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SONS OF THE PROPHETS

*Leaders in Protestantism from
Princeton Seminary*

EDITED BY HUGH T. KERR



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I. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER (1772-1851)

*Founding Father**

BY JOHN A. MACKAY

NOT infrequently, as history shows, the founder of an institution becomes its abiding image. When this happens, the institution manifests its genius and fulfills its destiny in the measure in which it reflects the spirit and dream of the person who brought it into being. This has been superlatively true of the theological seminary which was established in the New Jersey village of Princeton in the year 1812.

The Seminary's founder and first professor, Archibald Alexander, was described a century later by the church historian, John DeWitt, as "one of the largest and most disciplined intellects the American Church has produced." He can, without sentimentality, be regarded as the authentic soul and symbol of Princeton Theological Seminary. This Christian scholar and churchman, who throughout his long life lived on the frontiers of knowledge and the Church's total mission, is Princeton Seminary's most cherished and inspiring image.

I

Archibald Alexander was born on April 17, 1772, near Lexington, Virginia. His parents were Presbyterians of Scotch-

* The only important biography of Archibald Alexander was prepared by his son James Waddell Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander* (1854). See also W. B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, Volume III, 1857-1869, pp. 612-626; John DeWitt, "Archibald Alexander's Preparation for His Professorship," *Princeton Theological Review*, Volume III, No. 4, Oct. 1905, pp. 573-594; the bio-bibliographical account in *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, Index Volume, 1871, pp. 42-67. Alexander's books and many unpublished manuscripts are in Speer Library, Princeton Seminary; correspondence and other materials are in Firestone Library, Princeton University.

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Irish ancestry, as were so many other American colonists of the pre-Revolutionary era. Brought up in the lovely valley in which Lexington is located, young Archibald developed, in early youth, a passionate love of nature. This passion for the world around him, a veritable "emotion of the sublime," produced a life-long devotion to natural science.

Equally noteworthy was the profound religious temperament of this Virginia boy. Even before entering his teens, he developed a love for the Bible and for quiet meditation. In the years that succeeded the Revolutionary War, religion in American Presbyterian circles was of a very conventional and formalistic character. A Baptist lady of the period is quoted by the biographer of Archibald Alexander as remarking, "Presbyterians were sound in doctrine, but deficient in inward experience."¹ They reflected the spirit of the Scottish "Moderates," for whom the ethical, the dogmatic, and the aesthetic formed the core of religion, and who acclaimed cultural interests on the part of Church members as being more important than spiritual enthusiasm, which they in fact regarded with both suspicion and disdain. It is of interest to observe that a great Princetonian of an earlier period, John Witherspoon, had engaged in an historic debate with the Moderates immediately before leaving his native Scotland to become President of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University.

In an atmosphere marked by hostility to any manifestation of ardor in Church life, where the exciting phenomenon of religious conversion was frowned upon as most un-Presbyterian and something to be discouraged, Archibald Alexander passed through a profound experience of spiritual change. While still in his seventeenth year, he entered upon a new epoch of his life. Following a period of intense dissatisfaction with himself as he was, and anxiously longing for a personal acquaintanceship with God as Saviour, he joined that succession of "new men in Christ" which includes St. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. A year

¹ James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, New York: Scribner, 1854, p. 39.

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before his death, when he was seventy-eight years of age, Alexander would still return in intimate conversation to the time when his natural religiosity became evangelical faith, when Jesus Christ became a transforming reality in his life and the object of his passionate devotion.

This decisive, though quite undramatic, experience shaped Alexander's thought and behavior through all the coming years. Like that famous Spaniard, Raymond Lull, he could say of Jesus Christ, "I have one passion in life and it is He." Thus Alexander came to approach all questions concerning the human and the divine from a profoundly Christo-centric perspective. "His peculiar piety," said Cortlandt van Rensselaer while delivering the memorial oration after Alexander had passed away, "was the basis of his excellence." This piety, which had its origin in spiritual rebirth, its pivotal center in Christ, its charter in Holy Scripture, its pattern in New Testament sainthood, and its objective in Christian witness in the Church and in the world, was poles apart from the purely emotional and individualistic piosity of the religious zealot. While he proclaimed the importance of zeal, Archibald Alexander never ceased to deprecate "zeal without knowledge," that is, the unenlightened fervor of the fanatic. His favorite symbol of dedicated Christian living was the green meadow refreshed by rain showers from above, rather than the fierce flame of embers kindled from beneath. But in every case the ultimate norm of true Christian devotion was, for this Virginian, a passion to do good to men because of a sincere love for people. His life as a Christian was, in theory and practice, a reverberation of the words of that dynamic Spanish saint, Teresa of Avila, who used to say to the young women of her religious order, "The Lord demands works" (*Obras quiere el Senor*). She did not mean works to merit or to secure salvation, but works that follow salvation and insure its reality.

Alexander's experience of spiritual rebirth led him to the decision to become a Christian minister. In the United States in those days, just as in Scotland about the same period, the Presbyterian ministry had become to a large extent a profession like other professions and preaching had become a

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mere trade. But for the young man from Lexington, to become a "minister of the Word and Sacraments" was life's highest vocation. To this vocation he felt called by God Himself. He accordingly set about preparing himself for this high office.

In days when colleges were few and theological seminaries as such did not exist, Alexander was fortunate in becoming the pupil of a very remarkable man, William Graham. Graham was a fine scholar and an inspiring teacher. Quite early in their relationship, the teacher said to the student something the latter never forgot. "If you mean ever to be a theologian, you must come at it not by reading but by thinking." In the course of the years, the pupil became a very learned man; but he consistently shunned becoming a mere unreflective dogmatist or an erudite encyclopedist. While retaining an intense thirst for knowledge of all kinds, the pursuit of which he tells us "was never a weariness to me," he cultivated the Socratic approach to truth with which his revered teacher inspired him. The student of divinity developed, among other things, an amazing interest in mathematical and physical investigation. In this, as in other respects, the future head of Princeton Seminary resembled his Scottish counterpart and contemporary, Thomas Chalmers, who was adjudged by Thomas Carlyle the most outstanding Scotsman since John Knox. Chalmers became the first principal of New College, Edinburgh. These two men, who were later to enter into correspondence with one another, incarnated each in his own way the ideals of religious living and scholarly achievement, which in the course of time were to be enshrined in the charter of a seminary in New Jersey with the designation, "piety and learning."

II

His formal preparation completed, Archibald Alexander, after a trial sermon on the text "Thy Word is Truth," was licensed and ordained a Christian minister by the Presbytery of Hanover in Virginia. It is worthy of note that this Presbytery had the distinction of being the first ecclesiastical body

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in the United States to recognize the new revolutionary government of George Washington.

During the closing years of the eighteenth century, the new minister did the work of a rural pastor and itinerant missionary on the colonial frontier of Virginia and Ohio. His apprenticeship as a traveling evangelist, a Presbyterian "circuit rider," helped him to become intimately acquainted with common people and their problems. It came home to him that, in the true apostolic succession, the Word must never cease to become flesh. He learned that they who would witness to the Gospel must win a right to be heard, both by what they themselves are and by what they say and the way they say it. The inspiration of this experience and the lessons derived from it remained with Archibald Alexander to the end of his life.

While he was carrying on his ministry in the American wilderness, without in any way abandoning his passion for learning, the traveling preacher was called to the presidency of a Virginia college called Hampden-Sydney. This college, which had been established in 1783 for the purpose of educating men for the ministry, found itself a decade later in a serious plight. Alexander accepted the call, and in 1796, while in his twenty-fourth year, he was installed in his new office. He took up his academic duties with characteristic enthusiasm. To the pressures of his new responsibilities as a teacher, he later attributed "whatever accuracy he possessed in classical and scientific knowledge." The life of the college received a new impulse from its scholarly young President, who added, moreover, a rich humanity and love of people to his academic labors.

Four years passed. The young President of Hampden-Sydney began to question whether the headship of a college was his true vocation. His health, moreover, had been impaired. In quest of new vigor, and because of a long cherished desire to visit New England, he resigned the presidency in 1801. The northern journey that followed his resignation was destined to exercise a profound influence on his future life.

Having already become acquainted with life on the Amer-

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ican frontier as far west as Ohio, Alexander now moved northward into the land of the Pilgrims, the historic seat of American culture. This journey, which carried him to Boston, Harvard, and Dartmouth, had a broadening influence upon the outlook of Alexander with respect to Christians brought up in a tradition different from his own. The New England Congregationalists on their part received the Virginia educator with great kindness. While their warm hospitality won his heart, they were deeply impressed by this plain and simple man from the South whose first-rate intellectual qualities they recognized. From Dartmouth College came the announcement that he had been appointed Professor of Theology, an appointment which he, however, declined.

When Alexander returned to the South, it was with a mind cleared of many a prejudice and with a new-born appreciation of fellow Christians who engaged in ecclesiastical practices and cherished some theological ideas that he personally did not follow. While continuing through life an unashamed and ardent Presbyterian, a man committed to his Biblical and Christ-centered faith, Archibald Alexander was never a haughty dogmatist. He was nobly sensitive to the ideas and feelings of people whose viewpoints were at variance with his own.

After a year's absence from academic life, during which time his health had been restored and his spirits revived, Alexander resumed his former responsibilities at Hampden-Sydney, where he continued in the office of President until 1807. That year he accepted a call to become the pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, one of the city's largest congregations. He was at the time thirty-five years old and had just married a charming young woman, Janetta Waddell, who was to be his devoted partner for the next fifty years. Thus, in the full glow and exuberance of youth, the man from Virginia became a leading minister in the now historic city which in the first decade of the last century was achieving increasing importance in the life of the young Republic.

III

It was not long before the minister of the Third Presbyterian Church, which was known also as the Pine Street Church, was achieving renown as an impressive pulpit orator. To what has been described as a "disciplined mind, theological knowledge, rich imagination, and evangelical zeal," he added an extraordinary capacity for extemporaneous utterance which he continued to manifest throughout life. Because of this particular gift, the pastor of the Third Church made an extraordinary impact upon his people. "I have never succeeded in getting a discourse by heart," he is quoted as saying. As was the custom of the famous English preacher, F. W. Robertson of Brighton, Alexander, when he did write his sermons, wrote them after delivery.

Throughout his entire Philadelphia ministry, Alexander was an indefatigable reader of the writings of others. He devoted himself especially to mastering the theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. And it was not merely the theologians in the Reformed tradition whose works he read; his study also embraced the theological writings of Lutherans and Roman Catholics of that period. In this respect as in others, he was an everlasting frontiersman. On Sundays his words thrilled common folk; during the week the people's preacher absorbed the words of the learned whether written in English or in Latin.

The popular preacher of Pine Street was also a warm and tender pastor. In the great Pauline tradition, Archibald Alexander had a shepherd's heart. He loved people and was the friend and counselor of all who needed help. Among his writings are a series of most diverse pastoral letters, the text of which has been preserved. In this epistolary series are letters to young people and to aged folk, to persons who had suffered affliction, to widows and to widowers.

Nowhere does the soul of the preacher blend so perfectly and symbolically with the heart of the pastor as in the discourse Alexander was asked to deliver at a special service which was held on the night of December 28, 1811, following

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the burning of the theater in Richmond. In this conflagration, seventy-five persons lost their lives, including the Governor of the state of Virginia. Speaking from the text "Weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15) the preacher analyzed and applied the principle of sympathy as prescribed by the Christian religion in contrast to the cold impassivity of the Stoic ethic. "One leading difference," he said, "between the system of ethics prescribed by the Stoics and that inculcated by Christianity is that, whilst the former aims at eradicating the passions, the latter endeavors to regulate them, and direct them into their proper channels. . . . The great Author of our being has implanted the principle of sympathy deeply in human nature and has made the susceptibility of feeling the sorrows of another as extensive as the race of man. This principle of sympathy, whilst it indicates the unity of our species, seems to form a mysterious bond of connection between all its members."

After describing the horror that had befallen the city, and elaborating its significance as an example of the sorrows and uncertainties that beset man's mortal life, Alexander extolled what religion could mean for all suffering and concerned people. "But in order to enjoy the consolation of religion," he went on, "we must practice its precepts, and in order to practice its precepts, we must experience its power. True religion is not a form but a living principle within, not a name but an active energetic influence which governs the whole man and directs his views and exertions to the noblest object. . . . Therefore," he concluded, addressing himself in particular to the Virginia students of medicine who had invited him to conduct the service, "become real Christians; make religion a personal concern; attend to it without delay."

Loyal to his concept of "real Christian," Archibald Alexander did not limit his concern to the conscientious fulfillment of the duties connected with the pastoral ministry. This visionary crusader continued to be a frontiersman in the heart of the great growing city. Projects designed to meet needs in society or in the Church, whether in the city itself, throughout the new nation, or beyond its bounds, were initiated by him,

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or received his support. Here are some manifestations of his spirit: He introduced his congregation to the novelty of Sunday evening services, which became very popular. Concerned about the need of inculcating evangelical truth beyond ecclesiastical frontiers, he prepared the manuscript of a religious novel called "Eudocia," which, unfortunately, was never published. He launched the idea of a religious newspaper before any such journal existed. There was in Philadelphia at that time an organization called "The Humane Society." Dissatisfied with the spirit and objectives of this organization, Alexander created "The Evangelical Society." The purpose of the new society was not to employ other people to do good in the name of those who were its members. Every member was himself to be a worker by becoming directly involved in achieving the objectives of the Society.

Various other enterprises which were struggling to be born in the first decade of the nineteenth century had Alexander's active cooperation. Such were "The Philadelphia Tract Society," "The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge among the Poor," and the nascent "Sunday School Association," which in those days was encountering opposition from traditionalists. Other projects also were in his dreams for the advancement of God's Kingdom. Among them was a scheme whereby Negroes would be able to realize their aspirations. Another was the organization of a Foreign Missions Society. A third project was the establishment of a theological seminary.

IV

The election of Archibald Alexander as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was the beginning of a new era in the history of a Church which was still the leading denomination in the country. The minister of the Pine Street Church of Philadelphia, when elected by the Assembly of 1807, was, with a single exception, the youngest Moderator ever to hold that office. (The exception was Francis Landley Patton. Patton, too, was only thirty-five when he was elected Moderator by the Assembly of 1878.

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It is a striking coincidence that subsequently both these men became related to Princeton Theological Seminary. After years of service as a pastor and theological teacher, Patton was elected in 1888 President of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University. Following fourteen years in the presidency of the College, he retired and was succeeded by Woodrow Wilson. The same year, Patton became President of Princeton Seminary. This office he held for eleven years, retiring in 1913, the year following the Seminary's celebration of its one hundredth anniversary.)

In the overruling providence of God there exists an inseparable historical link between Archibald Alexander's election as his Church's Moderator and the establishment of Princeton Theological Seminary. During his year in office, the Presbyterian Church became abundantly aware of its Moderator's dimension. At the close of his moderatorial year, Alexander preached a sermon to the General Assembly of 1808. In this sermon, he pled that adequate provision be made for the preparation of ministers of the Gospel. Taking as his text the words of St. Paul to the Christians in Corinth, "Strive to excel in building up the Church" (1 Cor. 4:19), the preacher spoke with great eloquence. The time had come, he said, for the denomination to take theological education seriously. Here are his words:

"In my opinion, we shall not have a regular and sufficient supply of well-qualified ministers of the Gospel until every Presbytery, or at least every Synod, shall have under its direction a seminary established for the single purpose of educating youth for the ministry, in which the course of education from its commencement shall be directed to this object; for it is much to be doubted whether the system of education pursued in our colleges and universities is the best adapted to prepare a young man for the work of the ministry. The great extension of the physical sciences and the taste and fashion of life have given such a shift and direction to the academical course that I confess it appears to me to be little adapted to introduce a youth to the study of the Sacred Scriptures."



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The popular response to the idea of a theological seminary was such that a fellow minister of Alexander's, Ashbel Green, the minister of the Second Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, joined him in promoting the idea in their Presbytery. The effort was successful. The Presbytery of Philadelphia overtured the General Assembly of 1809 that a theological school be duly established, as had been proposed by their fellow Presbyter in his moderatorial sermon. The Assembly approved the overture and a committee was appointed. This committee submitted three alternative schemes to the Presbyteries of the Church. Presbytery opinion favored the establishment of a single theological seminary for the whole Church. A new committee of seven was appointed, under the chairmanship of Ashbel Green, to draft a plan that would serve as a constitution of the new seminary. It included Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church of New York. A constitutional plan was submitted in 1811. After some modifications, it was adopted, and the Assembly proceeded immediately to elect the first professor.

In what appears to have been a deeply moving session, and after a period of prayer, the members balloted for the person who, in their judgment, was most fitted for the new position. The "lot fell" on the minister of the Pine Street Church.

There is evidence that Archibald Alexander did not expect or desire this appointment, his personal preference being to continue his pastorate in Philadelphia. Yielding, however, to what he felt to be the call of the Holy Spirit speaking through the representatives of the Church, he accepted the invitation. A year later, on August 12, 1812, he was formally installed into his new office in the seminary which the Assembly had decided to establish in Princeton, New Jersey, under the name of "The Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America." Alexander's colleague, Ashbel Green, who played so important a part in launching the new institution, was in the same year elected President of the College of New Jersey. He had already been elected President of the Board of Directors of the new sem-

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inary, a position he held from 1812 to 1848. In this way, two close ministerial friends became neighbors in the village of Princeton, where they shaped the courses of sister institutions, each of which was destined for world renown.

V

The Plan, or Constitution, of the "one great school in some convenient place near the center of the bounds of our Church" became the inspiration and guide for Archibald Alexander and his successors. Its basic concepts are a faithful transcript of the personal ideas of the Seminary's founder. For that reason, and because the Plan has shaped the destiny of the institution for a hundred and fifty years, it merits special attention.

A central concept in this historic document is the affirmation that a Christian minister worthy of his office and fitted for his work should combine two indispensable qualities. These qualities are defined as "piety and learning." In the original report of the committee charged with preparing the Plan, we find this paragraph: "That, as filling the Church with a learned and able ministry without a corresponding portion of real piety, would be a curse to the world and an offense to God and his people, so the General Assembly think it their duty to state that in establishing a seminary for training up ministers, it is the earnest desire to guard as far as possible against so great an evil. And they do hereby solemnly pledge themselves to the Churches under their care that in forming and carrying into execution the plan of the proposed seminary, it will be their endeavor to make it, under the blessing of God, a nursery of vital piety as well as of sound theological learning, and to train up persons for the ministry who shall be lovers as well as defenders of the truth as it is in Jesus, friends of revivals of religion, and a blessing to the Church of God."

In the final version of the Plan as it was adopted, the design of the Seminary is stated as follows: "It is to unite in those who shall sustain the ministerial office, religion and literature; that piety of heart, which is the fruit only of the

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renewing and sanctifying grace of God, with solid learning: believing that religion without learning, or learning without religion, in the ministers of the Gospel, must ultimately prove injurious to the Church. . . .

“It is to afford more advantages than have hitherto been usually possessed by ministers of religion in our country, to cultivate both piety and literature in their preparatory course; piety, by placing it in circumstances favorable to its growth, and by cherishing and regulating its ardor; literature, by affording favorable opportunities for its attainment, and by making its possession indispensable. . . .

“It is, finally, to endeavor to raise up a succession of men, at once *qualified for* and *thoroughly devoted to* the work of the Gospel ministry; who, with various endowments, suiting them to different stations in the Church of Christ, may all possess a portion of the spirit of the primitive propagators of the Gospel; prepared to make every sacrifice, to endure every hardship, and to render every service which the promotion of pure and undefiled religion may require.”

The notes sounded here found an echo in the personality and life of the new professor. They express, moreover, his philosophy of what theological education and a theological seminary should be. Take, for example, “piety and learning,” or the synonymous designation, “religion and literature.” Personal devotion to God, as commitment and communion, must be accompanied in the Christian minister by a broad culture, involving an intelligent grasp of the Christian faith. When either one of these qualities is lacking, the Christian Church is in peril.

VI

Regarding people who have “learning without religion,” Samuel Miller had this to say in the address he delivered at the inauguration of his friend: “O my fathers and brethren, let it never be said of us on whom this task has fallen, that we take more pains to make polite scholars, eloquent orators or men of mere learning than to form able and faithful min-

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isters of the New Testament." For Christian truth, he went on, is to be "loved" as well as "defended." Miller, a member of the Seminary's first Board of Directors, had in mind the so-called Moderates of that day, whose sophisticated successors form a considerable group in our day. Such persons are to be found in the Church's conservative as well as its liberal tradition. They look down disdainful noses at any manifestation of religious emotion or any claim that people may make to the concrete subjective reality of communion with God in the daily round or the common task.

Equally to be avoided, however, according to the Plan, was religion without learning, zeal without knowledge, which could be also injurious to the Church. Frothy emotionalism, the reduction of religion to pure feeling, was rampant then as now. Archibald Alexander stood, as the Christian Church when true to itself has always stood, for dynamic centrality, for the commitment of the human self to the Christ who is both Life and Light, the "Power of God" as well as the "Wisdom of God." It was to be the function of the newly founded Seminary to make equal provision in its institutional life for the spiritual nurture as well as for the intellectual development of all who belonged to it.

What has been described as Alexander's "mental and spiritual universalism"² became strikingly evident in the Inaugural Address he delivered at the opening of the first seminary year. His thoughts ran the full gamut of intellectual interest and concern that human knowledge be regarded as relevant to a study of the Scriptures, to the interpretation of the Christian faith, and to the building of the Church.

The Plan of the Seminary had laid down that the new institution should have three chairs: Divinity, Oriental and Biblical Literature, Ecclesiastical History and Church Government. Until he was joined in 1813 by his friend Samuel Miller, who was elected professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government, Archibald Alexander was responsible for the entire curriculum. His competency and enthusiasm

² John DeWitt, "Archibald Alexander's Preparation for His Professorship," *Princeton Theological Review*, III, Oct. 1905, p. 593.

were immediately evident as he assumed responsibility for the first Seminary class of three students, which met in his home. The former President of Hampden-Sydney College became the Seminary's institutional foundation and a luminous and inspiring image for all who would succeed him down the years, whether in the classroom or on the campus, in the quiet sociability of the home or amid the agitations of public witness.

VII

In the discharge of his academic responsibilities, as well as in the writings which now began to flow from his pen, Professor Alexander manifested both his native intellectual qualities and the breadth of knowledge that made evident his mature scholarship. Alongside his fervent faith and his linguistic preparation for the exposition of Holy Scripture, his natural penchant for metaphysics was never absent. In his approach to Christian theology and to ideas in general, he never ceased to display the penetration of the philosopher. He inculcated in his students a passion for original research. He advocated, moreover, and exemplified in his own intellectual life, a spirit of fairness in dealing with controversial issues. Out of this spirit was born the Seminary's world-famous library. No books of representative significance were ever placed by a censor on a theological Index. In what is now the Robert E. Speer Library, the reader has access to all shades of opinion, however unconventional or heretical, to all sorts of supplementary literature in the realm of culture capable of shedding light upon a religious event, an historical epoch, or a doctrinal issue.

Alexander's intellect and vast knowledge had, however, one limitation. His cultural breadth and his incomparable power of penetration into a subject were not matched by a corresponding capacity for the massive organization of ideas. In this regard he was surpassed by his student, Charles Hodge, who subsequently became his colleague and successor. While Alexander was more universal than Hodge in his intellectual interests, and especially in his human concern, Hodge excelled his teacher as a systematizer.

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Out of the collaboration of these two men, one an everlasting denizen of the spiritual frontier, the other a genius for bringing the farthest horizons into perspective, and of Samuel Miller, a man more "polished and literary" than either, there was born in 1825 a theological journal called *The Biblical Repertory*. This journal was one of the first theological reviews published in America and the predecessor of *Theology Today*. To *The Biblical Repertory* Alexander contributed many important articles. These were written on such varied themes as: "The Catechism of the Council of Trent," "Evidences of a New Heart," "The Present State and Prospects of the Presbyterian Church," "Mr. H. Everett's Report on Indian Affairs." These few titles indicate the author's interest in theological dogma, the inner life of the Christian, the health of the Church, and the welfare of neglected people. Among the books written during his Princeton years, the following stand out: *A Brief Outline of the Evidences of the Christian Religion* (1825), *The Canon of the Old and New Testaments* (1826), *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (1841), *Biographical Sketches of the Founder and Principal Alumni of the Log College* (1845), *History of Colonization on the West Coast of Africa* (1846), *Outlines of Moral Science*, published in 1852, the year after his death.

The inspiring teacher and writer was also a warm-hearted friend. Archibald Alexander's home was ever open to students who wanted to see him. It was said of him that he seemed "incapable of being interrupted." Between him and his colleague, Samuel Miller, there existed throughout their long lives the most intimate Christian companionship. It was customary for them not only to converse together but to pray together. With their younger colleague, Charles Hodge, they conducted each week for the students "The Sunday Afternoon Conference." This gathering, which usually lasted an hour and a half, was devoted to the discussion of all sorts of questions relating to the Christian life, to experimental religion, and to practical behavior.

Here was campus community at its best. Teachers and students shared their deepest thoughts on what it meant to

be truly Christian, both in personal experience and in active obedience. The students represented, as the years went by, an increasingly diversified group both denominationally and racially. From the early decades of the Seminary's life, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Baptists shared with Presbyterians the life of classroom and campus in perfect Christian fellowship. And from its earliest years the Seminary was host to many students from abroad.

VIII

In the deepest, most classical sense, Archibald Alexander the professor was also a Churchman. He did all his thinking, and carried out his diverse forms of activity, with a sense of his calling as a member and minister of the community called the Church. Yet no American Churchman was ever less of a mere professional or cleric, less of an ecclesiastic or a hierarch, than he. Dedicated to the fellowship of Jesus Christ, he devoted his entire manhood to increasing the membership of this fellowship, calling upon people to commit themselves to Christ as Saviour. The second half of his life, forty years in all, he spent trying to equip young men for the Church's ministry under the Lordship of Christ.

The address he delivered at the beginning of the seminary year 1832 bears the title "Plea for Absolute Devotion to God in the Work of the Ministry." In the course of his remarks on this occasion he said, "You are coming forward, my young friends, at an eventful period of the world. Read then the signs of the times. Let every man be found at his post and standing in his lot. Let no one now entering the ministry dream of a quiet or easy life, or of literary leisure." He was interested in where his students went and where all Presbyterian ministers carried on their work. "There was no man living," we are told by his biographer, "whose acquaintance with the geography and topography of America was more extensive or exact."³ Archibald Alexander used this amazing knowledge as a Churchman who was personally interested in

³ Alexander, *Life of Alexander*, p. 540.

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all his fellow ministers. "The whole territory of the Church," it was said of him, "was so mapped out in his head that it is scarcely too much to affirm that he knew who was the pastor of every Presbyterian Church in the United States."

But this Churchman, who was personally acquainted with the identity and sphere of labor of every Presbyterian minister, was no sectarian, still less a bigot, in his spirit and concerns. He was profoundly ecumenical in his commitment. "The Church of Christ is one," he exclaimed, "and all who agree in essential matters should hold communion together, notwithstanding minor differences." And again, "Let us hold together as long as the foundation can be felt under our feet."

But for Alexander, to "hold together" did not mean remaining static or becoming institutionally minded. While his judgment was invariably cool and dispassionate, and his policy conservative, "he never rejected any scheme because it was novel." To the very end of his life he was interested in new schemes. What could be more conclusive than the following testimony? "No observation was more common than that Dr. Alexander was unlike most old men, in the tolerance for the changes of his day. If a new scheme of any promise was on foot, he was really more inclined to listen and to favor than most younger men."

Nowhere was the forward looking and dynamic spirit of Alexander, the Churchman, more manifest than in his advocacy and support of the missionary movement. At the time of his death he was President of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church. Two of his most famous public utterances were missionary sermons. One of those sermons he preached in Philadelphia in May 1814 at the invitation of the Standing Committee on Missions, while the General Assembly of the Church was in session. The other was delivered at Albany, New York, in October 1829 on the occasion of the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission.

In his Philadelphia sermon, Alexander challenged the idea then common in Church circles in Scotland and the United States that "civilization should precede evangelization." He

then proceeded to express the hope "that the General Assembly, which is the Missionary Society of your Church, will at their present session take the subject of foreign mission into serious consideration." Fruits of initiating mission work abroad, he declared, would be, "a missionary spirit which is the true spirit of Christianity," "the destruction of bigotry and a narrow sectarian spirit," the promotion of "peace and harmony in the Church." For Churchmen would then have no more interest in "petty contentions." Not only so, but the awakening in the Church of a missionary spirit would "increase the number of candidates for the ministry as well as the devotion to home missions."

In his Albany sermon, after discussing the prevailing objections to foreign missions, the Princeton Churchman spoke critically of the Puritan successors of the Reformers, who despite their eminent piety did not develop an interest in world evangelization and mission.

This precursor of the ecumenical spirit, true son of John Calvin, then proceeded to pay prophetic tribute to what can be expected in the realm of Church unity when Christians are gripped by a spirit of missionary enthusiasm. What statement of any Churchman in the early years of the nineteenth century is more contemporaneously significant than the following utterance from Archibald Alexander's Albany sermon? "Nowhere upon earth does the genuine spirit of Catholicism more prevail," he said, "than among missionaries and the ardent friends of missions. . . . It cannot, it must not, be that the progress of this work of God should be retarded or hindered by the petty jealousies of its professed friends. A better spirit prevails, and will, I trust, more and more prevail, until all our sectarian distinctions shall be melted into the complete 'unity of the Spirit' . . . when all the servants of God 'shall see eye to eye' and the bond of union shall be TRUTH, PEACE, and CHARITY."

This plain man, true saint and scholar, great preacher, professor and ecumenical Churchman is worthy to be, in the present sesquicentennial year and in the centuries to come, the abiding image of the institution he created.