

A COLLECTION
OF THE
ACTS, DELIVERANCES, AND TESTIMONIES
OF THE
Supreme Judicatory
OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

FROM ITS ORIGIN IN AMERICA TO THE PRESENT TIME.

WITH
NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

EXPLANATORY AND HISTORICAL:

CONSTITUTING A COMPLETE ILLUSTRATION OF HER POLITY, FAITH, AND HISTORY.

COMPILED FOR THE BOARD OF PUBLICATION

BY THE

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Pennsylvania.

appointed a committee to take into consideration the report, with power to offer such amendments as may be necessary, and to report to the next meeting.

Adjourned to meet on Friday morning at six o'clock. Concluded with prayer.

Friday May 30th, 6 o'clock A. M.

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The committee appointed to take into consideration the Act and Testimony, reported several amendments. The Act and Testimony was then adopted.

Rev. Messrs. Engles, Winchester, H. M'Keen, and Dr. Mitchell were appointed a committee to superintend the publication and circulation of the Act and Testimony.

Adjourned to meet at eight o'clock this evening. Concluded with prayer.*

D. R. PRESTON, *Secretary.*"

—*Baltimore Magazine*, 1839, p. 454.

[The names subscribed to the following copy of the Act and Testimony are those of the original signers. It was ultimately adopted in terms by about 374 Ministers, 1789 Elders, and 14 Licentiates; and either entire or substantially by five Synods and thirty Presbyteries.]

§ 122. *Act and Testimony.*

"*Brethren beloved in the Lord*:—In the solemn crisis, to which our Church has arrived, we are constrained to appeal to you in relation to the alarming errors which have hitherto been connived at, and now at length have been countenanced and sustained by the acts of the supreme judicatory of our Church.

"Constituting, as we all do, a portion of yourselves, and deeply concerned, as every portion of the system must be, in all that affects the body itself, we earnestly address ourselves to you, in the full belief, that the dissolution of our Church, or what is worse, its corruption in all that once distinguished its peculiar testimony, can, under God, be prevented only by you.

"From the highest judicatory of our Church, we have for several years in succession sought the redress of our grievances, and have not only sought in vain, but with an aggravation of the evils of which we have complained. Whither then can we look for relief but first to Him who is made Head over all things, to the Church which is his body, and then to you, as constituting a part of that body, and as instruments in his hand to deliver the Church from the oppression which she sorely feels?

"We love the Presbyterian Church, and look back with sacred joy to her instrumentality in promoting every good and every noble cause among men; to her unwavering love of human rights; to her glorious efforts for the advancement of human happiness; to her clear testimonies for the truth of God, and her great and blessed efforts to enlarge and establish the kingdom of Christ our Lord. We delight to dwell on the things which our God has wrought by our beloved Church; and by his grace enabling us, we are resolved that our children shall not have occasion to weep over an unfaithfulness which permitted us to stand idly by, and behold the ruin of this glorious structure.

"*Brethren,*' says the Apostle, 'I beseech you by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.' In the presence of that Redeemer by whom Paul adjures us, we avow our fixed adherence to those standards of doctrine and order in their obvious and intended sense, which we have heretofore subscribed under circumstances the most impressive. In the same spirit we do therefore solemnly acquit ourselves in the sight of God, of all responsibility arising from the existence of those divisions and disorders in our Church, which spring from a disregard of assumed obligations, a departure from doctrines deliberately professed, and a subversion of forms publicly and repeatedly approved. By the same high authority, and under the same weighty sanctions, we do avow our fixed purpose to strive for the restoration of purity, peace, and scriptural order to our Church; and to endeavour to exclude from her communion those who disturb her peace, corrupt her testimony, and subvert her established forms. And to the end that the doctrinal errors of which we complain may be fully known, and the practical evils under which the body suffers be clearly set forth, and our purposes in regard to both be distinctly understood, we adopt this ACT and TESTIMONY.

AS REGARDS DOCTRINE.

"1. We do bear our solemn testimony against the right claimed by many, of interpreting

*The subsequent meetings were mere conferences.

the doctrines of our standards in a sense different from the general sense of the Church for years past, whilst they still continue in our communion: on the contrary, we aver, that they who adopt our standards, are bound by candour and the simplest integrity, to hold them in their obvious, accepted sense.

“2. We testify against the unchristian subterfuge to which some have recourse, when they avow a general adherence to our standards *as a system*, while they deny doctrines essential to the system, or hold doctrines at complete variance with the system.

“3. We testify against the reprehensible conduct of those in our communion, who hold, and preach, and publish Arminian and Pelagian heresies, professing at the same time to embrace our creed, and pretending that these errors do consist therewith.

“4. We testify against the conduct of those, who, while they profess to approve and adopt our doctrine and order, do, nevertheless, speak and publish, in terms, or by necessary implication, that which is derogatory to both, and which tends to bring both into disrepute.

“5. We testify against the following as a part of the errors, which are held and taught by many persons in our Church.

ERRORS.

“1. OUR RELATION TO ADAM.—That we have no more to do with the first sin of Adam than with the sins of any other parent.

“2. NATIVE DEPRAVITY.—That there is no such thing as original sin: that infants come into the world as perfectly free from corruption of nature as Adam was when he was created; that by original sin nothing more is meant than the fact that all the posterity of Adam, though born entirely free from moral defilement, will always begin to sin when they begin to exercise moral agency, and that this fact is somehow connected with the fall of Adam.

“3. IMPUTATION.—That the doctrine of imputed sin and imputed righteousness is a novelty, and is nonsense.

“4. ABILITY.—That the impenitent sinner is by nature, and independently of the aid of the Holy Spirit, in full possession of all the powers necessary to a compliance with the commands of God: and that if he laboured under any kind of inability, natural or moral, which he could not remove himself, he would be excusable for not complying with God's will.

“5. REGENERATION.—That man's regeneration is his own act; that it consists merely in the change of our governing purpose, which change we must ourselves produce.

“6. DIVINE INFLUENCE.—That God cannot exert such an influence on the minds of men as shall make it certain that they will choose and act in a particular manner without destroying their moral agency; and that, in a moral system, God could not prevent the existence of sin, or the present amount of sin, however much he might desire it.

“7. ATONEMENT.—That Christ's sufferings were not truly and properly vicarious.

“Which doctrines and statements, are dangerous and heretical, contrary to the gospel of God, and inconsistent with our Confession of Faith. We are painfully alive also to the conviction that unless a speedy remedy be applied to the abuses which have called forth this Act and Testimony, our Theological Seminaries will soon be converted into nurseries to foster the noxious errors which are already so widely prevalent, and our Church funds will be perverted from the design for which they were originally contributed.

AS REGARDS DISCIPLINE.

“The necessary consequence of the propagation of these and similar errors amongst us has been the agitation and division of our Churches, and ecclesiastical bodies: the separation of our Ministers, Elders and people into distinct parties; and the great increase of causes of mutual alienation.

“Our people are no longer as one body of Christians; many of our Church Sessions are agitated by the tumultuous spirit of party; our Presbyteries are convulsed by collisions growing out of the heresies detailed above, and our Synods and our Assembly are made theatres for the open display of humiliating scenes of human passion, and weakness. Mutual confidence is weakened; respect for the supreme judicatory of our Church is impaired; our hope that the dignified and impartial course of justice would flow steadily onward, has expired; and a large portion of the religious press is made subservient to error. The ordinary course of discipline, arrested by compromises, in which the truth is always loser, and perverted, by organized combinations, to personal, selfish and party ends, ceases altogether, and leaves every one to do what seems good in his own eyes.

The discipline of the Church rendered more needful than ever before, by the existence of numberless cases, in which Christian love to erring brethren, as well as a just regard to the interests of Zion, imperiously call for its prompt, firm, and temperate exercise, is absolutely prevented by the operation of the very causes which demand its employment. At the last meeting of the General Assembly, a respectful memorial presented in behalf of eleven Presbyteries, and many Sessions and individual members of our Church, was treated without one indication of kindness, or manifestation of any disposition to concede a single request that was made. It was sternly frowned upon, and the memorialists were left to mourn under their grievances, with no hope of alleviation from those who ought to have at least shown tenderness and sympathy, as the nursing fathers of the Church, even when that which was asked was refused to the petitioners. At the same time they, who have first corrupted our doctrines, and then deprived us of the ordinary means of correcting the evils they have produced, seek to give permanent security to their errors and to themselves, by raising an outcry in the churches, against all who love the truth well enough to contend for it.

“Against this unusual, unhappy, and ruinous condition we do bear our clear and decided testimony in the presence of the God of all living; we do declare our firm belief that it springs primarily from the fatal heresies countenanced in our body; and we do avow our deliberate purpose, with the help of God, to give our best endeavours to correct it.

AS REGARDS CHURCH ORDER.

“We believe that the form of government of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, is, in all essential features, in full accordance with the revealed will of God; and therefore whatever impairs its purity, or changes its essential character, is repugnant to the will of our Master. In what light then shall we be considered, if professing to revere this system, we calmly behold its destruction, or connive at the conduct of those engaged in tearing up its deep foundations?

“Some of us have long dreaded the spirit of indifference to the peculiarities of our Church order, which we supposed was gradually spreading amongst us. And the developments of later years have rendered it most certain, that as the perversion of our doctrinal formularies, and the engrafting of new principles and practices upon our Church constitution, have gone hand in hand, so the original purity of the one cannot be restored without a strict and faithful adherence to the other. Not only then for its own sake, do we love the Constitution of our Church, as a model of all free institutions, and as a clear and noble exhibition of the soundest principles of civil and religious liberty; not only do we venerate its peculiarities, because they exhibit the rules by which God intends the affairs of his Church on earth to be conducted; but we cling to its venerable ramparts, because they afford a sure defence for those precious, though despised doctrines of grace, the pure transmission of which has been entrusted as a sacred duty to the Church.

“It is therefore with the deepest sorrow that we behold our Church tribunals, in various instances, imbued with a different spirit, and fleeing on every emergency to expedients unknown to the Christian simplicity and uprightness of our forms, and repugnant to all our previous habits. It is with pain and distrust that we see, sometimes, the helpless inefficiency of mere advisory bodies contended for and practised, when the occasion called for the free action of our laws; and sometimes the full and peremptory exercise of power, almost despotic, practised in cases where no authority existed to act at all. It is with increasing alarm that we behold a fixed design to organize new tribunals upon principles repugnant to our system, and directly subversive of it, for the obvious purpose of establishing and propagating the heresies already recounted, of shielding from just process the individuals who held them, and of arresting the wholesome discipline of the Church. We do therefore testify against all these departures from the true principles of our Constitution; against the formation of new Presbyteries and Synods, otherwise than upon the established rules of our Church; or for other purposes than the edification and enlargement of the Church of Christ; and we most particularly testify against the formation of any tribunal, in our Church, upon what some call principles of elective affinity; against the exercise by the General Assembly of any power not clearly delegated to it; and the exercise even of its delegated powers for purposes inconsistent with the design of its creation.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE CHURCHES.

“Dear Christian Brethren, you who love Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, and adhere to the plain doctrines of the cross as taught in the standards prepared by the Westminster Assembly, and constantly held by the true Presbyterian Church; to all of you who love

your ancient and pure Constitution, and desire to restore our abused and corrupted Church to her simplicity, purity, and truth, we, a portion of yourselves, Ministers and Elders of your churches, and servants of one common Lord, would propose, most respectfully and kindly, and yet most earnestly,

"1. That we refuse to give countenance to Ministers, Elders, agents, editors, teachers, or to those who are in any other capacity engaged in religious instruction and effort, who hold the preceding or similar heresies.

"2. That we make every lawful effort to subject all such persons, especially if they be Ministers, to the just exercise of discipline by the proper tribunal.

"3. That we use all proper means to restore the discipline of the Church, in all its courts, to a sound, just, Christian state.

"4. That we use our endeavours to prevent the introduction of new principles into our system, and to restore our tribunals to their ancient purity.

"5. That we consider the Presbyterial existence or acts of any Presbytery or Synod formed upon the principles of elective affinity, as unconstitutional, and all Ministers and churches, voluntarily included in such bodies, as having virtually departed from the standards of our Church.

"6. We recommend that all Ministers, Elders, Church Sessions, Presbyteries, and Synods, who approve of this Act and Testimony, give their public adherence thereto, in such manner as they shall prefer, and communicate their names, and when a Church court, a copy of their adhering act.

"7. That inasmuch, as our only hope of improvement and reformation in the affairs of our Church depends on the interposition of Him, who is King in Zion, that we will unceasingly and importunately supplicate a Throne of Grace, for the return of that purity and peace, the absence of which we now sorrowfully deplore.

"8. We do earnestly recommend that on the second Thursday of May, 1835, a Convention be held in the city of Pittsburgh, to be composed of two delegates, a Minister and Ruling Elder from each Presbytery, or from the minority of any Presbytery, who may concur in the sentiments of this Act and Testimony, to deliberate and consult on the present state of our Church, and to adopt such measures as may be best suited to restore her prostrated standards.

"And now, brethren, our whole heart is laid open to you, and to the world. If the majority of our Church are against us, they will, we suppose, in the end, either see the infatuation of their course, and retrace their steps, or they will, at last, attempt to cut us off. If the former, we shall bless the God of Jacob; if the latter, we are ready for the sake of Christ, and in support of the Testimony now made, not only to be cut off, but if need be, to die also. If, on the other hand, the body be yet in the main, sound, as we would fondly hope, we have here, frankly, openly, and candidly, laid before our erring brethren the course we are, by the grace of God, irrevocably determined to pursue. It is our steadfast aim to reform the Church, or to testify against its errors and defections, until testimony will be no longer heard. And we commit the issue into the hands of Him who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

"*Ministers.*—James Magraw, Robert J. Breckinridge, James Latta, Ashbel Green, Samuel D. Blythe, S. H. Crane, J. W. Scott, William Latta, Robert Steel, Alexander A. Campbell, John Gray, James Scott, Joshua L. Wilson, Alexander McFarlane, Jacob Coon, Isaac N. Candee, Robert Love, James W. McKennan, David R. Preston, William Wylie, William M. Engles, Cornelius H. Mustard,* James C. Watson, William L. Breckinridge, John A. Symmes, J. V. Brown, David McKinney, George Marshall, Ebenezer H. Snowden, Oscar Harris, William J. Gibson, William Sickles, Benjamin F. Spillman, George D. McCuenn, George W. Janvier, Samuel G. Winchester, George Junkin.

"*Elders.*—Samuel Boyd, Edward Vanhorn, Williamson Dunn, James Algeo, James Agnew, Henry McKeen, Charles Davis, William Wallace, A. D. Hepburn, Joseph P. Engles, James McFarren, A. Symington, A. Bayless, Wm. Agnew, George Morris, Hugh Campbell, Thomas McKeen, James Wilson, Daniel B. Price, Carver Hotchkiss, Charles Woodward, W. A. G. Posey, James Carnahan, Moses Reed, James Steel, George Durfor, John Sharp."

* Mr. Mustard subsequently revoked his signature.