A Miscellany of American Christianity

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF H. SHELTON SMITH

edited by

STUART C. HENRY

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Durham, North Carolina
1963

Library of Congress Catalogue Card number 63–14288
Cambridge University Press, London N.W.1, England

Printed in the United States of America
by Kingsport Press, Inc., Kingsport, Tenn.

A Centennial Appraisal of James Henley Thornwell

PAUL LESLIE GARBER

A century ago, on August 1, 1862, in the midst of the Civil War and at his home in Columbia, South Carolina, death came to the Reverend James Henley Thornwell, D.D., LL.D., "probably the most influential southern minister of his day." [1] "The leading Old School Presbyterian minister in the South," is Clifton E. Olmstead's 1960 estimate published in *History of Religion in the United States,* where Thornwell is credited with having served the Southern cause by defining the relation of the church to slavery and by having incorporated in the Address of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States, 1861, a defense on Christian grounds of the Southern position.[2] William Warren Sweet wrote similarly of him as one of the most able Old School Presbyterian defenders of slavery on scriptural and moral grounds.[3] For these reasons Thornwell now is generally remembered.

One of the published articles of H. Shelton Smith was entitled, "The Church and the Social Order in the Old South as Interpreted by James H. Thornwell." [4] Here it was stated:

> The Church, like all bearers of culture (in the last generation of the *ante-bellum* South) had to reckon with the South's "peculiar institution." In this process of reckoning, Dr. James H. Thornwell played a master role. What Calhoun was to political theory in this period, Thornwell was to the social ethics of the church.

1. Margaret Burr Deschamps, "Union or Division? South Atlantic Presbyterians and Southern Nationalism 1820–1861," *The Journal of Southern History,* XX (1954), 493.
2. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1960), pp. 375, 388.
3. *The Story of Religion in America* (2nd ed.; New York, 1950), p. 308.
4. *Church History,* VII, No. 3 (1938), 115–124.

During the time Dr. Smith was preparing that study, he introduced me as one of his graduate students to Thornwell. In the effort of the intervening years to understand Thornwell in the light of his environment and times, I have come to the conviction that any proper evaluation of Thornwell's place relative to slavery and the Southern Presbyterian Church must take into account the character of the whole of his thinking— philosophical, theological, social, political, ecclesiastical, and educational. The final estimate is not essentially changed for, as I have stated elsewhere,[5] Thornwell, with his characteristic personal fondness for debate and professional polemical religious thought and writing, can be considered a "Defender of the Old South." What widening the perspective adds, however, is the recognition that Thornwell's defense of the South's position regarding slavery and the separation of the Southern church were for him not isolated issues, but rather particular phases in his defensive kind of thinking. His thought ranged widely, but nearly always in exposition he viewed himself as having an obligation, which to him seemed a moral duty, to defend traditional standards against dangerous attacks, especially those which he considered ungodly and atheistic.

His Image

Any portrayal of Thornwell as protagonist of slavery and a "fire-eating" South Carolina secessionist is inaccurate and unfair through lack of perspective. He was, however, ardently fond of his state. There is a legend that returning from Europe in 1841 (he was not yet thirty years old), as the carriage which took him to South Carolina crossed the state line, he sprang suddenly out, and reverently kissed the soil.[6] In 1852, addressing the alumni of Yale College in New Haven, he confessed, "I am a Carolinian by birth, by education and love my native

5. Paul L. Garber, "James Henley Thornwell: Defender of the Old South," *Union Seminary Review*, LIV (1943), 92–116.

6. B. M. Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond, 1875), 180.

State, and my own *Alma Mater,* with a love passing the love of woman." [7] Until the last eighteen months of his life, fondness for state was for him synonymous with fondness for nation. He wrote from Paris in 1841, "I candidly believe that America is the first nation on the globe; . . . I am proud of my nation, the prouder still, after having seen others." [8] In Europe again in 1860 he wrote to his wife, "There is no land like our own . . . and if we can have the grace to deal justly and honestly with one another, and to hold together as a people, the time is at hand when the distinction of being an American will be as proud and glorious as it ever was to be a citizen of Rome." [9]

A recent student of Presbyterians in the ante-bellum South Atlantic states has stated that until the winter of 1860–1861 these folk were generally "loyal toward both ecclesiastical and political organizations tying them to the North." [10] Some were disgruntled about Northern control of church and state, but spokesmen like editors of church papers advised against church division on the ground that ecclesiastical divisions would foster political divisions. In the Nullification crisis of the 1830's and in the 1850 Compromise controversy, Presbyterians championed the cause of Union.

Thornwell's influence was as spokesman rather than as maker of Southern Presbyterian conservatism. In 1832, just following his college graduation, he gave the aid of his pen to the "Union men" at Columbia who were opposing Nullification. In 1851, when support for secession was much stronger, Thornwell as editor of the *Southern Presbyterian Review,* sharply critical of five sermons published by Northern ministers, wrote glowingly of American destiny and urged the South seriously to consider national as well as sectional consequences of separation.

> But [he concluded] for ourselves, we are linked to South Carolina, for weal or for woe. As long as our voice can be heard, we shall en-

7. Quoted, *ibid.,* p. 366.
8. Quoted, *ibid.,* p. 179.
9. Quoted, *ibid.,* p. 457.
10. Deschamps, *op. cit.,* p. 488.

deavour to avert calamity; but if what we regard as rash counsels finally prevail, we have made up our mind, as God shall give us to take what comes.[11]

In his Yale College address he had deplored "local jealousies" and "sectional distinctions." In 1855, involved, as president of South Carolina College, in state political affairs, Thornwell, in spite of opposition from friends, joined the Know Nothing party. He worked diligently to bring the whole South into that party, for he believed it was the only one which could save the country. Until the crisis of 1860, when Abraham Lincoln was elected to the presidency, Thornwell steadfastly maintained that withdrawal from the Union would bring "defeat and disaster, insecurity to slavery, oppression to ourselves, ruin to the State."

While in Europe during the summer of 1860, Thornwell determined that for the sake of peace, immediately upon his return, he would throw his influence on the side of gradual emancipation, but, he added, "When I got home, I found that it was too late; the die was cast." [12] It was in January, 1861, that his "State of the Country" article appeared in the *Review*.[13] It was a defense of secession which immediately attracted a great deal of favorable opinion.[14] In November, 1861, he wrote a lifelong friend, "I gave up the Union with great pain, but I saw no alternative. . . . We may have to suffer much, . . . but liberty is worth it all." [15]

A Mississippian had written to the Jackson paper in 1845, "The Presbyterian clergy . . . are whigs, not because they are aristocrats but because they are opposed to radicalism, and in favor of conservatism." [16] Thornwell, it would appear, reflected

11. *Southern Presbyterian Review*, III (1851); reprinted Appendix I, B. M. Palmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 482–483.

12. Quoted, B. M. Palmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 482–483.

13. *Southern Presbyterian Review*, XIII (1861), 860–889. It appeared in the *New York Observer* in February, 1861. Reprinted, Appendix III, B. M. Palmer, *op. cit.*, 591–610.

14. B. M. Palmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 487 f. Cf. Charles Hodge's remark, "never was a greater perversion of historical truth." A. A. Hodge, *Life of Charles Hodge* (New York, 1880), p. 446.

15. Quoted, B. M. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 498.

16. In the *Southron*, Jackson, Mississippi, Oct. 15, 1845. Quoted, Margaret Deschamps Moore, "Religion in Mississippi in 1860," *The Journal of Mississippi History*, XXII (1960), 235.

rather than invented the socio-political opinions of his denomination and region. In any case, he was not a "fire-eater." [17] On the contrary, his most characteristic thinking shows tendencies of moderation and restraint. Intrinsically and fundamentally the distinctive trend of his mind was toward preservation of inherited values. To the task of defending citadel walls, he gave himself not with heated emotion but with intellectual labor, on occasion in church and in public affairs, but more frequently in college and seminary chapel and classrooms.

His Shining Hour

When in 1855 Thornwell gave his inaugural as Professor of Theology at the Columbia Theological Seminary, he stated that on that particular occasion he could perceive how through his lifetime the Providence of God had been controlling, modifying, and shaping his training, studies, peculiar turn of mind, tastes, and "chosen speculations" "with reference to the solemnities of this hour." [18]

Another occasion in his life could be considered Thornwell's hour of destiny. On December 4, 1861, at Augusta, Georgia, there was convened a formal assembly of commissioners from forty-seven presbyteries making up ten southern synods of the Old School Presbyterian Church. Benjamin Morgan Palmer of New Orleans, a close friend of Thornwell and a pulpit orator widely known as a belligerent advocate of Southern independence, was elected Moderator.[19] On the motion made by Thorn-

17. The editor of the Philadelphia Old School weekly, *Presbyterian*, Aug. 23, 1862, commenting on Thornwell's death, stated that he "took great delight in propagating and defending the peculiar doctrines of that pompous and pragmatical people [Southerners?] upon all the great moral and political questions of the day" and added, "many were led into war . . . by his eloquent pleas."

18. John B. Adger, ed., *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (4 vols.; Richmond, 1871), I, 574. Hereinafter cited as *Collected Writings*.

19. But for Thornwell's illness, he probably would have been elected Moderator. Palmer preached the stirring opening sermon of the Assembly and was elected unanimously. He was later to give Thornwell's funeral eulogy, and to write his biography. He was Thornwell's successor at the seminary. See Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer* (Richmond, 1906), pp. 246, 262.

well the Assembly organized itself as an independent body and adopted the name of The Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. During the morning of the fourth day of this Assembly Thornwell asked permission to read a paper he had prepared setting forth reasons for the separate organization. Palmer, who was presiding, stated that it was read "amid the solemn stillness of an audience whose emotions are hushed with awe." [20] On the tenth day the lengthy paper, "Address to All the Churches of Jesus Christ Throughout the Earth," once more was read in full and adopted. The manuscript was placed on the Moderator's table, and in silence each of the ninety-three commissioners came forward one by one to affix his signature to the document. Palmer recounted his feelings:

> We were carried back to those stirring times in Scottish story, when the Solemn League and Covenant was spread upon the grave stone in the Grey Friar's churchyard, and Christian heroes pricked their veins, that with the red blood they might sign their allegiance to the kingdom and crown of Jesus Christ, their Lord and Head.[21]

The "Address" incorporates much of that which was "peculiar" and distinctive of Thornwell's deepest thought and conviction in ecclesiology and social thought as well as theology and ethics.

The Address

The Address, in "epistle" form, opens with "Dearly Beloved Brethren" and announces the formation of the new denomination as "taking its place among sister Churches of this and other Countries." [22] It asks that this new group not be considered guilty of schism, for "we are persuaded that the interests of true religion will be more effectually served by two independent Churches, under the circumstances in which the

20. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

21. *Ibid.* The original manuscript with the signatures affixed is in the collection of the Historical Foundation, Montreat, North Carolina.

22. For the complete text, see *Collected Writings*, IV, 446–464; in abbreviated form, Maurice W. Armstrong *et al.*, *The Presbyterian Enterprise* (Philadelphia, 1956), p. 211.

two countries (United and Confederate States) are placed, than by one united body." [23] The text follows in three numbered sections.

1. In a single Presbyterian Assembly, composed of commissioners drawn from two "enemy" nations, "political questions" "will be obtruded"; such an Assembly "would present a mournful spectacle of strife and debate" and "could have no security for peace."

"The only conceivable condition . . . upon which the Church of the North and the South could remain together . . . with any prospect of success, is the rigorous exclusion" of political considerations from Assembly debates. This observation provided opportunity for Thornwell to give classic expression to a Puritan interpretation of Church-State relations, a traditional Presbyterian theory known as that of the "spirituality of the Church." [24] This theory, though highly regarded today in some Southern Presbyterian circles, has recently come under attack by Ernest Trice Thompson, a former Moderator, as an "ultimate strangeness" to the Calvinistic heritage.[25] The key sentences are: "the provinces of Church and State are perfectly distinct, and the one has no right to usurp the jurisdiction of

23. Old School Presbyterians were fond of quoting a remark attributed to Cyrus McCormick that "the two great hoops holding the Union together were the Democratic party and the Old School Presbyterian Church." Lewis G. Vander Velde, *The Presbyterian Churches and the Federal Union 1861–1869* (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), p. 21.

24. The theory was not original with Thornwell. It was a part of his inheritance from Southern Presbyterian conservatism. For example, it had formed a basis for the separation of the Southern United Synod of the New School church in 1857. The theory was significant to conservatives outside of the South. One of the commissioners to the Philadelphia Assembly, May, 1861, Dr. A. G. Hall, protesting the Spring resolutions, stated it as the "duty of the Assembly . . . to confine itself exclusively to ecclesiastical action." *Minutes of the General Assembly*, XVI (1861), 338. Vander Velde (*op. cit.*, p. 65) found this to be "the only explicit objection of this kind," yet the judgment was assumed in Dr. Hodge's protest that the Spring resolution departed from Assembly precedent in such matters and, in deciding a political question, "violated the Constitution of the Church, and usurped the prerogative of its Divine Master." The Hodge protest had fifty-eight signatures, twenty-four from Northern commissioners. An editorial in the Philadelphia weekly, *Presbyterian*, April 27, 1861, anticipating the Assembly meeting, stated, "Our own settled conviction is that it would be prudent and wise in the Assembly to confine its attention to routine business . . . and to avoid all other questions which may engender difference of opinion and debate." Quoted, Vander Velde, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

25. *The Spirituality of the Church: A Distinctive Doctrine of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.* (Richmond, 1961).

the other." They are as planets moving in different orbits, and unless each is confined to its own track, the consequences may be as disastrous in the moral world as the collision of different spheres in the world of matter." To demonstrate the differentiation, Thornwell made detailed comparison at twelve points.

	State	*Church*
1. Institution of	Nature	Supernature
2. Founded on man as	Moral and social	Sinner, capable of Redemption
3. Designed to realize ideal of	Justice	Grace
4. Society of	Rights	Redemption
5. Aims at	Social order	Spiritual holiness
6. Concerned for	Visible and outward	Invisible and inward
7. Badge of authority	The sword	The keys of Heaven
8. Power of	Force	Exclusively spiritual
9. Constitution of	Determined by reason and circumstances	Given by divine revelation (the Bible)
10. Right excluded	To frame Church creed and polity	To construct or modify State government
11. Enjoins duty on man	As safeguard of social order	As obedience to God
12. Right of protest	When Church becomes seditious or disturber of peace	When State makes wicked laws, Church can make humble petition

The Address suggests that had this principle of polity prevailed in the May, 1861, Old School Assembly at Philadelphia, "the ecclesiastical separation of the North and South might have been deferred for years to come." (Note the word "deferred." Throughout the Address the permanency of the then still provisional Confederate States government is assumed; the culture of the North and the Federal government are already called "foreign.") Acknowledgment is given of the Old School Assembly's previously "conservative influence" as touching slavery and of the South's desire that this attitude

would continue. "But, alas! . . . these golden visions were soon dispelled." In contrast to the results of current historical reviews of pre-1861 Presbytery and Synod minutes, the Address states, "The first thing which roused our Presbyteries to look the question of separation in the face" was the passage of the Gardiner Spring resolutions by the Philadelphia Assembly.[26] This action is declared to be a "political theory" "propounded" by the Assembly which made secession a crime and Southern citizens traitors. Herein the Church "transcended her sphere and usurped the duties of the State." The Philadelphia Assembly, "like Pilate . . . obeyed the clamour of the multitude, and, though acting in the name of Jesus . . . kissed the sceptre and bowed the knee to the mandates of Northern phrenzy." [27]

It is admitted that this one unconstitutional action by an Assembly would not "in itself [be] considered a sufficient ground of separation." However, the Address asserts that, since what has begun cannot soon be arrested, for the sake of peace, Christian charity, the honor of the Church and the glory of God, the Southern Presbyteries "have quietly separated, and we are grateful to God that . . . we ourselves have never given occasion to break the peace. We have never confounded Caesar and

26. Palmer repeated this claim in 1886 at the quarter-centennial Assembly. Prior to the Philadelphia Assembly, following as it did the secession of states, the fighting at Fort Sumter, and Lincoln's call for volunteers, sectional feelings ran high. Only about a third of the Southern Presbyteries sent commissioners. They must have been pro-Union men; no pro-secession utterances are reported in the Assembly debates. Unrepresented Presbyteries, such as those in South Carolina, had officially advised elected commissioners not to attend, withheld benevolent funds, and invoked God's blessing on the Confederacy. The Synod of South Carolina in principle approved these actions, November 29, 1860. See William S. Bean *et al., History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina since 1850* (Columbia, 1926), pp. 74–102, and William C. Robinson, *Columbia Theological Seminary and the Southern Presbyterian Church* (Decatur, Ga.; 1931), pp. 46–52. The Georgia Presbyteries reacted similarly; see Franklin C. Talmage, *The Story of the Synod of Georgia* (n.p., 1961), p. 63. The Spring resolutions, after much publicity and debate, passed, 156 to 66. The strong conservative protest of Charles Hodge of Princeton was overruled. See Armstrong *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 211, and Vander Velde, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–41.

27. Cf. Palmer referred to the Spring resolutions as an attempt "to place the crown of our Lord on the head of Caesar." Quoted, Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 261. Note the 1951 formal exchange between the Northern and Southern Assemblies of statements of regret for past resolutions unworthy of Jesus Christ and His followers. *Minutes of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church, U. S.*, 1961, pp. 64–66.

Christ, and we have never mixed the issues of this world with the weightier matters that properly belong to us as citizens of the kingdom of God."

2. As precedent for separation Thornwell observed that, historically, "in all Protestant countries, church-organizations have followed national lines." Division under such circumstance is no violation of the unity of the Church: "The Church catholic is one in Christ, but it is not necessarily one visible, all-absorbing organization on earth." This division of labor, like the division of the human race into countries and nations, is a benefit since "it stimulates holy rivalry and zeal" and "is a beautiful illustration of the great philosophical principle which pervades all nature—the co-existence of the one with the many."

Hence, Thornwell concluded, Southern Presbyteries "need no apology for bowing to the decree of Providence, which, in withdrawing their country from the Government of the United States, has, at the same time, determined that they should withdraw from the Church of their fathers." Rather, this separation gives opportunity for fuller development in the South of precisely those Presbyterian principles the Northern Church once stood for: "we have resolved . . . to realize its grand idea in the country, and under the Government, where God has cast our lot." The parallel is drawn with the American Presbyterian Church at the time of the Revolution separating itself from the church in Scotland. The difficulty in that case was not distance, "but the difference in the manners, habits, customs, and ways of thinking. . . . These same difficulties exist in relation to the Confederate and United States." Of these "there is one difference which so radically and fundamentally distinguishes the North and the South, that . . . the religious, as well as the secular interest of both will be more effectually promoted by a complete and lasting separation." "The North exercises a deep and settled antipathy to Slavery itself, while the South is equally zealous in its defence. Recent events can have no other effect than to confirm" the antagonism. By separation the Northern section of the Church will "get entirely quit of the subject" of slavery. The Southern section of the Church will

have "unimpeded access to the slave population." "We cannot afford to give up these millions of souls [28] and consign them . . . to hopeless perdition for the sake of preserving an outward unity which, after all, is an empty shadow."

"And here we may venture to lay before the Christian world our views, as a Church, upon the subject of Slavery. We beg a candid hearing." The Address affirms that we are neither friends nor foes of slavery. Its existence or non-existence depends upon state action. Our business is with exclusively spiritual sanctions to proclaim and enforce the duties of masters and the duties of slaves. The church has no more right to preach the extirpation of slavery than she has to preach "republican equality" to the monarchies of Europe, unless, of course, slavery is a sin. Is it? The Church's only rule here is the Bible, her "positive Constitution," for she "has no right to utter a single syllable upon any subject, except as the Lord puts words in her mouth." The existence of slavery is found in both Old and New Testaments without any explicit word of condemnation. The Scripture's denunciations of oppression seem logically to involve condemnation of slavery, but, Thornwell insisted, since the Bible "expressly mentioned and treated [slavery] as a lawful relation," it follows that slavery as an institution is excepted. The Bible's law of love is to be regarded, not as against slavery, but simply as the "principle of universal equity," "that we should render unto [others] precisely the same measure which, if we were in their circumstances, it would be reasonable and just in us to demand at their hands." These conclusions, the Address declares, are nothing new; "we stand upon the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-stone." "We may be denounced, despised, and cast out of the synagogues of our brethren. But . . . we shall

28. In 1860 there were nearly four million slaves in the South. Full recognition is often not given to the efforts of ante-bellum Presbyterian ministers like J. Leighton Wilson of South Carolina and Charles Colcock Jones of Georgia to evangelize the slaves, nor to support given official resolutions regarding this matter, as those of the Synod of South Carolina, 1831 and 1832. See an able discussion in Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–134; also Alex R. Batchelor, *Jacob's Ladder: Negro Work of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Atlanta, 1953). In 1961 there were 6,321 Negro members of the southern Presbyterian church in 75 congregations with 54 pastors.

go forward in our Divine work . . . ; It will be our aim to resist the real tyrants which oppress the soul—Sin and Satan." "We cannot but accept it as a gracious Providence that [our slaves] have been brought in such numbers to America, redeemed from barbarism and sin." Slavery to them "has been a link in the wondrous chain of Providence, through which many sons and daughters have been made heirs of the heavenly inheritance."

The system of slavery, the Address remarks in Thornwell's words, is kindly and benevolent in its general operation, an effective discipline without which the Negro can never be elevated. "As long as that race, in its comparative degradation, co-exists side by side with the white, bondage is its normal condition." True, the Negro does not have the rights which belong to other men, but human rights exist in "not a fixed, but a fluctuating quantity." "The truth is, the education of the human races for liberty and virtue is a vast providential scheme, and God assigns to every man, by a wise and holy decree, the precise place he is to occupy in the great moral school of humanity."

This section is concluded with a plea for approval: Are we not right in assigning slavery to the authority of the state? Are we not acting as Christ and His Apostles have acted before us? We have done our duty. We can do no more. We walk according to the light of the Written Word.

3. The Address declares the new denomination to have aims common to all Christian churches. However, "we are not ashamed to confess that we are intensely Presbyterian." "We embrace all other denominations in the arms of Christian fellowship and love, but our own scheme of government we humbly believe to be according to the pattern shown on the Mount [Sinai], and, by God's grace, we propose to put its efficiency to the test."

"And now we commend you to God and the Word of His grace." The Address concludes, "We devoutly pray that the whole catholic Church . . . may speedily be stirred up to give

the Lord no rest until He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

These pages were read in full in two sessions separated by six days before the Assembly adopted them in full ceremony. In them there is an evident plea for understanding and, in spite of high feelings, an effort at objectivity and fairness. Taking the position of a defense against novelty, the Address is a positive exposition of a Southern conservative attitude toward slavery and church-state relations. An underlying conviction of the Address is that God in Providence is responsible for the historical separation of states and churches, and that this separation is to be accepted with gratitude and with no regret.

As a considered expression of conservative Southern religious opinion, made while the states were still ratifying secession, the Address is a significant document. The adoption of the paper by the 1861 General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church may well have been Thornwell's shining hour. In 1901 President William McPheeters of Columbia Theological Seminary, in reviewing the 1861 General Assembly, said of Thornwell, "Indeed, it is but history to add that to him, probably more than to any other single individual, our Church owes most of what is distinctive in her principles and her polity." [29]

A Hypothetical Student

A student who entered South Carolina College in 1851 would have been exposed through nearly the entire span of his collegiate career to the ideas of Thornwell as his college president. If, after graduating in 1855, he elected to continue his studies at the neighboring Columbia Theological Seminary, the student would have had three additional years in Thornwell's classroom. In the following pages we may discover the kind of thought influence Thornwell would have had on such a student. In imagination we can follow the student first through Thornwell's teaching of philosophy and ethics in college classroom

29. *Columbia Theological Seminary; A Retrospect* (n.p., 1901), pp. 26, 27.

and chapel and then through the kind of theology Thornwell taught in the seminary.

Introduction to Philosophy and Ethics

From about 1800 to 1875 the prevailing American academic philosophy was Scottish Common Sense realism. Professors of philosophy at Harvard, Yale, Brown, Amherst, and Princeton "were all definitely in the tradition of British philosophy." They used as textbooks the work of such authors as Locke, Reid, Stewart, Brown, Paley, Butler, and Hamilton. Thereby Scottish realism seemed firmly established in American philosophy.[30] According to H. W. Schneider, the Common Sense school was an attempt to give grounds for moral and religious certainty in the face of what was regarded as the materialistic systems of Thomas Brown and Erasmus Darwin in their scientific works of physiological psychology and biology. "Idealism and agnosticism," Schnieder holds, "were both powerful forces in American thought, but neither had an academic foothold. The safe and sane system of Scottish realism, on the other hand, was an ideal pattern for preventing youth from indulging in speculative extremes." Within the framework of this philosophy it was possible to expound, as reasoned metaphysics, orthodox theology while at the same time demonstrating sympathy for science; here agnosticism and positivism could be met on their own ground. Scottish realism filled a desperate American academic need in the field of philosophy and ethics.[31]

Levi Hedge, a Scottish realist, was appointed by Harvard College in 1810 as America's first full-time professor of philosophy. Of the more usual sort was Francis Wayland, who, in addition to being Professor of Moral and Intellectual Philosophy at Brown from 1827 to 1855, was also President of the Uni-

30. Harvey Gates Townsend, *Philosophical Ideas in the United States* (New York, 1924), p. 102.

31. H. W. Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy* (New York, 1946), p. 249. See also S. A. Graves, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford, 1960).

versity and a Baptist pastor. Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science* (1835) enjoyed numerous revisions and editions. Colleges in the South gave it an understandably warm reception. Princeton, its philosophical tradition of Scottish realism stemming from President John Witherspoon (who came from Scotland in 1768) and continued by his successor, Samuel Stanhope Smith, supplied four of the first five professors at the University of North Carolina. The first two or three presidents of the University of Georgia were Presbyterians and sometimes served as pastor of the local Presbyterian church. Princeton was so largely patronized by Presbyterian and other students from the South that until the war the college was thought by North and South alike as Southern in sympathy.

South Carolina College's first president was typical of both American philosophical and academic traditions. The Reverend Jonathan Maxcy, D.D., was a New England Baptist minister who had been trained at Brown. A kind of idealism and a sort of agnosticism soon came to be known in the college. The idealist was Robert Henry, a Charleston-born French Calvinist preacher, who in 1818 became Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logic, a position from which he was not to retire until 1854. Henry inclined toward Berkeleyan idealism, but his idealism was mild in comparison with contemporary New England transcendentalism. He regularly taught courses in the evidences of Christianity, and these, Thornwell wrote, effectively saved the faith of men at the college who were being tempted to agnosticism.

Agnosticism had academic representation in South Carolina College in the person of Maxcy's successor, the colorful Thomas Cooper, M.D. (hon.). When he became the college's president, Cooper was more than sixty years old. Born in England, he was an intimate friend of the deist Joseph Priestly and had had personal associations with leaders of the French revolution. Jefferson thought highly of Cooper but failed to secure a chair for him at the University of Virginia because of Presbyterian opposition. Cooper was an Episcopal layman with liberal religious

views; some thought him a Unitarian, others a Deist. Not a man to keep to himself his views on any subject, Cooper publicly pronounced the tariff act of 1828 adequate grounds for South Carolina's immediate withdrawal from the Union. He has been called "father of nullification in South Carolina." An Oxford-trained industrial chemist, he had no use for metaphysics and denied the existence of an immaterial soul. His rejection of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was ultimately responsible for his dismissal from the presidency in 1834. One of Thornwell's college mates wrote that Cooper was Thornwell's one-time "idol," but by his senior year Thornwell had become a student leader of the opposition to the college's president. It has been suggested that Thornwell's acceptance of a professorship in 1838 was part of an unofficial denominational effort to offset Cooper's influence on the institution.[32]

A survey of the footnote references in Thornwell's *Collected Writings* discloses that in the philosophical field he used mainly works of English and Scottish thought. After Thornwell's death his successor, John L. Giradeau, assigned his thought to the Scotch school. Thornwell had spoken his hearty approval of "the sturdy common sense of Englishmen." The training under Henry had given him this turn. In Scottish realism Thornwell found a philosophical tradition in which there was more than ample room for reasonable consideration of the theological beliefs he held as revealed truth. This too was in the tradition. Thornwell's memoir on Henry states he "never let slip an opportunity of vindicating religion, and the records of the Christian faith. We ourselves are particularly indebted to him for the able and satisfactory reply which he gave to us in private to Dr. Cooper's celebrated assault on the Pentateuch." [33] Here is a revealing picture of Thornwell, former student and now colleague, engaging privately with Henry, veteran professor, in critical analysis of their president's latest publication.

The task of apologetics suited Thornwell's mind. He was fond of debate and early stated that it was the Christian's duty

32. B. M. Palmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 145 ff., citing La Borde's history of the college.
33. "Memoir on Dr. Henry," *Southern Quarterly Review*, 3rd ser., I (1854), 202.

to resist all efforts to corrupt the Church's pure doctrine and discipline.[34]

It becomes clear that in his philosophic utterances, Thornwell was an apologist as well as an expositor. As minister-professor he filled an accepted academic function in presenting within the curriculum and otherwise the evidences of Christianity. This he could do with enthusiasm for it was his habit of thought when considering a matter to evaluate it on the basis of its relation to the "authoritative standard of faith."

Instruction in Philosophy

Philosophy, Thornwell held, unfolds the mysteries of the universe—whence it came and how it has been produced. As such it deals with the deliverances of consciousness, regulating its conclusions according to these data. "The common sense of man is right, though language does not always adequately represent it." [35]

The pervading love of truth for its own sake, Thornwell held, is the standard of intellectual integrity. "He only deserves commendation . . . who begins with the predominating love of truth, and maintains it steadily and sincerely all the subsequent periods of his history." [36]

What disturbed Thornwell about philosophy as a discipline was its tendency, as he saw it, to accept unproved maxim-like hypotheses as absolute truths. He had in mind particularly Absolute Idealism, from the ascendency of which the world had been delivered by the work of Hume, who "prepared the way for a sounder metaphysics." [37] Philosophy, Thornwell was certain, is chiefly "defective from its ignorance of the fall, especially regarding the will." [38] Further, the self-knowledge of philosophy tends toward self-sufficiency and independence in contrast to Christian self-knowledge as entire helplessness in

34. See his commencement address, Oglethorpe University, Milledgeville, Georgia, October, 1861, in *Collected Writings*, III, 78.
35. *Ibid.*, II, 545.
36. *Ibid.*, II, 596.
37. *Ibid.*, II, 506.
38. *Ibid.*, I, 614.

ourselves and total dependence upon God. Fallen man errs in his philosophic thinking when he fails to take into account his fallen nature, but, conversely, even fallen man, if aware of himself as fallen, and, in light of the Gospel, has the powers with which to construct or to consider a sound philosophy, as Thornwell apparently considered Scottish realism to be.

Logic was a division of philosophy in which Thornwell had great interest. He once said in jocular understatement that he probably owned the largest collection of works on the subject in the whole country. He spoke in 1857 of his gratification over the increasing interest in this country in the study of logic, and he expressed the hope that he might some day write on the science of logic. He never wrote the book, but logic and its technical terminology came unbeckoned to his pen and tongue. Charles Hodge, who crossed points of view more than once with Thornwell, observed that one of Thornwell's books included a "profusion of the mere technicalities of logic." [39] B. M. Palmer, Thornwell's biographer and admirer, says that "his familiarity with [logic's formulae] tempted him, perhaps, too often to employ them, for the sake of precision, in his popular writings, and rendered them sometimes a trifle too technical for the ordinary reader." [40] Thornwell credited his initial interest in logic to Robert Henry, who, he held, established the tradition for logical thinking for which South Carolinians were nationally famed.

As to epistemology, Thornwell endorsed Sir William Hamilton's statement, "Philosophy proper is principally and primarily the *science of knowledge:* its first and most important problem being to determine, What can we know." [41] What we can know, said Thornwell, we know first by sense perception. There are no such things as innate ideas. Consciousness is dormant until experience awakens it by the presentation of an object. The mind, stimulated from the outside object, comes to know, "and whatever knowledge it obtains in obedience to

39. *The Princeton Review,* XVII (1845), 269.
40. *Op. cit.,* p. 537.
41. *Collected Writings,* III, 79.

[the 'laws of thought'] is natural" and trustworthy.[42] Error comes through disobedience to the "laws of thought" and through man's depravity which renders it impossible for him to contemplate truth as he should. Error is a constant factor for which allowance must be made, but this, Thornwell insisted, is quite different from Kant's position that conceptions do not mirror the original objects of knowledge. "We can represent *all the essence* that we ever knew." [43]

The reliance on the ability of the mind to form exact ideas of reality leads readily to a defense of introspection as a dependable philosophic method. "Reflection is to psychology what observation and experiment are to physics." [44] Again, testimony is a real source of knowledge. All that is capable of being known through the experience of any one human individual is capable of being known to others through accredited testimony. This Thornwell supported by reference to God's revealing truth to the sons of men through testimony. Even so, for Thornwell all human knowledge is necessarily relative and limited. He wrote: ". . . all knowledge begins with the incomprehensible, and is bounded by the incomprehensible. . . . The longer I live, and the more I think, the more profound is my conviction of human ignorance." [45]

Thornwell's epistemology was directed against both absolute idealism and skepticism. For the epistemological conceptions of the idealists and those of the rationalists, Thornwell had no use. "Whoever," he said, "would seek to penetrate into properties of things to which our faculties are not adjusted, overlooks a fundamental condition of the possibilities of knowledge and his conclusions are entitled to no more respect than the speculations of a blind man upon colors or a deaf man upon sounds." [46] Knowledge is relative in its nature and sensual in its objects. The rationalist authoritatively pronounces that there can be no intelligible reality beyond the domain of hu-

42. *Ibid.*, I, 72.
43. *Ibid.*, III, 51.
44. *Ibid.*, III, 125.
45. B. M. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 344.
46. *Collected Writings*, II, 497.

man consciousness. According to the rationalist God cannot do with and in His world what He will and when He will; all that He can do must be known by man in advance. "Rationalism, in other words," Thornwell concluded, "if maintained as a logical necessity, subverts the first principles of Theism." [47]

On the basis of his epistemological principles Thornwell framed his apology for revelation and miracles. Some of his language suggests rigidly "fundamentalist" interpretation of the Bible. "The theory of 'verbal dictation' . . . is the only theory . . . which makes the Bible what it professes to be, the Word of God, and an adequate and perfect measure of faith." [48] Nevertheless, in response to the "Deist" and "infidel" attacks on Scripture, and in line with the early German critical studies of the Bible, Thornwell was prepared to admit that there might be errors in those parts of the Bible which pertain to geography, politics, customs, and manners. There is indication that he had read some of the early German Bible critics. He said of the essential significance of the Bible, "Christ crucified is its great subject; it is the knowledge of Him that saves the soul." [49] The central question regarding revelation, he held, is "Whether or not God *can* stand to man in the attitude of a *witness* to truth." [50] Since it is possible for all which can be known by any man to be received by other men by means of accredited testimony, then surely God can be a witness to truth, too. Revelation may be considered as God communicating truths to men or as God witnessing to man of the truth contained in some writings. The former way of revelation is illustrated by God's relation to writers of scripture; the latter by the way in which God in contemporary times, through the Holy Spirit, produces within the individual a faith that the Scriptures are true. How God inspired men, and how much human abilities were involved, Thornwell held, are simply curious questions to which the Bible gives no answers. The authority of the Scriptures rests in the fact that God moved the authors to write. Hence,

47. *Ibid.*, I. 46.
48. *Ibid.*, III. 51.
49. *Ibid.*, III. 197–198.
50. *Southern Presbyterian Review*, IV (1851), 503.

"the Word of God is truth, and . . . we are bound to receive all that it contains on the authority of its Author, independently of all other considerations. We are neither to question nor to doubt, but simply to interpret and believe. Philosophy and prejudice and everything else are to yield to the voice of God speaking in His Word." [51] Christianity, for Thornwell, has nothing to fear from true science: ". . . the real issue is between the Bible and a wild imagination." [52]

The credibility of miracles Thornwell supported through metaphysics. One's most immediate awareness in metaphysics is the self: that which is aware, conscious, and knowing. What is known of the material world may be regarded as objectively real; and this includes our own bodies. These bodies, however, are not of the same quality of existence, for our selves are immortal whereas our bodies "have not a single characteristic of personality." [53] The insistence on the body's relation to the self as solely instrumental was, clearly, a thrust at Cooper's denial of the soul.

In his analysis of the nature of the physical world, Thornwell relied upon the doctrines of Creation and Providence. The physical world manifests the principle of causality and so-called laws of nature; but these possess no efficiency in themselves. They are simply uniform effects of the agency of God as Creator and Providence. Providence, Thornwell was convinced, acts in such manner that many events seem to be fortuitous. This, however, has a divine intent to lift man's mind from the principles he can discover through observation and experience "to that sovereign Will which orders all things in heaven above and in earth beneath. Fortuitous [contingent] events are so many monuments of the Divine personality, so many memorials of God in the midst of a scene in which we are too prone to forget Him." [54]

Life in nature and man, Thornwell held, exists in a series of superimposed levels. Each possesses the characteristics of those

51. *Collected Writings*, II, 108.
52. *Ibid.*, III, 27.
53. *Ibid.*, I, 496; see also pp. 613–614.
54. *Ibid.*, II, 347; see also pp. 348, 351.

below it together with its own peculiar characteristics. These levels are in the main: vegetable, animal, rational, moral, and religious. The religious life is thus the perfection of earthly, spiritual nature. Thornwell, acknowledging his indebtedness, follows Aquinas in declaring the miracle is against the *order* of nature, but not against the *end* of nature. The enemy of the miracle is not the scientist who, like the geologist, begins and continues with miracles, but rather that pair of prejudiced systems to which science itself is opposed: Pantheism with its prejudicial outlook, and Naturalism, whose "blind devotion to the supremacy of laws" "is upheld against all extraordinary interventions of God." [55] A miracle, then, is to be regarded as "a direct interposition of an act of the will of some being whose will, having originally endowed all the causes with the powers by which they produce their effects, may well be supposed able to counteract them." [56] Thornwell concluded "Miracles," the third of his long articles on J. D. Morell's *The Philosophy of Religion,* in this oracular fashion:

> Future generations will wonder that in the nineteenth century men gravely disputed whether God could interpose in the direct exercise of His power in the world He has made. The miracle a century hence will be made as credible as any common fact. Let the earth be explored, let its physical history be traced, and a mighty voice will come to us from the tombs of its perished races testifying in a thousand instances to the miraculous hand of God. Geology and the Bible must kiss and embrace each other, and this youngest daughter of Science will be found, like the Eastern Magi, bringing her votive offerings to the cradle of the Prince of peace. The earth can never turn traitor to its God, and its stones have already begun to cry out against those who attempted to extract from them a lesson of infidelity or Atheism.[57]

It is of interest to point out that in 1834 the state legislature of South Carolina, upon the resignation of Cooper as president of the college and professor of chemistry and geology, prohibited further teaching of these subjects at the college. Sixteen years later, 1849, Thornwell and others succeeded in reinstating geology to the curriculum. The following spring Louis

55. *Ibid.*, II, 275.
56. *Ibid.*, II, 258.
57. *Ibid.*, III, 275–276.

Agassiz, Harvard's scientist-apologete for Genesis, lectured at the college.[58] A faculty colleague of Thornwell's from 1856 was Joseph LeConte, the geologist who attained national reputation after his removal to the University of California in 1869. LeConte in his autobiography referred to Thornwell as one whose society at Columbia had stimulated his intellectual activity. In 1861 Thornwell heartily endorsed the addition of James Woodrow, Ph.D. in science from Heidelberg University, Germany, to the faculty of Columbia seminary. Woodrow was to hold the newly established Perkins Professorship of Natural Science in Connection with Revelation, the only chair of its kind in a Presbyterian seminary in the South; its incumbent became the center of a Presbyterian controversy over evolution in the late 1880's.[59] John Calvin McNair, who studied under both Woodrow and Thornwell, established a lectureship on the relation between science and theology which was inaugurated in 1909 and is still continued at the University of North Carolina.

Instruction in Ethics

When Thornwell became president of the college in January of 1852, he also became professor of moral philosophy. As a college teacher and administrator Thornwell stressed the significance of ethics. "Knowledge is not the principal end of College instruction, but habits. . . . the maturity of the habit is measured by the degree and accuracy of the knowledge; but still, the habits are the main thing." [60] The outstanding single publication of his career was his *Discourses on Truth* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1855). It was widely circulated and had favorable reviews. R. S. Gladney in *The Southern Presbyterian Review* found it "especially valuable" in its insistence upon religion as a basis for true ethical judgment.[61] Sir

58. R. W. Gibbes, *The Present Earth the Remains of a Former World* (Columbia, S. C., 1849), p. 3.
59. Marion W. Woodrow, *Dr. James Woodrow* (Columbia, S.C., 1909), p. 13.
60. B. M. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 357.
61. IX (1855), 114.

William Hamilton acknowledged a copy Thornwell had sent him, stating, "I have read [the discourses] with great interest, and no less admiration." [62]

Every act of will, according to Thornwell, leaves permanent effect upon character. Ethical judgment of such acts springs from moral philosophy, in which the essential questions are: 1. How do we come to possess notions of right and wrong? 2. In what do the essential distinctions between right and wrong consist? 3. What, practically, are the actions that are right?

For Thornwell conscience was a simple element of our being, both natural and original. Decisions of conscience are not final considerations, but only preludes to God's higher pronouncements in the final judgment. Society must reinforce the consciences of its members with "punitive justice" as a part of moral order. "It is a fatal symptom that a nation is tending to anarchy when it becomes indifferent to ['punitive justice'], the first principle of prosperity." [63] Thornwell protested Bacon's assertion that all morality is supernatural, stating that morality as a subject falls within the province of natural reason. As such, systems of morality that do not accept the Scriptures as an authoritative rule of duty err in their omissions or in their additions or in their erroneous applications of right principles; "depravity of heart and the indulgence of corrupt and wicked passions . . . make out a false case, and hence a false judgment is necessarily rendered." [64]

The phase of practical ethics which Thornwell developed most fully was man's obligation in dealing with the truth. Ethical thinkers, he held, often overlook the fact that "there may be a virtuous or vicious exercise of the understanding;" "man is responsible for his opinions as . . . for the motives which impel him to intellectual effort, and for the diligence, caution and attention by which he avails himself of all the means of arriving at truth." [65] The moral character of a man is shown by his dealings with truth. "Why," Thornwell asked

62. Quoted, Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 357.
63. *Collected Writings*, I, 411.
64. *Ibid.*, II, 508.
65. *Ibid.*, II, 492.

rhetorically in his discourse on sincerity, "am I bound to speak the truth? . . . Because it is the law of our nature; it is a fundamental datum of consciousness, a command of God impressed upon the moral structure of the soul." [66]

Much of Thornwell's writing was directed against utilitarianism. "We would utterly protest against the principle that expediency is any measure of duty or obligation. . . . The position . . . [is] much closer . . . to the atheistic philosophy of Epicurus . . . than to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ." [67] As to theism and ethics Thornwell wrote, "Apart from the existence of a personal God, it is impossible to construct a consistent scheme of moral philosophy. . . . From God all moral distinctions proceed, and to God they naturally and necessarily lead." [68] The Bible, therefore, becomes necessary in ethics not as moral legislation, but as providing those principles of practical ethics against which the speculations of men can be tested. Redemption "opens a new chapter in the book of Ethics," and invites us to speculations as refreshing by their novelty as they are invigorating by their truth. In the same discourse Thornwell concludes: "There is a tenfold nearer approximation to the teachings of the Bible in Aristotle than there is in Paley; more affinity with the Gospel in Cicero than in the whole tribe of utilitarians." [69]

Instruction in Religion

It will be recalled that in his metaphysics Thornwell regarded the religious life as the highest form of earthly existence. He regarded man's whole being as involved in this and denied that there is a "religious sense" as conscience can be termed a moral sense. As such, religion is the true glory of man and its value a matter of universal human experience.

Nature and the supernatural are both parts of the same existence and cannot be separated.

66. *Ibid.*, II, 528.
67. *Ibid.*, IV, 167.
68. *Ibid.*, I, 505.
69. *Ibid.*, II, 462.

> God has not left the world, as a watchmaker (Paley's) leaves his clock after he has wound it up, to pursue its course independently . . . ; He pervades the powers which He has imparted to created substances by His ceaseless energy. . . . He is the life of nature's life. In Him we live, and move, and have our being.[70]

The closeness of the Creator and Providence to creation was the ground upon which Thornwell viewed revelation as not only possible but probable. Thus, as noted, the Bible was for him authoritative revelation, though he considered present revelation as only mediate through the writings of the prophets and apostles by the Holy Spirit.

To deny the possibility of miracles, to Thornwell, was to make "matter more important than the life and health of the soul," and to degrade the Creator and ourselves.[71] Miracles were, he thought, "the criterion by which a real is distinguished from a pretended revelation, the mark by which we know that God has spoken." [72] "It is impossible to abandon the miracle, and cling to any other Christianity but that which is enkindled in our own souls from the sparks of our own reason." [73]

Thornwell's writings reveal that he shared Cooper's conviction that non-Christian religions were worth studying. His conclusion was that for Christians the authoritative Bible as miracle-attested revelation was the ultimate criterion: "the doctrine is the decisive test of spurious and true revelations," whether of Rome, Mohammed, or Joseph Smith. "Whatever is repugnant to a *known* truth, . . . cannot be Divine." [74]

In Thornwell's opinion the humanistic philosophy of religion, enamored of its portrait of man, accepts this as reality rather than partial representation of reality. The pantheist, too, is an artist, whose folly lies in his rebellion against the true position of man as a dependent being, and in his betrayal of the common-sense principles of human existence. Schleiermacher, Thornwell warned, had framed a type of "rationalism"

70. *Ibid.*, III, 230–231.
71. *Ibid.*, II, 273.
72. *Ibid.*, III, 249.
73. *Ibid.*, III, 227.
74. *Ibid.*, III, 193; also 191.

which would prove particularly insidious for Americans; "it invites by its warmth" and employs "the very language of piety." But, he continued, it repudiates all external standards of truth, reduces doctrine to feeling, strips sin of any moral import and is supported by a philosophy which is essentially pantheistic.[75] Appealing to college students in a sermon, Thornwell begged that they might never abandon the incarnation, the atonement, and the resurrection "while there is a sin to be pardoned, a grave to be feared, a hell to be dreaded, a God to be met—" [76]

Man, Thornwell said, is essentially a religious animal. He must have a God to pray to, as well as a God to swear by, and if he does not know the true God, then in His place man will have idols. Absolute dependence with the concomitant consciousness of his own mortality is the law of human nature. Thornwell labeled the interpretation of religion which denied the reality of evil and sin as "bastard liberality."

Man's historical life, which Thornwell often called "this sublunary state," is a school in which human beings are being trained for a higher and nobler state by being taught what is necessary to their happiness. Of the end of history we know little apart from revelation, but we do know by our mortality, by conscience, and by revelation that history is directed by God. And we know, too, that man's destiny at the end of history is in accord with the relations he has sustained to the moral government of God under which he has lived within temporal history.

The apologetic concerns of Thornwell in the philosophical and ethical instruction which he gave at South Carolina College, as professor and president, suggest similarity to the earlier efforts of Timothy Dwight at Yale. Thornwell sought by logic and learning in classroom and chapel to meet what he regarded as the current intellectual assaults on Christian doctrine and ethics. Apart from the revealed good news of God's scheme of reconciliation through Christ as mediator, he held, there is no means of attaining true integrity.

75. *Ibid.*, III, 250–251.
76. "Matt. XXII. 29," *Southern Presbyterian Review*, IV (1851), 524.

All your present excellencies are dead works, and when the influences which now embalm and preserve the corpse are gone, it will putrify [*sic*] and stink. The first step in real moral improvement is faith in the Son of God. When that step is taken, we begin to live; until then we are dead in trespasses and sin.[77]

The college's students and faculty who first heard the discourses were soon thrown into the vortex of the "irrepressible conflict." The fiber of their determination had been sensitized appreciably by such spirited certainty and conviction.

A good man struggling with the storms of fate, unshaken in his allegiance to God, and steady in his purpose never to be seduced into wrong, is the noblest spectacle which earth can present. There is something unutterably grand in the moral attitude of him who, with his eyes fixed upon the favour of God rises superior to earth and hell, and amid the wrecks of a thousand barks around him steers his course with steadiness and peace.[78]

Introduction to Theology

Thornwell's mother, a Calvinistic Baptist, was his earliest identifiable religious influence. During his college days he had prolonged periods of struggle with feelings of guilt and religious accountability; yet he had no formal church affiliation until he was twenty years old. In May, 1832, he united with the Presbyterian Church and within months had decided to prepare for the ministry. Later he recalled that as a college student he had purchased for 25 cents at a town bookstore a copy of the Westminster Confession of Faith to which he, being at the time unacquainted with the work, was attracted by its title alone. He was so fascinated with it that he read it through that same night. "For the first time," he commented, "I felt that I had met with a system which held together with the strictest logical connection; granting its premises, the conclusions were bound to follow." [79] Before entering college, Thornwell had studied some law in the office of a friend. At college he had continued

77. *Collected Writings*, II, 474–475.
78. *Ibid.*, II, 553.
79. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

his study of classical languages and literature. The system of doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, reflecting the thought of Calvin, who similarly was trained in the classics and law, became for Thornwell a coherent whole to be explored, to be explained, and to be defended, but one which he did not feel needed to be subject to further test or evaluation. As early as the first year of his theological studies, when he was for some months attending divinity lectures at Harvard, he showed in a personal letter the dual attitude of acceptance and defense:

> I room in Divinity Hall, among the Unitarian students of theology; . . . I shall expect to meet and give blows in defence of my own peculiar doctrines; and God forbid that I should falter in maintaining the faith once delivered to the saints. I look upon the tenets of modern Unitarianism as little better than down-right infidelity.[80]

Palmer discovered more than a dozen points of parallel between the thought and career of Calvin and those of Thornwell and reported that Thornwell admired Calvin "above all, for his superior wisdom in founding his opinions upon the express declarations of Scripture, rather than upon the shifting speculations of human philosophy." Palmer also reports a student account of Thornwell's moving classroom description of his visit to Calvin's grave and of his concluding statement "that the emergencies of the conflict with Rationalistic infidelity were now forcing the whole Church more and more to occupy Calvin's ground." [81]

Thornwell's self-conscious role as expositor and defender of Calvinistic theology he held throughout his career. As a twenty-two-year-old theology student he confessed to a friend, "I have an eye on a Professorship in the Theological Seminary at Columbia." When he died, though not yet fifty years of age, he had held for six years in that institution the chair of Didactic and Polemic Theology. His thinking he did not regard as original, nor as grounded in any one historical church tradition,

80. Quoted, *ibid.*, p. 117.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 534.

much as he honored Calvin and repeatedly referred to the wording of the Church catechisms. Rather he thought of his theology as the necessary conclusions of biblical teachings. His students would recall his saying of a proposition that he could "see no flaw in my reasoning, but I am gravelled with one verse in the Bible," or again, "if there is but one passage against us, our speculation must go to the winds." Palmer explained, "Wherever he found a 'thus saith the Lord,' he ceased to reason, and began to worship." [82]

As a teacher Thornwell wrote out his lectures carefully. They comprise nearly 450 pages of the first volume of his *Collected Writings*. They were afterward used as basic text material in his own institution and also in the Presbyterian seminary at Richmond, Virginia, well into the twentieth century.

R. E. Thompson placed Thornwell among the three most influential systematic theologians of nineteenth-century American Presbyterianism.[83] Thornwell stood with Charles Hodge of Princeton and R. J. Breckinridge of Kentucky as champions of Old School Calvinism in distinction to the New School modifications which had been effected first by Jonathan Edwards and later by Nathaniel W. Taylor. The Old School claimed to represent the pristine Calvinistic system. It is clear, however, that in the case of Thornwell at least this representation was often colored by transmission through the English Presbyterian-Puritan thinkers like the Westminster divines as well as through continental Calvinistic scholastics like Cocceius, Turretin, and Van Mastricht. In discussing historical theology Thornwell repeatedly referred to the ancient catechisms, church council reports, and confessions of faith of which he possessed a fine collection. In his writings Thornwell practically ignored American religious writers while engaging in minute examination of writings by the Reformers, early church fathers, and Thomas Aquinas.[84]

82. *Ibid.*, p. 545.

83. *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States* (New York, 1895), p. 145.

84. For further analysis of Thornwell's sources in theological reading, see Paul L. Garber, "James Henley Thornwell: Presbyterian Defender of the Old South," *Union Seminary Review*, LIV, No. ■ (1943), 14–17.

Instruction in Theology

Thornwell defined theology as "the science of religion; . . . the system of doctrine . . . which, when spiritually discerned, produces true piety." [85] Its truth is an objective and systematically organized body of knowledge resulting from the rational examination of God-given data in the external world of nature, in the internal realm of human nature, and in the unsystematized revealed truths of the inspired Holy Scriptures. As such, theology is "queen of sciences," which "must confessedly stand at the head of all human knowledge" [86] since it deals with all humanly available knowledge in the realms of nature and human nature as well as "the Gospel," "the facts of revelation."

Thornwell conceived the central consideration of theology to be justification, how man, a sinner, can be justified by the righteous God. This revealed message from God, Thornwell asserted, makes all earthly knowledge, possessions, and honors secondary, for upon man's attitude toward the Gospel depends "heaven or hell, life or death, eternal life or eternal death."

The elements of Thornwell's theology are the familiar ones of Calvinism: the unqualified sovereignty of God in Creation, Providence, and Decrees; unredeemed or "natural" man, as finite creature "who calls corruption his father, and the worm his mother," and as sinner, guilty by his own transgressions and also by "imputed" or "original sin" (the "thorniest problem in theology," as Thornwell admitted); sin as transgression and rebellion and the Devil as fallen being whose temptations the saints can repel only by an enduring "fear of God;" the covenant of works in Adam; the efficacious atonement through the covenant of grace in Christ; Christ as by His twofold nature God's effectual agent in atonement; adoption, regeneration, and holiness constituting individual, but not social, redemption; God's judgment sealing at death the eternal doom of immortal souls, either for good or for ill.[87]

85. *Collected Writings,* I, 36.
86. *Ibid.,* I, 25.
87. See the longer exposition in Paul L. Garber, "The Religious Thought of James Henley Thornwell," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Duke University, 1939, chap. iv.

In Christology Thornwell left sketches of a book he proposed, but never wrote, on the Eternal Sonship of Christ.[88] His plan was an exposition based on the suggestions in Hebrews of Christ's atonement as an act of worship, an interpretation which he regarded as a helpful supplement to the more customary legal form of Calvinistic atonement imagery. A sermon, "The Priesthood of Christ," which Thornwell preached at the college in 1849, and later published, indicates the possibilities:

> . . . the whole work of Jesus was a solemn service of religion, . . . He was a priest in His death, a priest in His resurrection, a priest in His ascension. He worshipped God in laying His life upon the altar, He worshipped Him in taking it again, and it was an act of worship by which He entered with His blood into the very presence of the Highest to intercede for the saints.[89]

Vital for Thornwell in his systematic theology is his understanding of the relation of the Providence of God and the sense of duty. Thornwell's doctrine of Providence implies that nothing transpires within history which can ever take God by surprise. Yet God is not ethically responsible for all that happens. "God uses men without being a party to their crimes. The sun rouses the odour from the dung-hill, but is not itself defiled." "The design of the doctrine of Providence . . . is to prompt edification." [90] From these convictions, it followed, in Thornwell's thinking, that it was for the sovereign God in His good Providence and His good time to remove from the earth natural evils, the results of Adam's sin, such as disease and death; and it was equally for God, through the same offices, to remove from the earth social evils which were the results of Adam's sin, such as poverty and social classes. Meanwhile, it is possible by the Providence of God for these evils to be overruled for good to individuals. Death, for example, can be the means whereby a man, aware of the vanity of earthly things, gives his attention to his soul's eternal salvation.

There can be in God's world no "chance" occurrences; events

88. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 261.
89. *Collected Writings*, I, 280–284.
90. *Ibid.*, I, 616.

so designated actually constitute direct divine direction as to the believer's duty. Conscience is God's answer to prayer. So rigorously did Thornwell make practical application of this Puritanism that he confessed, "My friends sometimes charge me with a spice of fanaticism." [91]

In 1862 as he lay on what was to be his deathbed Thornwell was called upon by the South Carolina Tract Society to write something to strengthen public wartime morale. He entitled the pamphlet (#130) "Our Danger and Our Duty." In it Thornwell suggested that recent military reverses should be understood as "a call to break off our sins"—he mentions overconfidence, factionalism, public immorality, and all forms of materialism, and with an emphasis on the feelings of duty, concludes:

> Do we feel the moral power of courage, of resolution, of heroic will, rising and swelling within us, until it towers above all the smoke and dust of the invasion? Then we are in a condition to do great deeds. . . . Let us seize the opportunity, and make to ourselves an immortal name, while we redeem a land from bondage and a continent from ruin.[92]

Three False Theologies

From Thornwell's theological writings it is possible to identify three types of thought which he regarded as challenges to orthodoxy.

1. ROMAN CATHOLICISM. Early in his journalistic writing Thornwell crossed swords in a series of articles with a Roman Catholic priest of Charleston, a Dr. (later Bishop) Lynch. The exchange began with an essay written by Thornwell at the request of R. J. Breckinridge on the "Claims of the Apocrypha to Divine Inspiration," which was published as an anonymous pamphlet. When a Columbia, South Carolina, newspaper editor published this material, he, knowingly but without permission, attached to it Thornwell's name. As Thornwell stated later, Dr. Lynch "naturally" regarded this as a challenge to

91. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 266.
92. *Ibid.*, pp. 589–590.

vindicate Rome "from the severe charges which were brought against her" [93] and made reply by long letters to the newspaper editor. The exchange was carried on over several years. Its scope ranged as widely as Protestant-Catholic differences. In his book *The Arguments of Romanists from the Infallibility of the Church, and the Testimony of the Fathers in behalf of the Apocrypha, Discussed and Refuted* [94] Thornwell published his parts of the exchange along with an appendix summarizing Lynch's replies. The acrimonious parts of the exchange, for which Thornwell later expressed private regret, were exscinded from the *Collected Writings*. Even so, the substance of the Apocrypha work makes up almost half of the eight hundred pages of Volume III. To these have been added another 129 pages of Thornwell's "Arguments against the Validity of Romish Baptism," published first in Richmond, 1846, and republished in 1851–1852 as a series in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, South Carolina); Thornwell was then its editor.

In ante-bellum South Carolina, as in the South generally except for certain urban areas, Protestants, who were busily engaged among themselves in controversies, did not regard the Roman Catholic Church as a threat to their domination of the region.[95] There were anti-Catholic actions in the United States from the 1830's through the 1850's, including movements, published vitriolic sermons, organizations, mob riots, and political parties, but these were in the North and West.[96] Thornwell, however, became involved as a religious journalist; in 1855 he wrote a close personal friend in Mississippi that he gave his most cordial approval to the anti-Catholic Know Nothing party, "if it fails, our last hope for the union is gone." [97]

Thornwell was not original in his attacks on Roman Catholic

93. *Collected Writings*, III, 280.
94. New York, 1845.
95. Margaret Deschamps Moore, "Religion in Mississippi in 1860," *The Journal of Mississippi History*, XXII (1960), 226.
96. Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States*, pp. 326–327. W. W. Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (2nd ed.; New York, 1950), p. 273.
97. Palmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 478–479.

doctrine. He revived the customary Reformation and post-Reformation protests against Apocrypha as scripture, papal authority, transubstantiation, holiness as a supernatural grace, miracles as a present feature of Christian experience, and the doctrine of works of supererogation. Moral corruption, he warned his readers, is "the legitimate, natural, necessary" result of Romanism, "the bitter fruit of her graceless pretensions to infallibility." Thereby, he concluded, "the Church of Rome . . . declares herself to be a child of the devil and an enemy of all righteousness." [98]

2. PELAGIANISM AND ARMINIANISM. In view of the frequently bitter doctrinal disputes among Protestant champions in the South before the Civil War, particularly evident under the emotional strains of the widespread camp meetings or protracted revivals, Thornwell's handling of Pelagianism and Arminianism is strikingly moderate. He regarded both systems as being based on a misguided interpretation of the Bible in which human speculations had been made the determining principle; in this he compared them to the deists. Fortunately, Thornwell felt, in their Christian life, when loyalty to their systems of theology was laid aside, Pelagians and Arminians alike were found to be "sober and honest-hearted Calvinists, as their earnest prayers for grace and assistance unequivocally declare." [99] On the other hand, Socinians or Unitarians, he wrote, because of their denial of the Trinity, the depravity of man, the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, and eternal punishment, "are no more entitled to be considered as Christians than Mohammedans." [100]

3. RATIONALISM. The system of theology which Thornwell designated "rationalism" and which has come to be identified as Hegelian absolute idealism he regarded not as "the visions of crack-brained enthusiasts" but as the work of "men of the highest order of mind." He prophesied that it would have great

98. *Collected Writings,* III, 509.
99. *Ibid.,* II, 146.
100. *Ibid.,* I, 434.

vogue in this country and thus make the error of its theology more prevalent.[101] The German philosophers in the effort to discover the absolute, Thornwell held, "do not *rave*, but *reason*. They do not *dream*, but *think;* and that, too, with a rigour of abstraction, an intensity of attention, and a nicety of discrimination, which [we are] obliged to respect. . . . The difficulty with them is that they begin wrong." [102] The whole issue between Christianity and rationalism, as Thornwell saw it, "turns upon the question, Whether we have been left to ourselves, whether theology is in fact like all other sciences, the production of man, or whether God has framed it for us ready to our hands." [103] There is a subjective side to the religious experience, but, Thornwell insisted, it is never autonomous. The Bible as revelation was for Thornwell a God-given, objective, moral, and religious standard; he defended its authority with enthusiasm. "When men cry, Down with the Bible! the real meaning of their rage is, Away with Jesus and His Cross!" [104]

Thornwell regarded the appearance of the American edition of John Daniel Morell's *The Philosophy of Religion* [105] as a herald of rationalism's onslaught in this country. Morell had a scholarly reputation in America by reason of his widely used history of modern philosophy.[106] Thornwell's critical review of Morell's work on religion was long (occupying 171 printed pages in the *Collected Writings*) ; its three parts were published in 1849, 1850, and 1856. Here was occasion for Thornwell to express his own philosophy of religion: he did so in some of his closest reasoning. Reprints of the review were widely distributed, being regarded as including the best of Thornwell's critical thought. Thomas Smyth of Charleston, often a severe critic of Thornwell, sent copies with his com-

101. *Ibid.*, III, 27.
102. *Ibid.*, III, 99.
103. *Ibid.*, III, 29.
104. *Ibid.*, III, 155.
105. New York, 1849.
106. *An Historical and Critical View of the Speculative Philosophy of Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (2nd ed.; New York, 1847).

mendation to friends in England.[107] The general evaluation is indicative of the spirit of the work:

> We do not hesitate . . . to rank Mr. Morell's book in the class of infidel publications. He has assailed the very foundations of the faith; and in resisting his philosophy we are defending the citadel of Christianity from the artful machinations of a traitor, who, with honeyed words of friendship and allegiance upon his tongue, is in actual treaty to deliver it into the hands of the enemy of God and man.[108]

Conclusion

If our hypothetical theological student who studied under Thornwell in college and seminary, 1851–1858, had, along with his studies, followed Thornwell's published sermons and editorial writings, he would have discovered basic materials for an identifiable philosophy of education and an interpretation of the nature of society and politics, as well as a full examination of the nature of the Christian church and its relation to society. He would have been exposed to Thornwell's treatment of the Negro as a human being of God's creation with a soul capable of Christ's redemption, and of slavery as an arrangement in Southern society which, though admittedly an exploitive form of labor economy, was nonetheless, as a gift of God's Providence, a benefit to the slave in cultural education, and a more humane system of employer-employee relations than that of industrial free labor.[109]

Through the full panorama of Thornwell's thinking, the dominant characteristic is that of "broad-minded conservativism." This paradoxical description is given by Vander Velde as the nation-wide reputation of Old School Presbyterians from the late 1830's to 1861.[110] These people were regarded as broad-minded because of their intellectual leadership and enthusiasm

107. B. M. Palmer to J. H. Thornwell, Sept. 10, 1850. Anderson-Thornwell letters, MSS Collection, University of North Carolina Library.
108. *Collected Writings*, III, 27.
109. For details on these topics, see Garber, *op. cit.*, chaps. v, vi, vii.
110. Vander Velde, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

for education. Moreover, they were less rigid in attitudes on communion than Baptists and Episcopalians, more flexible about centralized church authority and dancing than Methodists, and less bound regarding ordination rights and interchurch co-operation than Episcopalians. The Presbyterians seemed liberal-minded in their willingness to examine novelties. They were considered, however, conservative because of the high value which staunchly they placed on the thought-forms and behavior patterns of the past; from these they moved only when persuaded not by what was popular or logical, but by what they felt to be commanded by a "thus saith the Lord."

From the earliest period of his ministry to the end of his life Thornwell was in traditional spirit an Old School Presbyterian, committed to learning and conservatism by the temper of his mind and by his deepest feelings. The liberality gave room for his ambition to be a man of learning which, he confessed, "from the earliest knowledge of himself [worked] as a passion within him." [111] In this pursuit he achieved no little success. George Bancroft, the historian, presented Thornwell with a copy of Aristotle, inscribed in Latin, "A testimonial of regard to the Rev. Dr. J. H. Thornwell, the most learned of learned." [112] John C. Calhoun commented that in capacity of mind Thornwell was comparable to Timothy Dwight of Yale and added, "I was not prepared for the thorough acquaintance he exhibited with all the topics that are generally familiar only to statesmen." [113] Thornwell's urge to investigate by scholarship was not knowledge for the sake of knowledge. It was rather "love of truth," as he put it, which for a man of ethical integrity, he held, would be a predominating motivation sustained steadily and sincerely through life. For him this "love of truth" meant examination of the new in light of the old, always with the assumption that one would find it wise and possible to hold fast to the good which had stood the test of time and human experience. Therein lay his conservatism.

It is in this context that Thornwell's role as a defender of

111. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 537.
113. *Ibid.*, pp. 305–306.

the South is to be understood. Within his academic and theological "ivory tower," where he was more congenially at home than he was in public debate or social action, his first premise was that the Bible was God's revelation of what was true in theology and permissible in action. Although he was prepared to grant Christian fellowship, he was committed to Presbyterian theology and Presbyterian government, both being, as he saw it, in accord with the Scriptures and thus God's revealed truth. This disclosure he regarded as part of the redeeming work of the sovereign God Who, in Providence, continues to make evident through historical happenings the pattern of obedience for those who know and love Him.

Until late in 1860 Thornwell resisted proposals for secession, calling them "rash counsels;" and this was long after the abolition agitations of the 1850's had thrown many in his area into panic with fears of slave uprisings and social disorders.[114] The election of Lincoln Thornwell interpreted as signifying an extraconstitutional amending of the Federal Constitution. This event in history, an assault of novelty on the value of the past, was evidence for Thornwell of God through Providence giving direction in duty. Thereafter he gave himself, as faithful to God's mandate, to wholehearted support, even from his deathbed, to the Southern cause.

The case is similar with reference to the separation of the churches. Thornwell regarded the Spring resolutions less cause than occasion, for it was "the decree of Providence, which . . . determined that they [the Southern Presbyterians] should withdraw from the church of their fathers." God was responsible, by way of Providence in history, for the separation of the nations; it was the God-given duty of Presbyterians to heed and obey. Thornwell reveals his assumption that the separation of North and South was a *fait accompli,* as in other writings, in a letter which he sent to the Philadelphia Assembly in May, 1861, requesting his absence to be excused. He concluded this communication, which was read aloud to the Assembly:

114. Margaret B. Deschamps, "The Presbyterian Church in the South Atlantic States, 1801–1861," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Emory University, 1952, pp. 147 ff.

> Brethren, I invoke upon your deliberations the blessings of the Most High. I sincerely pray that . . . He may save the Church from every false way; that He may make her a messenger of peace in these troublous times, and that He may restore harmony and good will between your country and mine.

The reporter for the Philadelphia *Press* commented, "The last part of the letter created great laughter." And in Vander Velde's words, "thus in a burst of merriment perished the influence of one who in less troubled times had been respected as had few others in the Old School Church." [115]

It is likely that Thornwell never seriously considered that the life of the Old South would not continue without interruption; there is no evidence that he was ever aware of the breakdown which was to come. Although his father, a plantation manager, died when Thornwell was eight years old, his mother, with the aid of planter friends and relatives, was able to rear and educate the four children who survived infancy. Thornwell was testimony that a plantation-dominated society could find a place for a white man who with eager and alert mind was ready and able to give himself to learning and to the service of the church. Through his wife Thornwell acquired a small plantation in the upcountry which he romantically named Dryburgh Abbey for the Scottish burial place of Sir Walter Scott. Here he must have had a number of slaves; he speaks of "hosts of backs to cover." In his home there were several "servants" (in personal correspondence they are never called "slaves"); one was a "body servant" named Charles, for whose welfare and religious experience Thornwell in his letters often expressed much concern.

The extent to which Southern Presbyterians were slaveholders is difficult to assess. A statement by the Reverend James Smylie of Mississippi, published in 1849,[116] is often cited, that three-fourths of all Presbyterian Church members in the South were slaveholders. This figure is probably excessive. Presbyterians in the South in 1860 numbered about 100,000. There

115. Vander Velde, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–45, citing the Philadelphia *Press*, May 21, 1861.

116. *Minority Report of a Committee of the General Association of Connecticut, on the Sin of Slavery* (Salisbury, Conn., 1849), p. 4.

was an average of about ten slaves to each slaveholder. By Smylie's figures this would mean that Presbyterians held 750,000 slaves out of a total of nearly four million.[117] Another index of uncertain value is the number of Negro members of the Presbyterian Church in the Old South; these have been estimated variously as seven thousand and twenty thousand, but, as Walter B. Posey comments, in either case "it is clearly evident that the Presbyterian Church held only a small percentage of the Negroes." [118]

Whatever their economic interests, Southern Presbyterian churches were generally self-consciously loyal to the "peculiar institution." By the time Thornwell entered the ministry, the Presbyterian critics of slavery in South Carolina as elsewhere had been silenced.[119] In 1818 the General Assembly had declared slavery to be "a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature," "totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the Gospel of Christ," and had encouraged Presbyterians to work earnestly for "a total abolition of slavery." [120] This position was protested to the Assembly of 1836 by twelve Southern presbyteries. One of these was Harmony Presbytery in South Carolina. Thornwell, more than a quarter of a century later, was to reflect that stand in the Address: "as the Kingdom of our Lord is not of this world, His church as such has no right to abolish, alter or affect any institution or ordinance of men, political or civil merely." [121] The request that the Assembly rescind its 1818 action failed to produce results at the 1836 Assembly. The 1837 General Assembly exscinded synods and presbyteries totaling five-ninths of its membership

117. For the number of Presbyterians, see Vander Velde, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–7; for the number of slaves and slaveholders, R. S. Cotterill, *The Old South* (2nd ed.; Glendale, Calif., 1939), pp. 274–275, and T. Harry Williams *et al.*, *A History of the United States to 1876* (New York, 1959), p. 476.

118. *The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest, 1778–1838* (Richmond, 1952), p. 92 with sources in notes 82 and 83.

119. Margaret B. Deschamps, "Antislavery Presbyterians in the Carolina Piedmont," *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, XXIV (Columbia, 1954), 6–13.

120. R. E. Thompson, *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States* (New York, 1895), pp. 364–365.

121. MS Minutes, Harmony Presbytery, 1830–1848, Oct. 27, 1836, in the Montreat, North Carolina, collection; cited by Deschamps, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

in an action of doctrinal reform. This was Thornwell's first Assembly. He seems to have taken little part in it save to give support by his vote to Old School stalwarts like Robert J. Breckinridge. In a letter to his wife from the Assembly, Thornwell makes no mention of slavery, but he does remark of the New School group, "They never, constitutionally and regularly, formed a part of the Church. . . . [The two parties] are wide apart in spirit, principle, and doctrines; and nothing but confusion and disorder can result from their being united." [122] There is a running historians' battle over whether this 1837 division was on doctrine, as appears on the face of the official transactions, or, more covertly, on the basis of slavery-abolition differences, as recent interpreters have held.[123] The fact is that, from the year of the division until after 1861, the Old School Assembly, following a markedly different policy from that of the New School, declined to pronounce on methods of emancipation. Its stand throughout this period, the time of Thornwell's connections with it, was that stated by the Assembly of 1845, "that the existence of domestic slavery, under the circumstances in which it is found in the southern portion of the country, is no bar to Christian communion." [124] Thornwell was consulted by the committee which framed this resolution and at their request prepared a paper for their use; he told his wife that by this Assembly action "abolitionism will be killed in the Presbyterian Church, at least for the present." [125] The South had a continuingly steady influence in the Assembly until 1861; many Southern moderators were elected, among whom was Thornwell, chosen in 1847 when he was thirty-four years old; eight of the Assemblies between 1844 and 1861 were held south of the Mason-Dixon line; and efforts were consistently made to place Southern professors in seminaries under Assembly control.[126]

In the separation of the churches, therefore, as well as in the

122. Quoted, Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
123. For example, C. Bruce Staiger, "Abolitionism and the Presbyterian Schism of 1837–38," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVI (1949), 391–414.
124. For the full text, see R. E. Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 269–272.
125. Quoted, Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 286.
126. See Vander Velde, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–27.

separation of the nation, Thornwell saw himself morally bound to yield obediently to the lesson of Providence. The cause of church separation was not basically the passage of the Spring resolution, as he acknowledged, nor was it any slackening of the Old School Assembly's traditional conservatism regarding slavery. It was simply that God in His Providence had seen fit to divide the nation into two countries, and in light of this accomplished fact it was the duty of obedient Presbyterians quietly to separate.

Clement Eaton wrote in 1940, "The dynamics of Southern thought moved, after the death of Jefferson, in the direction of defense, a trend which explains much in the cultural history of the Old South." [127] This observation may be illustrated by an examination of the characteristic trends of Thornwell's thought in its broad aspects. However, in 1963, in view of more recent history, though some things are clear, it is difficult, even more difficult than in 1940, to be certain exactly what eternal verities Providence was teaching through the events of Southern cultural history a century ago.

127. *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (Durham, N. C., 1940), p. 332.