

T H E
CONSTITUTION

O F T H E

Associate-Reformed Synod

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

THE FORMULA OF QUESTIONS,

TO BE PUT TO

CHURCH-OFFICERS at their ORDINATION;

A N D

A N U M B E R O F R U L E S,

FOR PRESERVING GOOD ORDER

In the SYNOD and SUBORDINATE JUDICATORIES.

P H I L A D E L P H I A,

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M.DCC.LXXXIII.

1783

T H E C O N S T I T U T I O N

O F T H E Associate-Reformed Synod.

A R T I C L E I.

IT is the resolution of this Synod to persevere in adhering to the System of Truth laid down in the Holy Scriptures, and exhibited in the Confession of Faith, and Catechisms larger and shorter; and to the fundamental principles of gospel worship, and ecclesiastical government, held forth in the Directory for Public Worship, and the Form of Presbyterian Church Government, agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster,

ster, with the assistance of Commissioners from the Church of Scotland.

This Declaration does not, however, extend to the following Sections of the Confession of Faith, which define the Powers of Civil Government in relation to Religion, *viz.* Chap. xx. sect. 4. Chap. xxiii. sect. 3. Chap. xxxi. sect. 2. These Sections are reserved for a candid discussion on some future occasion, as God may be pleased to direct. Nor is it to be construed as a resignation of their right to adjust the circumstances of public worship, and ecclesiastical policy, to the situation in which Divine Providence may place us. All the members of Synod, in the mean time, acknowledge that they are under the most sacred obligations to avoid unnecessary criticisms, on any of these excellent treatises, which would have a
native

native tendency to weaken their attachment to the truths therein contained.

IF any of the Members of Synod shall conceive any scruple or scruples, at any article or articles of the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, Directory for Worship, or Form of Presbyterian Government; or shall think they have sufficient reasons to make objections thereto, they shall have full liberty to communicate their scruples or objections to their brethren, who shall consider them with impartiality, meekness, and patience, and endeavour to remove them, by calm dispassionate reasoning: No kind of censure shall be inflicted in cases of this nature, till this Christian Process shall be fairly tried; unless those scrupling or objecting brethren shall disturb the peace of the church,

church, by publishing their opinions to the people, or urging them in judicatories with irritating and schismatical zeal.

ARTICLE II.

THE Ministers and Elders met in Synod also declare their hearty approbation of the earnest contending for the truth, and magnanimous sufferings in its defence, by which their pious ancestors were enabled to distinguish themselves in the two last centuries : That they have an affectionate remembrance of the National Covenant of Scotland, and of the Solemn League and Covenant of Scotland, England, and Ireland, as well intended engagements to support the cause of civil and religious liberty.

liberty *, and hold themselves bound by the Divine Authority to practise all the moral duties therein contained, according to their circumstances: That public and explicit covenanting with God is a moral duty under the gospel dispensation, to which they are resolved

* The members of Synod esteem themselves, and such of their people as have emigrated from Britain and Ireland, deeply interested in these solemn transactions, and they have a lively sense of the obligations they are under to prosecute the ends thereof, in a suitableness to their circumstances: but when they consider themselves as the representatives of a church, of which some are now members, and many more may become members, who never were, directly nor indirectly, under the formal obligation of these covenants, as being foreigners, or the posterity of foreigners, they cannot help thinking that they would go beyond their proper line, should they acknowledge them in any other form than that which is expressed in this Article.

ed to attend, as He shall be pleased to direct : That it is their real intention to carry with them all the Judicial Testimonies against defection from the faith once delivered to the saints, which have been emitted in the present age by their brethren in Britain, as far as these testimonies serve to display the truth, and comport with the circumstances of our church ; and they will avail themselves of every call to bear a pointed testimony against the errors and delusions which prevail in this country.

ARTICLE III.

THE Members of Synod also acknowledge with gratitude, that they are bound to honour the religious denominations in Britain, to which they formerly belonged, on account of their
zeal

zeal for the purity of the gospel, and of their laudable endeavours to promote it, not only in Britain and Ireland, but also in America: And they profess an unfeigned desire to hold an amicable correspondence with all or with any of them, and to concur with them in every just and laudable measure for promoting true and undefiled religion.

A R T I C L E IV.

IT is the resolution of the Synod never to introduce, nor suffer to be introduced into their Church, the local controversies about the civil establishment of the Presbyterian Religion, and the religious clause of some burgeses oaths in Scotland, or any unnecessary disputes about the origin of civil domi-

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nion, and the requisites for rendering it legal in circumstances dissimilar to those in which themselves are placed. They esteem themselves bound to detach their religious profession from all foreign connexions, and to honour the civil powers of America, conscientiously submitting to them in all their lawful operations.

ARTICLE V.

THAT the abuse of ecclesiastical censures may be effectually prevented, the following general rule of discipline is unanimously adopted, *viz.* That notorious violations of the law of God in practice, and such errors in principle, as unhinge the Christian profession, shall be the only scandals for
which

which the sentence of deposition and excommunication shall be passed ; and that the highest censure for other offences shall be, a dissolution of the connexion between the Synod and the offender.

ARTICLE VI.

THE terms of admission to fixed communion with the Synod shall be, soundness in the faith, as defined in the above mentioned Confession of Faith, Catechisms, &c. submission to the government and discipline of the Church, and a holy conversation.

ARTICLE

ARTICLE VII.

THE Members of Synod also acknowledge it to be their duty, to treat pious people of other denominations with great attention and tenderness. They are willing, *as God affordeth opportunity, to extend communion to all, who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus*, in conformity to his will: But as occasional communion, in a divided state of the church, may produce great disorders, if it be not conducted with much wisdom and moderation, they esteem themselves, and the people under their inspection, inviolably bound, in all ordinary cases, to submit to every restriction of their liberty

berty, which general edification renders necessary *.

THIS

* The principle expressed in this article, is not a new principle adopted by the Synod. It is one of the received principles of the Secession, and it is set in a very strong light in the 26th chapter of the Confession of Faith, which largely describes the communion of the catholic church. The members of Synod do not mean to draw any other conclusions from it, than were drawn by their pious ancestors in times of the greatest zeal for the purity of religion. No objection can therefore be justly stated against it, as it stands in the Article, but what may be made to it, as it stands in the Confession of Faith. The application of the principle to particular cases may indeed be attended with some difficulties. We are not, however, accountable for these difficulties, as they arise from the divided state of the church of Christ. The Article is guarded, and cannot, without the most evident perversion, be construed as a licence to hold unscriptural communion with other churches. It is the intention of the Synod not to go into connexions with
any

THIS Article is not however to be construed as a licence to encourage vagrant preachers, who go about under pretence of extraordinary zeal and devotion, and are not subject to the government and discipline of any regular church.

ARTICLE VIII.

AS the principles of the Synod are detached from the local peculiarities by which the most considerable parties of Presbyterians have been hitherto distinguished, it is farther agreed to reject all such applications for admission to
fixed

any denomination which are contrary to, or inconsistent with the spirit of what is usually styled the Covenanted Reformation.

fixed communion with the Synod, that may at any time be made by persons belonging to other denominations of Presbyterians, as evidently arise from caprice, personal prejudice, or any other schismatical principles; and that the only admissible application shall be such, as on deliberate examination shall be found to arise from a solid conviction of duty, and to discover Christian meekness towards the party whose communion is relinquished; or such as are made by considerable bodies of people, who are not only destitute of a fixed gospel ministry, but cannot be seasonably provided for by the denomination of Presbyterians to which they belong. It is, however, thought proper, that applications of the last kind should not be admitted, till the bodies by whom they are made shall previously inform the judicatory which

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hath the immediate inspection of them,
of the reasons of their intended appli-
cation, and shall use all due means to
obtain the concurrence of that judica-
tory.

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*** By order of Synod, these Articles are to be read at the Ordination of every Church Officer.**

tarian errors, and all other opinions which are contrary to sound doctrine, and the power of godliness?

Do you promise to submit, in the spirit of meekness, to admonitions of the brethren of this * in subordination to the Synod; and do you promise to maintain the *unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*; and that you will not follow any divisive courses, by complying with the defections of the times, or by giving † up to a detestable neutrality in the cause of God?

ARE not zeal for the glory of God,
and

* This blank is to be filled with the word *Session* or *Presbytery*, as the case may require.

† This blank to be filled up with the word *yourself*, or *yourselves*, as the case may require.

and a desire of being instrumental in edifying his church, the principal motives which induce you to take the office of * to this congregation?

HAVE you used any undue methods to procure your call to the office of *?

Do you sincerely resolve to rule your
 † in the fear of the Lord,
 and to be circumspect in the whole of your conversation, following after righteousness, faith, charity; and do you also

* * This and the foregoing blank must be filled with the word, *Pastor, Ruling Elder, or Deacon*, as the case may require.

† This blank must be filled with the word *Family*, if only one candidate is ordained, and *Families*, if more are ordained. If a candidate has not a family, these words must be added, *If it shall please God to give you one.*

also promise to promote the edification of the body of Christ, by endeavouring to perform all the official duties incumbent upon you with zeal and fidelity?

PARTICULAR QUESTIONS.

For MINISTERS.

DO you accept the call to be the Pastor of this congregation; and do you promise to preach the gospel, not *with the enticing words of man's wisdom*, but in the purity and simplicity thereof; not *shunning to declare the whole council of God*; to catechise and exhort from house to house; to visit the sick; and to perform whatever other duties are incumbent upon you, as a faithful minister of Christ, for convinc-

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ing and reclaiming sinners, and for
building up saints in their most holy faith?

For RULING ELDERS.

DO you promise to be faithful and impartial in the exercise of discipline, and to be punctual in attending meetings of Session, and superior judicatories, as you may be called?

For DEACONS.

DO you promise to attend to the necessities of the poor, with Christian meekness and tenderness, and to manage all such temporalities of the church as may be committed to your care, with diligence and fidelity, according to the directions which, from time to time, may be given you by the session?

For

FOR MINISTERS, RULING ELDERS,
and DEACONS.

DO you make these promises, as in the presence of Him *who searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins of the children of men*, and as you would desire to give in *your account with joy, and not grief*, at the great day of the Redeemer's appearance, when he shall come, and all his saints with him?

R U L E S

R U L E S, &c.

SOLITARY motions shall not be admitted.

MEMBERS, in their speeches, must closely attend to the point in debate, avoiding desultory harangues, and unnecessary digressions.

MEMBERS shall not be interrupted in the course of speaking, unless they deviate from the subject of consideration, or in other respects behave with impropriety.

WHEN two or more members rise, at once, to speak, the Moderator shall determine

determine the preference, without appeal.

No member shall speak more than twice on any subject in debate, without the permission of Synod, till all the other members shall have an opportunity for declaring their sentiments.

THE calling of the roll shall be so conducted by the Moderator, that all the members may have equal opportunities for giving their opinion.

No Member shall withdraw without the permission of the Moderator, or go home without the permission of Synod.

PAPERS presented to the Synod shall be filed in the order in which they are read, with proper indorsements, and
minutes

minutes of which shall be given to the Moderator.

THE Clerk of the Synod shall give extracts only to members, and parties in causes which have been determined by the Synod, or are yet in a depending state; and he shall be responsible for all the public papers committed to his care.

GENERAL rules respecting our churches shall not be established by the Synod, at that meeting at which they are proposed; but Members shall be requested to consider them, during the adjournment, that they may be prepared for reporting the expediency of such rules, at the next meeting of Synod.

CASES of peculiar importance shall not be immediately submitted to the
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synod, without the most pressing necessity : But the Moderator of the Presbytery, before which, in the first instances, such cases are cognisable, shall send a distinct account of their state to the Moderator of the Synod, who shall immediately transmit it to the Moderators of the other Presbyteries, that Members, having an opportunity for considering said cases with deliberation, may be prepared for a decision at the next meeting of Synod.

YOUNG men who have not been, for a considerable time, in communion with us; shall not be licensed by any of the Presbyteries, nor shall ministers of any other denomination in this country, be admitted as members thereof, without the consent of Synod.

CANDIDATES or Ministers from Britain

tain or Ireland, who have been in communion with either of the Associate Synods, or of that Reformed Presbytery of which the reverend John M'Mullan is a member, and who bring with them sufficient attestations of their character, and licence or ordination, may be received and admitted to service, by any of the Presbyteries, upon declaring their hearty approbation of the Constitution of this Synod, and their resolution to adhere to it.

PRESBYTERIES shall faithfully report in writing, at every meeting of Synod, licences given to candidates, ordinations, removals, and installments of ministers, and all other occurrences which affect the general interests of religion, that may happen within their respective districts.

PRESBYTERIES

PRESBYTERIES shall be particularly attentive to the capacity, literature, and piety of young men, before they are admitted to preach the gospel.

PRESBYTERIES shall not sustain a call for a minister, but in consequence of a regular moderation, according to the constant and laudable practice of our church.

EVERY Session, under the inspection of the Synod, shall keep an exact record of its judicial proceedings, and of marriages and births.

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