

AMERICAN  
PRESBYTERIANISM

ITS ORIGIN AND EARLY HISTORY

*TOGETHER WITH AN APPENDIX OF LETTERS AND DOCUMENTS,  
MANY OF WHICH HAVE RECENTLY BEEN DISCOVERED*

BY

CHARLES AUGUSTUS BRIGGS, D.D.

DAVENPORT PROFESSOR OF HEBREW AND THE COGNATE LANGUAGES IN THE  
UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, NEW YORK CITY

WITH MAPS

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Against this Answer, Dickinson, Jones, Morgan, Pierson, Webb, and David Evans, protested. After considerable debate, the Protest was withdrawn, the Synod harmonized on four articles prepared by Dickinson, and gave thanks for the composure of their difference :

“(1) We freely grant, that there is full executive power of church government in Presbyteries and Synods, and that they may authoritatively, in the name of Christ, use the keys of church discipline to all proper intents and purposes, and that the keys of the church are committed to the church officers, and them only.

“(2) We also grant, that the mere circumstantial of church discipline, such as the time, place, and mode, of carrying on in the government of the Church, belong to ecclesiastical judicatories to determine as occasions occur, conformable to the general rules in the Word of God, that require all things to be done decently and in order. And if these things are called *acts*, we will take no offence at the word, provided that these acts be not imposed upon such as conscientiously dissent from them.

“(3) We also grant that Synods may compose directories, and recommend them to all their members, respecting all the parts of discipline, provided that all subordinate judicatories may decline from such directories when they conscientiously think they have just reason so to do.

“(4) We freely allow that appeals may be made from all inferior to superior judicatories, and that superior judicatories have authority to consider and determine such appeals.” (*Records*, p. 74.)

Jedediah Andrews, writing to Benjamin Colman, April 30, 1722, says :

“The business of the protestation that happened at our last Synodical meeting, I've endeavored to heal, and I hope 'twill be healed. I know not but the Pacific articles have had their good use. In short, I think the difference is in words, for I can't find any real difference, having sifted the matter in several letters which have passed between Mr. Dickinson and me upon it. I am still of the mind, as I told you before, that the squabble at New York is at the bottom, and has an evil influence on our

peace. I wish it may not do more hurt hereafter." (*MSS. of the Mass. Historical Socie'y.* Webster, in *l. c.*, pp. 99-100.)

Jonathan Dickinson opened the Synod in 1722 with a sermon on 2 Tim. iii. 17, in which he declared that the Church had no authority to make new laws, or add to what is prescribed in the Bible. "I challenge the world to produce any such *dedimus potestatem* from Christ, or the least lisp in the Bible that countenances such a regal power."\*

These pacificatory articles harmonized the two elements for a time; but the stricter sort were not satisfied, and began to agitate immediately for the furtherance of their views. The Presbytery of New Castle carried discipline with such a high hand in the case of Robert Laing, that the Synod sustained Robert Cross and Thomas Evans in their dissent. In 1724 they entered on their books a formula expressing adherence to the Westminster Confession, and their candidates were obliged to sign it at licensure in this language: "I do own the Westminster Confession as the Confession of my faith." This was an usurpation of Presbyterian power, acting independently of the Synod in the advance toward the stricter Presbyterianism. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in 1717, had prohibited "Autherader or any other Presbytery to require subscriptions to any formulas except those approved of by the Assembly," and cited the offending Presbytery to explain their illegal action. The subscriptionists of the Presbytery of New Castle were acting in defiance of Presbyterian law and precedent.†

These were evil times for controversy in the Synod, for two of the leading churches, Newark and New York, were in grave difficulties with their pastors; and

\*Webster, in *l. c.*, p. 100.

†Cunningham, *Church History of Scotland*, II., p. 377.