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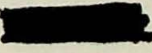
THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGY IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY


A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology

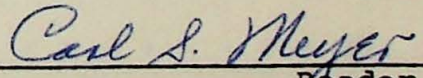
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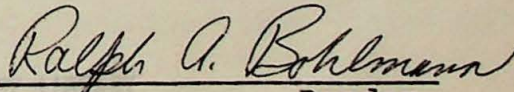
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May 1970


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"Our Idea." *The Presbyterian Critic and Monthly Review*, I (January, 1835), 3. *The Oxford English Dictionary* finds the first use of the term in the *British Critic*, XXI (1837), 370.

CHAPTER I

THE CHURCH IN AMERICA

Introduction

"The question of our age is the Church, her nature, her mission, her functions, her powers, her officers, her members."¹ It is difficult for a child of the twentieth century, struggling under the immense bibliography of the modern Ecumenical Movement, to understand how the question of the church could have been the question of any previous age. Even so, the above was the reflection of John B. Adger as he took the chair of Church History and Church Polity at Columbia Theological Seminary in 1859, and the statement was not without warrant.²

The question of the church is perennial, and the circumstances in America in the mid-nineteenth century provoked considerable discussion in the area of "'ecclesiology'-- in the new technical use of terms."³ The crucial questions are familiar in the life of the church in the mid-twentieth

¹J[ohn] B. Adger, "Inaugural Discourse on Church History and Church Polity," Southern Presbyterian Review, XII (1859-1860), 163.

²See Poole's Index to Periodical Literature, 1802-1907. Poole's entries under the heading "Church" take up sixteen columns as compared with fifteen for "America" and "American" combined.

³"Our Idea," The Presbyterian Critic and Monthly Review, I (January, 1855), 3. The Oxford English Dictionary finds the first use of the term in the British Critic, XXI (1837), 220.

century: What is the essential nature of the church? How does baptism relate to church membership? How can unity be achieved that both transcends and preserves the denominational heritage? How are non-Roman Catholic Western Christians to regard the Roman Catholic church? What is the church's mission to the society in which she lives? These and related questions a century ago arose out of the unique American situation.

American Evangelicalism

Robert Baird, in his monumental Religion in America, notes that among the vast majority of Christians in America, "on the fundamental doctrine of JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH, there is but one opinion."⁴ American religion, especially after the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century, was thoroughly evangelical in character, giving to American Christians a common core of saving knowledge and experience.⁵ Since, as Baird points out, the doctrine of justification by faith necessarily involves the other great doctrines of the Christian faith, such as the fall of man, the deity of Christ, and the atonement, the term evangelical carries with it the connotation of orthodoxy. The evangelical churches are for Baird the orthodox Protestant churches, "whose religion is the Bible,

⁴Robert Baird, Religion in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1856), p. 665.

⁵Leonard J. Trinterud, The Forming of an American Tradition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949), p. 197.

the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible."⁶ They are united in their opposition to "the errors of Rome and the heresy that denies the deity and atonement of Christ."⁷

The extent of doctrinal agreement was considerable. Philip Schaff on his return to the Old Country in 1854 informed his continental peers, "The religious character of North America, viewed as a whole, is predominantly of the Reformed or Calvinistic stamp."⁸ As Winthrop S. Hudson notes, the evangelicalism of the Great Awakening was not a revolt against Calvinism; it presupposed the understanding of the Christian faith as set forth in the Reformed confessions. He adds that evangelicalism's stress upon personal religious experience, if a revolt against anything, was "a revolt against the notion that the Christian life involved little more than observing the outward formalities of religion."⁹ The American Sunday School Union, seeking for someone to set forth the great doctrines of the Gospel as held in common by all evangelical Christians, chose none other than the pillar of Presbyterian orthodoxy, Charles

⁶Baird, p. 541.

⁷Ibid., p. 539.

⁸Philip Schaff, America, edited by Perry Miller (Cambridge, Massachusetts; Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 93. Also Baird, p. 582.

⁹Winthrop S. Hudson, Religion in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 78.

Hodge.¹⁰ From this renowned Calvinist issued The Way of Life, which Baird reports was received with great satisfaction throughout the land.¹¹

This oneness in doctrine was regarded as the foundation of the unity-in-diversity of the American church. It was almost universally held that the differences among the evangelical denominations were on matters non-essential to the common core of Christian doctrine. Baird traced the differences to the fact that emigrants naturally looked to Old Country formularies and, in addition, that provincial peculiarities within the United States, differences between East and West, and between North and South, contributed to some divergencies.¹² Samuel S. Schmucker of the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg noted that each evangelical denomination must "prefer its own peculiarities," but went on to say that it would be a "dangerous error" to hold the peculiarities "equal in importance with the great fundamentals of our holy religion held in common by all."¹³ In a similar vein, Samuel Miller of Princeton Seminary wrote, "it would

¹⁰ Charles Hodge, The Way of Life (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1841).

¹¹ Baird, pp. 534-535.

¹² Ibid., pp. 577-579.

¹³ Cited in Hudson, p. 151.

never occur to us to place the peculiarities of our creed among the fundamentals of our common Christianity."¹⁴

Accordingly, the denominations in America were not regarded as sects. Smauel Miller, in fact, argued that "in countries where there is no established religion, there can be no sectaries or dissenters, in the technical sense of those words."¹⁵ The different bodies of professing Christians were branches of the one visible church in America.¹⁶ Though to European eyes the American denominations might present a bewildering array, yet "when viewed in relation to the great doctrines which are universally conceded by Protestants to be fundamental and necessary to salvation, then they all form but one body, recognizing Christ as their common head."¹⁷

Action and Reaction

Unity in doctrine led to a recognition of the essential oneness of the church, and this in turn fostered a spirit of cooperation among the various branches of the church in America. Hudson aptly refers to the phenomenon as a "functional catholicity."¹⁸ This "unity in action" was especially

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Samuel Miller, Letters to Presbyterians (Philadelphia; Anthony Finley, 1833), p. 297.

¹⁶ Baird, p. 536. See also Miller, p. 297.

¹⁷ Baird, p. 439.

¹⁸ Hudson, p. 82.

characteristic of the "Second Evangelical Awakening" in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Hudson estimates that church membership in 1800 amounted to one-fifteeth of the population. By 1835 this had increased to one-eighth, attendance at Sunday services being three times the membership, and the constituency (those nominally related to the church) being twice the number in attendance.¹⁹ This large increase was evidence of the impact of the church's unified thrust.

The cooperation is best illustrated by the proliferation of voluntary societies for religious concerns. Charles I. Foster lists 158 of these societies in America in the first half of the nineteenth century (as compared with 26 British societies in the same period), and he notes that his list is by no means exhaustive.²⁰ The underlying thesis was that it was not necessary for work to be done through ecclesiastical organization for it to be truly the work of the church.²¹

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 129-130. The "constituency" would thus total three-fourths of the population!

²⁰Charles I. Foster, An Errand of Mercy. The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), pp. 275-280. Often the societies were formed for rather specific and narrow goals, for example, The Philadelphia Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Domestic. Hudson cites a contemporary lament, "Matters have come to such a pass that a peacable man can hardly venture to eat or drink, to go to bed or get up, to correct his children or kiss his wife" without the guidance of some society. Hudson, p. 150.

²¹See Absalom Peters, A Plea for Voluntary Societies (New York: John S. Taylor, 1837).

Through the societies the various evangelical branches expressed their unity.

The question soon arose, however, whether this kind of cooperation, through extra-ecclesiastical agencies, was conducive to order and the best interests of Christ's church. As important aspects of the church's mission were increasingly being undertaken by the autonomous societies, the church as an institution seemed increasingly anachronistic and irrelevant.²²

As the implications of corporate action began to be understood, an antithetical pattern developed. On the one hand, the "Christian" movement sought visible unity by abandoning the denominations. On the other, greater attention was given to the outward structure of the church and the value of denominations so long as differences exist in confession and church polity.

With regard to this latter emphasis, historians generally group several phenomena under the heading "resurgence of churchliness," or a similar head.²³ The characteristics of

²²Lefferts A. Loetscher, "The Problem of Christian Unity in Early Nineteenth-Century America," Church History, XXXII (March 1963), 7-8.

²³For example, Robert Ellis Thompson, A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1895), p. 125. H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy and Lefferts A. Loetscher, American Christianity. An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents, 1820-1960 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), II, 66-74.

this emphasis were (1) A reaction against revivalism; (2) An emphasis on the creed as defining the church; (3) An emphasis on the institutional side of the church; (4) An emphasis on official ecclesiastical action as the means of carrying out the mission of the church.²⁴ The historical, sacramental, or confessional character of the church was stressed, with varying emphases,²⁵ among High Church Episcopalians, Old School Presbyterians, adherents of the Mercersburg theology in the Reformed church, and the Lutherans of the middlewest.²⁶ The movement is sometimes described as a "churchly and orthodox reaction against revivalism and unionism,"²⁷ and sometimes characterized as

²⁴Smith, Handy and Loetscher, II, 70-72.

²⁵The qualification "with varying emphases" is important. The Old School Presbyterians, for example, were themselves accused of "one of the greatest high-churchisms this side of Rome" in holding the idea that no work is done by the church except through ecclesiastical action. At the same time, they were outspoken against manifestations of "churchliness" in the period. James Henley Thornwell, for example, characterized the time as "days of ecclesiastical extravagance," and the Presbyterial Critic and Monthly Review stated that "through this question [of the church] the most fundamental of heresies of ten years past have obtruded themselves upon the world." James Henley Thornwell, Collected Writings, edited by John B. Adger (Richmond, Va.; Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871-1873), IV, 17. "Our Idea," pp. 2-3.

²⁶With respect to the latter see Th[eodore] Engelder, editor, Walther and the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938) and Waldemar Burgdorf Streufert, "The Doctrine of the Church and Ministry according to Dr. Walther, in Relation to the Romanizing Tendencies within the Lutheran Church (1840-1860)" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1942).

²⁷Smith, Handy and Loetscher, II, 9.

a "self-conscious and often bitter denominationalism."²⁸

To quote an appropriate line of Samuel Miller addressed to a similar paradox, "this will not appear strange to those who are acquainted with the human heart, or who have witnessed analogous scenes in later times."²⁹

Presbyterians in America

The Presbyterian church is a microcosm of the nineteenth century religious world in America.³⁰ Almost all of the tensions of the period are reflected in her life. An actual separation of the Old and New Schools was forced in 1837-1838.³¹ Three issues were involved. (1) The degree

²⁸Maurice W. Armstrong, and others, editors, The Presbyterian Enterprise (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 146.

²⁹Miller, p. 10.

³⁰Philip Schaff wrote of the Presbyterian church in America, "It is without question one of the most numerous, respectable, worthy, intelligent, and influential denominations, and has a particularly strong hold on the solid middle class," p. 118.

³¹For documents and editorial comment on the division, see Maurice W. Armstrong, Lefferts A. Loetscher and Charles A. Anderson, The Presbyterian Enterprise; Sources of American Presbyterian History (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956.) For a contemporary analysis from the New School side, see E. H. Gillett, History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Revised edition, Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, [1873]), II, 503-552. For the Old School viewpoint see Charles Hodge, The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1851), pp. 9-61. For an excellent analysis of the New School as a whole see George M. Marsden, "The New School Presbyterian Mind: A Study of Theology in Mid-Nineteenth Century America" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1966.)

of theological latitude allowable under the Westminster Confession and the Adopting Act of 1729; (2) The constitutional legality of the admission of Congregationalists to Presbyterian courts as was being done in virtue of the Plan of Union of 1801. The division was forced by an Old School majority at the General Assembly of 1837 rescinding the Plan of Union, thus cutting off the New School synods at a stroke. (3) A question of ecclesiastical policy was involved, that is, if the mission of the church should be delegated to voluntary societies not under the jurisdiction of the church.³²

Samuel Miller pointed out in his Letters to Presbyterians in 1833 that the Presbyterian Church in America was established by ministers from Scotland and Ireland, on the one hand, and some who had been congregationalists in South Britain or in New England, on the other, and there was tension in the church on account of it. As a later historian has written,

The Scotch and the Scotch-Irish element held to a more authoritarian ideal of strong church contours and of a rigid theology. The New England

³²Ernest Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 1607-1861 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), I, 350-351. See also William Warren Sweet, The Presbyterians in Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936) II, 99-125.

Puritan element held a more dynamic view of theology and a more decentralized conception of church government.³³

To what extent slavery entered into the division has been a matter of debate. Bruce C. Staiger argues that "the alignment of forces and course of events leading to the break" shows that the issue of slavery was the deciding factor. The opposition to the New School, he says, came from three sources: those sincerely concerned with maintaining the purity of the Reformed faith, those alarmed by radicalism in the New School, and "those whose fortunes were directly or indirectly affected by the agitation of the slavery question." From "the alignment of forces" and the course of events, he concludes that the issue of slavery was the decisive factor.³⁴ Elwyn A. Smith, on the other hand, says, "The slavery-abolition issue did not cause the schism; but the South played a role of the utmost significance by giving the Old School the victory."³⁵ The proper balance would seem to be found in the analysis of Ernest Trice Thompson:

³³ Smith, Handy and Loetscher, II, 88-89.

³⁴ Bruce C. Staiger, "Abolitionism and the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-38," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVI (September 1949), 413-414. See also Edmund A. Moore, "Robert J. Breckinridge and the Slavery Aspect of the Presbyterian Schism of 1837," Church History, IV (December 1935), 282-294.

³⁵ Elwyn A. Smith, "The Role of the South in the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-38," Church History, XXIX (March 1960), 60.

It cannot be maintained that they [the Southern commissioners] supported drastic measures against the New School synods solely because of the latter's antislavery sentiments--their theological conservatism would range them on the side of the Old School once the issue had become clear. But to diminish or eliminate the threat of antislavery legislation in the Assembly was greatly to be desired, and the excision of the offending New School synods would be a long step in that direction.³⁶

In the view of Charles I. Foster, the division did not center on either slavery or the new theology, but rather on "the deeper issue of the nature of the church."³⁷ The issue was ecclesiological in that it concerned the church's responsibility as an institution ordained by God to carry on the work of missions, and by a watchful exercise of discipline with respect to the church's confession to insure the purity of the Gospel as it was preached. It should be noted, however, that this concern for the church as the proper agency for evangelism, and for the purity of the church's witness, arose in response to what was already considered a threat in the area of theology.

The question of the church was not resolved by division of the church into two schools. Although the Old School branch of the church committed the work of missions to

³⁶Ernest Trice Thompson, I, 397.

³⁷Foster, p. 270.

boards under the control of the General Assembly,³⁸ this reform was not radical enough for some, especially in the South.³⁹ It was argued that the church must have a positive sanction in the word of God for everything that she does, and has no authority to commit the work of missions to any agency, such as a board, since this has no warrant in Scripture.⁴⁰

The question of the nature of the church was at the center of two debates within the Old School, in the mid-forties with respect to the validity of Roman Catholic baptism, and in the late-fifties over the relationship of baptized children to the church. Discussion was further stimulated by treatises on the church produced by those

³⁸ Later the New School found it expedient to have the work of missions done under the control of the General Assembly. A Church Extension Committee was appointed in 1852 for the work of home missions, and a permanent committee, to be located in New York, was appointed by the 1861 General Assembly. Gillett, II, 556, 559-562.

³⁹ Notably, Robert J. Breckinridge and James Henley Thornwell, supported by Robert L. Dabney, Benjamin M. Palmer, and John B. Adger. The major voices raised in opposition to this theory were those of Thomas Smyth, of Charleston, S.C., and Charles Hodge.

⁴⁰ For a brief, but adequate, treatment of the operation of this "Puritan" principle, see Ernest Trice Thompson's chapter on "Jure Divino Presbyterianism," I, 510-529. His judgment that the emerging point of view in the southern branch of the Presbyterian church, characterized by the above concept of jure divino Presbyterianism, and also by the purely "spiritual" mission of the church, was based on "a legalistic interpretation of the Bible as the inerrant Word of God" is less satisfactory. I, 535-536. It does not account for Charles Hodge's sharp disagreement with Thornwell on both of these points while sharing his view of Scripture.

associated with the Oxford Movement within the Anglican church in England, and by the attempts to unite evangelicals in the United States, particularly after the Civil War.

The significance of the events in the mid-nineteenth century for the history of the Presbyterian Church did not escape the notice of those who witnessed them. Charles Hodge in his retrospect of the history of the Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review (his "ball and chain for forty years"⁴¹) observes, "The period from 1835 to 1869 is one of the most important in our ecclesiastical history."⁴² This study focuses on the doctrine of the church as presented by theologians and leading ministers of the Presbyterian Church from the division of 1837 to the reunion of the northern branches of the Old and New Schools in 1870.

There is considerable unity in the principle with respect to the essential nature of the church, a unity which the theological leaders see as grounded in evangelical theology. However, even with the evangelical principle, perhaps because of it, some differences appear with respect to the church. The main purpose of the writer of this paper is to investigate the roots of those differences. One major

⁴¹The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XXXVII (1865), 657. Hereafter cited as The Princeton Review.

⁴²[Charles Hodge], "Retrospect of the History of the Princeton Review," The Princeton Review, Index Volume, 1825-1868 (1871), p. 38.

problem discovered is a too great reliance on the distinction between the visible church and the invisible church.

On the other hand, the above distinction did not stand in the way of a search for the unity of the church. The writer investigates the contributions made in this period in dealing with the problem of church unity, in spite of the differences.

That there are differences, even among those so closely aligned in theology as the Old School, should not be a startling revelation; unity in principle does not necessarily guarantee uniformity in the analytic and synthetic work of systematic theology. Besides, there may be some truth in Charles Hodge's lament that "everything that involves the nature of the church pertains to one of the most difficult departments of theology."⁴³

⁴³[Charles Hodge], "Schaf[f]'s Protestantism," The Princeton Review, XVII (October 1845), 626.

¹See, for example, [Charles Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV (April and July 1853), 339; Stuart Kellison, The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel (Philadelphia: Joseph W. Wilson, 1838), p. 46; Robert Lewis Dabney, Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Biblical Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia, 5th edition (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, n.d.), p. 726.

²[Hodge], XXV, 347. Similarly, Thornwell says the Church is "the embodiment of the gospel." James Henley Thornwell, The Collected Sermons of James Henley Thornwell, edited by John B. Adger (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871-1873), I, 43.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The Radical Principle

The intimate relationship between soteriology and ecclesiology is given due emphasis in the period under discussion.¹ It is a commonplace that an "evangelical" understanding of salvation, especially of the means through which salvation is applied, leads to a corresponding "evangelical" understanding of the church. In Charles Hodge's words, "The nature of the church . . . is determined by the nature of the gospel."²

The principle on which ecclesiology is seen to turn is the answer given to the question, What unites us to Christ? "Is it a personal act of faith in him as the son of God? Or is it union with an external body having his merits and

¹See, for example, [Charles Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV (April and July 1853), 339; Stuart Robinson, The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel (Philadelphia; Joseph M. Wilson, 1858), p. 40; Robert Lewis Dabney, Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia (5th edition; Richmond, Va.; Presbyterian Committee of Publication, n.d.), p. 726.

²[Hodge], XXV, 347. Similarly, Thornwell says the Church is "the embodiment of the gospel." James Henley Thornwell, The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell, edited by John B. Adger (Richmond; Va.; Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871-1873), I, 45.

grace in custody."³ The answer of Presbyterians in this period is that persons are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit through faith and so made members of the church.⁴ A distinction is made between the church in its essence, as the mystical body of Christ, that is, those united to Christ through faith, and the form in which the church is manifest to the world.⁵ This distinction, for the most part, is assumed in the discussion as part of the heritage of the Reformation of the sixteenth century; it is theological ground that has already been possessed.⁶ Charles Hodge, however, does devote considerable space to understanding the true idea of the church, and its visibility.⁷

³Charles Hodge, "What is the Church?" (Unpublished manuscript, Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey), p. 7.

⁴Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), I, 134; Charles Hodge, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1857), p. 87; Thornwell, IV, 20-21, 139, 350, 591; Henry B[oynton] Smith, System of Christian Theology, edited by William S. Karr (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1884), p. 591.

⁵Thornwell, IV, 20-21. Smith, pp. 591-593; Robert Lewis Dabney, Discussions: Evangelical and Theological (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), II, 434.

⁶Hodge, Discussions in Church Polity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), p. 137.

⁷Charles Hodge [1797-1878] began his teaching ministry at the theological seminary in Princeton in 1822, under an appointment by the General Assembly as professor of Biblical and Oriental literature. In 1840 he was transferred to the chair of didactic theology, and in 1845 began lectures on the church. Much of his thought in this area appeared in the

The True Idea of the Church

The church in its essential nature is not a visible organized community, but a spiritual body consisting exclusively of true believers.⁸ This is the fundamental proposition which Charles Hodge seeks to prove.⁹ He begins his

Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, which he founded in 1825 and edited until 1868.

It was Hodge's desire to complete his Systematic Theology with a fourth volume on Ecclesiology. Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, holds a manuscript with one chapter, "What is the Church?" completed. The Rev. William Durant obtained permission from Hodge to publish a collection of his articles on the church, which had appeared both separately and in connection with his annual review of the General Assembly in The Princeton Review. The result is the valuable Discussions in Church Polity.

The first extensive article by Hodge on the church appeared in 1846. The occasion was the publication of The Unity of the Church by Henry Edward Manning (London: John Murray, 1842), but the article actually addressed itself to the theses advanced in A Treatise on the Church of Christ by William Palmer (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1839), which had been previously reviewed in The Princeton Review by John Miller.

Palmer and Manning were representatives of the Oxford Movement in the Anglican church during this period. The ecclesiology of that movement was, in the mind of Hodge, virtually identical with the ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic church, and they are together the subject of his criticism in his articles on the church in The Princeton Review in the mid-fifties.

In his Systematic Theology, Hodge treats aspects of the church under the Office of Christ as Teacher, I, 129-150, the Kingly Office of Christ, II, 596-609, and Baptism, III, 543-611.

⁸Hodge, Systematic Theology, I, 137.

⁹"The dividing line between the two great contending parties in the church universal, is precisely this--Is the church in its essential idea an external body held together by external bonds, so that membership in the church depends on submission to a hierarchy? or is it a spiritual body

most comprehensive essay on the nature of the church with an appeal to the Apostles' Creed. There, he says, in the symbol accepted by all Christians, the church is declared to be "the communion of saints," a conception which does not include the idea of any external organization. To understand the true idea of the church, one has only to ascertain to whom the word "saints" refers, and what is the nature of their "communion," that is, the essential bond that unites them.¹⁰

Although in the Old Testament the nation of Israel as a whole was "sanctified," that is, separated from the other nations and consecrated to God, and so was "holy" externally, in the New Testament, Hodge argues, the terms hagios and hagiazein are applied only to the true people of God. "Saints" are those persons who have been justified and inwardly renewed. Hodge concludes:

When, therefore, it is said that the Church consists of saints, the meaning is not that it consists of all who are externally consecrated to

owing its existence and unity to the indwelling of the Spirit, so that those who have the Spirit of God are members of the church or body of Christ." [Charles Hodge] "Presbyterianism," The Princeton Review, XXXII (July 1860), 549.

¹⁰[Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 249-250. For some reason the second part of this important article was not reprinted in Church Polity.

God, irrespective of their moral character, but that it consists of true Christians or sincere believers.¹¹

The communion which the saints enjoy has its foundation in their union with Christ, made effectual by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The church is the body of those united to Christ, which body is "animated" by the Holy Spirit. The bond of their union being thus spiritual and internal, the church is not essentially a visible society,¹² though visibility is an attribute of the church, as Hodge points out elsewhere.¹³ Since, in the evangelical system, faith is the means of union with Christ, it follows that none but believers belong to the church, and that all believers belong to the church in virtue of their faith alone.¹⁴ "The Church, therefore, in its true idea or essential nature, is not a

¹¹Ibid., XXV, 251. Hodge, accordingly, renders coetus sanctorum as "body of believers," "company of faithful men," "company of believers." XXV, 265-270, 343. See also [Charles Hodge], "The Visibility of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV (October 1853), 671.

¹²[Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 250. See also Hodge, Systematic Theology, I, 134, "the Church as such, or in its essential nature, is not an external organization." Hodge consistently thinks of the church in its radical idea, even where he fails to qualify his definition with "essentially" or "as such." This should be kept in mind when Hodge says a choice must be made between the church as "an external, visible society," or "a spiritual body." [Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 264.

¹³Infra, pp. 31-32.

¹⁴[Hodge], "The Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 343.

visible society, but the company of faithful men--the coetus sanctorum, or the communion of saints."¹⁵

To support his argument, Hodge appeals first to the use of ekklēsia in the New Testament. Relying on the derivation of ekklēsia from ekkaleō, Hodge argues that its basic import in the New Testament is the idea of a distinct class of people called out of the world by the gospel.

In all the various applications, therefore, of the word ekklesia in the New Testament, we find it uniformly used as a collective term for the kletoi or ekletoi, that is, for those who obey the gospel call, and who are thus selected and separated, as a distinct class from the rest of the world.¹⁶

The church is the assembly of the effectually called, of those who not only receive but who obey the call to repentance and faith. The church is composed of penitent believers.¹⁷

Robert Lewis Dabney¹⁸ argues much the same way. The New Testament meaning of ekklēsia is "out-called." It

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., XXV, 254. See also [Charles Hodge], "Theories of the Church," The Princeton Review, XVIII (January 1846), 140.

¹⁷[Hodge], "Theories of the Church," The Princeton Review, XVIII, 140.

¹⁸Robert Lewis Dabney [1820-1898] was professor at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia from 1853-1883, first in the chair of ecclesiastical history and polity, moving in 1859 to the department of systematic theology. He was called from this latter position to an

stands for "the spiritual and invisible company of true believers" called by "the grace which converts." The church, accordingly, is "the company of the converted."¹⁹

Hodge secondly appeals to the fact that the epistles addressed to churches in the New Testament are addressed to believers, saints, the children of God. These terms are thus equivalents for the church, and the conclusion is drawn that the church consists only of believers.²⁰ These terms may not be toned down by making faith "mere external consecration," or sonship "merely adoption to external privileges."²¹ They must be understood in their full redemptive import.

A third line of evidence that Hodge adduces from Scripture concerns the various descriptions of the church in the New Testament as the temple of God, the family of God, the flock of Christ, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ. "These descriptions of the Church," he says, "are inapplicable to any external society as such. . . . The only Church

appointment as professor of mental and moral philosophy in the University of Texas until his retirement in 1894.

¹⁹Dabney, Discussions, II, 434-435.

²⁰[Hodge], "The Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 258.

²¹Ibid., XXV, 259.

of which these things are true, is the communion of saints, the body of true Christians."²²

In answer to the objection that the apostles address as the church the whole company in any given place, among whom were hypocrites, Hodge replies that persons are addressed according to their profession, and the mere fact of their being so addressed does not prove that they are in actual possession of the reality. If they profess belief, they are addressed as believers; if they profess to belong to the church, they are addressed as church members. But the term ekklesia in the New Testament does not designate a body of professors, sincere and insincere; "though all are addressed as belonging to the Church, what is said of the Church had no application to those who were not really its members."²³

In addition to his analysis of biblical usage, Hodge argues that the attributes of the church as given in Scripture, along with the promises and prerogatives that are given to her, determine the conception of the essential

²²Ibid., XXV, 264.

²³Ibid., XXV, 261. See also his comments on Eph. 2:11-22. "The church of which this is said is not the nominal, external, visible church as such, but the true people of God. As, however, the Scriptures always speak of men according to their profession, calling those who profess faith, believers, and those who confess Christ, Christians; so they speak of the visible church as the true church, and predicate of the former what is true only of the latter." Commentary on Ephesians, p. 124.

nature of the church. The attributes that he especially appeals to are the holiness and the unity of the church.

Since holiness is a necessary attribute of the church, and this holiness is that of regenerated men, really separated from the world and consecrated to God, "no external society, composed of 'all sorts of men,' can be the holy catholic church."²⁴ For any particular denomination to claim to be the holy, catholic church would be a patent contradiction. Neither the Roman, nor the Greek, nor the Anglican, nor the Presbyterian church may be identified as the coetus sanctorum, because "no one of these societies is holy, they are all more or less corrupt and worldly."²⁵

With respect to the unity of the church Hodge notes that the church is one in a threefold sense: (1) In faith and communion; (2) In embracing all the people of God; (3) In being the same church in all ages.²⁶ Although true believers are one in all three senses, this unity cannot be predicated of any "external society calling itself the Church of God."²⁷ That is, no denomination of Christians can make an

²⁴[Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 266.

²⁵Ibid., XXV, 265.

²⁶Ibid., XXV, 270.

²⁷Ibid., XXV, 272.

²⁸[Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 270.

²⁹Ibid.

exclusive claim to be the church of God upon earth.²⁸ The reason Hodge gives is that there are children of God outside of any denomination making such a claim. Though it may not be possible in every particular case to distinguish infallibly between true and false profession, yet as a class the children of God are known, and are distinguished from, the children of the world. In view of their fruits as believers it is impossible to "unchurch" those outside of a particular communion, and refuse to recognize them as belonging to Christ. They have the fruits of the Spirit, and where the Spirit is, there is the church.²⁹

To say there is no piety and no salvation out of the papal or prelatic Church, is very much like doing despite unto the Spirit of God; it is to say of multitudes of true Christians, what the Pharisees said of our Lord; "They cast out devils by Beelzebub, the chief of devils."³⁰

The church cannot be limited to any visible society because the Spirit is not limited to external church organizations. The only church that is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic is "the communion of saints, the company of faithful men, the mystical body of Christ, whose only essential

²⁸ Compare Samuel Miller, Presbyterianism the Truly Primitive and Apostolical Constitution of the Church of Christ (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1835), p. 6. "No particular denomination of Christians is now entitled to be called, by way of eminence, the Catholic, or universal Church."

²⁹ [Hodge], Idea of the Church, " The Princeton Review, XXV, 276.

³⁰ Ibid.

bond of union is the indwelling of the Holy Ghost."³¹ Since these attributes do not belong to any external society as such, no such society can be the church.³²

The promises made to the church of the continued presence of Christ, the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit, protection and prosperity, holiness and salvation are not made to any external society as such, but rather to true believers.³³ So also, the prerogatives of teaching and exercising discipline belong to the company of believers; they are prerogatives of an external body "only on the assumption of their being, and only as far as they are what they profess to be, the true children of God."³⁴

At this point in his essay Hodge introduces without definition the distinction between the visible and invisible church. The "power of the keys," he says, "cannot belong to the visible Church as such. It can belong to her only so far as she is the organ of the Church invisible."³⁵ It is to the latter that "all the attributes, the promises and prerogatives of the true church belong.

³¹Ibid., XXV, 278.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., XXV, 279-283. See also [Charles Hodge], "The Church--Its Perpetuity," The Princeton Review, XXVIII (October 1856), 689-715.

³⁴[Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 287.

³⁵Ibid., XXV, 289.

According to an earlier explanation, this true church is in one aspect a visible, in another an invisible, body.³⁶ It is visible because believers profess their faith. However, unbelievers, unknown to men, also make outward profession, and seem to belong to the church, but in fact do not. Hence the distinction between the real and the nominal, or the invisible and visible church.³⁷ "All true believers are members of the true Church, and all professors of the true faith are members of the visible Church."³⁸

The same distinction is made by the other major theologians in the Presbyterian church in this period, though none give the matter the extensive treatment that Hodge does. Dabney defines the church as the "aggregate" of Christ's redeemed people, "the hidden company of the regenerate,"

³⁶[Hodge], "Theories of the Church," The Princeton Review, XVIII, 141.

³⁷Ibid., XVIII, 141-142. The reason for the choice of the term "invisible" is not discussed here. Often Hodge contrasts "true" with "visible" or "apparent" rather than "invisible" and "visible." [Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 351; [Hodge], "Theories of the Church," The Princeton Review, XVIII, 145, 147; [Hodge], The Princeton Review, XXVIII, 689.

³⁸[Hodge], "Theories of the Church," The Princeton Review, XVIII, 145. In another place the distinction is between those who are members of the church in the sight of God (the invisible church) and those who are members in the sight of men (the visible church). [Charles Hodge], "The Church Membership of Infants," The Princeton Review, XXX (April 1858), 350.

wholly visible to God, and partially discernable by man.³⁹ Henry Boynton Smith⁴⁰ argues that since vital union with Christ is essentially spiritual, and therefore invisible, so the true church is invisible. To the invisible church alone belong the attributes of catholicity, infallibility, and sanctity.⁴¹ Thomas Smyth, pastor of Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston, South Carolina, throughout this period, defines the invisible church as "the whole body of God's redeemed people," and explains that it is called "invisible" because its union with Christ is a spiritual union, and the faith and love of its true members are invisible to men and infallibly discerned by God alone. "In this sense, the church has no visible or formal existence on earth, but is an object of faith, being composed of all Christ's faithful members, wherever they are found."⁴²

³⁹Dabney, Discussions, II, 435-437.

⁴⁰Henry Boynton Smith [1815-1877] was the most prominent New School theologian in this period. Appointed to teach church history at Union Theological Seminary, New York, in 1850, he held that post for three years, transferring then to the department of systematic theology until his retirement in 1874.

⁴¹Smith, pp. 591-593. See also Dabney, Syllabus of Systematic Theology, p. 736.

⁴²Thomas Smyth, An Ecclesiastical Catechism of the Presbyterian Church for the use of Families, Bible-Classes, and Private Members (3rd edition; New York; Leavitt & Trow, 1843), reprinted in Complete Works, edited by J. Wm. Flinn (Columbia, S. C., 1908), IV, 447.

James Henley Thornwell⁴³ relates ecclesiology to the decree of election of which the church is the realization, a perspective not entirely absent from Hodge, and yet not made central as might be expected of a Calvinist. Thornwell defines the church as "the whole body of the elect considered as united to Christ their head." At any particular time, the church consists of the elect who have been effectually called, that is, renewed by and made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and exercising true faith. The church, accordingly, is "the communion of saints, the congregation of the faithful, the assembly of those who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."⁴⁴

Archibald Alexander Hodge⁴⁵ also views the church from the point of view of election. Though seen in part as it is actually gathered, the collective body comprising all the

⁴³James Henley Thornwell [1812-1862]. A native South Carolinian, Thornwell was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry in 1835. He was professor of sacred literature and evidences of Christianity at South Carolina College, 1841-1851, and president of that institution, 1852-1855. He resigned the latter position to become professor of theology in the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Columbia, S. C., his service there being terminated by his death.

⁴⁴Thornwell, IV, 350-351.

⁴⁵Archibald Alexander Hodge [1823-1886], the eldest son of Charles Hodge, entered the ministry as a missionary to India in 1847, but was forced to return to this country three years later for reasons of health. He was appointed to the chair of systematic theology at Western Theological Seminary, Allegheny, Pa., in 1864, remaining there until his call to Princeton Seminary in 1877, where he also taught systematic theology until his death.

elect of all nations and generations is called the church "invisible" for two reasons: (1) Because the part visible on earth at any one time is small in comparison with the body as a whole, and (2) "because even in the sections of this body visible to us its outlines are very uncertain."⁴⁶ The term "invisible" is not used in an absolute sense.

Thus the consensus of Presbyterian theology in this period is that the church is essentially a spiritual body, composed of all those united to Christ by the Holy Spirit in effectual calling, in pursuance of the decree of election. The question that naturally arises is how to relate this idea of the church as an essentially spiritual body to the consideration, which may not be by-passed, that the church is also "a social body, called out of the world, and constituted by the authority of Jesus Christ."⁴⁷ It was this question that gave American Presbyterians the greatest difficulty.

The Visibility of the Church

The basic proposition that the church is essentially a spiritual body is not equivalent to a denial of the visibility of the church. According to Hodge, the term "invisible" when

⁴⁶A[rchibald] A[lexander] Hodge, The Confession of Faith, (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), p. 312.

⁴⁷Miller, p. 44.

applied to the church has reference only to the fact that the condition of membership is something inward; it does not mean that those who have this condition are invisible or unknowable.⁴⁸ True faith will manifest itself outwardly in confession and good works.⁴⁹ As believers associate together for worship and discipline, having officers and government, they appear before the world as a visible body.⁵⁰ Hence, the true church on earth is always visible.⁵¹

One of the most helpful attempts at a clear definition of the visibility of the church is found in Archibald Alexander Hodge. The true church, he says, is always visible in part, with greater or lesser clarity. The "universal visible Church" is not a different church from the "invisible Church" comprising all the elect of all nations and ages. "It is the same body, as its successive generations pass in their order and are imperfectly discriminated from the rest of mankind by the eye of man."⁵²

⁴⁸[Hodge], "The Visibility of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 681. Hodge sometimes, by not qualifying his statements, gives another impression, as when he says, "we do not know who is a true believer; and therefore we cannot tell who is a member of the Church or body of Christ." Hodge, Church Polity, p. 206.

⁴⁹Thornwell, IV, 351. [Hodge], "Theories of the Church," The Princeton Review, XVIII, 141.

⁵⁰[Hodge], "Theories of the Church," The Princeton Review, XVIII, 141.

⁵¹[Hodge], "The Visibility of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 671.

⁵²A. A. Hodge, p. 312.

Particular churches throughout the world are one visible church for they are all "visible parts of the true spiritual or invisible Church, which, being 'the body of Christ,' can never be divided."⁵³

Charles Hodge also holds that the church is always visible, but emphasizes that since the church is the company of believers, it is visible only in the sense in which believers are visible.⁵⁴ The church is "only a company of Christians," and anything not essential to the individual Christian cannot be made essential to the church.⁵⁵ "What is not essential to the true Church, the spiritual body of Christ, or to salvation, cannot be essential to the visible Church."⁵⁶ The visibility of the church is not the visibility of external organization. The true church is visible "not as an organization, not as an external society, but as the living body of Christ; as a set of men distinguished from others as true Christians."⁵⁷ Where true believers

⁵³ Ibid., p. 313.

⁵⁴ [Charles Hodge], "The Visibility of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 671.

⁵⁵ [Charles Hodge], The Princeton Review, XXVIII, 693.

⁵⁶ [Charles Hodge], "Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church," The Princeton Review, XVIII (April 1846), 330.

⁵⁷ [Charles Hodge], "The Visibility of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 672.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 206. See also pp. 31-32.

confess their faith, and live holy lives, there the church is visible.⁵⁸

Hodge thus distinguishes between "the visible Church, considered as an organized body," and the true church as visible in professing believers "apart from any outward organization, and in the midst of all organizations."⁵⁹ The relationship is as follows: Believers, and thus the church, exist apart from external organization. However, it is their duty to organize, inasmuch as man is by nature a social being. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, believers form themselves into societies, uniting for worship and the celebration of Christian ordinances, and the subjecting themselves to a common ecclesiastical government.⁶⁰ Organization does not make them a church, however, but being members of the church they associate for these purposes.⁶¹

The criterion for admission to the church as a visible organization is not infallible evidence of regeneration, but a "credible profession of faith." The visible church is thus made up of all those who make such profession, though some may thus gain admittance to the organization who do not

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., XXV, 673; [Charles Hodge], The Princeton Review, XXVIII, 698.

⁶⁰Charles Hodge, Church Polity, pp. 63, 91. Hodge rejects, however, "mutual covenants" as the ground of church authority. p. 92.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 206. See also pp. 31-32.

belong to the spiritual body.⁶² The organization is not to be identified, therefore, with the body of believers. Associated with true believers are those whose profession of faith is insincere, whose union with believers is merely external. The mixed group, the external organization, though Hodge does not hesitate to call it "the visible church," is not the same thing as the true church as visible. The latter is composed of believers only; the external (or visible) church is composed of all those who profess the true religion, including hypocrites.

The true Church is visible in the external Church just as the soul is visible in the body. That is, as by the means of the body we know that the soul is there, so by means of the external Church, we know where the true Church is.⁶³

When Hodge says that the external society is not the church, he means that "the two are not identical, commensurate, and conterminous, so that he who is a member of the one is a member of the other . . ." ⁶⁴ The church is in the society, though the society itself is denied to be the church any further than it consists of true believers.⁶⁵ As a

⁶²[Charles Hodge], "Theories of the Church," The Princeton Review, XVIII, 141-142.

⁶³[Charles Hodge], "The Visibility of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 673.

⁶⁴Ibid., XXV, 674.

⁶⁵Ibid., XXV, 680.

matter of fact, the visible church has often been composed largely of unregenerate men.⁶⁶

The prerogatives of the church, the authority to teach and the right to exercise discipline, do not belong to the visible church as such, but to the church as the communion of saints. They belong to the external body of professors on the assumption of their being what they profess to be. The "power of the keys" belongs to the visible church "only so far as she is the organ of the Church invisible."⁶⁷

The word "church," according to Hodge, is used in the senses which cannot be embraced under one definition. It may be used for the whole number of the elect, or for the true people of God, or for all those who profess the true religion, that is, the essential doctrines of the Gospel necessary to salvation, together with their children. Organization does not enter into the definition of any of these perspectives, but only when the word "church" is used for a denomination, that is, "an organized society professing the true religion, united for the purpose of worship and discipline, and subject to the same form of

⁶⁶Charles Hodge, Church Polity, p. 288. See also pp. 58, 246.

⁶⁷[Charles Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 287-289; Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology I, 134, 137-138.

government and to some common tribunal."⁶⁸ Although the ministry is of divine appointment, and necessary to the edification and extension of the church, it is not essential to the being of a church so "that there is no church where there is no ministry."⁶⁹ Likewise, the sacraments are of divine appointment, and perpetual obligation, "but to make them essential to the church is to make them essential to salvation, which is contrary to Scripture."⁷⁰ The only essential mark of a true church is the profession of the true religion, Hodge argues, and claims the support of the Westminster Confession.⁷¹ The traditional "marks," the pure preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments, and the just exercise of discipline, provide "a description of a pure and orderly church."⁷²

Dabney's treatment is similar to that of Charles Hodge. God has ordained visible organized societies for the gathering of the spiritual company. By accommodation these societies are called "churches." Together they constitute the

⁶⁸[Charles Hodge], "Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?" The Princeton Review, XVIII, 327-328; Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 547.

⁶⁹[Charles Hodge], "Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?" The Princeton Review, XVIII, 330.

⁷⁰Ibid., XVIII, 332.

⁷¹Charles Hodge, Church Polity, p.138.

⁷²[Charles Hodge], "Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?" The Princeton Review, XVIII, 323.

visible catholic church. The name church is given in Scripture to "a visible body, consisting of all those throughout the world, who make a credible profession of the true religion, together with their children." To the visible church catholic God has given the ministry, the sacraments, and other ordinances, and "some measure of his sanctifying Spirit." Outside of this church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.⁷³

Dabney uses an analogy similar to that used by Hodge to describe the relationship between the true church and the external society. As the soul, which is the true man, inhabits the body, so the true church inhabits the visible society and makes it "the rude and imperfect instrument of its corporate functions." The word "church" may be applied to "the aggregate of those societies which the Church universal and spiritual now on earth inhabits," in a way similar to speaking of a corpse as a dead man, though without the spirit it is but a "clod." The visible must resemble the invisible so far as possible, but it cannot possess the qualities of the invisible "for reasons similar to those

⁷³Dabney, Syllabus of Systematic Theology, pp. 726-727. This agrees with the Westminster Confession. But see Discussions, II, 437 where the phrase is used with reference to the invisible church, a slip that Charles Hodge also makes. [Charles Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 274.

which forbid the shell to be the kernel, the body to be the intelligent spirit within it."⁷⁴

In some respects Thornwell's thought parallels that of Charles Hodge on the visibility of the church. The invisible church becomes manifest as the whole multitude of the elect are regenerated, united to Christ, and incorporated into him. "The body of professors is . . . to be accepted as the Church of Christ, because the truly faithful are in it." The Gospel is never preached without effect, so that profession of faith as the result of the preaching of the Word entitles any society to the name of a church, since such a society cannot be destitute of true believers. Those who profess faith without really possessing it are not properly members of the church, being merely tares among the wheat, passing for saints until it is manifest that they are not.⁷⁵

Thornwell differs from Charles Hodge, however, in defining the visible church as "the society or congregation of those who profess the true religion; among whom the Gospel is faithfully preached and the sacraments duly administered."⁷⁶ Hodge's statement that where the Spirit is, there is the church, needs to be qualified. It is true that there is no church without the Spirit; but, on the other hand, "something

⁷⁴Dabney, Discussions, II, 434.

⁷⁵Thornwell, IV, 351.

⁷⁶Ibid.

beside the indwelling of the Holy Ghost is necessary to convert a collection of believers into a Church." A dozen men may meet regularly for prayer, and the Holy Spirit may be present, but this does not make them a church. "A society that claims to be the Church must show something more than the possession of the Spirit." It must also have the order appointed by Christ. The essentials of the visible church institute are the ministry and the ordinances of Christ. Churches are to be regarded as true churches of Christ "as long as the Word, in its essential doctrines, is really preached, and the sacraments truly administered."⁷⁷

A similar line of argument appears in the Presbyterial Critic and Monthly Review, edited by Stuart Robinson and Thomas E. Peck, both prominent men in the southern portion of the Presbyterian Church:

The Church is not the people of God simply as such: it is an organization of the people of God. Apart from the consideration of this organization, the people who believe in Christ may be distinguished religiously, but not ecclesiastically. Indeed, in a loose and general sense, they may, prior to this organization, be called a church; but this use of the term is loose and inaccurate. In strictness of speech, their ecclesiastical character ensues when they are brought into an organized relation to each other, and not before.⁷⁸

⁷⁷Ibid., IV, 261-262, 293.

⁷⁸"The Issues Stated," The Presbyterial Critic and Monthly Review, I (1885), 81. See also John Mitchell Mason who argues that "church of God" in both the Old and New Testaments signifies "that great visible society which God

Though making a distinction between the church "in its essential elements and the mode of its external manifestation,"⁷⁹ Thornwell is not satisfied that the relation between the two has been adequately defined. He charges that all the Reformed theologians have evaded the question of the precise nature of the visible church, and asks, "Is it or is it not specifically a different thing from the communion of saints?" Commenting on the distinction between the profession of faith as the indispensable condition of membership in the visible church, and the possession of faith as that of the invisible, Thornwell notes that on such a basis there is no correspondence between the two churches. "The one is not an imperfect exhibition of the other, but a different though related institute. Where the specific difference is not the same there can be no identification of species." The church as visible is more than the invisible church

has set apart for himself." The church, accordingly, is to be defined as "the aggregate body of those who profess the true religion; all making up but ONE society, of which the Bible is the statute book; Jesus Christ the head; and a covenant relation the uniting bond." The Writings of the Late John M. Mason, edited by Ebenezer Mason (New York: Published by the editor, 1832), IV, 15, 24.

Mason [1770-1829] was an Associate Reformed minister until 1822 when he transferred to the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The work from which the above quotation was taken was re-issued separately by the Presbyterian Board of Publication in 1843 as Essays on the Church of God, and widely cited with approval in the period under discussion, even by Charles Hodge, from whom one would be led to expect some criticism. Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 546.

⁷⁹Thornwell, IV, 21.

become apparent. Otherwise, he asks, "Upon what principle [do] the official acts of an unconverted minister become valid?"⁸⁰

Thornwell does not offer a complete solution. In contrast to Charles Hodge, he denies that the outward order is simply the product of the inward life. "Spiritual impulses do not generate the Church; they only correspond to it." The outward order is authoritatively established as the condition for the healthful development of the internal life. "Neither springs from the other; they coexist according to a pre-established harmony." Accordingly, for a society to be regarded as the church it is not enough to appeal to the possession of the Spirit; the ministry and ordinances of Christ are necessary as well.⁸¹

There is a corresponding emphasis in Thornwell on the institutional side of the church. He sees the effect of the division into multiple sects, the abuse of the principle of private judgment, as bringing the church down to the level of a voluntary society. Thus the church is regarded as merely an association for religious purposes, analogous to temperance societies, or other associations for benevolent purposes. On the contrary, he says, the church must be venerated as the institute of God. It is not an "accidental society" owing its existence to a "voluntary compact." "It

⁸⁰ Ibid., II, 43-44.

⁸¹ Ibid., IV, 261-262.

is a society which has grown out of the facts of redemption."⁸² Accordingly, the church as a teacher must be heard with respect. "Her testimony is a venerable presumption in favour of the Divine authority of all that she proposes," though, of course, she must teach only as she has been taught in Scripture.⁸³

The attributes of the visible church are a matter of great concern, as the professing church seeks to realize the invisible. The two ought to coincide. Thornwell applies this principle in this context not to the holiness of the church, as might be expected, but to the unity of the church. A church which in principle "cannot realize a visible unity, and thus aim to coincide with the invisible Church, is self-condemned." The relationship is so close that it is inconsistent to predicate unity of the one and not be equally concerned with lack of unity in the other.⁸⁴

Robert Jefferson Breckinridge⁸⁵ also places emphasis on the church as a visible institution in the world. The church,

⁸² Ibid., I, 44-45.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., IV, 135-136.

⁸⁵ Robert Jefferson Breckinridge [1800-1871] was ordained to the ministry of the Presbyterian church in 1832, having been previous to his theological training a lawyer and a member of the Kentucky legislature. He was for several years (1832-1845) pastor of Second Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, where he engaged in a lively opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, as may be seen in the pages of the Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine (later the Spirit

he notes, is the personal kingdom of Christ.⁸⁶ Membership depends on union and communion with the Head and Redeemer of the Kingdom. The Kingdom has a form, however, and since Pentecost the form is that of "the Gospel Church State."⁸⁷ Messianic Kingdom, New Creation, and Church of God are names of the same reality viewed from the aspects of the dominion of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the gathered members, respectively.⁸⁸

The Church visible of Christ, is the Kingdom of God in this world, created through the communion of saints . . . possessed of a peculiar and divinely appointed organization, separate from the world, and so a divine institution among men."⁸⁹

The distinctive thing about Breckinridge's ecclesiology is his attempt to define the visible church in such a way as not to include hypocrites within the definition.⁹⁰ The

of the XIX Century) of which he was the editor. Breckinridge eventually became professor of theology in the Presbyterian Seminary at Danville, Kentucky (1853-1869). His principal literary legacy is the two-volume work, The Knowledge of God, Objectively Considered (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859) and The Knowledge of God, Subjectively Considered (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1860).

⁸⁶Breckinridge, II, 186.

⁸⁷Ibid., II, 386. See also I, 83, 92, 411.

⁸⁸Ibid., II, 418.

⁸⁹Ibid., II, 413.

⁹⁰This is also the concern of John Murray, Christian Baptism (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, n. d.), p. 42.

visible church, loosely speaking, may be described as "all living men who profess the name of Christ," but it is more truly "all living men who are his true followers." He points out that "it is not the same thing to be visibly a member of some organization or denomination of Christians, and to be a member of Christ visibly by being a true member of his visible body."⁹¹

Properly speaking, the visible Church can be nothing else but that portion of the true and eternal Kingdom of God, which is apparent on earth; and we might as truly speak of another head of the Kingdom than Christ . . . as of other members of it than the elect of God.⁹²

Breckinridge recognizes that hypocrites will gain admission to the church as visible. However, such "false brethren," are not of the essence of the church; they are "mere intruders into the visible Church, and ought to be cast out of it." Since these "intruders" are not always recognized for what they are, only God knows infallibly to what extent the church is visible on earth.⁹³

The divine institution of the church is based on the fellowship of believers in union with Christ. The church is made visible through the sacraments, which separate and organize the people of God.⁹⁴ Appealing to circumcision and

⁹¹Breckinridge, II, 400-401, 406.

⁹²Ibid., II, 406.

⁹³Ibid., II, 190, 400, 406.

⁹⁴Ibid., II, 383.

the passover as Old Testament parallels to baptism and the Lord's supper, Breckinridge concludes, "nothing is more distinct than the gradual organization of a visible Church, by means of outward ordinances . . . and outwardly preclusive of all who were not God's people in covenant."⁹⁵

Stuart Robinson, Breckinridge's colleague in the seminary at Danville as Professor of Church Government and Pastoral Theology, 1856-1857, also emphasizes the institutional side of the church. God's purpose, Robinson argues, is not to save men merely as individuals, but as a mediatorial body, a kingdom, a church. Through successive covenants, God separates his people from the world in realization of his purpose of redemption. As the result of Christ's redemptive accomplishment, he founds a community, which he organizes and rules.⁹⁶ A true definition of the church must include three elements: the internal call of the Spirit, the external call of the Word, and the organic structure of the institution.⁹⁷ This leads to a familiar duality:

Inasmuch as they are called by an external klesis of the word, [the people of God] are gathered in successive generations to constitute the external ekklesia on earth. In as

⁹⁵ Ibid., II, 383.

⁹⁶ Robinson, pp. 38-45

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 73.

far as they are called also by the internal klesis of the Spirit, they are gathered to constitute the invisible ekklesia, the full and complete actual of the eternal ideal.⁹⁸

Somewhat in contrast to Breckinridge, Robinson states that the visible church is not only a manifestation of the ideal church, but is an institute for the calling and training of the elect people of God.⁹⁹ Through the visible body the Mediator carries on his administration and works by his Spirit. The visible church by definition, includes those who are only externally called by the word.¹⁰⁰ Robinson's only attempt to relieve the tension is a rather vague statement that the process of calling and training the elect "creates the visible Church in the image of the invisible."¹⁰¹

Thus, although there is some difficulty in agreeing on the definition of the visible church, and the relationship of the institute having the word and sacraments to the spiritual and mystical body of Christ, these Presbyterians all acknowledge that there is a discrepancy between the church as God knows it, and the church as it appears to the eyes of man. Indeed, it is just this anomaly that precipitates their differences in definition. Given this

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 41.

unavoidable discrepancy, to what extent is the church as a visible institution responsible for excluding those who do not actually belong to the body of Christ?

The Criterion for Church Membership

All those who make "a credible profession" are to be received into the visible church, for those who make such a profession are presumably the people of Christ.¹⁰² By "credible profession" is meant "a profession of the true religion sufficiently intelligent and sufficiently corroborated by the daily life of the professor to be credited as genuine."¹⁰³ It involves "a competent knowledge of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, a declaration of personal faith in Christ and consecration to his service; and a temper of mind and habit consistent therewith."¹⁰⁴

Charles Hodge devotes several pages to this subject in his Systematic Theology.¹⁰⁵ The attempt to make the visible church consist exclusively of true believers, he says, is not only bound to fail, since it is not the purpose of God, but it will be productive of evil. The criterion by which the church accepts persons into her membership is not such

¹⁰²A. A. Hodge, pp. 3, 313. See Dabney, Syllabus of Systematic Theology, p. 726.

¹⁰³A. A. Hodge, p. 313.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰⁵Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 541-548, 569-579.

evidence of regeneration the constrains belief, so that the church, in effect passes judgment on whether the person is truly born of God. It is rather a profession of faith which may be believed, "one against which no decisive, tangible evidence can be adduced."¹⁰⁶

Hodge does point out that the profession is a profession of true faith, not of historical or speculative faith.¹⁰⁷ In other words, the person making such profession is professing to be a believer,¹⁰⁸ and this is taken as "credible evidence" that he is a true Christian.¹⁰⁹ Still, it is not the prerogative of the church to "judge" the condition of the heart.¹¹⁰ The church is to refuse those who deny the faith, or those whose manner of life is inconsistent with the biblical lists of offences which exclude from the kingdom of heaven. Beyond this the church cannot go. "The gates of the kingdom of God are not to be opened or shut at the discretion of weak, fallible men."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶Ibid., III, 546, 575.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., III, 563, 574.

¹⁰⁸[Charles Hodge], "Idea of the Church," The Princeton Review, XXV, 377.

¹⁰⁹Charles Hodge, Church Polity, p. 219.

¹¹⁰Systematic Theology, III, 575.

¹¹¹Ibid., III, 576-577.

CHAPTER III

THE RELATION OF CHILDREN TO THE CHURCH

According to the confessional standards of the Presbyterian church, the visible church consists of all those that profess the true religion, and of their children.¹ The common doctrine in the period under discussion is that the children of believing parents, in virtue of the covenant promise, are born within the visible church, and are therefore to be baptized.² Baptism, on this view, does not constitute such children members of the visible church, but is rather the public and orderly recognition of their membership. "It is the divinely appointed mode of recognizing

¹[Westminster Assembly of Divines], The Confession of Faith, The Larger and Shorter Catechisms with the Scripture Proofs at Large, together with the Sum of Saving Knowledge . . . Covenants, National and Solemn League; Acknowledgment of Sins and Engagement to Duties; Directories for Publick and Family Worship; Form of Church Government, etc. . . . (Edinburgh: The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland), p. 107. The reference is to the Confession of Faith, XXV, ii.

²John M[itchell] Mason, "Church of God," The Writings of John M. Mason, edited by Ebenezer Mason (New York: By the Editor, 1832), IV, 85-87; Samuel Miller, Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1835), pp. 49, 58; Charles Hodge, Discussions in Church Polity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), p. 246; Robert Lewis Dabney, Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia (5th edition; Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, n.d.), p. 347.

them as members of the Church, and of claiming for them a part in its promises and privileges."³

An exception to this view that membership in the visible church is the ground of infant baptism is found in Henry Boynton Smith. Although not arguing the point, Smith states that by baptism children of believing parents are received into and made members of the visible church. The covenant is the ground of their baptism, and baptism makes them members of the church visible, though not necessarily of the invisible church.⁴

There is some difference of opinion as to the meaning of their membership.⁵ Lyman Atwater notes "great diversities" within the Presbyterian church in both theory and practice. These stem, he says, from the difficulty that Presbyterian theology has in defining the precise ecclesiastical status of children, a difficulty that is rooted in the Reformed doctrine of the sacraments. The Baptists and the Romanists (including "Reomanizing Protestants") are said not to have this difficulty. It is a problem for our inter-

³[Charles Hodge], "The Church Membership of Infants," The Princeton Review, XXX (April 1858), 372.

⁴Henry B[oynton] Smith, System of Christian Theology, edited by William S. Karr (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1884), p. 595.

⁵See Lewis Bevens Schenck, The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant. An Historical Study of the significance of Infant Baptism in the Presbyterian Church in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940). Schenck discusses the divergences in light of the threat which revivalism posed to the historic Reformed doctrine.

Presbyterians because they try to steer between the "insane rationalistic view" on the one hand, and "ritualism or some vague mysticism" on the other.⁶ Sacramental theory and the doctrine of the church are inseparable at this point.

The Standards of the Presbyterian Church

According to the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian church, faith is the internal means by which the Holy Spirit unites the elect to Christ. Grace is offered and conveyed to the elect in effectual calling, including "the grace of faith," which is the work of the Holy Spirit, "ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word." This faith is increased and strengthened by the Word, the sacraments, and prayer. Thus does Christ make effectual to the gathering and perfecting of his people the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God.⁷

The sacraments, accordingly, are understood as "signs and seals of the covenant of grace," their purpose being "to represent Christ and his benefits; and to confirm our interest in him," as well as to put a visible difference between the church and the world. Their efficacy depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit, and the word of institution, which

⁶[Lyman Atwater], "The Children of the Church, and Sealing Ordinances," The Princeton Review, XXIX (January 1857), 4-5.

⁷Shorter Catechism, Q. 30; Confession of Faith, XIV, 1; XXV, iii.

contains "a promise of benefit to worthy receivers."⁸ The "benefit," on the most consistent understanding, is the nourishment and strengthening of faith already existing. The statement of the Shorter Catechism that in the sacraments "Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers," should probably also be understood this way.⁹ But this benefit would not be possible were there not "a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified."¹⁰ No attempt is made, however, to define this union. The Larger Catechism, for example, simply puts the parts of a sacrament side by side. "The parts of a Sacrament are two; the one, an outward and sensible sign used according to Christ's own appointment; the other, an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified."¹¹

Baptism is not only for solemn admission into the visible church, but is to be to the person baptized "a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, or remission of sins, and of his

⁸Confession of Faith, XXVII, 1, iii, emphasis added.

⁹Shorter Catechism, Q. 92. See William Cunningham, "Zwingle, and the Doctrine of the Sacraments," The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation (London; Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), pp. 272-282, especially his quotations from Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie.

¹⁰Confession of Faith, XXVII, ii.

¹¹Larger Catechism, Q. 163.

giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life."¹² By the "right use" of baptism,

the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.¹³

What is the grace promised? Is it union with Christ, or confirmation of this union? If it must be one or the other, it seems most consistent with Reformed theology to regard it as the latter, being conveyed through the sacrament as an efficacious seal.¹⁴ This benefit, the confirmation of the covenant blessings, is not "tied" to the moment of administration, but is conferred through the sacrament in God's own appointed time, to those to whom the promises belong according to the counsel of his will.¹⁵

The Westminster doctrinal standards do not elaborate on infant baptism, either as to its ground, or as the spiritual

¹²Confession of Faith, XXVIII, iii.

¹³Ibid., XXVII, vi.

¹⁴The Larger Catechism's "parts of a Sacrament" might be argued against this interpretation, and the "grace promised" identified with the "inward and spiritual grace thereby signified." The Confession of Faith in the immediately preceding paragraph states that grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto [Baptism], as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it." This implies that "grace and salvation," which involve regeneration, are in some sense annexed to Baptism.

¹⁵Confession of Faith, XXVII, vi.

status of the baptized child. The Confession of Faith simply states that the infants of at least one believing parent are to be baptized.¹⁶ The Larger Catechism adds that such children are "in that respect within the covenant," and on that account are to be baptized.¹⁷

The Directory for the Publick Worship of God, drawn up by the Westminster Assembly,¹⁸ on the other hand, treats the subject at length and thus provides the most definitive statement of that Assembly concerning the status of children within the covenant and the significance of their baptism. In the baptismal service, baptism is defined, in words almost identical to those of the Confession of Faith which followed two years later, as "a seal of the covenant of grace, of our ingrafting into Christ, and of our union with him, of remission of sins, regeneration, adoption, and life eternal." The instruction given by the minister before the baptism of the child (the Directory only deals with infant baptism) is to include the significance of the water (representing the blood of Christ and the sanctifying virtue of the Holy Spirit) and of the action of sprinkling or washing (representing cleansing by the blood of Christ, and dying and rising with

¹⁶ Ibid., XXVIII, iv.

¹⁷ Larger Catechism, Q. 95, emphasis added.

¹⁸ Approved and established by both the Parliament of the Kingdom of Scotland and the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland in 1645.

him). This is followed by instruction concerning the ground of infant baptism, in which the minister informs the congregation:

That the promise is made to believers and their seed; and that the seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church, have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, and to the outward privileges of the church, under the gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament; the covenant of grace, for substance, being the same; and the grace of God, and the consolation of believers, more plentiful than before:

That the Son of God admitted little children into his presence, embracing and blessing them, saying For of such is the kingdom of God;

That children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh:

That they are Christians, and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized.¹⁹

The inward grace is not tied to the moment of administration; "the fruit and power thereof reacheth to the whole course of our life." Accordingly, all present are admonished to "look back to their baptism," to repent of their sins against the covenant, and to "improve and make right use of their baptism."²⁰

¹⁹Westminster Directory for Worship, pp. 382-383.

²⁰Larger Catechism, Q. 167: "How is our Baptism to be improved by us?"

The parent is then exhorted "to consider the great mercy of God to him and his child; to bring up the child in the knowledge of the grounds of the Christian religion, and in the nurture and admonition of the Lord . . ." ²¹

In both of the prayers of the service, that is, immediately preceding and following the act of baptizing, the emphasis falls, so far as the effect of baptism is concerned, on its character as a seal. Before baptism, the Lord is asked to "join the inward baptism of his Spirit with the outward baptism of water," and to make the baptism "a seal of adoption, remission of sin, regeneration, and eternal life, and all other promises of the covenant of grace." After baptism the supplication is, if the child lives to years of discretion,

that the Lord would so teach him by his word and Spirit, and make his baptism effectual to him, and so uphold him by his divine power and grace, that by faith he may prevail against the devil, the world, and the flesh, till in the end he obtain a full and final victory . . . ²²

A dynamic, life-long relationship between faith and baptism is thus envisioned.

The ecclesiastical status of the baptized child is also reflected on in the prayer after baptism. The Lord is to be

²¹Westminster Directory for Worship, p. 383.

²²Ibid., pp. 383-384.

thanked "for he daily bringeth some into the bosom of his church, to be partakers of his inestimable benefits, purchased by the blood of his dear Son, for the continuance and increase of his church." The child has now been entered into the household of faith, and the Lord is asked to take him "into his fatherly tuition and defence, and remember him with the favour that he sheweth to his people."²³

In 1729 the Presbyterian Church in America, of which the supreme judicatory at that time was the Synod of Philadelphia,²⁴ adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism and Shorter Catechism as the church's doctrinal standards. The Westminster Assembly's formularies for worship, government, and discipline were recommended for use "as near as circumstances will allow."²⁵ An American Government and Discipline and Directory for Worship were adopted in 1788 and incorporated into the church's Constitution.²⁶ The section on discipline was subsequently revised

²³Ibid., p. 384.

²⁴The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was formed in 1789.

²⁵William E. Moore, editor, The Presbyterian Digest: A Compend of the Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1873), pp. 45-46.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 51-52. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, containing the Confession of Faith, the Catechisms, the Government and Discipline, and the Directory for the Worship of God, Ratified and adopted by the Synod of New-York and Philadelphia, held at Philadelphia May the 16th 1788 and continued until the 28th of the same month (Philadelphia: Thomas Bradford, 1789.

and emerges as the Book of Discipline in the Constitution as adopted by the General Assembly in 1821. Only a few minor changes appear with respect to the standards of government and worship.²⁷

The differences between the American Directory for Worship and the Westminster Directory for Worship are striking. The section on the administration of baptism is much briefer in the American Directory, and this is due not simply to a reduction of the wordiness of the Westminster Directory, but to a significant reduction in content. Whereas the Westminster Directory gives a full definition of what baptism seals, the American revision simply states that baptism is "a seal of the righteousness of faith." The revision does not define the significance of the water and of the action. It omits the exhortation to all present to "look back to their baptism." Prayer is to be offered before and after baptism, but there is no suggestion as to what the content of these prayers should be. Thus the official instruction given by the Presbyterian church is considerably reduced.

²⁷The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, containing the Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and the Directory of the Worship of God; together with the Plan of Government and Discipline, as ratified by the General Assembly at their sessions in May, 1821; and amended in 1833 (Philadelphia; Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.). References to the American Form of Government, Directory for Worship, and Book of Discipline are to this edition of the Constitution.

This is especially true with regard to the relationship of children to the church, and the significance of their baptism. This may be seen not only in the omission of the content of the prayers, but in the instruction to be given before baptism when compared to the Westminster Directory for Worship.²⁸ In the American Directory the minister is to inform those present that

the seed of the faithful have no less a right to this ordinance, under the gospel, than the seed of Abraham to circumcision, under the Old Testament; that Christ commanded all nations to be baptized; that he blessed little children, declaring that of such is the kingdom of heaven; that children are federally holy, and therefore ought to be baptized.²⁹

The paragraph in the old service that makes clear that children by their baptism are received into the visible church, distinguished from the world, and united with believers, finds no echo in the new.

The exhortation to parents, however, is more detailed in the revision, requiring

that they teach the child to read the word of God; that they instruct it in the principles of our holy religion, as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament; an excellent summary of which we have in the Confession of Faith of this Church, and in the

²⁸ Supra, p. 55.

²⁹ American Directory for Worship, VII, iv.

Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly, which are to be recommended to them, as adopted by this church, for their direction and assistance in the discharge of this important duty; that they pray with and for it; that they set an example of piety and godliness before it; and endeavor, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring up their child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.³⁰

The focus of the service shifts subtly from the child to the parent. A later chapter, on the admission to sealing ordinances, speaks of "children, born within the pale of the visible Church, and dedicated to God in baptism."³¹ Besides the weaker expression "within the pale of the visible Church" (the Westminster Directory has "born within the church" and "received into the bosom of the visible church"), the emphasis falls on what the parent does in presenting his child, rather than on what God does through this ordinance.³²

Even with these weaknesses, however, the revised Directory for Worship, and the Book of Discipline clearly consider baptized children as members of the church (though their precise status is not made clear), and the Presbyterian church resisted a further weakening of that position.³³

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., IX, i.

³² Compare Dabney's statement that "infant baptism is a sacrament to the parent as much as to the child," p. 780.

³³ For a full discussion see Schenck, pp. 90-103.

Baptized children are "under the inspection and government of the Church." They are to be taught the catechism, the Apostles' creed, and the Lord's prayer. Further, "they are to be taught to pray, to abhor sin, to fear God, and to obey the Lord Jesus Christ." When they come to years of discretion, they are to be examined as to their knowledge and piety, and admitted to the Lord's Supper.³⁴

The Nature of the Sacraments

The lack of a definitive statement in the official documents of the American Presbyterian church on the relationship of infant baptism to church membership is complicated by a difference in the understanding of the nature of the sacraments as defined in the Confession and Catechisms of the church. Thornwell and Dabney adhere very closely to the sacraments as signs and seals which confirm faith; Charles Hodge emphasizes that they are not only signs and seals, but "means of grace."

Thornwell presents the sacraments as having the same grounds and object of faith as does the Word. There is thus "a double preaching of the same Gospel." In the sacraments,

³⁴ American Directory for Worship, IX, 1. See also the American Book of Discipline, I, vi. "All baptized persons are members of the church, are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline; and when they have arrived at the years of discretion, they are bound to perform all the duties of church members."

the promises of God take visible form, being addressed to our senses on account of our weakness. Their purpose is for confirmation, either of "the Word just as a witness establishes a fact," or of "our faith in the truth and reality of the Divine promises."³⁵ The relationship between sign and thing signified is given as follows:

The certainty of the material phenomena, which is a matter of daily experience, is made the pledge of an equal certainty in the analogous spiritual things. It is in this way . . . that the sacraments are seals of the covenant. They not only represent its blessings, are not only an authorized proclamation of its promises addressed to the eye, but contain, at the same time, a solemn assurance that to those who rightly apprehend the signs the spiritual good shall be as certain as the natural consequences by which it is illustrated--that the connection between faith and salvation is as indissoluble as between washing and external purity, eating and physical strength.³⁶

The sacraments are thus "only a symbolical method of preaching."³⁷

For Dabney also, the sacraments symbolize and seal the same truths that are expressed verbally in revelation. They are "a kind of acted instead of spoken word." They present the truth of the Word, which the Holy Spirit makes the

³⁵James Henley Thornwell, The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell, edited by John B. Adger (Richmond, Va: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871-1873), III, 300-301, 329.

³⁶Ibid., III, 301.

³⁷Ibid., IV, 120.

occasion of sanctification. The uniform means of sanctification is thus the Word, "the means . . . in all other means."³⁸ The sacraments accordingly, should be reduced to their "Scriptural simplicity." Dabney finds that simplicity in their sphragistic (from the Greek, sphragis, "seal") nature. "A sacrament is God's pledge of some covenanted grace to the true participant."³⁹ The covenanted grace is the nourishment and strengthening of faith; the whole benefit depends on "intelligent, believing and penitent reception."⁴⁰ This is set in opposition to the "Papal view" which makes the sacraments "actually confer and work, instead of signing and sealing, the appropriate graces."⁴¹ "To signify and to promise a thing is different from doing it. Where the effect is present, the sign and pledge thereof is superseded."⁴² Baptism, specifically, is effective "through the Holy Spirit strengthening our devotion, but faith and assurance."⁴³

³⁸ Dabney, p. 666.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 727.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 731.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 728.

⁴² Ibid., p. 728.

⁴³ Robert Lewis Dabney, Discussions; Evangelical and Theological (London; Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), I, 436.

Charles Hodge, in his Systematic Theology, discusses the sacraments under "The Means of Grace," which he defines as "those institutions which God has ordained to be the ordinary channels of grace, i.e., of the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit to the souls of men."⁴⁴ The word grace in this connection means "1st. An unmerited gift, such as the remission of sin. 2d. The supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit. 3d. The subjective effects of that influence on the soul."⁴⁵ Hodge appeals to the Westminster standards, which, he says, enumerate the Word, the Sacraments, and prayer as "means of grace."⁴⁶

The design of the sacraments is distinctly threefold; "They were appointed to signify, and to instruct; to seal, and thus to confirm and strengthen; and to convey or apply, and thus to sanctify, those who by faith receive them."⁴⁷ Not only are the sacraments means of strengthening faith, but

⁴⁴Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), III, 466. Neither Thornwell nor Dabney use the expression "means of grace." Dabney speaks of the means of sanctification, "that is, "God's truth, His ordinances, and His providence." Dabney, Syllabus of Systematic Theology, p. 665.

⁴⁵Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 499.

⁴⁶Actually the Westminster standards do not refer to "means of grace" but to "means of salvation," that is, "the outward and ordinary means by which Christ communicates to us the benefits of his redemption." These are his ordinances, especially the Word (primarily the ministry or preaching of the Word), the Sacraments, and prayer. Shorter Catechism, Q. 88.

⁴⁷Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 487.

they are channels for conveying that which they signify. "A promise is made to those who rightly receive the sacraments that they shall thereby and therein be made partakers of the blessings of which the sacraments are the divinely appointed signs and seals."⁴⁸

Baptism is treated under this three-fold design. Charles Hodge's own expression is, that it is "not only a sign and seal; it is also a means of grace."⁴⁹ It is a means of grace "because in it the blessings which it signifies are conveyed, and the promises of which it is the seal, are assured or fulfilled to those who are baptized, provided they believe."⁵⁰

This view of the sacraments also finds expression in A. A. Hodge. The sacraments are "means and channels of grace." As seals of a divine promise "they do actually convey the grace they signify to those for whom that grace is intended." Baptism is a seal of the blessings of the covenant, which are conveyed in God's good time. It not only signifies, but really and truly conveys grace to the elect. The efficacy of the sacrament results from the moral power

⁴⁸Ibid., III, 499.

⁴⁹Ibid., III, 589.

⁵⁰Ibid. See also Breckinridge; "What follows to the worthy recipient [of baptism] is fellowship with the death and resurrection of Christ; salvation through grace, by the washing and regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." II, 547-548.

of the truth represented, the legal form of a seal, and "the personal presence and sovereignly gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, who uses the sacrament as his instrument and medium." The benefits conveyed through baptism are not peculiar to it; they belong to the believer "before or without baptism, and are often renewed to him afterwards."⁵¹

The Means of Regeneration

In the attempt to relate the doctrine of baptism to the church membership of children, the theologians center the discussion on the moment of regeneration. Charles Hodge notes that in the common theological usage of the day "regeneration" means "that supernatural change effected by the Spirit of God by which a soul is made spiritually alive."⁵² Although the term can be used in a wider sense for the progressive renewal of the whole nature in the image of God,⁵³ the uniform usage in this period is for the change from death to life that is "instantaneous" in its idea.⁵⁴

The American Directory for Worship includes in its instruction before baptism a clause not in the old service:

⁵¹A[rchibald] A[lexander] Hodge, The Confession of Faith (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), pp. 333, 351.
A[rchibald] A[lexander] Hodge, Outlines of Theology (revised edition; London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1886), p. 626.

⁵²Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 591.

⁵³Breckinridge, II, 144-145, 148.

⁵⁴Smith, p. 556.

"that we are, by nature, sinful, guilty, and polluted, and have need of cleansing by the blood of Christ, and by the sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God."⁵⁵ But, as noted above, this service contains no statement on the significance of the water and washing of baptism, as did the Westminster Directory. As a result, one might conclude that baptism has more to do with teaching us that we need regeneration, than it does with sealing that work of the Spirit to those who believe the promise made in baptism.

Children of believing parents are in need of regeneration, and it is widely held that it is possible for them to be regenerated in infancy.⁵⁶ They are "fully capable of present regeneration, and of receiving from the Holy Ghost the "habit" or state of soul of which faith is the expression."⁵⁷ Breckinridge argues that all descending from the first Adam inherit a depraved nature; surely the second Adam can heal that nature prior to and independent of our personal consciousness.⁵⁸ "Adam's sin cannot be more effectual to pollute, than Christ's righteousness to cleanse"⁵⁹

⁵⁵American Directory for Worship, Vii, iv.

⁵⁶A. A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology, pp. 424, 622; Smith, p. 557; Dabney, Syllabus of Systematic Theology, p. 729.

⁵⁷A. A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology, p. 624.

⁵⁸The Knowledge of God, II, 557.

⁵⁹Ibid., II, 155.

Besides, he asks, how much is known of the period of our lives beyond which our memory will not take us?

I am not able to perceive, in the actual state of knowledge attainable by us concerning our earliest mental and spiritual exercises, upon what ground it is that we can question the applicability to an infant soul, of any part of the glorious work which is allowed to be applicable to an adult soul.⁶⁰

When and how regeneration takes place is "in the hands of God."⁶¹ The sovereignty of the working of the Holy Spirit, a characteristic emphasis of Reformed theology, thus finds expression here. But there are two distinct approaches to the question of "baptismal regeneration," corresponding in part to the difference in sacramental theology noted in the previous section.

One group of theologians and ministers rejects "baptismal regeneration" as the doctrine which teaches that the spiritual change is uniformly wrought by the Holy Spirit at the moment of administration. The definitions of "baptismal regeneration" to indicate what is being rejected show a uniform polemical interest; "The inward grace of regeneration always accompanies the outward sign of baptism."⁶² Regeneration is bestowed upon all the recipients of baptism

⁶⁰ Ibid., II, 154.

⁶¹ Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 590.

⁶² Miller, p. 102. Emphasis original.

at the hands of a duly authorized minister at the time of its administration."⁶³ "Whenever and wherever this ordinance is properly administered [God] changes the heart of the subject by his Holy Spirit."⁶⁴

The Reformed view, on the other hand, is said to teach that "baptism does not uniformly convey the benefits which it signifies, and . . . its efficacy is not limited to the time of its administration."⁶⁵ Regeneration may accompany baptism, and this "doubtless often occurs."⁶⁶ The objection to "baptismal regeneration" is an objection to the idea that the grace of regeneration is always conveyed at the moment of the administration of baptism.

C. A. Stillmann expresses the opinion of another group when he argues against "baptismal regeneration" on the grounds that "this ordinance cannot exert any spiritual influence upon the ignorant and unconscious babe."⁶⁷ This

⁶³[Lyman Atwater], "The Children of the Covenant and Their 'Part in the Lord,'" The Princeton Review XXXV (October 1863), 632.

⁶⁴[John C. Rankin], "A Practical View of Infant Baptism," The Princeton Review, XXXIII (October 1861), 687.

⁶⁵Charles Hodge, Church Polity, p. 198.

⁶⁶[Charles Hodge], The Princeton Review, XXX, 379; Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 590; Miller, p. 43; Smith, p. 595.

⁶⁷C. A. Stillman, "The Benefits of Infant Baptism," Southern Presbyterian Review, XVII (September 1866), 160-161.

group emphasizes that all the "means of grace" presuppose an intelligent reception. If infants are saved, they must be regenerated "without the use of means," "without any apparent instrumentality."⁶⁸

Even those who admit the possibility that baptism is accompanied by regeneration argue from "experience" that in the majority of cases, "so far as we can judge," it does not happen.⁶⁹ The great majority of those baptized in infancy give decisive evidence to the contrary in the later course of their lives.⁷⁰ Since in the Reformed "system of doctrine" there is no falling from grace, the conclusion is that those who are baptized, and yet finally lost, were never regenerated by the Spirit of God. Charles Hodge states simply, "It is impossible for a man to be a Calvinist and believe the doctrine of baptismal regeneration."⁷¹

Both groups thus finally argue the same point: Baptism is not appointed as the ordinary means of conveying grace in the first instance.⁷² The truth is the "great instrument" of

⁶⁸A. A. Hodge, The Confession of Faith, p. 174; Smith, p. 565.

⁶⁹Miller, p. 43.

⁷⁰Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 603; [Charles Hodge], The Princeton Review, XXX, 387.

⁷¹[Charles Hodge], The Princeton Review, XXX, 383. Also [Rankin], XXXIII, 687, 688; [Atwater], The Princeton Review, XXXIII, 632-633.

⁷²A. A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology, p. 628; Dabney, Syllabus of Systematic Theology, p. 740; Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 582.

the Holy Spirit, the "chief occasional cause of regeneration in the ordinary course of divine providence."⁷³ The sacraments, in the estimation of Charles Hodge, "hold a place much below that of the truth as the instrument of regeneration and conversion."⁷⁴

Accordingly, it is through the training of baptized children that the Holy Spirit is expected to accomplish the work of regeneration.⁷⁵ God has established a connection between the faithful fulfillment of parental responsibility and the salvation of the child, so that we may expect that they will become truly the children of God through the appointed means of instruction and example.⁷⁶ This is "the appointed, the natural, the normal and ordinary means by which the children of believers are made truly the children of God."⁷⁷ Parents are to look for the "saving conversion" in this way. They should expect of their baptized children that the Holy Spirit "by his renewing and sanctifying energy"

⁷³A. A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology, p. 628; Smith, p. 569.

⁷⁴Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 583.

⁷⁵[Atwater], The Princeton Review, XXIX, 27.

⁷⁶Charles Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," The Princeton Review, XIX (October 1847), 504, 509.

⁷⁷Ibid., XIX, 510.

will often silently "intermingle with and vitalize this Christian nurture."⁷⁸

The advantage of baptism is that it secures this Christian education for the child. "In the baptism of the child there is a guarantee for parental faithfulness not elsewhere to be found."⁷⁹ By baptism,

children are brought into a situation in which all the means of grace; all the privileges pertaining to Christ's covenant family; in a word, all that is comprehended under the broad and precious import of the term Christian Education is secured to them in the most ample manner."⁸⁰

Parents who rightly use this ordinance, that is "who heartily and truly dedicate their children to God in baptism, faithfully comply with the covenant in their training, and finally believe God's promise therein," secure the certainty of the salvation of their children.⁸¹ Stillmann admits, however, that such faith and fidelity are rare.⁸²

⁷⁸[Atwater], The Princeton Review, XXXIII, 636-637; The Princeton Review, XXIX, 27. Dabney, Syllabus of Systematic Theology, p. 780; A Georgia Pastor, "The Church a Spiritual Power," Southern Presbyterian Review, XII (1859-1860), 480.

⁷⁹"Temporalities vs Spiritualities," The Presbyterian Critic and Monthly Review, I (1855), 120.

⁸⁰Miller, p. 43.

⁸¹Stillmann, XVII, 152.

⁸²Ibid., XVII, 153.

The Church Membership of Baptized Children

In light of these difficulties in sacramental theology, and preoccupation with the "moment" of regeneration, it is not surprising that differences should emerge with respect to the ecclesiastical status of baptized children, especially since the instruction of the official baptismal service is not only much less definitive than the Westminster Directory, but shifts the emphasis from the child to the parent. These Presbyterians are agreed that baptized children are in some sense members of the church, but the meaning of that membership is not understood alike by all.

On the one hand, there are those who stress that children of Christian parents are prospective heirs of the covenant of grace, with emphasis on the future reference to such an extent that the children are regarded as unregenerate until their personal profession of faith and repentance. This view came into the open with the revision of the Book of Discipline. The Old School General Assembly of 1857 appointed a committee to make the revision. Thornwell was chairman and Breckinridge and Charles Hodge were among those who served on the committee.

The report of this committee to the General Assembly of 1859 met with heated opposition. The question concerned the discipline of non-professors, that is, those baptized in infancy who grow up unconverted. The old Book of Discipline

read, "All baptized persons are members of the Church, are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline." No distinction is made within the membership. The new Book of Discipline proposes: "All baptized persons, being members of the Church, are under its government and training." An additional clause makes a distinction in the membership: "Only those, however, who have made a profession of faith in Christ are proper subjects of judicial prosecution."⁸³

Hodge reports that the committee itself had been divided, some preferring the clear language of the Old Book, others holding that such children were under the fostering care of the church, but not subject to its government or discipline. The proposal was a compromise: though all members are subject to the government of the church, only those who have made actual profession of faith may be subjects of judicial process.⁸⁴

Thornwell is the chief spokesman for the new proposal. Although the question dealt technically with baptized non-professors of age, in the defence of the proposal the idea is extended to all the baptized children, as such. These are under the government and training of the church, but "no government is to be exercised over them except that which

⁸³[Charles Hodge], "The Revised Book of Discipline," The Princeton Review, XXX (October 1858), 692-721.

⁸⁴Charles Hodge, Church Polity, p. 216.

looks to their conversion."⁸⁵ The thing always to be aimed at with reference to baptized children is their conversion. "They are brought into the Church as a school in which they are to be trained for Christ, and they are kept as pupils until they have learned the lesson."⁸⁶ This is virtually to regard them as unconverted until their personal profession of faith. They are unbelievers brought nigh by baptism.⁸⁷

The visible church thus in its very nature includes unbelievers. This part of the church is not related to the idea of the church in the same way as that part who themselves profess the true religion.

The Church of God, as a visible external institute, is made up of two classes of members. . . . One class consists of true believers, or those who profess to be such; the other of their children who are to be trained for God . . ."⁸⁸

The difference in discipline is grounded in the difference that profession of faith makes. "The two classes . . . are not equally related to the idea of the Church. The class of

⁸⁵Thornwell, IV, 329-330.

⁸⁶Ibid., IV, 330.

⁸⁷Ibid., IV, 331. Benjamin Morgan Palmer includes a letter dated August 4, 1859, from Thornwell to his eldest son Gillespie, then age fifteen, in which Thornwell expressed his desire for the salvation of Gillespie and his two brothers. The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell (Richmond; Whittet and Shepperson, 1875), p. 42. See also the letter to Gillespie dated June 19, 1861, pp. 491-492.

⁸⁸Ibid., IV, 333.

professors pertains to its essence; that of non-professors is an accidental result of the mode of organization."⁸⁹

The justification for this mode of organization is found in the decree of election which runs generally through the line of the faithful.⁹⁰ All children of believing parents are thus incorporated into the church because many are hereafter to be of the church. They are heirs apparent of the kingdom. In the meantime they are regarded as "of the world and in the Church," to be trained as "heirs of promises which they have not yet embraced," to be "induced and

⁸⁹Ibid., IV, 339. Thornwell's "two classes" is reminiscent of the ecclesiology that led to the expedient of the "Half-way Covenant" in the mid-seventeenth century. The basis of church membership among the Congregationalists of New England was a covenant with the local congregation in which one professed to be qualified to receive the Lord's Supper. The arrangement was intended to make the visible, communing church coincide more closely with the invisible.

The children of "covenanted" parents were baptized, and regarded as church members. However, inasmuch as the basis of their membership was different from that of their parents, the nature of church membership was also different. Many of those baptized in infancy did not enter the church covenant when they came to maturity. As long as such persons were free from scandal, this was not regarded as grounds for discipline, a further similarity to Thornwell. They were still regarded as church members, though not in the full sense of belonging to the body of Christ.

The question arose whether or not this peculiar status (baptized, but non-communicant or non-regenerate) entitled them to have their children baptized. The affirmative answer of the Synod of Massachusetts in 1662 allowed the practice which became known as the "Half-way Covenant," widely accepted until the time of Jonathan Edwards. Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 567-569. For a full treatment see Peter Y. De Jong, The Covenant Idea in New England Theology, 1620-1847 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1945).

⁹⁰Ibid., IV, 340.

persuaded by every lawful influence to accept the grace which has been signified and freely offered in their baptism."⁹¹

Charles Hodge says of this position that it is intelligible only "if a personal and voluntary confession of faith is the indispensable condition of church membership."⁹² If, as Thornwell admits, children are members of the church, they must be subject to its discipline. Dabney concurs with Hodge in this particular criticism. "The membership of baptized persons, if once granted, is forever inconsistent with their formal exemption from discipline."⁹³

However, Dabney appears to assume that baptized children are unconverted until they make personal confession of faith and repentance.⁹⁴ This, he says, argues for rather than against their being subject to discipline. Since they are enrolled in the school of Christ, the church must have some power to enforce attendance upon her teaching ministry.⁹⁵ Not only does the church instruct in the truth, but in godly living. Accordingly, "the church must be armed with some instrument by which she may either incite them to that decent

⁹¹Ibid., IV, 340.

⁹²Charles Hodge, Church Polity, p. 216.

⁹³Dabney, Discussions, II, 321.

⁹⁴Ibid., II, 319-320.

⁹⁵Ibid., II, 387-388.

and orderly living, in advance of conversion, which is most favorable to their own change of heart" or else "rid herself of the scandal by lopping them off."⁹⁶

Training again is the instrument of conversion, but here the assumption is that the child is not regenerate. The church "constrain[s] them to live Christian lives, in order that thereby they may come unto the Christian graces in the heart." Were the church only faithful in this respect "how much more uniformly would the good conduct and church-going habits of her unconverted members prove to them the blessed stepping-stone to a real interest in Christ!"⁹⁸

In contrast to the above, there are those who stress the unity of the membership of the visible church. They argue that the Westminster definition of the visible church does not allow for a radical difference in the treatment of its members. Baptism implies faith; the entire membership, being baptized, is to be regarded as the body of believers. Baptized children are to be regarded as believers through the faith of their parents, having been represented in baptism by those who have a warrant to believe for them.⁹⁹ They are

⁹⁶ Ibid., II, 390.

⁹⁷ Dabney, Syllabus of Systematic Theology, 796.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 392.

⁹⁹ A. W. Miller, "The Relation of Baptized Children to the Discipline of the Church," Southern Presbyterian Review, XVIII (July 1867), 50. See also the article by Georgia Pastor, XII, 480-481.

thus presumably one with their parents in their relation to God, "having in their parents professed Christ."¹⁰⁰

The assumption and expectation are that this representative faith will "ripen into a personal faith" through faithfulness to the covenant by all concerned.¹⁰¹ The things sealed in baptism presumably will be bestowed and accepted, and the renewed life will appear in due time.¹⁰² This prospective reference, however, must not be interpreted as giving the child a quasi church status until the time of his own personal profession of faith and repentance.¹⁰³ The import of baptism goes beyond that of mere dedication of the child to God by the parent, as a pledge of Christian instruction and training. Baptized children have presumptively and in appearance put on Christ."¹⁰⁴ "Baptism . . . is a sign and seal of nothing else than of justifying and sanctifying grace, ingrafting into Christ, and union to his body."¹⁰⁵ Because baptism bears this significance, it is

¹⁰⁰[Atwater], The Princeton Review, XXXIII, 634.

¹⁰¹A. A. Hodge, Confession of Faith, p. 481.

¹⁰²[Atwater], The Princeton Review, XXIX, 24.

¹⁰³Ibid., XXIX, 5. In addition it is sometimes argued that infants may have faith. Breckinridge, II, 558-560. A. A. Hodge, in this connection quotes Calvin: "The seed of both repentance and faith lies hid in them by the secret operation of the Spirit." Outlines of Theology, pp. 624-625.

¹⁰⁴[Atwater], The Princeton Review, XXIX, 634.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., XXIX, 7.

also the badge of union to Christ's "phenomenal body, the visible Church."¹⁰⁶ Children who are as yet incapable of personal profession of faith, are nonetheless visibly members of Christ's church. They are to be treated by the church as holy until they prove themselves otherwise.

"Membership in the visible Church is founded on a presumptive membership in the invisible Church, until its subjects, by acts incompatible therewith, prove the contrary . . ."¹⁰⁷

Those who, in the judgment of charity, belong to the number that Christ has purchased, are the visible church.

It is therefore inconsistent for church members to treat covenant children as outsiders. It contradicts the nature and significance of their baptism, as well as the nature of the visible church. There is indeed a prospective reference for children as through the training given them the Holy Spirit will accomplish his work. Nevertheless, this training is to take the form of teaching baptized children "to believe, feel, act, and live as becomes those who are the Lord's."¹⁰⁸

Since He has promised to be their God, it is in training them as if they were his; as if it were alone congruous with their position to walk as his children in faith, love, hope and all holy obedience, that we are to look for that inworking

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., XXIX, 22. Emphasis original.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., XXIX, 23.

Spirit, and outworking holiness, commensurate with their years, which shall seal them as sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.¹⁰⁹

Whereas those who hold the doctrine of "baptismal regeneration" expect too much from the sacrament, Atwater acknowledges that Presbyterians frequently expect too little -- "we practically regard our children as the children of the devil still."¹¹⁰ Faith ought to say, they belong to God, though not limiting God as to "time, place, or manner of their conversion."¹¹¹

To our faith, the presumption should be that they are the Lord's, and that as they come to maturity they will develop a life of piety. Instead of waiting . . . for a period of definite conviction and conversion, we should rather look for, and endeavor to call out, from the commencement of moral action, the motions and exercises of the renewed heart.¹¹²

The church is thus to consider baptized children "as ingrafted members of the family of Christ."¹¹³ They are presumed to be the Lord's, unless by their conduct they show that they reject God's covenant.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., XXIX, 16-17.

¹¹⁰ [Rankin], XXXII, 688.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., XXXIII, 693.

¹¹³ [Atwater], 56.

¹¹⁴ [Rankin], XXXIII, 694.

A variation of the above view appears in an article by Charles Hodge addressed particularly to this question.¹¹⁵

In this article, Hodge makes a distinction between the idea of the church and the idea of church membership. The church, that is, the body of Christ, consists of the regenerate.

But it does not follow that the church is not bound to regard and treat as church members some who may be actually unregenerate.¹¹⁶ The invisible church is the church as it exists in the eyes of God; the visible church is the church as it appears to men, being constituted of those who have the right to be regarded as church members. The distinction is drawn between being a member of the church in the sight of God, and having the right to be regarded and treated as a member of the church in the sight of man.¹¹⁷

This duality, however, almost becomes a dichotomy in Hodge's treatment of baptized children.

When . . . we assert the church membership of infants of believing parents we do not assert their regeneration, or that they are true members of Christ's body; we only assert that they belong to the class of persons whom we are bound to regard and treat as members of Christ's Church.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵[Charles Hodge], "The Church Membership of Infants," The Princeton Review, XXX, 347-389. This article was not included in Church Polity.

¹¹⁶Ibid., XXX, 349.

¹¹⁷Ibid., XXX, 350-351.

¹¹⁸Ibid., XXX, 351.

The most natural interpretation of this statement, on the basis of Hodge's general position, would lead one to believe that he was arguing for their treatment as actual members of the body of Christ, though such status, as in the case also of professing adults, is not infallibly known. But in arguing against the Baptist assumption that since children cannot give evidence of union with Christ, they cannot be treated as church members, Hodge seems to grant the assumption of their unregenerate condition. His reply is not that infants may be regenerate, which he does hold, but that "we are required to treat as members of the Church, many who are not regenerated."¹¹⁹ The question is not whether children are actual subjects of grace, but whether they belong to the class that are to be treated as church members. "By Church membership . . . is meant nothing more than membership in that class of persons whom the Church is bound to regard and treat as included in the covenant of grace."¹²⁰

Lyman Atwater, in an earlier issue of the Princeton Review, had grounded the treatment of baptized children on the presumption of membership in the invisible church, that is, as possessing what their baptism signified and sealed. E. V. Gerhart, in an article in the Mercersburg Review,

¹¹⁹Ibid., XXX, 352.

¹²⁰Ibid., XXX, 366-367.

rightly took this to be a presumption that the child was united to Christ, but challenged Atwater on the means by which this is accomplished. The dilemma that Gerhart posed was that children of believing parents are presumably members of the invisible church either by virtue of baptism, or by virtue of natural birth. If it is the latter, then the Princeton Review, besides teaching a novel and unconfessional doctrine for Presbyterians, gives no answer to the question of the significance of baptism.¹²¹

It is in reaction to this pressure that Hodge presents the invisible church from the aspect of eternity, a legitimate aspect, of course, but one that is far less frequently discussed by Hodge.¹²² "Membership in the invisible Church is not vital union with Christ, or regeneration by the Holy

¹²¹E. V. Gerhart, "The Efficacy of Baptism," The Mercersburg Review, X (January 1858), 1-44, esp. 40-41. Gerhart argues that the Westminster standards teach that baptism conveys that which it signifies at the time of administration because of the objective union between the parts of the sacrament. However, in a clause by clause exposition of XXVIII, vi of the Confession of Faith, Gerhart fails to comment on the critical phrase in this regard: "in His appointed time." Gerhart has a laudable concern for the objective character of the sacrament. But in a later article attempting to relate the objective and subjective factors in baptism his conclusion is that "baptism renders salvation possible," so that in the final analysis the efficacy of baptism depends on the subject who must "improve" the grace conferred, which grace "disposes" him to resolve to follow Christ, but does not remove the danger of failure. This involves a view of grace explicitly rejected by the Westminster standards. "Holy Baptism. The Doctrine of the Reformed Church," The Mercersburg Review, XV (April 1868), 180-228, esp. 218-223.

¹²²See above, p. 35.

Ghost.' . . . the invisible Church 'consists of the whole body of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one.'¹²³ It consists of millions of those who as yet are unconverted. Consequently presumptive membership in the invisible church is no presumption of union with Christ.¹²⁴ Hodge interprets Atwater as having said that baptized children are "to be regarded and treated as of the number of the elect until they give undeniable evidence to the contrary, or refuse to be so considered."¹²⁵ It is difficult to see how this could ever be applied.

The fact that this is not typical of Hodge should be stressed.¹²⁶ In his Systematic Theology the notion of "presumptive election" does not appear. Both aspects of the

¹²³[Charles Hodge], "The Church Membership of Infants," The Princeton Review, XXX, 375n.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Schenck seems to regard it as typical, pp. 136-137. Compare John Murray, Christian Baptism (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., n.d.), pp. 58-59. Hodge develops the idea, however, in a lengthy footnote to this article, written with evident heat; "Here is another example of a learned man forgetting the lessons taught him by his mother. Membership in the invisible Church is not 'vital union with Christ, or regeneration by the Holy Ghost.' Dr. Gerhart was taught in his infancy, (so long since that it has slipped his memory,) that the invisible Church 'consists of the whole number of the elect . . .'" p. 375n, emphasis original.

The idea of "presumptive election" is repeated in an article by A. W. Miller ten years later in the Southern Presbyterian Review, but otherwise does not find much expression. XVIII, 68.

invisible church are presented in balance: "The true or invisible Church as a whole consists of the elect. . . . the true or invisible Church on earth consists of all true believers."¹²⁷ With regard to the church status of children, the year following the article in question he writes: "While the true Church, or body of Christ, the Israel kata pneuma, consists of the true people of God, yet by divine ordinance the children of believers are to be regarded and treated as within its pale, and consecrated to God in Baptism."¹²⁸ There is still some tension because of the stress on the prospective reference of baptism. Baptized children are within the covenant "in the sense that God promises to give them in his own good time, all the benefits of redemption, provided they do not willingly renounce their baptismal engagements."¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 545.

¹²⁸ Charles Hodge, Church Polity, p. 102.

¹²⁹ Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 555.

CHAPTER IV

THE QUESTION OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Reformed ecclesiology from the beginning has been shaped by the controversy with Rome. Discussion of the church as a visible institute must take into account the concrete phenomenon of the Roman Catholic church. Although not pressed to do so in the colonial period,¹ the American Presbyterian church was eventually forced to declare whether or not it considered the church of Rome a true church, a branch of the visible church catholic.²

¹Leonard J. Trinterud, A Bibliography of American Presbyterianism during the Colonial Period (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian Historical Society, 1968) records no separate treatise which by its title evidences a specific polemic against Rome.

²The Westminster Confession of Faith makes no explicit judgment in this regard. Teaching that particular churches are "more or less pure" according to the way in which the Gospel is taught and received, the ordinances of Christ administered, and the worship of God conducted, the Confession acknowledges that "the purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan." [Westminster Assembly of Divines], The Confession of Faith... (Edinburgh: The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1967), XXV, v. The Roman Catholic church as such is not given as an example, though the Confession does reject Roman Catholic errors as a papal body. In the next section the Pope is said to be the Antichrist, the man of sin, the son of perdition, and it is denied that he is in any sense the head of the church, or has jurisdiction over the civil magistrate. Ibid., XXV, vi, XXIII, iv. Errors rejected with explicit reference to Rome are termed popish: "the popish sacrifice of the mass," "popish monastical vows," Ibid., XXIX, ii; XXII, vii.

The Official Position of the Presbyterian Church

The first official declaration of the American Presbyterian church on the status of the Roman Catholic church was made by the General Assembly of 1835. That assembly received an overture from the Presbytery of Baltimore requesting a declaration on the corruptions of the Roman Catholic church and the duty of Presbyterians in that regard.³ The following resolution was subsequently adopted by the assembly:

³Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from A.D. 1821 to A.D. 1835 Inclusive (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.), p. 475.

The overture coincides with the beginning of the immigration of Roman Catholics to the United States on a vast scale. The advent of two million Irishmen helped make the Roman Catholic church the largest religious body in the United States by the mid-century mark. Edwin Scott Gaustad, A Religious History of America (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 202, 209.

In reaction, the country entered a period of "nativism," the combination of sociological, political, and religious factors in one package labeled "Americanism." The Roman Catholic immigrants were not only "foreigners," their church was regarded as undemocratic and anti-American. The ultimate political expression of nativism may be seen in the Know-Nothing or American party, organized in 1854 (but defunct by 1860). Ibid., pp. 213-214.

Although the controversy reviewed in the following pages was argued as a problem in systematic theology, one cannot ignore the socio-political impetus. At least some Presbyterians tended to identify Protestantism with Americanism. See, for example, the contrast of "the American Roman Catholic Creed" and "Articles of the American Protestant Faith," in the unsigned article "American Romanism and American Protestantism," Presbyterian Quarterly Review, I (1852-1853), 375-405.

It is the deliberate and decided judgment of this Assembly, that the Roman Catholic Church has essentially apostatized from the religion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and therefore cannot be recognized as a Christian Church.⁴

It was further resolved to resist the extension of "Romanism," using both the pulpit and the press, and to endeavor by all means to bring Roman Catholics to a knowledge of the truth. For Christian parents to place their children in Roman Catholic educational institutions was deemed "utterly inconsistent."⁵

In the divided church, the General Assemblies of both the Old and New School renewed the resolve to resist the encroachments of Rome. The Old School in 1841 urged its ministers "boldly, though temperately, to explain and defend the doctrines and principles of the Reformation, and to point out and expose the errors and superstitions of Popery."⁶ The Old School General Assembly made arrangements to be addressed during its sessions on the controversy with

⁴Ibid., p. 490.

⁵Ibid. The Old School General Assembly of 1849 said that for Protestant parents, whether church members or not to put their children in Roman Catholic schools, is to take a course of action fraught with great danger for their children, and utterly inconsistent with every principle of Protestantism. Church members do so in violation of their baptismal vows. Samuel J. Baird, editor, A Collection of the Acts and Deliverances and Testimonies of the Supreme Judiciary of the Presbyterian Church . . . (Revised edition; Philadelphia; Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), p. 561.

⁶Baird, pp. 560-561.

Rome, a practice which was continued until the Assembly in 1852 declined to appoint someone to preach on this subject the following year.⁷ The New School in 1847 expressed its sympathy for the efforts made to spread the principles of the Protestant Reformation, and recommended its churches "to guard well the rising generation against the insidious approaches of the Man of Sin."⁸ Those so engaged are instructed "to avoid all denunciation, and to speak the truth in love."⁹

The declaration of the apostasy of the Roman Catholic church in 1835 led logically to the consideration of the validity of Roman Catholic baptism.¹⁰ The General Assembly

⁷Ibid.

⁸Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America [New School], I, 1836-1858 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1894), 189-190.

⁹Ibid. The intemperateness of the controversy is noted by Philip Schaff in his report to the Continent, being summed up as rabies theologorum. "The popular Protestantism of North America sees in Romanism the bodily Antichrist; the Man of Sin . . . ; the Synagogue of Satan; the Beast of the Apocalypse; the Babylonian whore; an enemy of all freedom of thought and faith; a fearful power of persecution and of tyranny over the conscience; a spiritual tyranny, which, if it rule, must also lead to political despotism." He is unable to say, however, whether the Protestant or Roman press is more guilty of injustice, deception, misrepresentation, and passion. Philip Schaff, America, edited by Perry Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 194-195.

¹⁰The matter was presented to the Old School General Assembly in 1845, with the result as given below. The question was raised in the New School General Assembly in 1853. A committee was appointed to report to the next General

of 1790 had affirmed the principle "that as long as any denomination of Christians is acknowledged by us as a Church of Christ, we ought to hold the ordinances dispensed by it as valid."¹¹ This principle was applied in 1814 to the question of Unitarian baptism, with the following result:

It is the deliberate and unanimous opinion of this Assembly that those who renounce the fundamental doctrine of the Trinity, and deny that Jesus Christ is the same in substance, equal in power and glory with the Father, cannot be recognized as Ministers of the Gospel; and that their ministrations are wholly invalid.¹²

The Old School General Assembly of 1845 was asked by the Presbytery of Ohio to answer the question "Is baptism in the Church of Rome valid?" The Assembly responded by rejecting the validity of such baptism by a vote of 173 to 8.¹³ The declaration of 1835 is said to render this decision

Assembly, at which the question was debated and indefinitely postponed. For the respective arguments within the New School, see Infra, pp. 94, 102.

¹¹Baird, p. 102. This principle was given in course of answering a question of baptism administered by an unworthy individual.

¹²Ibid., p. 103. Baptism in the denomination known as "Disciples" or "Cambellites" was deemed invalid by the Old School General Assembly of 1864, and by the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly of 1870. William E. Moore, editor, The Presbyterian Digest (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1873), pp. 348-349, 660. A Digest of the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1861-1965 (Atlanta, Georgia: Office of the General Assembly, 1966), pp. 20-23.

¹³Baird, p. 103.

"indispensable on the ground of consistency." The reasoning is as follows:

Since baptism is an ordinance established by Christ in his Church, . . . and is to be administered only by a Minister of Christ, duly called and ordained . . . it follows that no rite administered by one who is not himself a duly ordained Minister of the true Church of God visible can be regarded as an ordinance of Christ, . . .¹⁴

Roman Catholic priests, the assembly continues, are not ministers of Christ, but "agents of the papal hierarchy, which is not a Church of Christ, but the Man of sin, apostate from the truth, the enemy of righteousness and of God."¹⁵

The invalidity of Roman Catholic baptism thus rests ultimately on the position that the Roman Catholic body is not a true Church. "Though once a branch of the visible Church, [she] has long since become utterly corrupt, and hopelessly apostate."¹⁶ The apostasy is connected with "the contumacious adherence of Rome to her corruptions, as shown in the decisions of the Council of Trent." This adherence "cuts her off from the visible Church of Christ, as heretical and unsound."¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 103. The "legitimacy" of the Reformed ministry is thus assured. Though "fearfully corrupt" the Romish communion was the only visible Church when the Protestant Reformers left it. Being duly ordained, however,

She thus perverts the truth of God; she rejects the doctrine of justification by faith; she substitutes human merit for the righteousness of Christ; and self-inflicted punishment for gospel repentance; She proclaims her so-called baptism to be regeneration, and the reception of the consecrated wafer in the eucharist, to be the receiving of Christ himself, the source and fountain of grace, and with him all the grace he can impart. Is this the truth? Is reliance on this system true religion? Can, then, the papal body be a Church?¹⁸

Since the visible church is defined in the Westminster standards as consisting of those who profess the true religion, and since the doctrine and practices of Rome are not the religion of Christ, "the papal body is not a Church of Christ at all." Her ministers thus have no connection with the visible church, and consequently no power to administer baptism.¹⁹

It is not denied that there are pious individuals within the Roman communion; their virtues, however, do not purify the body.²⁰ The declaration concluded;

they were "fully authorized by the word of God, to ordain successors in the ministry; and so to extend and perpetuate the Reformed Churches, as true Churches of Christ." Ibid. This implies a "higher" view of "succession" than is generally common to Presbyterianism.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 105.

As we do not recognize her as a portion of the visible Church of Christ, we cannot, consistently, view her priesthood as other than usurpers of the sacred functions of the ministry, her ordinances as unscriptural, and her baptism as totally invalid.²¹

Although the New School indefinitely postponed the question in 1854, it should not be thought that the above views were peculiar to the Old School branch of the Presbyterian church. The majority report of the New School committee appointed to present an answer to the 1854 General Assembly²² also appeals to the 1835 decision, and to the Confession, which is said to teach that the Roman Church has become a synagogue of Satan.²³ All the ministers of the Pope are ministers of Antichrist, and not ministers of the Gospel. The position argued, though not adopted, is in substance the same as the declaration of the Old School.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (the Southern Presbyterian church) in 1871 adopted a lengthy report on the question of valid baptism. Roman Catholic baptism was rejected on the grounds of the apostasy of that

²¹Ibid.

²²The committee was composed of Edwin F. Hatfield, Samuel H. Cox, and Henry Boynton Smith. Smith stood in a minority against the other two; his views are presented in the following section.

²³The Presbyterian Quarterly Review, II (1853-54), 318-320.

body, and its corruption of the sacrament of baptism.²⁴ The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, following the union of the Old and New Schools, in answer to the question presented to the General Assembly in 1875, "Should a convert from Romanism, applying for admission into the Presbyterian Church, be again baptized?" left the decision to the judgment of each church session, "guided by the principles governing the subject of baptism, as laid down in the Standards of our Church"²⁵ Thus, the decision of 1845 was mitigated somewhat.

²⁴This position was reaffirmed in 1884, 1909, and 1914. In 1949 it was decided that candidates for Presbyterian church membership from the Roman Catholic church be received on confession of faith, and if such candidates are satisfied with their baptism, it may be deemed valid at the discretion of the church Session. This decision was reaffirmed in 1958. Digest, 1861-1965, pp. 23-24. In 1969 Roman Catholic baptism was declared valid. Supplementary Index to Digest of Proceedings of the General Assembly, 1966-1969 (Atlanta, Ga: Office of the General Assembly, 1969), p. 2.

²⁵Digest of the Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: The Office of the General Assembly, 1938), I, 51. The Assembly declined to make a new deliverance on the subject in 1878. In 1885 the above position was challenged on the grounds that Roman Catholic baptism is valid, and therefore a church session cannot require re-baptism, but the deliverance of 1875 was sustained. Ibid., 51-52.

The Defense of the Roman Catholic Church

Eight commissioners to the General Assembly of 1845 dissented from the action on Roman Catholic baptism on the ground that the decision "involves a denial that any part of the Church Catholic remains in the apostasy."²⁶ They argued that the Assembly's position is not in line with the historical practice of the Reformed churches. In the opinion of the dissenters "the question of rebaptism of converts from Romanism should be decided by the church Sessions called upon to receive them." where the circumstances peculiar to each individual case may be weighed.²⁷

Charles Hodge, sharply dissenting from the Assembly's position in his annual review of the proceedings of that body, attacks the rejection of Roman Catholic baptism as being "in direct conflict with our standards, and with the word of God."²⁸ Hodge emphasizes that Roman Catholic baptism has been declared not merely irregular, but invalid, that is, it does not avail for the purpose for which it was instituted; it does not make the person baptized a professing Christian, nor does it signify and seal to the true

²⁶ Minutes of the General Assembly [Old School], 1845, p. 36.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁸ [Charles Hodge], "The General Assembly. Romish Baptism," The Princeton Review, XVII (July 1845), 470.

believer the benefits of the covenant of grace.²⁹ Inasmuch as the declaration evidences a disposition to contract the limits of the Church, the Assembly itself is guilty of "a momentary outbreak of Popery."³⁰

Hodge rightly notes that the Assembly's decision ultimately resolves itself into the question whether or not the Roman Catholic church is a part of the visible church catholic. But since the Assembly had said that even if Rome could be considered a church she does not administer Christian Baptism because of her "perverted meaning" and "superstitious rites."³¹ Hodge undertakes to answer this objection at the outset.

Appealing to the Westminster Shorter Catechism,³² Hodge argues that there are three essential elements in Christian

²⁹ Ibid., XVII, 453.

³⁰ Ibid., XVII, 452.

³¹ Baird, p. 104.

³² Shorter Catechism, Q. 94. Hodge notes that to define baptism, in the words of the General Assembly, as a washing with water by a minister duly ordained, "is to give a new definition essentially different from the old one." Hodge, Church Polity, p. 200. He does not at this time deny that the proposition is incorrect, but argues that it is not the position of the confessional standards, and must be proved rather than assumed. Baptism by one not duly ordained is irregular, Hodge admits; but whether or not it is valid is another question. Lay baptism, he says, may not be rejected as invalid without argument. Ibid., pp. 199-200.

Hodge's mature position in his Systematic Theology is that the administration of the sacraments by persons not called and ordained to the ministry is disorderly in a settled state of the church, but not necessarily invalid. III, 525.

baptism: (1) a washing with water, (2) in the name of the Trinity, (3) to signify and seal the benefits of the covenant of grace. The objection that Roman Catholic baptism is invalid because oil is mixed with water is dismissed as "trivial." As to the Trinity, "there is not a Church on earth which teaches more accurately, thoroughly or minutely . . . than the church of Rome."³³ With respect to the third essential element, the great difference between the Roman and Protestant church to the efficacy rather than to the design of the sacrament.³⁴ The error of "absolute necessity and uniform efficacy," though serious, does not invalidate the nature of the sacrament. Roman Catholic baptism thus fulfills the conditions for valid baptism according to the definition given in the Westminster standards.³⁵

Hodge's argument that the Roman Catholic church is a true part of the visible church is two-fold. He first appeals to the fact that there are true believers within that communion, a fact that cannot be denied without "great sin" against the body of Christ.³⁶ The General Assembly had not

³³[Hodge], XVII, 450.

³⁴Ibid., XVII, 451.

³⁵Thornwell argued in response to Hodge, that none of the above essentials are retained in Roman Catholic baptism. James Henley Thornwell, The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell, edited by John B. Adger (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871-73), III, 283-328.

³⁶Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), III, 822.

denied the presence of such believers, but had argued that they were not members of the visible church. On Hodge's principles, this is a contradiction: believers who confess their faith are the visible church. Faith is an evidence of the Spirit, and where the Spirit is, there is the church.³⁷

Hodge is obliged to go beyond this, however, in defending the Roman Catholic church as a body as a branch of the visible church. The only mark essential to the being of the visible church is the Word, that is profession of the true religion.³⁸ "What is not essential to the true church, the spiritual body of Christ, or to salvation, cannot be essential to the visible church."³⁹ Any number of men, collectively considered, who have this essential mark, profession of the true religion, must be regarded as a branch of the visible church.⁴⁰ The fact that there are true believers in such a society is "God's own testimony that such society is still a part of the visible Church."⁴¹

³⁷[Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVII, 463, 465.

³⁸Charles Hodge, Discussions in Church Polity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), pp. 45, 138, 123.

³⁹[Charles Hodge], "Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?" The Princeton Review, XVIII (April 1846), 330. This article is more carefully argued than the one the previous year, but the substance is the same.

⁴⁰[Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVII, 461.

⁴¹[Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVIII, 335-336.

The traditional marks by which the church is recognized as "a society in which the pure word of God is preached, the sacraments duly administered, and discipline properly exercised by legitimate officers," are taken by Hodge to be a description of "a pure and orderly Church."⁴² They are not the essential definition of the church as visible. The Word alone is the mark of a true church, in distinction from a pure church.⁴³ The only question open to debate with respect to the ecclesiastical status of the Roman Catholic church is whether or not as a society she professes the true religion.⁴⁴

What is profession of the true religion? Hodge's principle that nothing that is not essential to salvation may be made essential to the definition of the church, visible or invisible, makes the answer to this question difficult, if not impossible. The content of a saving

⁴²Ibid., XVIII, 323.

⁴³Hodge relies on Turretin for support in making this distinction. Turretin gives three senses in which Rome may be called a Christian Church; (1) With reference to the People of God, the elect, still there; (2) With reference to the external form, "vestiges" of the Church in a dispersed state, as well as the word and the sacraments "especially baptism, which as to its substance is there retained in its integrity"; (3) With reference to the evangelical truths that distinguish her from a company of pagans or infidels. From this, Hodge concludes that when Turretin denies that Rome is a true church, he means by verus a pure church. Ibid., XVII, 324-325. The section referred to is Institutio Theologiae Elencticae, Tom. III, Loc. XVIII, quaest. XIV, iii.

⁴⁴Ibid., XVII, 338.

profession is "the minimum of truth that can save the soul," so that the question, What is a true Church? becomes in reality, How little truth may avail to salvation?⁴⁵ But since "the Scriptures do not warrant us in fixing the minimum of divine truth by which the Spirit may save the soul,"⁴⁶ there would seem to be no way to fix the minimum of truth by which a church may be regarded as a church.

In any case, there should be no question whether the church of Rome professes the true religion. The "essential doctrines of the gospel" are certainly there.⁴⁷

They retain the doctrine of the Incarnation, which we know from the infallible word of God, is a life-giving doctrine. They retain the whole of the atonement far more fully and accurately than multitudes of professedly orthodox Protestants. They hold a much higher doctrine as to the necessity of divine influence, than prevails among many whom we recognize as Christians. They believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and in eternal life and judgment. These doctrines are in their creeds, and however they may be perverted and overlaid, still as general propositions they are affirmed.⁴⁸

⁴⁵[Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVII, 462.

⁴⁶[Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVIII, 340.

⁴⁷Ibid. Evidence; Scripture believed to be the word of God, as interpreted according to the Fathers; the three general creeds of the church received. The same argument appears in The Princeton Review, V (1833), 230-231.

⁴⁸[Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVIII, 463-464.

Hodge goes on to point out that it is "truth presented in general propositions, and not with subtle distinctions, that saves the soul."⁴⁹ His conclusion, in sum:

Since as a society she still retains the profession of saving doctrines, and as in point of fact, by those doctrines men are born unto God and nurtured for heaven, we dare not deny that she is still a part of the visible Church. We consider such a denial a direct contradiction of the Bible, and of the facts of God's providence.⁵⁰

The arguments of Henry Boynton Smith, when the question came before the New School in 1853-1854, bear a close resemblance to those of Hodge. Baptism is valid "when administered as to form, matter, and intent, in accordance with its original institution."⁵¹ It is not a papal institution, nor do Roman Catholic priests simply derive all their authority from the Pope. Moreover, "on the Protestant view of what is essential to the being of a church, we cannot deny to the Roman Catholic communion the name of a church."⁵² Besides, there is the presumptive argument from the practice of the Reformed churches up until now, to which Hodge also appealed.

⁴⁹Ibid., XVIII, 464.

⁵⁰[Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVIII, 341.

⁵¹The Presbyterian Quarterly Review (1853-1854), II, 321.

⁵²Ibid., II, 322.

This is not to say that there is not a vigorous critique of the Roman Catholic church on the part of those Presbyterians who defend her right to be considered a branch of the visible Church. The Index of Hodge's Systematic Theology indicates a continuous polemic.⁵³ But a distinction is made between "the Popish hierarchy and its corruptions," to which the epithets "antichrist" and "synagogue of Satan" are applicable, and the people considered as a community professing the essential doctrines of the Gospel, and "groaning" under the "Romish system."⁵⁴

Hodge sought biblical and historical support for this distinction. "As of old the prophets denounced the Hebrew community under the figure of an adulterous woman, and almost in the same breath addressed them as the beloved of God, his chosen people, compared to the wife of one's youth;

⁵³ Reviewing Philip Schaff's Principle of Protestantism, translated by John W. Nevin, 1845, edited by Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker (Philadelphia; United Church Press, 1964) in the thick of the Old School debate, Hodge sees in Romanism a greater threat than in Rationalism, against which Schaff is sounding the alarm. "In itself considered . . . and in reference to the state of the church in America, we consider Romanism immeasurably more dangerous than infidelity." The Princeton Review, XVII (October 1845), 630.

Even so, he writes in the Presbyterian, August 10, 1872, "It [the Roman Catholic church] is unspeakably better than no church at all. And, therefore, when the choice is between that church and none, it is wise and right to encourage the establishment of churches under the control of Catholic priests The principle cannot be carried out that no church is to be encouraged which teaches error." A[rchibald] A[lexander] Hodge, The Life of Charles Hodge (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880, p. 342.

⁵⁴ [Charles Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVII, 470; [Charles Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVII, 336; Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 822.

so it may be here."⁵⁵ Calvin's familiar statement is offered; "Since then we are not willing to concede the title church unconditionally to the papists, we do not thereby deny that there are churches among them, but only contend for the true and legitimate constitution of the church, with which communion is required in sacraments and doctrine."⁵⁶ The people of God are commanded to come out of Rome, as they are every church which professes error, or imposes "terms of communion which hurt an enlightened conscience."⁵⁷ However, by coming out, they do not thereby assert that the body which is left is no longer a church.⁵⁸

This view of the Roman Catholic church is also implicit in the answer of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to the Encyclical of Pius IX prior to the First Vatican Council inviting all Protestants to return to the "one only fold." Charles Hodge was selected to write the reply of the Presbyterian church, and his letter was signed by the moderators of both General Assemblies (the reunion waiting only to be consummated).⁵⁹

⁵⁵[Charles Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVIII, 322.

⁵⁶[Charles Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVII, 466.

⁵⁷[Charles Hodge], The Princeton Review, XVIII, 343.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹[Charles Hodge], "To Pius IX, Bishop of Rome," The Presbyterian (September 11, 1869), pp. 4-5. A. A. Hodge identifies Charles Hodge as the author of this reply. Life of Charles Hodge, p. 341.

The reply emphasized the "Catholic faith" of the Apostles' Creed and first six Ecumenical Councils. As the Presbyterian church holds these doctrines the charge of heresy cannot be made good against her. Nor can the charge of schism. The Presbyterian church recognises all who profess the true religion as members of the visible church on earth, and earnestly desires "to maintain Christian communion with them" provided that unscriptural terms are not imposed. The implication is that the Roman Catholic church holds, at least in her official standards, the Catholic faith; the cause of separation is Rome's making "errors and abuses" conditions of membership. "So long as the profession of such doctrines and submission to such usages are required, it is obvious that there is an impassable gulf between us and the church by which such demands are made."⁶⁰

The final paragraph states that though fellowship must be withdrawn from the Roman Catholic church in order to be faithful to the Bible, still all who love, worship, trust, and serve Christ as God and Saviour are recognized as Christian brethren. "And we hope to be united in heaven with all who unite with us on earth" in giving glory to Christ.⁶¹ The tone of this letter is in rather striking contrast to the declaration adopted a quarter of a century earlier, and vindicates the then unpopular position taken by Hodge.

⁶⁰[Charles Hodge], The Presbyterian, p. 5.

⁶¹Ibid.

The Argument for Rejection

In view of the overwhelming vote of the Old School General Assembly to reject Roman Catholic baptism, it is not surprising that those who defended the Roman Catholic church as a true church met heated opposition. "How utterly worthless and vicious any theory of the Church, whether Prelatical or Presbyterial, that leads logically to the recognition of the Church of Rome as a true Church of Christ."⁶² Not that all of the opposition is on such a level; able theological support of the Assembly's position is found in James Henley Thornwell.

Thornwell, in his speech on the floor of the General Assembly, argued that "Protestants who believe the Romish Church to have saving truth put their own interpretations on these creeds instead of that of Rome in itself."⁶³ The Council of Trent, he says, extinguished the last spark of grace. "I have no enmity to Rome, but I wish a complete

⁶²The Danville Quarterly Review, I (1861), 72.

⁶³As reported in The Presbyterian (May 31, 1845), p. 84. Of his speech, Thornwell wrote to his wife: "For two days and a half, we have been discussing the question, whether Roman Catholic baptism is valid or not? I made a speech today, two hours long; which was listened to with breathless attention, and, from what I can gather, it likely to settle the question." B[enjamin] M[organ] Palmer, The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1875), p. 286.

separation from the mother of harlots and mistress of abominations."⁶⁴

Writing later in response to Hodge's review of the General Assembly,⁶⁵ Thornwell rejects the idea that Rome retains any of the essential elements of baptism. The use of water and oil as a mixture vitiates the sacrament; "the oil destroys the fitness of the water for the purpose of ablution."⁶⁶ To baptize in the name of the Trinity is to acknowledge the redemption which proceeds from the Triune God. The relation which baptism is understood to have to redemption cannot be separated from the question of baptism into the Triune Name.⁶⁷ Since the design of the sacrament is to confer grace ex opere operato, the design of baptism as administered by the Roman Catholic church differs essentially from the design in the Presbyterian Church. In Rome the

⁶⁴The Presbyterian (May 31, 1845), pp. 84-85.

⁶⁵Thornwell, III, 283-412. The article, "The Validity of the Baptism of the Church of Rome," first appeared in the Watchman and Observer, 1846, and was reprinted in the Southern Presbyterian Review, V (July, October 1851, January 1852). The statement in the Prefatory Note to their inclusion in Collected Writings that "no reply appeared from the other side" (p. 279) could be misleading. Hodge shows awareness of Thornwell's criticism in his 1846 article in The Princeton Review, though the series in the Watchman and Observer was not yet complete. To the present writer it does not appear that any new argument appeared subsequently to Hodge's writing.

⁶⁶Thornwell, III, 292-293.

⁶⁷Ibid., III, 298.

sacraments are laws of grace, corresponding to "a mechanical theory of salvation."⁶⁸

The real question, as Thornwell sees it, is whether in baptism the Roman Catholic church requires a profession inconsistent with salvation.⁶⁹ It is his opinion that "no man who truly believes and cordially embraces the Papal theory of salvation can, consistently with the Scriptures, be a child of God."⁷⁰ The question is not "whether Rome teaches truth enough to save the soul, but whether she teaches error enough to damn the soul."⁷¹ Rome teaches salvation by works, "because she resolves our justifying righteousness into personal holiness, damns the doctrine of imputation, audaciously proclaims the figment of human merit . . . and makes Christ only the remote and ultimate cause of pardon and acceptance."⁷² The Roman creed, teaching truth and error in combination, is incompatible with salvation.⁷³

By Romish baptism, those baptized are made Romanists.⁷⁴ They profess the Roman Catholic creed. Since that creed is

⁶⁸Ibid., III, 305-306.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., III, 411.

⁷¹Ibid., III, 337.

⁷²Ibid., III, 361.

⁷³Ibid., III, 338.

⁷⁴Ibid., III, 332-336.

not a saving creed, baptism does not make the person a professing Christian (other than in the loose sense of being part of an institution that traces its doctrine back to Christ).⁷⁵ "They only can be Christians, in [the] strict and proper sense, who profess to receive under the name of Christianity nothing that subverts the economy of grace."⁷⁶

Thornwell admits, with Hodge, and with the General Assembly, that there are true believers within the Roman Catholic communion. But he denies that they are made Christians by the creed that is professed by the Roman Catholic church as a body. Such believers are in Rome, but they are not of Rome; they are "in nominal connection with the Church without believing its creed."⁷⁷

What is their ecclesiastical status? Thornwell concedes that wherever the true church is, there is the Spirit, but not the reverse. Where the Spirit is, there is union with Christ, and membership in the invisible church. "But it is an act of the believer subsequent to his conversion, and founded upon it, to seek a corresponding membership in that visible congregation to which the ordinances are given."⁷⁸ They are thus truly united to Christ, but not to the body of believers as a visible institution on earth.

⁷⁵Ibid., III, 330-331.

⁷⁶Ibid., III, 330.

⁷⁷Ibid., III, 330.

⁷⁸Ibid., III, 343.

CHAPTER V

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

The Ideal Unity of the Church

The unity of the church is frequently set forth in this period by the leaders of theological discussion as a truth clearly taught in Scripture, and following necessarily from the idea of the church as the body of Christ. "No truth of God's word is more distinctly stated than that which affirms, that the Church is ONE."¹ Unity is "in the very nature of things" an essential attribute of the Church.² There is one fold, one kingdom, one family, one mystical body in which Christ dwells by his Spirit.³ "The Church is one, as there is and can be but one body of Christ."⁴ "All are incorporated into [Christ], and must therefore constitute one organized whole, which is the Holy Catholic Church."⁵

¹G., "The Unity of the Church," The Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine, VII (June 1841), 257.

²[Samuel Miller], "Christian Union," The Princeton Review, VIII (January 1836), 12.

³Charles Hodge, Discussions in Church Polity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), pp. 22-23, 89. See also G., 258-259.

⁴Hodge, Church Polity, p. 21. See also, James Henley Thornwell, The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell, edited by John B. Adger (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871-1873), IV, 135, and Catholicus, "Unity of the Church," The Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine, VI (January 1840), 39.

⁵Thornwell, IV, 135.

Closely related to the above is an emphasis on the unity created by the Holy Spirit as the "vital bond" between Christ and his body the church, an emphasis found especially in Charles Hodge.⁶ "Christ dwells by this Spirit in all his members, and thus unites them in one living whole."⁷ The Holy Spirit is thus both "the real and efficacious bond of union between us and Christ,"⁸ and "the essential or vital bond of unity in the Church."⁹ The Spirit teaches the people of God the same saving truth, gives to them the same inward experience of grace, and works in them love and affection toward each other.¹⁰

The unity of the church, however, is not a "mere invisible, ideal unity."¹¹ It is the will of Christ that his church on earth should be one.¹² There is considerable agreement that the unity of the church is not only an

⁶See also G., VII, 259, and [John William Yeomans], "The Unity of the Church," The Princeton Review, XX (January 1848), 117.

⁷Hodge, Church Polity, pp. 22-23.

⁸Charles Hodge, "The Unity of the Church based on Personal Union with Christ," History, Essays, Orations, and Other Documents of the Sixth General Conference of the Evangelical Alliance, Held in New York, October 2-12, 1873 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), pp. 113-114.

⁹Hodge, Church Polity, p. 42.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 22, 91-92.

¹¹G., VII, 258.

¹²[Charles Hodge], "To Pius IX, Bishop of Rome," The Presbyterian, September 11, 1869, p. 4.

attribute of the church as invisible, but also as visible. The relationship is deemed to be so close "that it is unwarrantable to predicate unity of the one and the want of unity of the other."¹³ The unity of the church implies external unity as well as mystical union.¹⁴ In his prayer for the unity of the church recorded in John 17, Christ treats the inward and outward aspects of the union as one and inseparable. "He challenges attention to a unity, which, having been inwardly created, shall be outwardly expressed; . . . He demands a visible unity."¹⁵

Charles Hodge and others argue that from one point of view the church on earth is one. Though divided organizationally, yet in the "highest and truest sense" the visible unity of the Church remains.¹⁶ "The external or visible Church is so far one, that wherever its branches are scattered, all acknowledge the same head, and profess the same faith, as to essentials."¹⁷ In the truths necessary to salvation, "the whole coetus sanctorum, or body of believers are one."¹⁸ True believers recognize each other as such,

¹³Thornwell, IV, 135.

¹⁴[John A. DeBaun], "A Plea and a Plan for Presbyterian Unity," The Princeton Review, XXXVII (January 1865), 53.

¹⁵[Yeomans], XX, 118.

¹⁶Hodge, Church Polity, p. 22. See also [Yeomans], XX, 114; J. G. Shepperson, "The Unity of the Church," The Southern Presbyterian Review, VII (1853-54), 543.

¹⁷Catholicus, VI, 39.

¹⁸Hodge, Church Polity, pp. 21-22.

unite in the service of their Lord, and make joint profession before the world.¹⁹ Moreover, the church in her corporate distinguishing characteristics--evangelical truth, the sacraments, a duly ordained ministry--will be found to be one.²⁰

The discussion shows a recognition that the visible unity of the church is ideally more than a unity of faith and communion. "The appearance of unity must correspond with the reality."²¹ The "strenuous assertions" that the church is visibly one really betrays the fault; a building "fitly framed together" does not need notices posted all over it pointing out its unity.²²

The true idea of the church, if perfectly realized, would unite all Christians in one ecclesiastical body.²³ Charles Hodge notes that the unity is "not merely a fellowship in the Spirit, but a union of subjection, so that one part is subject to a larger, and a larger to the whole."²⁴ Appeal is made to the apostolic age, at which time the whole body of professors were united in one body.²⁵

¹⁹Ibid., p. 22.

²⁰G., VII, 260.

²¹[Yeomans], XX, 118-119.

²²Ibid., XX, 119.

²³Hodge, Church Polity, p. 253.

²⁴Ibid., p. 125.

²⁵Ibid.

The church in the apostolic age, was thus visibly ONE. Not only one as her spiritual, living members were in union with Christ, and, in him, united with one another; but also as a visible association, whose united voice was heard in their profession, whose administrations were subjected to the eye of all, and the efficiency of which was felt in every land. Everywhere do the inspired writers of the New Testament contemplate the apostolic church as visibly one.²⁶

The unity of the apostolic church was visible and "organical," that is, "to her representative Synod, Assembly, or Council, her ministry and members were, in their respective places, amenable." The church in succeeding ages has striven for this unity, as may be seen in her provincial, national, and oecumenical councils.²⁸ So at the present time, the ideal is not federation, much less cooperation in extra-ecclesiastical voluntary societies, but "the ultimate, visible form of this unity is to be sought in one supreme representative Synod, Assembly or Council."²⁹ The responsibility of the Synod would be

to declare the Church's faith, order, and forms of worship . . . to provide for all that is of general interest in her profession and relations, leaving

²⁶G., VII, 262.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Hodge, Church Polity, p. 125.

²⁹G., VII, 260.

the more incidental things of locality to be disposed of according to local circumstances."³⁰

The ideal of "Catholic organic unity" is not to be considered as mere "visionary speculation."³¹ Though some regard the consummation as eschatological, it is not only "the prophetic hope," but also "the instinct of [the church's] deepest life even while militant here on earth."³² Charles Hodge writes,

The fact that the visible Church has never fully reached its ideal form is no proof either that the ideal is false or that the actual is not bound to strive to be conformed to the ideal."³³

It is further argued that the Presbyterian form of church government, with its representative assemblies, is fully equipped to give the unity of the church its visible expression.³⁴ The Presbyterian principle is capable of being extended finally to "embody the whole Church on earth in one grand parliament."³⁵ If this is to be realized,

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., VII, 261.

³² Henry B[oynton] Smith, "Christian Union and Ecclesiastical Reunion," Faith and Philosophy (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1877), p. 266.

³³ Hodge, "The Unity of the Church Based on Personal Union with Christ," p. 142.

³⁴ Hodge, Church Polity, p. 93; Thornwell, IV, 136.

³⁵ Thornwell, IV, 137.

however, one author writes, "the friends of Presbyterianism must cease to be panders of schism."³⁶

Though the above is the prevailing view of the unity of the church, there are those, especially in the South toward the close of this period, who deny that such organic unity is the ideal.³⁷ Dabney, for example, says,

As the invisible Church is one and catholic, the visible will strive towards the same unity. But as the bond of union in the invisible Church is a common faith and love, and no outward organism, so the unity of the visible Church will evince itself in ties of affection and brotherhood rather than in external conformity.³⁸

The separate existence of denominational churches "does not mar the catholicity of the visible church as one whole, but is the inevitable and designed result" of the geographical, political, and linguistic separation of the human race. Denominations are the result "Partly of the excusable limitations of the human understanding, and partly of the sinful prejudices of the heart."³⁹ Dabney argues that the parallel

³⁶G., VII, 261.

³⁷See, for example, Shepperson, cited above; B. W. Mosely, "Christian Unity," Southern Presbyterian Review, XX (1869) 492-507; Robert Lewis Dabney, "What is Christian Union?" Discussions: Evangelical and Theological (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), II, 430-446. This article was first printed in 1870.

³⁸Dabney, II, 434.

³⁹Ibid., II, 437; emphasis added.

existence and development of denominations is the apostolic conception of the structure of catholic Christianity, the designed development of apostolic institutions. The causes are unavoidable, and beyond the power of man to cure.⁴⁰

Denominations are thus not in principle schismatic; they exist not simply as the result of imperfection, but according to apostolic design.

The Divided State of the Church

For the most part, however, the Presbyterian theologians of this period regard the unity of the church as seriously marred by the divided state of the church.

All separate organization on inadequate grounds, and all diversity of opinion affecting important doctrines, and all want of Christian love and especially a sectarian, unchurching spirit, are opposed to the unity of the Church, and either mar or destroy it according to their nature.⁴¹

They attempt to present the division in its most serious light--"whatever breaks in upon this unity tends to the destruction of the mystical body of Christ."⁴² Everything that tends to divide the body of Christ, or to interfere

⁴⁰Ibid., II, 438-439.

⁴¹Hodge, Church Polity, p. 44. Compare [Miller], VII, 12.

⁴²G., VII, 258.

with entire harmony among the members of his body, is sinful, and ought to be avoided."⁴³

If the divisions are to be healed, these Presbyterians argue, causes of the divisions must be understood. The relative independency that arises from geographical, political, and linguistic separation do not violate the unity of the church.⁴⁴ In the ideal expression of the unity of the church, according to Presbyterian principles, the supreme Synod would be truly catholic, representative of the church in all nations. The divisions that mar the unity of the church have their root in human imperfection and sin.⁴⁵

Henry Boynton Smith, in his analysis of the divided state of the church, sees two principles at work throughout church history which divide the church; ecclesiastical domination, on the one hand, and extreme individualism, on the other. Whereas the former, in enforcing conformity to external rules in matters non-essential, degenerates into spiritual despotism, the latter "sets up the individual will, often under the name of conscience, in opposition to the general will and the historic order."⁴⁶

⁴³[Miller], VII, 37; see also p. 19.

⁴⁴Hodge, Church Polity, p.44.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 253, 46.

⁴⁶Smith, p. 268.

Schism, so far as the institutional side of the church is concerned, is separation without adequate cause.⁴⁷ Charles Hodge twice appealed to this principle when the Presbyterian Church was in danger of being divided. As the Old School--New School conflict drew to a head in the thirties, Hodge wrote, "The division of a church of Jesus Christ is a very serious thing; expressly forbidden in the Word of God, and only to be justified by the most obvious necessity."⁴⁸ Again, in 1861 he held that the command to be one remains in force, that separate organization is the exception and must be justified.⁴⁹ What will justify such a course of action?

Adequate cause is provided, Hodge argues, when terms of communion are imposed with which many Christians cannot in good conscience comply.⁵⁰ "It is often the duty of men to separate from a true church . . . when we are required either to profess or to do anything contrary to [God's] word, as the condition of our continued union with it."⁵¹ Separation is then "a duty which we owe to God and to the

⁴⁷Hodge, Church Polity, p. 412.

⁴⁸[Charles Hodge], "The Act and Testimony," The Princeton Review, VI, (October 1834), 520.

⁴⁹[Charles Hodge], "The Church and the Country," The Princeton Review, XXXIII (April 1861), 323.

⁵⁰Catholicus, VI, 42.

⁵¹[Charles Hodge and J. Addison Alexander], "General Assembly of the [Free] Church of Scotland," The Princeton Review, XVI, (January 1844), 116. See also Church Polity, p. 412.

real unity of the church, whenever unscriptural terms of communion are enjoined."⁵² The charge of schism is to be referred to those who impose unscriptural terms of communion.

Those who separate from such a body on account of unchristian rites or unsound doctrines entertained by her, are guilty of no schism, and are chargeable with no act inconsistent with their keeping the unity of the spirit. The crime of rending the body of Christ is chargeable to those who adopt unchristian rites and ceremonies, or establish an unsound creed, and require all to conform.⁵³

Those who withdraw from an external society whose unscriptural terms of communion hurt the conscience, are not schismatics, "provided this be done without excommunicating or denouncing those who are really the people of God."⁵⁴ Division without just cause, however, is schism, being "a breach of Christian fellowship and subjection, enjoined by Christ on his people."⁵⁵ The crucial factor in a justifiable separation is the coercion of conscience, rather than the presence of diverse opinions. Charles Hodge argued in the thirties that as long as the confession of the church is sound, separation is not warranted, even though a majority of the body may be corrupt. The ecclesiastical connection

⁵²[Charles Hodge], "Schaf[f]'s Protestantism," The Princeton Review, XVII (October 1845), 631.

⁵³Catholicus, VI, 42.

⁵⁴Hodge, Church Polity, p. 52, emphasis added.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 412.

does not approve the errors, but provides opportunity of witness against them.⁵⁶ Breaking the unity of the church is not justified unless one is "required to profess or to do something which the Bible condemns as false or wrong," or "prohibited from professing or doing what the Bible commands."⁵⁷

There is general agreement among those contributing to the discussion that separation is justifiable "where fundamental articles of the Christian faith are not only impugned, but the renunciation of the truth and the adoption of the opposite heresy are imposed, as terms of fellowship."⁵⁸ Separation is also just "where the associated circumstances are such, that a continuance of communion would imply either a departure from the faith, or a sanction of the error."⁵⁹ If those in error in the church are "so powerful as to defy the ordinary exercise of discipline," in the interest of the purity of the fellowship "the voice must be obeyed which says--Come out from among them, my people, and be ye separate, saith the Lord."⁶⁰

⁵⁶[Hodge], The Princeton Review, VI, 520.

⁵⁷Hodge, Church Polity, p. 412. This principle in Hodge applies only to existing bodies, not to the question of reunion.

⁵⁸G., VII, 403.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

It does not escape notice, however, that the principle of conscientious separation had been greatly abused on the American scene.

The ecclesiastical disorders of the Christian world are inveterate and painful. They are nowhere more so than in our own country. They spring not from the true liberty of thought and speech wherewith Christ makes his people free; but from the vague and inconsiderate presumption that diversity of theological opinion must work a corresponding diversity of ecclesiastical order, and show itself in external disintegration. Schism becomes the condition of enjoying one's own opinions. A peculiar opinion on almost any religious subject is deemed more important than Christian union, and incompatible with it.⁶¹

This is not to say that the form of Christian doctrine is unimportant; it is, and must be guarded.⁶² The problem in the American situation is that

separations are made, and expressly for the maintenance of . . . erratic dogmas; the separate bodies assume a distinct form of existence. Thus their distinct existence is not for the sustenance of the common faith, or the general principles of order--for these are common to the true

⁶¹[Yeomans], XX, 122.

⁶²Ibid., XX, 122-123. See also G., VII, 266-267. The fact that the church has felt it necessary to express her faith in a creed is not schismatic. Corporate action is impossible without well understood terms of agreement. Those who oppose creeds "have themselves some other term of communion, than the simple acknowledgement of the divine authority of the word of God. Either expressly, or by well understood implication, they have their leading interpretations of the Scriptures as their bond on union and term of fellowship." Ibid., VII, 406.

church of God; but for the maintenance and propagation of the sectional error.⁶³

Though the principle on which the Protestant Reformers acted is valid, it has been abused. "Mere party distinctions are seldom animated by much of sound and important principle."⁶⁴ "In the unhallowed business of schism, an unblest ambition of restless individuals has had a prominent place."⁶⁵

Alongside the principle of the necessity of separation when conscience is violated in essential matters, one finds the expediency of separation when significant differences appear. Where such differences exist on the important doctrines of grace, separation is advisable, a peaceful separation being better than continual discord.⁶⁶

True Christians often conscientiously differ so much in matters of doctrine and order as to render their harmonious action in the same ecclesiastical organization impossible. Under such circumstances it is better that they separate."⁶⁷

Diversity of opinion is an evidence of imperfection; the resultant divisions are evil as they show a lack of perfect

⁶³G., VII, 263.

⁶⁴Ibid., VII, 65. See also; [Miller], VIII,

⁶⁵Ibid., VII, 404.

⁶⁶[DeBaun], XXXVII, 54.

⁶⁷Hodge, "The Unity of the Church based on Personal Union with Christ," p. 143.

unity in faith.⁶⁸ But they are the less of two evils. "When men differ, it is better to avow their diversity of opinion or faith, than to pretend to agree, or to force discordant elements in a formal uncongenial union."⁶⁹

The division of the church into denominations is unavoidable, and "to be regarded as incident to imperfect knowledge and imperfect sanctification."⁷⁰ The church is one in affection, but not with that "full confidence and cordiality necessary for harmonious action in the same external society."⁷¹ The divisions are to be deplored, "yet the evil is not to be magnified above its just dimensions. So long as unity of faith, of love, and of obedience is preserved, the unity of the Church is as to its essential principle safe."⁷² Schism, given the existence of denominations, is the refusal to hold fellowship with other evangelical churches.⁷³

⁶⁸Hodge, Church Polity, p. 44.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 95.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 44.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 253.

⁷²Ibid., p. 44.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 88, 44, 134. See also: [Miller], VIII, 38.

Denominationalism

Where serious disagreement, the result of human imperfection, prevents harmonious action in the same organization, the division of the church into denominations is regarded as inevitable. It is but a step to justify them as a relative good. "On the supposition that this imperfection continues to exist, this separation of Christians into different bodies is not an evil, but attended with much benefit."⁷⁴ The competition between denominations is beneficial, providing mutual checks and being a stimulus to the discovery of truth.⁷⁵ "Who can doubt that the Bible is more studied than it would otherwise be when rival denominations search its pages day and night, to find support for their respective creeds and claims."⁷⁶

The defense of denominationalism is climaxed by the idea of a "peculiar mission" given to each branch of the church, in distinction from the mission given to the church as a whole. This finds expression especially in the New School in the fifties.⁷⁷

⁷⁴Catholicus, VI, 41. See also Hodge, "The Unity of the Church based on Personal Union with Christ," p. 143; [Miller], VII, 19.

⁷⁵Albert Barnes, "Our Position," Presbyterian Quarterly Review, I (1852-1853), 290-291.

⁷⁶[Miller], VII, 20.

⁷⁷Barnes, I, 290-291. Robert W. Patterson, "The Position and Mission of our Church," Presbyterian Quarterly

Each denomination is working out some problem in the Christian life, developing some portion of truth. Each has its part to perform, its peculiar work to do for the kingdom of Christ, which it, in the present condition of things, is better fitted to do than any other.⁷⁸

This is sometimes presented as the eschatological form of the church; in the millennium there will be greater, but not universal, external uniformity.⁷⁹

Much is thus made of the argument that though the ideal unity of the church is marred by the division into denominations, it is not wholly broken by their existence, unless accompanied by an "unchurching spirit." Denominationalism and sectarianism are to be distinguished. Denominations are not inconsistent with the unity of the church.⁸⁰

A denominational spirit is not necessarily sectarian. . . . It may be strong in its attachments, earnest in its preferences, clear in its convictions, zealous for the interest of its own branch of the church; yet it will be generous, and liberal, respectful of the convictions of

Review, IX (1860-1861), 107. "Exclusivism," Presbyterian Quarterly Review, VI (1857-1858), 9.

⁷⁸J. Few Smith, "Denominationalism not Sectarianism," American Theological Review, II (1869), 314. For the New School's conception of its mission see George M. Marsden, "The New School Presbyterian Mind; A Study of Theology in Mid-Nineteenth Century America" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1966).

⁷⁹[Miller], VII, 31. "Exclusivism," Presbyterian Quarterly Review, V, 566.

⁸⁰[Miller], VII, 37; "Exclusivism," Presbyterian Quarterly Review, V, 567-576; J. Few Smith, II, 323; Moseley, XX, 497.

others, and truly and supremely zealous for the triumph of Christianity; and ready to sacrifice its own preferences or personal gains whenever the cause of the Redeemer can be effectually advanced by such sacrifice.⁸¹

When the denominational spirit becomes sectarian, that is, exclusive and isolating, so that one is wholly absorbed in his own branch of the church, and closes his eyes to the good in others, then the sin of schism is committed.⁸²

The Realization of the Ideal

Charles Hodge looks at the unity of the church in light of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The inward unity which the Holy Spirit gives to the people of Christ is the source of all legitimate forms of outward union.⁸³ The visible church should be one in faith, communion, worship, organization, "just so far, and no farther than the indwelling Spirit is productive of such union."⁸⁴ There is general agreement among Hodge's contemporaries: external union is the expression of internal unity. Spiritual union will create external unity, but the reverse is not true.⁸⁵

⁸¹J. Few Smith, II, 318.

⁸²J. Few Smith, II, 322-323; "Exclusivism," Presbyterian Quarterly Review, VI, 19.

⁸³[Charles Hodge], "Principles of Church Union, and the Reunion of the Old and New-school Presbyterians," The Princeton Review XXXVII (April 1865), 274.

⁸⁴Hodge, Church Polity, p. 253.

⁸⁵Henry B[oynton] Smith, p. 274; [Miller], VIII, 16, 37-38.

Practically this means that the first condition of external union is unity in the truth which the Holy Spirit has given. Truth is placed above outward peace and harmony.

Every attempt to reconcile differences among professing Christians which involves the relinquishment of truth; or a compromise with important corruption, either in doctrine or worship; or giving countenance to what is deemed an injurious departure from what Christ has commanded, is, undoubtedly, criminal and mischievous.⁸⁶

Both Henry Boynton Smith and Charles Hodge emphasize that the external unity of the Church must be a confessional unity. Smith sees in the rationalism of Renan and Strauss the beginnings of a conflict in which "the whole of historical Christianity, the Bible, the Church, and all the doctrines of our confessions of faith are at stake."⁸⁷ In this situation, "to call upon us to strike down our symbols is like calling on an army to strike down its flag in the face of a foe."⁸⁸ Hodge recognizes that it is difficult to say how minute the confession must be for an extended organization of Christians, but whatever the confession, Hodge insists, it must be "sincerely adopted and enforced

⁸⁶[Miller], VIII, 15. See also G., VII, 122.

⁸⁷Henry B[oynton] Smith, p. 274.

⁸⁸Henry B[oynton] Smith, System of Christian Theology, edited by William S. Karr (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1884), p. 593.

⁸⁹[Miller], VIII, 17.

so far as everything essential to their integrity is concerned."⁸⁹

With the widespread recognition of this condition for unity, the logical place to begin healing the divisions of the church is among those "whose view as to doctrine, worship and discipline, are such as to admit of their harmonious cooperation."⁹⁰ Where the grounds of separation are inadequate and unscriptural, denominations are bound to unite as one outward, visible church.⁹¹

The hope that all Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in the United States⁹² might be united in one body is expressed by Samuel Miller, writing in the Princeton Review for 1836.⁹³ His statement came at a time when the Presbyterian churches in America were showing an opposite tendency, toward fragmentation. The Associate Reformed Church, begun in 1782 as an only partly successful union of the Reformed Presbyterians and Associate Presbyterians in America (both groups are of Scotch descent), proved unable to maintain

⁸⁹Hodge, Church Polity, p. 97. Hodge noted as a practical matter that "differences as to doctrine do not form such inseparable barriers to Church union as diversity of opinion respecting ecclesiastical government." Ibid., p. 96.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 254; see also p. 96.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 254; see also pp. 95-96.

⁹²For the relative size of the churches concerned, see the appended statistical table.

⁹³[Miller], VIII, 17.

organic connection between its three synods. The Western Synod became independent in 1820, and the Synod of the Carolinas (eventually the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church of the South) followed suit in 1822, leaving the Associate Reformed Synod of New York to carry on alone. In the meantime, a portion of the Associate Reformed Church was absorbed in 1821 by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church, the outgrowth of the labors of the Reformed Presbyterian ministers who refused to join the Associate Reformed Synod at its formation in 1782, divided in 1833 on the issue of allegiance to the Constitution of the United States, and were distinguished as the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (the "Old Light" body which continued the policy of non-participation in the civil government) and the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (those who were said to have seen "New Light" on the meaning of the church's position, so that participation without compromise was a possibility).

The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was not without divisive incidents in this century. As the result of a controversy over the qualifications of frontier ministers, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was formed as a separate body in 1810. Even while Samuel Miller wrote, a major schism between the Old School and New School of the Presbyterian church was in the air. The following year it

became a reality as the Old School's body gained control of the General Assembly and forced, by the "Excinding Acts" of 1837, the formation of the New School as a separate denomination.

The formation of the Evangelical Alliance in London in 1846 caused some ripples among the Presbyterians in this country with respect to union. Although neither the Old nor the New School saw fit to send delegates to London, both bodies expressed their approbation of the endeavor.⁹⁴ The Old School General Assembly of 1847 bade the proposed establishment of an American branch of the Alliance "God-speed in their legitimate efforts," but raised the question of whether or not combined effort should be sought in the first place among denominations holding the same doctrine and church polity.⁹⁵

The Old School, accordingly, proposed a conference with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the Associate Presbyterian Church, as well as the Reformed Dutch Protestant Church and the

⁹⁴ Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America [New School] (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, 1894), I, 174. Samuel J. Baird, editor, A Collection of the Acts and Deliverances and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church (Revised edition; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), p. 543.

⁹⁵ Baird, p. 544.

German Reformed Church.⁹⁶ The unity to be sought is not that of "amalgamation," but rather a unity "consistent with denominational distinction."⁹⁷

The proposed Convention met, and its report was presented to the Old School General Assembly of 1849. The report is a convenient exposition of the principles of church union that were commonly received in this period. The argument may be summarized as follows:

Christ prayed that the church may be one. Those who love Christ should therefore actively seek the union of all Christians. Of course, a spiritual union already exists among all true believers, as they all belong to the one body of which Christ is head, and all have one Spirit. However, because of imperfect knowledge and sanctification, this unity is obscured. The church is divided into many organizations which even oppose one another. In order that the unity of the church may be made manifest, the effort must be directed at bringing the different branches "into the unity of the faith."

This is an "imperative duty." Since the church is one body, it should be so organized as to exhibit that unity. Christians, accordingly, must "aim at bringing about a union

⁹⁶Ibid. The New School General Assembly was not included.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 545.

of all the different portions of the household of faith upon a scriptural basis."⁹⁸

The resolutions which the Convention offered, however, did go beyond the promotion of fraternal affection and co-operation.⁹⁹ Although the Committee was continued, no further report was ever presented.

In the fifties successful church union crowned the efforts of the Associate churches of Scotch descent. The Associate Reformed General Synod was formed by the reunion of the Synods of New York and the Synod of the West. The same year, a correspondence was begun with the Associate Synod with a view toward organic union. This union was consummated in 1858 with the formation of the United Presbyterian Church of North America.¹⁰⁰ The following year a communication was received from the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church looking toward eventual union. Discussions were continued throughout the sixties, but failed to produce a union.¹⁰¹

The General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church made its own contribution to Presbyterian reunion in calling

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 545.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 546.

¹⁰⁰ Digest of the Principal Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, 1859-1902. (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1903), pp. 313-320.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 238-239.

for a convention "for prayer and conference in regard to the terms of union and communion among the various branches of the Presbyterian family."¹⁰² The Philadelphia Presbyterian Union Convention accordingly met in November of 1867 with delegates present from both the Old and New School General Assemblies, the United Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Dutch Reformed Church.¹⁰³

The idea of federation represented in a convention was rejected as such a body would have nothing properly ecclesiastical to do. "The delegates of the different churches might meet and talk together, and pass excellent resolutions, and express a good degree of confidence in one another. And how long could they keep this up?"¹⁰⁴ Past experience indicated not long. The convention therefore drew up a basis for the organic union of the Presbyterian churches.

Although the organic union of all Presbyterian churches in the United States did not materialize, the convention did provide an added impetus to the attempt, already in progress, to reunite the Old and New Schools of the Presbyterian church. Both Schools had lost their southern

¹⁰²[Henry Boynton Smith], "The Philadelphia Presbyterian Union Convention," American Presbyterian and Theological Review, XXI (January 1868), 106.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., XXI, 105.

constituency, the New School in 1858, the Old School in 1861, and had begun a friendly correspondence with each other in 1862. Discussions toward reunion began in earnest in 1866, but were somewhat slowed by the question of confessional subscription, as the Old School regarded the other body as latitudinarian.

Henry Boynton Smith in response to this Old School attitude argued that the New School was now closer to the confessional standards than at the time of the division.¹⁰⁵ He seized upon the moment of this Convention to demonstrate the sense in which the New School subscribed to the confession by adding to the Convention's proposed basis for union (that the Westminster Confession of Faith be received and adopted as containing the System of Doctrine taught in Holy Scripture) the clause; "it being understood that this Confession is received in its proper historical, that is, the Calvinistic or Reformed, sense."¹⁰⁶

When the New School supported Smith by voting 46 to 2 for his amendment¹⁰⁷ he regarded his demonstration successful. "So far as the form and terms of the doctrinal basis are concerned, it seems to us that the Philadelphia

¹⁰⁵Henry B[oynton] Smith, pp. 282, 287.

¹⁰⁶[Henry Boynton Smith], American Presbyterian and Theological Review, XXI, 109, 114.

¹⁰⁷Lewis F. Stearns, Henry Boynton Smith (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892), p. 301.

Convention has settled the question as between the Old and New School."¹⁰⁸

Charles Hodge, who was present at the convention and initially impressed with the New School's willingness to support the Smith amendment, on further reflection indicated that he still had misgivings about reunion. The question, he said, was not the orthodoxy of the New School ministers, which he granted, but rather what the New School tolerates as being legitimate under the form of subscription.¹⁰⁹ He believed that a basic contradiction was involved in the basis for union:

Three-fourths of our Presbyteries have twice decided that they cannot consent to the union if they are bound legally or in honor to be as liberal in the interpretation of the standards as their New School brethren have hitherto been. And the latter have as clearly declared that they can consent to the union only on the condition that the united church is to be as tolerant as themselves.¹¹⁰

Hodge did not see that either side was giving up its historic position, though he did express the opinion that some

¹⁰⁸[Henry Boynton Smith], American Presbyterian and Theological Review, XXI, 116.

¹⁰⁹[Charles Hodge], "Presbyterian Reunion," The Princeton Review, XL (January 1868), 57, 60, 76; [Charles Hodge], "The Protest and Answer," The Princeton Review, XL, (July 1868), 475.

¹¹⁰[Charles Hodge], "The New Basis of Union," The Princeton Review, XLI (July 1869), 465.

Old School men would vote for the union because they believed the time had come for a more tolerant principle.¹¹¹

The reunion became a reality in 1870, and the date has become standard as marking a new era in the history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

¹¹¹ Ibid., XLI, 466.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The doctrine of the church receives two distinct emphases in American Presbyterian theology in the mid-nineteenth century. The difference has less to do with the controversy between the Old and New Schools than it does with disagreement within the Old School. As the New School eventually rejected the Plan of Union with the Congregationalists, and modified its position with respect to voluntary societies, the differences between New School and "Princeton" ecclesiology became minimal, though an important difference with respect to confessional subscription remained. At the same time, there were several clashes in this area of theology within the Old School, especially between the two leading theologians of that branch of the church, Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell.

The disagreement was not over the validity of the classic distinction between the invisible and visible church; the problem lay in the definition of the visibility of the church. Hodge, reacting to the ecclesiology of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England, regarded visibility as an attribute of the church only in the sense in which believers are visible. There is a corresponding stress in Hodge on the Church as a spiritual organism, composed of believers in union with Christ. Distinguishing between a

true church and a pure church, Hodge regarded the Word, that is profession of the essential doctrines of the gospel, as the only mark of the former.

Thornwell, sensing a weakness in this view, stressed the church as a visible institution having the ministry and the sacraments. He regarded visibility as an attribute of the church in the sense of having the order appointed by Christ. Both emphases appear to be necessary, and the one need not negate the other.

The tension with respect to the nature of the church is reflected in the debate over the relation of baptized children to the church, a question that is bound up with the significance of infant baptism. Whereas the Westminster Directory for Public Worship of 1645 dealt adequately with this question, the revised directory adopted by the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. did not, thus making it easier for divergences to appear.

According to classic Reformed theology, the sacraments as signs represent Christ and his saving benefits; as seals they confirm the promises of God and thereby strengthen the faith which the Holy Spirit works through the ministry of the Word. In the period under discussion, this is interpreted by some, for example, Dabney and Thornwell, to mean that the whole benefit of baptism depends on a conscious, intelligent reception on the part of the person baptized. Though infants are to be baptized, they are not capable of

such believing reception, and are regarded as unregenerate until their personal faith and repentance are evident. The visible church thus contains prospective heirs of salvation as well as those who make a credible profession of the true religion and are presumably in actual union with Christ.

On the other hand, there are those, including both Charles and Archibald Alexander Hodge, who deny that such a radical division of the membership of the visible church is legitimate. They argue that the sacraments, in addition to being signs and seals, are "means of grace" which convey the spiritual blessings which they signify and seal. Regeneration by the Holy Spirit at the moment of the administration of baptism is not absolutely rejected, though it is denied that regeneration uniformly takes place. The significance of baptism is union with Christ, and those who are baptized are to be treated as members of Christ. Baptized children belong to the visible church which in its entirety is to be regarded as the body of believers.

When the Mercersburg Review wondered why the Princeton Review stopped short of baptismal regeneration, Charles Hodge heatedly responded that baptized infants are to be regarded as members of the invisible church in the sense of the company of the elect, which includes many that are not yet actually united to Christ. "Presumptive election" is an inherently unsatisfactory solution, however, because there is no practical way to treat a person as elect and yet not

united to Christ. Since it only occurs in this one place in Hodge, it should not be regarded as a definitive position.

The question of the validity of Roman Catholic baptism also involved the issue of the visibility of the church. The General Assembly of 1835 declared that the Roman Catholic church had essentially apostatized from the faith and could not be regarded as a Christian church. Following on this decision, the Old School Assembly of 1845 by an overwhelming vote declared Roman Catholic baptism to be invalid, because such baptism was not administered by a duly ordained minister of the visible church.

Charles Hodge defended the validity of Roman Catholic baptism, and the right of the Roman Catholic church to be regarded as a part of the visible church catholic on the grounds that it retains the one essential mark of the church--the Word, that is, the essential doctrines of the gospel. He seemed to shift ground, however, when he appealed to the presence of true believers within the Roman Catholic church as evidence that Rome is a part of the visible church, and yet attempted to dissociate the people from the hierarchy. Thornwell admitted that there are believers within the jurisdiction of Rome, but he denied that they are united to the church as a visible institute on earth. The characteristic emphases noted in connection with the issue of the visibility of the church thus appear also in this controversy.

On the unity of the church, there was considerable agreement that the ideal unity of the church is visible as well as spiritual. The true idea of the church, if perfectly realized, would unite all Christians in one ecclesiastical body. Both Hodge and Thornwell argued that the Presbyterian form of church government, with its representative assemblies, is equipped to give the unity of the church its visible expression on a national, and even international, scale.

The attitude of Presbyterians toward the divided state of the church varied, however, though the multiplication of denominations in America met general condemnation. Hodge argued that division is necessary when terms of communion are imposed which violate the conscience, and may be expedient when significant differences in doctrine render harmonious action impossible. In the latter case, division is the lesser of two evils. There were those, especially in the New School, who defended denominations as a positive good, each denomination fulfilling its "peculiar mission" in the world.

After the Civil War, Presbyterians sought a greater expression of visible unity. Cooperation in the voluntary societies, unity-in-action, had left much to be desired as an expression of church unity. Now a unity-in-truth was called for, beginning with the Presbyterian and Reformed bodies in America, which could lead beyond cooperation to organic union.

APPENDIX

Presbyterian Churches in America, 1859¹

	Minis- ters	Church- es	Communi- cants
Associate Reformed Synod of New York	16	14	1,631
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, South	68	---	---
Associate Synod of North Amer- ics	11	32	778
Cumberland Presbyterian Church	927	1188	84,249
Free Presbyterian Church	43	---	---
Presbyterian Church in the USA Old School	2578	3491	279,600
Presbyterian Church in the USA New School	1558	1543	137,989
Reformed Presbyterian Church General Synod	54	83	---
Reformed Presbyterian Church Synod	63	70	5,821
United Presbyterian Church of North America ²	408	634	55,547
United Synod ³ of the Presbyter- ian Church	118	187	12,125

¹The statistics are from Joseph M. Wilson, The Presbyterian Historical Almanac, and Annual Remembrancer of the Church for 1860 (Philadelphia; Joseph M. Wilson, 1860), p. 289. Wilson made use of statistics published by the representative bodies in 1859 for this table. His Almanac was published annually, 1859-1868.

²Constituted in 1858 as the result of a union between the Associate Reformed Church and the Associate Synod of North America.

³Withdrew from the northern portion of the New School Presbyterian church in 1857 over the issue of slavery. The United Synod (of the South) was formed the following year.

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¹Articles appearing in The Princeton Review were not signed until 1869, the intent being that the periodical should speak "the language of all the conductors." (Charles Hodge, in a letter to his brother, July 26, 1837. A. A. Hodge, The Life of Charles Hodge, p. 307.) An Index Volume identifying the authors of articles for the years 1825-1868 was issued in 1871. The Index Volume has been checked against Earle William Kennedy's critical compilation, "Authors of Articles in the Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review," (Unpublished typescript, Speer Memorial Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1963) in the identifications made here.

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