

RESOLVING CONFLICT IN CHURCH HISTORY:
CHARLES HODGE AND THE OLD SCHOOL PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH IN THE TIME OF NATIONAL CONFLICT.
*A PRESENTATION TO THE 2016 ALUMNI CONFERENCE*¹

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THE MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY Alumni Association, in determining to hold a conference addressing conflict in the church, decided that one of the subjects warranting examination would be the disposition of some particular conflict in church history. Since church history is replete with such conflicts, my goal was to select something in which efforts were made to resolve such in a biblical way. One of the greatest conflicts in the history of the American Presbyterian Church was over slavery, an issue that not only played a role in the Old School/New School division of 1837, but also engendered conflict among the Old School, particularly with regard to the construction of the doctrine of the spirituality, or the spiritual interdependency, of the church (a doctrine that emphasized the differing spheres of church and state, highlighting that the calling of the church was chiefly spiritual, the task of gathering and perfecting the saints).

It is the conviction of this presentation that the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, rightly defined and employed, can serve the church (and the broader culture) well, especially in the resolution of conflicts that might arise within and without the church. In the time period under consideration, Charles Hodge, the renowned theology professor at Princeton Seminary, opposed those in 1859 and 1860 who would define the spirituality of the church so narrowly as to “stop the mouth of the church, and prevent her bearing her testimony to the kings and rulers, magistrates and people, in behalf of the truth and law of God” (see Appendix A). The doctrine of the spirituality of the church, wrongly defined and employed, can wreak havoc on the church and society: thus Hodge opposed the overly narrow approaches of Stuart Robinson and James Henley Thornwell, both of which ultimately proved to be inconsistently applied, depending on whose ox was being gored.

The way that we handle conflict is important: we must keep our heads when those about us are losing theirs—Hodge did this in his 1861 opposition to the Gardiner Spring Resolution, showing himself to have a balanced view of the spirituality of the church, the church being able to speak where needed and be silent where needed. A failure to address conflict rightly can lead to disastrous consequences: the U.S. Civil War (in the political sphere) and the split of the

1. This material was presented at the Alumni Conference, held on campus at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in April 2016. I explore these themes at length in a forthcoming monograph based on my dissertation, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017).

Presbyterian Church along sectional lines in 1861 into the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches. Politics became paramount over theology during the Civil War so that in 1869 political matters seemed more important than theological ones in the reunion of the Presbyterian Church. The doctrine of the spirituality of the church serves to make sure that the church keeps her spiritual head and keeps on task. What follows are some rather extended portions of my dissertation that deals with Hodge's doctrine of the spirituality of the church. As I've summarily argued at the end of my dissertation, the spirituality of the church could be recovered for the ongoing dialog of how the church is to relate to the world in which it finds itself, both in how it distinguishes itself from the world and how it gives itself to the world.

Slavery, as argued earlier in my dissertation and in a previous article in this journal, came to define the doctrine of the spirituality of the church in the 1830s and 1840s.² We continue here our survey of that history, leading up to, and entering into, the first phase of the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), with a view to examining serious church conflict and how Charles Hodge handled it. As sectional conflict increased throughout the 1850s, as is often the case when serious social tensions exist, politics became more and more dominant, threatening to overshadow all concerns, resulting in pervasive politicization.³ The church, as was the case with other institutions, could not escape the pull of such politicization and the question of the spirituality of the church became paramount at that time. The issue became, "Can the church resist cultural pressures to dissolve into political differences?" The church was hard pressed to maintain its integrity in the midst of such intense political pressure, remembering its calling and province to preach the gospel and not simply to be one more social agent that has chosen a "side" among competing political claims.⁴

On the other hand, what if what is driving the political is not merely political? What if the differences that are fueling conflict are profoundly moral or have profoundly moral implications? The church cannot be, nor should it appear to be, indifferent to its times and insensitive to the suffering of the poor and the oppressed

2. See also, for further definition of the spirituality of the church and as background to this essay, my article "The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Theology of Charles Hodge," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 25 (2014): 101-116.

3. A politically polarized citizenry tends to politicize every issue. A decade before the Civil War, the ideological war between the North and the South manifested itself in the Compromise of 1850, the penning of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, the Dred Scott decision of 1857, etc. The massive, and now-classic, set on the prelude to (and conduct of) the U.S. Civil War by Allan Nevins sheds much light on this period, particularly the first three of the eight volumes in *The War for the Union* set: *Ordeal of the Union: Fruits of Manifest Destiny, 1847-1852*, v. 1, and *Ordeal of the Union: A House Dividing, 1852-1857*, v. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947); v. 3, *The Emergence of Lincoln: Douglas, Buchanan, and Party Chaos, 1857-1859* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950).

4. The church does not escape this politicization, including the Old School Presbyterian Church, as seen in this essay in Hodge's opposition to the Gardiner Spring Resolution, and in chapter 7 (of my dissertation), with the increasing politicization of the church in the Civil War, and then in chapter 8 (of the same), with Hodge opposing reunion of the Old and New School churches in the North, such reunion occurring not because all doctrinal differences had been resolved but because political ones had, politics appearing to trump doctrinal concerns.

in its midst.⁵ The situation with slavery in America had, inarguably, a distinct political dimension to it. But unlike a matter of, say, congressional term-limits, there was a moral aspect to the slavery crisis. For those who argued that slavery was mostly a political question, something that the Bible allowed, and even regulated for the good of master and slave, the contention tended to be that the church as an institution should let slavery alone. On this construction, slavery was a civil matter and it was not the province of the church properly to intrude into civil matters.⁶ For those, however, who found American slavery morally repugnant, contrary to Scripture, the church as an institution had every right, indeed, a responsibility, to address it, calling both the members of the church, particularly, and civil society more broadly to obey God's commands and to manumit the slaves.⁷

Old School men of all stripes affirmed that the church has a particular province in which it ought to remain but disagreed on how exactly Scripture would have the church carry that out. Some saw the spirituality of the church acting as a kind of regulative principle while others saw the spirituality of the church as broader and looser in its conception. What was the relationship of the church to slavery? To whom was political allegiance due in the Civil North (Union or Confederacy)? Did

5. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 of my dissertation seek to demonstrate that Hodge withstood those who would unduly politicize the church, developing a supple doctrine of the spirituality of the church to fend off such ham-handed politicizers. These chapters will also show that Hodge resisted those who would use the doctrine of the spirituality of the church to keep the church from dealing with issues that it had every right to deal with (because the Bible addressed them) but who invoked the spirituality of the church to muzzle the church—leading up to and in the War, as well as after (brought to clearest expression in the *Declaration and Testimony* of the Louisville Presbytery, as seen in chapter 8 of my dissertation).

6. In chapter 5 of my dissertation, we see that many in the Old School Presbyterian Church, including Hodge, though moderately, took a version of this approach. Hodge and others, however, were willing to call for reform of slave laws, while some Southerners even supported slavery as a positive good. An example of the latter position would be the infamous sermon preached by Benjamin Morgan Palmer, the renowned pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, LA on Nov. 29, 1860, "Slavery, A Divine Trust: Duty of the South to Preserve and Perpetuate It," in *Fast Day Sermons; or, The Pulpit on the State of the Country* (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1861), 57-80. Palmer's title says it all. Another defense of slavery that is fascinating, and unusual because made by a New School man (albeit from Alabama), is the series of addresses published as a book by Fred A. Ross, *Slavery: Ordained of God* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1857).

7. Apart from the works by Patterson (in criticizing the 1845 GA) and M'Leod (in calling American slavery unjustifiable), one of the most prominent attacks on slavery came from Leonard Bacon, *Slavery: Discussed in Occasional Essays, from 1833 to 1846* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1846). Also helpful in grasping the shape of this whole argument in the 1840s and 1850s are two publications that emerged out of prominent public debates on slavery: one held in Cincinnati in 1845 and the other from correspondence exchanged in the late 1850s: The first: *A Debate on Slavery... Upon the Question: Is Slaveholding in Itself Sinful, and the Relation Between Master and Slave a Sinful Relation?* Affirmative: J. Blanchard, Pastor, Sixth Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati; Negative: N.L Rice Pastor, Central Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati (Cincinnati: Wm. H. Moore and Co., 1846); and the second: Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution* (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1860).

the Bible set forth a detailed church government? These questions are explored below.⁸

1. The Shifting Constitutional Landscape

The American Founding Fathers did not deal with the difficult issues relating to slavery for fear of disunion; rather, they compromised, thereby deferring issues to the nineteenth century. This fear of disunion, necessitating compromise, also actuated Old School Presbyterianism. Even though the slave trade ended in 1808, slavery continued and was increasingly profitable. Events after the War of 1812 forced compromise, beginning with the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which helped maintain the balance of slave and free states (at the insistence of the Southern states, which could never hope to maintain congressional power in the House of Representatives but could in the Senate).⁹ The Mexican War disrupted this balance, leading to an acute crisis that the Compromise of 1850 sought to address.¹⁰ With the Compromise of 1850, it was recognized that a precise balance could no longer be maintained in the number of slave and free states, and hence in the U.S. Senate, where each state, regardless of population, had two U.S. Senators, appointed by the dominant party in their respective state legislatures.¹¹ This heightened sectional conflict.

8. Those in Reformed and Presbyterian circles often refer to the regulative principle of worship: the conviction that Scripture regulates worship, determining its elements, so that whatever Scripture does not prescribe is proscribed. In his 1859 and 1860 debate with Charles Hodge, as seen later in this essay, James Henley Thornwell enunciated something like this with respect to church order: whatever the Bible did not prescribe (it did not, Thornwell argued, prescribe, e.g., Boards of Missions) it proscribed so that church judicatories were not permitted to act in ways except those explicitly set forth in Scripture. As far as the spirituality of the church was concerned, this meant that the church was restricted to what God had explicitly called her to: the ministration of Word and Sacraments, narrowly conceived.

9. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 147-160. The Missouri Compromise was struck between pro- and anti-slavery forces, permitting slavery south of a line running along what would be the new state of Missouri's southern border (except permitting it in the state of Missouri) and forbidding it north of that line. This maintained a balance of free and slave states and provided a measure of stability until the question of Texas and the Mexican War raised further questions needing addressing. The Compromise, in effect, asserted the right of Congress to regulate slavery in the Western territories. Congress's right to do so was strongly affirmed by Lincoln, especially in the Lincoln/Douglas debates, and affirmed by Hodge as fundamental (see chapter 2 of my dissertation).

10. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 658-700. Texas gained its independence from Mexico in 1836. It was widely recognized that if Texas became a U.S. State this could lead to a dispute with Mexico (which did not recognize Texan independence) and that the entrance of Texas as a state, due to its size, would vastly increase territory that would welcome slavery and possibly imperil the Missouri Compromise. Texas became a state in 1845 and soon thereafter, the United States, claiming Mexican encroachment on U.S. Territory, declared war on Mexico; see Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 744-791. Hodge opposed the annexation of Texas and the Mexican War (see chapter 2 of my dissertation).

11. Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 90-120. The significance of the Compromise of 1850 cannot be overestimated. This was the Compromise that held the country together in the aftermath of the Mexican War and the looming question of what to do with slavery in the

The Compromise of 1850, gained at great expense, reflected the work of two of Charles Hodge's political heroes, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. Besides the question of the admission of California as a free state, the Compromise included, among other things, a Fugitive Slave Act that provided for the return of slaves on the part of the North to the South. Many in the North thought that the Fugitive Slave Act was an outrage and opposed it as unconstitutional, unbiblical, and everything in between.¹² Moses Stuart of Andover Seminary wrote a book defending the Act as biblical and taking the kind of subtle approach of Hodge: slavery *in se* was not unbiblical, though problematic in its American form, warranting much regulation.¹³ He, like Hodge, argued against abolition, especially the growing tide of atheistic, or at least humanistic, abolitionism that either little regarded, or disregarded altogether, the Bible. Hodge was delighted in this work and gave it a good review, lending hearty support to the work that his political heroes had rendered in the Compromise, and hoping that it would prove to be the glue needed to hold the union together.¹⁴

John Calhoun, the third member of the senatorial triumvirate (along with Clay and Webster) had taken a different path from his compromising former friends. Calhoun adopted a posture of strict constitutional interpretation and found in it, like those that took a certain literalistic approach to Scripture without accounting for redemptive historical considerations,¹⁵ that the U.S. Constitution had permitted slavery and that it was thus not to be prohibited.¹⁶ The penchant of some, as would

territories. Hodge fervently hoped that this compromise, like the one in the church in 1845 (see chapter 5 of my dissertation), would solve the slavery/sectional crisis. It did not, and, some would say, only postponed the inevitable (the Civil War).

12. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law was quite important in securing the support of the South in the adoption of the Compromise of 1850. Hodge supported this law, as did a number of Old Schoolers who, like Hodge, otherwise hoped for the gradual extirpation of slavery. Hodge did it because he thought that the Compromise of 1850 was critical for the maintenance of the Union and the only way to attract Southern support was to pass this law as a part of the package. For Northern resistance to it see Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 132-39.

13. Moses Stuart, *Conscience and the Constitution, with Remarks on the Recent Speech of the Hon. Daniel Webster...on the Subject of Slavery* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1850). Stuart was similar to Hodge in his moderate treatment of slavery and hoped that the Compromise effected by Daniel Webster and others would save the country.

14. *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 23/1 (1851): 125: Hodge makes it clear that, though the "great anxiety for the peace and union of the country" has been lessened by the passage of the Compromise of 1850, there remains "great dissatisfaction at the north and south" with regard to the "compromise measures." Hereafter referenced as *BRPR*.

15. One of the greatest problems, arguably, with Hodge's approach to slavery—he affirmed that the Bible recognized, but regulated, it—was his failure to account for redemptive historical developments of the sort noticed by M'Leod in chapter 4 of my dissertation: the permission for the Hebrews to enslave foreigners for life was connected with *herem* warfare and was part of the particular redemptive historical situation that prevailed in Israel in her taking possession of the land of Canaan (recalling that slavery among Israelites was restricted—a kind of indentured servitude in which manumission was required).

16. The strict constructionism of Calhoun and others of his time is set forth in Peter Zavodnyik, *The Age of Strict Construction: A History of the Growth of Federal Power, 1789-1861* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

be evident in Lincoln,¹⁷ to read the Constitution through the Declaration of Independence, and to oppose slavery on the basis of a growing recognition that “all” humans were created equal, was particularly repugnant to Calhoun. What may have seemed a more conservative approach to the Constitution on Calhoun’s part was, arguably, a more radical approach since the Constitution was never meant, on the part of its drafters, to answer all questions (certainly they expected regular amendments), and many, including Adams and Jefferson, did not expect it to continue on but to be replaced as the times might demand.¹⁸ Jefferson especially looked for its obsolescence, declaring many times that the earth belonged to the living and not the dead. The notion that the U.S. Constitution was to be treated like Sacred Writ, binding upon all for all times, was fairly new and frequently tied with a vigorous defense of slavery.¹⁹

This observation about the growing trend among some, exemplified by John Calhoun, of adopting a so-called strict interpretation of the constitution is relevant to the church because something similar was happening among Old School Presbyterians. Certain Old School men began emphasizing a kind of literalistic, strict interpretation of the Church’s Constitution, particularly its Church Order, containing its Form of Government and Book of Discipline. Peter Wallace has argued persuasively that the debate at this point in the history of the Old School Church about the spirituality of the church was “a matter of hermeneutics and constitutional law.”²⁰ Wallace has reference to evidence that even as Calhoun “was pressing a similar line of argument in the United States Senate, the younger generation of Southern Presbyterians took a particularly hard-line stand on a strict construal both of the Bible and Presbyterian church order, while older Southerners and most Northerners preferred to make room for the concept of equity.”²¹

17. Harry V. Jaffa has become renowned for promoting Lincoln’s approach to the Constitution through the Declaration of Independence. Though he has several books on the subject, perhaps his best remains, and some think it the best book on Lincoln (which is remarkable in the American context, given the almost seemingly endless number of books on Lincoln): *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

18. For an incisive yet brief treatment of Adams’s political philosophy see Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (1969; rpt., Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1998), chapter 14, and for Jefferson’s, see Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, 6 vv. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1948-81), especially vv. 2-3.

19. As Merrill D. Peterson writes in *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 507: Jefferson’s claim that the “earth belongs to the living” has become a byword for Constitutional hermeneutics, making, for instance, such a strong impression that Richard Carlyle in 1936 used that very phrase as the title of a book that he wrote defending the New Deal.

20. Peter Wallace, “‘The Bond of Union’: The Old School Presbyterian Church and the American Nation, 1837-1861.” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2004, Chapter 10, p. 3.

21. *Ibid.* Strict constructionists of constitutional documents, typically, do not concern themselves with equity but with hewing to the letter of the law. Those concerned with equity typically stress that the letter of the law should not be slavishly adhered to so as to destroy the spirit of the law.

The evidence that Wallace produces is what he calls a “trivial matter” that “reveal[s] significant change.” Wallace then relates an incident illustrative of his contention at the 1846 General Assembly in which a minister was nominated by his presbytery to serve as a GA commissioner, but inclement weather prohibited the presbytery from meeting and thus it was never able to elect him. Since the Form of Government stipulated that commissioners be elected to the GA by their presbyteries, “it would be a clear violation of the letter of the constitution to allow him a seat. He only had a letter from the moderator of his presbytery attesting to his nomination.” But the “Assembly admitted him to a seat nonetheless.”²²

Fifteen commissioners protested his being seated, not for any personal reasons, but purely on constitutional grounds. Wallace notes the reason for the protest: “Fearing that setting aside constitutional rules would lead back to the ‘committeemen’ of the New School, the protest warned that this action would establish a precedent of laxness. The Assembly responded to the protest by noting that the Assembly “was not bound merely to the letter of the law, but to the equity of the law—the principles of justice established by the constitution,” having historically appointed a Committee of Elections to “examine and report on defective claims and doubtful cases,” which demonstrated “that the spirit, and not the mere letter of our Form of Government is to be our guide in all such cases.”²³ Wallace discovered that of the fifteen protesters, only four were from the North, while several others were prominent Southerners of the rising generation; older leading Southerners did not tend to protest. Wallace argues that evidently “the older generation found the more nuanced argument [for equity] persuasive and the strict constructionist argument of their younger colleagues less satisfying.”²⁴ So this strict constructionist approach, far from being the time-honored Presbyterian procedure, was arguably novel, and even threatening, to many like Hodge, who were accustomed to doing things more with a view to equity than to an approach that felt slavishly bound to the church order.

The doctrine of the spirituality of the church takes on its own shape in the nineteenth century due to slavery and to those that adopt, like John C. Calhoun in the civil realm, a strict constructionist stance in the church. Perhaps the two greatest champions of this strict constructionist approach were Stuart Robinson and James

22. Wallace, “Bond of Union,” Chapter 10, p. 1.

23. Wallace, “Bond of Union,” Chapter 10, pp. 1-2. The Assembly reasoned further that it had been the intent of the presbytery to follow the Form of Government to the letter but that it had been providentially hindered from doing so and since the brother in question had traveled for more than two weeks to reach the Assembly site, it would be unjust to deprive them of representation. The committee argued more fully that the Assembly should “feel its obligation to act not merely according to law, but according to equity, and where an adherence to a mere municipal regulation would conflict with the manifest claims of equity, it would endeavour to follow out the principle embodied in the declaration of the Master, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.’ It believes that rules were made for judicatories, and not judicatories for rules: and hence where the maintenance of a rule would inflict a manifest wrong and injury upon Christ’s cause. . . as a court of equity it ought to do that which *is* right, rather than that which merely *appears* right. If it be lawful and safe to violate the letter of a divine statute—like that of the Sabbath—in order to preserve the spirit of such a statute; much more is it lawful and safe to disregard a human enactment, rather than perpetuate a serious wrong.”

24. Wallace, “Bond of Union,” Chapter 10, p. 3.

Henley Thornwell. Robinson particularly gloried in the American experiment in the separation of church and state, seeing in it an opportunity denied his Scottish forbears, who, as part of an established church, had to contend with Erastianism and other aspects of the continuing impurities fostered by the heritage of Constantine. Robinson's view on church and state, and thus the spirituality of the church, was expressed endlessly by him, throughout the whole corpus of his work, but perhaps most clearly in his 1858 work entitled *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel*,²⁵ in which he writes:

Touching the distinction between the power ecclesiastical and the civil power, which latter is also ordained of God, the points of contrast are so numerous and so fundamental that nothing but the confusion of mind arising from the oppression of Cæsar and antichrist, backed by the power of Cæsar, could ever have caused the obscurity and inconsistency of the church's testimony in modern times. For they have nothing in common, except that both powers are of divine authority, both concern the race of mankind, and both were instituted for the glory of God as a final end. In respect to all else, their origin, nature, and immediate end, and their mode of exercising the power, they differ fundamentally. Thus they differ:

1. In that the civil power derives its authority from God as the Author of nature, whilst the ecclesiastical comes alone from Jesus as Mediator.
2. In that the rule for the guidance of the civil power in its existence is the light of nature and reason, the law which the Author of nature reveals through reason to man; but the rule for the guidance of ecclesiastical power in its exercise is that light which, as Prophet of the church, Jesus Christ has revealed in his word. It is a government under statute laws already enacted by the King.
3. They differ in that the scope and aim of the civil power are limited properly to things seen and temporal; the scope and aim of ecclesiastical power are things unseen and spiritual. *Religious* is a term not predicable of the acts of the state; *political* is a term not predicable of the acts of the church. The things pertaining to the kingdom of Christ are things concerning which Cæsar can have rightfully no cognizance, except indirectly and incidentally, as these things palpably affect the temporal and civil concerns of men; and even then Cæsar cannot be too jealously watched by the church. The things pertaining to the kingdom of Cæsar are matters of which the church of Christ, as an organic government, can have no cognizance, except incidentally and remotely, as affecting the spiritual interests of men; and even then the church cannot watch herself too jealously.
4. They differ in that the significant symbol of the civil power is the sword; its government is one of force, a terror to evil-doers; but the significant symbol of church power is the keys, its government only ministerial, the functions of its officers to open and close and have a care of a house already complete as to its structure externally, and internally organized and provided.
5. They differ in that civil power may be exercised as a 'several' power by one judge, magistrate, or governor; but all ecclesiastical power pertaining to government is a joint power only, and to be exercised by tribunals. The Head of the government has not seen fit to confer spiritual power of jurisdiction in any

25. Reprinted recently under the same title (Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2009).

power upon a single man, nor authorized the exercise of the functions of rule in the spiritual commonwealth as a several power.²⁶

Several aspects of this would be challenged by other Old Schoolers who also affirmed the doctrine of the spirituality of the church. Hodge, Thornwell, Dabney and other Old Schoolers would challenge item 1 as denying the Lordship of Christ over all.²⁷ They would likewise, with respect to item 2, deny that only general revelation ought to inform civil government.²⁸ Perhaps general revelation is the only thing that does inform civil rulers in the case of a pagan state, but Scripture ought to inform all government everywhere, in keeping with the Calvinist understanding of the second use of the law.²⁹ With respect to item 3, fellow staunch spirituality-of-the-church proponent Thornwell, along with the others, would dispute Robinson and declare that the state is inescapably religious and not merely political.³⁰ Old Schoolers generally would agree with items 4 and 5.

Interestingly, even Stuart Robinson, particularly when the issue had nothing to do with slavery, could be found supporting the church addressing the state with respect to legislation deemed to be of interest to the church.³¹ The Westminster Confession of Faith, as has been noted, was changed in the American de-established context, though WCF 31.4 retained its same shape: “Synods and councils are 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.”

In the Scottish context, given the realities of establishment, it was more common, and natural, for the Kirk to find occasion to address civil affairs. This was, understandably, less common in the American context, but Robinson did not hesitate to argue that the 1852 General Assembly should petition the President of the United States to order that all treaties with foreign nations should include “provision made for securing to the American citizen travelling or resident in foreign countries, the right to profess his faith, and worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.”³² This was fiercely debated and opposed by some leading figures as constituting the undue “intermeddling” in civil affairs forbidden by the Confession. Support for the measure did pass at the 1853 GA.³³ What is important here is not so much that the GA ultimately decided to petition the U.S. President and Congress, but

26. Robinson, *Church of God*, 211-212.

27. Each of these men affirm, as seen in this work, that while Jesus bears a particular redemptive rule over his church, he also rules as king over all creation.

28. Thornwell says explicitly, as seen later in this essay, that the Bible ought to govern civil society.

29. Calvin delineates three uses of the law, the first to teach man his sin and thus to lead him to Christ, the second to serve as a guide to civil society and to inform rulers of their duties as magistrates, and the third to serve as a guide to and expression of gratitude in the Christian life (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.7). It is to the second of these uses that the state attends.

30. Hodge, Thornwell and Dabney affirm this, as seen in this thesis.

31. Peter Wallace, “Bond of Union,” Chapter 10, pp. 5-8.

32. Quoted in Wallace, “Bond of Union,” Chapter 10, p. 5.

33. Wallace, “Bond of Union,” Chapter 10, pp. 7-8.

that Stuart Robinson, leading proponent of the spirituality of the church, was in support of it. After examining Thornwell's strong advocacy of the spirituality of the church, we will also see ways in which he qualified that, both on the cusp of and in the U.S. Civil War. But for now, let us explore further the commitment that some of the strict constructionists made with respect to interpreting the church's constitution and the impact that had on their doctrine of the spirituality of the church.

2. The 1859 General Assembly

The 1859 GA discussed whether to support voluntary societies.³⁴ Though the Old School Church had taken on the work of missions and Christian education herself, voluntary religious societies developed apace and the question of whether such extra-ecclesiastical societies warranted GA endorsement occupied the attention of the 1859 GA. Thornwell had convinced the 1848 General Assembly to declare that the Assembly as a "spiritual body" had nothing to do with recommending voluntary societies to its members (whether for temperance, slave colonization, etc.).³⁵ He hoped to do so again in 1859, when the General Assembly had, as customary, various voluntary societies seeking endorsement of their programs with respect to the slave trade, temperance, and colonization.

Thornwell spoke at the end of the 1848 Assembly against support of the Temperance Society, though the American Colonization Society had already received that Assembly's expression of support.³⁶ In 1859, Thornwell publicly opposed the Colonization Society itself, which opposition was widely reported, eliciting strong criticism from Charles Hodge in his annual GA review. The Minutes of the General Assembly for that year indicate, however, that the overture "respecting the Colonization Society, and the report of the Committee thereon, was taken up, and on motion...the whole subject was laid on the table."³⁷ Thornwell's speech against it, however, was published. In his speech, Thornwell set forth his view of the spirituality of the church, arguing, "The Church is exclusively a *spiritual* organization, and possesses none but spiritual power."³⁸

Interestingly, what the GA did adopt (instead of tabling) was the recommendation brought by a committee on which Thornwell served with respect to the Presbyterian Historical Society. The Society was not an official agency of the church though fairly close to it, certainly closer than the American Colonization Society. Thornwell rebuffed the historical society's request that the GA "recommend

34. Alan D. Strange, "2001 Preface to Charles Hodge's *The Church and Its Polity*," *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 13 (2002): 26-32. In addition to such voluntary, extra-ecclesiastical societies that were focused on foreign missions, some of the leading agencies that elicited Presbyterian support were the American Bible Society (1816), the American Sunday School Union (1824), the American Tract Society (1825) and the American Home Missionary Society (1826) (*Ibid.*, 26-27).

35. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1848), 32; 58-9.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1859), 550. In the American context, "to lay on the table" means "not to take up" or "to set aside." A fuller explanation of this parliamentary procedure is below.

38. Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, IV, 473. Emphasis his.

to the churches to take up a collection in their behalf.” Thornwell’s Committee recommended, and the Assembly adopted, the following: “The Church of Jesus Christ, as a spiritual body, commissioned only to execute the revealed will of God, can sustain no direct relation to any voluntary associations, however praiseworthy in their aims, formed for the purpose of promoting the interests of art, literature or secular morality. When such societies involve no wrong principles, it is a matter of Christian liberty to join them or not join them, encourage them, or otherwise—and therefore the Church should leave them where Christ has left them, to the sound discretion of his people.”³⁹ More than a few Southerners took heart that the General Assembly adopted this recommendation, one in particular noting that it was a greater victory for the “Southern” slant on the spirituality of the church than if the vote had been on the Colonization Society, since the Presbyterian Historical Society “is of a far more decidedly religious character than the Colonization Society,” the supposition being that the principle of exclusion would apply even more to the Colonization Society.⁴⁰

On the one hand, this was not the first time that Hodge had encountered Thornwell’s sort of reasoning with respect to the spirituality of the church. On the other hand, Hodge himself, arguably, had engaged in similar reasoning in the classroom and in publication, particularly regarding the nature of the church, slavery, the state, and the relationship of church and state with respect to slavery. He had supported strongly the General Assembly in previous years when it had expressed something quite like this about slavery: in 1845, 1846, and 1849. Hodge, as we’ve seen, upheld the spirituality of the church. What made him differ so sharply from Thornwell in his article on the 1859 GA? Perhaps it was in part because Hodge was a strong supporter of colonization, knew that the Assembly had supported colonization many times before, and suspected that Thornwell’s claim of an across-the-board opposition to church support of voluntary societies (Thornwell being willing even to go after the Presbyterian Historical Society) arose because Thornwell’s real target was the Assembly engaging something so closely related to slavery as the American Colonization Society.⁴¹ The sectional conflict had heated considerably at this point. Perhaps Hodge was weary of what he perceived as the demand that the church yield time and again on the question of slavery. Whether or not these motives actuated Charles Hodge in his opposition to Thornwell, it is clear that Hodge wanted a more nuanced approach to the whole question, not one that drew such a sharp distinction between the spiritual and the secular.

Hodge sharply criticized the arguments that Thornwell advanced at the 1859 GA.⁴² He noted that Thornwell’s theory of the spirituality of the church was more akin to the views of Independents like John Owen and the Puritans of New England than the historic Reformed and Presbyterian views of the church on this matter.⁴³ Hodge argued that the “purely” spiritual view of Thornwell was a marked departure from the ecclesiology of the Reformed churches. He argued that such an approach

39. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1859), 533.

40. Quoted in Wallace, “Bond of Union,” Chapter 10, p. 28.

41. See other places in my dissertation for information about the American Colonization Society.

42. *BRPR* 31.3 (1859): 607-618.

43. *BRPR* 31.3 (1859): 612.

yields the view, for instance, that the “merely” baptized are not “members” of the church: evidence for this being the common reference to those making a profession of faith as “joining the church,” as if they were not already members of the visible church by virtue of their birth and solemn admission by baptism.⁴⁴ Hodge continues a vigorous defense of the province of the church, maintaining that it is properly within the power of the church both to support voluntary societies advancing the work of the kingdom and to do that work itself through its agencies, like the Boards of Missions, Christian Education, etc. He argues that the church has full competency and power to act in the ways that Thornwell opposed, and that Thornwell’s doctrine of the spirituality of the church was radical and out of the Old School Presbyterian mainstream.⁴⁵

3. The 1860 General Assembly

The debate between Hodge and Thornwell continued at the 1860 General Assembly. This time, however, Hodge was in attendance at the General Assembly and he and Thornwell had their storied faceoff over the nature of Presbyterianism. At the 1859 Assembly, the main item at issue between Hodge and Thornwell had been Thornwell’s “novel” argument for the spirituality of the church. What the 1860 Assembly adopted with respect to spirituality was, however, unlike the 1859 proclamation, a much more balanced statement: it affirmed both the church as a spiritual institution and the right of the church, nevertheless, to address issues that it thought to be warranted, whatever the consequences of such address might be.

The Minutes of the General Assembly note that “Overture No. 32, several memorials and overtures referred to the Committee relating to Colonization, Temperance, the Slave Trade, & c.” This is what the Assembly adopted with respect to interacting with these voluntary societies: “While the General Assembly on the one hand, disclaim all right to interfere in secular matters; and on the other, assert the right and duty of the Church, as God’s witness on earth, to bear her testimony in favour of truth and holiness, and against all false doctrines and sin, wherever professed or committed, yet in view of the often repeated action of the Assembly in reference to the subjects above referred to, it is inexpedient to take any further action in relation thereto.”⁴⁶ With respect to the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, the 1860 General Assembly took an even-handed approach, disclaiming secular authority while asserting the right to bear witness against sin in any sphere, finally refusing to take any action. This was an attempt on the part of the GA to please North and South and continue the bond of union. This was also an endorsement of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church virtually identical with Hodge’s view.

The main contention between Hodge and Thornwell in 1860 was not how the church should relate to extra-ecclesiastical agencies, but over the nature of Presbyterianism, arrived at through a debate on the question of church boards. The 1859 GA had tasked a committee to report to the 1860 GA on the question of whether changes should be made in the structure of the administrative boards that

44. *BRPR* 31.3 (1859): 614.

45. See Appendix A for a fuller expression of Hodge’s position from *BRPR* 31.3 (1859): 616-618.

46. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1860), 44

governed the agencies of the church, in this case the Board of Domestic Missions. The Minutes of the General Assembly laconically record that debate took place, that it involved Thornwell, Hodge, and others and that the question was put after some time: “The main question, that it is inexpedient to make any organic change in the Board of Domestic Missions, was then put, in calling the role and the vote is as follows, viz....Ayes—248...Nays—59.”⁴⁷ Here Thornwell’s strict constructionism came into play: Thornwell argued that the Bible and the other standards of the church implied, if not explicitly taught, that the judicatories of the church, and not an agency like a board, are what Christ had authorized to carry out the work of the church. Hodge argued that the church was not bound in the way that Thornwell alleged and that a board could carry out the work of the church on behalf of the General Assembly. Thornwell taught that the church had a regulative principle of government in the same way that it had a regulative principle of worship. The General Assembly heavily sided with Hodge and ruled that the Board was not out of accord with Scripture and thus did not need reorganization.⁴⁸

This decision was taken on a Friday and on Monday Thornwell read a protest against the earlier action of the Assembly. The Assembly appointed five men, including Hodge, to answer the protest.⁴⁹ The next day, however, several resolutions were adopted with respect to the question of the re-organization of the boards, having to do with better informing all the members of the Board of their meetings and, when special meetings were in view, the subjects under consideration; requiring the boards to send with their annual GA reports all their minutes, including executive committee minutes; and to end some practices that tended to affect aspects of the integrity of the boards. This appears to have been sufficiently concessive for Thornwell and his fellow protesters, who withdrew their protest and the committee appointed to prepare an answer to the protest was accordingly dissolved.⁵⁰ As sharp as differences could be at this point this close to the War, there was still room for concession and the maintenance of the unity of the church.⁵¹

The debate between Hodge and Thornwell in 1860 focused on the question of the justification of church boards: could the church as a whole (through the General Assembly) appoint a board to oversee the task of foreign and domestic missions, Christian education, and publication or was each judicatory (including GA and the presbyteries) bound to carry out these tasks more directly? Underlying this debate, which might seem to a casual observer simply to deal with a difference on how the church ought to oversee and carry out its tasks, was a deeper debate over different conceptions of the church. Thornwell’s conception of the church was in keeping with

47. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1860), 36.

48. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1860), 36.

49. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1860), 37.

50. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1860), 46.

51. For all his professed principled objections to boards, it seems that Thornwell’s criticism of the boards may have had as much to do with process as principle. When measures to make the boards more responsive to the judicatories were proposed at the 1860 Assembly, Thornwell withdrew his protest against the boards, signaling that he may have objected as much to the way the boards operated as to the fact of their existence. He also opposed the parochial nature that the boards reflected, particularly in their Philadelphia-dominated constituency. He did not later seem to mind boards that centered on Richmond.

the kind of strict constructionist approach discussed in this chapter. He believed that the Bible defined the work of the church in detail, and since the Bible prescribed Presbyterianism, it also prescribed everything necessary to the carrying out of the church's task of gathering and perfecting the saints. Since the Bible knew no intermediary agency, like a board, in the carrying out of such a task, Thornwell reasoned, the Bible did not permit such an agency to exist.⁵² Hodge argued that the Bible did not give details for Presbyterian government like it did for doctrine and worship, but rather principles of Presbyterianism, one might say, that the church had a good deal of freedom in implementing.⁵³

As we've seen, at some length and in some detail, in chapter 4, Hodge's conception of the church as a spiritual institution meant not only, and not even chiefly, that the church was an essentially *visible* institution; rather, Hodge believed the church in its essence to be *invisible*. To be sure, outward organization always arose from this invisible core. While such outward organization was not unimportant, it did not define the church in her essence. If the outward organization did define the church in her essence, Hodge feared that this rendered every church not Presbyterian to be no true church. He affirmed divine right Presbyterianism of a sort (the conviction that the Bible set forth not only a pattern for doctrine and worship but also for government), but of a clearly less stringent sort than the kind of divine right Presbyterianism espoused by Thornwell; and that became evident in their debate. Thornwell, at the 1860 GA, admitted that the question of whether or not to use a board to oversee some of the church's work was "but an off-shoot from another question dividing...us, and that question is *the organization of the Church itself*."⁵⁴ Thornwell described his own position, and that of those who agreed with him, as holding to the conviction that "God gave us our church-government, as truly as He gave our doctrines; and that we have no more right to add to the church-government, which is Divine, than to add to the doctrine, which is Divine." This does not seem particularly controversial, or controverted by Hodge or others. It is what follows in the details that aroused dispute.

Thornwell argues that entailed in his view of the church is the belief that the church "has no discretionary power to create a new church court or judicatory, or body, of whatever name to stand in her own place." Thornwell characterized Hodge and company as believing that "no definite form of church-government is of Divine origin, but God has left it to *man* to organize His Church." Thornwell goes so far as to describe Hodge's position as "church-government may be modified according to circumstances—according to human ideas of expediency, at the whims of men. God gave only general principles, and man is to work out of them the best system he can....[God] has left us to shape [the materials and principles of church government] pretty much as we please."⁵⁵ Thornwell sees what he takes as Hodge's *laissez-faire* approach to church government to be in sharp contrast with his own position: "God

52. Thornwell's main arguments against the legitimacy of boards, as opposed to judicatories themselves (or committees thereof), in carrying out the work of the church may be found in a series of four articles found in his *Collected Writings*, IV, 143-295.

53. *BRPR* 32.3 (1860): 511 ff., also "Warrant for the Boards," in *Church Polity*, 435-443; see Hodge's "Presbyterianism," in *Church Polity*, 118-133.

54. Thornwell, *Collected Works*, IV, 218. Emphasis his.

55. *Ibid.*

gave us a Church, a Constitution, laws, Presbyteries, Assemblies, Presbyters, and all the functionaries necessary to a complete organization of His kingdom upon the earth and to its effective operation.” Little wonder that Hodge, reflecting upon such an assertion, proclaims, “Dr. Thornwell seems to think that something like the whole of our Book of Discipline is found in Scripture.” Hodge regards this as “a peculiar theory of Presbyterianism; a theory which should exclude all discretionary power in the church, and tie her down to the modes of action prescribed as of divine authority in the word of God.”⁵⁶

Hodge, both at the 1860 GA and more fully thereafter, set forth his own view of the nature of true Presbyterianism over against what he viewed as Thornwell’s cramped and novel view (what might otherwise be termed as a strict constructionist view). We have discussed that in some length in chapter 4, but briefly recapitulate it here as consisting of the following general principles: 1. That all the attributes and prerogatives of the church arise from the indwelling of the Spirit, so that where he dwells, there are those attributes and prerogatives. 2. The Spirit dwells not only in the clergy but in all the people who thus enjoy and exercise church power. 3. That in the exercise of this church power, the “church is to be governed by principles laid down in the word of God, which determine, within certain limits, her officers and modes and organization; beyond which she has discretion as to methods, organs and agencies.” 4. The fundamentals of Presbyterianism are, “first, the parity of the clergy; second, the right of the people to a substantive part in the government of the church; and third, the unity of the church, so that a small part is subject to a larger and a larger to the whole.” Hodge set this forth over against Thornwell’s strict constructionist view of the church, which Hodge believed essentially un-churched everyone but Presbyterians.⁵⁷ From Hodge’s perspective, Thornwell’s view of the church was both too spiritual (being more like Owen than Knox or Rutherford and muzzling the church’s prophetic voice to civil society) and not spiritual enough (stressing the organization at the expense of the organism, tending to un-church all but Presbyterians).

4. The 1861 General Assembly

The doctrine of the spirituality of the church took on a different dimension at the General Assembly of 1861. Previously, the question had impacted the discussion of the boards and the nature of Presbyterianism, the nature and limits of church power with respect to slavery, and the province of the church with respect to the state. These last elements—particularly church and state questions—remained at the fore in 1861, but they had an entirely different feel about them. There was a new urgency, a crisis atmosphere, at the 1861 General Assembly because of what had happened in civil society between the Assembly of 1860 and that of 1861. Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States in November 1860. Because Lincoln had campaigned and been elected on a platform opposing all extension of slavery into the territories, having the effect of limiting slavery to where it existed and preventing its

56. Hodge’s article on “Presbyterianism,” published in the *BRPR Church Polity* (118-133), and reprinted in Thornwell, *Collected Works*, IV, 616.

57. Thornwell, *Collected Works*, IV, 617.

spread, the Southern states, in none of which Lincoln had been on the ballot, began to secede, i.e., to withdraw from the union with a view to forming their own confederacy.⁵⁸

These developments, particularly secession and the specter of war, were distressing to Old School Presbyterians, to Thornwell no less than Hodge. Thornwell was a “Union” man, as were all the leading Old School Presbyterians of the South. Thornwell, having returned from Europe in 1860, proposed the emancipation of the slaves in order to save the Union.⁵⁹ But with the successive withdrawal of Southern states from the Union, beginning with Thornwell’s state of South Carolina in December 1860 (with ten others seceding in the following days and months), hopes for the continuance of an intact United States dimmed. Over against such an eventuality, Hodge published “The State of the Country” in the January 1861 issue of the *BRPR* and “The Church and Country” in the April issue of the same year. Clearly all thoughts were turned to the national crisis: how to save the Union (and induce seceded states to return) and to avert the horrors of war. Hodge’s first article was written before South Carolina’s secession, with Hodge making every argument that he could as to why secession was not called for and would be a disaster.⁶⁰ In the second article, secession had occurred, though it was written before the outbreak of war, the Southern firing on Ft. Sumter on April 12, 1861.⁶¹

In “The State of the Country,” Hodge perceived some need to justify his foray into matters civil in a journal devoted largely to matters ecclesiastical. “There are occasions,” Hodge wrote, “when political questions rise into the sphere of morals and religion; when the rule for political action is to be sought, not in considerations of state policy but in the law of God. On such occasions, the distinction between secular and religious journals is obliterated.”⁶² This was such an extraordinary

58. Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005) details the rise of Lincoln and the violent reaction against it in the southern states.

59. William W. Freehling, “James Henley Thornwell’s Mysterious Antislavery Moment,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 57/3 (Aug., 1991): 383-406. Thornwell went with his state, South Carolina, when it seceded, but he was in favor of the Union historically and was even willing ultimately, as the article notes, to abolish slavery to save the union.

60. The response of R.J. Breckinridge to Hodge’s January 1861 article—Breckinridge agreed with and appreciated the article—was accurate: “Your article in the *Repertory*...will not ...satisfy any except temperate and thoughtful persons.” Breckinridge predicted disunion and war (Hodge and Lincoln underestimated the will and resolve of Southerners with respect to such), a letter sent (hereafter ALS), 19 January 1861, Charles Hodge Miscellaneous Collection (Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library [hereafter CHMC]), Box 28, Folder 21. In correspondence with Peter Walker, Hodge notes that “nine tenths” of the response to his January 1861 article is “greatly in its favour,” while also noting that he is “greatly harassed by some over the article,” n.d., CHMC, Box 46, Folder 30. Hodge is especially upset that his good friend and PTS Board President, Henry Boardman, who had seen an advance copy of the article, sent Hodge “a very serious remonstrance against the appearance of my article in the *Princeton Review*,” 12 December 1860, CHMC, Box 46, Folder 30. See also, in the same place, Hodge’s letter to Walker of 17 December 1860.

61. Hodge noted, with dismay, that some copies of the April 1861 article, after the outbreak of the War, “have been returned, as refused,” the mail in the South being censored, 1 May, 1861, CHMC, Folder 46, Box 30.

62. Hodge, *BRPR* 33.1 (1861): 1.

occasion, as Hodge saw it, in which the threat of disunion imperiled the nation and the church in the nation. Hodge fervently believed that the United States was to serve as a city upon a hill, a political and religious model to the rest of the world, a beacon of freedom and holiness that a civil war threatened to bring to an ignominious end. Though Hodge was highly political personally, he sought publically to downplay partisanship and it was indeed an extraordinary situation at hand, the dissolution of the nation, which prompted Hodge to believe that his address of civil affairs so directly in the pages of *BRPR* was warranted.

Hodge was seen throughout the church as a moderate, unlike the Southerners, who were seen as more extreme with their defense of slavery, or R.J. Breckinridge, who was seen as a man who loved to fight altogether too much. Hodge expressed to his brother Hugh that he intended to maintain the peace by his article.⁶³ Indeed, many in the North were heartened by it, but his friends in the South attacked and rejected it.⁶⁴ And insofar as Hodge remained opposed in principle to abolitionism, the abolitionists of the North attacked it as still currying favor with the South and seeking yet to appease them so that they would remain in the Union.⁶⁵ Though Hodge viewed the situation as an acute crisis meriting attention in a theological journal—and, as noted, others were to follow in the war years—he could still maintain that there was no undue intrusion into matters that were more purely civil or political because he was neither preaching from the pulpit (having far more license in a journal article than in a sermon) nor was he urging the church as an institution to adopt his view. On any proper view of the spirituality of the church, Hodge had not, in his view, in either of his two pre-War articles, transgressed by addressing the more purely political and he certainly hoped that the church would observe such strictures.⁶⁶

Hodge's hopes for the church as an institution maintaining her proper spirituality and avoiding improper political pronouncements threatening the bonds of union of the Presbyterian Church, though the times were tempestuous, were thoroughly dashed at the 1861 General Assembly. As Hodge scholar John Stewart

63. ALS to Hugh Hodge, 13 December, 1860, The Charles Hodge Papers (Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library [hereafter CHP]), Box 12, Folder 2.

64. ALS to Hugh Hodge, 18 February, 1861, CHP, Box 12, Folder 2. This reception of his article by many in the South vexed Hodge greatly. One correspondent (John Miller, 7 January 1861, CHMC, Box 28, Folder 20) went so far as to say, in reference to Hodge's January 1861 article, that it would "denationalize the Seminary and confine it to the Northern States." In a 3 January 1861 letter from Hodge to Leighton Wilson, Hodge expresses dismay at the prominent churchman's conviction that Hodge's article will be ruinous for Hodge and the Seminary.

65. Gutjahr, 311-317. Hodge's January 1861 article was followed by an article in the South from Thornwell, upholding his version of the spirituality of the church. Hodge's April 1861 article was, in part, a response to Thornwell.

66. While some correspondents excoriated Hodge for expressing what he did in the two articles as inappropriate for a clergyman, several correspondents (particularly as reflected in CHP, Box 15) commended him, especially several letters from an L. Elmers (CHP, Box 15, Folder 50, letters dated 15 and 21 January and 11 March, 1861), begging Hodge to use his influence to avert war, arguing that if Hodge called for letting the South go in peace, Hodge was so influential that "the course you take in this matter may decide the question."

put it: “In the history of American Presbyterianism, no General Assembly can equal the one that met in Philadelphia in May of 1861. For drama and long-range consequences, it is without peer. By the time the Assembly adjourned, all the Southern states had withdrawn from the Union except Tennessee and North Carolina.”⁶⁷ What precisely went on at the 1861 General Assembly bears telling in some detail because it particularly reveals where Hodge was with respect to the spirituality of the church and the role that the doctrine played at that Assembly.

Since the War had already begun when the Assembly convened in Philadelphia on May 16, 1861, commissioners from the Southern presbyteries and synods were either ill-represented or not represented at all.⁶⁸ The Synods of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Arkansas had no commissioners in attendance.⁶⁹ The Synod of Virginia had only one minister and one elder present, representing one Presbytery (Greenbrier), which would become part of West Virginia.⁷⁰ The Synods of Memphis and Texas each had only two ministers present representing two presbyteries in each synod. The Synod of Nashville had two ministers representing two presbyteries and one elder from one of those presbyteries.

The Synod of Mississippi, however, was relatively well represented, with a minister from each presbytery (two from the Presbytery of New Orleans), but no ruling elders. The Northern Synods generally had full representation (the Synod of Philadelphia, for example, had, for its seven presbyteries, fourteen ministers and fourteen ruling elders).⁷¹ Clearly, the civil and political situation of the day marked the character of the Assembly: the 1861 Old School General Assembly in Philadelphia was overwhelmingly Northern in its composition from the beginning. And, at least in the judgment of Charles Hodge, the 1861 Assembly addressed political matters that ought to have been left in the discretion of the individual members of the church.

Ironically, the moderator of the previous General Assembly, who customarily preaches the opening sermon of the new Assembly (and presides until a new moderator is elected), preached on John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world,” one of the classic texts ordinarily used by those vying for the doctrine of the spirituality of the church.⁷² One suspects that this might have been an attempt, arguably a fruitless one, to lower the temperature of patriotic fervor and focus

67. John Stewart, “Charles Hodge as a Public Theologian,” in *Theology as Conversation: The Significance of Dialogue in Historical and Contemporary Theology—A Festschrift for Daniel L. Migliore*, ed. by Bruce L. McCormack and Kimlyn J. Bender (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 350-351.

68. Though the meeting place of the General Assembly was chosen by the previous General Assembly, and the previous Assembly (1860) had no way of knowing the events of 1861, that Philadelphia was the chosen city was ironic: it was both the cradle of American Presbyterianism (being the first Presbytery in 1706 and the first GA in 1789) and of the nation (in which city both the Declaration of Independence, 1776, and the Constitution, 1789, were adopted). It was also quite a patriotic city, which made it difficult to resist patriotic demands on the 1861 GA to issue a strongly pro-Union statement.

69. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 296-297.

70. *Ibid.* Eighteen counties in northwestern Virginia refused to secede and formed the state of West Virginia that was admitted to the Union in 1863 (to the delight of President Lincoln).

71. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 294.

72. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 294.

everyone on the ecclesiastical tasks at hand. On Saturday morning, May 18th, “Dr. [Gardiner] Spring offered a resolution, that a Special Committee be appointed to inquire into the expediency of this Assembly making some expression of their devotion to the Union of these States, and their loyalty to the [Federal] Government [of the United States]; and if in their judgment it is expedient so to do, they report what that expression shall be.”⁷³

Immediate opposition arose. A motion to lay the resolution on the table carried 123 to 102.⁷⁴ There was then a call for the vote to be recorded while a rising count was in process. The Moderator ruled the call for the “yeas and nays” accordingly to be out of order. The result of the vote “to lay on the table” was announced (from the rising count) and a member moved immediately to take the resolution from the table, “and on this motion called for the yeas and nays. Points of order were discussed on this motion, until the Moderator called for the order of the day” to attend to other scheduled matters. This sort of parliamentary maneuvering and wrangling is evidence of controverted matters and often indicative of a highly divided body. After the order of the day was dealt with, “the discussion was resumed on points of order,” connected with the motion to record the vote to take the Gardiner Spring resolution from the table. A substitute motion passed that Spring’s resolution be made the order of the day on the following Tuesday.⁷⁵ For some reason, there was not a return to Dr. Spring’s resolution until the following Wednesday: “Dr. Spring offered a paper with resolutions respecting the appointment of religious solemnities for the 4th of July next, and the duty of ministers and churches in relation to the present condition of our country, which, on motion of Dr. Hodge, was made the first order of the day for Friday morning next.” Hodge shows himself as a key player in the matter. He is obviously not satisfied with what Gardiner Spring is offering and is seeking more time that he might put together an alternate to what Spring has offered.⁷⁶

Friday morning arrived and Dr. Spring presented his paper; after its adoption was moved, Dr. Hodge moved a substitute that was debated, together with Spring’s paper, the rest of the morning and that afternoon.⁷⁷ The debate between Spring and Hodge resumed on Saturday morning, but not first thing. Several matters intervened, including a report of the “Sabbath Committee” which the Assembly adopted, part of which said, “The duty of the Government to protect the Sabbath, and secure it to all as a civil right, has ever been acknowledged and acted upon by every Christian nation.”⁷⁸ This statement received no opposition, even from the most ardent advocate of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church. Clearly whatever divided those who debated at the 1861 General Assembly and elsewhere from each other with respect to the proper role of the church vis-à-vis the state, no one saw the church’s witness to

73. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 303.

74. It should be remembered in the American context that the motion “to lay on the table” is a motion to set aside the main motion so that other matters may be considered. It is not, as in the British context, “the introduction of a proposed resolution or document to be placed among items of business waiting to be considered,” *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, 11th ed., Henry M. Robert, III, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press), 217.

75. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 304.

76. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 308.

77. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 315.

78. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 316.

the state about the sanctity of the Sabbath as in any way intermeddling in the affairs of the commonwealth.

The Spring/Hodge debate continued that Saturday and on Monday morning as well. On Monday evening, Hodge “asked and obtained leave to withdraw the substitute he had offered for the paper of Dr. Spring. Another substitute was moved by Dr. Wines, and discussed; and a motion was made, at length, by Dr. Hodge, to lay this whole business on the table.”⁷⁹ A roll call vote yielded 87 in the affirmative and 153 in the negative.⁸⁰ Being played out here is a determination on the part of the Assembly to say something affirmative about the Union and offer support for the U.S. Government. Hodge and those with him continued to resist these efforts, yet continued to suffer defeat. Matters were considered so weighty, and so hotly contested, that, on Tuesday morning, it was ordered that commissioners absent from the vote just taken be allowed to have their names put on the record. Finally, it was moved that these matters be referred to a Special Committee to report that afternoon at 4:00.⁸¹

The Committee, appointed by the Moderator, had Hodge and others in its membership. The Committee tended to favor Hodge’s approach.⁸² In fact, eight of the nine members of the Committee submitted a report favorable to Hodge’s approach. The one dissenting member “offered a minority report, consisting of Dr. Spring’s resolution, with a slight alteration....A motion was made to adopt that of the majority.”⁸³ The debate continued until the time of adjournment that evening (9:00). The report of “Hodge’s Committee” lost by a vote of 128 to 84.⁸⁴ The minority report, essentially Gardiner Spring’s resolutions, were then adopted 156 to 66. Immediately, “Dr. Hodge and others gave notice that they protested against this action of the Assembly for reasons to be given.”⁸⁵ The resolutions that the General Assembly adopted in its final form are as follows:

Gratefully acknowledging the distinguished bounty and care of Almighty God towards this favored land, and also recognizing our obligations to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, this General Assembly adopts the following resolutions:

1. *Resolved*, That in view of the present agitated and unhappy condition of this country, the first day of July next be hereby set apart as a day of prayer throughout our bounds; and that on that day ministers and people are called on humbly to confess and bewail our national sins; to offer our

79. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 321.

80. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 321-322.

81. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 322.

82. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 322. It was the case then, as it tends to be now in Presbyterian judicatories, that Moderators often appoint members to seek to “balance” committees and even to “over-balance” them with those whom they know to have a strong viewpoint, with the hopes that they can work out such differences in the committee and spend less time in debate on the floor.

83. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 325.

84. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 329.

85. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 330.

thanks to the Father of light for his abundant and undeserved goodness to us as a nation; to seek his guidance and blessing upon our rulers and their counsels, as well as on the Congress of the United States about to assemble; and to implore Him, in the name of Jesus Christ, the great High Priest of the Christian profession, to turn away his anger from us, and speedily restore to us the blessings of an honorable peace.

2. *Resolved*, That this General Assembly, in the spirit of that Christian patriotism which the Scriptures enjoin, and which has always characterized this Church, do hereby acknowledge and declare our obligations to promote and perpetuate, so far as in us lies, the integrity of these United States, and to strengthen, uphold, and encourage the Federal Government in the exercise of all its functions under our noble Constitution; and to this Constitution in all its provisions, requirements, and principles, we profess our unabated loyalty.

And to avoid all misconception, the Assembly declare that by the terms "Federal Government," as here used, is not meant any particular administration, *or* the peculiar opinions of any particular party, but that central administration, which being at any time appointed and inaugurated according to the forms prescribed in the Constitution of the United States, is the visible representative of our national existence.

On a motion to adopt this report the *ayes* and *nays* were ordered. The *ayes* are as follows: *Ministers*, 87; *Elders*, 69. *Total ayes*, 156. The *nays* are as follows: *Ministers*, 49; *Elders*, 17. *Total nays*, 66.⁸⁶

Hodge did not contest the right of the church to give prophetic witness to a matter that might have political consequences, as we've seen, for example, in the case of Sabbath observance or the acknowledgement of the Christian faith in the public schools.⁸⁷ What he contested in the action of the General Assembly in the Gardiner Spring resolutions was the right of the church to decide for its members to whom their allegiance belonged, whether to the Union and the Federal Government or to their states and the government of the Confederate States of America. Hodge, and those who joined him in protest, put it like this:

We make this protest, not because we do not acknowledge loyalty to our country to be a moral and religious duty, according to the word of God, which requires us to be subject to the powers that be; nor because we deny the right of the Assembly to enjoin that, and all other like duties, on the ministers and churches under its care; but because *we deny the right of the General Assembly to decide the political question, to what government the allegiance of Presbyterians as citizens is due, and its rights to make that decision a condition of membership in our Church.*⁸⁸

86. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 329-330.

87. See Chapter 4 of my dissertation.

88. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 339, emphasis mine.

Given that the General Assembly, on the one hand, was lacking most of her Southern commissioners, it seemed arguably unfair for the Northern commissioners, in their absence, to ram through measures that Southerners would have opposed and that would have required them to give allegiance to the federal government as opposed to their state governments. And for those Southern commissioners who were there, the passage of these resolutions defined their loyalty for them, calling them to give their loyalty to the federal government over their own states. The Assembly was asking her Southern commissioners, and even more so all her Southern members, to declare their allegiance to a government hostile to their own more local government.

One might think of it this way: to the degree that the Gardiner Spring resolutions would have been taken up and acted upon by any Southerners, to that degree the state from which the commissioner came and the CSA as an entity could rightfully have looked on them as traitors, or as treasonous. Hodge acknowledges in the protest the reality of the matter:

It is, however, a notorious fact, that many of our ministers and members conscientiously believe that the allegiance of the citizens of this country is primarily due to the States to which they respectively belong; and, therefore, that when any State renounces its connection with the United States, and its allegiance to the Constitution, the citizens of that State are bound by the laws of God to continue loyal to their State, and obedient to its laws. The paper adopted by the Assembly virtually declares, on the other hand, that the allegiance of the citizens is due to the United States; anything in the Constitution, or ordinances, or laws of the several States to the contrary notwithstanding.⁸⁹

Hodge argues that “In adopting this paper, therefore, the Assembly does decide the great political question which agitates and divides the country.” And in so doing, Hodge contended, the General Assembly “pronounces or assumes” a particular interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. Hodge protested flatly that “this is a matter clearly beyond the jurisdiction of the Assembly.” It was beyond the jurisdiction of the Assembly because it was not a matter clearly addressed in either the Scriptures or the Westminster Standards. Indeed, the Bible did ordain due submission to lawful authority but, in a case like this, the Bible did not clearly establish which was the lawful authority. Hodge continued:

The General Assembly in thus deciding a political question, and in making that decision practically a condition of membership to the Church, has, in our judgment, violated the Constitution of the Church, and usurped the prerogative of its Divine Master. We protest loudly against the action of the Assembly, because it is a departure from all its previous actions. The General Assembly has always acted on the principle that the Church has no right to make anything a condition of Christian or ministerial fellowship,

89. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 339.

which is not enjoined or required in the Scriptures and the Standards of the Church.⁹⁰

The church has no authority from her Master or competency as an institution to make such pronouncements. And this resolution made it impossible for her Southern members to continue in and with her. Instead Southerners were “forced to choose between allegiance to their States and allegiance to their Church.” Hodge believed strongly that this was neither constitutional nor necessary and lamented that this sealed the division of the church and furthered the division of the nation.⁹¹

Though Thornwell had differed with Hodge in the previous two years on what precisely comprised the spirituality of the church, here he was in full agreement with, and appreciative of, Hodge.⁹² With the coming of the war, however, the doctrine of the spirituality of the church would receive continual challenge and, in Hodge’s hands, take on greater subtlety. Even though Thornwell and his Southern supporters would become particularly identified with advocating the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, it is the case that at the point of secession, and once it had occurred, Thornwell himself addressed issues of concern that had clear political implications and ramifications. That is to say, Thornwell as well could address the political when he perceived a moral imperative to do so.

90. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1861), 340.

91. ALS from William McMichael to Hodge (June 26, 1861, CHMC, Box 28, Folder 23) puts the cost of opposing the GSR quite poignantly: “you and I, and other by our actions in the General Assembly, [it was alleged] endorsed the doctrine of secession as held by the South. Even in our Presbytery, which met a few days ago, several intelligent persons maintained that our ‘Protest’ held this doctrine. I, of course, declared that we held to no such thing, and explained that we simply refused to decide a political question, and voted that every man, North and South, should settle the question of allegiance for himself; that we voted as we did, because the General Assembly had no right to decide a political question; because it was ‘cruel’ to commit the Southern brethren to a position in which they would be compelled to sacrifice their allegiance to the Church or their allegiance to their States; and for other reasons. I also declared that the ‘Protest’ saved the church from an immediate rupture. Was I not right? The members, I think, became satisfied that our Protest did not [stem] from secession.” He goes on to lament, however, that though treated with courtesy in the Presbytery, he had, because of the GSR, been marginalized. He does offer that “Perhaps the Protest, owing to its brevity, is a little obscure on some points, to persons who did not hear the discussion in the Assembly.” “Many cannot comprehend,” he continues, “the statement that the action of the Assembly makes a new term of communion.” He looks forward to the “next repertory,” which will contain the customary GA analysis by Hodge, particularly of the following four questions: “1. Do the Scriptures or the Standards of our church contain a single word which encourages Ecclesiastical bodies to engage in political discussions? 2. Do the Scriptures contain one word which encourages war for any purposes whatever? 3. Ought the church to become a war party in any circumstance whatever?” and “4. Did not the late General Assembly virtually make a declaration of war, and in place of filling the Scriptural office of ‘Peacemaker’ abandon itself to the spirit of a contentious and ungodly world?”

92. This is not to imply that Thornwell was present at this Assembly. Like most southerners, he did not attend this Assembly and his native state, South Carolina, had seceded from the Union months earlier and the War had already begun in the month previous to the Assembly.

5. Thornwell's Modification of his Spirituality Doctrine

James Henley Thornwell, as perhaps the leading proponent of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church in the Old School Presbyterian Church, was quite sensitive, coming out of the debates of 1859-60 with Charles Hodge, about any politicization of the pulpit on his part, even as the sectional crisis grew white hot after the election of Abraham Lincoln. Thornwell's concerns in this regard are powerfully reflected in a Fast-Day sermon that he preached after Lincoln's election and before South Carolina's secession. First of all, Thornwell made it quite clear that though his text, Isaiah 37:1, had to do with King Hezekiah's repentance, "I have no design, in the selection of these words, to intimate that there is a parallel between Jerusalem and our Commonwealth in relation to the Covenant of God."⁹³ Thornwell sought to make it painfully clear to his hearers that he was not making a simplistic facile identity between Israel as the chosen people of God and the people of South Carolina. Rather, he assured his congregation, "My design in the choice of these words [for a text], is to illustrate the spirit and temper with which a Christian people should deport themselves in times of public calamity and distress. Jerusalem was in great straits."⁹⁴ And so was the South, as they saw it, after the election of Lincoln.

Still, Thornwell remained uneasy in announcing the text. He candidly disclosed the reason to his auditors: "In applying the text to our own circumstances, widely different in many respects from those of Jerusalem at the time referred to, I am oppressed with a difficulty, which you that are acquainted with my views of the nature and functions of the Christian ministry can readily understand." Thornwell was in principle dedicated to the doctrine of the spirituality of the church. "During the twenty-five years in which I have fulfilled my course as a preacher," he told the flock, "I have never introduced secular politics into the instructions of the pulpit. It has been a point of conscience with me to know no party in the State. Questions of law and public administration I have left to the tribunals appointed to settle them, and have confined my exhortations to those great matters that pertain immediately to the kingdom of God."⁹⁵

Thornwell hastens to add that this only means that "the angry disputes of the forum I have excluded from the house of the Lord;" it did not mean that he had failed to exhort "all classes...to the discharge of their common duties, as men, as citizens, as members of the family—while the sanctions of religion have, without scruple, been applied to all the relations of life, whether public or private, civil or domestic." What has "not been permitted to intrude into the sanctuary" are those matters which "divide the community into parties, and range its members under different banners."⁹⁶ This is because "the business of a preacher, as such, is to expound the word of God. He has no commission to go beyond the teaching of the Scriptures. He has no authority to expound to senators the Constitution of the State, nor to interpret for judges the law of the land."⁹⁷ In these, and in other words that he

93. Thornwell, "Our National Sins," in *Fast Day Sermons: Or The Pulpit on the State of the Country* (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1861), 9.

94. *Ibid.*, 9-10.

95. *Ibid.*, 10.

96. *Ibid.*, 11.

97. *Ibid.*

said (for another two pages of text), Thornwell expressed, at least in part, his doctrine of the spirituality of the church to his hearers.

In all of his reluctance to violate the spirituality of the church in his sermon by intermeddling in the civil sphere with things that do not pertain to the kingdom of God, it never seemed to have occurred to Thornwell that he should regard the civil sphere as secular. While it is the case that, in more recent years, those who would vie for the spirituality of the church might have as its concomitant the secularity of the state,⁹⁸ Thornwell decidedly did not go in that direction. In the very next section, after setting forth all his reservations about intruding into the civil sphere and involving the pulpit in matters political, Thornwell preached, “As the individual, in coming to God, must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently search Him, so the State must be impressed with a profound sense of His all-pervading providence, and of its responsibility to Him, as the moral Ruler of the world.”⁹⁹ Thornwell proceeded in this vein for some time, heartily affirming the divine nature of human government and its answerability to God as the governor. Since the state is established by God and is an organ of his justice in the world, “A state therefor [sic], which does not recognize its dependence on God, or which fails to apprehend, in its functions and offices, a commission from heaven, is false to the law of its own being.” The sanctions of a secularized state, in fact, “are insufficient either for the punishment of vice or the encouragement of virtue, unless they connect themselves with the higher sanctions which religion discloses.”¹⁰⁰

Thornwell argues that laws based upon defective morality do not sustain a society. “It is not only necessary that the State should have a religion; it is equally necessary, in order to an adequate fulfillment of its own idea, that it have the true religion. Truth is the only proper food of the soul, and though superstition and error may avail for a time as external restraints, they never generate an inward principle of obedience.”¹⁰¹ In emphasizing the necessity of the true religion for a well-ordered society, Thornwell goes so far as to affirm this: “It is obvious that a Commonwealth can no more be organized, which shall recognize all religions, than one which shall recognize none.”¹⁰² This is surprising because, typically, one hears Old School Presbyterians, and Hodge and Dabney¹⁰³ are prime examples, extol the virtues of the

98. Darryl G. Hart, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006). Hart not only argues for the institutional separation of church and state, something commonly accepted in the American context, but for a secularized state, which is something that neither Hodge nor Thornwell would argue for and, in fact, as can be seen herein, argued against. This is important to note here because Hart and others claim that their doctrine of the spirituality of the church is the successor to Thornwell’s spirituality doctrine. While there are certainly points of clear continuity, Thornwell’s rejection of a secularized state reveals clear discontinuity.

99. Thornwell, “National Sins,” 14.

100. *Ibid.*, 15.

101. *Ibid.*, 16-17.

102. *Ibid.*, 17.

103. For Dabney on church, state and their relationship, see his *Discussions*, v. 3 (rpt., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982). For an excellent treatment of Dabney’s public theology, see the dissertation of Sean Michael Lucas at Westminster Theological Seminary and the book that emerged from it, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005).

American experiment in the separation of church and state and Thornwell's argument here at least sounds to be in opposition to that.

Thornwell, in fact, is not opposing separation of church and state and advocating Establishment. He does say that "the Christian, the Pagan, the Mohammedan; Jews, Infidels and Turks cannot coalesce as organic elements in one body politic. The State must take its religious type from the doctrines, the precepts, and the institutions of one or the other of these parties." However, he assures his hearers, "To have a religion is one thing—to have a Church Establishment is another; and perhaps the most effectual way of extinguishing the religious life of a State is to confine the expression of it to the forms and peculiarities of a single sect."¹⁰⁴ This was fairly common nineteenth-century conservative American Christian rhetoric—seeing the state as favoring no particular church but the state itself operating with a kind of generic Protestantism.

Thornwell sounds quite American again. He preached, "The Church and the State, as visible institutions, are entirely distinct, and neither can usurp the province of the other without injury to both." The next statement is quite significant in understanding Thornwell's doctrine of the spirituality of the church in its context, as opposed to those who would lay claim to his doctrine as they seek a "usable past." He said, "But religion, as a life, an inward principle, though specially developed and fostered by the Church, extends its domain beyond the sphere of technical worship, touches all the relations of man, and constitutes the inspiration of every duty." Without denying the proper province of either church or state, Thornwell continued, "The service of the Commonwealth becomes an act of piety to God. The State realizes its religious character through the religious character of its subjects; and a State is and ought to be Christian, because all its subjects are and ought to be determined by the principles of the Gospel."¹⁰⁵

This is quite similar to what we examined Hodge affirming at some length in Chapter 4 of my dissertation.¹⁰⁶ Thornwell concluded this section of his sermon: "As every legislator is bound to be a Christian man, he has no right to vote for any laws which are inconsistent with the teachings of the Scriptures. He must carry his Christian conscience into the halls of legislation."¹⁰⁷ Thornwell, arguably the foremost champion of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, furthermore preached that "We are a Christian people...a Christian commonwealth...[and, as such] We accept the Bible as the great moral charter by which our laws must be measured, and the Incarnate Redeemer as the Judge to whom we are responsible."¹⁰⁸

Thornwell was ultimately willing to take his view of the state as "Christian" further than many of his fellow Old School Presbyterians, either in the North or in the South. He submitted a paper to the "First General Assembly of the Southern

104. Thornwell, "National Sins," 18.

105. *Ibid.*

106. Surely C.N. Willborn is right when he argues that Hodge and Thornwell have more in common with respect to the spirituality of the church than is commonly recognized, in *Confessing Our Hope: Essays Celebrating the Life and Ministry of Morton H. Smith*, eds. Joseph Pipa and C.N. Wilborn (Greenville, SC: Presbyterian Press, 2004), 298-303.

107. Thornwell, 18.

108. *Ibid.* Thornwell went on to make it clear that by saying the state is Christian and its rule the Bible, that such is not "enacted as a law, nor enforced by authority."

Presbyterian Church, at Augusta, Ga., in 1861” meeting at the time of the Church’s formation. “It was withdrawn by him, on the ground that circumstances did not permit a full discussion of the subject.”¹⁰⁹ What he had submitted, to the surprise and even dismay of some, was a document asking the General Assembly of the newly formed Southern Church to petition the Confederate Congress in Richmond to add words to this effect to the section in their newly adopted constitution providing for liberty of conscience: “Nevertheless we, the people of these Confederate States distinctly acknowledge our responsibility to God, and the supremacy of His Son, Jesus Christ, as King of kings and Lord of lords; and hereby ordain that no law shall be passed by the Congress of these Confederate States inconsistent with the will of God, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.”¹¹⁰ This was the recognition of the crown rights of King Jesus that the Scottish Covenanters were always pressing.¹¹¹

Thornwell sought to make clear in the statement that what he desired was not the exile of non-Christians, or the forcing of consciences, or even the requiring of Christian faith on the part of any of the citizenry. Rather, as Thornwell saw it, he wanted a simple acknowledgement of King Jesus as the ruler of the nations.¹¹² The Confederate Constitution, based on and sounding much like the U.S. Constitution, already had bettered the U.S. Constitution, Thornwell argued, because it explicitly mentioned God. Now this additional step was needed in simple recognition of the reality of things. Thornwell reiterated his credentials as a spirituality-of-the-church advocate: “The State, as such, cannot be a member, much less, therefore, can it exercise the function of settling the creed and government of the church. The provinces of the two are entirely distinct: they differ in their origin, their nature, their ends, their prerogatives, their power, and their sanctions. They cannot be mixed or confounded without injury to both.”¹¹³ This is the classic Reformational position that sees the two as distinct and both under God: a historic Reformed position that is both anti-Erastian and anti-Roman.

However, Thornwell continued, “the separation of the Church and State is a very different thing from the separation of religion and the State. Here is where our fathers erred. In their anxiety to guard against the evils of a religious establishment, and to preserve the provinces of Church and State separate and distinct, they virtually expelled Jehovah from the government of the country, and left the State an irresponsible corporation, or responsible only to the immediate corporators. They made it a moral person, and yet not accountable to the Source of all law.”¹¹⁴

109. Thornwell, *Collected Works*, vol. 4, ed. by Adger and Girardeau (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1872), 480.

110. Thornwell, *Works*, v. 4, 556.

111. It is quite interesting that Charles Hodge’s son A.A. Hodge came to lament the American experiment of the separation of church and state, particularly as that impacted and meant “practical atheism” in the public square, including the public school. See A. A. Hodge, “Religion in the Public Schools,” *The New Princeton Review* 3 (January 1887), 30-36. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture*, citing other original sources, summarizes: “For A.A. Hodge, the solution to the social problems of the late nineteenth century lay in maintaining ‘the crown rights of Jesus’ over all of life—in the family and in the state as well as in the church” (228).

112. Thornwell, *Works*, v. 4, 552.

113. Thornwell, *Works*, v. 4, 554.

114. Thornwell, *Works*, v. 4, 555.

Thornwell argues against, then, what he takes in the American context to be not only the separation of church and state—which Thornwell vigorously supported in general—but the separation of God and state, a secularization that he could not abide. Some in more recent times have taught that the spirituality of the church means that one accepts or even celebrates the secularization of the state. This was not the case for Hodge and Thornwell, the latter modifying his supposed “strict spirituality” view by supporting a state that recognizes God, if not Christ, and the former showing his “spirituality of the church” credentials by opposing the Gardiner Spring resolution in which the church intermeddled unwontedly in matters of state.

As we consider Hodge’s development and use of the spirituality of the church in a time of unparalleled conflict in the church and the nation, we must determine, as did he, not to let conflict in the nation, or in whatever context we find ourselves, unduly influence us and cause conflict among ourselves, even as we must not let unity in the nation be the primary cause of our seeking unity among ourselves, especially when that unity is misguided or ill-begotten. We can and should recognize how this applies to things in the church like political parties, labor unions, other voluntary societies, etc.

It is not having the same political or economic convictions that form the basis for our unity in the Church. Rather, it is the truth of God’s Word and as expressed in our secondary standards that is the basis of our unity. We must never pit unity against truth, as perhaps was done in preserving the unity of nation and church at all costs in the face of the iniquity of slavery; nor may we pit truth against unity, as is done when we divide over narrow sectarian matters. Instead we must work, as we all pledge, to preserve the purity, peace, and unity of the church. Hodge furnishes us with a good model of engaging conflict: he was temperate, without lacking conviction, and moderate, without compromising the truth, not perfectly so (far from it), but sufficiently so, to provide an example and to furnish guidance for us.

6. Appendix A: Hodge Reflecting on the 1859 GA

[Here] is the great prerogative and duty of the church: Her divine commission is, “Go, teach all nations.” From this it follows: 1. That she has the right to preach the gospel. This is the first, most important, and pressing of her duties; and in the discharge of this duty, she ordains ministers and sends forth missionaries. Hence your Boards of Foreign and Domestic Missions, and of Church Extension. 2. She has the right to administer discipline, which is one of the divinely appointed means of preserving the truth. 3. The right to educate. If she is to teach all nations, she must train up teachers; she must prepare the minds of men to receive the truth, and she must communicate that truth by all the means at her command. Hence your schools, colleges and theological seminaries; hence also your educational institutions among the heathen, and your establishments for printing and distributing Bibles, tracts, and religious books. On this foundation rest your Boards of Education and Publication. 4. It follows from the great commission of the church, that it is her prerogative and duty to testify for the truth and law of God, wherever she can make her voice heard; not only to her own people, but to kings and rulers, to Jews and Gentiles.

It is her duty not only to announce the truth, but to apply it to particular cases and persons, that is, she is bound to instruct, rebuke, and exhort, with all long-suffering. She is called of God to set forth and enjoin upon the consciences of men the relative duties of parents and children, of magistrates and people, of masters and slaves. If parents neglect their duties, she is called upon by her Divine commission to instruct and exhort them. If magistrates transcend the limits of their authority, and trespass on the Divine law, she is bound to raise her voice in remonstrance and warning. She has nothing to do with the state, in the exercise of its discretion within its own sphere; and therefore has no right to meddle with questions of policy, foreign or domestic. She has nothing to do with tariffs, or banks, or internal improvements. We say, with Dr. Thornwell, "Let the dead bury the dead." Let Caesar attend to his own affairs. But if Caesar undertakes to meddle with the affairs of God; if the state pass any laws contrary to the law of God, then it is the duty of the church, to whom God has committed the great work of asserting and maintaining his truth and will, to protect and remonstrate. If the state not only violates the Sabbath, but makes it a condition to holding office, that others should violate it; or if it legalizes piracy, or concubinage, or polygamy; if it prohibits the worship of God, or the free use of the means of salvation[;] if, in short, it does anything directly contrary to the law of God, the church is bound to make that law known, and set it home upon the conscience of all concerned.

In many of our states, there are in force laws relating to marriage and divorce, in open conflict with the word of God. We hold that it is the duty of the church of every denomination, in those states, to tell their legislators, that while they have the right to legislate about matters of property and civil rights at their discretion, under the constitution, they have no right to separate those whom God has joined together, or make that lawful which God has declared to be unlawful.

A few years since, Dr. Thornwell preached an elaborate sermon, setting forth what he believed to be the true teaching of the word of God on the subject of slavery. What he had a right to do, and was bound to do as a minister of the gospel, the church has the right and obligation to do. If, on the one hand, Northern brethren would abstain from teaching, on that and other subjects, what God does not teach; and if, on the other hand, Southern brethren would clearly assert, in their capacity of ministers and a church, what they fully believe God does teach, great good and God's blessing, we doubt not, would be the result. They are as much bound to teach the truth on this subject, as a church, as they are bound to do it as ministers; and they are surely as much bound to teach the law of God respecting the duties and of masters and slaves, as they are to teach what God says are the duty of parents and children, of saints and sinners. *There is a great temptation to adopt theories which free us from painful responsibilities*; but we are satisfied that the brethren must, on reflection, be convinced that the duty to testify to the truth, to make it known, and to press it upon the hearts and consciences of men, is as much obligatory on the church, in her aggregate capacity, as on her individual pastors. Her Confession and Catechisms are an admirable summary of that testimony but she is no more to be satisfied with them, than the ministry is to be satisfied with reading the Confession of Faith, Sabbath after Sabbath to the people.

The principle which defines and limits the prerogative and duty of the church in all such cases seems to us perfectly plain. She has nothing to do as a church with

secular affairs, with questions of politics or state policy. Her duty is to announce and enforce by moral means the law of God. If at any time, as may well happen, a given question assume both a moral and political bearing, as for example, the slave-trade, then the duty of the church is limited to settling for the law of God on the subject. It is not her office to argue the question in its bearing on the civil or secular interests of the community, but simply to declare in her official capacity what God has said on the subject. *To adopt any theory which would stop the mouth of the church, and prevent her bearing her testimony to the kings and rulers, magistrates and people, in behalf of the truth and law of God, is like one who administers chloroform to a man to prevent his doing mischief. We pray God that this poison may be dashed away, before it has reduced the church to a state of inanition, and delivered her bound hand and foot into the power of the world.* It is obvious that the same principle is applicable to ministers. They profane the pulpit when they preach politics, or turn the sacred desk into a rostrum for lectures on secular affairs. But they are only faithful to their vows when they proclaim the truth of God and apply his law to all matters whether of private manners or laws of the state.

The whole history of the Presbyterian Church in Europe and America is instinct with this spirit. The Presbyterians of Scotland told the government that it had no right to establish Popery or Prelacy, and that they would not submit to it. 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 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 coloured 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. With the Colonization Society, as a commercial enterprise, or as a mere benevolent institution she has nothing to do; but as a means designed and adapted to promote the progress of the gospel in Africa, she has over and over commended it to the favour of the people. It is only on the assumption that Presbyterians, neither in this country nor in Europe, have understood their own system, that the principle advocated by Dr. Thornwell can be admitted. Presbyterians have always held that the church is bound to hold forth in the face of all men the truth and law of God, to testify against all infractions of that law by rulers of people, to lend her countenance and support to all means, within and without her jurisdiction, which she believes to be designed and wisely adapted to promote the glory and kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. This our church has always done, and we pray God, she may continue to do even to the end.¹¹⁵

115. *BRPR* 31.3 (1859): 616-618, emphasis mine throughout.