

1823–1830: The Establishment Of Princeton's Polemic

By Allen Stanton

The first decade following the inauguration of Princeton Seminary (1812–1822) marked a period of crucial significance to its existence.¹ The Presbyterian Church called Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller into a grand project. The professors possessed no precedent to emulate, no blueprint, no curriculum for clerical education, and few students willing to submit themselves as variables for an experiment. Adding to these pressures, Presbyterian eyes looked to Drs. Miller and Alexander, by virtue of their offices, for guidance in a time of denominational uncertainty.

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1. For an extended treatment of the polemical founding of the seminary and the first two decades see the two previous installments: Allen Stanton, "The Theological Climate of the Early Nineteenth Century and the Founding of a Polemical Seminary at Princeton" *The Confessional Presbyterian* 6 (2010), 22–30, 298; and "1812–1822: The Development of Princeton's Polemic" 7 (2011), 65–76.

2. For example see: Archibald Alexander, *A Brief Outline of the Evidences of Christianity* (Princeton: D.A. Borrenstein, 1825); and *The Canon of Old and New Testament ascertained, or, The Bible Complete without the Apocrypha & Unwritten Traditions* (Princeton: A.D. Borrenstein, 1826); Samuel Miller, *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions: an Introductory Lecture, delivered at the Opening of the Summer Session of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, July 2, 1824* (Princeton: D.A. Borrenstein); "Why are there at Present so few Ministers of the Gospel Really Eminent in their Profession?" Outline of Introductory Lecture at Opening of the Session of Princeton Theological Seminary, November, 1825. Published in *American Magazine of Letters and Christianity* (Princeton: 1826); *Letters on Clerical Manners and Habits: Addressed to a Student in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, N.J.* (New York: G. & C. Carvill, 1827); *The Importance of the Gospel Ministry: An Introductory Lecture at the Opening of the Winter Session of the Theological Seminary at Princeton, New Jersey, Nov. 9, 1827* (Princeton: D.A. Borrenstein, 1827); *The Importance of Mature Preparatory Study for the Ministry: An Introductory Lecture, Delivered at the Opening of the Summer Session of the Theological Seminary at Princeton, New-Jersey, July 3, 1829* (Princeton: Princeton Press, 1829).

During those years the church lacked identity, which the seminary at Princeton soon provided. This they did through lectures, preaching, and synodical involvement, but most significantly through polemical engagement. Prior to Princeton Seminary, the theological attacks of High Church Episcopalians, Hopkinsians, Unitarians, and extravagant revivalists posed significant threats for Presbyterians. As a result, the professors at Princeton, especially Miller, published prolifically during this decade.

By 1823, things had significantly changed. Polemical engagement during the years leading up to the 1830's slowed to such an extent that Miller's biographer dubbed them the "quiet years." There are several apparent reasons for this. First, the status of the professors had changed. No longer novices in seminary education, Alexander and Miller had become experienced pedagogues and had established their credentials as clerical educators. The need to prove themselves no longer existed.

Secondly, the demands of the seminary had changed. In 1812, Alexander easily carried the load of instruction, as he was responsible for only three students; but his responsibilities having grown to eight in the following year, he required the assistance of a second faculty member. Miller was hired to help with the load. By 1825, enrollment reached one hundred, and with this increase of influence the seminary professors began shifting their attention more toward the students under their care than the external adversaries of Presbyterianism. This is indicated by the numerous publications by Miller and Alexander which initially began as introductory lectures to the students or debates inside the walls of Princeton.²

Thirdly, the Presbyterian Church began to demand more of them. This is especially evident in the work of Samuel Miller. He was called by the presbytery to serve on committees, often as chairman. He was also called

upon to investigate special cases and deliver installation sermons. He and Dr. Alexander served on the board for the founding of a theological college for African-American clergy, and they both continued regular preaching at the seminary and surrounding congregations. These years were not exactly quiet.³

MAJOR TRANSITIONS AT PRINCETON FROM 1822 TO 1830

This relative polemical silence might lead historians to bypass much of the twenties in order to arrive at the seemingly more exciting thirties which culminated in the division of the Presbyterian Church between Old and New Schools. To dismiss these years, however, would be a mistake. Although polemic *slowed*, in comparison with the years between 1812 and 1822, it did not *cease*. The polemical engagement of this decade, though substantially less, significantly shaped the character of Princeton's identity in subsequent years. This shaping came primarily through four major developments: the shift of polemical adversaries, the establishment of Princeton's identity, the hiring of Charles Hodge, and the establishment of the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*.

The Shift of Polemical Adversaries

In the early years of the seminary, Dr. Miller engaged in bitter controversy with Unitarians and extreme Episcopalians. Since the turn of the century, Miller had defended Presbyterianism against the charges of High Church Episcopacy. By 1823, after more than twenty years of controversy, Miller no longer saw the fruitfulness of engagement with them. After all, he had already devoted nearly one thousand pages to the topic!

Although the controversy had not ended, we find in his correspondence that he hoped to pass the torch on to others. After Hobartian sympathizers wrote a provocative letter in one of the local papers, Miller encouraged the reverend John Rice to take up the cause. He wrote: "I most sincerely hope you will give it a searching and faithful review. I do not know a subject, by writing on which, in your best manner, you would be likely to do more good."⁴ Although a worthy task, Miller had no intentions of undertaking it himself. This marked a period of silence for him in the Episcopacy controversy.

Miller's polemic with Unitarians also came to a close. After he published *Letters on Unitarianism*, in 1822, Rev. Jared Sparks began correspondence with him to persuade him to engage further in public debate. In response to this request Miller wrote:

It is not my present intention to make any public reply to the "Letters" contained in the volume which you have been so obliging as to send me; not because I have not respect for the talents and learning of the author; nor because I consider the work as destitute of such ingenious and plausible statements as are calculated to lead astray the unwary; but because I cannot perceive that a single important point is set by you in a light demanding further public notice; because the state of my health, and other plans and enterprises forbid me to enter the lists with any of my assailants; and because there is no end to controversy. As I expect, however, in a short time to put a second edition of my "Letters on Unitarianism" to the press, I may be induced by what you have written to extend my discussion, and to fortify my arguments in a few cases; but without a formal reference to any particular work" (LSM, 2:90–91).

It also appears that, other than Sparks, few Unitarians had interest in engaging with Miller. In *the Unitarian Miscellany* of Baltimore, one Unitarian wrote:

We will say to him (Miller), that of all theological writers of the present time in this country, he has the distinction of being the *most bitterly and perseveringly illiberal*; that we know not of what kind of fame he may be ambitious, but if he continue much longer in the course which he is pursuing, *he will be regarded by all the moderate and judicious, and he will go down to posterity, as*

3. Samuel Miller, for example, preached several installation sermons and church dedications such as *A Sermon, delivered in the Middle Church, New Haven, Conn. Sept. 12, 1822, at the ordination of the Rev. Messrs. William Goodell, Willam Richards, and Artemas Bishop, as Evangelists and Missionaries to the Heathen, New Haven, Sept. 12, 1822* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1822); *A Sermon, delivered June seventh, 1823, at the Opening of the New Presbyterian Church, in Arch Street, in the City of Philadelphia, for the Public Worship of God* (Philadelphia: T.T. Ash, 1823); *Holding Fast the Faithful Word: a Sermon, Delivered in the Second Presbyterian Church, in the city of Albany, August 26, 1829; at the Installation of the Reverend William B. Sprague, D.D. as pastor of the said church* (Albany, NY: Packard and Van Benthuyzen, 1829) and *Christian Weapons Not Carnal, but Spiritual: A Sermon, delivered in the Second Presbyterian Church, in the City of Baltimore, October 13, 1826, at the Installation of the Reverend John Breckinridge, as Colleague with the Reverend John Glendy, D.D., in the Pastoral Charge of Said Church* (Princeton: Princeton Press, 1826). These are simply those which were published. To see the massive storehouse of unpublished material by Miller during this time see Princeton Seminary's Miller manuscript collection online at: http://libweb.ptsem.edu/collections/ead/miller_samuel.html#a23. See also: Wayne Sparkman, "Samuel Miller, D. D. (1769–1850) An Annotated Bibliography," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005).

4. Samuel Miller Jr. *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen, and Haffelfinger, 1869), 2:116. Hereafter LSM.

the ARCH-BIGOT OF HIS DAY. If that is a reputation which he covets, he is in a fair way of acquiring it. *And these are our last words to Dr. Miller* (LSM, 2:102, italics and capitalization original).

Miller's polemic with the Unitarians and Episcopalians subsided for a time, but this silence did not extend to Hopkinsians and Revivalists. They posed a much more imminent threat. Due to the influence of Congregationalism on the PCUSA as a result of the Plan of Union of 1801, New England Theology and enthusiasm had made their presence known in the Presbyterian Church. J.W. Alexander described the era as a time when "disputation ran high upon the points mooted by Hopkins and Emmons." This bears considerable importance in reference to the status of the professors at Princeton, as "it was not uncommon to stigmatize those who adhered to the old theology, as behind the age, if not as the enemies of revivals."⁵

This tumultuous time in the Presbyterian Church led to the shifting of Miller and Alexander's focus away from episcopacy and Unitarianism to those threats which, in their minds, put the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in greatest jeopardy. Although their opponents cannot always be explicitly identified in Miller and Alexander's writings, the emphases of Hopkinsianism and revivalism are clearly identifiable as targets of their polemic. One such emphasis was a general opposition to traditional Confessionalism.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PRINCETON IDENTITY: PRINCETON'S CONFSSIONALISM

The General Assembly of 1821 approved John M. Duncan, a minister of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), to the board of directors for Princeton Seminary.⁶ Born to an immigrant Irish family of some repute, Rev. Duncan had been the pastor of the ARP

church of Baltimore since 1812. The faculty of Princeton Seminary had long been familiar with him due to his involvement with the Board of Foreign Missions, a board which, at that time, consisted of several Presbyterian denominations as well as Congregationalists. It existed as a cooperative effort to promote foreign and domestic missions. This presented no problems during the earliest years of the seminary, but by the mid-1820s a growing level of suspicion had developed in regard to this association due to the increased influence of New Divinity on the board and its missionaries (LSM, 2:114).

Although evidence is scanty, it is possible that Duncan himself had fallen under New Divinity sympathies. Yet as of 1821, Princeton's board of directors possessed no reason to be suspicious of his theology or practice. According to his peers, Duncan was "one of the most eloquent and popular divines of the Presbyterian Church, for views of doctrines and church government."⁷ When he finally subscribed to a formula of the confession and received admittance to the board of directors in 1823, no reason existed for distrust. All this changed within the first year of Duncan's service.

Having become a member of Princeton's board of directors, the seminary's faculty invited Duncan to address the students during the inaugural Spring Semester Lecture. Duncan presented a paper on May 17, 1824 entitled *A Plea for Ministerial Liberty*.⁸ In this lecture, Duncan began with an exposition of 1 Corinthians 9:16–17 in which he proposed that the call to gospel ministry is a matter of individual conscience. This in itself was hardly controversial; yet in his applications he struck a nerve with the faculty of Princeton Seminary.⁹

Having completed his exposition, Duncan offered a few general propositions that he desired the students to appropriate from the central theme of the passage. He first directed them to contemplate the fact that ministers of the gospel are placed under the law of Christ and, secondly, that as a personal matter the preacher must pay attention to his own conscience. If the man finds that in his conscience he has been called of God, "O how delightful then the task" (Duncan, *A Plea*, 40). Having been confirmed in his calling, the minister can tenderly serve his people knowing that the Lord alone is his judge and motivation for attending to this calling properly.

In light of these propositions, Duncan arrived at his most controversial assertion, writing:

Our fifth general proposition is, that the minister of the gospel should consider his Bible as the *only document*, which is, or can be, commensurate with his commission;

5. James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1854), 424–25. Hereafter LOA.

6. *Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1821), 121.

7. Associate Synod of North America, *The Religious Monitor and Evangelical Repository* (Albany, NY: Chauncey Webster, 1834–35), 327.

8. John M. Duncan, *A Plea for Ministerial Liberty* (Baltimore: Cushing & Jewett, 1824).

9. Duncan's account of these details surrounding his invitation to Princeton and his formula of subscription are recounted in the introduction to *Remarks on the Rise, Usefulness, and Unlawfulness of Creed and Confessions in the Church of Christ* (Baltimore: Cushing & Jewett, 1825), vii–xxviii.

and should study it, believingly, and prayerfully, as the only method by which he can acquire true ministerial literature (Duncan, *A Plea*, 57, italics mine).

This statement prompted little offense; yet upon further explanation of his meaning, Duncan twisted the knife which he had most certainly plunged in the bosom of the Princetonians.

We all know that every age has its own classification of what it apprehends to be scriptural truths ... All our religious sects have their own classifications of what they suppose to be scriptural doctrines. The matters which now startle Christians and Christian ministers into activity, and thrill every nerve of the ecclesiastical body, are Calvinism, Arminianism, Hopkinsianism, and other such like gorgeous fragments of Christ's spiritual kingdom ... To me it is of the purest astonishment to hear Christian ministers talk so untenderly about the BIBLE, and speak so affectionately and feelingly about their own STANDARDS.—Standards, the meaning of which they have never yet settled, and about which there has been incessant controversy, both in public and private. They surely can never have fairly thought out what they say, or suffered themselves to apprehend the immense difference between the word of God and the doctrines of men, simply as exercising an efficient 'control over consciences and lives of mankind' (Duncan, *A Plea*, 60–61, 63–64).

Dr. Alexander and Dr. Miller did not receive these comments favorably. Two months later, Dr. Miller addressed the student body with his inaugural lecture for the summer semester entitled *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions*.¹⁰

Although this title appeared on the published edition, Miller's lecture bore the fuller title "The Importance of Creeds and Confessions for Maintaining Unity and Purity of the Visible Church." This gives particular insight into the substance of the lecture. Miller began by explaining what is meant by a creed or confession. It is

an exhibition in human language of those great doctrines which are believed by the framers of it to be taught in the Holy Scriptures; and which are drawn out in regular order, for the purpose of ascertaining how far those who wish to unite in church fellowship are really agreed in the fundamental principles of Christianity (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 8).

He then presented seven evidences from scripture,

history, and reason which demonstrated the usefulness of creeds and confessions in maintaining purity and unity. He wrote, "Without a Creed explicitly adopted, it is not easy to see how the ministers and members of any particular church and more especially a large denomination of Christians, can maintain unity among themselves." According to Paul, we are to "stand fast in one spirit with one mind." This being the command of God, "[h]ow," Miller asked, "can any walk together unless they be agreed?" Certainly, Calvinists, Arminians, Pelagians, Arians, and Socinians cannot worship, pray, and teach together knowingly in the same body with a clear conscience (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 9).

He argued that it is not enough to claim a belief in the inspiration of Scripture, for all heresies do the same. The real question is how one *understands* the teaching of the Bible. Miller contended that the requirement for peace and unity is something *recorded*, something *publicly known* and "capable of being referred to when most needed; which not merely this or that private member supposes to have been received; but to which the church *as such* has agreed to adhere, as a bond of union" (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 14–15).

Miller then proceeded with a second use of a creed: to preserve the truth of the scriptures. At all times, Christians are required to guard the truth and to contend for it. If this be the case, "Does this not imply taking effectual measures to distinguish between truth and error?" He continued, "Before the church, as such, can detect heretics, and cast them out from her bosom ... her governors and members must be agreed what is truth" (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 15–17).

Thirdly, the adoption of a creed is a gift to other churches and Christians. How can a person know whether or not he can honestly join with a particular church if he cannot find a statement of the church's beliefs? The publication of a creed expounds what a particular body of believers holds to be truth. This, said Miller, is a charitable act.

Fourthly, creeds are "friendly to the study of Christian doctrine, and of course, to the prevalence of Christian knowledge" (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 22). Miller argued that the abandonment of a creed naturally leads to indifference toward Christian doctrine.

The fact is, when men love gospel truth well enough to

10. Samuel Miller, *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions: an Introductory Lecture, delivered at the Opening of the Summer Session of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, July 2, 1824* (Princeton: D.A. Borrenstein, 1824). Hereafter Miller, *Utility of Creeds*.

study it with care, they will soon learn to estimate its value; and when they learn to estimate its value, they will soon be disposed to “contend for it,” against its enemies, who are numerous in every age; and this will inevitably lead them to adopt and defend that “form of sound words” which they think they find in sacred scriptures. On the other hand, let any man imbibe the notion that Creeds and Confessions are unscriptural, and of course unlawful, and he will naturally and speedily pass to the confusion, the abandonment of the study of doctrine, or, at least, the zealous and diligent study of it. Thus it is, that laying aside all Creeds, naturally tends to making professing Christians indifferent to the study of Christian truth (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 23).

Following this argument, Miller demonstrated that “experience of all ages has found them indispensably necessary.” He claimed that “with one accord, [the church] formed their creeds and confessions, which served, at once, as a plea for the truth, and a barrier against heresy.” He also contended that, more often than not, those who opposed creeds and confessions normally held “corrupt opinions” (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 25, 31).

In his final argument for the usefulness of creeds, he charged their opponents with inconsistency. Although they claimed to be free of creeds, they themselves employed them.

Did anyone ever hear of a Unitarian congregation engaging as their pastor a preacher of *Calvinism*, knowing him to be such? But why not, on the principle adopted, or at least, *professed* by Unitarians? The Calvinist surely comes with his *Bible* in his hand, and professes to believe it as cordially as they. Why is not *that enough*? Yet we know that, in fact, it is *not enough* for these advocates of unbounded liberality. Before they will consent to receive him as their spiritual guide, they must be *explicitly informed*, HOW HE INTERPRETS THE BIBLE; in other words, WHAT IS HIS PARTICULAR CREED; whether it is substantially the same with their own or not; and if they are not satisfied that *this is the case*, all other professions and protestations will be in vain. He will be inexorably rejected. Here then, we have in all its extent, the *principle* of demanding SUBSCRIPTION TO A CREED; and a principle carried out into practice and rigorously as ever it was by the most high-tone advocate of orthodoxy (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 34 italics and capitalization original).

Having concluded his arguments on the usefulness

of creeds, Miller addressed a few principal objections. Miller addressed the first objection, that “forming a creed and requiring subscription, is superseding the Bible and making a human composition instead of it a standard of faith” (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 37), by claiming that the accusation is based on a misunderstanding. The authority of a creed is contingent upon its fidelity to the scriptures. The creed simply summarizes how a man or church understands the Bible. However, the objection continues, “Where is the need of any definitive declaration of what we understand the scriptures to teach? Can we make them plainer than their author has done?” Miller argued that though the essential teachings of the scriptures are perspicuous, people frequently misinterpret the scriptures. “Can it be wrong, then, for a pious and orthodox man ... or church ... to exhibit, and endeavour to recommend to others, their mode of interpreting the sacred volume?” (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 39–40).

But then, Miller continued, the opposition might ensue thus: “What *right* has any man, or set of men to interpose their authority, and undertake to deal out the sense of scripture for others? Is it not both impious in itself, and an improper assumption over the minds of our fellow men?” (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 40). Miller claimed that this statement demands too much and therefore must be abandoned. If this logic were adopted all preaching, teaching, and writing on scripture should be condemned as attempts to improve upon it. Such reasoning would restrict the preacher to repeating the very words of Scripture, and only in the way God originally spoke them in their original languages. Such absurd arguments, Miller contended, must be rejected.

A second major objection to which Miller responded is the accusation that creeds interfere with the rights of the conscience, which “naturally lead[s] to oppression.” Miller assented that this might be the case if men were compelled to subscribe by the state or a state church. Such, however, cannot be the case in America. For that matter, he contended, a church has never forced a man to subscribe to a creed; rather, the individual simply declares “as a matter of fact, whether he *does* possess that belief, which, from his voluntary application to be received into Christian fellowship with that church, he may be fairly presume to possess” (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 50).

Objectors might continue, states Miller: “What about disrobing a man in the ministry who has out of clear conscience expressed his interpretation of the scriptures—is it not oppression to refuse to let him preach any longer because he differs from the church’s standards?” Miller replied:

It is only practically saying—‘you can no longer, consistently with our views, either of obedience to Christ, or of Christian edification, be a minister or a member with us. You may be as happy and as useful as you can in any other connection; but we must take away that authority and those privileges which we once gave you, and of which your further exercise among us would be subversive of those principles which we are solemnly pledged to each other to support’ (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 51–52).

Third, Miller addressed the objection that creeds prohibit the free inquiry of subscribing ministers. He stated that a person entering the ministry should already be decided on leading doctrines of Scripture, since a man who wavers on fundamental doctrines has no business entering into the ministry. A man must not pursue such a post without having studied basic statements of the Christian faith contained in that body’s creed and decided whether or not he assents to them.

Miller further addressed this issue in his “practical inferences,” stating that a man should be able to articulate his views, honestly and fully, allowing the governing body to review it and ensure that they can harmoniously receive his views into their fellowship. If the manner in which he understands the scriptures changes in a significant degree, he must “make [this] known and peaceably withdraw and join another branch of the visible church with which he can walk harmoniously” (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 71, 75).

Lastly, Miller responded to the charge that creeds fail to fulfill the purpose for which they were intended, and that, rather than peace and unity, they produce discord and strife. Miller explained first, that history refutes these assertions, and secondly, that the same thing could be said about the Bible. “Has the Bible banished dissension and discord from the Church? No one will pretend that it has. Yet why not? Surely not on account of any error or defect in itself.” Discord is not indicative of a deficient Bible or creed but rather of human sinfulness (Miller, *Utility of Creeds*, 53, 63).

In 1825, Duncan responded to Miller’s lecture with a work entitled *Remarks on the Rise, Use and Unlawfulness of Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Church of God*.¹¹ Although Miller refused to address Duncan directly, in 1826 he indirectly responded in a publication entitled *A Letter to a Gentleman of Baltimore, in Reference to the Case of the Rev. Mr. Duncan*.¹² In this piece, Miller essentially reformulated his inaugural lecture while also including a few remarks as to why he would not respond directly to Duncan. Miller stated that his

health, professional commitments, and “aversion to controversy,” which “increases with age,” prohibited a public response (Miller, *A Letter*, 4–5). Determining little promise of edification, Miller declined further interaction with him. Unwilling to allow Miller the final word, Duncan published *A Reply to Dr. Miller’s Letter to a Gentleman of Baltimore*.¹³ Since Miller did not respond to this work, we will cease our review of the literature at this point.

These exchanges were certainly not inconsequential—especially for Duncan. In 1826, Duncan was dismissed from the Presbytery of Philadelphia for disagreement with the Presbyterian Confession. Following this, Duncan appealed to the care of the Presbytery of Baltimore by submitting to regular examinations, with the same result. Having been twice dismissed from Presbyterian fellowship, Duncan retreated altogether from the care of the Presbyterian Church and continued to pastor independently. Following these events, a minority of his church filed legal suit on behalf of the ARP to retain church facilities for the denomination from which he had seceded. Needless to say, Duncan did not engage in controversy with Dr. Miller without cost to himself.¹⁴

Dr. Alexander shared Dr. Miller’s understanding of creeds and confessions. However, to discover such harmony in his writings proves difficult. During this time period, 1822–1830, the only writing that we have on the subject in Alexander’s corpus is his composition on *Suggestions in Vindication of Sunday-Schools*.¹⁵ In that work, Alexander proposed a basic structure to adolescent instruction which all evangelical churches might usefully employ. He suggested that classes begin at the earliest stages. Of most significant importance in this training is catechetical instruction. He claimed: “these children should be furnished with a simple, historical catechism, containing questions and answers; and also plain moral precepts with a reference to the retributions of eternity.” Following training on basic evangelical doctrines, the

11. John M. Duncan, *Remarks on the Rise, Usefulness, and Unlawfulness of Creed and Confessions in the Church of Christ* (Baltimore: Cushing & Jewett, 1825).

12. Samuel Miller, *A Letter to a Gentleman of Baltimore, in Reference to the Case of the Rev. Mr. Duncan* (Princeton: Princeton Press, 1827). Hereafter Miller, *A Letter*.

13. John M. Duncan, *A Reply to Dr. Miller’s Letter to a Gentleman of Baltimore* (Baltimore: Cushing & Jewett, 1827).

14. George Washington Howard, *History of Baltimore City and County, From the Earliest Period to the Present Day* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), 551.

15. Archibald Alexander, *Suggestions in Vindication of Sunday-Schools, but More Especially for the Improvement of Sunday-School Books and the Enlargement of the Plan of Instruction* (Princeton, 1829). Hereafter Alexander, *Suggestions*.

student should then “learn the catechism of the church to which they belong, with such explanatory lectures, or exposition, as might be provided” (Alexander, *Suggestions*, 26).

Alexander’s demonstration of the practical usefulness of a confession is made more certain in a work published nearly thirty years earlier, *The Way of Salvation Familiarly Explained*. In that work he describes a hypothetical conversation of a father with his sons. These sons begin asking their father about theology, to which he responds, “what does your Catechism say?” The father then proceeds to cover the fundamentals of evangelical theology with the aid of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. After one of the sons discovers the usefulness of the *Shorter Catechism*, the Father says to him:

I hope you will hereafter be more attentive to commit the Catechism perfectly to memory, and also some few texts of scripture which are annexed to each question to prove the doctrine; for if the Catechism did not teach according to the Holy Scriptures, it would be of no authority. It was intended to contain a short summary of what is in the Bible.¹⁶

These statements demonstrate assent to Dr. Miller’s understanding of the authority of the creeds as outlined in his work. And like Miller, Alexander made certain that the creed should be understood as inferior to the Bible. In the dialogue, one son questions the need for the scriptures when possessing such a helpful document such as the Confession, to which his Father sharply responds: “We never compare any human composition with the Bible, the excellence of this Catechism is, that it embodies, in a short space, the most important doctrines and duties inculcated in the Bible” (Alexander, *The Way*, 46). The Catechism cannot take the place of the Bible.

In these two works, basic harmony between the two Princeton professors is established. The topic which Dr. Miller treated at length in the *Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions* received full endorsement from

his colleague. There can be little doubt that the polemical exchange between Miller and Duncan resulted in the clarification of Old Princeton’s understanding of the nature of creeds, confessions, and subscription. Princeton was a *confessional* seminary. Its professors had committed themselves to the standards and to teaching them in accordance with their vows in the Plan of the Seminary *ex animo*.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PRINCETON IDENTITY: PRINCETON’S VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

In a recent article, Stephen R. Holmes claimed that the doctrine of inerrancy was a common locus at Princeton from Alexander to Machen. However, he asserted, this doctrine did not receive a place of prominence until a defensive Princeton exalted it during the second half of the nineteenth century. He wrote:

In this reactionary defence of old orthodoxy, however, inevitably certain themes, *relatively minor* in the earlier position, assume a new importance. Princeton’s Old Testament scholars devoted themselves between 1850 and 1930 to defending the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch; her theologians gave themselves to inerrancy. *Alexander would have assumed both positions, but emphasized neither*. Warfield’s great legacy was the elevation of plenary verbal inspiration resulting in inerrancy to the primary position in the doctrine of scripture. It is this decision that has been broadly accepted by North American Evangelicalism in recent years, as evidenced by the various symbolic statements, such as that of ETS, which confess only the inerrancy of Scripture (italics added).¹⁷

In recent years, as this article suggests, it has been fashionable to treat inerrancy, as well as Princeton’s more formalized doctrine of Scripture, as a late innovation—a product of the Hodges and Warfield. But, as we will see, the assertion that “Alexander would have assumed” these positions “but emphasized neither,” expresses a severe lack of familiarity with Alexander’s writings.

In 1823, Ashbel Green invited Dr. Alexander to preach to a group of rationalists and skeptics who had filled the halls of the College of New Jersey. Alexander obliged the invitation and presented what would be published in 1825, entitled *A Brief Outline of the Evidences of the Christian Religion*,¹⁸ followed by *the Canon of the Old and New Testaments; or the Bible Complete without the Apocrypha and Unwritten Traditions*.¹⁹ In these two works, Alexander defended the lack of errors of any kind in scripture (i.e. inerrancy) and Mosaic authorship; the

16. Archibald Alexander, *The Way of Salvation Familiarly Explained* (Philadelphia: the Presbyterian Board of Education, 1800), 19. Hereafter Alexander, *The Way*.

17. Stephen R. Holmes, “Evangelical Doctrines of Scripture in Transatlantic Perspective,” *Evangelical Quarterly* (2009): 38–63.

18. Archibald Alexander, *A Brief Outline of the Evidences of the Christian Religion* (Princeton: D.A. Borrenstein, 1825). Hereafter Alexander, *Evidences*.

19. Archibald Alexander, *The Canon of the Old and New Testaments Ascertained; or the Bible Completed Without the Apocrypha & Unwritten Traditions* (Princeton: D.A. Borrenstein, 1826). Hereafter Alexander, *Canon*.

two notions which Holmes claimed did not gain emphasis until the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁰

In *The Evidences*, Alexander attempted to persuade the young students of the limitations of reason, the trustworthiness of the scriptures, and the superiority of Christianity to other religions. The primary reason for this superiority, according to Alexander, consisted in the writings of the Old and New Testament whose inspiration can be proven by external and internal evidences. Alexander's understanding of this inspiration can be summarized in the following statement:

No man, or set of men, ever had sufficient talents and knowledge to forge such a book as the Bible. It evidently transcends all human effort. It has upon its face, the impress of divinity. It shines with a light, which from its clearness and its splendour, show itself to be celestial. It possesses the energy and penetrating influence, which bespeak the omnipotence of its Author. It has the effect of enlightening, elevating, purifying, directing, and comforting all those who cordially receive it. Surely then, it is THE WORD OF GOD, and we will hold it fast as the best blessing which God has vouchsafed to man (Alexander, *Evidences*, 241–242).

Given this firm commitment, a common challenge which Alexander felt must be addressed was the presence of supposed errors. For college students living in the wake of the skepticism of David Hume, inspiration and inerrancy were precluded by incredulity regarding the presence of miracles and prophecies in the Bible. In response to this, Alexander spent much time challenging Hume by commending evidences of the *credibility* of the New Testament witnesses and the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. As an extension of God's very nature, his word resembles the trustworthiness that he himself possesses. Alexander wrote: "The truth ... is, that everything which proceeds from God, whatever difficulties or obscurities accompany it, will contain and exhibit the impress of his character" (Alexander, *Evidences*, 193). And this "truthfulness" extends not just to the theological character or the central themes of the scripture but even to details. "In the New Testament, there are numerous references to rivers, mountains, seas, cities, and countries, which none but a person well acquainted with the geography of Judea and the neighboring countries, could have made without falling into innumerable errors" (Alexander, *Evidences*, 86–87).

This statement recognizes the fluidity of inspiration; it is not a mechanical process in which God manipulates and violates the freedom of the writer; but rather God

employs his experiences, circumstances, and nationality, etc. The author's inspired writings, are protected from error, which otherwise would be impossible to avoid. Alexander did, however, recognize the occurrence of scribal errors in the New Testament documents.

There are, it is true, small discrepancies, which have occurred through ignorance or carelessness of transcribers; but not more than might naturally be expected. There is no ancient book which has come down to us so entire as the Scriptures, and which is accompanied by so many means of correcting an erroneous reading, where it has occurred (Alexander, *Evidences*, 88–89).

He continued the same line of reasoning in the *Canon of Scripture Ascertained*. In this work, Alexander argued that Jesus himself acknowledged the inspiration and the infallibility of the Old Testament Scriptures by claiming that they "could not be broken," and, therefore, reasoned Alexander, supposed errors must be attributed to the reader's ignorance of the scriptures, never with "the *unerring word of God*" (Alexander, *Canon*, 30 italics added). The New Testament, written and collected by the apostolic church, is also inerrant. He concluded:

We have, therefore, an important point established with the utmost certainty, that the volume of Scripture which existed in the time of Christ and his apostles, was uncorrupted, and was esteemed by them an inspired and infallible rule (Alexander, *Canon*, 31).

Alexander claimed that this had been acknowledged from the time of the Fathers throughout the ages of history of the undefiled church (Alexander, *Canon*, 347). In the remainder of the book, Alexander proceeded to define the limits of the canon of scripture in which Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch played a vital role. In no uncertain terms, Alexander affirmed repeatedly that these books belong essentially to the pen of Moses.

Thus it must be understood that the plenary inspiration and the absence of errors in the scriptures, as well as the validation of these positions based on Mosaic authorship, were not late innovations of Princeton but were instead foundational to the Princeton theology. Alexander, the first professor of Princeton Seminary, clearly articulated the position of the seminary from its

20. We acknowledge that "inerrancy" had not yet become common nomenclature; nevertheless, the teaching of the absence of errors in scripture was an understood position of the Princetonians as suggested by synonymous terms and phrases that they regularly employed such as "unerring" or "without error" and infallible.

earliest days. This exaltation of scripture had already played a vital role in Princeton's polemic (e.g., in Miller's refutation of Unitarian heresies) and would continue to do so in the future. The doctrines that the Hodges and Warfield taught were simply formulations and elaborations of what they had inherited from their predecessors.

THE HIRING OF CHARLES HODGE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIBLICAL REPERTORY

The most significant developments at Princeton Seminary during the years 1822–1830 were the hiring of Charles Hodge as Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature and the birth of *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*. But to understand Hodge the polemicist, one must begin with his childhood and educational development.

On December 28, 1797, Hugh and Mary Hodge welcomed a son, Charles, to their family. A proud descendant of French Huguenots and Irish Presbyterians, Charles boasted in his autobiography: "I wish ... that those who come after me should know that their ancestors were kindred Presbyterians and patriots."²¹ After his father died of yellow fever in 1798, his mother tirelessly devoted herself to rearing the child in the Presbyterian fashion. Ashbel Green, the pastor of the Hodge's Philadelphia Presbyterian church, baptized Charles as an infant, and at an early age Charles underwent constant drilling by his mother and Green in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. Of these early years he wrote, "There has never been anything remarkable in my religious experience, unless it be that it began very early" (LCH, 13). These details demonstrate Hodge's decidedly Presbyterian and confessional background.

During his early years of education, Charles went through various tutors and instructors before ultimately attending boarding school with his brother Hugh, Jr. in 1810. In 1812, both Charles and Hugh moved to Princeton to begin collegiate education, during which Charles first came under the influence of Archibald Alexander. On August 12, 1812, Charles was present for the inauguration of Dr. Alexander and the opening of the seminary. He recorded in his journal: "I can well remember, then a boy of fourteen, lying at length on the rail of the gallery listening to the doctor's inaugural address and watching the ceremony of investiture." Not long after the inaugural celebration, Alexander walked into a

classroom and saw Hodge "stammering over a verse in the Greek Testament." He asked Hodge the derivation of the word *piſtis* but Hodge and his professor were embarrassed by Charles' inability to do so. Although this episode might seem trivial, Hodge later wrote that "this occurrence was the first thread of the cord which bound me to Dr. Alexander—a cord never broken" (LCH, 18).

In 1815, a revival in the town of Princeton broke out, bringing Hodge under conviction and prompting him, for the first time, to publicly profess his faith. In his words, "he enlisted in the army of King Jesus." This is significant, as Hodge would become a chief adversary to extravagances of the revivals of the mid-nineteenth century. Hodge did not regard these revivals as an outsider but as one intimately influenced by them, yet not without suspicion. Although Hodge favored them less than Alexander and Miller, they all supported a notion of *true* revival in the Edwardsian fashion; always allowing time to "test the spirits."

Another major influence on Hodge during his student years was his early exposure to the writings of Francis Turretin. In his autobiography Hodge wrote, "the best way to make a logician is to study Euclid, or, as any student of Princeton Seminary would say, set him to study Turretin" (LCH, 24). There can be little surprise that the devoted student of Turretin, the great polemicist, would himself become a polemicist. Hodge, as a seminary professor, employed Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* as a theological textbook until the publication of his own *Systematic Theology* in 1872.²²

After taking a year off due to poor health, Hodge returned to Princeton in 1817 to begin seminary education. Having devoted himself to the ministry, Hodge came under the paternal wing of Dr. Alexander, having become to him "more as a beloved son than even as a cherished pupil" (LOA, 381). That summer, Alexander took Hodge on his preaching tour and exposed him to the religious climate of Virginia. These travels proved significant for Hodge and his relationship with Alexander, who he claimed influenced him more than any other person. This relationship, however, was not one-sided (LCH, 47).

As Hodge approached graduation in 1819, Alexander had plans for him. After graduation, Alexander wanted Hodge to return home to Philadelphia and begin studying Hebrew with professor Dr. Joseph Banks, whom Hodge dubbed "one of the most eminent Hebrew scholars at that day in America" (LCH, 68). Hebrew scholarship in America was in its early stages, and Alexander saw the need for the development of a more sophisticated language department for the seminary. His blueprint included Hodge, whom he wished to return

21. A.A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge: Professor in the Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 5. Hereafter LCH.

22. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 3 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1873).

to Princeton, following this year of study, as a teacher's assistant and in time as professor of biblical languages. Although hesitant at first, Hodge ultimately agreed to Alexander's proposal (LCH, 46–56).

On his return home, Hodge immediately devoted himself to his studies and to the ministry. Still believing that he had been called to the preaching office, he pursued the appropriate process and Philadelphia Presbytery licensed him to preach on October 21, 1819. Shortly thereafter he received assignment for stated supply in two mission churches. But in June of 1820, he returned to the seminary as an assistant to Dr. Alexander. He continued to preach after being received as a licentiate of Brunswick Presbytery and served as stated supply for a half year in Georgetown and then at Trenton. Although an able preacher, something within him prevented him from accepting a call to a full-time pastorate. These early ministry experiences ultimately thrust him toward scholarship, where he felt better equipped.

By 1822, Hodge had once and for all put his hand to scholarship and, under the encouragement of Dr. Alexander, presented "A Dissertation on the Importance of Biblical Literature." This dissertation is a reflection of the seminary's polemical influence upon Hodge. It indicates that the seminary was not merely concerned with the theological training of its students, but it was determined to train Reformed *polemicists*. This early work foreshadows the reputation Hodge would earn as *the Princeton polemicist*.²³

*A Dissertation on the Importance
of Biblical Literature*

The title of Hodge's work summarizes the aim of his paper: to provoke the students of Princeton toward enthusiastic study of biblical literature. But this work is significant for our purposes for the early glimpse of his polemic which would in time become a well-honed craft.

After a survey of the history of biblical criticism from Origen to the present day, Hodge turned his attention to the need and demands of biblical interpretation. Prior to that discussion he revealed his foundational commitment to scripture:

Before proceeding to say anything on *Interpretation*, I would mention two or three subjects, on which our minds should be previously made up vis. the Canonical authority, the Genuineness, and the Inspiration, of the Sacred Scriptures.²⁴

According to Hodge, if one is to interpret scripture

properly, one must know the scope of that sacred writ—the books that properly belong to the Bible. Hodge then explained that this included the consideration of the *genuineness* (i.e. divine authenticity) of each of the canonical writings. Those two subjects go hand in hand; the second is "little more than an extension of the application of the principles of Sacred Criticism, ascending from the investigation of the genuineness of particular passages, to the genuineness of entire books" (Hodge, *Dissertation*, 23).

The last article of a fundamental nature is the notion of the *plenary inspiration of scripture*. He claimed that our understanding of the authorship of scripture radically affects the manner in which we read the scriptures—we are to read them with reverence as the product of a divine author for their origin exerts a "considerable influence on the principles by which they are interpreted." Although God is the ultimate author of the scriptures, their human authorship must not be denied. Because the authors themselves were fully human, we must understand their cultures, languages, and customs in order to understand them for our own time. In other words, God inspired men to write the contents of scripture, but not in a way that violated the personality of the human author. Thus, Hodge affirmed the Princeton view of scripture as articulated by his predecessors (Hodge, *Dissertation*, 23–25).

A second aspect of importance for our study of Hodge's development as a polemicist is his *commitment to polemic*. Toward the end of this work, Hodge provided one more, most important reason for devotion to the study of biblical literature—"the present state and future prospects of our country" (Hodge, *Dissertation*, 39). He described at length the contemporary theological climate which the seminary student must be prepared to engage:

The state of religious opinion in our country, imperiously calls for our attention on this subject. The advocates of a system which we all consider as *fatally erroneous*, are exerting an influence for its advancement, which it well becomes us to consider how we may counteract. Their plans are well laid and extensive: some of the most important fountains of literature are already in their hands. Wherever we turn our eyes, we see clear indications that

23. From its earliest days, Princeton received students from all denominational backgrounds, but there can be little doubt that their primary concern was for the Presbyterian Church as a seminary of that denomination.

24. Charles Hodge, *A Dissertation on the Importance of Biblical Literature* (Princeton, 1822), 23. Hereafter: Hodge, *Dissertation*.

a serious struggle is at hand. Happily this struggle is to be made on Bible ground. The authority of the Bible has not been disclaimed. We are called upon therefore, in preparing for this great conflict, which is probably to be the most momentous, that truth and piety have ever yet endured ... This battle is not to be with an individual, nor in a day, but constantly and everywhere. Our opponents are wise and learned, and they have devoted themselves particularly to this subject. If we expect, therefore, to acquit ourselves to God and his church, if we intend to discharge the solemn obligation of handing down to the generations which follow, the truth, as we received it from our Fathers, we must prepare to meet them upon equal terms (Hodge, *Dissertation*, 41–42 italics added).

Although Hodge does not name these “adversaries,” they are most likely the endorsers of the New Divinity. That theological movement challenged the standards of Presbyterian orthodoxy while still maintaining the scriptures to be the authority of the church’s faith and practice. This theology found its greatest expression at Yale and also at Andover; both institutions had profound influence on Presbyterianism due to the Plan of Union. Hodge’s allusions seem more consistent with these adversaries than any others that posed a significant threat to the Presbyterian Church at the time. More importantly, however, we find here a clear commitment in Hodge to polemic. The two original professors of Princeton, Miller and Alexander, had achieved the goal for which they set out in establishing the seminary—the making of polemicists. Hodge is the greatest testament to this success.

A third element important to the development of Hodge as a polemicist was his recognition of the need for academic sophistication. In order to meet the challenge of the adversaries of biblical literature, one must himself be well-versed in the discipline; he wrote, “Shall error, and in its train destruction, triumph over truth and salvation, through the ignorance of truth’s defenders?” (Hodge, *Dissertation*, 42). The battle to be fought was an intellectual war; therefore, those engaging in the debates must contend with the best scholars in the field. Although he pointed to them as an example of how *not* to approach biblical literature, he nonetheless implied that the Germans were the leading scholars in the

field; as a result, biblical scholars must go through Europe (Hodge, *Dissertation*, 45–49). It seems that Hodge bought his own argument and, within a short period, devoted himself to what he commended.

The European Tour

Not long after the publication of his paper, the General Assembly elected Hodge Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature. He quickly settled into his role at Princeton and within a couple of years discovered time enough to found the *Biblical Repertory*. Yet, Hodge’s early years of teaching, rather than affirming his gifts and education, cultivated feelings of inadequacy. Although Miller and Alexander disagreed with his evaluation, Hodge determined that further study was imperative. He then began planning a two year tour of European universities, especially those in Germany, believing them to be the center of biblical literary criticism. Hodge ultimately persuaded the faculty, board of directors, and General Assembly; and on November 1, 1825, he arrived in Paris, where he began studying French, Arabic and Syriac (LCH, 92–105).

Although he apparently enjoyed his studies in France, Hodge was more interested in Germany. On February 15, 1826, Hodge set out for Halle. Upon arrival, he began studying Hebrew with the world’s leading scholar, H.F. Wilhelm Gesenius (1786–1842), whose *Hebrew Grammar*, after twenty-eight editions, continues to be used today.²⁵ He also developed lifelong friendships with August Tholuck (1799–1877) and August Neander (1789–1850), who both grew to be enormous figures in theology and church history.²⁶ These friendships proved to be significant, as these men familiarized Hodge with the German theology and criticisms of the day. This would prove invaluable to Hodge during his tenure as editor of the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*.

Perhaps the most significant impact that the European tour had on Hodge was an invigorated commitment to the divine origin of the scriptures. During this time, he became deeply impressed by the animosity of Europeans toward the scriptures. In May of 1826, Tholuck told Hodge that until the age of 15, he knew only one person who believed in the Bible; and that without exception all of his teachers and pastors were of the “rationalistic opinion and decidedly deists” (LCH, 136). Tholuck also told him the impressionable story of Professor Hengstenberg in Berlin.

Hengstenberg began as a rationalist who was challenged by some Moravian Brethren to begin a simple study of the Bible. As the young professor devoted himself to this challenge, he emerged from it “at last

25. See Christo H.J. van der Merwe, Jack A. Naude and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Cornwall: Sheffield Academic Press, 2006), 19.

26. For a very brief introduction see James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1995), 16–20.

... a firm and practical believer in the great truths of the Gospel." Now as professor of Oriental languages in Berlin, he had grown "exceedingly bold," and in one of his early lectures proclaimed to his students, "It matters not whether we make a god out of stone, or out of our own understanding, it is still a false god; there is but one living God, the God of the Bible." His students responded with "hissing and scraping," which failed to intimidate the new convert. This account left a decided impression upon Hodge (LCH, 133–134).

In a journal entry dated December 31, 1827, Hodge recounted a conversation with Tholuck and Neander about the doctrine of inspiration, which Hodge had apparently attempted to impress upon his German friends. He recorded that Neander was

disposed to recognize the infallibility of the Apostles in all doctrinal points, but not in their manner of proving them. Thus it was certain that Christ was God, but all Paul's arguments in support of the doctrine from the Old Testament are not of force, as in the first chapter of Hebrews (LCH, 164).

The conversation continued with a discussion of the Reformed understanding of predestination, regarding which Tholuck and Neander continued to disagree with their American brother. It is certain that Hodge differed from them on these accounts and probably demonstrated his frustration with their opinions, as indicated by Hodge's record of Neander's response at the close of the conversation:

In coming away, Neander shook me very affectionately by the hand, and said to Tholuck, "Tell our friend Hodge, that though we dispute with him, we belong to the same Lord, and are in one heart" (LCH, 164).

Perhaps convicted by his intemperance, Hodge, following the record of this episode, closed the journal entry thus: "Read at evening prayer with Monod the 90th Psalm. So closed another year of sins and mercies" (LCH, 165). However inhospitable he may have been, there can be little doubt that Hodge's European tour confirmed for him the Princetonian position on scripture.

Although some scholars have doubted it, in our judgment Hodge's European tour significantly influenced the young professor.²⁷ This is indicated by the enormous amount of journal entries preserved by his son, A.A. Hodge, in the biography of his father. But this European experience, rather than altering his original theological commitments, only affirmed that which he had learned

from his Princeton forebears. The German approach to the Bible and theology served as an intellectual foil to Hodge, rather than effecting a significant paradigm shift in his thinking. We find David Calhoun's assessment persuasive: "Hodge was home. He was broadened culturally and enriched intellectually but, as was soon clear, unmoved theologically."²⁸

The Introductory Lecture of 1828

That Hodge had been "unmoved theologically" finds confirmation in his inaugural lecture at the beginning of the 1828 school year.²⁹ In this address, Hodge reflected upon a few lessons that he learned in Europe that might enrich American students. In these reflections, we find a Hodge who had not distanced himself from the Princeton Theology but rather aligned himself with it more closely in regard to the Bible, tradition, and piety.

We first consider his thoughts on tradition, as revealed in this lecture. Following reflection on the importance of civil and religious liberty, Hodge considered the "training of youth in knowledge and religion." He asked the question, "whether something more might not be done to secure their indoctrination of our faith and discipline, and to destroy the indefinite relation in which they now grow up, to the church?" (Hodge, *Introductory Lecture*, 10). Hodge claimed that the German catechetical practice superseded that of America. There can be little doubt here that Hodge is referring to "indoctrination" to the Standards of the Presbyterian Church, the Westminster Catechisms.

Hodge also claimed that true piety is always the result of right doctrine. If men are right in their understanding, they will live in accordance with that. For instance, he claimed that in Germany those whom he found to be truly pious always embraced the essential doctrines of Christianity, namely, the depravity of man, the holiness of God, the atoning work of Christ, etc. This, for Hodge, was a helpful way to test theological opinions. He recommended that theological innovators

take them to the aged children of God, who have spent

27. E.g. see B.A. Garrish, "Charles Hodge and the Europeans," in *Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 129–158. I am indebted to Andrew Hofferker in helping me arrive at this conclusion. See, *Charles Hodge: Pride of Princeton* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2011), 79–120.

28. David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Faith & Learning* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 123.

29. Charles Hodge, *An Introductory Lecture Delivered in the Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J. Nov. 7, 1828* (Princeton: Connolly & Maddon Printers, 1828). Hereafter Hodge, *Introductory Lecture*.

years in close communion with the Father of lights. Propose to them your novel doctrines, should they shock their feelings, depend upon it, they are false and dangerous. The approbation of an experienced Christian of any purely religious opinion, is worth more, than that of any merely learned theologian upon earth (Hodge, *Introductory Lecture*, 25).

This gives us a particular insight into Hodge's understanding of tradition. Innovations must be tested. Novel ideas should be given ample time for corporate reflection. Throughout his career, Hodge prided himself on his preservation of the Princeton tradition, which built its theological foundation upon the Westminster tradition.

Hodge also affirmed that his doctrine of scripture remained substantially unchanged. He warned his hearers of the speculations of mystical theology and the dangers that accompany it, and instead commended to them the scriptures as the foundation of theology. "Beware then of unhallowed speculations on sacred subjects. Bring all your doctrine to the test of God's word and holiness" (Hodge, *Introductory Lecture*, 25). He warned:

If there be any declaration of the Bible, confirmed by the history of the churches, and especially by the recent history of the European churches, it is that "he that leaneth to his own understanding is a fool." When men forsake the word of God, and profess to be wise above that which is written, they inevitably and universally lose themselves in vain speculations (Hodge, *Introductory Lecture*, 26).

The theology of the scriptures, he asserted, is also affirmed by true piety. Hodge claimed that the loss of reverence for Christ is the final evidence that a man has fallen beyond the bounds of orthodoxy and, perhaps worse, into apostasy.

Reverence for the Redeemer of sinners, is the very last feeling which deserts a falling Christian, or a sinking church. When all other evidence, and all other arguments for the Bible had lost their force, this solitary feeling has held the soul from sinking into infidelity and thence into perdition. When this is lost, all is lost. The soul that is insensible to the glory of the Son of God, is "as a tree twice dead and plucked up by the roots" (Hodge, *Introductory Lecture*, 26).

These positions are not dissimilar to those of Hodge's

30. Charles Hodge, "Retrospect of the History of the *Princeton Review*" in *Index to the Princeton Review 1826-1868*, ed. Peter Walker (Philadelphia: Chas. Scribner & Co., 1871), 1.

predecessors. The emphasis upon piety as a test of orthodoxy was used by Miller in his *Letters on Unitarianism*, and Hodge's understanding of the scriptures had been previously articulated in Archibald Alexander's writings as early as 1825. All of these things continued to play a role in Hodge's polemic. Throughout his career, Hodge defended his theological tradition as faithful to the teaching of scripture. He also employed tradition as weaponry against theological innovators. The chief instrument of these polemical engagements was Hodge's own creation, *The Biblical Repertory*.

The Founding of The Biblical Repertory

In 1825, Charles Hodge founded *The Biblical Repertory*. This journal did not "aspire to originality," but rather purported to be "a repository for tracts on biblical subjects, selected from various sources."³⁰ Its content consisted primarily of the translation of German writings which Hodge hoped to introduce to English readers. However, after returning from Europe in 1829 he radically changed the plans for his journal. He first changed the name of the journal to *The Biblical Repertory: A Journal of Biblical Literature and Theological Science* in 1829, then to *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* in 1830. It retained this title until 1837, at which point it was renamed *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, a title that it bore until 1888. Throughout the various names from 1829 until 1888, its purpose remained the same—the propagation of Princeton Theology. J.W. Alexander, son of Archibald Alexander, wrote:

Through good and evil report it has pursued its way, and has contributed more than any other agency, to make known those opinions which belong to what some have chosen to call the Princeton School ... In times of controversy it has not refrained from a free expression of judgment on great questions; and its pages contain ample discussion of all matters relating to the defence of Calvinism and Presbytery, the policy of the Church, the charities of the age, new divinity, new philosophy, and new measures, and especially the difficulties which preceded, accompanied and followed the division of our ecclesiastical body (LOA, 448).

That this journal had a polemical bent is clear from the first installment. The volume is introduced by a letter circulated by the "association of gentlemen" of the journal which informed its readers of the journal's purpose and also solicited their support. In this letter, the association gave nine reasons for the change

in design of the original journal and the purpose of the present format.

First, although the original intent of the *Repertory* was to “assist ministers and candidates in the criticism and interpretation of the Bible,” the new format would be adapted to “the use and benefit of all intelligent Christians.”³¹ In other words, the scope of the previous format was too narrow to support such a journal. The journal then adapted to allow for a broader readership. This being the case, the first purpose of the *Repertory* was “to afford the people, every possible facility for a right understanding of the divine oracles” (*Association*, iv).

Secondly, the purpose of the *Review* was to

bring under strict and impartial review, the philosophy and literature of the time; and show their influence, whether for good or evil, on biblical interpretation, systematic theology, and practical religion. In doing this, it will be necessary to detect and expose the error, common in every age, of founding religious doctrines on insulated passages, and partial views of bible-truth; or forcing the Scriptures to a meaning which shall accord with philosophical theories (*Association*, 4–5).

The polemical orientation of the journal was further emphasized in its third endeavor:

The circumstances belonging to every age produce a tendency to some particular form of error, so as to make it the epidemic of the period. At one time men are disposed to be satisfied with a heartless and inactive orthodoxy. At another, religious action is represented as everything, and its stimulus is substituted for those deep inward feelings which mark the character of thorough piety. It will be the business of this Journal carefully to notice, and faithfully to exhibit dangers of this kind (*Association*, 5).

The letter continued by claiming that attention would be devoted, fourthly, to the history of doctrine and, fifthly, to “the influence of different principles of ecclesiastical polity on piety, morals, literature, and civil institutions.” Sixth, the journal would review the literature of the Sabbath schools; and seventh, as much as time allows, “important interest of general knowledge; and select literary information” would be considered (*Association*, 5).

Having established the journal’s primary purposes and concerns, and having demonstrated the polemical nature of these tasks, the letter continued by offering a brief word on polemical endeavors. It read: “The work is not designed to be controversial in its character, but to state temperately and mildly, yet firmly and

fearlessly, Bible truth in its whole extent” (*Association*, 5). In other words, although the chief aim of the journal was to “firmly” and “fearlessly” proclaim biblical truth, the inevitable consequence of doing this would lead to polemical engagement. One cannot exonerate biblical truth without exposing error. Polemic is an unavoidable consequence of biblical scholarship. A.A. Hodge summarized the polemical aspect of the journal this way:

The conductors of the Princeton review ... were Presbyterians. They firmly believed that system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the system of the Reformed Church and of Augustinians in all ages, is the truth of God revealed for His glory and the salvation of men. They believed that the upholding of that system in its integrity, bearing witness to it as the truth of God, and its extension through the world, was the great duty of those who had experienced its power ... It was, therefore, the vindication of that system of truth and of the principles of that ecclesiastical polity, the conductors of this Journal, from first to last, had constantly in view ... That a journal consecrated to the support of truth should be controversial is a matter of course; it is a law of its existence, the condition of its usefulness. The Bible is the most controversial of books. It is a protest against sin and error from beginning to end. To object to controversy, therefore, is to object to what is in this world the necessary condition of life (LCH, 255–256).

The letter ended by informing its readers that the association was presently in search of a general editor, but that currently the task of editing was being performed by this collective body of gentlemen. The signees were Ashbel Green, Samuel Miller, Archibald Alexander, John H. Rice, Ezra Fisk, Ezra Stiles Ely, Francis Herron, Thomas Clelan, Samuel H. Cox, Thomas Skinner, James Hoge, Henry Weed, William Nevins, Joseph Sanford, Thomas Biggs, Samuel Graham, and Luther Halsey (*Association*, 6).

Conspicuously absent from the list of signees was Charles Hodge, who was the journal’s founder and who would in time become the general editor, a post which he held almost exclusively for nearly fifty years. This journal became the primary vehicle of Princeton’s polemic, beginning with the seminary’s first professors. Hodge contributed some 142 articles, which made up at least five-thousand pages; Alexander contributed 77 articles and Miller another 25. The sons of Alexander, J.A. and J.W., together contributed nearly 200 articles (LCH, 250).

31. Association of Gentlemen, “Letter to General Assembly” vol.1 of *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* (1829), iv. Hereafter *Association*.

The influence of *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* can hardly be overestimated. In its own time, it was considered by the *British Quarterly Review* “beyond all question the greatest purely theological review that has ever been published in the English tongue.” The same journal acknowledged its polemical grandeur: “[The *BRPR*] has waged war in defence of the Westminster Standards for a period of forty years, with a polemical vigor and unity of design without any parallel in the history of religious journalism” (cited in LCH, 257). The *BRPR* became the chief vehicle for the articulation of the Princeton theology, and its founding ensured the establishment of her polemic. Old Princeton would be a polemical institution until her death.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study we have demonstrated the centrality of polemic to Princeton Seminary’s origin, development, and establishment. It has been sufficiently shown that the seminary was founded for integrally polemical reasons. Likewise, the curriculum was designed to continue that polemic; and this thrust was established in the appointment of Charles Hodge and his founding of the *Biblical Repertory*, which became the vehicle through which Princeton’s polemic was transmitted. The shortcomings of the popular idea that Charles Hodge founded Princeton’s polemic should now have been clearly exposed. But what significance does this point contribute to contemporary theological education? In order to contemplate the relevance of these conclusions we must briefly consider the end of the story, which spatial limitations prohibit us from doing in great detail.

The story of Old Princeton ends with its inability to withstand the push for theological progress. Although Old Princeton met the progressive agenda with resistance, the seminary received a fatal blow in 1921 when the ‘lion of Princeton,’ B.B. Warfield, died, and the chair of polemic theology with him. Although many of the faculty of Princeton attempted to preserve the heritage of Alexander, Miller, and Hodge (as well as the other representatives of the old heritage), the General Assembly decided to restructure the seminary in 1929, a decision which forced Princeton to “progress” toward a “broad

and warm evangelicalism” and away from the bondage of “a highly rational orthodoxy and extreme literalism.”³²

Directly after the reorganization of the seminary, J. Gresham Machen led several of the faculty members to leave the seminary in order to form a new one, Westminster Theological Seminary, which would continue the mission of Old Princeton. For Machen, this secession consisted, at least in part, in the continuation of Old Princeton’s polemic.³³ This move eventually spawned the birth of several conservative seminaries which also claimed to continue the legacy of Old Princeton, including Covenant Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, and Fuller Seminary, to name a few.

Yet the fact that polemical engagement has become passé is hardly debatable. Clearly illustrating the point is the fact that a chair of polemic has not reappeared since the death of Warfield even in the halls of Princeton’s so-called successors. This chair has consistently been replaced by the chair of apologetics. To question the wisdom of polemic’s demise in Reformed seminary education appears warrantable. Should those who claim to carry Princeton’s torch at least *consider* reclaiming her polemic, which we have demonstrated to be so very essential to her identity?

If this reconsideration is appropriate, it must consist in due attention to the *manner* of Princeton’s polemic. Although spatial constraints have limited our full exploration of this, we have recognized that the Princetonians were procedural with their adversaries and their theologies. They endeavored to deal truthfully and fairly with their opponents while weighing the severity and danger of each supposed error. A.A. Hodge wrote of his father as a polemicist in a way that might fairly represent all of the early Princetonians. He wrote:

Mistakes he has made, and very important ones; but designed misrepresentations he has never made. Next to having Dr. Hodge on one’s side is the pleasure of having him as an antagonist; for where conscientious men must discuss a subject, who can express the comfort of honorable, magnanimous dealing on both sides—the feeling that in battling with each other they are also battling for each other, in that grand warfare whose final issue will be what all good men desire, the establishment of truth? (LCH, 616)

More research should be done on this point. Yet, it is sufficient to note that *if* Princeton’s polemic is worth reclaiming, such retrieval must be accompanied by due attention to the manner and degree by which Princeton conducted her polemic. ■

32. Lefferts Loetscher, *Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 147.

33. See Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1954) or David Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony* Vol.2, 2vols. (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996).