"I am thrilled to see these articles from Charles Hodge put together in book form and made accessible for a wider audience. With clear writing, careful scholarship, and lucid argumentation, Hodge addresses some of the most important issues of ecclesiology in his day—which happen to still be some of the most important issues in our day. I hope that this volume will be read by many students, pastors, elders, and thoughtful Christians in our churches."

Kevin DeYoung
Senior Pastor, Christ Covenant Church (Matthews, NC);
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology,
Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte)

"Charles Hodge's concerns over the Oxford Movement in the Anglican Church and the Mercersburg Theology in the German Reformed Church remain as pertinent today as they were then. This is why Gary Steward's reprisal of these important controversies is so needed and timely. Will the significance of the church in its essentially invisible character prevail, or will some overly objective definition dominate? Some views circulating in Reformed circles today tend to undermine the Westminster Confession's definition of the church as 'the communion of saints,' thus rendering the church into a merely external organization. These views will result in nominalism and the politicization of the church's mission. We need to hear Hodge's warnings about the true character of the church, lest we end up subverting the gospel and the spiritual mission of the church to gather and perfect the saints."

Alan Strange
Professor of Church History,
Mid-America Reformed Seminary

The Church and the Lord's Supper

CHARLES HODGE

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Edited by Gary Steward

joshua press

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Introduction

by Gary Steward

The doctrines of the Church, the sacraments, and the gospel are all intertwined. The position one adopts in any one area necessarily affects the others. Certain views of the Lord's Supper can determine how one answers the fundamental question, "What must I do to be saved?" An evangelical answer to this question requires an evangelical view of the church and the sacraments.

Charles Hodge (1797–1878) was one of America's greatest nineteenth-century theologians. He understood the interrelated nature of these various doctrines. In his own day, Hodge believed that various views of the Church making inroads among Protestant evangelicals were undercutting the fundamental assertions of the Protestant gospel. Some of these views were being circulated in England by members of the High Church party of the Church of England, also known as "Tractarians" or adherents of "the Oxford Movement." In America, John Williamson Nevin and Phillip Schaff of Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, started a school of thought that promoted views of the church worked out against the backdrop of Second Great Awakening revivalism. Both of these groups elevated the institutional church and the administration of the sacraments to a degree that Hodge found alarming. Indeed, he believed these moves were nothing less than a reversion to Roman Catholicism and an abandonment of the evangelical gospel as traditionally espoused by Protestants.

It is against this backdrop that Hodge articulated his doctrine of the church in a number of articles that originally appeared in *The Princeton Review*. Hodge's main point in these articles was to

assert that the Church of Jesus Christ is composed of all true believers who are spiritually united to Christ and to each other by the Holy Spirit. There is no external institution or organization that can lay claim to being the one true Church.

After reading the selected articles in this book, some may question whether Hodge's view necessarily leads to a Baptistic view of regenerate church membership. This was not the case for Hodge, and he did not follow any such implication in that direction. Hodge maintained the confessional Presbyterian views that the "visible church" consists of believers and their children, while the Church in its invisible and essentially spiritual nature consists only of Spirit-regenerated believers.[1]

Many in our own day are hungry for a mystical sense of the transcendent in their church experiences. Believers, having grown tired of faddish, therapeutic, consumeristic, and entertainment-oriented approaches to church life, are desirous of richer and more historical experiences. Many are thereby attracted to the kind of High Church ritualism and sacramentalism that Hodge felt was so destructive to personal faith in the gospel. He wrote these articles with a clear pastoral concern in mind, and it is with this same spirit and same concern that these articles are commended to you today.

The articles reprinted here have been slightly edited from how they first appeared in the volumes of *The Princeton Review*. All Latin and Greek has been translated, and minor changes have been made in capitalization, punctuation, and spelling to make these articles conform more closely with modern usage.

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[1] Hodge's fullest argument for this view can be found in his article "The Church Membership of Infants," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 30 (1858): 347–389. See also Charles Hodge, "Bishop McIlvaine on the Church," *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 27 (1855): 355–357.

Chapter 1

A Summary of the Evangelical Doctrine of the Church[1]

The Church consists of those who are united to Christ by faith. He is the head; they severally are his members, collectively his body, which is the Church. As nothing but graduation is required to make a man an alumnus of a college, as all graduates are alumni, no one not a graduate is an alumnus; so nothing but faith in Christ is necessary to make a man a member of the true Church; all believers are members; and no one not a believer is or can be a member. The Church, therefore, consists of true believers scattered abroad throughout the world, united to Christ and to each other by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

Christ has commanded his people to associate themselves together in outward visible societies for the purposes of public worship, edification and mutual watch and care.

He has commanded them to receive into these societies, and to regard and treat as members of his body, all who, possessing competent knowledge, make a credible profession of faith and obedience. But as they cannot discern the heart, it must follow that many who are not true believers would be received into these societies, and be regarded and treated as members of the Church, before men, though they are not such in the sight of God. As union with the Church depends solely on union with Christ its head, by

[1] This chapter is excerpted from an article by Hodge entitled "Bishop McIlvaine on the Church," *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 27 (1855): 350–359. In this article, Hodge commended the Episcopalian Bishop Charles P. McIlvaine's evangelical doctrine of the church, as it appeared in McIlvaine's *The Truth and Life* (New York: Robert Carter, 1855).

faith, and not on union with these external societies; and as union with these societies, though a duty, is not in all cases essential, of course there may be members of the Church who are not members of these societies as there are members of these societies who are not members of the Church.

The attributes, prerogatives, and promises pertaining to the Church belong to the body of believers, and not to the external organization as such; and to these external organizations, only so far as they are what they profess to be, viz., associations of believers.

As we cannot discern the heart, we are bound to regard and treat as believers all who make a credible profession of faith, and to regard and treat all associations of credible believers for church purposes, as true Churches.

It is universally agreed that Christ has commanded his people to associate in external organizations, and that thus, as well as in other ways, the true Church becomes visible among men. But there is great diversity of opinion as to how far the mode of external organization is prescribed in the Scriptures. Some hold that nothing is absolutely enjoined on this subject, but that the Church is at liberty to assume what outward government she deems best suited to her circumstances. She may be Congregational, Presbyterian, or Prelatical, just as she sees fit, according to the saying of Stillingfleet, "Government is of God, the form of man;" and according to the analogy of civil governments, which may rightfully assume the democratical, aristocratical, or monarchical form, as the people may determine.[2] Secondly, others hold that while

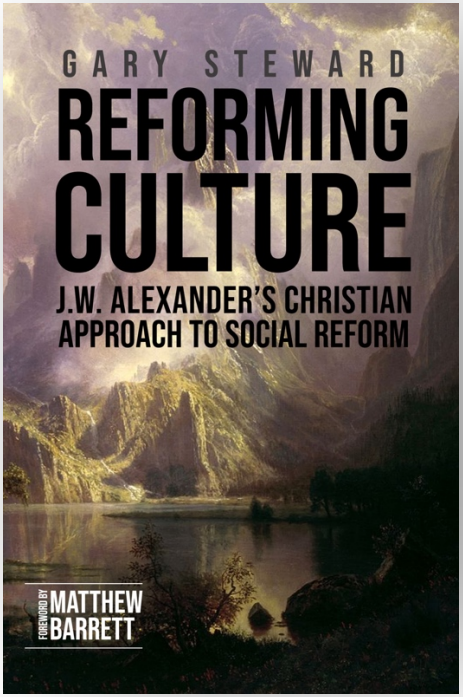
[2] Edward Stillingfleet (1635–1699) was an Anglican clergyman and scholar. According to him, "[church government] is necessary by way of divine command…but which particular way or form it must be, is wholly left to the prudence of those in whose power and trust it is to see the peace of the church be secured on lasting foundations" (Edward Stillingfleete, *Irenicum: A Weapon-Salve for the Churches Wounds, or The Divine Right of Particular Forms of Church-Government: Discuss'd and Examin'd according to the Principles of the Law of Nature* (London: Henry Mortlock, 1662), 3.

Christ has prescribed certain principles relating to the organization of the Church, he has left much, as to the details, discretionary. This is the common opinion of Protestants, and especially of Presbyterians; and whether recognized *in thesi*[3] or not, is practically acted upon by every religious denomination on earth. Thirdly, others again hold that everything in the government or polity of the Church is prescribed in the Scriptures; that the Church has no more discretion in this matter than she has in matters of doctrine; and that whatever is not enjoined, and, therefore, obligatory *jure divino*,[4] is forbidden and unlawful.

Any of these theories of Church government is consistent with the Protestant doctrine as to the nature of the Church. We may believe that the Church consists of true Christians, and yet believe that they are at liberty to assume what outward organization they please; or that their discretion is limited to matters of detail; or that they have no discretion in the premises. All that that doctrine requires, is that we hold that the Church is independent of all forms of external organization. She may exist under any form, or in the persons of scattered believers, for the obvious reason that she owes her existence not to outward organization, but to union with Christ. So long, therefore, as there are believers in the world, the Church is in the world. These believers are bound, whenever practicable, to unite in an outward organization; and the mode or form of that organization is, according to our doctrine, prescribed, to a certain extent, in the word of God; but the Church is no more dependent on such organization than the soul is upon the body.

[3] Latin for "as a proposition."
[4] Latin for "by divine right."

Other books by Gary Steward



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