

Hodge and Thornwell: “Princes in Israel”

By C. N. Willborn

In 1812, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) opened a theological seminary in Princeton for the training of men for the gospel ministry. No name is more closely identified with Princeton Theological Seminary than that of Charles Hodge. He labored at Princeton for Christ’s church for over fifty years, instructing thousands of men, laboring in the courts of the church, and publishing seminal works that would endure into the 21st century.

The year 1812 is significant for another birth, that of James Henley Thornwell. Like Hodge, Thornwell would come to be the most notable name associated with a seminary, this time a school located in Columbia, South Carolina. Prior to his time at the Presbyterian Seminary in Columbia, he was an influential figure through his publishing, teaching, and leadership of the South Carolina College (now University of South Carolina). Although he lived less than fifty years, whereas Hodge taught for over fifty years, his legacy endures in similar proportion to that of Hodge.

There is no doubt in my mind that many readers will be familiar with the two men of interest in this paper—Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell. Many will readily recognize the significance of this bicentennial year of 1812–2012. Some, if not many, will well know the various debates that marked their lives and relationship. I should not wish to bore the reader with a rehash of familiar details, but some rehearsal will be necessary as the paper unfolds. What I wish to accomplish in the course of this address is to engender

a renewed appreciation for the men and the pastoral importance of their debated views. First, I shall speak to their lives and abiding relevance. Only secondarily will I consider the debates and the relevance of those ecclesiological nuances.

Why do I say *secondarily* I will consider the debated topics? Anyone who has read of these men’s lives will know that these debates make up a pittance of their life’s work. Andrew Hoffercker has rightly said: “Despite appearances resulting from their General Assembly skirmishes, the two men were more alike than unlike.”¹ Far too often we allow differences to exacerbate our relations, associations, and fraternity, when our commonalities should propel us to greater productivity.

The ultimate purpose of this paper then is to draw us together in the common cause of Christ and a robust Presbyterianism (no offense to our non-Presbyterian friends who may read this!). Why do I say, a robust Presbyterianism? Well, both Hodge and Thornwell were Presbyterians by conviction. That is, they were bound by the Holy Scripture to the Presbyterian form of governance for Christ’s church. While they were generous towards all Christians, they were unapologetic about their Presbyterianism, just as they were about their Calvinism. Their convictions are represented by one of Dr. Thornwell’s students, Thomas Dwight Witherspoon. In his delightful little book, *Children of the Covenant*, Witherspoon urges children to love the church of the living God. After urging them to faith in Christ Jesus alone, he writes:

I have one thing more which I wish to say to you, dear children, and then my task in the preparation of this little volume will be done. I wish to urge upon you that you cherish an INTELLIGENT AND DEVOTED LOVE FOR THE CHURCH OF YOUR FATHERS. (I speak now particularly to those whose parents are members of the

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1. Andrew Hoffercker, *Charles Hodge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 269. Hereafter CH.

Presbyterian Church, since it is chiefly into their hands this little volume will fall.)

But while you cherish a kindly spirit towards all other branches of the church, and guard yourselves against all sectarianism and bigotry, cultivate always a special devotion to the church of your choice. Be decided and frank in your attachment to Presbyterianism. Let others around you see that while you cheerfully accord to them the right to think differently from you, you rejoice in the fact that you are Presbyterians. Let them see that you love the faith and order of the Presbyterian Church, that its doctrines and polity, its history and memories are all dear to your heart.²

Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell were Presbyterians. They were also theologians of substantial worth and standing. It is this author’s aim to acquaint or reacquaint his readers with these two “princes of Israel” on this the 200th anniversary of both Princeton Seminary and James Henley Thornwell.

CHARLES HODGE

Charles Hodge was born December 28, 1797. His ancestry was one of Presbyterian stock that extended nearly one hundred years back and into the north of Ireland. Hodge himself enumerated the backgrounds of his forefathers—physicians, merchants, lawyers, a congressman, several senators, and a Supreme Court clerk were among his relatives.³ Hodge’s grandmother was converted under the preaching ministry of George Whitefield. With some one hundred and sixty others, Hannah Hodge formed the membership of the Second Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, pastored by New Side revivalist Gilbert Tennent. Hugh Hodge, Charles’s father, was a graduate of the College of New Jersey (1773), a surgeon during the American Revolution, a respected physician in Philadelphia, and member of Second Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia. Having lived to see the death of his first three children, Hugh died when young Charles was but six months old, leaving his beloved Mary Blanchard to bear the burden of rearing two sons. Like so many godly men in church history, Charles Hodge was blessed with a godly and industrious mother who did what it took to see her sons to adulthood. Of his dear mother, “the Pride of Princeton” said: “To our mother, my brother and myself, under God owe absolutely everything. To us she devoted her life. For us she prayed, labored and suffered” (LCH, 9, 10).

Godly nurture was not singularly derived from his

mother. Charles Hodge was also nurtured by a godly pastor, Ashbel Green, “one of Philadelphia’s most popular preachers for twenty-five years” (CH, 35). Green virulently opposed the “new measures” of the revivalists, particularly the Pelagian Charles Grandison Finney. He was far more ecclesiastically committed than many of the revivalists of the 18th and 19th centuries. Green was committed to what we would call today the ordinary means of grace—word, sacrament, and prayer. The Philadelphia minister made application of these ordinary means regularly by utilizing the Shorter Catechism in his preaching and visitations, thus aiding the parents’ labors at home. He also held a weekly Bible class in his study, a class attended by both Charles and his brother Hugh. Andrew Hoffercker suggests that these formative years, under the tutelage of Green, shaped Charles Hodge into the Old School theologian and defender of Westminsterian orthodoxy we know today (CH, 38).

Due to his father’s death, the Hodge family was forced to move to New Jersey, eventually landing in Princeton when Hugh enrolled at the College. Young Charles enrolled as a sophomore at the college in September 1812, the same year Archibald Alexander introduced Princeton Seminary to the world. Some two years later there was what Hoffercker describes as “an outbreak of revival” (CH, 43). Charles Hodge would speak of it as having such an effect upon him that he soon thereafter made a public profession of his faith in Christ and was received as a communing member of the Presbyterian Church in Princeton. Charles’ dear mother explained that the religious effect upon her seventeen-year-old was not the “consequence of a sudden impulse of feeling” (CH, 45), but the consequences of the covenantal ordering of the Spirit of God. This is surely consistent with what has been called the “reasonable revival” (Arthur Thomas, quoted in CH, 46, 366), which differed greatly from the “new measure” events of the revivalism of the same period of history.

Three years from his initial matriculation, Hodge graduated, sharing second honors with another student. After a brief sabbatical from studies (due largely to health; rheumatism was to plague him throughout his life), Hodge enrolled at the Seminary with twenty-five other students. The three years of seminary left an indelible print upon the youngster’s life, largely owing to his “teacher and surrogate father” (CH, 47), Archibald Alexander. Hodge would from this time forward follow

2. T. D. Witherspoon, *Children of the Covenant* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1873), 138, 142, 143.

3. A. A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1881), 5–7. Hereafter LCH.

Alexander, who largely followed Francis Turretin. While the academic rigors of early Princeton may have been deficient in some areas (lack of courses in Hebrew, for instance), Hodge's discipline for study and life was established at Princeton.

After a period of "mission preaching" and studying Hebrew in Philadelphia with the Associate Presbyterian Joseph Banks, Hodge returned to teach at the seminary in Princeton. He took up biblical languages and produced a fifty-one page *Dissertation* on the importance of Biblical Literature. He would teach the languages at Princeton Seminary for twenty years before taking up the discipline of theology in 1840, in which he would remain until his death.

In 1822 Hodge married Sarah Bache, great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin and niece of the famous physician and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Caspar Wistar. Children soon followed—Archibald Alexander being the firstborn of eight offspring. In 1825 Hodge founded a theological journal that would extend his and the seminary's influence, *The Biblical Repository* (later named *Princeton Review*). A year later, in 1826, Hodge embarked upon a two-year study leave that took him to leading universities in Europe—Göttingen, Halle, and Berlin—"to shore up his educational deficiencies and expose him to scholars, ideas, movements and cultures beyond his accustomed vistas" (CH, 80). He returned from his hiatus and took up his labors once again at the seminary where he would serve the church for the rest of his life, leaving the church a number of biblical commentaries, journal articles, books, and a three-volume systematic theology.

Hodge lost his wife Sarah on December 25, 1849 and remarried in 1852. Mary Hunter Stockton, a longtime friend and confidant to Sarah, "was immediately accepted into the household and successfully assumed the duties of completing the training of the remaining children. She would survive Hodge by a mere twenty months" (CH, 220). Charles Hodge died in 1878 and his body waits the resurrection in the cemetery of his beloved Princeton.

JAMES HENLEY THORNWELL

James Henley was a scion of South Carolina. Like Hodge he was born in December, December 9, 1812. He too was blessed to be a child of a Christian home. Young Thornwell found himself fatherless just three

weeks after his eighth birthday. James Henley's father was English and his mother, Martha Terrell, was of Welsh stock.⁴ Like Hodge's godly mother, Martha Terrell Thornwell did what it took to see that her son and his surviving siblings grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man.

Early in young James' life he showed great aptitude for learning, so much so that two able men, one a wealthy planter and one "a rising lawyer" (LLT, 21), took up his cause and aided him in his education. While Charles Hodge's mother and brother always questioned Charles' diligence toward his studies, everyone saw in Thornwell a ravenous, selfless commitment to learning. One biographer and acquaintance said, "His ambition ... was equal to his powers" (LLT, 20). Young Thornwell had a great love for the classics, metaphysics, and logic.

Though endowed with great mental attributes, his life was a rural life. He was not reared in the city and his schooling, due to providence, began later than that of Charles Hodge. He thus applied for admission to the South Carolina College late, just before his sixteenth birthday. Owing to his respect for and indebtedness to Mr. Robbins, one of his patrons, he was to pursue law as a vocation. He applied for standing as a junior, but was rejected. "On Graeca Minora, Xenophon, the Odes of Horace, and Cicero, I was admitted, and on part of Mathematics, Homer, and the Art of Poetry, I was rejected on. The difficulty with me, on these books, was not ignorance, but confusion" (LLT, 54, 55). The faculty advised he retake rather than take a lower standing (i.e., freshman or sophomore), and so on January 4 (less than a month later) he wrote his patron of his success and standing as a junior in the college. Less than two years later Thornwell graduated with the highest honors conferred and delivered the commencement address in Latin.

Spiritually, Thornwell had struggled during his college days. During his baccalaureate studies he had been forced to interact with the systems of Socinianism and Deism. He had found both wanting in rationality and revelation. From both systems he concluded there was "the necessity of a Divine revelation" [LLT, 78] if man is to know God truly. Thornwell had been taught the wonderful truths of God's salvation in Christ Jesus, but unlike Charles Hodge, he was given no rational framework for those gracious truths. His mother was a lifelong Baptist, and a confessional framework was not hers to give. While the young South Carolinian was intellectually certain that Deism and Socinianism were untenable, he was religiously adrift. Then

4. B. M. Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (1875; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), page 9. Hereafter LLT.

"during an evening stroll [in Columbia], he stumbles into the book store of the town, and finds lying upon the counter a small volume, entitled, 'Confession of Faith,'" (LLT, 80).

He had never before heard of its existence; he only saw that it contained a systematic exposition of Christian doctrine. It is needless to apprise the reader that it was the Westminster Confession. He bought it for twenty-five cents, carried it home, and, as he himself testifies, read it entirely through that night. "For the first time," he adds, "I felt that I had met with a system which held together. With the strictest logical connection; granting its premises, the conclusions were bound to follow." He could not immediately pronounce it true, without a careful comparison of the text with the scriptural proofs at the bottom of each page. But he was arrested by the consistency and rigour of its logic. This book determined him as a Calvinist and a Presbyterian; although he had never been thrown into contact with this branch of the Church of Christ, and had never been, but once, within any of its sanctuaries of worship (LLT, 80).

Some months later, he professed faith in Jesus Christ and became a devoted subject of Christianity, against all challengers. He found in Christianity a religion of faith and reason, one that encompassed and indebted the whole man—body, mind, and soul—to faithful service to Christ.

B. M. Palmer describes very ably the anatomy of God's saving grace in this man's life:

The series of facts, thus far developed, seems to be: that he was originally endowed with strong religious susceptibilities; that these were deeply impressed by the influence and teachings of a pious mother; so that, at the age of ten years, he discussed the high problems of "fate and free will," and became the partisan of views against which his heart rebels.... At College he is brought suddenly in contact with opinions antagonistic to those he had hitherto cherished. Curiosity is aroused. With almost the love of romantic adventure, he rushes into the battle, where a keen and subtle dialectic must supply the weapons of assault and defence [sic]. He delivers himself forthwith from the web of materialism, in which he was first in danger of being ensnared by his "idol," Dr. Cooper. He pushes the investigation forward, under an impulse which appears to be, and, doubtless, predominantly was, a purely speculative interest, until his mind is settled, upon the truth of Christianity. With intellectual conviction which was never afterwards seriously

disturbed, he accepts the doctrines of the fall of man, and of recovery by grace alone. (LLT, 98)

Upon his public testimony of conversion, the twenty-year-old native of the Palmetto State was received into the communion of Concord Presbyterian Church in Sumterville, South Carolina. A resolve to pursue gospel ministry was now his.

While leading an academy in Cheraw, South Carolina he was encouraged by a traveling minister to attend Andover (Massachusetts) Seminary and quickly did so, only to find it, as he said upon arrival, "awfully New School" (LLT, 116). He moved on to Harvard to study Hebrew in the fall of 1834. There he lodged with "the Unitarian students of Theology; for there are no others here" (LLT, 117). His studies were cut short, however, due to poor health and the contrary winters of New England (LLT, 126). He returned to South Carolina where he was licensed to preach and subsequently ordained to the gospel ministry in the Bethel Presbytery (Waxhaw area) in South Carolina.

During this period of life, Thornwell married Nancy White Witherspoon, one of his parishioners. The Witherspoon family was prominent in the state, the bride's father a rising political star, having served as Lieutenant-Governor of the State before he died suddenly of a stroke. Happiness was tempered in the Thornwell household through death—the death of their firstborn (a son) and a teenage daughter—and war.

Like Charles Hodge, Thornwell's academic peers recognized his abilities and potential. In 1837, aged twenty-four years and eleven months, Thornwell joined the faculty of his alma mater, South Carolina College. For the next eighteen years (with only brief interruptions)⁵ he taught philosophy, ethics (moral science), sacred literature and evidences of Christianity, and served the college as chaplain. It was from the Rutledge Chapel of the college campus that Thornwell delivered the masterful "Discourses on Truth," which were subsequently published and applauded by such as Sir William Hamilton of Scotland.⁶ He would eventually be called upon

5. During a twelve-month period in 1839 he was pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Columbia (now First Presbyterian Church of Columbia). Again for six months in 1851 he was pastor of Glebe Street Presbyterian Church, Charleston, before being called back to take the Presidency of the South Carolina College.

6. The *Discourses* may be found in *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, vol. 2 and, more recently, published as a monograph entitled *Whatever Things are True* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005). A letter from William Hamilton to James H. Thornwell can be found in the Thornwell Papers in the South Carolinian Library, Columbia, SC.

to serve the college as President, and he oversaw its rise from the failed leadership of the Unitarian rationalist Thomas Cooper.⁷ Eventually, however, his gospel calling and the needs of the church drew this “prince in Israel” to a professorship in the Theological Seminary of the Synod of South Carolina (Columbia Seminary). In that position he established himself as professor and theologian of the Presbyterian Church from 1855 until his death in 1862. His primary textbook was Calvin’s *Institutes*. All the while, he edited the *Southern Quarterly Review* and was instrumental in forming and leading the *Southern Presbyterian Review* in 1846.

In 1862, four months and eight days shy of his fiftieth birthday, Thornwell was taken from this life by his Savior. His bodily remains lie in Elmwood Cemetery in Columbia, South Carolina underneath a beautiful magnolia tree, awaiting the resurrection. A faithful and fruitful life is his legacy.

THE DEBATED ISSUES

From these brief life stories, we have seen two men who have much in common. From their fatherless childhoods to their academic lives we have seen considerable parallels. Both men were also eminent churchmen. These were not men who sat in academic safe-houses and wrote books to fuel the blogosphere. They were active in and for the church of the living God.

These two stars of the theological galaxy did, however, have some notable and public differences. The disagreements we shall consider ultimately stemmed from the men’s disagreement over what constituted Presbyterianism. Hodge defined Presbyterianism in three inseparable parts:

1. That the people have a right to a substantive part in the government of the Church.
2. That presbyters who minister in word and doctrine, are the highest government officers of the Church, and all belong to the same order.
3. That the outward and visible Church is or should be, one, in the sense that a smaller part is subject

7. An interesting story is that of Cooper’s earlier dismissal from the University of Virginia, due in large part to a Presbyterian publication by John Holt Rice. See William Henry Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, Second Series, Revised (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1856), 335; and Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 3 vols. (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), 1:258.

8. Charles Hodge, *What is Presbyterianism?* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1855), 6, 7.

9. James Henley Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, volume 4 (1875; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 267. Hereafter JHT.

to a larger, and a larger to the whole. It is not holding one of these principles that makes a man a Presbyterian, but his holding them all.⁸

Thornwell did not see these three principles as being peculiar to Presbyterianism. Congregationalists, he argued, recognize the first principle, and in some cases the second. Other evangelical churches recognize and maintain the parity of ministers. And Roman Catholics certainly hold to the third principle concerning the unity of the visible and invisible church.

Like Hodge, Thornwell established Presbyterianism upon three principles as well, albeit more particular. Presbyterianism is “the government of the Church by parliamentary assemblies, composed of two classes of Elders, and of Elders only, and so arranged as to realize the visible unity of the whole Church.”⁹ It is Thornwell’s contention that his definition “distinguishes us from Congregationalism by our representative assemblies, and from Prelacy and Popery, not only by the assemblies, but by the officers of whom they are composed” (JHT, 267).

For his incisive critique at this point and others Hodge labeled Thornwell’s standpoint “hyper-hyper-High Church Presbyterianism” (quoted in JHT, “Debate Touching Church-Boards,” 4:229). Since the South Carolinian thought Hodge left church polity in a very generic state, with no distinctively Presbyterian flavor, he responded by saying, “my brother has said that my principles are ‘hyper-hyper-HYPER-High-Presbyterianism,’ and I must retort that his principles are no, no, No Presbyterianism, no, no, No Churchism!” (JHT, “Debate Touching Church-Boards,” 4:232). While both men expressed commitment to *jure divino* Presbyterianism, they “differed sharply ... on the application of that theory” (Hoffecker, CH, 270).

The application of their respective brands of Presbyterianism brought them to rhetorical blows over the status and role of ruling elders. The PCUSA General Assembly of 1842 opposed elders’ participation in ordination services, reserving that right of participation for preaching/teaching elders only. Hodge argued syllogistically and historically. Historically he cited the Westminster Directory, which reads: “Every minister of the word is to be ordained by imposition of hands, and prayer, with fasting, by those preaching presbyters to whom it doth belong” (The Form of Church Government, “Touching the Doctrine of Ordination”). While Hodge acknowledged that the idea of ruling elders acting in the ordination event seemed “plausible,” he concluded, “Surely it is rather late in the day to begin to

teach the whole Presbyterian world what are the first principles of their own system."¹⁰

The fact of the matter was that Thornwell, Robert J. Breckinridge, R. L. Dabney, and others were not deterred by the historical data. That is not to say they did not honor historical theology. In this case, they were working under the banner of *ecclesia semper reformans, semper reformanda* (the church reformed and always reforming). R. J. Breckinridge's colleague at Danville Seminary and author of *The Church of God*, Stuart Robinson, argued that ecclesiology had not received the same attention as other great doctrines—e.g., the science of God, anthropology, soteriology—and was "yet to be developed."¹¹ The Southern men were simply declaring *ad fontes*—running to the ultimate source of belief and practice, the Holy Scripture—and seeking to reform the church in its belief about and use of elders. It was Thornwell's contention that ruling elders and teaching elders possessed the very same qualifications (1 Tim 3:1–7) and power in the church (1 Tim 4:14), thus making both fit subjects for the laying on of hands.

A second area that involved the high office of elder was their necessity in presbytery. Hodge had cast the ruling elders as "delegates" rather than "members" of presbytery.¹² As such they were not essential to a presbytery meeting or its actions. Thornwell, as one might deduce by now, considered the ruling *and* teaching elder as necessary for presbytery meetings and to the constitution of a quorum. He argues this at some length as he interacts with two speeches delivered before the 1843 General Assembly by R. J. Breckinridge. "To dispense with elders in the assemblies of the Church," he wrote, "is to sever the chords which bind the hearts of our people to their government, and to prepare the way for converting a free, vigorous and healthful Commonwealth into a sacred aristocracy" (JHT, 4:70).

A third disputed area was that of "boards" versus "committees" for the execution of the church's work. It should be noted that both Hodge and Thornwell, as Old School Presbyterians, opposed voluntary associations as an appropriate means to carry out the education of ministers and the missionary enterprise of the church. They differed, however, when it came to application of the church's power. In other words, the discretionary power of the church was the issue.¹³ Here in brief is Thornwell's argument: "I might appeal to the equally acknowledged truth, that all the power of the Church is ministerial and declarative, and that she has no right to make laws, establish constitutions, or institute ordinances without the authority and sanction of the written Word" (JHT, 4:193). To constitute an entity for the

propagation of the gospel and the establishment of local churches was beyond the powers of the church and was, indeed, the work of the church. God in his infinite wisdom gave the world the church and to the church elders and deacons. "Now we maintain that the system of Boards gives us a set of officers and a set of ecclesiastical courts entirely different from those of our Constitution. The Corresponding Secretary and the General Agent of these Boards are discharging the peculiar functions of neither Minister, Elder nor Deacon. They certainly are not Pastors, and are just as far from being Evangelists. They do not claim to be Ruling Elders, and much less would they submit to be called Deacons in the sense of our Book. What, then, are they?" (JHT, 4:149).

The boards, as constituted by the Old School Presbyterian Church after the excision of the New School in 1837, were established by the church and for the church. Here they excelled over the independent boards, such as those produced during the period marked by the infamous Plan of Union in 1801.¹⁴ Yet they were self-governed, operating in a semi-autonomous (if not altogether autonomous) manner. Hodge argued for them on grounds of discretion and expediency. There is simply too much work to be done by presbyters and deacons was one argument. You need hired men located centrally to answer the urgent, time sensitive needs of educators or missionaries.

Thornwell argued for presbyteries and committees of the church to oversee the fiduciary requirements of foreign and domestic missions. Well enough, you say, but what of the determination of a man's suitability for the missionary enterprise? Who will assess men for the mission field, whether domestic or foreign? What about a man's accountability while on the field of service? Well, first remember that the missionary enterprise is nothing more or less than the gospel endeavor of the church. God gave us gifted men for this worthy work of the church and the presbytery is the court charged with determining the suitability of men for the gospel

10. Hodge, "The General Assembly of 1843," *Princeton Review* 15, no. 3 (1843):438.

11. Stuart Robinson, *The Church of God* (1858; repr., Willow Grove, PA: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2009), 27.

12. Hoeffcker, CH, 272; Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), 300–05. Hereafter *Church Polity*.

13. For a detailed articulation of this topic see John L. Girardeau, "The Discretionary Power of the Church," *Sermons* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1907), 369–412.

14. Such independent boards included American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the American Home Mission Society.

ministry. The presbytery examines, approves, ordains and installs men to their field of service. Thus Thornwell argued from the church's penultimate and ultimate Standards.¹⁵

Another difference between the men concerned the doctrine of the church and her spiritual nature. While both men spoke in favor of the spirituality of the church, Hodge and his southern friend differed on this matter as well. Thornwell applied the ministerial and declarative power of the church to her membership and matters spiritual:

[The Church] has a fixed and unalterable Constitution; and that Constitution is the Word of God. It is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is enthroned in it as a sovereign. It can hear no voice but His, obey no commands but His, pursue no ends but His. Its officers are His servants bound to execute only His will; its doctrines are His teachings, which He as a prophet has given from God; its discipline His law, which He as king has ordained. The power of the Church, accordingly, is only ministerial and declarative.... She can announce what it teaches, enjoin what it commands, prohibit what it condemns, and enforce her testimonies by spiritual sanctions. Beyond the Bible she can never go, and apart from the Bible she can never speak," (JHT, 4:384).

As Hoeffcker has rightly concluded, "Hodge demurred," (CH, 277). The church, as an institution,¹⁶ is bound to speak to the government if the civil authority is transgressing the law of God.

Our fathers of the Revolution took sides with the country in the struggle for independence, and protested against the acts of the British Government tending to the introduction of Episcopacy. Before the Revolution the old Synod remonstrated with the authorities in Virginia, for their persecuting laws. In 1830 the General

15. It should be noted as well that JHT supported the use of deacons in the missionary enterprise, not limiting them to the jurisdiction of the local church. Rather, he saw them as instrumental at presbytery and GA levels as they exercised their role over fiscal and physical matters of the church. To put elders of either class in charge of fiscal and physical concerns of the church was to take them from their ordained ministry of prayer and word. To do so is to confuse "the purse and the keys" (JHT, 4:155).

16. Interestingly, Hodge seems not to distinguish the individual Christian's responsibilities toward the civil government from the institutional church's posture to the civil realm. Thornwell would have certainly agreed that Christians are bound to speak for good in the public square and what they speak should be informed and guided by the teaching of Scripture. Thornwell simply wanted the church, as the institutional agent of God, to speak only to matters ecclesiastical.

Assembly raised its voice against the persecution of Christians in Switzerland. It has, over and over, remonstrated with the Government of this country on the laws enjoining the carrying and distribution of the mails on Sunday. While admitting that the Bible does not forbid slave-holding, it has borne its testimony in the most explicit terms against the iniquity of many slave laws. It has many times enjoined on the conscience of the people the duty of instructing the colored population of our land, and patronized the establishment of schools for that purpose. It has never been afraid to denounce what God forbids, or to proclaim in all ears what God commands. This is her prerogative and this is her duty (Hodge, *Church Polity*, 105).

Consider then how both men reached different conclusions on the matter of slavery due to their divergent understanding of the declarative power of the church. Both affirmed that slavery could not be condemned, for it was instituted and given guidelines in the Bible. Thornwell understood the institution to be a civil institution, and as such was under the authority of the civil government, not an ecclesial government. Thus, the church was, as the Westminster Confession states, "to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs, which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition, in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate" (WCF 32.5). Thornwell put much stress on "nothing but that which is ecclesiastical."

Hodge, on the other hand, understood it to be the church's duty to speak to all matters, whether ecclesiastical or not. Thus he could endorse ecclesiastical pronouncements for or against civil policy as we have shown in the lengthy quote immediately above. He did, however, draw the line more tightly during the 1861 debates over the infamous Gardiner Spring Resolution. For the church to endorse particular politicians, parties, and policies was to overstep the bounds of the spiritual mission of the church.

The final Hodge-Thornwell debate we shall consider concerned Roman Catholic baptism. The baptism question began with a more basic question of the nature of Roman Catholicism as it existed after Trent (1545-63). In 1834 the PSUSA General Assembly considered whether the post-Tridentine church in Rome was a true church. Based upon the professed public doctrine of the Roman Church, they concluded it was no church at all, for it denied, among other cardinal tenets, the gospel. They

recognized, of course, that there were elements of genuine Christianity in Rome—like adherence to the Trinitarian formula—but elements were not enough. The marks of the church had to be present, and the American Presbyterians found Rome to be disqualified. The vote was quite overwhelming, approaching unanimity in that General Assembly.

For Hodge it was enough that Rome recited the Apostles' Creed. He recognized that they qualified it to death at Trent (and we could add to Trent the Catechism of 1992/94), but Hoffecker is correct: "professing the simple statements of the Apostles' Creed satisfied" the Princetonian (CH, 250). Hodge put much weight upon the analogy of Israel at the time of Christ as well. Surely Israel was theologically apostate, and yet they were God's true people. Likewise, Hodge reasoned, Rome was apostate, but was nevertheless a true church. Hoffecker explains Hodge's rationale faithfully when he writes,

By analogy, on the one hand Old Testament Israel and the Roman Catholic Church were apostate—and in their apostate condition could not require obedience to them as obligatory of all Old Testament Jews or contemporary Christians outside the Roman church. As long as they remained in the state of apostasy, they must be considered apostate. Thus Protestants correctly refused to submit to papal supremacy, clerical hierarchy, transubstantiation, the Mass as a sacrifice, and other beliefs and practices. Hodge concluded that Rome was a true but impure church by virtue of its creedal profession of truths held by all genuine churches" (CH, 251).

A. A. Hodge gives this reading of his father's rationale for acknowledging Rome as a true church: "the great body of people constituting the Roman Catholic Church do profess the essentials of the true Christian religion, whereby many of them bear the image of Christ, and are participants of His fellowship" (LCH, 340). That is, since many Roman Catholics around the world believe in Christ, their church is true.

By contrast, Thornwell's argument was reminiscent of Paul's when writing to the church in Galatia: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:8, 9). Indeed, Paul is writing to the church in Galatia and considers them brothers in Christ. However, he distinguishes adherents to the true gospel from those who teach falsehood. To anyone who perverts and corrupt

the truth (Gal 1:7), Paul says, "Let him be accursed." Such a person is to be considered outside the church. Likewise for Thornwell, the Roman hierarchy and their doctrinal pronouncements were outside the pale of gospel truth. The addition of all sorts of false teachings had turned the gospel into something else, something other than the true gospel. Thus, they were not "the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). Thornwell took seriously the doctrinal standards of his church, which declared that some churches had degenerated in doctrine and practice so as to "become no churches of Christ," but "synagogues of Satan" (WCF 25.5). In the very same chapter, the "Pope of Rome" is declared to be "antichrist."¹⁷ From these teachings of the Westminster Standards it was hard for Thornwell to believe our Scottish and English fathers did not believe Rome to be a synagogue of Satan and thus no church of Christ.

Hodge's dealing with the Confession on this point was, as one might expect by now, different from that of Thornwell. The church at Rome is not a synagogue of Satan, but "the system" of Rome is, according to Hodge. The terms "refer not to the mass of the people, nor to the presbyters of that communion, or the word of God nor [sic] the saving truths which they profess, but to the Popish hierarchy and its corruptions."¹⁸ For Hodge, the fact that believers existed within the Roman establishment validated the institution as a true, albeit impure, church. A current representative of Hodge's view explains: "For those people who are converted under the ministry of the RCC, it is not the voice of the apostate church that they hear, and hence its erroneous theology of baptism. Rather, they hear the voice of Christ speaking in the Scriptures, and it is the Scriptures that define what baptism means."¹⁹ No matter, therefore, what the Roman system of doctrine says about baptism; a person who is genuinely converted within the system hears not the system, but the Scriptures. So, it would seem, a church is true, and its minister lawful, and its sacraments valid, if someone, somewhere, at some time, is converted within the context of that "church" and continues to attend to its ceremonies, just as long as some Scripture is read. And this regardless of what the church believes or practices.

17. The "antichrist" attribution to the Pope of Rome has since been removed from the American edition of the Confession of Faith used by most Presbyterians in the U.S., but had not been changed at the time in question.

18. Hodge, "The General Assembly of 1845," *Princeton Review* 17, no. 3 (1845): 470; see similar arguments in "Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?," *Princeton Review* 18, no. 2 (1846): 320–44.

19. J. V. Fesko, *Word, Water and Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 388.

The PCUSA Assembly and Thornwell understood the Roman establishment to have failed on the three marks as set forth in the Scots Confession: “first, the true preaching of the word of God, into the which God has revealed himself to us, as the writings of the prophets and apostles do declare; secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, which must be annexed unto the word and promise of God, to seal and confirm the same in our hearts; last, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God’s word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed, and virtue nourished” (Scots Confession 18).

So the PCUSA in 1834 declared Rome no church at all. Hodge and Thornwell later debated this case, although Thornwell’s position prevailed. Then in 1845 the Assembly was called upon to answer a pastoral question—is Roman Catholic baptism valid? This was, after all, a legitimate question, since the PCUSA had declared Rome

20. Hoeffcker, CH, 248 states the vote as being 169–68. The Assembly Minutes, however, record otherwise. Here we publish the records of PCUSA *Minutes of General Assembly 1845*: “The unfinished business was resumed, and after discussion the previous question was moved and sustained. The main question came up on the motion, Shall the inquiry of the Presbytery of Ohio, “Is baptism in the Church of Rome valid?” be answered in the negative? And the yeas and nays being demanded, were recorded and are as follows, viz.:

Yeas — Ministers. — Maltbie, A. T. Chester, Clancy, D. M. Smith, Reeve, Harkness, Frame, J. McDougall, Kirtland, Imbrie, B. Davidson, Perkins, Curran, Junkin, Tully, Olmstead, Corss, Jones, Stead, Belville, Boggs, Harrison, Morris, Moody, Gibson, Williamson, McClung, Donaldson, McClain, McGill, Gordon, Kerr, Core, Weed, McKean, Mitchell, Robertson, Hulburd, Pitkin, J. E. Alexander, Dodd, Noyes, Whitham, Gould, Newell, Bice, Gilliland, Clark, Vaneman, Wood, Thomas Alexander, Crowe, Eastman, Monfort, Wright, W. K. Marshall, Nevius, Ewing, Spilman, Wilson, Bliss, McCune, Stocker, Goodrich, Potts, McConnell, Cowan, Dickson, Proctor, Bard, Brown, N. H. Hall, Bayless, Osborn, Bell, Price, Sampson, Cassells, Lewis, Doll, Lacy, McKay, W. A. Hall, Cunningham, Mathes, Arnell, Edgar, Turner, Jacobs, Gregg, Thornwell, Bowman, J. Y. Alexander, Pratt, Hamilton, Morrow, Graves, Hagaman, McLinnis, Weatherby, Twitchell.

Elders. — Fowler, A. Smith, J. White, W. Lowrie, Baldwin, o. Meeker, J. F. Meeker, Sinclair, Long, Shafer, Wynkoop, Dunlap, Patterson, Davis, McCoy, McCormick, W. T. Smith, Oliphant, Bailey, Miller, Carson, Carl, Thompson, Leavitt, Milligan, Gaston, E. Chester, Boyd, B. Marshall, Conn, Brice, Barton, Stuart, Ward, Thorpe, Williams, Telford, Henderson, Woodruff, Burch, Dunn, Seller, Blake, Brown, Hanna, Ramsey, J. Clark, Dick, Peers, Morton, Miles, Barrett, Bullcock, Mitchell, J. Alexander, Watkins, A. D. Dickinson, Head, Logan, J. Dickenson, McCallum, Gillespie, Armstrong, McNairy, Campbell, Douglass, Hoge, Pickens, S. Lowrie, Gunby, Lilly, Kirkpatrick—173.

Nays — Ministers. — Lord, Burton, Hendren, Warnock, McDonald. Elders. — George Davidson, McNair, Hibben—8.

21. See CH, 249; “The General Assembly,” *Princeton Review* 17, no. 3 (1845): 444, 447–51.

22. Paul Conkin, *The Uneasy Center* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 228, 229.

23. David Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Faith and Learning 1812–1868*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 305.

to be no church at all. After an “elaborate argument” from Thornwell, the Assembly voted 173–8 “against the recognition of such baptism” (LLT, 285).²⁰ His argument was rooted in the Westminster position that Rome was no church of Christ (WCF 25.5) and her priests, therefore, were not valid agents of a true church. The Papal communion was to Thornwell “destitute of some of the indispensable marks of a true church” (JHT, 3:284). Furthermore, baptism itself “was so corrupted in its constituent elements—its matter and form—that it cannot be treated as the institution of Christ” (JHT, 3:284). A Roman priest was to Thornwell no different than your next door neighbor and their baptismal waters no different than your neighbor’s swimming pool or hot tub (see Thornwell to Breckinridge, in Palmer, LLT, 288).

Hodge, on the other hand, as we have come to expect, argued against Thornwell, saying that as long as “the matter [washing with water], the form [invoking the Trinity] and intention [sealing the benefits of Christ’s work]” were present, a valid baptism was performed.²¹ Paul Conkin has argued that Hodge’s moderation on issues like Romanism placed him in that “uneasy center” of 19th century Reformed American Christianity.²² David Calhoun reminds us: “Charles Hodge’s views on the Roman Catholic Church were not only more moderate than those of many in the Presbyterian church but also those of more ‘liberal’ ministers such as Lyman Beecher and Horace Bushnell.”²³

How did Hodge deal with his own church’s doctrinal standards? WCF 27.4 states that neither baptism nor the Lord’s Supper “may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the word, lawfully ordained.” One of Hodge’s biographers draws our attention to Hodge’s answer. “He cited the twenty-third article of the Church of England as expressing what all churches of the Reformation believed regarding the validity of ordained clergy: ‘Those ought to be judged lawfully called and sent, who are chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them, in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord’s vineyard’” (CH, 249; “The General Assembly 1845,” 457). Consider, however, what the Scots Confession of 1560 says: “Two things are necessary for the right administration of the sacraments. The first is that they should be ministered by lawful ministers, and we declare that these are men appointed to preach the Word, unto whom God has given the power to preach the Gospel, and who are lawfully called by some Kirk. The second is that they should be ministered in the elements and manner which God has appointed” (Chapter 22). For this much, Hodge and Thornwell could heartily concur. But consider the very

next sentences of the very same chapter concerning "The Right Administration of the Sacraments"—"This is why we abandon the teaching of the Roman Church and withdraw from its sacraments; firstly, because their ministers are not true ministers of Christ Jesus (indeed they even allow women, whom the Holy Ghost will not permit to preach in the congregation, to baptize) and, secondly, because they have so adulterated both the sacraments [i.e., baptism and Lord's Supper] with their own additions that no part of Christ's original act remains in its original simplicity." Of the two theologians *only* Thornwell could even begin to agree with this aspect of the Scots Confession.²⁴

Here we should address an area of possible confusion. Simply because Thornwell, in agreement with his Scottish forefathers (i.e., Scots Confession), did not believe a Roman priest to be "a minister of the word, lawfully ordained," one should not construe that he believed efficacy resided in an individual man. He concurred fully with the WCF when it states, "neither does the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it" (27.3). Here Thornwell agreed with Augustine in the Donatist controversy (5th century AD) and the Westminster Standards. While the individual's piety and/or intention did not effect the validity of a sacrament, the office did. For only the church, through her lawful ministers, may rightfully administer the Lord's sacraments. Where there is no church, there can be no lawful minister. Where there is no lawful minister, there can be no lawful sacrament.

Therefore, Thornwell would argue that baptism is valid which is administered by a creedal-orthodox church, through her lawfully ordained ministers, by the application of water (alone), in the name of the Triune God. There is one other matter involved and to which we should speak—the intention of baptism. Hodge admitted that the intention of RC baptism was regeneration. Thornwell believed this intention, too, invalidated their baptism. Baptism was a visible picture of the gospel, just as the Lord's Supper was. The Roman gospel was not the true gospel, and, therefore, what was intended to be communicated was not the gospel, but another gospel. Therefore, their baptism was not only wrong in matter (RC added human mixture to the biblically prescribed matter of water) and form (a lawful minister did not invoke the Trinity), but also in its intention (the gospel was missing).

AREAS OF COMMONALITY

With these debated topics stated, it would be wise to

once again remind the reader that these two princes in Israel held much in common. They were both Old School Presbyterians. They stood staunchly against New School theology and New School inclusion in their respective branches of Christ's visible church. Hodge proves this by his ardent stand against the Old School/New School (OS/NS) reunion in 1869/70. Thornwell attended his very first GA in 1837, the year of the OS/NS division. He supported whole-heartedly the exclusion of the NS presbyteries formed under the Plan of Union and the subsequent division of the two parts.

Both men held a high view of Holy Scripture, believing it to be the infallible and inerrant word of God, necessary for faith and practice. Both men were highly suspicious of and inclined against revivalism, especially New Side—and Finney—styled revival. They were, after all, churchmen. Hodge's views toward the New Side revivalism of the 18th century can be readily gathered from his two-part work of over six hundred pages, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (1851). A faithful explanation of Thornwell's view can be found from the pen of one of his finest theological descendants, Thomas E. Peck. In Peck's essay "Revivals of Religion," we find him condemning Finney as Pelagian and works-oriented. We find him warning against the extra-ecclesiastical labors of men like Whitefield and Tennent, whom he labeled

24. It should be noted of course that the Scots "didn't go" where Thornwell did with their own confession. John MacPherson notes: "It should not indeed be overlooked that the Scottish Confession of Faith of 1560 lays down two things as requisite to true baptism: (1) That it be ministered by lawful ministers, preachers of the Word, chosen thereto by some Kirk, and (2) that it be ministered in such elements and in such sort as God hath appointed. Then it proceeds to declare that Papistical ministers are no ministers of Christ Jesus, "Yea (which is more horrible) they suffer women, whom the Holy Ghost will not suffer to teach in the congregation, to baptize," and also they adulterate the Sacrament by using oil, salt, spittle, and such-like inventions of men [Laing's Knox, vol. ii. chap. xxii. pp. 115, 116. Dunlop's *Collection*, vol. ii. pp. 84–86]. And so in theory they make Romish baptisms not only unlawful but also invalid. In an exactly contemporary document, however, the First Book of Discipline, drawn up by the same six Reformers, it is only enjoined that the introducers of these inventions be punished [Laing's Knox, Ut sup. p. 187. Dunlop, Ut sup. p. 521. "Such as would presume to alter Christ's perfect Ordinance you ought severely to punish"]. So far as appears, even from the beginning of the Reformation in Scotland, the idea of the unity of the Church so prevailed that even in regard to Romish baptism, against which so much could be said, only its lawfulness, but not its validity, was called in question." John MacPherson, *The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology*, The Sixth Series of the Chalmers Lectures, edited by C. G. M'Crie, D.D. (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1903) 98–99. This position of the Scottish church is also found in the many writings of men such as Samuel Rutherford, contra the English Separatists.

as “generally good men,” but whose abuses and methodology he found deplorable.²⁵

Hodge and Thornwell were both men of similar theological methodology, which point I hope to develop subsequently.²⁶ They were adherents of Scottish Realism, a philosophical orientation that they used as a handmaiden to their theological enterprises. They were men committed to the covenant of works and covenant of grace distinction as a *sine qua non* of their soteriology. Lastly, they were men of the *solas*.

CONCLUSION

In late 1897 Dr. Robert Lewis Dabney, blind and bent, visited Columbia, South Carolina to deliver an address and visit his longtime friend John Lafayette Girardeau. Both men had been venerable warriors in the church of the living God. They had differed on some substantial issues but fought together on many other points. Now they were nearing the gate that led to their exalted Savior. One last time Dabney opened God’s word to preach. Girardeau was physically able only to listen. George Andrew Blackburn recorded the scene at the close of the service as the two able theologians, philosophers, educators, and churchmen hobbled down the aisle and out of the building. The two servants of Christ commented to one another on the beauty of the simple Scoto-American worship service and the singing of the psalms. They remarked on the words of life mined from God’s word by the Virginian, and then Blackburn adds, “And so, blind and lame these princes in Israel walked on, talking of the past and future worship of God. A few months after this meeting they both joined the general assembly and church of the first born in the majestic worship of their God and Saviour.”²⁷

Dabney and Girardeau were indeed “princes in Israel,” and so too were Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell. While Dabney and Girardeau enjoyed a social intimacy right up to the time of their deaths, one can only wish that Hodge and Thornwell had known a more intimate society with one another. Then, perhaps, their differences could have been more constructive and less polarizing. Still, Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell continue to be worthy of our study and men from whom much can be learned. ■

25. Thomas E. Peck, *Miscellanies of Thomas E. Peck*, 3 vols. (Richmond: The Presbyterian Committee of Publications, 1895), 206–224.

26. An article comparing the theological propaedeutic and key doctrines of each man is scheduled for publication in 2013. This should serve as a helpful sequel to the present article.

27. George A. Blackburn, compiler, *The Life Work of John L. Girardeau* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1916), 368.

***In Brief: Dr. John M. Mason and a Colorblind Lord’s Table* (The Evangelical Guardian, IV. 6 (Nov. 1846): Editorial, 285–286.**

New York has undergone great changes, since I left it, on leaving the Theological Seminary in the year 1817. The mass of the population now reside beyond the bounds of what was then the city. Most of the churches are now also “up town” a mile or two beyond what was formerly the region of churches. The Wall Street church, of which Dr. Miller was at one time the pastor, is now on the other side of the Hudson in Jersey city. Murray Street church, whose pulpit, at the period referred to, was occupied by Dr. Mason, is removed at least a mile farther up, and presents precisely the same appearance it formally did, every stone probably occupying its former place in the walls.... The principal Associate Reformed Church in the city is under the pastoral care of Rev. W. McLaren, a man of solid talents and acquirements, who stands well with the city clergy as a pious and peaceable man.... On Sabbath evening before leaving the city, I paid a visit, in company with Mr. McLaren, to old Katherine Ferguson, a colored woman who became a member of Dr. Mason’s Church about 40 years ago. She is a remarkable woman. The most of what she made by keeping a confectioner’s shop (enough to have placed her now in independent circumstances) she spent in feeding, clothing, and educating destitute colored children. She is warmly attached to the Associate Reformed Church, and remembers Dr. Mason, and the ‘days of old,’ with peculiar delight. Two young persons, members of Mr. McLaren’s congregation, were in her house, being there, as I understood, to read the Bible, and converse with her. This would not fail to make on a mind at all accustomed to sober reflection, a favorable impression as to their piety.—One object of my visit, was to obtain from her lips an account of an occurrence which I had sometimes heard related. Her statement was as follows: “After Dr. Mason commenced preaching in Murray Street, some ‘gay ladies’ from Pearl Street, said to him: ‘Doctor it will not do for those colored people (Katherine and a male relative of her’s who had made a profession of religion) to sit at the same table with the white communicants.—They should be at a Table by themselves at the last.’ The Dr. simply replied, that he would think of it. When the day for the communion came round, and the people were about to take their seats at the Lord’s table, the Doctor came down from the pulpit, and taking the two colored persons by the hands, he said, “This is my brother, this is my sister. He that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother. In Christ Jesus, there is neither Greek, nor Jew,—Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free,’ and then led them forward to the table and set them down ‘first of all.’” This was the result of the Doctor’s reflection on the subject, and it settled the question forever. ■