

III.

Dr. Thornwell as an Ecclesiologist

REV. A.M. FRASER, D.D., STAUNTON, VA.

Dr. Thornwell was not first of all an ecclesiologist. He was first of all an eminent Christian, a mighty preacher of the gospel, a profound theologian and philosopher; and afterwards an ecclesiologist. His genius, his taste and his vocation all led him to the direct study of other subjects, and his work as an expounder of Church government was incidental and even accidental. But, as often happens, the by-product of his genius left as lasting and **beneficent** an impression upon the Church as those services upon which he consciously concentrated his powers.

His work in Ecclesiology was original. The mark he has left on the organization and work of the Church is distinct; it is of inestimable value, and we trust it will endure till that time of which the Scriptures tell us, when the Head of the Church shall present it to Himself "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing"; but "holy and without blemish."

I would not imply, however, that Dr. Thornwell himself disparaged the study of Church government, or that he thought it unworthy of his greatest powers. In his famous debate with Dr. Hodge in the Rochester Assembly of 1860, to which I shall have occasion to refer repeatedly, while he declared that the doctrines of grace were of more importance than the doctrines of government, yet, he claimed that the doctrines of government were second in importance only to the doctrines of grace. He believed that Church government was an essential and inseparable part of a revealed gospel. All those splendid descriptions which the Bible applies to the Church he accepted in all the fullness and accuracy of their meaning. To him the Church was a new creation, rivaling in splendor and beauty the original creation, at which "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy"; it was the "Kingdom of Heaven," "the House of God," "a glorious Church," "the Church of the Living God," "the pillar and ground of the truth," "the temple of the Holy Ghost," "the body of Christ," "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all," "the Bride of the Lamb," "adorned as a Bride to meet the Bridegroom," whose never fading bridal freshness and radiance and beauty will make her the most resplendent

created object in Heaven. Her constitution and her laws, her officers and her courts, her administration and her discipline, her worship and her fellowship, her labors and her achievements, her tears and her prayers, her struggles and her victories, all excited his admiration and devotion as reflecting the divine glory of Him who is her Author and her Object, her indwelling King and her exceeding great reward.

To him, all that is revealed concerning the Church expressed the divine sense of the beautiful, the orderly, the puissant and the enduring. It thrilled with the joy of the divine heart and pulsated with the life of God. So that the peroration of his great speech in the Rochester Assembly, a discussion of the mere mechanical structure and operations of the Church, is said to have been "a thrilling appeal that moved all hearts, holding the Assembly and the thronged galleries in breathless attention." In the sphere of Ecclesiology, Dr. Thornwell was a happy combination of the thinker and the man of action without impairing his superiority in either sphere. As a thinker, there was no subject too abstruse or intricate for him. As an equal with equals he could commune with Sir William Hamilton, and Kant, and Aristotle. At his death it was printed concerning him in Great Britain that America regarded him as "an incarnation of sheer intelligence." While this expression did not do justice to the depth and warmth of his emotional nature, or to his mastery of questions of practical administration, it did not overstate America's estimate of his intellect. Dr. T. C. Johnson, the biographer of Dr. Dabney, says that in the nineteenth century America produced three theologians: Shedd, Thornwell and Dabney. He says that Dr. Dabney's writings entitle him to the first place amongst these three, but adds: "It is not forgotten that Dr. Thornwell was cut off early in life." Dr. Peck forty years ago said that three South Carolinians had attained to preeminence in literary work. These three are John C. Calhoun, Hugh S. Legare and James H. Thornwell. When such a mind was turned to Church government, from the necessity of nature it must reason, it must be exhaustive, analytic, discriminating, making nice distinctions, tracing things back to their origin and forward to their results. There were giants in those days. The Alexanders, father and sons, Drs. Hodge and Magill were at Prince-

ton; Drs. Breckinridge and Robinson at Danville, in Kentucky; Drs. B. M. Smith and Dabney at Union, in Virginia; Drs. Edward Robinson and H. B. Smith at Union, in New York; Drs. W. G. T. Shedd, Edward A. Park and Austin Phelps at Auburn; Drs. Adger, Palmer and Thornwell at Columbia, in South Carolina. These men did not think it unworthy of their great learning and ability to debate the nicest distinctions in Church government, even though their lives may have been devoted to the study of the larger subject of Systematic Theology. They well knew that, however acute might be the angle of divergence between truth and error at the beginning, the lines had only to be projected far enough to measure the whole diameter between absolute truth and ruinous falsehood. With all Church history spread out before them as a panorama, seeing the errors, the tyrannies, the corruptions and the loss of spiritual power that had so often entered the Church as a result of what at first seemed the most trivial and innocent innovations, they were led to repeat with the frequency of a motto, "Beware of the beginnings of error!" Though but fifty years have passed since Thornwell died, the time has none too soon arrived for recalling the man and his mission. Has there not in these modern times set in a mighty tide of impatience with principles and distinctions in Church government, and a demand for the common sense, and the practical, and for the doing of things, as if anything could be common sense that is out of harmony with the supreme reason, or anything practical that is not true to the ideal, or anything really done till it is rightly done? And do we not need to gaze, and ponder, and pray, and learn anew the lesson that zeal is safe only when guided by knowledge, and that it is not only well to do what is right, but of the last importance to do right things in the right way?

But Dr. Thornwell was a man of action as well as a thinker. Whilst he must know the theory, he was no mere theorizer; whilst he must determine the doctrine, he was no mere doctrinaire; whilst he must see the vision, he was far from being visionary; and whilst he must discover the principle, it was in order to insure the practice and the results. Accordingly, when the Assembly in Lexington, Ky., in 1857, found the Church at a crisis where it must pass through the ordeal of recasting its rules of discipline, the moderator promptly and confidently se-

lected Dr. Thornwell to be the chairman of the committee on **revison**, and the one to do the work. This undertaking required breadth of view, a logical and self-consistent plan, a wide knowledge of the practice of courts, a keen sense of human rights, a spiritual insight into the meaning of ecclesiastical law, a familiarity with the Scriptures, a capacity for tireless patience in the elaboration of details, and withal a literary style at once compact, comprehensive and perspicuous. The moderator, in writing to Dr. Thornwell afterwards concerning his appointment, said: "I was strongly drawn towards you that night, by an influence which seemed to me more like a special divine influence than anything I remember to have experienced during my whole life." The appointment gave universal satisfaction in the Church, which felt no uneasiness since the work was in his hands.

Let us pause just here to catch a picture of Dr. Thornwell as he tranquilly crosses the threshold of his stirring career. When he is only twenty-four years of age and has been an ordained minister less than two years, he is sent by the Presbytery of Bethel as a commissioner to the General Assembly. It is the historic Assembly of 1837, which meets in the city of Philadelphia, and which witnesses the debate between the Old and the New School parties and ends in the disruption of the Church. He is a man of medium height, of spare build and somewhat stooped in his carriage. An abundance of soft, black hair is smoothly brushed down around his face in long, ample folds, and meeting his short, black beard on the side of his face, gives the effect of a dark oval frame about his none too healthy countenance. His eyelids droop when his countenance is in repose and through the narrow opening between them can be seen rich, kind, brilliant dark eyes that not only give tone to the face, but also transfigure the whole man. A stranger, seeing those eyes, will surely look again. When his mind begins to work, the eyelids no longer droop, and the eyes dilate and grow. At this time he writes, "I have not opened my mouth in the Assembly except to give a vote, and I do not expect to do so." The debate is the culmination of a long and heated controversy and the excitement in the Assembly is intense; yet he has no speech to make, no thought of electrifying the Assembly, or of making a name for himself; no conceit of a mission to lead the Church. He feels a very weighty respon-

sibility, it is true, but that responsibility is all discharged when he has listened, and learned, and thought, and prayed, and cast his vote aright. A refreshing example of the modesty of youthful genius! But Dr. Thornwell was not to remain a silent listener to the debates of the Church. In the meeting of the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia, in the fall of 1838, we find him conspicuous in the arena of debate. From that time on till he breathed his last, in 1862, his white plume always marked the thickest of the fight. In the Cincinnati Assembly, in 1845, he was the most commanding personality in the body, though only thirty-two years of age. In the Richmond Assembly, in 1847, he was chosen moderator, when only thirty-four years of age—probably the youngest person who ever presided over so august an ecclesiastical court. Hear these fine sentiments from Dr. Peck: “There are no contests more interesting than those of the forum and the deliberative assembly; no battles so grand as those waged for principle; no sufferings so sacred as those which are endured for truth; no struggles so suited to elicit human sympathy as those which are maintained with the tyranny of the devil and sin and hell, those which take place in the arena of the soul itself, between powers once pervaded by the spirit of unity in the service of their God, but now split asunder in consequence of the fatal schism effected by the fall. Such is the drama that moves before us as the story of Thornwell’s life unfolds itself.”

Now that I come to recount Dr. Thornwell’s contributions to the science of Church government, I shall be compelled by all the conditions under which I speak to confine myself to a simple recital of the salient points of the system he expounded. I greatly regret that Dr. Whaling, in his address this morning on “Dr. Thornwell as a Theologian,” restrained himself from discussing the vital relation of Dr. Thornwell’s theology to his ecclesiology. That relation exists, and Dr. Whaling is so competent to discuss it. I feel obliged to choose a different line of thought. I will give the summary as briefly as the subject matter will permit, but as fully as the time will allow.

1. At the foundation of Dr. Thornwell’s theory of the Church lay an absolute conviction that the Bible is the very Word of God, which reaches us through human channels, it is true, but is wholly uncontaminated with human imperfections by coming in

that way. Being the Word of God, it is free from all error and becomes a perfect and sufficient rule of faith and practice in all matters of religion. To questions of Church government, as to all others, he applied that noble sentiment of our Shorter Catechism: "The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him."

He believed that in this infallible and authoritative Word of God he had found a form of government prescribed for the Church. Having found it there, it bound his conscience as absolutely and as imperiously controlled him in thought and actions as anything else he found there. With him it was not enough to say that the Church is "a divine institution." The State also is a divine institution. The State is an ordinance of God in the sense that men are so related to each other that government is a necessity; in the sense that men are so constituted that they are naturally drawn together to live in masses or communities and seek a form of government; in the sense that God has endowed man with sufficient reason and light of nature to construct a government for himself; and in the sense that a government so constructed becomes the ordinance of God to all who are subject to it which they are under obligation to obey, but not in the sense that any particular form of government has been prescribed by Him. But the Church, on the contrary, is a divine institution in exactly the sense which the State is not, namely: that God has prescribed a particular form of government for it. Here again an important distinction must be made. In the Rochester Assembly, in 1860, in his debate with Dr. Hodge, Dr. Hodge agreed with him that the Church was a divine institution, but held that it was divine only in the sense that the general principles of Church government are given in the Scriptures, and not in the sense that a particular form of government is commanded there. Dr. Thornwell, in reply, made the distinction between "regulative principles" and "constitutive principles." In his view, what Dr. Hodge contended for was merely "regulative principles," which prescribe the end of Church government without prescribing the means or the particular constitution of the Church by which the end was to be reached. On the contrary, he himself saw in the Bible "constitutive principles" of Church government, which prescribed the exact structure of the govern-

ment, its officers, its courts and its laws. So that two formulas came to be distinctive of the two sides in the debate. Dr. Hodge maintained that whatever in the matters of Church government is not forbidden by the Scriptures is by implication permitted. Dr. Thornwell contended that whatever is not expressly commanded in the Scriptures is by implication forbidden. He believed that whatever is needful for Church government is either expressly set down in the Bible, or may be deduced from what is set down by good and necessary inference. He believed that the function of the Church is, as our Standards express it, "ministrative and declarative." It is declarative because the Church has no authority to originate truth, but only to declare what it finds in the Word of God. It is ministrative in the sense that it has no authority to make laws, but only to administer those laws it finds in the Word of God. He believed man incapable of constructing a wise government for the Church. "Man cannot be the counsellor of God," he would say. Hear some sentences of his own: "The Word of God uniformly represents man as blind and ignorant, incapable of seeing afar off, perverted in judgment, warped in understanding, seared in conscience and misguided in affections; and therefore requiring a heavenly teacher and a heavenly guide at every step of his progress. He has no light in himself in reference to divine things. He is a child, a fool, to be taught and led. Utterly unqualified by the narrowness of his faculties to foresee the future, he cannot even tell what is good for himself all the days of his vain life, which he spends as a shadow, and much less can he determine upon a large scale what is expedient for the Church of God. Surrounded by natural darkness, he has a light most graciously bestowed, which penetrates the gloom—even the sure word of prophecy—and to this he is required to give heed." Referring to the Bible as a bulwark against foolish and ruinous innovations of man, he says: "To remove a single chink from the obstructions which bank up a mighty body of water is to prepare the way for the desolations of a flood. The only safe principle is the noble principle of Chillingworth, 'The Bible, the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants.' When this great sun arises, all meaner lights retire, as the stars disappear before the dawning day." He trembled at the words of Christ, "Howbeit in vain do they worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments

of men”; and such warnings of the Scriptures as that found on the last page of the sacred volume: “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” The Church is, therefore, not a voluntary organization, but a divine institution. It is voluntary only in the sense that man has the option of coming within the Church to the salvation of his soul, or remaining out of it to his everlasting undoing. When, in the exercise of this free choice he comes within the Church, that which he enters is a divine thing—divine in every fiber of its structure and in every movement of its life.

This principle is fundamental among us now. Our appeal is immediately to the Scriptures, and what we do not find there for us does not exist. It is an accepted principle, a settled question, and yet, in a large measure, it holds this place amongst us as a result of Dr. Thornwell’s teaching. It was not accepted in the old Church. It was rejected by the Rochester Assembly by a large vote. How lightly we sometimes hold those principles for which the fathers risked so much! In defense of this truth, Dr. Thornwell entered the lists of debate with Dr. Charles Hodge, who was one of the most learned theologians of any age, who was intrenched in all the prestige that belongs to the Professor of Systematic Theology in the leading Theological Seminary in the United States, and in the esteem of the large number of ministers who had been educated by him and many of whom were members of this Assembly.

3. As to the particular form of government which Dr. Thornwell believed to be revealed in the Scriptures, it should be of interest to all students of the Science of Government to know that it was the highest form of a representative republic. He was fond of quoting Milton’s panegyric upon that form of government, that it was “held by the wisest men of all ages, the noblest, the manliest, the equalest, the justest government, the most agreeable to all due liberty and proportioned equality, both human and civil and Christian, most cherishing to virtue and true religion.” But there are two interpretations of the representative republic. One is that it is a mere substitute for popular democracy. It is held

that because of the inconvenience of having the multitude assemble in one place to participate in the government, the representative is chosen to act for them. He is a mere delegate or deputy, empowered to do no more than execute the wishes of those who have chosen him and express their opinions. According to the other interpretation, the representative is selected for his individual capacity to deal with questions of government. He is not merely to record what his constituents wish, but to confer with other representatives, to learn, to weigh, to deliberate, to decide and to act, not merely in accordance with the caprices of the masses, but in accordance with their best interests, as those interests are determined from his more advantageous point of observation. This is that splendid ideal of government expounded and acted upon by both Burke and Pitt at dramatic crises in their public careers. It is this latter ideal of government which Dr. Thornwell saw in the Scriptures, a government of elders or presbyters chosen by the people, chosen for their age and experience, or because they possessed those qualifications which are usually associated with age or are the result of experience. There is, however, this marked difference between this divinely given mode of government and its counterpart in the State. In the State, the representative rules for the benefit of the people in accordance with a humanly made constitution, which he interprets and applies by merely human reason and the light of nature. In the Church, the ruler rules by a divine constitution and is guided by divine laws interpreted for him by the Spirit of God. The function of the people is to elect the rulers and nothing more. Having been elected, the elder becomes the deputy of God, whose sole function is to learn and apply the law of God as that is revealed with sufficient fullness in the Bible. If that be the best human government in which the wisest and best men are selected to rule according to their best information and judgment, how vastly more splendid a thing is this God-given government in which the most godly and most discreet men are selected to rule by a divinely given and divinely interpreted law! Consider another aspect of this question. It is admitted on all sides that the strongest and most effective form of government would be the absolute monarchy, provided the monarch were wise and good. But seeing there can be no security for the wisdom and the character of the monarch, the repre-

sentative republic is the best form to secure the equilibrium of efficiency and human freedom. It is noteworthy that this Scriptural government provides for the advantages of both, while a republic in its human administration does not cease to be an absolute monarchy, inasmuch as it is the Kingdom of Christ.

So much for the general theory of it. As to its mechanism, there are two orders of officers: the deacons, to minister on the temporal side of the Church's life, and the ruling elders or presbyters, to rule. Of the presbyters there are two classes, those who rule only and those who also preach the Word, or "labor in the Word and doctrine," as well as rule. The preachers exercise their special function of preaching severally or as individuals, but the elders, whether preachers or not, exercise their function of rule jointly in courts called Presbyteries, because composed of presbyters. When the ministers and the ruling elders meet in the courts, they meet on a plane of absolute equality of authority. Each local congregation has its Presbytery, called for convenience the "Session," composed of the pastor and his associate ruling elders. Where there are a number of neighboring congregations, a higher Presbytery may be formed of representatives of the sessions and called specially by the name "Presbytery." When the area is enlarged, a number of Presbyteries may be formed, uniting in a still higher court, which is called a "Synod." A number of Synods unite in a higher court, called the "General Assembly." And thus the system is elastic and so susceptible of expansion as at length to embrace all the Christians in the world and illustrate the universality and unity of the Church.

Let us examine another aspect of the case. It has been found by reason and experience that the representative republic may be still further reinforced and strengthened if, instead of committing the whole authority to one body of legislators, there are two bodies, like our Senate and House of Representatives, of co-ordinate jurisdiction, whose members are elected on a different principle and have a different tenure of office. Dr. Thornwell found the counterpart of that in the Presbyterian system of the Scriptures. We do not have two separate and co-ordinate courts for the same territory, but we do have two classes of presbyters, those who rule only and those who also preach. Sitting in the same court and possessed of equal au-

thority, they are of two classes, with a different tenure of office and elected on a different principle, and so regard all questions from a somewhat different point of view.

Out of the promulgation of these views by Doctors Thornwell and Breckinridge and others grew a long controversy as to the nature of the office of ruling elder. Is the ruling elder the same as the presbyter spoken of in the Bible, or is the term presbyter confined to the minister of the Word? Is the presence of a ruling elder necessary to make a quorum in a Church court? Has the ruling elder a right to lay his hands on the head of a minister in ordination? To some it may seem a trivial question and one unworthy of the serious attention of great men, whether or not the elder may lay hands on a minister; but back of it lay questions that reach to the foundation of things: the question of what God meant by the office of presbyter; the question of the meaning of the ministry of the Word. Is it a governing caste, with exclusive privileges and a special official grace, or are the officers (the presbyters, including both preachers and ruling elders) mere ministers or servants, all alike representatives of the people and chosen by them; the question of the nature of ordination, Is it a charm or a magical rite by which an official character is imparted, or is it merely an act of government, a formality by which those already in office induct a new officer into office; the question of the place of the people in the Church, Are they merely the subjects of the Church, or do they compose the Church, whose ministers and servants the officers are? This subject also was included in the Rochester debate. Dr. Hodge contended that the elder was merely the delegate of the people to offset the power of what he called the "clergy"; that the elders being of a different order from the minister could not impose hands on a minister in ordination on the ground that they could not confer on others what they did not themselves possess. Dr. Thornwell charged that such views were prelatical and claimed that papacy itself was introduced into the Church by the gradual denial to the elders of the right to impose hands in ordination. Dr. Thornwell's views on this subject seem to us now as the simple primer of Church government. Few of us have ever known anything else; but there are brethren in this Synod who remember the controversy, and in other days heard the contention that an elder had no right to impose hands in the

ordination of a minister, because he could not impart to another what he did not possess himself.

4. For this Church, thus organized, he also found in the Word of God a specific vocation and a circumscribed sphere of action. The argument that the Church is a divine institution for the benefit of man, and that therefore the Church may embark in anything that is for the benefit of man, had no weight with him. The argument that the Church is a moral institution, and can do anything to advance morality, had no weight with him. The argument that the Church is spiritual, and may employ any innocent means it chooses for the accomplishment of spiritual results, did not weigh with him. In answer to the question, "What is the purpose of the Church, for what was it intended, and what may it do?" he repaired to his guiding principle, "The Bible, the **Bibly** only, is the religion of Protestants," and sought for light in the Scriptures. There he found that the Church is exclusively religious in its organization and its methods. The Church has four clearly defined duties: First, it is to preach the gospel of free salvation through the atonement of Christ: "The Spirit and the Bride say come." Second, it is to gather, educate and discipline believers: "The edifying of the body of Christ," the apostle declares, is one of the purposes of Church organization. Third, it is to be a witness for the truth; it is called "the pillar and ground of the truth." Fourth, it is to take order for the extension of the kingdom into all the world: "Go ye into, all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." To give merely secular education, to cultivate the merely natural virtues, to engage in a beneficence that terminates in physical, social and civic betterment, but does not seek the salvation of the soul from sin and ruin; these, nor one nor all of them, are within the sphere of the Church's mission. Touching them all, he would use the language of Christ, "Let the dead bury their dead." Hence we find him opposing all schemes for enlisting the Church in secular education. He opposed any direct alliance between the Church and temperance societies or other societies for mere moral reform. He likewise opposed making the Church ancillary to voluntary benevolent societies. Were he living in this day, he would, no doubt, be opposed to "social service" as a part of the Church's work, scientific sanitation, wholesome food, social purity, temperance, proper relations between capital and labor. He

would be opposed to the "institutional church," in which the Church is threatened to be strangled by the institutions. He would be opposed to "civic righteousness" as a part of the Church's work, the purifying of political methods, the enactment of better laws, the enforcement of existing laws. It was not that a man of his transcendent learning depreciated education, or that a man of his exalted sense of virtue and of the dignity of manhood was indifferent to sobriety and its kindred virtues; or that a man of his sympathetic nature failed to respond to human suffering. But what commission had the Church to teach the classics or the sciences or profane history? What commission had the Church to seek an improvement in morals only, leaving men dead in trespasses and in sins, healing the hurt a little, while it was empowered of Heaven to offer the renewal of the whole man after the image of Christ? Accordingly, in the Cincinnati Assembly, where he was a commanding influence, though not a member of the committee on slavery, he was consulted by that committee and prepared the report which it presented and which the Assembly adopted, and which fixed the attitude of the Church towards slavery for years to come. And in the Baltimore Assembly of 1848, in a report on temperance societies, speaking of the Church, he uses this language: "Its ends are holiness of life and the manifestation of the riches and glory of divine grace, and not simply morality, decency and good order, which may to some extent be secured without faith in a Redeemer, or the transforming efficiency of the Holy Spirit." And in the Indianapolis Assembly of 1859 occurred a most dramatic incident in this connection. Exhausted by his Assembly duties and by loss of sleep, he sat by his friend, Dr. Palmer, leaned his head upon his shoulder and fell asleep. A report was presented in which it was proposed that the Assembly formally give its countenance to a society for the colonization of Southern slaves in Africa. Dr. Palmer aroused him and told him what was pending and urged him to take the platform at once and speak, since he had given special study to the questions involved. He did so. To speak upon such short notice and under those trying physical conditions, to overcome the natural prejudice against a Southern man and a slave owner, to win confidence in his patriotism, to command an interest in the abstract principles in the case, to neutralize the political enthusiasm "upon which the advocates of the report had counted, to

snatch complete victory from foregone defeat, to do all this in a brief speech and sit down amidst uncontrollable applause, was one of the most brilliant achievements ever witnessed in a deliberative Assembly.

But of all the questions of this character, tending to obscure the purely spiritual nature of the Church's mission and work, that which far exceeds all others in practical menace is the question of the relations of Church and State. The danger in this case is enhanced by a multitude of circumstances. No service of Dr. Thornwell's to the cause of the Church was more important than his elucidation of this intricate subject. To deal properly with such a subject, it was necessary not only to have a knowledge of Church law, but also of the nature and history of civil government. In this respect Dr. Thornwell was fully qualified to cope with the question. Mr. Calhoun said of him, after his first interview: "I was not prepared for the thorough acquaintance he exhibited with all the topics that are generally familiar only to statesmen." Chancellor Job Johnston said of his article on the state of the country: "I took up the article with trepidation, fearing that a divine would make a muddle of the question, but I found it a model state paper." He held to the absolute severance of Church and State—the pure spirituality of the one, the distinct secularity of the other.

The occasion which led to Dr. Thornwell's greatest activity in this connection was the breaking out of the War Between the States. When the General Assembly met in Philadelphia in 1861 Fort Sumter had just fallen. The heart of the North was inflamed. One church body after another had proven a victim. It had been hoped that the doors of the Presbyterian Assembly would be barred against political passion. Excitement throughout the country was volcanic. The increase of the excitement within the Assembly itself could be measured from day to day. Telegraphic communication was kept up between members of the Assembly and members of the President's cabinet touching the kind of deliverance the Assembly should make. The Assembly became a boiling caldron of passionate political debate, from which issued the declaration that the Assembly was "under obligation to promote and perpetuate the integrity of the United States and to strengthen, uphold and encourage the central government." There was no question as to the duty of a citizen to

be loyal to the existing government. It was a question whether the loyalty of a citizen in a seceding State was due first to the state government or to the central government. It was this purely political question which the Assembly decided. Dr. Hodge and a number of associates entered a protest on the grounds that the paper adopted by the Assembly does decide a political question "and that the Assembly in deciding this question made a political opinion a condition of communion in the Christian Church." Dr. Thornwell was not a member of that Assembly, but he and others were indefatigable in their efforts, by correspondence and otherwise, to effect the union of the seceding Presbyteries into a General Assembly of the Confederate States. His hopes were realized, and the first General Assembly of the Confederate States convened in Augusta, Georgia, December 4th, 1861. He was a towering figure in that body. His most important service was the preparation for the Assembly of an "Address to All the Churches of Jesus Christ Throughout the Earth," a defense of our Church in its separation from the old Church, as noble a specimen of ecclesiastical composition as the literature of all the ages can afford. Dr. Palmer says of it: "It was pervaded with a sacramental fervor which stamped upon it the impression of a sacred and binding covenant." In his discussion of the relation of Church and State, in that address, occurs this sentence: "They (Church and State) are as planets moving in different orbits, and unless each is confined to its own track, the consequences may be as disastrous in the moral world as a collision of different spheres in the world of matter."*

Before passing from this subject, let me further say that whilst Dr. Thornwell believed that the Church had a specific vocation and a circumscribed sphere of action, he also believed that the effect of its work was generic, and that it was felt in every department of human thought, experience and effort. The object of the Church is to secure the regeneration and sanctification of man—to quicken his conscience, to reinforce his will. Place a man thus restored by divine grace amidst the responsibilities of

*At this point the Rev. Dr. T. H. Law, the Stated Clerk of Synod, who is also Stated Clerk of the Assembly, held up to the view of the congregation the original manuscript of the address here referred to, with the signature of every member of the Assembly affixed to it.

life, and under all circumstances he will act as a Christian should act. If he has children, he will educate them. If he sees human depravity and suffering, he will reclaim the depraved and relieve the suffering. Give him political power of any sort, whether on the hustings, at the polls, in halls of legislation, under the judicial ermine, or in the executive chair, and he will use that power out of conscience towards God. Thus, while the Church must confine herself to the one work of the salvation of souls, souls cannot be saved without leaving a generic impression upon the face of all society.

5. For the work to which the Church is called, Dr. Thornwell found that it was sufficient. It has sufficient organization, sufficient authority and sufficient power. The Church does not need that voluntary societies, without or within the Church, should come to its assistance to supply any supposed deficiencies in its organization. The Church itself has no authority and has no need to devise agencies of her own in addition to those expressly given in the Scriptures or necessarily growing out of those so given. She may not delegate her authority to any other body, or transfer her responsibility. Hence the bitter controversy concerning "Boards" as a means of conducting the work of the Church. Prior to the disruption in 1837, Home and Foreign Missions and other Church work were conducted by voluntary organizations, outside of the jurisdiction of the Church, called "Boards." Dr. Thornwell perfectly agreed with Dr. Breckinridge and other leaders in the Church that these "Boards" usurped the functions of the Church. It is the mission of the Church to evangelize the world. The Church is a missionary society; every member of the Church is a member of a missionary society. On joining this missionary society, by the very act of joining, one is committed to the doing of something for the spread of the gospel. The Church with such a membership, with its equipment of officers and courts, with its authority, with the Spirit of God dwelling within her, is competent to do whatever is necessary for carrying the gospel to every creature in the world. Therefore, the seizing of this work by a voluntary society is unnecessary and a usurpation. Believing in these views, Dr. Thornwell soon became a recognized leader of the opposition to "Boards." Even after the disruption, the old school Assembly did not wholly emancipate itself from the former means

of doing Church work. Instead of the Church's assuming complete control of all its proper work after the separation, it adopted a new kind of Boards in lieu of the old denominational Boards, Presbyterian Boards instead of non-sectarian Boards. These Boards were brought nearer to the Church by being composed of Presbyterians, by propagating a Presbyterian gospel, by having members of the Board elected by the Assembly and by having annual reports made to the Assembly. Dr. Thornwell antagonized these new Boards on several grounds. He held that they were too large and unwieldy, their membership being scattered over the whole territory of the Church, so that only a few members could attend the meetings. Those few members who attended and controlled the business became autocratic and defied the authority of the Assembly. The Boards became, as he expressed it, not "organs" of the Church as they should be, but independent and competing "organisms." He also violently opposed a custom that had grown up in connection with the Boards, of conferring honorary life memberships upon persons who contributed given amounts for their work. He did not hesitate to describe this as a selling of ecclesiastical honors, and did not shrink from calling it "Simony." He believed that the true principle upon which money should be given for Church work is that of the expression of worship towards God. In the Rochester Assembly he contended for radical changes in the system. This it was that brought on the great debate with Dr. Hodge in that Assembly—a debate which, as we have seen, took a wide range into a number of related subjects. In the heat of debate, Dr. Hodge declared that Dr. Thornwell's views were "hyper—hyper—hyper—high-church Presbyterianism!" which caused Dr. Thornwell to reply that the views of Dr. Hodge were "no—no—no Presbyterianism, no—no—no Churchism!"—"a touch of democracy and a touch of prelacy, a large slice of Quakerism, but no Presbyterianism."

Dr. Thornwell's views were rejected by a large vote. He then offered a protest, but subsequently a paper was adopted by the Assembly conceding so much of what he had contended for that he withdrew his protest. Applause greeted this generous act. One who is ignorant of the history of the Rochester Assembly and who merely compares accounts of the modern operation of Northern Boards and Southern Committees is led to think that

there is not enough difference between the debaters to justify so great a debate, and that the chief difference is in the name. Dr. Thornwell strongly maintained that he cared nothing for a name; it was the principle he sought. It was because the Rochester Assembly finally modified the Boards in accordance with his views that the operations of those Boards became more like those of our Committees. And so Dr. Thornwell has left an indelible mark upon the operations of the Northern Church itself. But that a radical difference between Boards and Committees still remained is shown by the definitions of the two published by Dr. Hodge himself in 1882. Of the Board he says that it "has full powers to transact all the business of the missionary cause, only requiring the Board to report annually to the General Assembly." Of the Committee he says it "is bound in all cases to act according to the instruction of the Assembly." At the organization of the Southern Church eighteen months later, Dr. Thornwell's views were adopted throughout. The work of the Church was placed in charge of small Committees, whose members were to live close to the central office of administration and whose officers were to be chosen by the Assembly itself. The Committees were to make annual reports to the Assembly. These reports were to be carefully digested, and the Assembly was thus to control directly its own work. Simplicity of organization and directness of control by the divinely appointed Church courts are the distinct characteristics of the new plan. How far the last Assembly at Bristol, Tennessee, may have departed from this ideal in permitting the Committees to elect any of their own executive officers, and what the significance and results of the change may be, are questions worthy of our serious consideration. The men selected by these Committees are my personal friends. I greatly admire them and staunchly support them, but no personal consideration can obscure the fact that the Assembly has changed its method of conducting the Church's work, and the new method is a hybrid between the views of Dr. Thornwell and those of Dr. Hodge.

Another incident at the Augusta Assembly greatly rejoiced Dr. Thornwell. Judge Shepherd, of North Carolina, chairman of a committee of distinguished elders to report a charter for the Church, recommended the appointment of a Board of Trustees, of which the various Committees of Church work were to be branches, the Board to receive for the Committees and

transfer to them all gifts, conveyances, transfers of estate and legacies. The object of this plan was to prevent the accumulation of power in the various Committees, such as had existed in the old Church, and to concentrate the power in the hands of a single board immediately under the Assembly's control. Judge Shepherd was subjected to a spirited cross-fire of questions from all over the house, till at length Chancellor Job Johnston, of South Carolina, remarked: "I think the Judge has passed a good examination, and I hope he will be allowed to retire." To this Dr. Thornwell replied, with a glow of animation suffusing his face: "To me this is a most delightful paper. I can find nothing in it to be objected to, and I move therefore that it be received." Dr. Palmer says, with reference to the incident: "It was a scene of dramatic interest the exact parallel with which we never had witnessed in a Church court."

6. He believed that when the courts act within their authority, that authority is divine and is binding on the consciences of those who are subject to these courts. In 1845 he accepted a call to the pastorate of the Second Church of Baltimore, and the Presbytery of Charleston granted him a letter of dismissal to the Baltimore Presbytery. There occurred a delay in his presenting that letter, and circumstances changed. The Presbytery of Charleston recalled the letter of dismissal. Dr. Palmer says of this act of the Presbytery: "It is the strongest illustration of Presbyterial power of which the writer is aware." But he at once acquiesced, believing that Presbytery had divine authority to control his movements. When Dr. Palmer was called from the Seminary to the First Church of New Orleans, and the question came before the Synod of South Carolina, many urged that the Synod ought to be governed by Dr. Palmer's own convictions of duty. But Dr. Thornwell strongly contended that it was the duty of the Synod to decide this question regardless of Dr. Palmer's personal convictions. Dr. Palmer himself agreed with that construction of the law.

7. His entire theory of the Church has found formal expression in a monumental book—*The Book of Church Order*. He was chairman of a committee of the old Assembly to recast the Rules of Discipline and had presented a draft of the new rules. The Assembly, however, did not act upon the report before the division of the Church. The Southern Assembly, in December,

1861, appointed him on a similar committee to revise the *Rules of Discipline* and also to revise the *Form of Government*. Dr. Thornwell died within eight months. Dr. John B. Adger, his associate and successor, intended to write a history of the preparation of our *Book of Church Order*. He died, however, without carrying that purpose into effect. No one else could now write its history. It is well assured that the *Rules of Discipline* were recast again before being presented to the Southern Church. Whether Dr. Thornwell did any work upon that book or any on the *Form of Government* is not known. The members of the committee, however, were in hearty sympathy with him in all his views of Church government, and whilst he may not have prepared the *Book on Church Order*, it unquestionably expresses his views and is in a large measure the result of his work and influence. Concerning that book, the Chicago *Interior* declared that "in its style it is worthy to be the companion of the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms." The Presbyterian *Banner* said of it: "It is Presbyterianism of the highest and purest kind." Dr. West, a Northern Presbyterian minister of great experience and distinction as an ecclesiologist, says: "It is superior in every way to any Presbyterian manual of discipline I have ever seen."

Fathers and Brethren, my task draws to its close. I do not discuss dead issues nor engage in useless debate of questions forever settled. It would not be worth your while nor mine merely to celebrate the glories of the past or the deeds of a hero. These conflicts which engaged Dr. Thornwell's great gifts will ever call for the loyal and courageous support of those who love the Kingdom of Christ. So long as there is ecclesiastical ambition, so long as there is pride of human inventions, so long as there is hostility to God and resentment of authority in religion, so long as Satan is active in the Church of God, just so long will these same questions be encountered and must we dare and endure for Christ's crown and covenant. Dr. Thornwell's genius showed itself quite as much in the amazing power with which he aroused the Church to a sense of the importance of these things and to decisive action upon them as in the masterly manner in which he wrought out his system. Dr. Conrad Speece tells this story of Patrick Henry. He was once employed in a murder trial in the city of Richmond. It was quite late at night when

he rose to make his speech. The house was still thronged with people who were waiting for his time to speak, though many of them had fallen asleep. He began by apologizing for speaking at that late hour and said he would not think of detaining them longer if it were not for the fact that in this case human blood was concerned. He pronounced the four words, "human blood is concerned," in such a manner that the whole audience was instantly aroused and thrilled. They listened to him with rapt attention as long as he chose to speak. What was it that had so startling an effect upon that sleeping audience? Had the orator's tones imparted to human blood a value it had not possessed before? No, he had simply awakened them to a sense of the value it always has, even when men are indifferent and asleep. In the same way the eloquence of Dr. Thornwell aroused a dormant Church to an appreciation of the importance that always invests these questions, and that no torpor on our part can diminish.

How many and how powerful are the motives which inspire us to be faithful! It has been remarked by historians that Presbyterian Church government had a controlling influence in determining the form of government for the United States. If that be true, how important it is, even to secular government, that we should somewhere preserve that model in its purity, against the days when the Ship of State will encounter every species of tempest, of every degree of violence and danger! If this Church government be divine, it is indestructible. It may be obscured and smothered by human inventions in one place, but somewhere in the extensive Kingdom of Christ it will reappear, in Korea, in China, or it may even be in Africa. Let us beware lest, proving unfaithful, the Kingdom be taken from us and given to another nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

And now once more let us turn and get a last view of Dr. Thornwell's life as a whole. With what reverence did he view the Church as the work of Jehovah! How dare a sinful man change such an ordinance of God even in the smallest particular! How dare a man, however holy might be the office he fills, put forth his hand to touch the Ark of God, however great might seem its danger! And who is it that thus bows so reverently in the presence of the Most High? He is a youth who, by his own efforts and without the aid of **adventitious** circumstances, achieves

the highest literary, social and ecclesiastical distinction. He is conscious of powers that rank him with the greatest intellects of history. See this imperial youth standing at the entrance of life, with vaulting pride, unabashed before the throne of God, gazing defiance into the face of **Diety**, gnashing his teeth, raising his hand aloft and crying, "I shall be damned, but I will demonstrate to the assembled universe that I am not to blame." See him again when he has heard the voice of God, and his heart is touched and subdued, prostrate before God, always asking, like Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"