



# P R E F A C E.

*A Very grievous complaint is made by the Committee of the Associate Reformed Synod, concerning the abuse of their friendship, gentleness, lenity, and forbearance\*. How good and kind these gentlemen in former times were, the writer of the following sheets shall not take upon him to determine. But ever since he came to this country, he can answer for himself and his brethren, that they stand in no debt to the good will of the Associate Reformed Synod. He is little acquainted with any of that party, and connected by the ties of friendship with none of them. He would, however, be sorry to give them any just cause of forfeiting a right to the character they give themselves. Only he takes the liberty of freely declaring his adherence to the Secession cause, and his objections to the Constitution and procedure of their Synod; and if they are displeased at this, there is no help for it. To be silent when the truth is injured might please men, but would not be right in the sight of God. By him every man's work shall be tried, and the day of his righteous judgment shall declare of what sort it is.*

\* See a pamphlet bearing this title, "A Draught of an Overture prepared and published by a Committee of the Associate Reformed Synod," &c.



## Points of Difference, &c.

**I**F some can see no difference between us and the Associate Reformed Synod, this is easily to be accounted for. The matters of God are little and unworthy of notice to men who mind earthly things only. In what respects the present life many are quick-sighted, who cannot distinguish between good and evil according to the divine law. A small variation in the least article of a civil constitution they can soon discern; and if they think the change is for the worse, they can predict its pernicious and lasting effects; how it will make way for other alterations, and in the end destroy our civil liberties. To withstand such a change is, with them, integrity, fortitude, duty, and steadfastness, worthy of praise. The neutralist in a political controversy is despised, as a useless member of society, as a coward who hid his head in time of danger, or as a man so selfish that he will hazard nothing for the common good. Very often he is suspected, notwithstanding his profession of indifference, as leaning to the wrong side. Plainness, in any cause of this kind, is reckoned honesty; warmth passes for a zeal becoming the importance of the subject: to oppose even a small innovation

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is affirmed to be no more than a commendable inflexibility; as a little ground lost in the beginning of the day, may be the occasion of our being driven quite out of the field ere night.

Such is the wisdom of men, and such is their way, in worldly things, in things which engage their attention, and in things which they consider as interesting to themselves and to their posterity. But the reverse of all this, in what concerns religion, is highly approved; and never more approved any where than in this country. According to the greater part, we ought to be very zealous about forms and modes of civil government; but indifferant about the discipline and government of the Lord's house. To be hot in defence of a political question is virtue; but if we are in any degree like the prophet, very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, we may expect some such challenge as Ahab gave to him, *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* In matters concerning our civil rights and liberties, we must be immovable as a rock; but earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, is bigotry, the effect of prejudice, the infallible sign of a weak, a narrow, and an unenlightened mind. The least iota of politics we need not be ashamed to contend about,—men reputed great, and wise, and good, are in this respect an example to us; but these which are counted the lesser articles of God's law, we must regard as trifles, as subjects of controversy only among the weak and foolish. If opinions injurious to the public interests of the country

are like to gain ground, it is a crime to be quiet, we must resolutely oppose these political heresies; if we are blamed for this, the answer is ready, viz. that we enjoy the liberty of declaring our sentiments, act from upright principles, and care little what reflections are cast on us for attending, as good citizens to our duty: but if in this manner we testify our abhorrence of opinions which we consider as injurious to the interests of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and warn others against them, there is no excuse for us; we are led by a party spirit, are uncharitable toward other people, and guilty of an offence which cannot be removed but by retracting what we have said. If we appeal to former times, when our fathers judged otherwise, we shall be told of their blindness, their narrow spirit, and hear the superior light of this age extolled. But the true state of matters is, that in spiritual things the most part of this generation see very dimly, or not at all. The whole of our Christian profession is a very light thing to them; and differences which may happen about the manner of stating it, or about particular articles of it, seem so small to them as to be almost imperceptible.

As to the difference between us and the Associate Reformed Synod, it is plain enough to all who seriously desiring information, compare the profession made by them in their *Constitution*, with that made by us in our *Declaration and Testimony*. The following are

the most interesting, though not the only questions in which we and they are manifestly far from being agreed :

I. We receive the Westminster Confession without any reserve, as the Confession of our Faith ; only explaining more fully than it does the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, which leaves civil magistrates no right to impose by pains and penalties, such a profession of religion as they think best, on mens consciences.

The Associate Reformed Synod speak so dubiously about this Confession, that we do not know what they mean. Let the first article of their Constitution speak for itself. It contains the whole profession of that body concerning their belief of the Scriptures, their adherence to the Confession, and other matters mentioned in it.—“ 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, 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 re-  
“ served for a candid discussion on some fu-  
“ ture occasion, as God may be pleased to di-  
“ rect. Nor is it to be construed as a resig-  
“ nation of their right to adjust the circum-  
“ stances of public worship, and ecclesiastical  
“ policy, to the situation in which Divine Pro-  
“ vidence 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 tendency to weaken their attach-  
“ ment to the truths therein contained.

“ If any of the members of Synod shall con-  
“ ceive any scruple or scruples, at any article  
“ or articles of the Confession of Faith, Cate-  
“ chisms, Directory for Worship, or Form of  
“ Presbyterian Government; or shall think  
“ they have sufficient reasons to make objecti-  
“ ons 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 dispa-  
“ sionate reasoning: No kind of censure shall  
“ be inflicted in cases of this nature, till this  
“ Christian process shall be fairly tried; un-  
“ less those scrupling or objecting brethren  
“ shall disturb the peace of the church, by  
“ publishing their opinions to the people,  
“ or urging them in judicatories with irritat-  
“ ing and schismatical zeal.”

According to this language, the first ever that Synod uttered, opposition to this or that part of our Confession, may be reconciled with an approbation of their Constitution. It forbids unnecessary criticisms only; and who ever found fault with any thing of that kind, who did not, at the same time, affirm his own criticisms to be highly expedient. No scruple at any article of the Confession, was it even the same with that of Professor Simpson, who denied the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, is deemed worthy of immediate censure. Yet we know that the Synod have lately affirmed the expediency of immediate censure in another case, which they pretended came under the cognizance of a Presbytery belonging to them; though the matter was in itself no other than a refusing to relinquish the secession cause, and join with them. The article of their Constitution just now mentioned, leaves it also doubtful whether they will censure objectors to the Confession of Faith at all, if they manage their objections with decency, and keep them a secret from the people.

It would be more honest, if the Associate Reformed Synod reckon any part of the Confession not agreeable to the word of God, to tell us so. Neither we nor they need be ashamed to acknowledge whatever we may at any time find to be amiss or defective in our profession of the faith; and in consequence of seeing our mistake, to make this profession more agreeable to the supreme and the unerring standard, the Word of God, which Pro-

testants unanimously confess to be the only rule of faith and practice. According to it, the Confession of our own faith is to be made; and if we find any thing in the latter repugnant to the former, we must instantly give it up, or we contradict the first principles of our holy religion. But every one who makes an honest confession of his faith, must utterly disclaim all apprehension of any thing false or dubious in it at the time. He, as a witness, asserts what he is persuaded is truth, and confesses what he believes to be the doctrine taught in the word of God, which he is resolved, by divine aid, to maintain all the days of his life.

Such hesitation as that expressed by the Associate Reformed Synod about the Confession of Faith, and such allowance as they seem willing to make for any of their number who may object against it, are very agreeable to the spirit of the times, and may redound to their credit with many; but nothing can be more manifestly opposite to the views of those who belong to the Secession. The latter consider such hesitation, and such objection to the Confession, as a plain evidence of a secret aversion to our reformation principles, and as a forerunner of avowed defection from them.

About sixty or seventy years ago, some ministers belonging to the synod of Ulster in Ireland, began to hesitate about the Confession of Faith; they refused to own their adherence to it, or would do so only with some reservations, which made their adherence to it nothing; and to justify their cause, much was said

about charity, candor, liberality of sentiment, tenderness to such as differed from us, and the unreasonableness of requiring more of any candidate for the ministry, than an acknowledgment of the Scriptures to be the word of God. But what has the consequence been? The bringing in of another gospel, and the denying of our Lord Jesus Christ to be God over all, blessed for ever. The *New Light* party, as they are called, now prevail in that Synod; the little leaven having almost leavened the whole lump.

II. A distinguishing characteristic of the Secession, as a body, and that which draws a most visible line between them and other Presbyterians in Britain and in America, is, their adherence to a Testimony against what they account the errors and defections of the present time. As many of these have either taken place since the Westminster Confession was framed, or have assumed a new colour of late years, a more full and particular condemnation of them was judged necessary, than is expressed in the Confession. The truths asserted in it are not neglected by making a new application of them in a Testimony against the opposition now made to the doctrine and order of the church of Christ.

It is too manifest, that in several Protestant churches, the most part have quite departed from the spirit of that doctrine which is asserted in their respective Confessions. It is long since these were framed; and by the help of

False colouring, opinions which have become common and fashionable in our times, are represented as consistent with an adherence to the faith professed by our reforming ancestors; which are, notwithstanding, as opposite to it as darkness is to light. Such deceitful acting in any case is sinful; in the matters of God it is exceedingly so: and the Testimony we maintain is intended as a protest against it.

Our stating the profession of our faith, so as by it to condemn those errors and defections from the right ways of the Lord, which are most ensnaring in our own days, is neither new nor unprecedented.—When the Arians, Pelagians, and other heretics troubled the church in ancient times, their opinions were expressly condemned; not as if these had not been materially condemned by the profession made in the church before, but it was judged necessary to make their contrariety to that profession more evident, by a farther testimony in behalf of the truth; and in a time of wavering, confusion, and danger, it was judged necessary to distinguish, so far as the present state admits, who were on the Lord's side, faithful in his cause, and valiant for the truth, and who were not.—The Protestant churches meant no reflection on the profession of the faith made in the ages before Antichrist, nor did they relinquish any article of the truth then stated and defended against various adversaries; yet they did not reckon adherence to that which is called the Apostles Creed, or to that agreed on by the council of Nice, a sufficient discharge of their

duty; this being neither a proper mark to distinguish them and the Antichristian -synagogue, nor a proper testimony in behalf of such articles of divine truth, as were in their day most violently denied, opposed, and persecuted. Therefore, as the Lord called them and gave them strength, in one nation after another, our Protestant ancestors made a confession of their faith, in which they held forth, asserted, and vindicated the truth of the gospel more expressly against the abominations of the church of Rome.—The Assembly at Westminster judged a more full and particular confession, as to various articles respecting the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the Lord's house, necessary in their time. They did not depart in any wise from the truth received and professed in the churches of Britain at the reformation; but seeing many new adversaries rising up against it, they framed the confession of their faith, so as to make it a still more express testimony against them than it was before. They endeavoured indeed to take away some corruptions, the remains of Antichrist; but they injured not the truth set forth in any former confession, by their having made a new one more suitable to the circumstances in which they were placed, and more directly stated against the errors of their own day.—The Synod of Dort agreed on certain articles (or canons, as they were called) as a seasonable and necessary testimony in behalf of those truths injured by the Arminian party, whose errors were at that time threatening the ruin of the

reformed church in the United Provinces. That synod was then, and has been since much de-  
famed, on account of that glorious cause in de-  
fence of which they acted; asserting and vindi-  
cating the doctrine of free grace, in opposition  
to the Pelagian heresy, revived and dressed in  
somewhat fairer colours by the Arminians: But  
whoever appears on the Lord's side in a time  
of backsliding, and opposes pernicious heresies,  
will bear no good name in this evil world.  
That synod did not injure the doctrines expres-  
sed in their Confession, by applying it in this  
manner, against the errors that were then  
spreading like a pestilence through their coun-  
try. The real cause of hatred to them was their  
steadfastness, their holding fast that which they  
had received; but to render them odious they  
were represented as chargeable with innova-  
tion, as rigid and uncharitable, as guilty of  
destroying the peace of the reformed churches,  
and of laying new articles in the way of union  
among Protestants.

A synod in Switzerland, in the latter part  
of the last century, in like manner, opposed a  
scheme warmly espoused by some eminent men  
in the reformed church of France, who made  
high professions of moderation, and of willing-  
ness to heal differences, but were evidently  
leaning toward the Arminian side. The Con-  
sent of Doctrine which was agreed on by that  
synod, and which was a testimony for the truth  
against these French Estitudinarians, displeased  
many. Adherence to it was for a time requir-  
ed of such as were called to the ministry in the

churches of Switzerland and of Geneva: But this was represented as an unnecessary addition to the former Confession of these churches, and as an intolerable imposition. Through the loud cry made against it, and through the lukewarm spirit of the times, it was neglected, and at length in a manner forgot. But was this for the benefit of these churches? Verily no. The most part of their late writers, whose works have reached us, being no more like their reforming ancestors, than tin is like gold. The church of Geneva appears to be wholly Arminian; yea, according to late accounts, the ministers of that city are suspected of inclining to the Arian or Socinian blasphemies. How is the faithful city become an harlot; it was full of judgment, righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers, who have destroyed the flock. Calvin, Beza, Diodati, and Francis Turrentine, men who were not of the world, and who were for this cause hated by it, are no more; and a time-serving generation fill their place.

One instance more of this kind, though of an older date than that now mentioned, may yet be adduced. The Thirty-nine Articles of the church of England can never, by any fair and equitable construction, be made to speak in favour of the Arminian cause; yet this heresy began to infect some of the Episcopalian communion in the reign of James I. The disciples of Arminius were however as scarce, or more so, at that time in England, than the preachers of salvation by free grace, through our Lord Jesus Christ, are in this age. The Lambeth articles

Carrying in them a strong condemnation of Arminianism, were framed by some of the most eminent prelates in that church; and it was proposed that an assent to them should also be required of such as were admitted to the ministry. This was opposed, under the pretence that it was unnecessary, seeing the Thirty-nine Articles already received, were a sufficient guard against the Arminian errors. They would indeed be so, if men were not either so blind, or so destitute of integrity, as to wrest them exceedingly. But many (some of whom filled high stations in that church) have perverted these articles to an Arminian sense, who would never have attempted the expounding the Lambeth articles in favour of opinions which they so expressly condemned. Had these been adopted as a part of the Confession of the church of England, they must have bid defiance to common sense who would have said that its doctrine was Arminian. Many unreasonable, and many trifling things have been imposed in that church, to secure the episcopal dignity and authority; but such an acknowledgment of the truth, as was necessary to preserve the flock of Christ from the contagion of error, was thought too much. Men were zealous in what they found affected their worldly interest; but not so in the cause of God. Every attempt which threatened to lessen the power and revenue of the prelates, has been opposed with firmness and resolution, often with much intemperate zeal; but those who set themselves to deny the grace, and to diminish the glory of our Re-

deemer, were applauded rather than censured. Thus while the church of England, pleased with its own deformities, holds fast those remains of Popery in its government and worship, which were the cause of much trouble to many, who could neither in conscience approve them, nor yet have liberty to dissent from them,—it has lost that purity of doctrine which was once its glory; the Arminian heresy having almost entirely destroyed that part of the Lord's vineyard.

These things being considered, we will not be found to have acted contrary to the doctrine and practice of the church in former times, in our endeavours to maintain a testimony against the backsliding spirit of this age, against that manifest and increasing defection from the truth of the gospel once received among us, by which the church of Christ has been wasted and ruined, made a prey to seducers, and a scorn to enemies in our days. We have been in some degree mindful of the Lord's direction, to go forth by the footsteps of his flock.

We are for our part fully satisfied, that as matters now stand, adherence to the Westminster Confession, is not by itself alone sufficient to distinguish between such as take part in the common defection, and such as desire to withstand it. A prevailing party in the established church of Scotland, have adopted or favoured various errors, have condemned in sundry instances the truth, and have perverted the discipline of the Lord's house exceedingly, while they still profess an adherence to the Westmin-

ter Confession: and others in this country, have in some sort owned it as the confession of their faith, while they either maintain; or suffer many in their communion to maintain, opinions which to us appear quite contrary to the spirit and design of that Confession, very injurious to the cause of Christ; and manifestly tending to promote that apostacy, which thro' grace we would desire to oppose. Instances of this may be given when it is found necessary.

Now, the Associate Reformed Synod differ so much from us here, that they have fairly given up the principle on which the Secession was formed, and still remains distinguished from other Presbyterians in Britain and America. No such testimony as that which we maintain, and for the necessity of which at this time we plead, belongs to the profession of that synod. They say, (Article II.) "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." But every one may see, that this is the language of men who would seem to say something, and yet mean to say nothing. The testimonies to which they may be supposed to

refer, are in sundry instances contrary to one another; and all contrary to the Constitution of the Associate Reformed Synod. If tried by the principles contained in it, they must fall together. But the framers of that Constitution seem to have been more intent to amuse people with language, in sound somewhat like that which they had been accustomed to hear, than to make them understand the *real intention* of their party. Has this synod ever recommended all or indeed any one of the testimonies concerning which they speak, to the consideration of the people under their inspection; or given them any proper rule to distinguish between the good and evil, which their Constitution supposes to be in them. It cannot be denied, as they were told on a former occasion, that they may adhere to the decrees of the council of Trent, in the same form of words. Some truths, and important truths, are expressed in the decisions of that Popish assembly, though composed of sworn and bloody enemies to the cause of Jesus Christ. The worst profession ever was made of the Christian faith, displays the truth so far.

Upon the whole, no such testimony as that maintained by the Secession, either now is, or ever was maintained by the Associate Reformed Synod. In the passage last quoted from their Constitution, they seem in dubious language to propose something of this kind. But either that promise had no such meaning, or they have since retracted it. Above six years have passed away, and nothing is done in consequence of it: and lately a committee of their number has

told us, that their synod “ are afraid of publishing too many papers called Testimonies; “ because these may tend to turn away our attention from the holy Scriptures, and fix it “ on human compositions; and they are convinced that in this manner, all the trumpe- “ ry of the church of Rome was gradually introduced. They therefore,” add the committee, “ offer no other testimony to their “ churches, than the Bible as explained in the “ Confession of Faith.” Some people in their communion, not having as yet fully entered into the spirit and design of the Constitution, have waited long for the *pointed testimony* they were taught to expect; and at length they are gratified with a severe condemnation of papers called Testimonies. The Secession has been often accused, but scarcely ever with more malignity and injustice. The committee who have done so, were all once of that denomination, and made the same profession we still make. But the Testimony they, at their ordination to the ministry, solemnly engaged to maintain, appears now to them worse than unnecessary. Such papers as it, may tend to draw people’s attention away from the Scriptures, and fix it on human compositions. An hackneyed argument of the New Light party in Ireland, and of their Socinian brethren in England, against any other profession of the faith than this, That we own the Scriptures to be the word of God. It is as easily applied against one kind of papers as another; against these which are called Confessions, as against those which are called

Testimonies. It needs only to be pressed a little farther, and the Westminster Confession, which stands not on very firm ground in the Constitution of the Associate Reformed Synod, will give way also, and fall, as the Secession Testimony has done, before it.

But the committee have not expressed all their dread of Testimonies, and displeasure at the Secession, in this last accusation. They farther tell us, that their Synod "are convinced that in this manner," (viz. by publishing papers called Testimonies) "all the trumpery of the church of Rome was gradually introduced." Aye, gentlemen! your convictions have been very strong as to the evil tendency of the Secession Testimony, before you renounced it. After this, I hope no man will doubt of your repentance, for ever having been among the defenders of it. The abominations of Popery are so very great, that whoever duly considers them, can hardly forbear praying with the church of England, in good king Edward's days, *From the tyranny of the bishop of Rome, and all his detestable enormities, deliver us.* But as to the manner in which these were introduced, this committee greatly err; and if they are acquainted with ecclesiastical history, they must have done so wilfully. The truth of the gospel was forgotten by the careless in ancient times, as it is now; and few endeavoured to revive the knowledge of it. It was slighted and denied; and the Lord's witnesses who asserted it, were constrained to seek an hiding place in the wilderness. It was hated

by the greater part of men; and for this cause God sent them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie. New additions were time after time made to the worship of God, that it might be rendered more pleasing to the eye and to the ear, till it was dreadfully corrupted. Many Christian teachers borrowed too much both from the opinions and customs of the Pagans, that they might the more easily prevail on them to become professors of Christianity. By desolating wars, and frequent overturnings among the nations, learning was almost extinguished; and the ignorance of the multitude made them an easy prey to such as were ever intent to impose on their consciences, by some new and lucrative species of superstition; and the bishops of Rome took every advantage which the favour, the weakness, or the contests of princes at any time gave them, to increase their own power.

In this manner were the errors, blasphemies, and bloody tenets of the church of Rome gradually introduced; not by such measures as those of the Secession have taken. Many faults attend the ministers and people of that communion; yet the members of this committee, who were long acquainted with them, may, if they please, tell the world, whether they found them neglecting the Scriptures through attachment to human compositions, and disposed to receive such opinions, and follow such human devised modes of worship, as these which prevail in the church of Rome; and if they have found them guilty on this head, they may next

tell us, if their neighbours, who, like the Associate Reformed Synod, own no other testimony than the Bible as explained in the Confession of Faith, are in general better acquainted with the scriptures, and more stedfast in their adherence to the several articles of the Protestant faith, as stated against the doctrine and practice of the Papists.

Such a charge against us, as is insinuated in the words of this committee, ought to be well supported, or it will be considered as the effect of ill will, the language of men, who having changed sides, are disposed to justify themselves, by representing the cause and people they deserted in the most odious light. The Associate Reformed Synod acknowledge it to be their duty, to treat pious people of other denominations with *great attention and tenderness*; but either this, like many other things in their Constitution, has no meaning, or they wont allow that there are any pious people among us; for that they treat us, one and all, with no great tenderness, is abundantly evident. Let them, however, treat us with equity, and reserve their *great tenderness* for others, who may, in their opinion, better deserve it.

III. The solemn covenant engagements we are under to continue stedfast in our profession, is another subject of difference between us and the Associate Reformed Synod. We never entered into a covenant which contained any thing like an oath of allegiance to civil magistrates. An engagement of fidelity to him who

is the Most High over all the earth, King of kings, and Lord of lords, can never become void, as it is impossible we can ever go out of his dominions. We therefore own ourselves to be as much bound, by oath and covenant, to continue in adherence to the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the Lord's House, received among us, as ever our fathers were, or as our brethren in Britain and Ireland now are.

We ever esteemed covenants, partly of a civil, partly of a religious nature, (if allowable in some peculiar cases) to be quite improper in our situation. To live quietly and peaceably, obeying the civil powers under whose protection we are, in all their lawful commands, is our duty, enjoined on us in the Lord's word; and we engage through grace to walk according to this rule. Therefore our covenant engagements are a witness against us, if we are found disobedient or seditious in our behaviour toward any government, established by the choice or consent of the people among whom we live. But a swearing allegiance to a particular government not requiring this of us, would be as absurd as it is uncommon.

The Jews at Rome gave Paul a strange account of the Christians of that age: *As for this sect, say they, we know that it is every where spoken against.* However unlike we are in other respects to those of whom they spoke, there is a similarity in this particular. Because we testified against some things in the civil constitution of Great Britain, as injurious to the

kingdom of Christ, and refused to swear oaths which carried in them an unlimited approbation of it, we were frequently represented as inclined to sedition under that government. Now in America we are represented by the Associate Reformed Synod's party, as so much attached to Britain, that we ought to be suppressed. This accusation is almost every where in their mouth against us. They ought however to take a little more heed how they speak. The charge is very grievous; and if it is malicious, it will hurt those that make it more than any other.

The Associate Reformed Synod are; we doubt not, as much attached to the government of this country, as any other denomination here; but as to such of them as once belonged to the Secession, they would not have been less faithful and good citizens, though they had made more conscience of paying their vows to God;—the vows their fathers came under, and which they themselves have often acknowledged as binding on them.

As to these covenant obligations, the Associate Reformed Synod consider themselves, as a church, free from any obligation by them. They however say, that they have an affectionate remembrance of them. This is an empty compliment at taking farewell. They may have an affectionate remembrance of the covenant of friendship between Damon and Pythias, two celebrated Pagans.—They mention them as well intended engagements. Here their language is more easily understood than usual. They cautiously avoid an approbation of them

is just and lawful engagements. They make the end designed to be the support of civil and religious liberty: as if our ancestors had only joined in a league, to defend the liberty of making a profession of any religion, which this or that man among them might devise for himself; and had not engaged to maintain the reformed religion; as it was professed by them, and as it has been transmitted to us.—They add, that they hold themselves bound by the divine authority, to practise all the moral duties contained in these covenants. If the Koran had been the subject, the language would be still proper. We may tell the deluded votaries of Mahomet, that we hold ourselves bound by the divine authority, to practise all the moral duties contained in that impious and foolish book, which the impostor gave them to be a rule of their faith. We are bound by the divine authority, to practise all the moral duties which ever were heard of in the world, according to the opportunities we have of serving God, and doing good to men.

But the obligation to duty arising from the divine authority, does not render our engaging to perform it superfluous. If a man is called to an office in the state, he is bound by the divine authority to act uprightly in it; yet this supercedes not the necessity of requiring from him an oath of fidelity. The Associate Reformed Synod will not surely deny, that ministers are bound by the divine authority to practise all the moral duties contained in their own formula; yet I suppose they will not choose to

ordain ministers without requiring some engagement from them.

The committee formerly mentioned have said somewhat about public covenanting; but they are silent as to the confession we ought to make of the sins of the church and of the land, though our backslidings are many, and our trespas is grown up unto the heavens. The bond they propose is such, as almost any denomination of Christians may, in consistency with their own profession, swear it. Doctrine, worship, discipline, and government are mentioned; but while the bond, having no reference to any particular profession of religion, does not ascertain what doctrine, worship, discipline, and government are intended, the swearers may have very different, yea very opposite views. If a man is called to swear allegiance to the state, it is not thought sufficient that he is willing to swear that he will be subject to government: the question is, what he esteems a right or lawful government. During the late war, every man would readily have come under a general engagement to submit to lawful authority: but this would not have made the requisite distinction between those who were for, and those who were against, the independence of this country.

The bond this committee have proposed is quite agreeable to the Constitution of their synod. It is framed for people who are agreed in what are called the essentials of Christianity, but who differ widely as to these things which are said to be circumstantial; and it

is framed on this principle, that we have no particular concern either with the covenant engagements our fathers entered into, or with their breach of vows, and defection from the Lord's cause. These are its distinguishing excellencies, which moved the committee to recommend this plan of their own, as "*infinitely better*" than the manner of covenanting which we, acting on the principles of the Secession, proposed in an overture we published on that subject. According to the committee, the difference between them and us is a huge one indeed; not less than *infinite*. Great is the advantage their profession is like to have over ours; by their infinitely better way of covenanting, theirs must be infinitely better, and infinitely different from ours.

IV. Any one who compares the Formula of Questions put to ministers and elders at their ordination among us, and the Formula subjoined to the Constitution of the Associate Reformed Synod, will see a very manifest difference, not in words only, but in the profession required of office-bearers.

The first five questions in ours, express what is required of the person ordained, as to his faith, and as to his desire, through grace, to continue in a stedfast adherence to our received principles. The rest express what is required of him as to his practice. They are all materially, though not verbally, the same with those used by the Secession judicatories since its beginning. The former are as follows:

“ Q. 1. Do you believe the Scriptures of  
“ the Old and New Testament to be the Word  
“ of God, and the only rule of faith and prac-  
“ tice.

“ Q. 2. Do you believe and acknowledge  
“ the whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith,  
“ and Catechisms larger and shorter, agreed  
“ upon by the Assembly of Divines at West-  
“ minster, with commissioners from the church  
“ of Scotland; as these are received in the  
“ Declaration and Testimony, published by the  
“ Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania, to be  
“ the doctrine taught in the word of God;  
“ and are you resolved, through the grace of  
“ our Lord Jesus Christ, to maintain this as  
“ the Confession of your Faith, against all  
“ contrary opinions?

“ Q. 3. Do you acknowledge Presbyterial  
“ church government to be of divine institu-  
“ tion, and appointed by Jesus Christ, the  
“ only King, Head, and Lawgiver of the church,  
“ to continue in it to the end of time; and do  
“ you adhere to the same, as stated in “ The  
“ Form of Presbyterial Church Government  
“ and Ordination of Ministers,” agreed upon  
“ by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster,  
“ and as testified for by us; and are you re-  
“ solved, by the Lord’s assistance, to maintain  
“ and defend the same against all contrary opi-  
“ nions?

“ Q. 4. Do you adhere to the “ Declaration  
“ and Testimony for the Doctrine and Order  
“ of the church of Christ, and against the Er-  
“ rors of the present Time,” agreed upon by

the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania, 1784. And do you, in your judgment, disapprove the manifold errors and Latitudinarian schemes prevailing in these United States, which are condemned in that Declaration and Testimony, as contrary to the word of God, to the profession of the faith we make, and to the solemn engagements we in this church are under to continue in that profession?

“ Q. 5. Do you acknowledge the perpetual obligation of the solemn covenant engagements we in this church are under, as they have been explained in the Declaration and Testimony agreed upon by the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania; and are you resolved, through grace, to endeavour faithfulness in adhering to the Testimony maintained by the Lord’s witnesses for these reformation principles we profess, in contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and in attending to all these duties which the Lord in his word hath enjoined upon us, and which we in this church are, by these our covenant engagements, bound to perform?”

In place of these, the Associate Reformed Synod have only this question, which merely requires an approbation of their Constitution:

“ Do you approve of the principles exhibited in the constitutional articles of the Associate Reformed Synod, now read; and do you resolve, through grace, to adhere thereto, in opposition to all Deistical, Popish,

“ Arian, Socinian, Arminian, Neonominan,  
 “ and Sectarian errors, and all other opinions  
 “ which are contrary to sound doctrine, and  
 “ the power of godliness?”

The errors mentioned we all ought to be on our guard against; but this Synod have nowhere declared what they are; though, as matters presently stand, this was highly necessary, both for the information of those who are to be ordained, that they might in truth and in judgment engage to testify against them; and also that it might be manifest to all, how far the synod. meant to go in testifying against such opinions as may fall under one or other of those designations.

In the Declaration and Testimony agreed on by us, we choose rather to mention the errors themselves which we condemn, than the designations which they bear from the authors of them, or from the nature of them; and our reason for doing so was, that in the present time many Popish, Socinian, Arminian, Neonomian and sectarian errors, are taught by persons who are not known by any one of these designations. In this sceptical age, many are properly attached to no one sect of heretics, and yet seem to glean a little from many, or from almost every description of such men.

The person to be ordained in the Associate Reformed Synod, is not to be considered as condemning the errors enumerated in the question already mentioned, any farther than the Constitution of that synod condemns them; and we cannot consider it as any proper, any

explicit testimony against them at all. It is so dubious, that one may hold various of these errors, and yet profess satisfaction with *the principles exhibited in it*. Is he an enemy to some truth stated in the Confession of Faith? he can easily vindicate himself as no way inconsistent: he approves that *excellent treatise*; but he has *conceived some scruples* at a few articles of it, and thinks a *criticism* here and there necessary. So thought the celebrated Mr. Baxter: the alteration of a few words in it would have satisfied him. Yet he was the man who began that perversion of the gospel among the Nonconformists in England, which has increased to a dreadful apostacy from the faith of Christ with many of them. Baxterians became in process of time followers of Arminius; the next step was to Socinian blasphemies; and the last has been, and with many is still like to be, *absolute infidelity*.

About the year 1720, the Baxterian or Neonomian scheme prevailed so much in Scotland, that sundry truths opposite to it, extracted out of a book entitled, *the Marrow of Modern Divinity*, were condemned by a leading party in the General Assembly of the national church. These men professed adherence to the Confession of Faith in stronger terms than the Associate Reformed Synod does; yet they perverted the gospel, by turning it into a new law covenant, according to which salvation was offered to sinners, not freely through Jesus Christ, but conditionally on the performance of certain terms prescribed to them. The de-

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fenders of this scheme are highly displeas'd at the condemnation of it by the Seceſſion; but ſurely there is nothing in the Conſtitution of the Associate Reformed Synod, which can be an offence to them. That Synod have ended the controverſy; but have done ſo to the injury of truth. The doctrine of free grace thro' our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, is in this inſtance ſadly neglected. The Neonomian ſcheme may find acceptance among them, or it may not. There is nothing to hinder men of that deſcription from entering in to the miniſtry among them. Do they reckon the teſtimony we maintain againſt this a local peculiarity, unworthy of their notice?

Several members of the Associate Reformed Synod, who formerly belonged to the Seceſſion, made the effecting a coalition with the Reformed Preſbytery, an excuſe for the ſteps they have taken: but the Conſtitution of their ſynod is a manifeſt proof that ſomething more than union with that party was intended. It is not merely matters of controverſy between us and the Reformed Preſbytery, nor merely local peculiarities, as they call them, which are laid aſide; but every thing which diſtinguiſhed the Seceſſion body from other Preſbyterians in Britain and America. Concern for that purity of doctrine which through the Lord's goodneſs has been hitherto maintained in the Seceſſion, cannot be ſtrong, where this one lame queſtion is judged a ſufficient evidence of ſoundneſs in the faith, when it is answered in the affirmative by thoſe who are to be admitted into the mi-

nistry. Yet lame as this question is, preachers have been in sundry instances employed among them, without being required to answer it; and if the people had been as easily satisfied as the ministers were, it is likely such instances would have been still more common.

V. The Associate Reformed Synod and us are so far agreed about the terms of admission to church fellowship, that we both profess to exclude the grossly ignorant, and such as have not a conversation becoming the gospel. But we differ about two questions respecting this matter; and the determination of them must, in its consequence, have a great and lasting influence on the state of the church.

The first is, concerning the Testimony maintained by the Secession. We exclude all who are in a stated opposition to it. The admission of such would be a falling from that testimony. In admitting them we might expect confusion; and ruin would follow. Can the members of a church stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, while not agreed about the very principles on which they are joined together in one visible society? If we take fire into our bosom, is it any wonder we are hurt? We are often sore pressed by enemies from without: to have such in our own house is still more dangerous.

We do not, as some affirm, confine the church of Christ to those of our own denomination. Such a thought is far from us. We are bound to love all who love our Lord Jesus

Christ; but we are not bound to follow them in strengthening the hands of backsliders, and in opposing such as are endeavouring to maintain the purity of doctrine, worship, discipline, and government in the house of God. It is not safe for us to be where the cause and truth of our Lord Jesus Christ is betrayed or despised; and where our continuance as church members, may have rather a tendency to harden others in their evil ways, than to reclaim them.

The same principles which constrained us to withdraw from the corrupt party, under whose influence and managements the established church of Scotland has, for a long time, declined from its former purity and zeal, stand in the way of our entering into the communion of any other church, where the like or as grievous disorders and errors prevail, with as little prospect of reformation. Our secession has been much blamed, but we see no cause to repent of it; but rather to bless the Lord, who led those who began it in a way they knew not. Had it not been for the Testimony we have in much weakness maintained against overflowing corruptions, matters would have been still worse at this time than they are.

As the Associate Reformed Synod have disclaimed every thing which distinguishes the Secession body from other Presbyterians; so in describing the terms of admission to their fellowship, no mention is made of any testimony against the errors and defections of the present time, except what those from whom we made a secession will allow. The most corrupt, who

in any sort receive the Westminster Confession, though ever so much enemies to the Secession cause, will find the door opened for their admission, by the 6th Article of the Constitution of the Associate Reformed Synod, which is as follows :

“ 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.”

But it seems there is another kind of communion, beside that which they call **FIXED**, allowed by this synod. About this, they and we are far from being agreed. The 7th Article of their Constitution expresses their mind, so far as they have thought proper to declare it, concerning this matter.—“ 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, which general edification renders necessary.*”

**OCCASIONAL COMMUNION** is, both name and thing, a late invention. The Apostolic churches were one in profession, and Christians were in those days admitted to partake of the seals of the covenant of grace, by any particular church, in whose bounds they might at any time reside; in the very same manner as one may be admitted to church fellowship by us, and by our brethren in Britain or in Ireland; a sufficient testimonial of his character being transmitted with him, from one place to another. But that which is understood by occasional communion, is what can have no existence but in such a broken state of the church as the present is. It is Christians of different denominations, as Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians, sitting down together at the Lord's table, and when they rise from it, returning each one to his own party. This is the import of the term as defined by Dr. Watts \*, and other celebrated writers on the subject.

\* Dr. Watts distinguishes church communion in the same manner as the Associate Reformed Synod; but his language is more intelligible than theirs. " We must  
 " (says he) distinguish between that communion which  
 " is fixed and constant in one church, or that which is  
 " only occasional.

" By fixed constant and complete communion, I mean the  
 " joining myself to a particular church, so as to become a  
 " complete member of that religious society; engaging to  
 " perform at appointed times and places, my most usual  
 " public worship with that society, rather than with o-  
 " thers; to assist in all services necessary to support that  
 " society, and partake of all privileges of it, for mutual

The Westminster Assembly (to whose words there seems to be a reference in this Article about occasional communion) never intended to withdraw from the fellowship of other churches agreeing with them in the profession of the faith, holding fast that which they had attained; and so far as they were defective in government, worship, or discipline, acknowledging this, and labouring after a more perfect reformation. But that this Assembly ever meant to assert the lawfulness of that which is called occasional communion, or that they judged it safe to receive those into their fellowship, who were in a stated opposition to the cause and work of God, in which that Assembly were engaged, cannot be proved.

The Relief Synod in Scotland, and this newly formed one in America, may defend their opinion about occasional communion by what arguments they think fit: but they will never convince such as are acquainted with the history of the Westminster Assembly, that it meant to favour their views. Often has that Assembly been blamed as too rigid, and averse to any

“ edification and comfort, and to maintain the public  
“ honour of Christ in the world.

“ By occasional communion, I understand a mere participation of the general and special ordinances of the  
“ gospel, with a particular church for a time, under the  
“ general character and claim of Christianity, and so far  
“ as occasions of providence may make it convenient and  
“ desirable; but not to become properly a member of  
“ that particular society, nor be interested in the affairs,  
“ regulation, or management of it.” See his *Rational  
Foundation of a Christian Church.* Chap. 4.

fort of fellowship with those who differed from them. But neither friends nor enemies seem to have understood their words till very lately, if the exposition of these two synods is just. They may try to silence people with the authority of the Confession; but surely they either do not enquire very seriously into the matter, or they find some difficulty in persuading themselves that it is on their side.

The Associate Reformed Synod had foresight enough to perceive that this article of their Constitution would be contested. Therefore they were at pains to engage advocates to plead for it. It happened, however, that they applied to some who were bespoke by the other side. The Secession is invited to stand by the Westminster Confession, in defence of occasional communion. "The principle," says a foot note, "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." Such a tale about the Secession might be believed by those who have only heard that body named; but it is somewhat strange that it should be told by men, who knew that it is one of the received principles of the Secession, to testify against that occasional communion, in favour of which this article of their Constitution was designed. The repeated declarations of the Secession judicatories; the constant practice in their congrega-

tions respecting admission; the testimony of their neighbours, friends or enemies, must, with every reasonable man, put it beyond all possibility of doubt, that they absolutely reject the doctrine of occasional communion; neither granting to Christians of any other denomination, nor asking from them, any such indulgence.

The committee of the Associate Reformed Synod, formerly mentioned, have laboured, and not spared words, to vindicate, or excuse, or soften, or explain this article of their Constitution. But the commentary is as dark as the text. They except against communion with Papists, with those whom they call raving Sec-tarians, and with churches which impose any thing sinful as a term of admission to their fellowship. But the exception ought to extend further. The most corrupt churches, in which Arians, Socinians, and other enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ are suffered to teach, and to seduce the simple, yea, churches chiefly or wholly made up of such men, will admit any to their communion who own themselves Christians; requiring nothing more of them than that they believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. This is a snare of the subtle fowler. The communion which is most pernicious, and which is indeed nothing else than a confederacy against Christ, may be offered on very easy, and apparently fair terms. But as the body is to which we join ourselves, so must our adherence to it be. If we join a church obstinate in her holding, we take part

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in its backslidings. If we join a church maintaining heresy; we act with it against the truth. If we join a church avowing a contempt of any part of the testimony of Jesus, a church which refuses to assert and vindicate the truth, when called upon so to do; especially a church which makes our approbation of its indifference and neutrality in the cause of God, a condition of our being admitted into it; we are surely approving these evils. If we join those who are attempting to suppress any proper testimony against the apostasy of the present time; we strengthen the party we ought to oppose.

Neither the defects of a church, though many, nor the faults of individuals, while the order and discipline of the Lord's house are not commonly and wilfully neglected, render its communion unsafe. But into the society of those who are obstinate in backsliding and corruption, we ought not to enter; to come out from among such and be separate is our duty.

It would be tedious to enlarge on every subject about which the parties of whom we speak differ. If the Associate Reformed Synod adopt the work of their committee, by passing into a judicial deed, the *Draught of an Overture, &c.* the difference between them and the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania will be much increased. That work contains sundry things both with respect to doctrine and discipline, which we apprehend are not agreeable to the

word of God. But while it is uncertain whether they will as a synod approve it; or if they do, what alterations they may see cause to make, the discussion of it may be left to themselves. The remarks which have been made on it, are only such as were necessary to shew, that the spirit, design and tendency of it, and of the Constitution of the Associate Reformed Synod are the very same.

The Associate Reformed Synod must, themselves being judges, either allow that the difference between them and us is very great, or that they are very inconsistent. They profess that they will be slow to censure offending members among themselves, and that they reckon it their duty to treat pious people of other denominations with great attention and tenderness; yet how much have they laboured to suppress us altogether? Either they are not so charitable as they seem to be; or they are persuaded in their conscience that we differ so much from them, that they can exercise little charity towards us.

The difference between us and the Associate Reformed Synod cannot be removed, unless by our deserting the principles of the Secession for the sake of agreement with them; or by their returning to the profession which the most part of them formerly made. As to the first of these ways, we desire to be kept from it. The agreement obtained at such a price would be too dear. And as to the last, we entertain little or no hope of it. If the Associate Reformed Synod shall continue in existence

for any length of time, their opposition to the Secession cause will become more and more manifest. They have been departing from it for some years past, and have not yet gone so far as they will go. They are evidently more desirous of union with those whose views are more agreeable to their own, than ours are. The body of this generation are gone into a course of backsliding, which carries them farther and farther from the right ways of the Lord; and when men once give way to this, like a mighty stream, it sweeps them away, they know not whither.

In this time of general and grievous defection, all who desire to be found faithful ought to watch, lest they be ensnared, and led astray ere they are aware. The Lord Jesus is still saying to us, *Behold I come quickly, hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

F I N I S.