

The Origin of the Theological
School

of Yale College, 1822

A Bicentennial Publication



200

Yale Divinity School

Yale University, 2022

Documents Relating to the Founding
of Yale Divinity School:
A Bicentennial Publication

As part of the observation of the two-hundredth anniversary of Yale Divinity School, the YDS 200 Committee presents two documents that relate to its founding in 1822. The two documents, printed in a pamphlet that was apparently published as part of the semi-centennial observations, are by William C. Fowler (1793-1881), a member of the Yale College class of 1816 and one of the first students of the new Theological School; and by Eleazar T. Fitch (1791-1871), professor of divinity at Yale College from 1817 to 1852 and lecturer in homiletics at Yale Divinity School from 1824 to 1861. Fowler's contribution was retrospective, a personal memoir of the circumstances and personages involved in the creation of a Theological School within Yale College;¹ while the piece by Fitch is a memorandum addressed in April 1822 to the College's Prudential Committee calling for a structural reorganization and an expansion of the faculty to accommodate the demands of students for theological training—and to relieve Fitch's increasingly taxing workload.

Yale College was at a turning point at the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century. In 1817, the widely respected President Timothy Dwight had died, leaving the College not only in search of a leader but also a direction for the new century. And in 1818, the newly adopted constitution of the State of Connecticut ended the mandatory public support of the Congregational churches—the "Standing Order"—bringing to a close a prerogative the clergy had enjoyed since the seventeenth century. Henceforth, churches would rise and fall on their ability to thrive in an open marketplace of religion, a reality that at once reinforced the College's original mission of training clergy but also brought home anew the importance of well-educated and skillful pastors and preachers. These imperatives were punctuated by waves of revivalism in 1821, in New Haven

and beyond, that preceded and coincided with the events these documents describe.

In this context, several students, including Fowler, approached Prof. Fitch and his colleagues about furthering their studies. The instructors agreed, but it soon became clear, especially to Fitch, that the added teaching load could not be maintained for long. So Fitch, in his approach to the administration, broached the feasibility of a new initiative in theological education in terms of the "primitive" design of the College, its relation to outside institutions as well as to the existing resources of the College, and the advantages a new department would bring.

Out of this history emerged a tradition of teaching ministry that reflected the noble ends of learning and of "kingdom work," bringing innovative perspectives to advanced education. But we also recognize that over the course of two centuries, many graduates of Yale Divinity School, and the institution itself, played a role in perpetuating the systemic injustices of American society and of misguided Christian practices, even while others questioned these injustices and worked towards needed reform.² May YDS's storied past ever remind its alums, students, faculty and staff of our responsibility to bring equity, inclusion, and understanding to the world of today and tomorrow.

The YDS 200 Committee: Harold Attridge (Chair), Mark Dingler, Ronald Evans, Bruce Gordon, Lynn Haversat, Lisabeth Huck, Deborah Jagielow, Tom Krattenmaker, Kenneth Minkema, Jamal Neal, Carolyn Sharp.

ORIGIN OF THE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL OF YALE
COLLEGE.

BY PROF. WILLIAM C. FOWLER, LL.D.³

IN the vacation following the Commencement of 1817, I went to New Haven to make some arrangements for entering the Theological Seminary at Andover. This was the same year that was darkened by the death of Prest. Timothy Dwight.⁴ Accidentally meeting Samuel B. Ingersoll,⁵ who had just taken his degree, I was urged by him to give up my purpose of going to Andover and to study theology under Professor Fitch,⁶ if he would receive us. I entertained his proposal so far as to consent to an interview with Professor Fitch on the subject. Accordingly we immediately went to see him. He appeared to be very much pleased, and told us he would take the subject into consideration. On our second visit he expressed great readiness to receive us as students, saying that he thought it would be a great advantage to himself, inasmuch as it would necessitate a review of his studies, which would help to qualify him to prepare a course of sermons on doctrinal subjects, as Professor of Divinity in Yale College. While the matter was pending, I was urged to accept the office of rector of the Hopkins Grammar School, a position which I had occupied for a portion of the summer term of my senior year. I concluded to accept the appointment and also study theology with Professor Fitch, who had impressed me very favorably.

Accordingly Mr. Ingersoll and myself commenced our course in theology with Professor Fitch, at the commencement of the next college term, visiting his house, the same which is now occupied by Professor Thacher,⁷ two evenings a week, and confining our attention for the first term to Biblical criticism. In the course of the

term we were joined by Wm. Graham, a graduate of Jefferson College, Pa., of the year 1816; during the same term I received letters from Edward Bull, my class-mate, writing for himself and David N. Lord,⁸ inquiring about the advantages they would enjoy, in studying theology in New Haven. I wrote in reply, urging them to join us at the commencement of the next term. This they concluded to do.

Thus at the commencement of the second term our class consisted of five in number. Soon after Horace Hooker and Joseph D. Wickham joined us, who were then tutors in Yale College. After this our class was increased by Epaphras Goodman, a graduate of Dartmouth College, of the class of 1816. The next year Edward Hitchcock joined us, who received the degree of A.M. from Yale College in 1818; and also Lyman Coleman, a tutor in the college, and Levi Smith, who graduated at Yale College in 1818. At a later period, Stephen D. Ward, a graduate of Princeton College, of the class of 1819, also joined us.⁹ The whole number of the class was twelve.

After the commencement of the second term, the class requested one of the tutors, either Mr. Hooker or Mr. Wickham, to invite Professor Kingsley to instruct us in the Hebrew language,¹⁰ which he consented to do. Some months later, I was requested by the class to invite Professor Goodrich to instruct us in elocution, and the composition of sermons.¹¹

At the commencement of the second term, January, 1818, I invited the class to hold their recitations in the Hopkins Grammar School-house, on the corner of Temple and Crown streets. Accordingly the recitations were afterwards held there. In our exercises we pursued much the same course as the one pursued at Andover.

Professor Fitch, "with the vision and faculty divine,"¹² Professor Kingsley with his thorough scholarship and keen sagacity, Professor Goodrich, with his earnest and discursive mind, kindling as it ran, united their efforts for our improvement. With these efforts the class were not only entirely satisfied, but were grateful for them, and the professors appeared to be highly pleased with our progress.

In our exercises with Professor Fitch, we were especially interested in the science of Biblical criticism, or Exegesis, a term that was beginning to be current. The opinion that the language of the Bible must be interpreted in the same way as the language of any other book, was readily welcomed. This opinion seemed to dispel the cloud of mysticism or mystery, that in some of our minds, had enveloped that sacred book. Several of us imported and read German books, one of which, Ernesti,¹³ three of us united to translate into the English language; certain portions being assigned to each. We carried our design into execution so far, that each of the three read portions of the book to the tutors' club, which met weekly. While thus engaged, Professor Stuart's translation of the book was announced, and this relieved us from our labors.¹⁴

In our investigations in theology proper, we pushed our discussions on some points to the utmost limits of orthodoxy. Professor Fitch himself was a seeker after truth, and thus was in the same attitude of mind that we were. He was not polemic; he was not dogmatic; and if he was didactic, he was so rather in regard to the means of arriving at the truth, than in regard to the ultimate conclusions. It was pleasant in the class-room, to hear him state an abstract doctrine to us, as if he was a pure intelligence addressing pure intelligences; and then to hear him in the chapel on the Sabbath, exhibiting the same doctrine in the relations of logic, rhetoric, and poetry, sometimes in thrilling tones, as if he was a human being addressing human beings. It was no wonder that, on one occasion

when he had preached in the chapel, before his ordination, Governor John Cotton Smith,¹⁵ who heard him without knowing his name, exclaimed, as he came out, "Who is this angel from heaven, who has preached to us this morning?" We enjoyed other advantages. The class, though organized by a voluntary association, enjoyed the advantage of being considered a part and parcel of Yale College—that school of the prophets.

On the death of President Timothy Dwight, January 11, 1817, great anxiety was felt for the college. Men who still retained distinction impressions of the energetic intellect and fervid eloquence of President Stiles, "the most learned scholar in America," and fresher impressions of President Dwight, imperial in mind, manner, and person, in their opinion the beau ideal of what a president of Yale College should be, in their regret and despondency were ready to say, "These suns have set, O rise some other such!" In the expected political change from the charter of Charles II., to a constitution adopted by the people, they feared in some way the interests of Yale College would be compromised.

After the appointment of President Day,¹⁶ it became known generally among the friends of the college, that in him the elements were so mixed that there was no redundancy and no deficiency; that "good without pretence," his "mind of large discourse was able to look before and after," and was thus not liable to be jostled from its place by the surging impulses of the present; that he was to be the Palinurus,¹⁷ the pilot who could weather the storm and with a wary eye and steady hand could take the ship into port. The public were reassured. At a festival attended by the citizens of New Haven, a toast was drank:—"We want no brighter light than that of Day." Strangers were strongly impressed in his favor. When two from abroad were speaking of him with admiration, one said, "Why, he has the head of Leo."¹⁸

Five of the class were tutors in the college. At one period when there were only three tutors, who were members of the class, the other three tutors were William T. Dwight, Professor Alexander M. Fisher, and Rufus Woodward. Mr. Dwight was by inheritance a theologian, being a son of President Timothy Dwight; and though then studying law, afterwards became an eminent divine in Portland, Maine. Professor Alexander Metcalf Fisher, the eminent mathematician, who was lost in the "Albion," in the year 1822, had studied, after his graduation, a year under his pastor, Dr. Emmons,¹⁹ that Corypheus²⁰ in theology, and another year at Andover. Dr. Emmons had discussed with him the many knotty questions connected with this science. He put into his hands the objections of leading skeptics, as nuts for him to crack. He put into his hands a small tract by Hume, not published in his works, in which the author, then a young man, treats the common arguments in favor of existence of the Deity as fallacious.²¹ Professor Fisher's mode of treating subjects may be seen in the *Christian Spectator*, Vol. I., monthly series, p. 414.²²

Mr. Woodward fully equaled these two in breadth of mind and depth of research even in theological subjects, especially the Evidences of Christianity. Mr. Woodward also contributed a number of able articles to the *Christian Spectator*. (See Memoir, *Christian Spectator*, Vol. VII., p. 113.)²³

The class, too, had the advantage of witnessing and aiding a great revival in New Haven. For an account of this revival see *Christian Spectator*, Vol. III., p. 49, signed by Samuel Merwin, and Nathaniel W. Taylor, in which mention is made of the theological students.²⁴ It was during this revival that the lay preachers of New Haven became distinguished and called forth the letter of Professor Stuart, to correct or prevent any evils attendant upon their course.²⁵ These men believed in the great power of prayer, united with

personal appeals to the unconverted. They visited other towns and made their reports Saturday evenings at Mr. Timothy Dwight's. Several evenings I was present when the reports were given in. The persons that I remember among them were Timothy Dwight, Dwight Williams, Levi Stillman, Seth Bliss, S. P. Davis, Sherman Converse, and S. S. Jocelyn.²⁶ In many cases their public addresses and their private appeals and prayers appeared to be attended with a divine blessing. This was more strikingly the case at first than it was after the novelty had passed by. They may some of them have been over-confident at first, but afterwards were more inclined to sustain a divinity school than to exercise any clerical functions themselves.

Apprehensions were entertained by clergymen and others, that evils would grow out of this system injurious to the clergy, and the order of the churches. At one time there seemed to be some ground for that apprehension. Embracing the opinion that prayer and correspondent exertion could at any time produce a revival of religion, they were inclined to blame those ministers and those churches where there was no revival. Said one, in his report: "We visited such a minister and such a church, we found the sentinel (the minister) sleeping at his post." A good woman present, in the warmth of her feelings, exclaimed, "He ought to be shot." But, this feeling gradually died out and none were more efficient or generous patrons of the future theological school than were the so-called lay preachers. Mr. Timothy Dwight gave five thousand dollars for founding a professorship in it.

At the period we are considering, distinguished preachers addressed audiences in New Haven. Dr. Asahel Nettleton,²⁷ with his strong scriptural doctrines, pungent appeals to the conscience, and his sepulchral voice coming up from the depths of his soul, would hold a great audience breathless, as if eternity and heaven were everything, and time and earth nothing.

Then, too, there was Dr. Lyman Beecher,²⁸ with so much of the old and familiar as to furnish a basis of argument in the minds of his hearers, and so much of the new as to keep their attention; with so much of the abstract as to require the exercise of their reason, and so much of the concrete as to make his thoughts intelligible; with so much of graphic power as to awaken the imagination, and so much of his own will as to make his subject a personal matter between him and them.

Then there was Dr. Nathaniel Hewitt,²⁹ from whose lips, when his soul was charged, would "leap the live thunder" to the heads and hearts of his congregation. There was also Dr. Thomas H. Skinner,³⁰ whose soul was so full of life that he vitalized all the truths which he uttered.

Then there was Dr. John Rice, whose large mind and large heart were so "touched to fine issues," that his hearers readily gave themselves up to his guidance. It was of him that President Jefferson said: "If that measure is adopted, John Rice will set all Virginia in a blaze."³¹ Other distinguished preachers might be mentioned. I should not omit to mention Rev. Samuel Merwin,³² who was pastor of the North church in New Haven, saintly in character, in aspect and manner,—a model pastor. Dr. Taylor was pastor of the Center church, and was at the height of his popularity as a preacher and a man.

Rev. Dr. Emmons, having been called to preach an ordination sermon in North Guilford, was invited to visit New Haven, and to preach in the North Church. There was a general attendance of the intelligent Christians of New Haven to hear this far-famed theologian. He preached a sermon on the relation between the foreknowledge of God and His decrees, to an appreciating and admiring audience, which was a fine specimen of his terse and compact style of writing, and of his inferential theology.

The religious controversies formerly existing in New Haven had at that time died out, but had left the leading men there well acquainted with the doctrines at issue in those controversies, and ready to converse intelligently about them. Some of these men had sat under the pastoral ministration of the venerable Chauncey Whittlesey, of that profound metaphysician, the younger Jonathan Edwards of the White Haven church, of James Dana,³³ that man of high culture, and of his successor Moses Stuart.

Among them were James Hillhouse, the statesman, the strong prop of Yale College during the years of its weakness; Judge Charles Chauncey, often consulted by President Dwight on theological subjects; Noah Webster; Judge David Daggett, an amateur hearer of sermons and a prophetic judge of young preachers, generous and appreciative; Judge Simeon Baldwin, ever candid and gracious; Elizur Goodrich, Samuel Darling, Joseph Darling, Judge Dyer White, Stephen Twining, Timothy Dwight, William Leffingwell, and others.³⁴ These men seemed to take great interest in the class, and showed a readiness to converse with them. Indeed, the religious people of New Haven seemed to view the class with favor, were disposed to hear them preach, and were ready to subscribe to the endowment of the Dwight Professorship by which the school could become permanent.

There had been in Connecticut, from the first, a union, or quasi union between Church and State, sanctioned as was supposed, by the God of Israel; "Thou leddest forth thy people as a flock by the hands of Moses and Aaron."³⁵ But by the State constitution of 1818 Aaron was deposed from his joint leadership with Moses. The aureola which encircled his head faded off. The clergy, most of them, had laid aside their wigs. Some of them had come down from their pristine elevation "to become all things to all men." Had they kept on their wigs, had they not come down from their elevation,

they might, perhaps, according to the remark of Roger Minot Sherman,³⁶ have kept back the revolution for a time. After 1818 they could no longer be recognized by the General Assembly as a power of the State. They could no longer take their annual public dinner at Hartford, furnished at the expense of the State. The people, by their vote declared in favor of "toleration," and the clergy had nothing to do but gracefully submit to the loss of their prestige.

With some feeling of bereavement and degradation they naturally turned their thoughts to Yale College, which had always been their pride and their love. It was at first the child of the clergy, and afterwards the Alma Mater of most of them. The ministers of the "standing order" of Connecticut had their attention especially turned to our class of theological students. Indeed, they seemed to have been taken almost by surprise. They had expected nothing of the kind after the death of President Dwight, who had given occasional instructions to students in theology; but here was a school composed of twelve promising young students, regularly taught at stated times by three accomplished professors, who were devoted to their work. Nothing equal to it had ever been seen at Yale before.

There was a good deal of curiosity expressed by the clergy in regard to this school, both as to the instructions given and as to the proficiency of the students. At an early period we were given to understand by some of the associations³⁷ that they were ready to receive our application for licenses. Somewhere about the year 1860, President Day informed me that he walked all the way to Woodbridge in order to be present at the examination of one of the class, before the New Haven West Association.

After we were licensed to preach, we were received with favor by the ministers and the churches. Invitations came in upon us from different quarters to preach as candidates, even before we were ready to accept them. In one or more cases the invitation came in

advance of the license. After we were licensed, all the pulpits were opened to us. One of the class preached his first sermon to the students in the college chapel at the earnest request of Professor Fitch, and another preached to the students during a summer term in the absence of Professor Fitch.

Sometime in the year 1822 a Memorial, signed by a portion or all of the class, was addressed to the corporation of the college, requesting them to establish a Theological Department. The corporation listened to the "memorial," and appointed Nathaniel W. Taylor to the chair of Didactic Theology. There were also certain literary advantages outside of the school and the college which contributed to the improvement of some or all of the class. Dr. Benjamin Trumbull, in that period, was engaged in publishing his "History of Connecticut," at New Haven; Dr. Noah Webster was there preparing his great American Dictionary for the press; Professor Silliman commenced the publication of the *American Journal of Science and Art* in the year 1818; the same year the Rev. Thomas Davies commenced the publication of the *Christian Spectator*; in 1820 Cornelius Tuthill began the publication of the *Microscope*; James A. Hillhouse spent a portion of the time there; so did James G. Percival, the "walking encyclopedia;" and Carlos Wilcox, who was sometimes called the "beloved disciple," published there his "Age of Benevolence"; then there was Nathaniel Chauncy, Henry Dwight, and Mr. Torrey, for a short period afterwards professor at Burlington. Then there was Eli Whitney, whose invention introduced a new era for the cotton fabrics of the civilized world; and, for a small portion of the time, Rev. Jedidiah Morse and his excellent sons, Samuel Finley Breese, Sidney Edwards, and Richard.³⁸

The medical department of the College was in operation. Its faculty were Prof. Æneas Munson, a man of various acquisitions,

and as good a joker as Abraham Lincoln; Prof. Nathan Smith, one of nature's gifted sons; Prof. Eli Ives, learned and high principled; Prof. Knight, whose merit was equaled only by his modesty.

At the bar there was David Daggett, whose clear and adroit statements of a case in court sometimes won it before he commenced his argument; Nathan Smith, who successfully addressed the common sense and the common heart of the jury; Seth P. Staples, learned in the law with his fierce and fiery logic; Ralph I. Ingersoll, whose "soul of honor was seated in a heart of courtesy;"³⁹ Roger S. Baldwin, endowed with hereditary talents for the law, *a patre et avo*, and Dennis Kimberly, who, by his high intellectual and moral qualities, won all hearts that he approached.

The literary atmosphere of New Haven was genial and invigorating. The educational influence of the community in which a college is placed, upon the officers and students of the college, has long well been understood. Thus, in ancient Oxford, England, there were laws prohibiting any of the students of the university from entering into any house of the town. It was feared they would be contaminated by contact with the community. They were expected by their segregation from it, to ascend into a higher plane of learning, religion, morals, manners, and refinement. It was expected that the scholars, after they had enjoyed the advantages of a university education, would endeavor to elevate the community. After a long period, when the people of Oxford had become elevated by the influence of graduates of the colleges, these prohibitory laws were abolished, and the undergraduates derived great advantage from an intercourse with families of cultivation and refinement.

About one hundred years had elapsed since the establishment of the college at New Haven, and one hundred and eighty years since the time that John Davenport, himself an Oxford student, had led a "London Company" to settle at New Haven. Intelligence, courtesy,

and refinement of manners, transmitted from the "London Company," had been increased through the influence of the college, so that the people of New Haven generally were intelligent, pious, and refined. There were, moreover, generally in the community, habits of industry, order, and frugality.

The social atmosphere of New Haven, on the high grounds, was pure and exhilarating, tempered and made fragrant by airs from what Bunyan calls "the delectable mountains."⁴⁰ Breathing this atmosphere, with "looks commencing with the skies,"⁴¹ the young theological aspirant could easily send his thoughts to the region where there is a *largior ether*,⁴² where there is a higher communion, where there is the city of the living God, the home of his own soul, and of the souls of all whom he may in his ministry lead to Jesus.

A STATEMENT SUBMITTED TO THE PRUDENTIAL
COMMITTEE, BY THE PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN YALE
COLLEGE.

GENTLEMEN:

Several members of the present Senior Class, desirous of pursuing their theological studies at this college, have applied to the professor of divinity to engage in the business of their instruction, and he begs leave on this occasion, deeply interesting to his feelings, to avail himself of that provision in the laws of the college, which declares that he may "receive" from the Prudential Committee "their advice and direction in all matters relating to the business of his office."

By the laws, it is made his duty to attend to the instruction which has been requested of him in this application. Such is the construction he has ever given to the clause, which enacts that "it shall be his duty to give from time to time, such lectures and private

instruction, to the resident graduates and students, as he shall judge may best preserve and promote the religious interests of the college, and tend most effectually to form for future usefulness in the work of the evangelical ministry, such of the students as shall appear desirous of being prepared for it." The clause is indeed worded in accordance with the spirit of the times, in which theological studies were commenced before the expiration of the collegiate course, but it contemplates one important design entertained in calling a professor of divinity to the college—that of "supplying the churches with a learned, pious, and orthodox ministry."

In accordance with this duty of his office, he has given private lectures, once or twice weekly, ever since his induction into office, to such theological students as have chosen to remain here. In doing it, however, he has had to struggle with embarrassments which the present application,*⁴³ if complied with, must greatly enhance, which he will now state to the committee, and out of which there arises an interesting practical question on which he solicits their advice.

His chief embarrassment in the discharge of his duty, has arisen from the present advanced state of theological instruction. He looks back to the state of theological education at the period in which his office was instituted, when the instructions of a single divine, in systematic theology, formed the highest standard of such education, and he looks abroad on its advanced state at the present period when the labors of two or more instructors are wholly devoted to it, and Scriptural interpretation and sacred eloquence as well as systematic divinity are comprised in its standard, and he feels embarrassed with the duty of continuing an old establishment that exhibits to students, under the present raised standard of education, such comparative disadvantages. The professor of languages is willing to afford assistance and all that is necessary in the department of Hebrew

criticism. The professor of rhetoric and oratory is willing to do something in the department of sacred eloquence; yet the state of his health, and the pressure of his duties in the classical department, require him to leave the main burden unsustainable. The whole burden therefore of Greek criticism and Scriptural theology, and of didactic and polemic theology, and the main burden of sacred eloquence rest upon the professor of divinity, if any attempt be made, under present circumstances, to give to theological students the advantages required by the present standard of education. He need not say that the burden is more than he can assume. Accordingly, he is thrown back still on the embarrassments of being obligated to continue an old establishment under its disadvantages.

Another embarrassment arises from the state of his own health. The labors of the Sabbath and of preparations for it are so exhausting to him, that altogether unaided in these, he could hardly contribute to this branch of instruction the labors of a single man.

In these circumstances of embarrassment, he has ever felt himself placed, while he has held the office; and he has felt at a loss what reply to make to young gentlemen who have desired to pursue their theological studies here. To advise them to remain, under disadvantages to themselves, was repugnant to his feelings: to refuse them instruction, seemed abandoning an important design of his office: and he has hitherto avoided the decision himself by stating the superior advantages to be enjoyed elsewhere, and engaging in the instruction of those who, after all, chose to remain.*⁴⁴

These difficulties are presented afresh to his mind by the application now brought to him by the seniors; and from these difficulties he can be freed by nothing short of having assistance, on the one hand, adequate to place this department of education on a suitable foundation, or else, on the other hand, of having this important duty disconnected from his office.

The question which arises on this statement, and which he respectfully submits to the Committee, is the following: *Shall exertions be made to add a new professor to the College who shall take a part in the education of theological students, and the duties of the Chapel; or, shall the education of students in theology be wholly discarded from the college?*

The preceding statement, he conceives unavoidably leads to the great practical alternative presented in this question, whether the object of educating theological students shall be *pursued* or *abandoned* in the college; and in this attitude he chooses to present the subject, without specifying particularly here, the branches of instruction a new professor, were he introduced, should assume other than such a share in chapel duties as would afford a necessary relief to the professor of divinity, were he to engage earnestly in this instruction. The specification of his duties can be made afterwards. The question *what* shall be done may be raised, when the main point is decided whether *any thing* shall be done.

The question, it will be perceived, is one of momentous interest to the college, (to mention no other relation which it bears,) on which its constituted guardians will not act without serious deliberation, and in submitting it to the Prudential Committee, he begs leave to append, with modesty, the following considerations which, in his opinion, ought to have an influence on the result to which they come.

I. *The primitive design of the college demands consideration.*

More than a century has rolled by since the clergy and pious laymen in the colony of Connecticut contemplated the establishment of this college. By adverting to the circumstances of the age, the acts that were passed respecting the college and its past history, it is apparent that the chief design of establishing it was, that it should be a school to prepare men for the ministry of the Gospel.

At that age our ancestors had no idea of the severance of theological schools from the schools of philosophy. They derived their views from the higher schools of Europe in which the four branches of philosophy, law, medicine, and theology, were united, and maintained the sentiments of that age—that the primary design of the superior schools of learning was to educate young men for the ministry.*⁴⁵ The fathers of New England have left their sentiments on this subject in sundry expressions in their early synodical acts.†⁴⁶ The circumstances of the colonies did not permit of their establishing schools at the first, comprising all the advantages of the higher schools of Europe; and out of these exigencies arose the practice of pursuing theological studies with individual clergymen of eminence, as well as in the schools supported by the colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut. But most remote was it from their intentions to erect mere schools of philosophy. "*Christo et ecclesiae*" was the dedicatory motto of Harvard, and the ministers who first concerted the plan of this college proposed to call it "The School of the Church."‡⁴⁷

The acts which have been passed from the first respecting this college exhibit this as its primitive design. When the charter was granted and the college was organized in 1701, the trustees gave special directions to the rector "to instruct and ground the students well in theoretical divinity," in order "to promote the power and purity of religion, and the best edification of *these New England churches*.*⁴⁸ The General Assembly of the colony, in 1753, "recommended a general contribution to be made in all the religious societies in the colony, for the purpose of settling a professor of divinity in the college," considering "that one principal end proposed in erecting the college was to supply the churches in this colony with a learned, pious, and orthodox ministry."†⁴⁹ In 1756 a professor of divinity was attached to the college, whose duty it was

made in the statutes, not only to be pastor of the church and a religious teacher of the pupils, but also, as has already been explained, to furnish such students in theology as might be reared in the college or chose to resort to it, with assistance in their studies preparatory to the university.

The history of what has been done in theological education in the college is in conformity with this design of its founders and benefactors. Theological instruction has always been given to the pupils of the college and to students in divinity, and there has been maintained in the college a strictly theological school. The Rev. Professors Daggett and Wales, and the Rev. President Dwight, in his capacity of professor of divinity, have each successively given instruction to students in theology, and prepared many for the ministerial office, who have been highly distinguished for their usefulness in the churches. In 1765 President Clap, speaking of the progress of the college, says: "The principal design of the institution of this college was to educate persons for the work of the ministry; which design has been so far succeeded as that above four hundred worthy ministers have received their education here." From that date to the present period several times that number have been added to the catalogue, and out of this large number of students who have entered into the ministry, a great portion have been qualified for their labors by pursuing their theological studies at this college.

The committee then will take into consideration this primitive design of the college while deliberating on the question which the professor of divinity now proposes to them; and may he be permitted respectfully to ask of them whether, when acting as guardians over the trusts of our pious ancestors, they can consistently convert a school, held sacred by them to the purposes of the ministry, into a mere school of science? Whether, when they have already augmented the scientific department, and have already annexed a

medical department completely organized, and may yet be called upon to add the department of law, they shall wholly discard a theological department, so clearly intended by the founders to be the chief pillar and ornament of the college.

II. *The support of a theological department in the college interferes not with existing theological institutions.*

The friends of religion take a deep interest, as well they may do, in those theological seminaries which have been recently instituted in our country, and have extended such aid to the work of preparing men for the ministry. Any measure undertaken with the design of interfering with the welfare of these seminaries must meet with the decided disapprobation of their many and devoted friends. The committee then will consider whether the support of a theological department in this college, according to the primitive design of its founders, and on a foundation adequate to the present standard of theological education, would be justly considered, either, in design or in effect, as an interference in the welfare of existing theological seminaries.

Not in design surely; for the design in them, who hold as trustees the sacred bequests of past generations, would be no other than that of consulting with fidelity the high interests committed to their guardianship—a design which they are bound equally to entertain in their consultations and decisions, whether any, or however so many, new institutions spring up around them into existence.

Nor in its effect could such a support of a theological department here as is necessary, be justly deemed an interference with existing theological seminaries. Not an interference in regard to any claim of precedence in such seminaries, in regard to their students, or in regard to their funds.

Not in regard to any claim of precedence they may have upon the public patronage, for the department of theology had long been known here, as the most precious branch of instruction, in the estimation of the founders, before any of these institutions ever had an existence, and it has languished for want of suitable encouragement while these more recent institutions have been attracting, in an unprecedented degree, the patronage of the wealthy; and if so ancient a school of theology, so long languishing for want of necessary support, should now lift its supplicating voice for aid, no claims of precedence from any quarter could arise to resist its claims.

Not, in regard to the number of students in existing seminaries, would the support of this department be an interference. For, it is obvious that a maximum number of students may be assumed, beyond which it is not desirable, either in regard to study, piety, charity funds, or the interests of the church, that an individual theological seminary should go, and one of these seminaries has nearly attained, it will be acknowledged, it is believed, by the professors themselves, to this maximum. But it will be perceived, on a statistical view of the number of pious students in the colleges of New England, that more than a maximum are coming forward for existing institutions; and on reverting to the efforts making by the education societies, it will be perceived that this overplus must be expected still to increase; so that without any infringement on the number of students in existing seminaries, this department may speedily expect, if supported, a suitable number of pupils.

Nor, finally, will the support of this department interfere at all with the funds of such institutions. For as to students, an increase of their number in charity students is but a consumption of their funds, and in other students is but a bare re-payment of simple expenses;

and as to the community, they look to a different portion of it from that on which this department must chiefly rely.

While the committee then consider the obligations of pursuing the primitive design of the college, the professor of divinity would beg leave to ask whether they are not encouraged to pursue it by the ability they possess of doing it without interfering at all with those existing seminaries that are held deservedly in high estimation by the friends of religion?

He would suggest also as another encouraging consideration—

III. *The facilities of supporting a theological department in the college.*

For much that is needed for the proper organization of such a department is already in their possession. They have a library that is more ample on this department than on any other, and which might, at little expense, be made adequate for all the purposes of both the instructors and the pupils. They have one professor who, by his very office, is devoted to this department, and have the promise of partial assistance in it from two others. The whole department seems already organized to their hands, with the exception of merely an additional instructor; and will they abandon these advantages?

What they have not in possession they may easily obtain—the additional instructor. For so far as the subject has been broached among the clergy or among laymen, it meets with that warm reception which promises that solicitations, becomingly urgent, made on private individuals of wealth, or, if need be, on the community, will be productive of the necessary funds. With adequate funds it can hardly be supposed but that a man can be found who is suited to fill the station.

IV. *The positive advantages of upholding such a department of instruction in the college are also to be taken into consideration.*

The professor of divinity might suggest the advantages which the school would afford to its own students arising from its location, and the benefits it would impart to the church of Christ, but he omits these topics most deeply interesting, to hint merely at some of the advantages likely to arise from it to the college, in which they must be supposed to take a lively interest as the constituted guardians of its welfare.

The complete organization and successful operation of such a department of education, it is confidently believed, would exert a most auspicious influence on the college in regard to the character of its students, its reputation in the community, and the augmentation of its funds.

The influence must reach the students of the classical department, and be highly auspicious in favor of their order, morals, and religion. For it would bring the weight of the character and instructions of a new professor and religious teacher, and the conversations and examples of a more advanced grade of students, to bear on the minds of the classical students.

The influence of the department too, if successful, (as the professor of divinity flatters himself it would be,) would be felt on the reputation of the college in the community. For much might be done by the students of six or seven years' standing, like those in this department, and their instructors in connection with them, to exalt the standard of literature in the college; and the approaches it would make by the full organization of this department towards the character of a university, would exalt its reputation in the view both of the religious and literary part of the community.

The influence of it would, it is presumed, reach also the funds of the college. The religious and the literary both would feel stronger motives to send their sons to a college of increased sanctity and celebrity, and the wealthy of whatever character would more

Notes

¹ First published in *The College Courant*, Vol. XIII, no. 11, Sept. 27, 1873.

² See Ray Waddle, "*This Grand Errand*": *A Bicentennial History of Yale Divinity School* (New Haven, 2022).

³ William C. Fowler (1793-1881), pastor, educator, and politician.

⁴ Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), Yale College tutor, pastor of Greenfield Hill, Conn., appointed Yale College president in 1795, prominent spokesman of school of theology based on the thought of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) known as the "New Divinity," and member of literary circle known as "The Connecticut Wits."

⁵ Samuel B. Ingersoll (1785-1820), ordained at Shrewsbury, Mass., but died after preaching only one sermon.

⁶ Eleazar T. Fitch (1791-1871), professor of divinity at Yale College from 1817 to 1852, and lecturer in homiletics at Yale Divinity School from 1824 to 1861.

⁷ Thomas Anthony Thacher (1815-1886), professor of Latin and Greek at Yale College from 1842 until his death.

⁸ David N. Lord (1792-1880), who went on to edit a theological journal and write books for Bible schools and on "geognosy," a critique of evolutionary theory based on traditional principles of geology.

⁹ Horace Hooker (1793-1864), pastor, editor, and secretary of the Connecticut Missionary Society; Joseph D. Wickham (1797-1891), pastor of several churches in New York state and principal of Burr Seminary in Vermont; Epaphras Goodman (1790-1862), Cincinnati pastor and abolitionist; Edward Hitchcock (1793-1864), pastor, professor, and geologist; Lyman Coleman (1796-1882), professor of literature and languages at a variety of institutions; Levi Smith (1790-1854), evangelist and pastor; Stephen D. Ward (d. 1858), rector of Hopkins Grammar School, New Haven, and clergyman in Maine and Massachusetts.

¹⁰ James L. Kingsley (1778-1852), professor of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin at Yale College.

¹¹ Chauncey A. Goodrich (1790-1860), Connecticut clergyman and professor of rhetoric and oratory in Yale College, 1817-1839, and afterwards professor of pastoral theology.

¹² From William Wordsworth, *The Excursion* (1814), Book 1.

¹³ Johann August Ernesti (1708-1781), German rationalist theologian and philologist, *Institutio Interpretis Novi Testamenti* (1776).

¹⁴ Moses Stuart (1780-1752), professor of biblical studies at Andover Seminary, *Elements of Interpretation, Translated from the Latin of J. A. Ernesti and Accompanied by Notes* (1822).

¹⁵ John Cotton Smith (1765-1845), member of the Connecticut delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives, Connecticut's Lieutenant Governor, 1811-1813, and Governor, 1812-1817.

¹⁶ Jeremiah Day (1773-1867), Yale College president from 1817 to 1846.

¹⁷ The coxswain of Aeneas' ship in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

¹⁸ Latin for "Lion."

¹⁹ Nathanael Emmons (1745-1840), longtime pastor of Franklin, Mass., who in his parsonage school trained many ministerial candidates in the principles of the Edwardsean New Divinity.

²⁰ The conductor of choruses in ancient Greek dramas.

²¹ David Hume (1711-1776), controversial English philosopher, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779), Part I.

²² [Fisher,] Review of *An Essay on the existence of a Supreme Creator, possessed of infinite power, wisdom and goodness . . .* By William Laurence Brown, *Christian Spectator* I, issue 8 (Aug. 1819): 414-21.

²³ "Memoir of Rufus Woodward," *Christian Spectator* VII, issue 3 (Mar. 1825):113-25; the list of articles Woodward contributed to the journal is found on p. 122.

²⁴ Samuel Merwin and Nathaniel William Taylor, "Revival in New-Haven," *Christian Spectator* III, issue 1 (Jan. 1821): 49-52.

²⁵ Moses Stuart and Isaac Mills, *An address to all lay exhorters and lay preachers at conferences and other public religious meetings . . . Together with a letter from the Rev. Moses Stuart to Mr. Timothy Dwight, on lay exertions . . . and remarks thereon* (1821).

²⁶ Timothy Dwight (1778–1844), son of Pres. Timothy Dwight and New Haven merchant and philanthropist; Dwight Williams (not further identified, but a person by this name, possibly his son, is listed in the 1870 Census as born in 1829 and living in New Haven); Levi Stillman (1791–1872), owner of a large furniture factory in New Haven, which burned in 1834; Seth Bliss (1793–1879), minister in Jewett City, Conn., in 1825, and thereafter secretary of the American Tract Society, Boston; S. P. Davis (dates unknown), a contributor to the *American Journal of Science and Arts*, printed in New Haven; Sherman Converse (1790–1873), publisher of journals including the *Christian Spectator* and of other works such as Noah Webster's *American Dictionary*; and Simeon S. Jocelyn (1799–1879), later pastor of the Temple Street Church in New Haven, who was involved in the effort to create an African-American college in 1831 and who formed the Amistad Committee in 1839.

²⁷ Asahel Nettleton (1783–1844), Connecticut-born evangelist who later was a supporter of the East Windsor Theological Seminary, an institution founded on the neo-Calvinist thought of Jonathan Edwards in opposition to the perceived heterodoxy of the "New Haven Theology" of Yale Divinity School.

²⁸ Lyman Beecher (1775–1863), patriarch of the famous Beecher clan, Presbyterian minister in New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, and later president of Lane Seminary in Ohio, whose body is buried in New Haven's Grove Street Cemetery next to that of his longtime friend, Nathaniel William Taylor.

²⁹ Nathaniel Hewitt (1788–1861) pastored Congregational churches in Fairfield and Bridgeport, and then founded a Presbyterian church in Bridgeport.

³⁰ Thomas Harvey Skinner (1791–1871), Presbyterian minister in Philadelphia and Boston, later professor of theology at Andover Seminary and one of the founders of Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

³¹ John H. Rice (1777–1831), professor at Union Theological Seminary, Virginia. Jefferson's comment may relate to the efforts to establish the University of Virginia instead of a "southern seminary," for which Rice was a strong advocate.

³² Samuel Merwin (1777-1856), pastor of the White Haven (or North) Church in New Haven, which eventually merged with the Fair Haven Church to form the United Society.

³³ Chauncy Whittelsey (1717-1787), pastor of New Haven's First Congregational Church; Jonathan Edwards Jr. (1745-1801), pastor of the White Haven (or North) Church in New Haven, later president of Union College in New York; and James Dana (1735-1812), pastor of the First Church of Wallingford, Conn., and then Whittelsey's successor at New Haven's First Congregational Church.

³⁴ Those not already identified include James A. Hillhouse (1754-1832), Connecticut politician, New Haven activist, and longtime Yale College treasurer; Charles Chauncey (1747-1823), attorney, judge, and lecturer on jurisprudence; Noah Webster (1758-1843), American lexicographer and textbook writer; David Daggett (1764-1851), U.S. senator, New Haven mayor, and Connecticut Supreme Court judge; Simeon Baldwin (1761-1851), U.S. congressman, court clerk and judge, and New Haven mayor; Elizur Goodrich (1761-1849), elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and to the Connecticut General Assembly, New Haven mayor, and member of the Yale Corporation; brothers Samuel (1751-1842) and Joseph Darling (1759-1850), respectively, a New Haven physician and pharmacist; Dyer White (1762-1856), lawyer, judge, and revenue collector; Stephen Twining (1767-1832), lawyer, justice of the peace, steward and treasurer of Yale College; and William Leffingwell (1765-1834), a stockbroker in New York City and later a resident of New Haven.

³⁵ Psalm 77:20.

³⁶ Roger Minot Sherman (1773-1844), nephew of Roger Sherman, and Connecticut lawyer, politician, and judge, who upon the death of Timothy Dwight in 1817 was considered as his successor to the presidency of the college.

³⁷ Established by the Saybrook Platform of 1710, associations were companies of ordained Congregational clergy, organized by counties or parts of counties, among whose duties was the examining and licensing of candidates for the ministry.

³⁸ Dr. Benjamin Trumbull 1735-1820), historian and pastor of North Haven, Conn.; Benjamin Silliman (1779-1864), professor of chemistry and natural history at Yale College, founder of *The American Journal of Science*; Rev. Thomas Davies (dates unknown), one of the founders of the *Christian Spectator*; Cornelius Tuthill (1795-1825), New Haven schoolteacher and editor of *The Microscope*, a gentleman's literary and cultural magazine; James G. Percival (1795-1856), poet, surgeon, and geologist; Carlos Wilcox (1794-1827), minister and poet, whose unfinished work, "The Age of Benevolence," was published in *The Remains of the Rev. Carlos Wilcox* (1828); Nathaniel Chauncy (1789-1865), Philadelphia native who resided in New Haven; Henry E. Dwight (1797-1832), son of Pres. Timothy Dwight; Joseph Torrey (1797-1867), professor of philosophy at the University of Vermont; and Eli Whitney (1765-1825), inventor, who pioneered in the use of interchangeable parts but was most famous for the cotton gin, whose factory was in Hamden, Conn.

³⁹ Philip Sydney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1580), Book 1: "High-erected thoughts seated in the heart of courtesy."

⁴⁰ A topographical feature in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, from which the main character Christian could view the Celestial City.

⁴¹ John Milton, *Il Penseroso* (1631), line 39.

⁴² "Serene and motionless atmosphere" (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.640).

⁴³ * A class more numerous than had applied to him for previous years.—Fitch's note.

⁴⁴ During this interval, the following persons pursued their Theological studies here: J[oseph] D. Wickham, Edward Bull [(1791-1865), pastor of the Congregational Church in Lebanon, Conn.], William C. Fowler, Edward Hitchcock, Lyman Coleman, Samuel B. Ingersoll, David N. Lord, H[orace] Hooker, Levi Smith, C[hauncy] Whittelsey [(1783-1834), lawyer, general in the War of 1812, and politician].—Fitch's note.

⁴⁵ * Cent. Magdeb. [sic], Lib. i, Cap. vii.; Lib. xi., Cap. vii.; Lightfoot's Works. Vol. 2d, p. 80; Stillingfleet's Works, Vol. 3, p. 878; Alsted, Chron. Scholarum.—Fitch's note. [Fitch cites *The Madgeburg Centuries*, a late 16th-century German ecclesiastical history divided into one-hundred-year sections; John Lightfoot (1602-1675), Church of England divine and

Cambridge don, *Works* (2 vols., 1684); Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699), Church of England bishop, preacher, and polemicist, *Works* (6 vols., 1709-10); and Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588-1638), German Calvinist minister and academic, *Encyclopaedia* (1630).]

⁴⁶ † President Clap's History of Yale College, page 1.—Fitch's note.

[Thomas Clap (1703-1767), *The annals or history of Yale-College* (1766).]

⁴⁷ ‡ Clap's History of Yale College, page 2.—Fitch's note.

⁴⁸ * Clap's History of Yale College, page 11.—Fitch's note.

⁴⁹ † Clap's History of Yale College, page 60.—Fitch's note.

⁵⁰ From the records of the Corporation of Yale College, Sept. 20, 1822:

Whereas, one of the principal objects of the pious founders of this College was the education of pious young men for the work of the ministry, and whereas, to provide the requisite funds for establishing a Professorship of Didactic Theology in this College, sundry persons have subscribed an instrument in the following words, viz: 'The undersigned, feeling a deep interest in the prosperity of Yale College, do hereby severally agree to pay the sums annexed to our names respectively, for the establishment of a permanent fund to support an additional Professor or Professors in the Department of Theology in Yale College, June 20, 1822.' . .

Voted, That this Board doth accordingly found and establish in this College on said fund, a Professorship of Didactic Theology, on the terms, conditions and limitations expressed by said instrument, subscribed by said Timothy Dwight [Jr.] and others.

Voted, That in commemoration of the high sense which this Board entertains of the distinguished merits of the Rev. Timothy Dwight, deceased, late President of this College and of his eminent services and usefulness in office, the professorship this day established, shall take his name and be styled the DWIGHT PROFESSORSHIP OF DIDACTIC THEOLOGY.

Voted unanimously, That the Rev. Nathaniel W. Taylor, of New Haven, is elected Dwight Professor of Didactic Theology in

this College, and that he have as a salary annually the income of the fund established for the support of the Professorship of Didactic Theology, to be paid one-third at the expiration of each term; provided, however, that no greater yearly salary shall be allowed than twelve hundred dollars until further ordered by this Board.