance.

There was little enough to work with. Transylvania was a university in name only. According to Charles Caldwell, later of the medical faculty:

> In the year 1818, Transylvania was but a grammar school, composed of a few boys acquiring the elements of classical learning . . . But the magician came, and in 1823, 1824, and 1825, it was a proud university, consisting of three departments, and containing four hundred pupils, amply instructed in what most essentially pertains to scholarship, profession, and general science.[32]

Caldwell was speaking at a memorial service which the medical students had requested after Holly's death, and perhaps his word "magician," should be discounted. But the changes at Transylvania University, which occurred after Holley arrived in Lexington, were so rapid that, even from this distance, they seem magical.

Take the medical school, for example. "It had started work in 1799 . . . Yet students were few, dissatisfaction increased, and in 1806 the faculty resigned."[33] It was reorganized in 1816, and by 1817, "the well-organized faculty (which by then included the famous Daniel Drake) gave a full series of lectures to a score of students."[34] President Holley brought Dr. Charles Caldwell from the University of Pennsylvania in 1819 to serve as dean of the faculty and lifted the medical school, with seven faculty members, "to a position second only to that of the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania."[35] One measure of its success lies in the fact that 181 of 282 medical students in 1826 came from outside Kentucky. The total enrollment of that year (1826) was 418, the high point of Holley's administration.[36]

The law school also had its brilliant period under Dr. Holley. "Only William and Mary's law school antedated Transylvania's school."[37] After 1820, the faculty consisted of William T. Barry

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31 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
32 Caldwell, *Discourse*, p. 70.
33 Jennings, *Transylvania, Pioneer University*, p. 106.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 108.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 109.
36 Charles W. Hackensmith, *Higher Education in the Ohio Valley in the 19th Century*, University of Kentucky Bureau of School Service Bulletin, Vol. XLV (Lexington: College of Education, 1973), p. 16.
37 Jennings, *Transylvania, Pioneer University*, p. 112.

and Jesse Bledsoe, both superb teachers, and they were joined by President Holley himself. "No law school in the country," says Jennings in his history of Transylvania, "could boast a triumvirate superior to the three."[38] By 1823, there were twelve graduates from Kentucky, two from Indiana, and one each from Illinois, Louisiana, and Virginia. There were forty-four students in all. Unfortunately, even with this amazing growth, the law school was disbanded in 1826, when "three professors refused their late appointments from the vacillating trustees."[39]

Funds were increased greatly. In 1819, the Kentucky legislature gave the University $3,000. In 1820, it gave $5,000 to the medical school and about $10,000 to the University itself. The town of Lexington lent the school money and raised funds also.[40] Faculty, students, funds, and facilities, each of these came to the University in greater measure than they had before Holley became President. He organized the "academical department" into four years of study. The department grew until in 1826 there were 136 students, over a third from outside Kentucky. By 1825, according to Jennings, "Few universities in the country . . . had a better library than Transylvania."[41] At that time, its library held about 8,500 volumes. In 1816, Harvard University, after almost two centuries of existence, had a library of less than twenty thousand volumes.[42]

Even these tangible assets, important as they were, may not have been as significant as:

> the spirit of emulation and ambition which Holley introduced, by the example of vigorous activity, by many practical demonstrations of intellectual achievement, and by his great oratorical abilities . . . Holley also gave meaning to the students' work by employing a system of weekly exhibitions at which they could display to a cultured audience their progress in oratory, literature, and science.[43]

During these years, Dr. and Mrs. Holley's home became the center of much social life in Lexington. They entertained "many of the greatest men of [the] time," including President Monroe, General Jackson, and the Marquis de La Fayette. Henry Clay was a frequent guest. "His home was open to the genteel families of the town, to the professors of the faculty, and to those students whose talents he wished to encourage . . . . Holley tried in various ways

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38 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
39 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
40 *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.
41 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
42 Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard 1636-1936* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 226.
43 Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky*, p. 173.

to cultivate the social abilities of his students and to raise the tone of social life. He offered courses in manners to his students, and to others who wished to attend."[44]

His hope and his expectation was that he could help transform the backwoods of Kentucky into a center of intellect and culture, and through Transylvania University make Lexington into the Athens of the West in fact as well as in fancy. Ultimately, he saw a vision of having a single central university in each state, related on the one side to a national university and on the other side to seminaries in each of the counties of each state. "But," says Charles Caldwell, "that more than one in each state would be injurious to education, was his settled conviction, the result of observation and deliberate reflection."[45]

Basically, the attacks that began to mount against Horace Holley even before he began his administration centered on his religious beliefs and their contrast with orthodox Calvinism. Many found his beliefs wholly acceptable. For example, members of the state House of Representatives, to whom he preached on the first Sunday in 1819, reacted enthusiastically, asking for a copy of his sermon for publication. The editor of the Lexington *Commentator* wrote glowingly of the sermon, saying that "Never were the sentiments of pure philanthropy delivered with more apparent sincerity or the spirit of mutual tolerance and forbearance recommended with more feeling or stronger reasons."[46]

Such support did not protect him from attack, however, for "mutual tolerance and forbearance" were not characteristics of his attackers. By February, 1819, the *Weekly Recorder* of Chillicothe, Ohio, said "that Holley was not esteemed orthodox . . . and that the trustees were enemies of the Bible and had had dishonest motives in electing him."[47] "Other orthodox writers accused Holley of preaching enmity to Christianity, of denying the doctrines of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the atonement, and of teaching universalism."[48] Still others "charged him with infidelity[49] and declared that his social life was unmoral and his home life worldly."[50]

These were but the opening shots of attacks that soon turned

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44 *Ibid.*, p. 184.
45 Caldwell, *Discourse*, p. 52.
46 Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky*, p. 185.
47 *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188.
48 *Ibid.*, p. 189.
49 Not domestic infidelity, but infidelity to Calvinistic doctrine.
50 Lee, *Mary Austin Holley*, p. 125.

into full scale cannonades. Their rise can be dated from Holley's "discourse" on the death of Colonel James Morrison, chairman of the board of trustees, who left a substantial sum to Transylvania University for the construction of Morrison Hall and the endowment of a faculty chair. In praising Morrison's freedom in religious opinion, Holley said, "when he saw the bigoted and intolerant use unworthy means, appeal to base prejudices and employ unrighteous denunciations against the upright advocates of free inquiry and religious liberty in opinions and worship, he was capable of being roused to a high degree of severity, and of pursuing a lofty tone of expostulation and rebuke."[51]

With the "discourse" as their text, "the Presbyterians, with the greater part of the community against them, with great determination set about the task of stirring up opposition to Holley and to the university organization."[52] They gained ground. In 1823, they were able to persuade the legislature to establish a committee to investigate the finances of the university.[53] Although the committee found some difficulties in the way accounts were kept, they reported no serious mismanagement whatever.

But the attacks continued. According to Sonne, "the Presbyterians employed every device conceivable to achieve the destruction of Holley's administration. They preached against the 'infidel' in the presidency. They made efforts, through conversations in the streets, to get people to oppose him. They took advantage of the hospitality of Holley's home to spy out facts which they could use as charges against him."[54] They reported that he ridiculed religion and told profane anecdotes in class. One student is supposed to have reported:

> Mr. Holley took frequent opportunity of ridiculing the doctrine of human depravity . . . Speaking one morning upon this doctrine, he said he would illustrate his meaning by an anecdote: One of those men (a believer of the above doctrine) and a Quaker put up at the same public house for the purpose of lodging all night. After supper, they were both shown into the same room in which to rest, and as was his custom, the former knelt beside his bed and commenced saying his prayers, in which he repeatedly confessed himself a sinner, deserving God's punishment, etc. After he had finished, the Quaker took his hat for the purpose of retiring; are you not to rest with me tonight, said

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51 Horace Holley, *A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of Col. James Morrison, Delivered in the Episcopal Church, Lexington, Ky., May 19, 1823* (J. Bradford, 1823).
52 Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky*, pp. 199-200.
53 Kentucky General Assembly, *Report on the Transylvania University, and Lunatic Asylum*, 1824.
54 Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky*, p. 225.

> the religious man to the Quaker? No sir, answered he, I can not sleep with such a scoundrel as thou confessest thyself to be.[55]

The end came near in 1825 when Governor Joseph Desha attacked the university in his message to the General Assembly. He "repeated the oft-told stories of heavy endowment, extravagance, an overpaid president and professors, excessive tuition, exclusion of the poor, and the general failure of the institution to live up to expectations."[56] Governor Desha returned to the attack in 1826, saying that Transylvania was accessible "only to the wealthy," and that although it was still respectable, it had ceased "to unite the confidence and affections of the people."[57]

Religious intolerance had thereby joined with political ambition, and the situation became impossible for Holley. He believed that no further state funds would be appropriated for the university. He resigned soon after the first Desha attack, but friends persuaded him to reconsider. He finally resigned early in 1827, after the second attack. The attacks had been successful in driving Holley from the presidency. They also destroyed any hope which Kentucky might have had for constructing a major university of Transylvania. Holley's departure ended the university's golden era. The number of students dropped precipitously. From January, 1826 to January, 1827, the enrollment plummeted from 418 to 286. Holley left from New Orleans for New York on March 24, 1827. By December of that year, Transylvania had 184 students — less than half the number it had had only eighteen months earlier.[58]

As he prepared to leave Lexington, Holley wrote a report of his administration for the board of trustees. He described the expansion of the university facilities and the great increase in the number of graduates. He stated that the libraries held 8,500 volumes, five-sixths of which had been obtained during his administration. He pointed out that equipment for mathematics and natural philosophy had been obtained, and scientific collections had been greatly enlarged. He hoped that the university would add instruction in modern languages and revive the law department. He was pleased with the fact that although the university had awarded only twenty-two degrees between 1799 and 1818, it had awarded 644 degrees in the nine years of his administration, even though the academic standards of the university had been "rendered much more severe

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55 *Ibid.*, p. 223.
56 *Ibid.*, p. 252.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 253.
58 *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.

and exact."[59] Later, he responded to the student members of the Union Philosophical Society saying:

> I wish never to forget the period which I have spent in this place. I have experienced incomparably more blessings than evils, and have found vastly more friends than enemies. The ingenious, the liberal, the magnanimous, have cooperated with me; the character of those, who have assailed me, I will not now take time to delineate. They have nothing to do with my determination to go or stay.[60]

Holley left Lexington with his family in March of 1827, intending to start a school in New Orleans for sons of planters who had sent their boys to Transylvania. He found the heat and humidity of Louisiana oppressive and debilitating. He probably was also suffering from the shock of defeat. Unable to force himself to continue with his plan, he boarded the ship *Louisiana*, bound for New York. He never arrived.

Transylvania University never again reached the heights of the Holley period. In 1837, Charles Caldwell led half the medical faculty to Louisville to form the Louisville Medical Institute, forerunner of the University of Louisville. The trustees tried the experiment of electing more conservative ministers to the presidency. In the fifteen years following Holley's departure, they chose four presidents: a Baptist, two Episcopalians, and a Presbyterian. "Each of these men retired, after a short period of comparative failure."[61] "From 1842 to 1849, Transylvania was a Methodist College . . ."[62] Hackensmith says that "mid-century found Transylvania University only a shadow of its former self. In seeming desperation, the trustees offered the institution to the Grand Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. After giving careful consideration to the future prospects of the university, the Grand Lodge politely refused."[63] Transylvania again became a state institution, and, in 1865, it disappeared into a merger with the Church of Disciples' Kentucky University, echoing the earlier merger of Transylvania Academy with Kentucky Academy. It reappeared forty years later as Transylvania College in 1908, an independent private college, and has continued in that form ever since.

Most historians who have written about Transylvania see in its rise and decline a reflection of the struggle between liberal religious beliefs, such as those of Jefferson, and fairly rigid sectarianism,

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59 *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256.
60 *Ibid.*, p. 257.
61 *Ibid.*, p. 260.
62 Hackensmith, *Ohio Valley*, p. 16.
63 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

as represented by the Presbyterian Calvinists. Hackensmith wrote in 1973:

> Sectarian jealousies and political rivalries were to blast the future of this promising cultural effort which the Ohio Valley offered. Holley was a Unitarian and was subjected to bitter attacks throughout his administration . . . Transylvania University never fulfilled the promise of its budding season of the early 1820's." [64]

As one thinks back over these dramatic events of one hundred and fifty years ago, he is constrained to conclude that Holley's vision of great state-supported universities, deeply religious but nonsectarian, was impossible from the start, both in Kentucky and in the nation. Following the Supreme Court decision in the Dartmouth case in 1819,[65] the United States began to separate sharply publicly supported colleges and universities from privately supported, denominationally oriented colleges and universities. As a result, denominational colleges lost public funds and tax supported colleges lost religion, or, at most, reduced it to the campus ministry. The leading private institutions that originally identified themselves with denominations, like Harvard and the University of Chicago, no longer do so. The smaller private institutions search desparately for public support both through Federal grants and state scholarships. And in Kentucky, the proportion of students in religiously oriented colleges continues to decline, as it does throughout the nation. In 1964, one out of every three Kentucky students enrolled in a private college; in 1975, it was only one out of seven.[66]

Where do these trends lead? At the worst, they lead to a point where public colleges and universities no longer recognize or consider the common spiritual values that make women and men significant, and are captured by the amoral pursuits of technology, occupational competence, and material comfort. At the worst, they lead to the demise of private institutions, or to a point where private institutions lose their concern with the meaning of existence and the ethics of national life. At the best, the trends could lead public colleges and universities to recognize and respond to the

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64 Ibid., p. 16. See also Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky*, pp. 260-261; Peter, *Transylvania*, pp. 3-4; Thomas D. Clark, *Kentucky: Land of Contrast* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 65-66; John D. Wright, Jr., *Transylvania: Tutor To The West*, p. 117.

65 *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (4 Wheaton 518). The case originated in an attempt of the New Hampshire legislature to revise the College's charter which dated back to colonial days. The College trustees appealed to the Supreme Court where Chief Justice Marshall held that a charter of a private corporation was a contract and therefore protected by contract clause (Article I, Section 10) of the Constitution. The decision appeared to place charters of existing private corporations outside the scope of the states.

66 Richard Wilson, "Kentucky private colleges' enrollment drop slows," *Louisville Courier-Journal and Times*, Sunday edition, March 2, 1975, Section E, p. 6.

need of human beings for values that transcend technology and for ethics that can direct the marketplace. Also, at the best, they could lead individuals and perhaps the state to support private institutions for their moral and religious contributions in so far as these can be provided this side of a denominationalism that excludes dissenters from participating in them. The history of Horace Holley and Transylvania University shows the tremendous difficulty of achieving the best. Perhaps people in Kentucky have grown sufficiently in wisdom and charity since that time to make the best a reasonable possibility.