

**THE CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY  
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
IN THE UNITED STATES OF  
AMERICA, PART I: 1705 TO 1741**

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The constitutional history of the Presbyterian church in the United States of America, Part I:  
1705 to 1741 by Charles Hodge

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**CHARLES HODGE**

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THE  
CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY  
OF THE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

BY  
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PART I.

1705 to 1741.

PHILADELPHIA:  
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## P R E F A C E.

SOMETIME during the past summer, the Rev. Dr. Hoge, of Ohio, wrote to one of his friends in Philadelphia, stating that a work was greatly needed, which should give a distinct account of the character of the present controversies in our church. He conceived that in order to the proper exhibition of the subject, the documentary history of the formation of the first presbytery, of the adopting act, of the great schism, of the union of the two synods, and of the formation of our present constitution, should be clearly presented to the public. The gentleman to whom this letter was addressed submitted it to a meeting of clergymen and laymen, who all concurred in the opinion that such a work ought to be prepared, and united in requesting the undersigned to undertake the task. A request from such a source the writer did not feel at liberty to decline. He soon found that the work was far more extensive than was at first supposed. If the documentary history of the leading events connected with the origin and progress of our church, was to be given at all, it was clearly right that it should be done in the best manner the materials at command would allow. These materials, though in some respects very defective, were ascertained to be too numerous and too important to be compressed within the limits of a pamphlet. The plan was, therefore, enlarged, and the writer was led to undertake a general review of the history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. The design of the work is to exhibit the true character of our

church, to show on what principles it was founded and governed; in other words, to exhibit historically its constitution, both as to doctrine and order. He has, therefore, ventured to call the work "A Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church." His readers will not expect more than this title promises. To trace the rise and progress of our church in different parts of the country; to detail the controversies, struggles, revivals, and declensions which have attended its course, is a work far too extensive for the time or resources of the present writer. It is indeed greatly to be desired that some competent person would undertake the task. If this cannot be done, it would be comparatively easy for different persons to collect and arrange the rapidly perishing materials of the history of our church in those portions of the country with which they are most familiar. Such a history for Virginia and the Southern States; another for Kentucky and the West; and another for the middle States, could not fail to be instructive and interesting. No one who has not attended to the subject can be aware of the necessity of this work's being done soon, if it is to be done at all. Every year carries with it into forgetfulness the knowledge of important facts. Much has already been lost, which the men of the last generation might have preserved. It is our duty to save as many of the memorials of the past as we can, for the sake of those who come after us.

Recent events have led to various speculations on the origin and constitution of our church. It has been said, that we owe our ecclesiastical existence to Congregationalists; that the condition of ministerial communion among us was assent to the essential doctrines of the Gospel; and that the presbyterian form of government which our fathers adopted was of a very mitigated character. As



these statements relate to the fundamental principles of our ecclesiastical compact, they deserve to be investigated. To ascertain how far we are indebted for existence as a church to Congregationalists, the writer was led to inquire what foundation was laid for a Presbyterian Church in the character of the early settlers of our country. This inquiry was extended so far as to form an introductory chapter by itself, which may be considered as too long if viewed in relation to the contents of the present number. It is hoped, however, that this objection will not be considered of much weight, if the probable extent of the whole work be taken into view. The next subject of investigation was the actual character of our church before the year 1729, as far as it can be learned from its history and records. This required an examination into the origin of our early congregations and ministers, and into the standard of doctrine and form of government which they adopted. As to the first of these points, great difficulty has been experienced in gaining satisfactory information. The reader has the results of as thorough a search as the circumstances of the writer permitted him to make. The exhibition of the form of government was comparatively an easy task; since the records of the original presbytery and synod furnished the materials on which the decision of that question must be made.

The third chapter contains the review of our history from 1729 to 1741. As the act by which the Westminster Confession of Faith was adopted by the synod as their standard of doctrine, was passed in 1729, this seemed to be the proper place to exhibit in full the testimony furnished by the records, not only as to the true interpretation of that act, but as to the condition of ministerial communion in the Presbyterian Church.

It is intended, should God permit, to continue, in a second number, this history from 1741 to 1789. This will require an exhibition of the causes of the great schism, an investigation of the doctrinal and constitutional questions involved in that controversy, and of the principles on which the church was settled at the time of the union of the two synods. Whether the work shall be continued in a third number, embracing a review of our history from the formation of the General Assembly to the present time, must depend on circumstances over which the writer has no control.

The author is bound to acknowledge his obligations to Dr. Green and to Dr. John McDowell, for allowing him access to records and documents in their possession. The former of these gentlemen as chairman of the committee appointed some years ago to write the history of the church, had received from various sources, a great number of short sketches of the history of particular congregations and presbyteries. Of these documents much use has been made in the investigation of the origin of our early churches. They are referred to, in the subsequent pages, as authority under the general title of MS History.

CHARLES HODGE.

*Princeton, March, 1839.*

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