

# Archibald Alexander & the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary

By James M. Garretson

## INTRODUCTION

Established in 1812 as *The Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, Princeton Theological Seminary quickly became the premier academic institution for ministerial training in the United States. Blessed with a succession of godly and gifted faculty, its reputation for a biblical and Reformed confessional orthodoxy in the academic instruction students received was unrivalled throughout its first century. While changes in the institutional direction of the school in the late 1920's reflect doctrinal realignments within the denomination that would drastically alter the theological trajectory of the seminary for the remainder of the twentieth century, the rich theological and pastoral emphases for which earlier generations of Princeton directors, faculty, and graduates so well known have been preserved in countless publications and addresses.

Foremost among Princeton's widely acclaimed faculty was its founding professor, Archibald Alexander.<sup>1</sup> Highly regarded as a preacher and pastor, Alexander's reputation was further enhanced as the first Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology at the new institution. Alexander's ministerial instruction established the school's reputation as an educational center committed to the spiritual and intellectual development of its students; with the passing of the years, the ministerial education that Princeton provided left a lasting legacy on the development of American Presbyterian pastoral and pulpit practice.

Active churchmen and confessional theologians, the Princetonians' academic and pastoral labors were conscientiously rooted in their ministerial identity as servants of Christ in the service of church and society. From the school's inception, broad-based learning was wedded with the rich spiritual legacy of Reformed

confessional orthodoxy, birthed during the Protestant Reformation in Europe and the British Isles and later transplanted by Pilgrims and Puritans to the colonies of North America. While faced with a constantly changing theological and cultural landscape in American church life, successive generations of Princeton faculty throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century sought to embody and apply the confessional orthodoxy

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1. Major biographies have been written on a number of the leading nineteenth-century Princeton Seminary faculty. For Archibald Alexander see James Waddel Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1854; repr. Sprinkle Publications, 1990). For Samuel Miller see Samuel Miller Jr., *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1869; repr. Tentmaker Publications, 2002). For J.A. Alexander see Henry Carrington Alexander, *The Life of Joseph Addison Alexander*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1870). For Charles Hodge see Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge, D.D., LL.D., Professor in the Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880). For recent modern biographies on Hodge's life and influence see Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Andrew W. Hoffercker, *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2011). While not strictly a biography, information about James W. Alexander can be found in an extensive series of correspondence between Alexander and his friend, John Hall. See John Hall, *Forty Years Familiar Letters of James W. Alexander*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1860). For a recent collection of primary source funeral sermons, eulogies, and related articles on the lives of the major Princetonians see James M. Garretson, *Pastor-Teachers of Old Princeton: Memorial Addresses for the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary 1812-1921* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012).

of the Westminster Standards in their instruction and publications in the various departments of the seminary's curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

The theology of ministerial instruction, doctrinal emphases, and ecclesiological convictions represented by Princeton's founding faculty established the spiritual ethos of the school and continues to provide a rich repository of biblical wisdom for pastoral ministry in today's world. Familiarity with "Old Princeton's"<sup>3</sup> theological and pastoral legacy remains of benefit for seminary training today for a number of reasons.

Princeton's emphasis on cultivation of both piety and learning in preparation for ministerial service balances theoretical and practical instruction in ways that demonstrate the pastoral implications of biblical knowledge for church-based ministry. The faculty's commitment to the authority and reliability of the Scriptures for defining and directing the church's ministry evidence a model of biblical churchmanship that recognizes the divine origin, holy character, and upward calling in Christ that is to characterize the witness of the visible church before a watching world. Likewise, their strong confessional convictions display a needed doctrinal fortitude in a time of doctrinal indifference among large segments of today's church. Perhaps most notable is the recurring emphasis on the minister's love for Christ as foundational for fruitful pastoral ministry in service to God's people. In a real sense, the profound insights into the Scriptures which came to expression in their theological writings all have some bearing in formulation of a biblical theology of pastoral ministry for the

2. For introductions to the theological and cultural landscape of nineteenth century America see Paul C. Conkin, *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

3. The term is used by historians to distinguish the period between the seminary's founding in 1812 and its institutional reorganization in 1929.

4. For an extensive collection of primary source writings documenting the Princetonians approach to the study of pastoral theology and related aspects of ministerial leadership see James M. Garretson, *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012).

5. Excellent treatments chronicling the development of the American seminary include Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Intellect: The Aims and Purposes of Ante-Bellum Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); idem; *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education, 1870-1970* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

instruction students were to receive in preparation for the work of the gospel ministry.

While a number of the Princetonians' convictions about ministerial preparation were not unique to nineteenth century American Christianity, they remain distinct, especially so in comparison to various models of ministry training presently in vogue. The godly example of their lives, sense of God's holiness and majesty, communion with Christ, doctrinal fidelity to the teaching of Scripture, and pastoral ministries evidently owned and blessed of God, remain as examples of spiritual life and influence that may enrich ministerial instruction for the good of Christ's church in the twenty-first century.<sup>4</sup>

Rooted in developments within American culture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the founding of Princeton Theological Seminary, with its strong interest on piety and learning, would prove formative in shaping an American model of theological instruction pastoral in focus and confessional in conviction that would spiritually invigorate American and Presbyterian church life for many years to come.

#### THE FORMATION OF AN AMERICAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTION

Seminary education, as we know it today, was in its infancy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As America's population grew and its borders expanded with development of the Western frontier, churches throughout the nation wrestled with the challenge of supplying additional ministers for the growing needs of their denominations and the westward expansion of the nation's population. While appreciative of the older one-on-one mentoring models that had worked so well in the colonial period, it became increasingly apparent to many church leaders that the older model could not keep pace with the number of ministers now needed for established works and for missionary opportunities emerging in the new settlements.

Denominations throughout the nation responded to this need by establishing schools exclusively devoted to the training and preparation of men for the pastoral ministry. Characterized by a common commitment to the cultivation of Christian piety and intellectual apprehension of the Christian faith, the new schools also reflected the distinctive theological convictions and polities of their founders.<sup>5</sup>

As church-based institutions, American seminaries were founded to contribute to the spiritual welfare of their respective denominations and to the propagation of their theological convictions. Rooted in a common

Protestant theological heritage with memories of persecution, intense theological debate, and carefully defined confessional statements, denominational schools were established to preserve and perpetuate particular theological heritages in the new country. Ethnic distinctions, language barriers, and theological convictions coalesced in ways that necessitated the creation of schools that could produce ministers who would be able to communicate with the waves of new immigrants arriving in America, as well as ministers who would be able to defend and articulate the distinctive theological and confessional heritage of each of these people groups. A strong theological and confessional focus was thus embedded in the core values and purpose of the new seminaries.<sup>6</sup>

#### FOUNDATIONS FOR A PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Committed to the preservation of Reformed and Calvinistic confessional orthodoxy; experimental piety; and the Presbyterian polity that American Presbyterianism had come to embody by the end of the eighteenth century, Princeton's founders sought to design a school for ministerial preparation that would provide godly models and exemplary minister-scholar mentors in a community environment characterized by sanctified academic inquiry in order to prepare young men to become Presbyterian pastors who would be both pious and learned.<sup>7</sup>

Princeton's founders were careful to root the identity of the new school in the ministerial and confessional heritage of colonial Presbyterianism.<sup>8</sup> Having learned from earlier ruptures within its denominational history, the seminary's charter embodied a proper balance in emphasis between doctrine and piety in the training students received; by emphasizing its commitment to the theology of the Westminster Standards and the importance of "vital piety" in Christian character, the founders sought to avoid the issues that agitated the peace and unity of the colonial Presbyterian Church in the division which emerged in the 1730's - 1740's between "New Side" and "Old Side" ministers.<sup>9</sup>

The streams of influence behind the founding of the seminary were varied, but two in particular are of note. Princeton's founders drew initial inspiration for their project from the earlier educational initiatives of colonial Presbyterian pastor and educator, the Rev. William Tennent Sr. educated in Scotland and ordained an Anglican clergyman, Tennent emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1718; shortly afterwards he received ordination as a

Presbyterian minister and subsequently served pastorates in New York for the next seven years. Desirous of providing for the colonies the kind of educational opportunities he had received in Scotland, Tennent founded a classical academy in 1727 on the Little Ne-shaminy Creek in Bucks County, Pennsylvania for the purpose of educating prospective Presbyterian ministers. Tennent's academy emphasized both piety and sound learning and became well-known for the quality of its graduates. Pejoratively referred to by contemporaries as the "Log College," the students who graduated from Tennent's small and short-lived academy went on to become influential ministers, evangelists, and educators who did much to help establish and expand the work of colonial churches and educational institutions.

With the closing of Tennent's academy in 1742, the Presbyterian Church in the Middle Colonies began making plans to establish a more permanent college for education of America's citizenry and future ministers; by 1746 it had founded the College of New Jersey as fulfillment of the denomination's educational commitment to the training of future leaders for society and ministers to fill her pulpits.

By the early nineteenth century, a number of concerns had arisen that precipitated the Presbyterian Church's founding of an educational institution

6. For valuable studies documenting the development of theology in America during this period see Paul C. Conkin, *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

7. For a study on the changing concepts of the Presbyterian ministry during 1700-1900 see Elwyn A. Smith, *The Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962).

8. For a recent study on the development of American Presbyterianism see S. Donald Fortson III, *The Presbyterian Creed: A Confessional Tradition in America, 1729-1870* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2008). For an older work examining the division in colonial Presbyterianism see Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Reexamination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949). For a detailed historical and theological analysis of the founding period in the history of American Presbyterianism see Charles Hodge's important work, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1839-40).

9. Subscription to the system of doctrine represented in the Westminster Standards was an issue of discussion in colonial Presbyterianism and became a source of intense debate and eventual division in nineteenth century American Presbyterianism. For an overview of the debate and contributions to the discussion by Princeton faculty see David B. Calhoun, "Old Princeton Seminary and the Westminster Standards," *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, edited by J. Ligon Duncan (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2005), 33-61.

exclusively committed to the training of men in preparation for the Christian ministry. The establishment of Princeton Theological Seminary would reflect the emergence of a new kind of school specializing in the

10. See Samuel Miller, "The Duty of the Church to take Measures for Providing an Able and Faithful Ministry: A Sermon," in *The Sermon, Delivered at the Inauguration of the Rev. Archibald Alexander, D.D. as Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology, in the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States of America. To Which are Added, the Professor's Inaugural Address, and The Charge to the Professor and Students* (New York: Whiting and Watson, Theological and Classical Bookseller, 1812). Alexander's "Address" and Milledoler's "Charge" are also essential reading for understanding the direction the new seminary was intended to take. All three inaugural messages can be found in James M. Garretson, *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012).

11. For important works examining these developments in American higher education see especially James Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

12. For an analysis of these changes and the concerns they created for the founders of Princeton Theological Seminary see Mark A. Noll, "The Founding of Princeton Seminary," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (Fall 1979): 72–110. For a more detailed examination of the institutional and educational changes taking place at the college since its founding in 1746, see Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic 1768–1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

13. The Presbyterian Church was not the first denomination to establish a seminary in the United States. Earlier institutions had been established in New York City in 1784 by the Dutch Reformed Church and in 1794 by the Scottish Associate Presbyterian Synod in Beaver County, Pennsylvania. By 1802 a Moravian seminary was founded in Nazareth, Pennsylvania; in 1804, the Associate Reformed Church established a seminary (also in New York City) with the Rev. John M. Mason, well-known preacher and pastor, serving as its first professor.

14. In his analysis of the events which led to the founding of the seminary, Sprague noted: "Three generations at least had performed their work and passed away, leaving the results in a widely extended ecclesiastical body, in an elevated tone of public spirit, and in a just appreciation of an enlightened as well as earnest ministry. And now that the fullness of time for this great work had come, not only was the general state of the public mind, in a good degree, prepared for it, but there were men found suitable to conduct the enterprise;—men who united to a sober, comprehensive, far reaching intellect a heart in which the love of Christ and of his Church was the ruling passion." See William B. Sprague, *A Discourse Addressed to the Alumni of the Princeton Theological Seminary, April 30, 1862, on Occasion of the Completion of its First half Century* (Albany: Steam Press of Van Benthuysen, 1862), 8–9.

15. See Samuel Miller, *A Brief History of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, at Princeton, New Jersey; Together With Its Constitution, Bye-Laws, &c.* (Princeton: John Boart, 1838) (hereafter *A Brief History*). Miller's history includes a copy of the Plan; both documents can be found in Garretson, *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012).

biblical, theological, historical, and practical knowledge which the Presbyterian Church considered necessary to graduate able and faithful ministers of the New Covenant.<sup>10</sup> Alarmed at the growing influence of deism and infidelity in American culture, theological realignments at schools such as Yale and Harvard College,<sup>11</sup> and loss of confidence in the College of New Jersey to provide suitable educational emphases in preparation of men for the Christian ministry,<sup>12</sup> Princeton Theological Seminary's curriculum and educational environment emphasized cultivation of "vital piety," "sound theological learning," pastoral competency in the work of preaching and shepherding Christian congregations, and missionary outreach to the lost.<sup>13</sup>

The school's founding was the culmination of nearly ten years of conversation, prayer, planning, proposals, and consequent approval by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church to establish a single school to be located in Princeton, New Jersey for the training of its future ministers.<sup>14</sup> While a number of men helped to secure the denomination's interest in establishing a centralized school for ministerial training, Ashbel Green, Samuel Miller, and Archibald Alexander each played a pivotal role in the school's founding. Alexander and Miller's subsequent service as the seminary's first professors and Green's leadership as President of the seminary's Board of Directors would prove influential in shaping the institutional identity and educational ethos of the school's character well into the twentieth century.

As approved by the 1811 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, "The Plan of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America" details the ministerial philosophy underlying the school's curriculum, the theological convictions which the professors were to embrace and uphold, the spiritual culture which is to characterize the training and community life of the faculty and students, and the distinctive content of the curriculum.<sup>15</sup>

The Plan emphasizes the faculty's obligation as professors entrusted with representing the spiritual interests of the Presbyterian Church to teach the theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and its Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as well as to uphold the polity and Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church:

Every person elected to a professorship in this Seminary, shall, on being inaugurated, solemnly subscribe the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, and Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church, agreeably to the following formula, viz.—"In the presence of God and the Directors of this Seminary, I do solemnly, and ex

*animo* adopt, receive, and subscribe the Confession of Faith, and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, as the confession of my faith; or, as a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief which is contained in holy Scripture, and therein revealed by God to man for his salvation; and I do solemnly, *ex animo* profess to receive the Form of Government of said Church, as agreeable to the inspired oracles. And I do solemnly promise and engage, not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate any thing which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any thing taught in the said Confession of Faith or Catechisms; nor to oppose any of the fundamental principles of Presbyterian Church Government, while I shall continue a Professor in this Seminary.<sup>16</sup>

The Plan also identifies the expectations of the Church with respect to the model of piety professors were to provide in their instruction and example. Professors were to be exemplary in godliness both inside and outside the classroom, making the most of every opportunity to encourage and inculcate godly maturation in Christ-like character in the students' lives:

The Professors are particularly charged, by all the proper means in their power, to encourage, cherish, and promote devotion and personal piety among their pupils, by warning and guarding them, on the one hand, against formality and indifference, and on the other, against ostentation and enthusiasm; by inculcating practical religion in their lectures and recitations; by taking suitable occasions to converse with their pupils privately on this interesting subject; and by all other means, incapable of being minutely specified, by which they may foster true experimental religion, and unreserved devotedness to God.<sup>17</sup>

The founder's interest in cultivation of *vital piety* and *sound theological learning* lies at the heart of the school's purpose. The Presbyterian Church believed that *both* piety and theological knowledge were essential non-negotiables in the maturing of Christian character and ministerial leadership. Accordingly, the Plan delineates the goals for which the seminary was established:

That, as filling the Church with a learned and able ministry, without a corresponding portion of real piety, would be a curse to the world, and an offence to God and his people; so the General Assembly think it their duty to state, that in establishing a seminary for training

up ministers, it is their earnest desire to guard, as far as possible, against so great an evil. And they do hereby solemnly pledge themselves to the churches under their care, that in forming, and carrying into execution the plan of the proposed seminary, it will be their endeavour to make it, under the blessing of God, a nursery of vital piety, as well as of sound theological learning; and to train up persons for the ministry, who shall be lovers, as well as defenders of the truth as it is in Jesus; friends of revivals of religion; and a blessing to the Church of God.<sup>18</sup>

Students especially were encouraged to nurture "fervent piety" and grow "in a spirit of enlightened devotion." Academic excellence and the practice of piety were viewed as complementary components of the educational objectives which the seminary sought to inculcate for effective and spiritually fruitful ministerial service:

It ought to be considered as an object of primary importance by every student in the Seminary, to be careful and vigilant not to lose that inward sense of the power of godliness which he may have attained; but, on the contrary, to grow continually in a spirit of enlightened devotion and fervent piety; deeply impressed with the recollection that without this, all his other acquisitions will be comparatively of little worth, either to himself, or to the Church of which he is to be a minister. He must remember, too, that this is a species of improvement which must of necessity be left, in a great measure, with himself, as a concern between God and his own soul.<sup>19</sup>

Of particular interest is the way in which the Plan recognized the need for the cultivation of godliness *within* the context of Christian community. The academic aspect of seminary life was only one component in the multi-pronged mentoring model the founders envisaged for maturing young men in the likeness of Christ;<sup>20</sup> the Plan also provided practical directives on how Christian piety can be cultivated in the context of a godly community of redeemed sinners preparing for service as gospel ministers. Specific directives were included that addressed hygiene, dormitory behavior, hours for study and recreation, manners, and apportioned times

16. "The Plan of the Theological Seminary" in Miller, *A Brief History*, 15.

17. See Miller, *A Brief History*, 20–21.

18. See Miller, *A Brief History*, 8.

19. See Miller, *A Brief History*, 19.

20. Students, like the professors, took an oath as participating members in the seminary community: "Every student, before he takes his

for prayer, personal devotions, fasting, reading of “practical authors,” and corporate worship.

It is expected that every student in the Theological Seminary will spend a portion of time every morning and

standing in the Seminary, shall subscribe the following declaration, viz.—“Deeply impressed with a sense of the importance of improving in knowledge, prudence, and piety, in my preparation for the Gospel ministry, I solemnly promise, in a reliance on divine grace, that I will faithfully and diligently attend on all the instructions of this Seminary, and that I will conscientiously and vigilantly observe all the rules and regulations specified in the plan for its instruction and government, so far as the same relate to the students; and that I will obey all the lawful requisitions, and readily yield to all the wholesome admonitions of the Professors and Directors of the Seminary, while I shall continue a member of it.” See Miller, *A Brief History*, 22.

21. See Miller, *A Brief History*, 20.

22. “No man occupies a place of higher responsibility than he who superintends the education of young men for the sacred office; for the influence of his instructions, and counsels, and spirit, instead of terminating upon them, diffuses itself all over the Church...” See William B. Sprague, *A Discourse Addressed to the Alumni of the Princeton Theological Seminary, April 30, 1862, on Occasion of the Completion of its First Half Century*, 40.

23. By graduation, students were expected to have completed the following “attainments:” skill in the original languages of the Scriptures, ability to address textual and apologetic questions related to the canonicity of the Scriptures and matters of biblical criticism; familiarity with Jewish and Christian antiquities, ancient geography, and oriental customs which “throw light on the sacred records;” ability to state and defend the Scriptures in response to the “deistical controversy;” ability to “support the doctrines of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms, by a ready, pertinent, and abundant quotation of Scripture texts for that purpose;” careful study of “Natural, Didactic, Polemic, and Casuistic Theology;” “considerable acquaintance with General History and Chronology” and “a particular acquaintance with the history of the Christian Church” in preparation for becoming “an able and sound divine and casuist.” The Plan further explains that, “He must have read a considerable number of the best practical writers on the subject of religion. He must have learned to compose with correctness and readiness in his own language, and to deliver what he has composed to others in a natural and acceptable manner. He must be well acquainted with the several parts, and the proper structure of popular lectures and sermons. He must have composed at least two lectures and four popular sermons, that shall have been approved by the Professors. He must have carefully studied the duties of the pastoral care.—Thus he will be prepared to become a useful preacher, and a faithful pastor” and finally, “He must have studied attentively the form of Church Government authorized by the Scriptures, and the administration of it as it has taken place in Protestant Churches.—Thus he will be qualified to exercise discipline, and to take part in the government of the Church in all its judicatories.” See Miller, *A Brief History*, 17–18. As prescribed, the curriculum was a rigorous program of academic study integrated with a strong emphasis on practical theology, or experimental religion, designed to prepare men for the gospel ministry and active churchmanship in the Presbyterian Church.

24. It should be noted that the seminary’s *exclusive* purpose was to train *men* for the Gospel ministry: “...the General Assembly, after mature deliberation, have resolved, in reliance on the patronage and

evening in devout meditation, and self-recollection and examination; in reading the holy Scriptures, solely with a view to a personal and practical application of the passage read, to his own heart, character, and circumstances; and in humble, fervent prayer and praise to God in secret.

The whole of every Lord’s day is to be devoted to devotional exercises, either of a social or secret kind. Intellectual pursuits, not immediately connected with devotion, or the religion of the heart, are on that day to be forborne. The conversations had with each other are to be chiefly on religious subjects. Associations for prayer and praise, and for religious conferences, calculated to promote a growth in grace, are also proper for this day; subject to such regulations as the Professors and Directors may see proper to prescribe. It is wished and recommended, that each student should ordinarily set apart one day in a month for special prayer and self-examination in secret, and also that he should, on suitable occasions, attend to the duty of fasting.<sup>21</sup>

Special emphasis was placed on humility and a servant’s spirit; both were considered essential for effective ministry and, the founders believed, were best learned through the living example. Thus strong emphasis was placed on the professor’s character and example in shaping the outlook and attitude of the young hearts and minds that would one day likely imitate, by choice or default, the example they received as students.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the emphases on doctrine and piety, the Plan subscribed the content of the course curriculum to be taught;<sup>23</sup> it is also explicit about who is eligible for admission.<sup>24</sup> The success of the Plan would

bring blessing of the Great Head of the Church, to establish a new Institution, consecrated solely to the education of men for the Gospel ministry, and to be denominated, *The Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*. And to the intent that the true design of the founders of this institution may be known to the public, both now and in time to come, and especially that this design may, at all times, be distinctly viewed, and sacredly regarded, both by the teachers and the pupils of the seminary, it is judged proper to make a summary and explicit statement of it.” *The Plan* further explains that the purpose of the seminary is to “form men for the Gospel ministry, who shall truly believe, and cordially love, and therefore endeavour to propagate and defend, in its genuineness, simplicity, and fullness, that system of religious belief and practice which is set forth in the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, and Plan of Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian church; and thus to perpetuate and extend the influence of true evangelical piety and Gospel order.” See Miller, *A Brief History*, 10–11. The founders’ understanding of the nature and authority of the ministerial office as presented in the Scriptures limited enrollment to students who would be biblically eligible to serve as officers in Christ’s church.

depend, in large measure, on the integrity of the men who were appointed as professors to faithfully fulfill the responsibilities of the sacred office to which they had been called.

It was an ambitious goal. As the years passed, the school prospered under the good hand of God. The founders and faculty's faithfulness to the Bible's message, ardent and genuine love for Christ, and lives of selfless service on behalf of Christ and his people—often at great personal cost—bore a rich spiritual harvest.<sup>25</sup> The number of students grew, resources increased, facilities enlarged, churches were strengthened, new congregations were established, missionaries multiplied, additional seminaries were birthed, and numerous countries around the world, besides the United States, benefited from the presence and influence of Princeton Theological Seminary graduates in their midst.<sup>26</sup>

But the story of the school's success is more than the story of its institutional development in enrollment, finances, and facilities. Schools often retain these long after the vision of its founders has been abandoned.<sup>27</sup> Princeton's influence owed much to the godly outlook of the men who founded it; their sensitivity to the spiritual dynamics of an educational center committed to the study of theology and nurture of piety was also matched by careful selection of the men who would be entrusted with the training of the denomination's future ministers. By the time of the school's founding in 1812, it had become evident to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church that one man's life, example, and gifts made him especially suitable for the responsibilities that the new school would entail.

#### ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER: BACKGROUND & FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

Archibald Alexander was born on April 17, 1772 in Rockbridge County, Virginia. One of nine children born to William and Ann Alexander, Alexander enjoyed the privilege of being raised in a God-fearing home. Alexander's father was a successful merchant who also served as an elder in the local Presbyterian Church.

Alexander's childhood achievements are quite remarkable: as a five-year old Alexander had read through the New Testament; by age seven he had mastered the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Raised in a rural setting, Alexander enjoyed the hills and forests of Virginia's countryside. In addition to learning how to hunt, swim, and tend cattle, Alexander enjoyed the privilege of attending some of the rustic classical academies in his community as part of his childhood education.

Most notable in this regard was the course of study he pursued under the Rev. William Graham at Liberty Hall Academy. A graduate of the College of New Jersey, Graham's small academy provided Alexander with instruction comparable in emphasis to the classical training Graham had received as a student at the College of New Jersey under the presidential leadership of the Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon. Graham's preaching, devout piety, and academic instruction also stimulated Alexander's interest in spiritual matters and became an important influence which helped lead to his conversion a few years later.

By the time he turned seventeen, Alexander's educational accomplishments led to work as a tutor in the home of a General Posey. It was during his time in the Posey home that Alexander's religious temperament began to awaken. It was also here that God used the witness of a pious millwright, an aged widow by the name of Mrs. Tyler, and the reading of John Flavel's sermons on the book of Revelation, to bring Alexander to the brink of spiritual despair. Alexander came to realize that for all the knowledge of correct doctrine he possessed, he had not exercised genuine saving faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. In the midst of his spiritual brokenness, Alexander sought the Lord and found salvation in the person and work of Christ in 1789.

During the following months, Alexander continued to wrestle with the question of the genuineness of his faith. As the weeks and months passed, it became evident that he had in fact passed from spiritual death to spiritual life as the fruit of faith and the evidence of a transformed life rooted in the Spirit's work of regeneration became increasingly obvious to both himself and

25. In the act of giving themselves away in the service of Christ and his people, they endeared themselves in the hearts of those among whom they ministered; their lives became a continual source of spiritual enrichment to those around them. Archibald Alexander was fond of quoting Proverbs 11:25, "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (KJV).

26. For a superb history of the seminary and the spiritual culture that characterized the school from its founding through its reorganization in 1929 see David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, vol. 1: Faith and Learning, 1812–1868; vol. 2: the Majestic Testimony, 1869–1929* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994, 1996). A briefer treatment of the seminary's institutional history from its founding in 1812 until 1992 can be found in William K. Selden, *Princeton Theological Seminary: A Narrative History, 1812–1992* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

27. For a suggestive study examining the factors that led to the decline of American Presbyterian seminaries in the twentieth century and the impact this has on the spiritual life of a denomination see John H. Leith, *Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

to others. Having joined the Presbyterian Church and devoted his life to Christ's service, Alexander began to experience an internal call to the pastoral ministry and desire to receive theological training for ordination as a Presbyterian clergyman.<sup>28</sup>

It was at this critical point in his new-found faith that William Graham would once again play a significant role in Alexander's life—now as a theological educator and spiritual mentor. Under Graham's tutelage, Alexander "read theology" and studied for licensure. Among the notable theological books Alexander read were the writings of Joseph Alleine, William Bates, Richard Baxter, Thomas Boston, Phillip Doddridge, Jonathan Edwards, Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine, Walter Marshall, John Owen, Francis Turretin, and George Whitefield. Alexander's biographer notes that Bates, Boston, Edwards and Owen were read by Archibald Alexander "with great care."

Graham's counsel would prove influential in directing Alexander to pursue the calling of the Christian ministry; likewise, Graham's invitation to the youthful Alexander to accompany him on his itinerant preaching ministry through the back country of Virginia during seasons of revival provided powerful examples of the effects of "experimental preaching" carried out in power and demonstration of the Spirit.

Alexander was subsequently licensed and ordained to the Presbyterian ministry, where he would first serve for several years as an itinerant preacher/missionary in the Virginia/Piedmont region of North Carolina before assuming responsibility of several combined pastoral charges in rural Virginia.

Alexander's pastoral labors were also accompanied by administrative responsibilities he assumed in 1796 as President of Hampden Sydney College, Virginia; in 1807 Alexander resigned his responsibilities at the college in order to accept a call to serve as pastor of the Pine Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. The "Philadelphia years" would provide Alexander opportunity for mastery of additional biblical languages and deepening familiarity with the history of theology. Innovative ministry programs and outreach to the inner city of Philadelphia enriched his pastoral experience even as his pulpit ministrations gained increasing notoriety in the city and within his denomination.

Alexander's principled life of piety, academic

achievements, administrative background, pastoral experience, and pulpit eloquence resulted in his denomination's election in 1812 to serve as Princeton Theological Seminary's founding professor. It was while at Princeton that Alexander would bequeath his greatest legacy to his denomination and churches around the world in the model of pastoral and theological instruction that Princeton Theological Seminary established through his leadership.

#### THE SHAPING OF A THEOLOGY OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

Archibald Alexander's early commitment to a lifestyle of principled piety foreshadowed a number of key ministerial emphases that would characterize Princeton's model of ministerial instruction.

Alexander's reading in the theological writings of the Puritans and their theological descendants in seventeenth and eighteenth century American pastor-theologians provided a solid theological foundation for understanding the work of grace in the human heart. Their profound mastery of Scripture, confessional theology, and exemplary pastoral leadership introduced Alexander to some of the best examples of spiritual casuistry in the history of American Reformed Christianity.

Besides his formal studies in classic works of Christian theology, Alexander's first-hand exposure as a young man to the effects of Spirit-wrought revival which he witnessed while accompanying William Graham's itinerant preaching ministry in Virginia left an indelible impression upon his understanding of what a true work of the Spirit of God looks like during "seasons of refreshing."

Likewise, his reading of Christian biography deepened his awareness of the Spirit's work in cultivation of Christ-like character in conforming of the believer into the moral likeness of Christ. Alexander's itinerant missionary labors as a young man, pastoral experience, pulpit ministry, and gathered wisdom from his study in Christian biography provided him with a profound knowledge of the spiritual condition of those to whom he ministered. Conversant with the struggles, setbacks, and victories of the Christian life, his counsel on matters of spiritual growth and decline was widely sought.

A renowned preacher in his own right, Alexander's early exposure to the Christ-centered experimental Calvinistic preaching which he witnessed during his time spent with Graham did much to introduce him to the kind of preaching that has built the Christian church

28. For a fuller account of these momentous months in Alexander's life which also includes Charles Hodge's assessment of Alexander's spiritual struggles, see James M. Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching: Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2005), 7–17.

and brought about the conversion of the lost. Study of the principles and practice of rhetoric under Graham, personal reading in works such as Hugh Blair's recently published *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*,<sup>29</sup> and growing familiarity with the sermons and ministries of great colonial preachers and pastors such as the Mathers, Shepards, Stoddards, Edwardses, Blairs, Tennents, Davies, and the Dicksons grounded their theology of sermon preparation and understanding of the activity of preaching in men whose ministries were blessed and owned of God and whose impact was still felt years after their earthly labors had concluded.

Finally, Alexander's friendships and opportunity to experience the fellowship of born-again Christians enabled him to experience the realities of heaven-sent spiritual life giving him a taste and longing for the greater glory which awaits every child of God. His personal practice of prayer, Bible-reading, and reading of devotional literature with an experimental and applicatory thrust furthered his growth in grace and deepened his understanding of the nurture and cultivation of biblical piety.<sup>30</sup>

Alexander's life experiences and ministerial background were all brought to bear upon his calling to serve as Princeton's founding professor. While the General Assembly had approved the course recommendations provided in the Plan for the educational parameters which the seminary was to provide, it was left to Alexander to design the educational curriculum students would receive in their classroom instruction.

As stated in the seminary's Plan, the founder's intended the school to be "a nursery of vital piety as well as of sound theological learning...to train up persons for the ministry who shall be lovers as well as defenders of the truth as it is in Jesus, friends of revivals of religion, and a blessing to the church of God."

In his labors as a professor, Alexander worked diligently to accomplish the goals for which the school had been founded. And while there was a strong emphasis on the academic aspects of the program, Alexander was careful to prioritize the practical dimensions of pastoral instruction in his lectures, sermons, publications, and personal counsel.<sup>31</sup> The primary focus of the instruction the students received was to prepare them to become godly pastors and effective gospel preachers.<sup>32</sup> The goal was to graduate competent and capable practitioners of ministry rather than academic professionals.

The pastoral emphases that Alexander intended to characterize the seminary training at Princeton were augmented with the appointment of Samuel Miller in 1813 as Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government. Miller would also assume responsibility

for the department of Composition and Delivery of Sermons. Together, the two men were able to provide a wealth of practical pastoral wisdom borne from their respective years of service as pastors, preachers, educators, and involvement in missionary endeavors.

Careful examination of Alexander and Miller's unpublished lecture manuscripts and their numerous publications in systematic and historical theology, church history, pastoral and practical theology, and Christian biography bear testimony to the profound and insightful pastoral counsel students received at Princeton in preparation for the Christian ministry. Their counsels and admonitions are tethered to a biblically-based theology of pastoral ministry rooted in the Westminster Standards and applied in the same spirit of pastoral care as found in the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God.<sup>33</sup> Alexander and Miller's combined

29. William Graham is a significant but now largely forgotten pastor-educator from the colonial period. Interestingly, Liberty Hall Academy became the predecessor for what is now Washington and Lee University. Graham exercised a profound influence on Alexander's understanding of Christian piety and "experimental" preaching. Alexander considered Graham's system of mental philosophy unrivaled. As an old man, Alexander would pay tribute to his former teacher in a major address delivered in the early 1840's. In addition to his instruction in mental philosophy and theology, Graham's instruction in rhetoric, along with Alexander's reading of the Rev. Hugh Blair's recently published, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, would eventually shape the instruction in homiletics that Alexander would provide to generations of Princeton Seminary students. For more on the relationship between piety, the principles of rhetoric, and the development of homiletics instruction under Alexander's leadership, see Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 249-253. A facsimile reprint of the 1783 edition of Blair's influential work was published in 1965. See Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols., ed. by Harold F. Harding (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965).

30. The Seminary's Plan recommended the reading of "the best practical writers on the subject of religion"; Alexander likewise encouraged his students to "Be in the habit of also reading daily some spiritual, practical, searching, and pungent treatises or sermons." See Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 117.

31. For representative publications see Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1841; repr. Banner of Truth, 1978); idem, *Biographical Sketches of the Founder and Principal Alumni of the Log College* (Princeton: J.T. Robenson, 1845; repr. Banner of Truth, 1968); idem, *Practical Sermons: To Be Read in Families and Social Meetings* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1850; repr. Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004); idem, *Practical Truths* (New York: American Tract Society, 1857; repr. Odom Publications, n.d.).

32. For a treatment of Archibald Alexander's instruction on preaching and pastoral care see Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2005).

33. As Hodge notes in testimony to Alexander and Miller's service at the seminary, the founding faculty were men of deep piety who loved Christ, honored his Word, and cherished his Church: "There

instruction in preaching and pastoral theology would shape the pastoral, educational, and missionary service of multiple generations of Princeton Theological Seminary graduates.

Several areas of emphasis which lie at the heart of the pastoral instruction students received in Alexander's lectures are worthy of mention; they help to explain the factors which led to Princeton becoming such an important ministerial training center and why the ministry of her graduates proved so effective. Although selective, they are representative of important pastoral matters that Alexander and his colleagues believed were at the heart of Christ-centered ministerial development: cultivation of eminent piety, the love of Christ, and Christ-centered experimental preaching.

#### AIMING FOR EMINENT PIETY

While the entire seminary culture was intended to be an environment redolent with the presence and practice of Biblical piety, Alexander and his fellow faculty

are theologians who exhort men to think for themselves, and to receive nothing on authority . . . and others who crave after novelty and aspire after originality . . . and others who have a philosophical disposition. . . . It pleased God that the first professors in this Seminary would belong to neither of these classes. They exhorted their students to be humble rather than high-minded. They had no fondness for new doctrines, or for new ways of presenting old ones; and they dreaded the thought of transferring the ground of faith from the rock of God's word to metaphysical quick sands. For this reason Princeton Theological Seminary was regarded by the illuminati in every part of the land as very umbrageous, impenetrable to any ray of new light. This did not move the men of whom we speak. They had heard Christ say of certain men that the light that is in them is darkness. And knowing that man is blind as to the things of God, they thought it safer to submit to be guided by a divine hand, rather than, with darkness within and darkness without, to stumble on they knew not whither." See Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge*, 553.

34. See Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge*, 456–457.

35. For an extended study on this topic see Archibald Alexander, "An Address to Candidates for the Ministry, on the Importance of Aiming at Eminent Piety in Making Their Preparation for the Sacred Office," in *The Annual of the Board of Education of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States*, ed. John Breckinridge (Philadelphia: Russell and Martien, 1831), 175–194. For a study of the relationship between piety and doctrine in the lives of Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and B.B. Warfield, see W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1981); idem, "The Devotional Life of Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (Fall 1979): 111–29. For an introduction to Alexander's understanding of piety and representative selections from his sermons and writings see James M. Garretson, *A Scribe Well-Trained: Archibald Alexander and the Life of Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

were also careful to set aside special times for its development and nurture.

Glimpses of Alexander's profound spiritual influence on the student's lives during these scheduled times for prayer and spiritual discussion are found in A.A. Hodge's memories of his days as a student at the seminary. Hodge's narrative is a descriptive account of the pronounced piety which empowered Alexander's public ministrations:

In his early and middle life he had been an orator endowed with singular powers of dramatic representation. In his old age he was always calm and quiet, but such was his intense sense of the reality of the subjects on which he discoursed, that often, as he spoke of angels, of heaven, of the beatific vision of saints, of Christ and of his second coming and judgment, his hearers felt that their eyes also were opened to discern the presence of things unseen and eternal. Every Wednesday evening Dr. Alexander presided at the public prayers in the Oratory. The instant the students were in their seats he came in rapidly, his cloak hanging often diagonally from his bent shoulders, his head inclined as in reverie, yet flashing sudden glances on either side with piercing eyes, which seemed to penetrate all the secrets of those upon whom they fell. He sat down with his back to the windows, and his right side to the students, sitting low—almost hidden by the desk. Drawing the large Bible down before him, he seemed to lose at once all sense of human audience, and to pass alone into the presence of God. As he read, and mused and ejaculated the utterances of all the holy exercises of his soul upon the Divine Word, a solemn hush fell upon us, and we felt not as those who listen to a teacher, but as those who are admitted to approach, with the shoes from off their feet, to gaze in and listen through an opened window to the mysterious workings of a sanctified soul under the immediate revelations of the Holy Ghost.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the Wednesday evening prayers, one of the most appreciated aspects of seminary life at Princeton during the nineteenth century for cultivating the spiritual vitality of the student body was the Sabbath afternoon conference. Convinced of the importance of *eminent piety* as a necessary accompaniment of ministerial effectiveness, the Sabbath afternoon conference was a weekly meeting at which the faculty met with students and presented and discussed topics bearing upon practical godliness and ministerial leadership.<sup>35</sup> Its impact on the students was profound and lasting. The Sabbath afternoon conferences became one of the

most cherished memories of Princeton's graduates. Administrated by Drs Alexander and Miller in the seminary's early years, Charles Hodge would later assume a prominent role in its oversight with the passing of the original faculty.

Charles Hodge bore testimony to the spiritual impact of these meetings. He too, had once sat as a student in the Oratory and knew the spiritual presence and power that accompanied the ministrations of Princeton's first two professors. As he reflected on the example of the early faculty, Hodge noted the character qualities and convictions which proved most influential in student's lives:

Their influence on the students was after all mainly religious, arising from the doctrines which they taught, the character which they exhibited, and the principles which they inculcated. To this must be added the power of calling the religious feelings into exercise, which Dr. Alexander possessed beyond any man whom I have ever known. He had the gift of searching the heart; of probing the conscience; of revealing a man to himself; of telling him his thoughts, feelings, doubts and conflicts. As with a lighted torch he would lead a man through the labyrinth of his heart, into places which his intelligent consciousness had never entered. He would thus humble him, instruct him, comfort or strengthen him. He could melt his hearers to penitence, make their hearts burn within them, inspire them with zeal, and give them a foretaste of the joy that is unspeakable. This power he exerted not only in the pulpit, but in our Sabbath afternoon conferences, and in his addresses to the students at evening prayers.<sup>36</sup>

A.A. Hodge also remembered the powerful impressions the Sabbath afternoon conferences made upon those who gathered together week by week. A.A. Hodge's testimony is representative of the student body's affection for the professors' pastoral involvement in their lives during their time of study at the seminary:

The prominence and effectiveness of this weekly exercise was unquestionably for the last half century a grand special characteristic of Princeton Seminary. During these past years it was in many respects the most remarkable and memorable exercise in the entire Seminary course. They were held every Sabbath afternoon by the professors and students for the discussion and practical enforcement of questions relating to experimental religion and the duties of the Christian life. The members of all the successive classes will bear testimony

to the unique character and singular preciousness of those Sabbath afternoon Conferences in that sacred old Oratory, whose walls are still eloquent to them with imperishable associations. Here the venerable professors appeared rather as friends and pastors than as instructors. The dry and cold attributes of scientific theology moving in the sphere of the intellect, gave place to the warmth of personal religious experience, and to the spiritual light of divinely illuminated intuition. Here in the most effective manner they sought to build up Christian men rather than form accomplished scholars and to instruct them in the wisest methods of conducting their future work of saving souls and edifying the Church of Christ.<sup>37</sup>

While piety was nurtured in the classroom and throughout the seminary campus, it was especially cultivated in the context of the Sabbath afternoon conferences. There, in the "sacred old Oratory," the dew of heaven fell in great abundance as the ministerial conversations took place in "power and demonstration of the Spirit." It is not unexpected that men who honored the Lord's Day, evidenced the fruit of the Spirit, and sought to be filled with the Spirit would know something of God's blessing coming upon their gatherings as they pleaded his presence and favor.

#### LOVE OF CHRIST

Alexander's spiritual counsel to his students also stressed heart-felt love for Christ. The affectionate aspects of biblical piety were to be cultivated in growing love to Christ for who he is and all that he has done for his people. Developing love for Christ is indicative of the deepening of biblical piety, and serves to animate the minister's pastoral labors and pulpit delivery. Likewise, empowerment for ministry is rooted in the knowledge of Christ's love for the believer and provides the strength and determination to fulfill the purposes of the pastoral office:

The love of Christ ought so to predominate, so to possess his mind, and to bear him along, that every interfering, or opposing principle, should be neutralized or extinguished. This should suggest all his plans, guide all his operations, give energy to all his efforts, and afford him comfort under all his trials. Constrained by the love of Christ, he should cheerfully forgo all the comforts of

36. See Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge*, 555–56.

37. See Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge*, 453–54.

ease, affluence, and worldly honour, to serve his Master in places far remote; or far removed from public observation. This holy affection should impel him to undertake the most arduous duties, and encounter the most formidable dangers; this should enkindle the ardour of his eloquence, and supply the pathos of his most tender addresses. This is the hallowed fire which should be kept bright and burning continually. All other warmth is no better than "strange fire." Nothing but the love of Christ, can make a truly faithful pastor, or evangelist, assiduous in all his services, and indefatigable in the most private and self-denying duties of his office.<sup>38</sup>

In another context, Alexander told his students that "the strongest inducement to be entire and unreserved in devoting your hearts and lives to the service of God, is the love of Christ to you." "If your hearts are filled and warmed with this love of Christ," he said, "you will never be satisfied with any thing short of a complete surrender of every thing to him." "The terms of discipleship as laid down by Christ require you to be unreserved in the consecration of yourselves to the service of God." "You cannot in any other way so effectually promote your own happiness," Alexander insisted. "This absolute devotedness of spirit is the quality which will prepare you to be eminently useful."<sup>39</sup>

Charles Hodge also directed attention to this topic in a commemorative message he delivered in September, 1874 on the institutional history of the seminary. Hodge's observations describe the way in which the Christ-centered focus of Alexander and Miller's personal piety and public ministries impacted the seminary's development:

They were in the first place, eminently holy men. They exerted that indescribable but powerful influence which always emanates from those who live near to God. Their piety was uniform and serene; without any taint of enthusiasm or fanaticism. It was also Biblical. Christ was as prominent in their religious experience, in their preaching, and in their writings, as he is in the Bible. Christ's person, his glory, his righteousness, his love, his presence, his power, filled the whole sphere of their religious

life. When men enter a Roman Catholic Church, they see before them a wooden image of Christ extended upon a cross. To this lifeless image they bow. When students entered this Seminary, when its first professors were alive, they had held up before them the image of Christ, not graven by art or man's device, but as portrayed by the Spirit on the pages of God's word; and it is by beholding that image that men are transformed into its likeness from glory to glory. It is, in large measure, this constant holding up of Christ, in the glory of his person and the all-sufficiency of his work, that the hallowed influence of the fathers of this Seminary is to be attributed.<sup>40</sup>

An apprehension of Christ's love for the believer and the believer's responsive love to Christ are essential elements of "vital piety;" the two are complementary and give birth to the spiritual pulse-beat of pastoral ministry.

#### ASPECTS OF EXPERIMENTAL PREACHING

Alexander's interest in cultivation of piety, gratitude for Christ's love, and love for Christ, was also accompanied by a strong interest in a Reformed experimental model of Christ-centered applicatory preaching. "In planning your discourses and in their whole composition," he said, "let the edification of your hearers be your guide, rather than rhetorical rules." Pastoral, practical, and personal in spirit and focus, Alexander believed it to be the best model of preaching for his students to imitate for the pulpit ministries they would one day assume. The main object in preaching, he told his students, is to "excite the affections and lead to the resolutions which correspond to the nature of evangelical truth."<sup>41</sup>

For preaching "to excite the affections," the minister's heart must first be stirred with the truths of God's Word if he expects to speak with power and deliver his sermons with conviction. Several key emphases help explain the strength of the experimental preaching model Alexander recommended: preparation of the heart, discriminating application, descriptive and graphical presentation, and characteristic portraiture of the spiritual condition that marks the lives of both believers and unbelievers.

##### 1. Preparation of the Heart

In his lectures on sermon preparation, Archibald Alexander was careful to instruct his students on the importance of preparing their heart in advance of the preaching of their sermons in order that they would

38. See Archibald Alexander, *The Pastoral Office. A Sermon, Preached at Philadelphia, before the Association of the Alumni of the Theological Seminary at Princeton on Wednesday Morning, May 21, 1834* (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1834), 8–9.

39. Quoted in Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 106.

40. See Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge*, 551–52.

41. Quoted in Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 95–96.

approach the responsibilities of their pulpit ministries with the proper disposition.

But there is one qualification which such a man will want; that solemnity which arises from the fear of God; and that affectionate manner, termed *unction* which arises from a deep feeling of the truth, and importance and excellence of what he utters, from the Word of God. This qualification which is nothing else but piety in a lively exercise is of the utmost importance to good and useful preaching. Possessed of this a preacher may be defective in vigour of intellect, in liveliness and imagination, of a good visor [appearance], and graceful address, and yet be an edifying preacher. But without it he may be a good preacher, a splendid orator, and an impressive declaimer, but there will be an essential defect in his sermons, the right spirit will be wanting. And while the multitude may be pleased, and the refined gratified, the hearers will not be edified, or sinners converted.<sup>42</sup>

Alexander believed that eloquence which is natural and uncontrived lies at the heart of effective public speech; the same is true for gospel proclamation which is powerful and persuasive. Effective preaching emerges as Scriptural truth pours forth from the heart of the minister into the hearts of his hearers in the public delivery of God's Word:

Perhaps, the defect which above all other prevents most from becoming powerful preachers is the want of a deep and lively feeling of the subjects of which he treats. Here lies the greatest difficulty in the way of the eloquence of the pulpit. *Lively emotion is the soul of genuine oratory* [emphasis added]. It has been remarked that often they speak the most forcibly who never thought of oratory as an art, and who never learned a single rule of rhetoric. The more the speaker is absorbed in his subject, and the less he thinks of the manner of his own performance, the better will he speak. Forcible speaking is therefore more common among uneducated men, than the highly cultivated.<sup>43</sup>

Alexander frequently reiterated this point in his lectures; study of the principles of rhetoric and familiarity with the Bible's theology of preaching compelled him to impress the importance of this matter upon his student's understanding. "Be diligent and earnest in your endeavours not only to cultivate piety generally, but to prepare your hearts for every discourse you have to deliver" he told his students. "Endeavour to get your hearts affected with the truths which you are to deliver to others." "To believe fully in the truths of the Gospel,

and to feel their power on our own hearts is the main thing to fit us to preach profitably to our hearers.' Alexander noted that this is the point where many ministers fail. "Many who are faithful and laborious in composing sermons," he said, "neglect the due preparation of the heart. The consequence is that while the understandings of the hearers are occupied and their taste gratified, their hearts are unimproved, and indeed, unaffected."<sup>44</sup>

The preparation of the preacher's heart is also related to his prayer life. Prayer nourishes the life of piety, prepares the minister's heart to preach, and allows the minister to speak from the fullness of the spiritual fellowship he enjoys with God. Alexander makes note of its importance in the concluding remarks of an ordination charge he delivered:

A fourth quality very essential to the character of a faithful labourer in the vineyard of the Lord, is a devotional spirit—a love of prayer and delight in communion with God. He who communes most familiarly and affectionately with God, will best understand His will, and will be best qualified to declare His counsel. That minister who wrestles much in private, with his Maker, is likely to plead His cause most earnestly and successfully in public. As the success of preaching is not owing to the learning or eloquence of the organ by which the Word is proclaimed, but on the blessing of a sovereign God, we have good ground to expect, that in common those ministers who most abound in prayer, will see most fruit of their ministry. The seed of the divine Word should be watered both before and after it is sown; the preacher of the Gospel should arise to the pulpit from his knees, and should descend to his knees again from the sacred desk.<sup>45</sup>

## 2. Preaching that is Christ-centered in focus and content

Alexander taught his students that "Altho' the whole Word of God is the subject for preaching, there is some central point to which the whole of the parts tend—some fundamental principles on which the whole fabric rests" and that these "central points" should "furnish the principal themes" of the minister's sermons. At the heart of the Bible's message is the person and work of Christ:

Though the Scriptures contain much and various

42. Quoted in Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 116.

43. Quoted in Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 117.

44. Quoted in Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 113–16.

45. Quoted in Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 119–120.

matter; yet there is one grand design running thro' the whole. The history contained in the Old Testament and that in the New; the law and the Gospel; the ceremonies and the moral precepts—the predictions and their fulfillment—the doctrines and the precepts—the encouragements and the admonitions—the threatening and the promises, are all parts of one grand scheme; and that is the revelation of a new method of acquiring salvation thro' the interposition and obedience and death of a Mediator. We may assume as the central part of this whole system, the death of Christ on the cross as an expiatory sacrifice for the sins of his chosen people.<sup>46</sup>

“In the Christian system Christ is the centre and foundation of the whole system; and especially the death of Christ on the cross is the centre from which all the doctrines of the system emanate, and to which everything should be referred.” Preaching Christ will address his “Advent and Incarnation, His holy and blameless life, His stupendous miracles, His heavenly discourses; His patient endurance of evil; His compassion to the afflicted; His kindness and forbearance to His own disciples; His parables; His predictions; His death, Resurrection and Ascension; His Divine person and attributes; His mediatorial offices—and the manner of their execution.” These, Alexander informed his students, “will form a large part of your discourses.”<sup>47</sup>

All the doctrines of the Bible, Alexander noted, are related to Christ's person and work and must be shown their proper meaning and purpose in relation to Him. Thus, sermons which do not speak about Christ or lead to Him fail to make clear the gospel message of salvation found in Christ:

When any part of Scripture is expounded we should never forget, that we are doing nothing to purpose, unless directly or indirectly [we are] making known to men, the method of salvation thro' Christ. Ministers might spend their lives in explaining the Scriptures, and yet never truly preach the *Word*, because they do not make their discourses bear on this cardinal point.<sup>48</sup>

### 3. *Preaching that is Discriminating & Applicatory*

Alexander's theology of pulpit proclamation was shaped

through exposure to the experimental preaching he witnessed as a young man and his subsequent affiliation with the Presbyterian Church. His developing familiarity with the history of preaching was accompanied by a deepening appreciation of the characteristics of experimental sermonizing once common in America's pulpits. Alexander especially valued early colonial preachers who modeled this approach. Their piety, preaching, and pastoral labors were held up as examples to Alexander's students for the kind of preachers and pastors they should seek to become:

It is much to be regretted that this accurate discrimination in preaching has gone so much out of use in our times. It is but seldom that we hear a discourse from the pulpit which is calculated to afford much aid to Christians in ascertaining their own true character; or which will serve to detect the hypocrite and formalist, and drive them from all their false refuges. In the best days of the reformed churches, such discriminating delineation of character, by the light of Scripture, formed an important part of almost every sermon. But we are now more attentive to the rules of rhetoric than to the marks of true religion. How do Owen, Flavel, Boston, and Erskine abound in marks of distinction between the true and false professor! And the most distinguished preachers of our own country—the Mathers, Shepards, Stoddards, Edwardses, as also the Blairs, Tennents, Davies, Dicksons, were wise in dividing the word of truth, that all might receive their portion in due season. But certainly the word of truth should be so handled, that every person who does not turn away his eyes may see the lineaments of his true character, reflected from the word, as the image from the glass. This, indeed, requires something more than a fertile imagination and a ready utterance—more than the learning of the schools, or profound critical acumen. It requires that the preacher study much upon his knees, that he examine his own heart with unceasing care, that “the word of God dwell in him richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”, and also that he converse frequently and freely with experienced Christians. In these matters there are many private persons who are wiser than their teachers; and a preacher, of true humility, will be often glad to learn from those who have had longer or deeper experience than himself. While others are seeking his counsel in regard to their spiritual condition, he is learning from them, for these are lessons which we can best learn from the living subject.<sup>49</sup>

46. Quoted in Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 150.

47. Quoted in Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 150–51.

48. Quoted in Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 152.

49. Archibald Alexander, “Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth,” *The Princeton Pulpit*, ed. John T. Duffield (New York: Charles Scribner, 1852), 29–47.

#### 4. Descriptive and graphic preaching:

Alexander was particularly adept at *descriptive* or *graphic* preaching. His skill in vivid verbal description created interest in the biblical storyline as his hearers often sat mesmerized at the power of his presentation.

One of his favourite methods was the descriptive or graphic. He would take some Scriptural scene and reproduce it. He would so describe the event as to make it all pass before you, awakening the feelings which an intelligent spectator might be supposed to have experienced. Many years ago we heard him in Winchester, Virginia, depict the scene of Abraham offering up Isaac, when he excited the sympathy of his audience to the highest pitch. Everybody knew how it was to end, and yet everybody felt relieved when the angel arrested the hand of Abraham. It was not, however, sympathy in the mere sufferings of Abraham, but in his faith, submission, and gratitude; so that the pleasure of his hearers was not so much aesthetic as religious. They went away filled, not with admiration of the preacher, but with devout affection towards God.<sup>50</sup>

One of Alexander's former students, the Rev. John S. Hart, captures the essence of Alexander's powerful portrayals in his observations on Alexander's manner of elocution:

Who that ever heard that almost despairing wail with which the venerable Dr Alexander used to utter the cry, "Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani!" but felt that he had received a new revelation of the meaning of that mysterious utterance? It was not that Dr Alexander understood Hebrew better than thousands of others have done. It was because he had meditated on the subject until he had the whole dreadful scene before him.<sup>51</sup>

#### 5. Characteristical Preaching

Alexander was also appreciated for his skill in *characteristical* preaching. By personalizing spiritual truths in the lives of biblical personages, he enabled his hearers to visualize the application of Scripture in ways that were both tangible and meaningful. J.W. Alexander remarked that "the strong historical, we might even say biographical turn of his mind, led him to dwell much on Scriptural personages. Surviving hearers will remember his portraits of Abraham and Joseph, of Ruth, Eli, and Hannah, of Josiah and Daniel, of Paul and John."

In connection with the same trait, he was uncommonly large in his delineation of individual types of Christian life, or what may be called characteristical preaching. Here he evinced his delicate acquaintance with the anatomy of saint and sinner. The outline was firm and unmistakable, and the hues bright and decided. Such pictures of particular experience dwell in the recollection of his hearers, who often felt the probe entering their consciences to the very quick.<sup>52</sup>

Alexander's skill in portraying biblical truth through Scriptural characters by descriptive expositions of Old and New Testament passages often made his hearers feel as if they were physically present at the scenes being described. A valuable example of the power of Alexander's characteristical preaching can be found in a sermon Alexander delivered in 1816 at a meeting of the Synod of Virginia; the account was later published in the January 1852 edition of the *Virginia Historical Register*:

On Sabbath day the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was to be administered, and it was announced that Dr. Alexander would preach the Action sermon. At an early hour the church was filled to its utmost extent. . . Dr Alexander began his sermon with that humility and simplicity for which he was ever so remarkable. . . The text which he had selected was I Cor. 5:7, "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." As he advanced in explaining the origin, design, and typical signification of the Jewish Passover, he became warm and animated, and soon commanded the attention of his whole audience, and awakened a universal and intense interest.

During the discourse of that morning, which many will recollect as long a memory lasts, several incidents occurred which showed the power of true Christian eloquence. As he passed from the description of the Jewish Passover, to the sacrifice of Christ, he said, bending forward and looking intently on the communion table spread before him, where the bread and wine lay covered, "But where is our lamb?" At these words, so impressively uttered, and accompanied by a gesture so significant, an old French dancing master, who scarcely ever entered the church, rose from his seat near the pulpit, and gazed intently, to see if there was not something on the communion table, which he had not yet seen. An intelligent little girl, too, who sat before him, after she

50. Charles Hodge, "Memoir of Dr Alexander," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 27 no. 1 (January 1855): 154.

51. Quoted in Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 113.

52. See James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 686.

returned home, said, "Aunt H., did you ever hear such a man? When he said, 'Where is our lamb,' he seemed as if he was looking for a lamb on the communion table."

As he proceeded in describing the successive scenes of our Saviour's sufferings, his hearers became deeply and almost universally affected. Feelings which could scarcely be suppressed were manifest in every part of the house; and tears were seen rolling down the cheeks of many but little accustomed to weep. When he depicted the last scene of our Saviour's suffering on the cross, that power of descriptive painting, for which he was remarkable in his pulpit efforts, was displayed in a manner rarely surpassed by the most accomplished orators. Amidst the unutterable agonies which Jesus suffered while hanging on the cross, he introduced Mary his mother among the spectators, beholding the cruel sufferings of her beloved son, and quoted the prediction of Simeon as there fulfilled: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul." Such was his gesture, his voice, his whole manner, that had Mary actually stood before the audience, with flowing tears and every token of deepest sorrow, the impression could hardly have been increased.

Dr Alexander never aimed to excite mere animal feelings. The effects produced were the result of Bible facts and truths, clearly presented by one who believed them, and felt their power. During the delivery of that discourse, it would have been easy, repeatedly, to have

produced an amount of feeling that could not be controlled. Such, however, was his command over himself and his audience, that besides the speaker's voice, nothing was heard but, here and there, a half suppressed sob, and nothing seen to disturb the solemnity of divine worship.<sup>53</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The quality of a school's program is only as good as the faculty who serve in its classrooms. And for ministerial schools which are established to train and prepare graduates who will be both pious and learned, it is vital that the faculty be men who have the intellectual, physical, and spiritual gifts necessary for such a demanding task. Ideally, they will always be men who have had practical experience in ministry and whose teaching will be defined by the needs of the church rather than the passing academic fashions of the academy.

In its early decades, the institutional life of Princeton Theological Seminary was shaped by men whose preaching and experience in pastoral ministry brought rich practical insight into their classroom instruction. Marked by a genuine love for people, their interest in pastoral ministry was rooted in the call of God upon their life and nurtured by living lives of principled piety in fellowship with Christ. Their common commitment to a Reformed confessional orthodoxy rooted in the Westminster Standards, and principled fidelity in the application of the teaching of God's Word to individuals, church, and society, knit their hearts together in a deep and lasting fellowship – a fellowship, it must be said, that helped preserve the doctrinal foundations and direction of the school for many years to come.<sup>54</sup> As men who had experienced the power of God's Word in their lives, they were especially qualified to speak about the calling and work of the pastoral ministry.

In this respect, the enduring legacy of Archibald Alexander's instruction on preaching and pastoral ministry will continue to be a source of wisdom and inspiration for men whom Christ gifts to his Church as pastors and teachers. Alexander's mastery of a biblical theology of pastoral ministry, vital piety, pastoral instinct, paternal care for his students and the church, and burden for the salvation of the lost, may still be discovered in his various publications, sermons, lectures, and the biography provided by his son. His Christ-like character bespeaks a man whose life exudes devotional intimacy with his Lord and Savior.

If there is an explanation for the success of the seminary during the days of his tenure, it is simply that

53. See James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 410–11.

54. On various occasions Samuel Miller spoke about the unity of the faculty. A diary entry for December 3, 1848, written on the anniversary of his removal to Princeton makes note of its importance: "When I came to Princeton, it was under a deep impression of the importance of harmony among those who were united in office in the same institution, and with a fixed and recorded resolution to have no quarrel or disagreement with any colleague whom the Lord might appoint me, if it should be possible to avoid it without a dereliction of truth or duty. But it has pleased a gracious God so to order my lot, that I have never been brought to this dilemma. All my colleagues have been men with whom it was easy, nay delightful, to work. I have never known any one of them, on any occasion, to manifest a disposition to raise a rival, a personal, or a selfish standard in our little camp; but on the contrary, a uniform desire to promote, by all the means in their power, the best interests of the Seminary, as a nursery of ardent piety, and of sound biblical and theological knowledge. I have no recollection of any one instance, in which any of them seemed for a moment to postpone these great interests to his own private or selfish aims." See Samuel Miller, Jr., *The Life of Samuel Miller, D.D., LL.D., Second Professor in the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, at Princeton, New Jersey*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1869; repr. Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 2:503.



Archibald Alexander, D.D. (1772–1851). Daguerrotype, 1849. Reproduced with permission of Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries.

Alexander and his colleagues were men whose lives were “hid with Christ in God.”<sup>55</sup> It was because of Christ that they were called to serve at the seminary; it was in union with Christ that they found their source of spiritual strength and life; and it was for Christ that they offered their talents and gifts in the service of his church.

A seminary can begin on a firm foundation with men whose lives are marked by the kind of godly character and conviction that characterized the early Princetonians, but it is only by continuing to appoint professors equally committed to lives of principled piety, love for Christ, sound theological learning, and active churchmanship that a seminary’s future will remain a place of God’s favor. Their example as professors lives on in the minds and hearts of their former students while it becomes a source of inspiration to successive generations of ministers in their labors as the Lord’s servants.

Charles Hodge’s observations on the early faculty are a fitting conclusion to our brief study of Alexander’s

impact upon the development of ministerial training at Princeton Theological Seminary. Hodge’s words give testimony to the example that Alexander’s life provided, but even more importantly, point us to the Christ in whose service Alexander bids us all to follow:

We all know that the man who is instrumental in bringing us near to God, who enables us to see the glory of Christ, who stirs up our heart to penitence and love, becomes sacred in our eyes, and that the place in which we have enjoyed these experiences can never be forgotten. Hence the feeling which our old alumni cherish for this Seminary, is not pride, but a tender, sacred, love, as for the place in which they passed some of the holiest, happiest, and most profitable hours of their lives.<sup>56</sup> ■

55. The phrase is the Apostle Paul’s: “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3, KJV).

56. See Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge*, 557.