

## 1812–1822: The Development of Princeton’s Polemic

By Allen Stanton

In an earlier installment we demonstrated the centrality of polemic to the founding of Princeton Theological Seminary.<sup>1</sup> One must not conclude that this polemic ceased after the inauguration of the seminary; rather, polemic was the foundation on which Old Princeton continued. Successive generations—those of Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen—merely built upon the cornerstone which had been previously laid. The seminary’s charter testifies to this fact; the introduction to The Plan, as the charter is called, contains eleven items identifying the purpose of the seminary, two of which clearly indicate the primary significance of polemic to the seminary’s purpose:

[The Seminary’s purpose] 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.... It is to provide for the Church, men who shall be able to defend her faith against infidels, and her doctrines against heretics.<sup>2</sup>

According to these statements, the establishment of Princeton Seminary in 1812 must not be viewed simply as a ministerial training ground, but as a declaration of theological warfare. Its founding demonstrated to all the foes of American Presbyterianism that the denomination (PCUSA) had begun preparation for theological combat. Now backed by a clerical training facility, Old School Presbyterians (as they would come to be known), under the guidance of Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller, began to work on the development of the seminary’s identity, which at its core was polemical. This

first decade was crucial to the seminary’s advancement and, consequently, marked one of the most contentious periods in the school’s existence. The following is a reconstruction of that first decade.

ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER AND SAMUEL MILLER

Prior to their appointment at Princeton Seminary, Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller had proven themselves to be *de facto* ecclesiastical authorities. By the initiation of Miller in 1813, they had been granted *de jure* authority. Presbyterian eyes now looked to the Princetonians for guidance and clarity amidst the clamor of familiar opponents: the Episcopalians, Hopkinsians, Unitarians, and hyper-revivalists. As a result, the next decade thrust the two into the midst of constant controversy, which in turn shaped the denomination and the seminary.

Before proceeding it would be helpful to make a few observations. Alexander and Miller each possessed three distinct roles: professor, pastor, and writer. They had been ordained as ministers of the gospel and neither relinquished that call for the professorate. Upon his appointment to Princeton, Miller made several resolutions, one of which pertains to the present discussion.

I will not merge my office as a *minister of the Gospel*, in that of *professor*. I will still preach as often as my Master

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1. Allen Stanton, “The Theological Climate of the Nineteenth Century and the Founding of a Polemical Seminary at Princeton,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 6 (2010) 22–30, 298.

2. Introduction to *The Plan of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, located at Princeton, New Jersey: Adopted by the General Assembly of 1811* (Elizabethtown: Isaac A. Kolluck, 1816) 5.

gives me opportunity and strength. I am persuaded that no minister of the Goſpel, to whatever office he may be called, ought to give up preaching. He owes it to his *ordination vows*, to his *office*, to his *Maſter*, to the *Church of God*, to *his own character*, to the benefit of *his own ſoul*, to go on preaching to his laſt hour. Lord, give me grace to act on this principle!<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the same period, Alexander’s biographer writes, “During all this time he was preaching as much as many paſtors. Both to his own ſtudents and to thoſe of the College, he was always welcome in the pulpit.”<sup>4</sup>

Alexander held preaching in ſuch regard that he took it upon himſelf to hold worſhip ſervices in his houſe for the ſtudents. In 1818, Dr. Alexander ſtarted a weekly conference on Sunday evenings in the village church where, after prayer and the ſinging of hymns, he would preach on various topics of piety (LOA, 421–422).

As paſtors, they were alſo churchmen, and the General Aſſembly conſtantly called upon them to ſerve on committees, advisory boards, and eccleſiaſtical courts. As churchmen, they alſo ſerved as ſhepherds for their ſtudents and the church at large, and both Alexander and Miller took personal reſponſibility for the protection of their ſtudents from doctrine inſiſtent with Weſtminſterian orthodoxy.

As profeſſors, polemic became a ſtaple of their inſtruction. With Turretin as his primary textbook, Alexander conducted his claſſ by following a pattern of ſound logical and argumentative theology—the

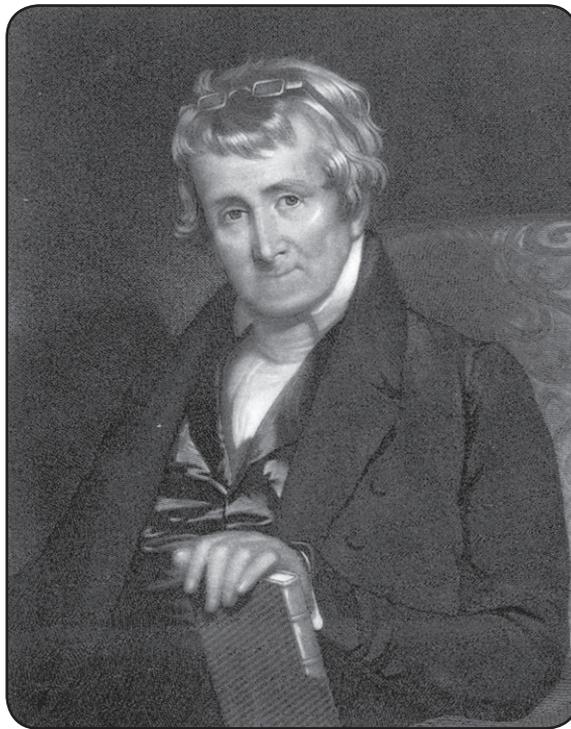
revealing of *proton pseudos* (principal falſhoods) and the reſolution of principal objections againſt the Calviniſt ſystem.<sup>5</sup> He was determined to equip all graduates of the ſeminary to deal with controversy. His ſon writes:

He was ſo earneſtly in favour of having the young clergyman armed at all points againſt adverſaries, that he greatly extended his lectures, ſo as to embrace the varieties of Heatheniſm and Mohammedaniſm with which miſſionaries muſt be brought into conflict; and alſo the forms of error which prevail in our Weſtern country (LOA, 372).

One method Alexander uſed to train his ſtudents in the ways of polemic, was to aſſign to each of them an ancient heresy on which they were to write a diſſertation. The ſtudents were to familiarize themſelves with the heresy and build an adequate deſe againſt it, and at the end of the term, each ſtudent preſented their work. During the preſentation, Alexander typically deſended the heresy as if he himſelf were a ſympathizer to the heretical ſystem, before ultimately deſonſtrating its falſity. This challenged his ſtudents to think through their critiques and their own theological ſystem as well as contributing to their polemical development.

Although Alexander placed great emphasis on the diſmantling of erroneous ſystems, his biographer aſſirms that, far from being “an active controvertiſt,” he often weighed adverſe arguments with “judgelike calmneſs.” He ſpent countless hours ſtudyng the moſt controversial and potentially dangerous writers and encouraged his ſtudents to do the ſame. In the claſſroom, his approach was no different:

It became his ſacred duty, to inculcate what he held to be truth, with augmented diligence, and by every means to guard his pupils againſt the errors of the age. This he never attempted in the way of direct debate, or violent aſſault, but rather by the ſafe eſta bliſhment



Archibald Alexander, D.D. (1772–1851)

3. Samuel Miller Jr., *The Life of Samuel Miller*. (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1869) 2:10, emphasis his. Hereafter LOM.

4. James Waddel Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1854) 422. Hereafter LOA.

5. Francis Turretin, *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992) 1: xxxix.

of such principles in the earlier parts of the course, as from a logical necessity should lead to the reception of orthodox opinion (*LOA*, 427).

Although less documentation exists on Miller's classroom methods, Henry Boardman described his mannerisms in a eulogy:

He was before them, from year to year, a model of the graces and the duties he inculcated ... [But] he had no sympathy with that poor ambition, poor especially in a theological teacher, which loves to startle the world by bold speculations and novel theories. His views on all the subjects which engaged his attention were comprehensive, discriminating, sober, and of salutary tendency. And to this mould he labored to fashion the characters of the candidates under his care.<sup>6</sup>

These three responsibilities weighed heavily on the consciences of the Princetonians. They saw themselves as pastors, professors, and penmen and in these three capacities they felt compelled to defend the truth and dismantle error for the good of the church; and they therefore employed each venue—pulpit, classroom, and print—to do so.

#### POLEMIC AGAINST EPISCOPACY

Tensions between Presbyterians and Episcopalians developed quickly in the years immediately following the Revolution. As Episcopalians sought to establish an American Episcopate, the prevalence of anti-British sentiments prevented this from taking place. Politicians such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson championed efforts to hinder its development, but it was Presbyterian involvement that insured the Episcopalians would not succeed. This produced animosity between the two denominations that continued throughout the early years of the republic.

In 1801, the Rev. John Henry Hobart received a call as assistant minister of New York City's Trinity Episcopalian Church.<sup>7</sup> His tenure at that church sparked a revival of Episcopacy in New York, beginning with his work, *A Companion for the Altar* followed by *Festivals and Fasts of the Protestant Episcopal Church* in 1804. Such writings, though modified in later years, expressed an exclusivist understanding of Episcopacy, and although his teaching only represented a small portion of the Protestant Episcopal Church, it took direct aim at New York Presbyterians.

Hobart's writings evoked a response from Dr. William

Linn in 1805 in a newly formed journal called the *Albany Centinel*.<sup>8</sup> His article, "Miscellanies, No. IX," attempted to counter the high church claims of Hobart and immediately incurred the wrath of the Episcopalians. This prompted a three-year war of words which became known as the "Albany Centinel Controversy." Without an ally, Dr. Linn received the full brunt of the blows from prominent Episcopalians—Dr. Thomas How, Rev. Frederick Beasley, Bishop William White, and John Henry Hobart.<sup>9</sup> With little reinforcement from the Presbyterians, the *Centinel* pulled the plug on the controversy and implicitly declared the Episcopalians victorious (Miller, *LOM*, 1:216).

Capitalizing on this momentum, Hobart continued his assault in 1806 by republishing the entire episode in *Essays on Episcopacy*. Aggravated by this action, the Associate Reformed Pastor, John Mitchell Mason, composed a rebuttal to these essays in the journal which he edited, *The Christian Magazine*.<sup>10</sup> Hobart then released his most famous work in response, *An Apology for Apostolic Order and Its Advocates*, in June of 1807. Because the magazine had "pointedly and violently assailed" his opinion, he felt compelled to write a series of letters addressed specifically to the editor to engage these misrepresentations.<sup>11</sup> Anglicans lauded this work as "a still more confirmed judgment (if that were possible) on the subject of apostolic order," and deemed him "the most authoritative voice on the subject of apostolic order and episcopacy ... the undisputed head of the high church in America."<sup>12</sup>

6. Henry Augustus Boardman, *A Discourse Commemorative of the Character and Life of the Late Reverend Samuel Miller of Princeton, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1850) 20–21.

7. John Henry Hobart (1775–1830) was the leader of this Episcopal "revival." He was trained at the University of Pennsylvania and the College of New Jersey.

8. Dr. William Linn (dates unknown) was Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Big Spring and President of Washington College in Maryland before editing the *Albany Centinel*.

9. Thomas How (1776–1855) served with Hobart at Trinity Church from 1808–1810. Frederick Beasley (1777–1845), was an Episcopal clergyman and provost of the University of Pennsylvania. He earned the MA at the College of New Jersey in 1797. William White (1748–1836), Protestant Episcopal Bishop, graduated from the College of Philadelphia. Became Bishop of Pennsylvania in 1786.

10. John Mitchell Mason (1770–1829) was an Associate Reformed minister and founder of Union Theological Seminary, and graduate from Columbia and Princeton. He founded the New York Missionary Society, *Christian Magazine* (1806), and American Bible Society (1816). He was later President of Dickinson College.

11. John Henry Hobart, *An Apology for Apostolic Order and Its Advocates* (New York: T. & J. Swords, 1807) iii.

12. Quoted in Esther De Waal, "John Henry Hobart and the Early Oxford Movement," *Anglican Theological Review* (1983): 326–327.

In his works, Hobart promoted several problematic doctrines for Presbyterians. He endorsed baptismal regeneration, the necessity of the Lord's Supper in salvation, apostolic succession, and participation in the ordinances of an Episcopal bishop in order to have communion with Christ.<sup>13</sup> Up to this point, Presbyterians had remained relatively quiet, and would do so until, writes Miller, the Episcopalians began crossing denominational lines, proselytizing and hindering the weak of conscience.<sup>14</sup> In response, in July of 1807, Samuel Miller published the first volume of letters concerning the proper constitution of the Church.<sup>15</sup>

LETTERS CONCERNING THE CONSTITUTION AND  
ORDER OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

For Miller, the doctrines which Hobart espoused depended entirely upon the defensibility of his understanding of church polity, namely, apostolic succession. In the *Letters*, Miller attempted to expose the error of Episcopalian polity and to demonstrate Presbyterianism's greater fidelity to biblical testimony. Miller attempted to prove four things which, if successful, decided the argument.

1. Christ gave but one commission for the office of the Gospel ministry, and that this office, of course, is one.
2. That the words *Bishop*, and *Elder*, or *Presbyter*, are uniformly used in the New Testament as convertible titles for the same office.
3. That the same *character* and *powers* which are ascribed, in the sacred writings, to *Bishops*, are also ascribed to *Presbyters*; thus plainly establishing the identity of *order*, as well as of *name*.

13. John Henry Hobart, *A Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: T. & J. Swords, 1804). See especially "Preliminary Concerns" pp. 15–72. See Also *LOM*, 1:213–227.

14. Samuel Miller, *A Continuation of Letters Concerning the Constitution and Order of the Christian Ministry* (New York: William & Whiting, 1809) 14–18.

15. Samuel Miller, *Letters Concerning the Constitution and Order of the Christian Ministry as deduced from Scripture and Primitive usage: addressed to the members of the United Presbyterian Churches in the City of New-York* (New York: Hopkins and Seymour, 1807). Hereafter: *Letters*.

16. The primary texts in this discussion are: Matthew 28:18–20; John 20:21–23; Acts 20:17, 28; Acts 14:14; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:17; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1,2.

17. Thomas How, *Letters Addressed to the Rev. Samuel Miller, D.D., in reply to his letters* (1808) 8.

4. Finally, that the Christian Church was organized by the apostles after the model of the *Jewish Synagogue*, which was unquestionably Presbyterian in its form (Miller, *Letters*, 28).

He concluded: "If these four positions can be established, there will remain no doubt on any candid mind how the question in dispute ought to be decided" (28).

After spending considerable time proving these positions by examining the relevant biblical data, he traced the developments of church government through history and attempted to demonstrate that the first three centuries followed in line with this biblical heritage but that the church, emulating the hierarchical structure of the Roman state, progressed towards Episcopacy.<sup>16</sup> However, the Reformers restored Presbyterian polity to the church with American Presbyterians following in their wake. This final portion, if successful, satisfied the purpose for which he set out to write—the restoration of confidence in Presbyterian polity and the protection of Presbyterians from the agitations of popery and high churchism (Miller, *Letters*, 350). Still, as Miller wrote these lines, he warned his readers of bigotry and lack of charity with Christian brethren. He writes:

It is your duty to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*. But 'let us not ... lay aside charity to maintain faith.' This is never necessary; and when it is done, it is always the effect of that *unhallowed fire* in which our Lord has declared he *has no pleasure* (Miller, *Letters*, 351).

Miller's publication made no small stir in the Episcopal world. In 1808, Dr. Thomas How responded fiercely to the *Letters*, writing to Miller:

I proceed to examine your letters; and it gives me great pleasure to observe that they are expressed, for the most part, in terms of politeness, and courtesy. But ... they are, not infrequently, marked with a spirit of extreme bitterness; and that they, too often, present assertions and insinuations, which, on every principle of consistency, and candor, should have been spared.<sup>17</sup>

Miller attempted to defend himself against these charges in 1809 with the publication of a second work, entitled, *A Continuation of the Letters Concerning the Constitution and Order of the Christian Ministry*. Dr. Hobart continued the assault against Miller during this time by composing articles for *The Churchman's Magazine*, and Dr. Bowden replied to Miller's *Continuation* in

1811. It is there that the controversy appeared to end, and as Miller entered Princeton in December of 1813, he entered free from controversial baggage—or so it seemed.

In the fall of 1813, around the time Miller began his tenure at the seminary, his work, *The Life of Dr. Rodgers*, was published.<sup>18</sup> Praised by later Princetonians as a “richly replenished storehouse, in which Dr. Miller has introduced ... nearly everything that was known thirty years ago of our Church,”<sup>19</sup> it was not received as well by the Episcopalians, who proceeded to enter into sharp debate with Miller’s take on the conflicts between Presbyterians and Episcopalians in the early part of the nineteenth century (*LOM*, 1:313). The battle had followed Miller to Princeton.

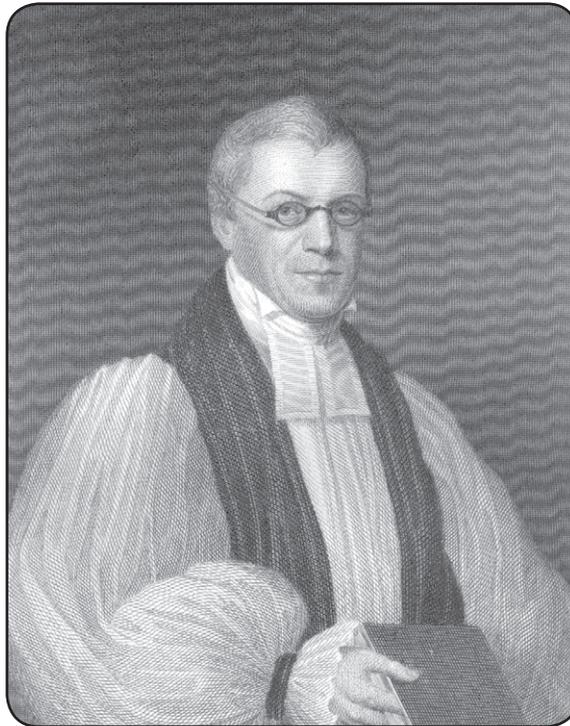
In 1816, Dr. How again responded to Miller in his work, *A Vindication of the Protestant Episcopal Church: in a Series of Letters Addressed to the Rev. Samuel Miller, D.D. in reply to His late writings on the Christian Ministry, and to the Charges contained in His life of the Rev. Dr. Rodgers; with Preliminary Remarks*.<sup>20</sup> Dr. How asserts:

I came, pretty much, to the conclusion to remain silent; especially as you had declared your intention to take no further part in the Episcopal controversy. But you continued to renew the attack, in different forms, on the doctrines and order of our church; publishing, in 1811, a Sermon on the subject of lay elders; and, in 1813, a Life of the Rev. Dr. Rodgers; both of which contain matter which the sincere Episcopalian must regard, not only as inaccurate in itself, but as very pernicious in its tendency.... Upon seeing you thus persevere in your animadversions upon our Church, I resolved to finish my reply (How, *A Vindication*, 5–6).

How claimed that the biography misrepresented the Episcopal Church and compelled him to continue the controversy. This time Miller did not take up the pen again, but allowed Dr. How the final word; and while

this did not mark the end of the Episcopal controversy, it sufficed to stifle it for a number of years and allowed Miller to enjoy some peace from the Episcopalians.

In concluding this section, it is interesting to note that Dr. Miller had been hired by the seminary to fill the chair of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government. It can be no coincidence that a large portion of his responsibility subsisted in the defense and propagation of Presbyterian polity. As enrollment at the seminary climbed, Miller devoted himself principally to equipping pupils to continue the polemic which he had begun with Hobart in 1807. During this first decade, Charles Hodge was one of these students who heard Miller’s lectures and ultimately continued the battle of his senior professor with high church Episcopacy.



Bishop John Henry Hobart (1775–1830)

#### POLEMIC AGAINST HOPKINSIANISM AND REVIVALISM

During this time period, Episcopacy was not the only challenge to traditional Presbyterianism. The territorial growth of the United States and vast immigration raised awareness of the growing need to provide churches and pastors for the new American frontier (including the states of Ohio, Kentucky, and Illinois) and the lack of Presbyterian ability to do that.<sup>21</sup> Due to their strict, traditional standards for ordination, it was not possible for them to train clergy fast enough

18. Dr. John Rodgers was the senior pastor of the church where Samuel Miller received his first call. Rodgers was a convert of Whitefield and apparently a well reputed preacher himself.

19. John De Witt, “The Intellectual Life of Samuel Miller,” *Princeton Theological Review* (1906): 183.

20. Thomas Y. How, *A Vindication of the Protestant Episcopal Church: in a Series of Letters Addressed to the Rev. Samuel Miller, D.D. in reply to His late writings on the Christian Ministry, and to the charges contained in His life of the Rev. Dr. Rodgers; with Preliminary Remarks* (New York: Eastburn, Kirk, & Co., 1816) Hereafter: *A Vindication*.

21. William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier: the Presbyterians 1783–1840* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1936), esp. 3–20.

to meet the incredible demand of the new frontier. The Baptists and the Methodists, on the other hand, rapidly established ecclesiastical monopolies across the frontier because their lack of educational requirements allowed them to readily send ministers on the field. Pressure inevitably set in against the slow-moving Presbyterians to adjust their long-held standards for ordaining ministers. Rather than give up their customs, Presbyterians concocted another way to accomplish their desired end: a partnership with the Congregationalists.

This collaboration, known as the Plan of Union (1801), initially seemed like a good idea. Presbyterian and Congregational churches, which had long been the established churches of New England, now made their presence felt in the West together. This alliance allowed particular congregations, whether Congregational or Presbyterian, to choose a pastor from either tradition, thus rapidly populating the pool of ministerial candidates for both denominations and filling the pulpits of previously vacant churches in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, as well as new ones in

Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky. This amalgamation promoted a Presbyterian revival in the New England States which, due to vast migration, swiftly reached the West. From 1790 to 1820 it is estimated that some 800,000 New Englanders moved to the frontier, placing Congregationalists and Presbyterians in a prime position to impact the expanse.<sup>22</sup> As a result, between 1816 and 1826 some fifty thousand new members joined the Presbyterian Church.<sup>23</sup> By 1834 communicant members exceeded 248,000, a remarkable increase from the mere 18,000 in 1807 (Marsden, 12)!

22. George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) 10.

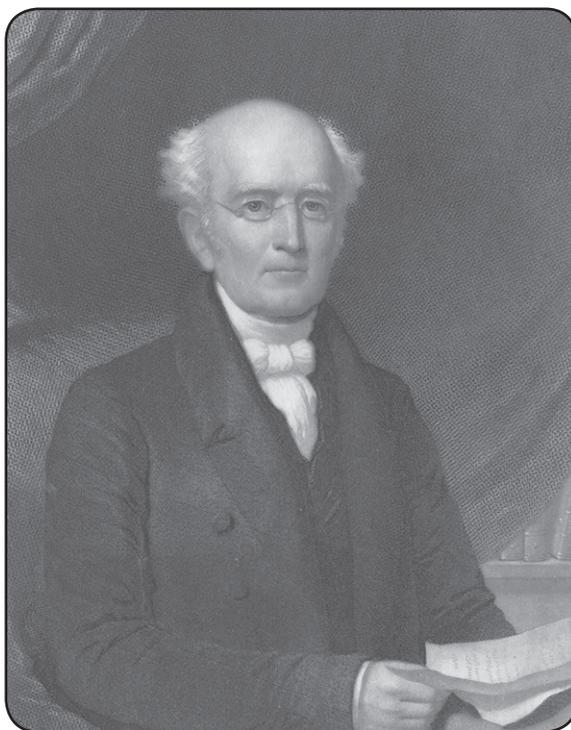
23. See D. G. Hart and John Muether, *Seeking a Better Country* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2007) 112.

The reasons for these Presbyterian successes stemmed from the employment of Congregational preachers, theology (Hopkinsian), and practice (revivalistic traditions such as camp meetings, itinerant and experiential preaching).

These revivalistic and Hopkinsian implementations played a profound role in the growth of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). The emphasis on experience rather than doctrine captivated the hearts of listeners who had formerly characterized Reformed preaching as “rigid Calvinism” and “dead Orthodoxy.” These implementations sparked massive conversions to an extent previously unknown to Presbyterians. Yet such success did not come without a price.

Although the initial achievements of these years undoubtedly brought hope and encouragement to the Presbyterian Church, the theological and ecclesiastical compromises of the union had not slipped in unnoticed. Resentments and concerns had arisen among the more traditional Presbyterians who had committed themselves to the Westminster Standards and the outward and ordinary means of grace. Some of these

more traditional members proposed a plan to counter the negative effects of the Union which included establishing a seminary at Princeton. This helps to explain the reality that, from its earliest days, Princeton Seminary found itself constantly in contention with advocates of revivalism and Hopkinsianism which by the nineteenth century normally accompanied one another. Fortunately Archibald Alexander had become well acquainted with both, having spent a considerable amount of time in the Northeast and having personal acquaintance with Samuel Hopkins. He also had a vast familiarity with revivals. His biographer writes, “It may safely be asserted that there was no man in the Church who had studied more closely this whole subject” [of revival] (*LOA*, 427).



Samuel Miller, D.D. (1769–1850)

## PRINCETON AND REVIVALISM

Tensions over revivalism quickly made their way into Princeton's classrooms. Since the 1740s, the revivals had rapidly produced aspiring clergy and this intensified in the early part of the nineteenth century. With its emphasis on the dangers of an unconverted ministry, the experience of a conversion became, in many cases, the sole requirement for the preaching office. Although higher theological education had been sharply criticized by revivalists, particularly Baptists, Methodists, and the Christian Movement,<sup>24</sup> New Side Presbyterians and Congregationalists still found great value in education and encouraged converts to enter the theological institutions.<sup>25</sup> This influx of "enthusiasm" was further sparked by a revival at the College of New Jersey (Princeton) in 1815 which claimed over fifty new converts.<sup>26</sup> In fact, in 1816, revival served as the primary topic of discussion at General Assembly as each Presbytery reported their experience of the Spirit's work (*Minutes*, 299–302). Young revivalists flocked to the newly formed Princeton Seminary, but their entrance inevitably proved problematic.<sup>27</sup>

As Princeton began to fill its student body, Dr. Alexander began to experience discord in his classrooms. Alexander clearly possessed revival sympathies, having been converted at a Virginian revival, but had grown cautious over the years due to its damaging extravagances. His reticence, in time, proved warranted. In an account of this time period we read:

The young men of the Seminary came in great numbers from the very midst of revival scenes, where these matters of controversy had been agitated, in connection with their most sacred exercises. There often appeared within the walls of the institution, hot and valorous youth, who were wiser than their teachers, and eager to beard a professor, and make converts among their fellows. The whole of this period, therefore, was one of agitation and consequent solicitude (*LOA*, 426).

This depiction describes much of the student body in terms typical to revivals: an emphasis on personal experience, skepticism of those who lacked adult conversion, and a disregard for authority. Such disturbances thrust Alexander into immediate contention with these students. Alexander attacked the extravagances of the revivals and expounded for his students, similarly to Jonathan Edwards, the true evidences of divine work. As a result of his labors, Alexander fell under sharp criticism. Opponents charged him with teaching "obsolete

Calvinism of the seventeenth century" and opposing the "work of grace which was in progress." Ignorantly, they indicted him as "unacquainted with the phenomena of religious revival" (*LOA*, 426–427).

In response, the Princetonians resorted to polemic, defending "Old School" Calvinism and opposing "New School" profligacy. Alexander's assault against revival's extravagances consisted primarily of lectures in the classroom and discussions in the debate halls of the seminary. He established Friday night as a weekly time for disputation, and during these debates the professors gave the students absolute freedom to express their ideas, but Dr. Alexander was always given the final word. J.W. Alexander describes these Friday evenings:

As this was a period of very active controversy in our Church, on those points of theology which have since divided us, there was, as might have been expected, a peculiar animation in these discussions; and in our opinion he, never shone more, or more displayed his stores of knowledge, his grasp of great subjects, or his acumen and dialectical force, than in some of these disputations, when, after being warmed by hearing the defence of specious error, he closed with the establishment of sound doctrine (*LOM*, 419).

Alexander also used the pulpit as a polemical platform where he "seized every fair occasion to preach the Word, in seasons of awakening, and with a fervor and success that often disarmed the prejudice which was ready to arise from mistaken views of his position" (*LOM*, 428).

Miller also devoted attention to revivalism. In 1816, during the General Assembly, enthusiastic reports of revivals took up a large portion of the meeting. However an equal amount of time was devoted to the issue of the church's constitution, in which Samuel Miller played an important role. The Assembly appointed Miller to a committee devoted to broader publication and distribution of the Confession, Catechisms, and Directory of Worship of the Westminster Assembly (*Minutes*, 310–311). The allocation of the Standards to Presbyterian ministers made up a large portion of the plan. This indicates

24. See Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

25. *Extracts from the Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 1816 (Philadelphia: Printed by Jane Aitken, 1816) 300. Hereafter: *Minutes*.

26. See the full account in Ashbel Green, *The Life of Ashebel Green* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1849).

27. Joseph Contorti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1981) 23–40.

that, prior to this time, ministers were either ignorant or negligent of the church's standards. At the same meeting, the Assembly selected Miller and Alexander to revise the Directory of Worship and the Presbyterian forms of government and discipline. This committee had been directly appointed to encourage order in light of the enthusiastic extravagances of the revivals (*LOM*, 415). These actions, though probably not to be regarded as overtly polemical, demonstrate potential concerns with the revivals of 1816. Although the Assembly celebrated the authentic work of the Spirit, remembrance of the recent century (such as the Old/New Side split) prohibited Old School Presbyterians from fully embracing the revivals.

#### PRINCETON AND THE HOPKINSIANS

The Princetonians also involved themselves in the Hopkinsian controversies during these early years. The founder of this theological school, Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803), was the preeminent student of Jonathan Edwards who attempted to continue the teaching of Edwards by developing a more “consistent Calvinism.” In his system, Hopkins endorsed positions on original sin and depravity which could lead to dramatic departures from Westminsterian orthodoxy. He also emphasized what he called “disinterested benevolence,” which encouraged complete devotion to the glory of God without regard for self-interest. Extremists of this position used absurdities akin to, “I would gladly enter eternal damnation for the glory of God.” However, Hopkins' followers did not all press his logic to its natural conclusion, and this theology, also known as the “New Divinity,” far from being a monolithic school of thought, was expressed by its adherents in varying degrees.

The tensions between Hopkinsianism and Presbyterianism surfaced when Dr. Alexander left his Philadelphia pulpit for the professorate. Ezra Stiles Ely filled the vacancy of the pulpit left by Alexander at Old Pine

Church in 1813.<sup>28</sup> Ely had made quite a stir with the publication of his polemical work, *A Contrast Between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism*, in 1811, where he attempted to demonstrate Hopkinsianism's failure to align with Orthodoxy. This prompted far-reaching suspicion of ministers with Hopkinsian sympathies (see Hart and Muether, 117), which came to a head in 1816 when a meeting of the Hudson Presbytery refused to grant a call to the Rev. William Gray to the congregation of Goodwill because of his Hopkinsian leanings. The congregation appealed to the Synod of New York and New Jersey who reversed the decision of the Presbytery, a move which Dr. Alexander adamantly opposed. In response to his resistance, Hopkinsians turned on Alexander and the seminary, declaring them opposed to revival and the progress of grace. Hopkinsians swiftly assembled a united front against Princeton Seminary:

Are we, gentlemen, to understand that young men, educated for the Church in that Seminary are to be imbued in this intolerance of spirit—are to be sent forth to preach down Hopkinsian heresy?... As for our Theological Seminary, it will be in the hands of men who will imbue, if possible, every candidate whom they shall instruct and send forth, in a deep abhorrence of the ‘Hopkinsian heresy,’ and every one will go forth under a full impression that he must beat down the odious doctrine of disinterested benevolence, and erect selfishness on its ruins.<sup>29</sup>

These adversaries viewed the Princetonians as supporters of a dead “triangle” Orthodoxy committed to the imputation of Adam's sin, the necessity of the atonement, and moral inability. The General Assembly of 1817, despite the Hopkinsian contentions, supported Alexander and upheld the decision of the Presbytery to refuse the call of Rev. Gray, a considerable victory for Alexander, for traditional Presbyterians, and for the seminary (Baird, 235–246).

This same General Assembly of 1817 also appointed Dr. Miller to head a committee to review the proposition of the Philadelphia Presbytery to expose ministers with Hopkinsian sympathies and charge them with heresy. By this time some Hopkinsians had sharply veered from the Confession's teaching on original sin and particular atonement.<sup>30</sup> Dr. Miller, however, was unwilling to fully support the proposal by the Philadelphia Presbytery to “call to an account *all* such ministers as may be suspected to embrace *any* of the opinions usually called Hopkinsian (*LOM*, 2:27, italics mine).” In other words, he would not endorse the demarcation of *all*

28. Ezra Stiles Ely (1786–1861) was a Presbyterian minister educated at Yale who in 1811 published a sharp attack on Hopkinsians entitled, “A Contrast between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism.”

29. Quoted in Samuel Baird, *A History of the New School: And of the Questions Involved in the Disruption* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen, & Haffelfinger, 1868) 244.

30. Some extreme Hopkinsians denied the imputation of Adam's sin and espoused a doctrine of a general atonement; both are in contradiction with the Westminster Confession: 6.3, “the guilt of this sin (Adam's first sin) was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation”; 8.5, “The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself ... hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father ... for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.” See also Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, 34–39.

Hopkinsianism as heretical. He acknowledged varying degrees of sympathies and did not believe that the influence of the system was as far reaching as some believed. Later evidence vindicates his assessment.

Except for a few sentences, Miller endorsed the pastoral letter of the Philadelphia Synod, and proposed the allowance of some room to diverge on minor points of the Confession and thus proposed in essence the “system of doctrine” approach to the Confession. Samuel Baird, a fierce opponent of New School Presbyterianism, sharply criticized this move, claiming that this moderate position became “a policy which had well nigh been [the church’s] ruin” (Baird, 248). Miller’s policy called pastors to submit to the Confession as essentially containing the system of doctrine found in the Scriptures. Candidates were to make known any scruples with the Standards and the Presbyteries were left to decide whether these were fundamental issues or not.<sup>31</sup>

In light of these events, Miller’s actions might seem inconsistent. Baird interprets his actions as an attempt to preserve unity at the expense of doctrine, but there is another possible interpretation. By this time Miller was well aware that many men of the Presbyterian Church possessed some Hopkinsian sympathies as a result of the influence of the Plan of Union. However he was also aware that any man of integrity espousing Hopkinsian sympathies of the most extreme order would be forced to withdraw his Presbyterian ordination in consistency with their vows. The doctrines at stake in the extreme instance—imputation of Adam’s sin, atonement, and moral inability—were central to the teachings of the Westminster Standards. It appears that Miller actually made a very strategic move; instead of proposing a witch hunt, Miller placed the authority in the hands of the Presbyteries. Had he fully endorsed the actions proposed in the pastoral letter, an immediate split would have occurred and all Hopkinsian sympathizers, regardless of the degree, would have been forced to leave.

Miller’s actions allowed room for three things to happen. First, they allowed for the possibility of reformation of the Hopkinsian sympathizers to the fundamental teachings of the Standards. These New Divinity men, following the General Assembly of 1817, would have been keenly aware of the dangers of flirting with these teachings and perhaps would denounce former sympathies. Miller’s efforts to distribute the Standards to all Presbyterian pastors could indicate such a hope. Second, it left room for adamant Hopkinsians to leave on their own. Rather than encourage a rash break from the Presbyterian Church of all those inclined toward the system, Miller’s actions would cause only the staunch

Hopkinsians to leave. On this point however, his hopes appear to have failed, for there does not appear to be any evidence of this happening. Third, it restored sovereignty to the Presbyteries.

Viewed this way, Miller’s actions seem quite shrewd. Although division finally came in 1837, Miller effectively prevented this for two decades. Some, as a result, have pointed to these actions to demonstrate the moderate position of the Princetonians (see Marsden, 42). However, these actions were polemically driven and specifically directed at *bona fide* Hopkinsians, for true Hopkinsians could not with clear conscience subscribe to even the fundamentals of the Westminster Confession. Any minister of integrity with such sympathies would immediately inform his presbytery. Had Miller endorsed the enforcement of strict subscription to the Confession, he would have immediately ostracized both committed Hopkinsians and those with only slight Hopkinsian inclinations. Miller limited his polemic to those he viewed as truly dangerous rather than to all those veering in any minor shade from the Princetonian’s theological positions. Whether or not one evaluates Miller’s actions in this way, it is far too simplistic to simply dub him, as Samuel Baird did, a “peace man.”

#### POLEMIC AGAINST UNITARIANISM

Aside from Episcopacy, revivalism, and Hopkinsianism, Princeton also found itself involved in controversy with Unitarians. Unitarianism had been present in the New England Colonies for quite some time and had become increasingly fashionable since the infiltration of those of Unitarian persuasion at Harvard University and the election of the Unitarian President John Quincy Adams. However, it did not encroach upon Presbyterians until the early years of the seminary. When it finally became a Presbyterian issue, Samuel Miller acted as chief commander in extinguishing the threat.

Unitarianism began threatening the Presbyterian Church as early as 1816 when the Rev. J.W. Freeman, a Unitarian pastor in Boston, obliged the invitation of a congregation to conduct a series of services for a group of Unitarian sympathizers in Baltimore, Maryland. This series ultimately led to the creation of the Unitarian Independent Congregation in the following year. Once the assembly had been established, a pastor named Jared Sparks, the thirty-three year old graduate

31. For a summary on Old Princeton’s view on subscription see David Calhoun, “Old Princeton and the Westminster Standards,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 3 volumes, ed. Ligon Duncan (Geanies House: Mentor Publications, 2004) 2:33–62.

of Harvard College, accepted a call to the pastorate. On May 5, 1819, William Channing, pastor of a Unitarian Church in Boston, delivered Rev. Sparks' ordination sermon. In that sermon, entitled "Unitarian Christianity," Channing blasted orthodox congregations with particular attention to five distinct doctrines: the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, total depravity, substitutionary atonement, and irresistible grace in regeneration. This spurred controversy both nationally and locally, and demanded a response.<sup>32</sup>

On October 19, 1820, the first Presbyterian Church of Baltimore installed a new pastor, William Nevens, and invited Dr. Miller to preach the installation sermon for his former student. Always eager to support his students, Miller gladly complied. Miller's visit, however, had a distinctly polemical purpose. In his sermon, *The Difficulties and Temptations which Attend the Preaching of the Gospel in Great Cities*, Miller took full aim at the Unitarians of Baltimore, warning Nevens that the temptation in a major city is to move away from the gospel and toward "refinement" and "smooth and superficial preaching."<sup>33</sup> This, Miller says, has always been a great danger in the church as demonstrated by the errors of Arius and Socinus. He continues:

We might easily illustrate and confirm this position, by examples drawn from our own country, had we time to trace the history of several sects among us, and especially of American Unitarianism. But I forbear to pursue the illustration a little further; and shall only take the liberty to ask, as I pass along—How is it to be accounted for, that the preaching of those who deny the Divinity and Atonement of the Saviour, and who reject the doctrines of Human Depravity, of Regeneration, and of Justification by the righteousness of Christ—How, I ask, is it to be accounted for, that such preachers, all over the world, are most acceptable to the gay, the fashionable, the worldly minded, and even the licentious? That so many embrace and eulogize their system, without being, in the smallest perceptible degree, sanctified by it? (Miller, *Difficulties*, 20–21).

32. See Terry Bilhartz, *Urban Religion and the Second Great Awakening* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1986) 119–122.

33. Samuel Miller, *The Difficulties and Temptations which attend the Preaching of the Gospel in Great Cities: A Sermon Preached in the First Presbyterian Church, in the City of Baltimore, October 19, 1820, at the Ordination and the Installation of the Reverend William Nevens* (Baltimore, 1820). Hereafter *Difficulties*.

34. Samuel Miller, *Letters on Unitarianism; addressed to the members of the First Presbyterian Church, in the City of Baltimore* (Trenton: George Sherman, 1821) 11, 19, 20. Hereafter *Letters on Unitarianism*.

Immediately following this sermon, *The Unitarian Miscellany*, a monthly Boston magazine, produced a response by Jared Sparks under the alias, "A Unitarian of Baltimore." He rebuked Samuel Miller for being so uncharitable as to refuse to extend the Christian name to Unitarians. Miller responded in the same magazine defending and maintaining his assertions. After this brief response, Miller, having become aware that his positions needed greater clarification, took up the polemical pen in a more thorough collection of letters against Unitarianism (*LOM*, 2:59–60).

#### LETTERS ON UNITARIANISM

Miller's *Letters on Unitarianism* comprised his most sustained attack against Unitarianism, and were the most severe polemic of his literary career to this point. He demonstrates his purpose in these initial remarks:

My object in writing at present is your benefit. It is to put you on your guard against a system of error, which I have no hesitation in considering as the most delusive and dangerous of all that have ever assumed the Christian name ... it is impossible for me to think of making terms with such a system ... I am bound, as a conscientious man, to do all in my power to expose the sin and danger of the heresy itself, and to warn my fellow men against its fatal allurements.<sup>34</sup>

Unlike his debate with Episcopalians, with whom he believed he could hold communion, Miller believed communion with Unitarians could not be maintained because they were heretics. After illuminating readers of the Unitarian rejection of essential Christian doctrines, (i.e., the Trinity, deity of Christ, deity of the Holy Spirit, the atonement, original sin, justification by Christ's merits, inspiration of Scripture, as well as the assertion of universal salvation), Miller differentiates between controversies involving evangelicals and those involving Unitarians:

It is not a controversy between *Presbyterians* and *Episcopalians*, or between *Calvinists* and *Arminians*, in which men may take different sides, and yet be equally safe with regard to their eternal prospects. Although I am a decided Calvinist ... I find no difficulty in embracing as brethren in Christ, many who do not view them with the same eyes. But the controversy between Orthodox and Unitarians, is of more vital and awful import (Miller, *Letters on Unitarianism*, 34).

This religious faction must not be recognized as

Christian because they reject the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Miller acknowledges that an attempt to divide between fundamental and non-essential doctrines can be a precarious work; but, no doubt, the heart of the faith consists in Christ's deity. "Those who admit this doctrine, and build their whole system upon it; and those who totally reject it, can never worship or commune together" (Miller, *Letters on Unitarianism*, 46).

This writing served as a cursory attempt to answer the basic objections of Unitarians against Orthodox contentions by exposing these most basic Unitarian errors. Miller began by responding to Unitarian charges against those who held to traditional orthodoxy, particularly their claim of his intolerance. Rather than recoil from the accusation, he validated his claims with the pages of history.

The word of God, as the Orthodox believe, is the only certain test of divine truth; the only infallible rule of faith and practice.... But when we think we find a doctrine plainly, frequently, and solemnly taught in the Bible, it certainly does, and in the estimation of all reasonable men, it ought to corroborate the fact, that the doctrine is *really* found there, and is, consequently, of God, when we find the true Church, in all ages, maintaining and cleaving to it, nay contending for it, with zeal as a fundamental part of divine truth. I need not tell the pious that there is a consolation as well as a duty, in *walking in the footsteps of the flock* (Miller, *Letters on Unitarianism*, 111–112).

Establishing the value of church history, Miller, in an encyclopedic manner, cited the testimony of the Church Fathers on the deity of Christ. Having traced the church's testimony from Barnabas, Polycarp and Melito through to Justin, the Cappadocian Fathers and Irenaeus (to name a few), he concluded with Athanasius that those denying this testimony cannot be called by the name Christian. As the clear witness of the Scriptures and its interpreters throughout the ages conclude, so, he writes, should contemporary readers. Miller then took a surprising turn. Rather than going directly into the next time period of testimony (as he did in his letters on Episcopacy) he moved into a discussion of the heresies of the same period previously discussed. Miller suggests that Unitarianism, far from being an innovation, finds its manifestation already in the Christological heresies of the early church. He expressly identified them as the direct successors of the Marcionites and Ebionites (Miller, *Letters on Unitarianism*, 150).

Next, Miller attacked the Unitarian view of Scripture. The Unitarians, he claims, place higher emphasis on their own reason than the testimony of the Scriptures. If a teaching of the Bible, such as the Trinity, appears unreasonable, then Unitarians reject it. Orthodoxy, on the other hand, recognizes the difficulty in comprehending the Scripture's teaching on the Trinity, and instead views it not as unreasonable, but transcending the comprehension of humans. Orthodoxy accepts this teaching and submits to it as plainly revealed in the Bible despite its incomprehensibility to the mortal mind (Miller, *Letters on Unitarianism*, 191–234).

For Miller, the clearest evidence against unorthodox teaching comes from examining the practical piety of those who possess such doctrines. In other words, he viewed piety and theology as integrally connected. The Unitarians, he argued, comprise the most lascivious part of society. Besides that, they commonly seduce men into thinking that they share similarities with the Orthodox camp while obscuring major differences. In sum, they express an indifference to truth utterly inconsistent with the Christian call to contend for the truth.

Lastly, he asserted their incapability of practical usefulness, namely, their inability to offer consolation in death. When one examines the claims of a religious sect, one must account for the benefits of the party. A religious camp that fails to offer consolation in death possesses little value.

Miller then offered a few thoughts on the nature of dealing with this conflict. He encourages his readers to treat Unitarians as neighbors and to allow the grace of God to bear fruit in their lives towards them in order to avoid offense. However, he warns them not to submit themselves to the preaching and writings of the Unitarians unless fully engaged in the conversation. In other words, he admonished his audience not to read Unitarian works unless they counter it with a regular intake of orthodox teaching. To do otherwise would be like "swallowing poison without accompanying it with the requisite antidote" (Miller, *Letters on Unitarianism*, 289). The Unitarian faction, far from meriting the name Christian, illegitimately engages in Christian ministry and the administration of her ordinances and one must subject oneself to those ordinances very cautiously. Miller's assessment fully agrees with the declaration of General Assembly in 1814.

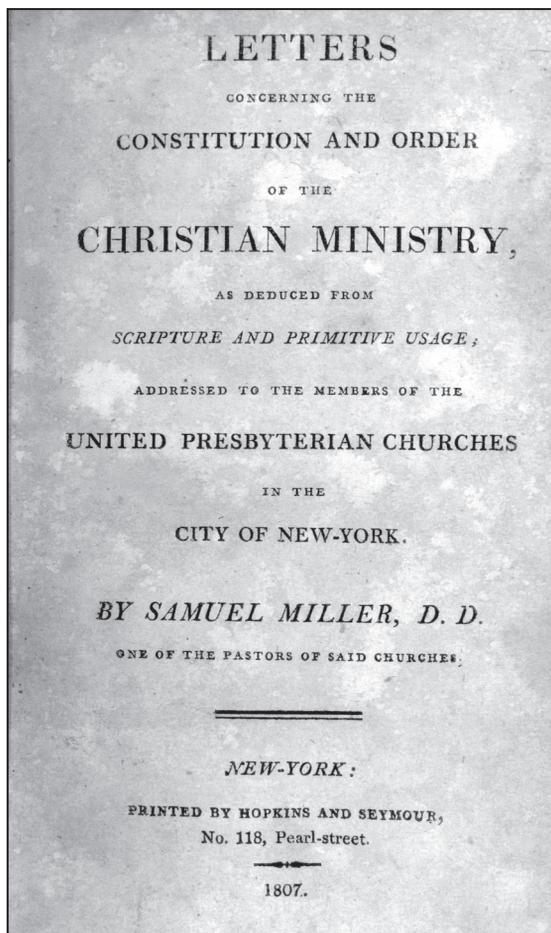
He ended the book with the following encouragements. First, he urges his readers to hold fast to the truth in righteousness. Many have been zealous for the truth but in an impious fashion as those unaffected by that truth. The truth does no good for a person who has not

been altered by the possession of it. Second, he attempts to persuade parents of the importance of instructing their children in this topic. Lastly, he admonishes his audience to live in a manner of temperance and practice superior to the Unitarians which is the only hope of winning them (Miller, *Letters on Unitarianism*, 302–311).

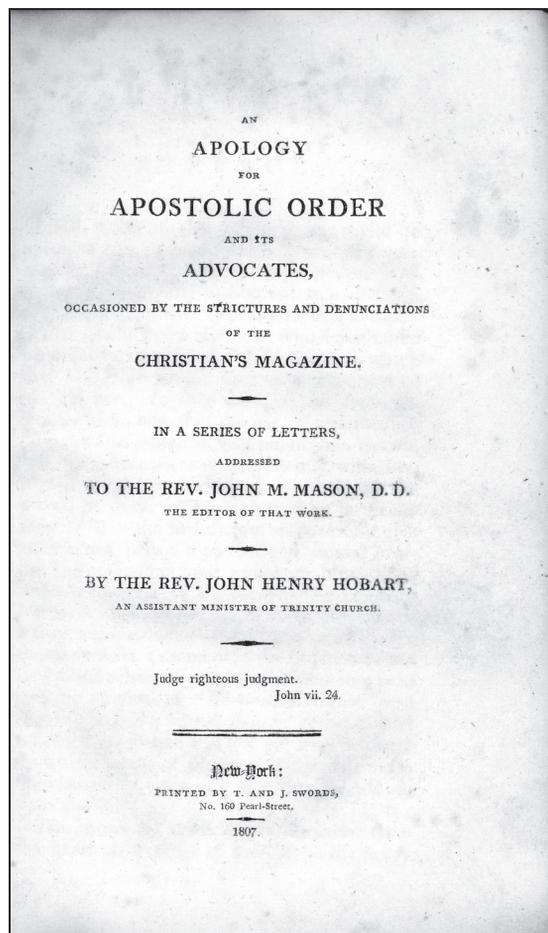
### Conclusion

In these two installments on Princeton Seminary, we have seen that the seminary came into existence for the purpose of equipping its graduates to “contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.” Having been built upon polemic, Princeton continued to fulfill its purpose by developing a distinctly polemical identity. The seminary’s

theological curriculum was, in keeping with this purpose, divided into two sections: dogmatic and polemic theology. The seminary’s primary textbook, Turretin’s *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, was decidedly polemical, and the professors themselves modeled for their students a commitment to contending with those who challenged the confessional and theological standards of the Presbyterian Church of the United States. Those who have assumed that polemic at Old Princeton did not emerge until the development of *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* under the guidance of Charles Hodge have concluded so mistakenly. Polemic and Old Princeton went hand-in-glove. One cannot rightly understand its story unless one acknowledges this fact. What this reality means for the present I leave to the reader to decide. ■



Title page of Samuel Miller, D.D. (1769–1850), *Letters Concerning the Constitution and Order of the Christian Ministry* (1807).



Title page of Bishop John Henry Hobart (1775–1830), *An Apology for the Apostolic Order and its Advocates* (1807).