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AN

OVERTURE

Presented to the 4428-88.

REVEREND SYNOD

OF

Dissenting MINISTERS,

Sitting in *Philadelphia*, in the Month of *September*, 1728.

And is now under the Consideration of the Several Members of the said Synod, in Order to come to a Determination concerning it at next Meeting.

Together with a PREFACE, or an Epistle containing some further Reasons to strengthen the Overture, and an Answer to some Objections against it.

By a Member of the said SYNOD.

Jude 1. 3. *Beloved, when I gave all Diligence to write unto you, of the common Salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the Faith, which was once deliver'd unto the Saints.*

Printed for the Author, 1729.

J. H. Thomson

READER,

Altho' the Overture be placed last in the Book, yet I would advise thee to read it first, because the Preface supposeth it, and therefore cannot be fully understood, until the Overture be first gone over.

861.

4438-9.

John Thomson.

Va. + n. C.

Candid READER,

After I came to a Resolution with my self as to the Publication of the following Overture, by putting it in Print, I found my self also obliged to endeavour to lead it forth into publick View, under the Covert and Protection of an apologetical Epistle or Preface, lest otherwise both the Overture it self, and likewise its Publication should be misconstrued and unduly censured; for first, it being only as yet an Overture, which is come no further Length but only to be now so under the Consideration of our Synod, as not yet to have any actual Conclusion or Determination passed by our Synod upon it; the Publication of such a Matter, being yet as it were, but in Conception, and lyable to Abortion, might appear impertinent if it appeared naked and alone, without something to make an Apology for it. And

2ly, I judged it needful hereby to endeavour the removing and preventing of some Objections, Scruples and Misconstructions, &c. that otherwise the Overture it self, in Manuscript or Print, might be lyable unto; the Intent thereof (*viz.* subscribing Confessions) being a new Thing, as to the Practice of it, in these Parts of the World, (except among a few) and the apparent or real Novelty of any Thing that is of such sacred as well as publick Concern, (I acknowledge) doth give just Ground to far to suspect

what is, or appears Novel, as not precipitantly or implicitly to imbrace or approve it, until first the Reasons upon which it is grounded, be examined.

Now before I say any thing in Vindication of the Overture it self, further than what is contained in it, I think it proper here to offer some Reasons for my thus putting it in Print, which are briefly these;

1st, I think it is of no small Concern to our Interest in these Parts of the World, what Effect the Overture will take, *viz.* whether it shall be by our Synod rejected, or passed into an Act; as I believe every one will acknowledge, both such as will appear against it, and those who will appear for it. And therefore it is needful that all that are concerned, or have any Interest in the Effects of it, should have an Opportunity of forming a Judgment in themselves concerning it, and of declaring their Mind, as they see just Cause, before any Thing be finally determined concerning it.

2^{dly}, Altho' perhaps Multitudes of private Professors may not concern themselves much about it; yet I conceive our Flocks or Hearers, they and their Posterity are no less, yea I had almost said, more concerned in the Issue that it shall have in the Synod, than the Ministers themselves personally considered; and therefore I thought it highly reasonable, that our Flocks or Congregations, who have so great Interest in
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all our ministerial Acts, and especially in such a publick an Affair as this; which, whatever Way it goes, must of Necessity affect our whole Church, should have an Opportunity of considering and judging of it, and that not barely by the Imperfect Relation of others, wherein there is so much Danger of an unfair Representation of the Matter, according as the Relator affects or disaffects; but truly, and candidly, according to its genuine and primitive Design; which End I hope this Publication will answer.

3dly, According to our Constitution (if we may be properly and truly said to have a fixed Constitution) as to Church Government, our Congregations by their Delegates, *viz.* our ruling Elders, must judge and vote in this momentous Affair; and therefore it's all the Reason in the World, that they all should have an Opportunity of considering and pondering the Matter before hand; for we all know that where there is a Plurality of ruling Elders, it's perhaps not known which of them shall be appointed to attend the Synod, until within a Month before it meets, and sure it's as unreasonable that an Elder who is to judge and vote, should act an implicit Faith upon his own Ministers, or any other Minister's Representation, or Judgment of the Matter, as it is, that one Minister should act an implicit Faith upon another's: Now it's not to be expected that every one can procure a
true

true Manuscript of this Overture for their serious Perusal and Consideration; and therefore, to supply this Defect, I judg'd it necessary to publish it.

4^{thly}, I may add, that it's not to be expected that this Affair in the Management of it, by our Synod, can possibly be kept so among our selves, but that our neighbouring Churches, of differing Principles, will at least hear the Rumor of it, it being a Matter of such publick Concern, and is to be carried on publickly in open Synod; now I conceive, that, so which Way it will, it's more eligible that our Neighbours have a true and genuine than a false or unfair Representation of the Matter; and I expect, that this Publication will do much to answer this End also.

5^{thly}, I may add a fifth Reason, for the Publication of this Overture; viz. The Practice of another Church, which I not only regard and reverence, but also own my self to be of the Seed and Offspring of it in Matters of Religion: I mean the Church of *Scotland*; which, when about to receive the *Westminster* Confession, &c. before the General Assembly would proceed to receive the said Confession, or determine any Thing concerning it; they ordered, that printed Copies thereof should be sent and spread throughout the Kingdom, that all Ranks might have the Benefit of perusing the same: Now I conceive, this is a very parrallel Case, seeing our Synod
hath

hath (I may say) the very same Thing in Substance, under their Consideration.

Now altho' I be of Opinion, that the Reasons given in the Overture, are, or might be sufficient to justify the Design of it, not only with all my Brethren of the Ministry; but also, with every intelligent unprejudiced Person, (at least) of our Principles and Communion; yet I think it not amiss to add something to the same Purpose here.

Let us then consider our present Condition as we are a Church. As it is observed in the Overture, we are an intire Church of our selves, so as not to be a Part of any particular Church in the World, with which we are joyned as a Part. Now every Collection of People which are united together unto a Politick Body, whether Ecclesiastical or Civil, must have some Bond of Union, by which the severall Parts are joyned together, to make or constitute them one intire Whole; as Kingdoms and Commonwealths are joyned, linked together by the same Government, Laws and Privileges, &c. Churches by the same Faith, Worship and Government: Now, until we fulfil the Intent of the following Overture, I am at a Loss where to find any sufficient External Bond of Union, by which we are united, and by Virtue of which we may be properly denominated one Church, as particular Churches are so denominated, either in Scripture or in the common Way of speaking;

seeing that we, as a Church, have never yet so much as agreed, either about our Principles of Faith, Worship, or Form of Government.

If it be said first, *That we all own the Westminster Confession.* I answer, *First*, perhaps that is *Gratis dictum* (*i. e.*) said without Proof; but *2dly*, it's further answered in the Overture, to which I refer the Reader.

2dly, If it be said, *That we all take the Scripture for our Rule, and so are United thereby.* I answer, we are thereby no more united together as one particular Church, than to all other *Christian* Churches in the World; for they all own the Scriptures for their Rule. *2dly*, I answer, it's true the Scripture or written Word of God, is the only Rule and infallible Foundation of our Faith and Practice; but whether is it the bare Letter, or the Letter together with its true and proper Sense and Meaning, intended by the Holy Ghost, which is this Rule? Surely the latter. Now how is it possible for us to know concerning one another, or others to know concerning us, in what Sense we take or understand the Scriptures, or believe them as a Church, unless we joyn together to declare in what Sense we understand them; which I cannot see how it can be possibly done, but by agreeing upon a common Confession of our Faith, in some Form or other.

3dly, If it be objected further, *That we have no Account of any Confessions of Faith in Scripture, beside the Scripture it self, and yet we have an Account of many particular Churches;*

I answer, It was not then so necessary, because there were then infallible Guides alive, viz. the Apostles, by whose Means, Heresies, Errors, and Differences of Judgment were in a great Measure either prevented or cured, so that generally all Professors of the *Christian* Religion were of one Judgment and one Faith, at least as to Fundamentals; it's not so now.

2dly, I answer, altho' it's possible there might be Confessions of Faith, or Creeds even then besides the Scripture, yet I see not how it's possible that they could be recorded in Scripture; for if we once suppose such Confessions to be recorded in Scripture with Approbation, that would *ipso facto* constitute them a Part of Scripture.

3dly, But yet I think we have a plain Hint in Scripture of something very like a Creed or Confession in *Chap. 5* and *6* of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, where in *Chap. 5. v. 12.* the Apostle blames these *Hebrews*, for their Ignorance of the *first Principles of the Oracles of God*; and *Chap. 6. v. 1.* he speaks of passing on, from, or leaving these first Principles, several of which he mentions by their Titles; which seems to me to signify, that then Christians had Systems or rudimental Principles of Faith, collected out of the Word, and reduced into Order for facilitating the Learner's Labour; for there are some Principles spoken of as prior, and others following in Order, which is not found any where in Scripture that I know of; nor so much as hinted, excepting in this Place only; and yet

this Context suppoeth these Principles to be known to be in that Order of Priority and Posteriority; and whether these Principles, Articles, or Creeds were then ordinarily, or at all committed unto Writing, it matters not; it is enough to our present Purpose if it be acknowledged that he speaks of some collected rudimental Principles, which their young or more ignorant Professors were put to learn, and acquaint themselves with them, before they advanced to the more difficult or mysterious Doctrine of the Christian Faith, which are alledged to come after the former; both which were to them what our Confessions are to us.

3dly, If it be alledged, *That we are sufficiently united by our regular conjunct Exercise of external Church-Government.*

Ans. 1. I apprehend, that an Union by a publick Profession of the same Doctrine, is more material, than to be united in Government.

2dly, The one doth neither exclude, nor supply the room of the other.

3dly, Are not profess'd Deists, Socinians, Arminians, Free-thinkers, and profane Libertines united with the Orthodox, under the same Form of external Church-Government? What a pitiful Union is this!

4thly, Even our Union by this seems very defective and slender, seeing it's only the actual Exercise thereof that binds us. We have never yet that I know of, judicially and formally as a
Church

Church, declared to one another, or to the World, that we believe our Constitution or Form of Government, as we exercise it, to be agreeable to the Word of God, in all or any of the principal Branches of it; altho' virtually, and by our Practice, we may be said to have acknowledged it so to be. But how unsafe are we while it is so? For an *Erastian* in Principle, who denies that any particular Form of Church-Government, is of divine Institution, alledges, *That Christ hath left us at Liberty to choose what Form of Government we think most agreeable*; I say an *Erastian* may freely join with us in the actual Exercise of *Presbyterian Church Government*, and not be guilty of counter-acting his own Principles. In Brief, while we are as we are, *viz.* without any Form of Doctrine, Worship, or Government publickly and unanimously received among us, by a judicial Act of our own, we are liable to be corrupted in all the Three, being without a sufficient Sense or Bar to keep out of the Ministry, such as are unsound in their Principles.

I will here further propose and answer two Objections which I conceive to be the Chief, at least, of what I have known to be made against the Intent of this Overture, *viz.* the subscribing the *Westminster Confession*.

Obj. 1. To propose or pursue this Overture, is in Danger to breed Rents and Divisions in our small Infant-Church; and certainly all Divisions and Causes of Divisions in the Church ought to be avoided,

as being of most pernicious and dangerous Consequence, contrary to Christian Charity, and most obstructive to Spiritual Edification.

To this, I answer, *First*, If I could be persuaded, that this Overture, or any Thing in it, had a Native Tendency to divide us, I would be as much against it, as now I am for it: But on the contrary, I apprehend it in it self to be a very proper Preventive and Antidote against Division, being a suitable Mean to bring a Church to be of one Mind, and one Judgment; and if it should in the Event, have other Effects, it is only by Accident, as Christ and his Gospel have been the Occasion of all the Divisions that have been in the Christian World about Religion; for in this respect, he comes not to send Peace, but a Sword upon Earth; tho' he be justly Titled the Prince of Peace, and his Gospel, the Gospel of Peace.

Secondly, I acknowledge Peace and Unity to be sweet and beautiful, when joined with Truth and a good Conscience; but when they cannot be enjoy'd together, I am sure Truth and a good Conscience is infinitely preferable to any Peace or Unity that can be had without it: And therefore,

Thirdly, If it be a Church's Duty, as a Church, thus to declare unto the World, and unto one another, the Principles of their Faith, &c. it's not the Fear or Danger of Division that should deter from it. For,

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Fourthly, Those who will decline or refuse to joyn in the publick and judicial Acknowledgment of such a Doctrine, Worship and Government, as are agreeable to the Word of God, and will divide upon that Score, must be the only Guipable Causes of the Division, and not they who are willing to make such a Profession. If there be any who can instance any Particulars in the *Westminster Confession, &c.* that are unsound, no doubt they will be heard, and if they can make good their Objections against it, they will be allowed of; but grant that there should be some Clauses or Paragraphs, that upon Examination should be found, or judged either unsound or unsafe; I see not why these should be a just Reason to refuse subscribing to what is acknowledged to be Orthodox, unless we could either procure or compose one that is less exceptionable.

Object. 2d, Another Objection, made against subscribing the Confession, strikes in general against all subscribing of any Thing of that Kind; the Force thereof (that I may give it all the Advantage that I can) may be conceived to run thus; *For a Synod to oblige their Members to subscribe the Confession, is an imposing upon Mens Consciences, Things that are of a humane and not of divine Authority; which is Tyranny and Persecution, for which we justly blame the Church of Rome; Why then should we, or how can we be justified, while we are guilty of an Evil of the same*

same Nature? How can a Person warrantably subscribe any Thing as containing the Articles of their Faith, but the Word of God, without being guilty of idolizing or too much exalting of Mens Works or Words? However specious this Objection may seem to be at the first Glance, to such as have not duly considered it; yet I dare say it will plainly appear to be not only falacious and sophistical, but in part nonsensical and trifling, if the following Answers be duly considered.

Ans. For a Church to oblige their Members to receive, embrace, acknowledge, subscribe, or practise any thing that is not founded upon the Word of God, is indeed Tyranny and Persecution; but to impose what *Christ* in and by his Word hath already imposed, is their indispensable Duty; and therefore if the Confession, &c. be according to the Word of God, (as I will venture to say it is, until the Contrary be made appear) it is our Duty to impose or require the Acknowledgement of it, or what is contained therein in other Words.

If it be urged, *That the Confession is a humane Composition, and therefore, tho' sound, yet not of divine Authority, and therefore ought not to be imposed.*

I answer, the Matter is of divine Authority, being contained in the Word of God, and the Words, tho' composed by fallible Men, being agreeable to the divine Matter, tho' falling short of that Perfection that the Scripture justly claims, must of Necessity have the divine Ap-
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probation; and so far as they are agreeable to the infallible Word, are themselves infallible, as to the Truth contained in them, tho' as hath been acknowledged, they fall short of scriptural Perfection, as to manner of Expression; for whatsoever is agreeable to an infallible Rule, in so far is it self infallible.

And further, if Persons would but consider the Nature of a Confession, truly and properly so called, they might see that the very intrinsic Nature of the Thing requires that it should be expressed in our own, tho' imperfect Words, (*viz.* Words that are our own by Acknowledgment and Assumption, tho' we did not compute them, as a Person who can neither write nor indite makes the Words, composed by his Clerk or Scribe, his own, by setting his Name or Mark to them, tho' he computed none of them) This will appear evident, if we consider *First*, that when we exhibit, acknowledge, or subscribe a Confession of our Faith; we thereby acknowledge such a Confession to be our Act and Deed, *viz.* our Confession of our Faith, or our own Declaration of our Sentiments, and Belief in Matters of Religion; and therefore, both Words and Sense must be our own, at least by Assumption; whereas the Scripture, as such, is God's Act and Deed, *viz.* his Declaration of his Mind to us, and thereby prescribing a Rule for our Faith and Practice; and therefore the Scripture as such, cannot

not possibly be the Confession of our Faith, in a true and proper Sense. Our Confession is a Manifestation of our Thoughts; but the Scripture is the Declaration of God's Thoughts; our Faith and Knowledge is but dark and imperfect, and therefore our Confession may be so too; but the Scripture is every way perfect, being a divine infalible Declaration of his Thoughts who is Perfection it self. The Scripture is the divine Rule, but our Faith and Confession too is the Thing ruled; from all which it may appear, that it's but a trifling Sophistication, to alledge that *Christians* should own or subscribe the Scriptures, and nothing else as their Confession of Faith, which they neither are or can be in a proper Sense. The Scriptures as such, are the Object of our Faith, that is, they contain the Truth which we believe; and consequently prior to our Faith in order of Nature; but our Confession is a Declaration, a manifestative Sign of our acts of Faith or Believing, and therefore posterior in the Order both of Nature and Time to our Faith it self: I may add to what hath been said, all the Precedents in Scripture, where Persons are brought in as giving a Confession as *Peter*, the *Eunuch*, &c. whose Confession was not offer'd in Scripture-Words, but in Words agreeable to their own Sentiments, altho' these Words now being recorded in Scripture, are now become a Part of it; yet as originally spoken by the Persons whose

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Words they were; they were not Scripture, but the Expression of their Faith about these Things revealed in the Scripture. It is true, it's not unsuitable to make use of Scripture-Texts and Phrases in our Confessions; but then as they are there used, they are not formally Scripture whereby God speaks to us, but a Confession whereby we speak to one another; for we bringing in a Text of Scripture into our Confession, it becomes so far an Expression of our Thoughts; and it may be possible, yea I know not but it too often falls out, that when Persons so use a Text, they may take it in a Sense different from what is originally intended to signify by the Holy Ghost; now Scripture, as it is Scripture, that is divine Revelation, takes in not only Scripture Words and Phrases, but also true Scripture Meaning as spoken by God, *viz.* dictated by his Holy Spirit.

Again further, to the same Purpose, a Confession of Faith is a Declaration of the Sense and Meaning in which we understand the Scriptures; but we can never declare in what Sense we understand them, by either repeating or acknowledging the bare Words of the Scriptures. And therefore, from the very Nature of a Confession, of a single Person, or Church, it should be expressed in Words that we acknowledge for our own, and make them ours by Assumption; yea they must be Words differing from the
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Words of the Scripture, at least in Part; and if any Scripture Text be made use of and brought into our Confessions, they must be so connected with some preceeding and succeeding Words of our own, that the Sense, in which we understand such a Text, may be plain and obvious to the Hearers, otherwise it is no genuine Confession, but rather a Dissimulation of our Faith.

Again our Confessions of Faith must be humane, that is, our own, because one Design of Confessions is, that thereby we may make known the Soundness of our Principles, which we cannot do possibly by owning or acknowledging the Scripture; seeing there have been and still are so many gross Errors and Heresies in the Church, all pretended to be according to Scripture.

And how nonsensical (as I may say) is it for any to make this Evasion, that they are willing to subscribe the Scriptures; the Spirit of God (so to speak with reverence) hath already sufficiently subscribed them by the many Marks and Characters of the Author's Image instamp'd upon them; and therefore for us to talk of subscribing them in any other wise than thereby to testify that we believe them to be divine, is I think (to say no worse) to cast a great Affront upon the Scriptures and their Author too: For to subscribe an Instrument is to own it by writing as our Act and Deed, in which

which Sense we are to understand the subscribing Confessions; and in this Sense it would be most blasphemous Presumption to pretend to subscribe the Scriptures; and for such to say, that they only intend or mean that they are willing to subscribe the Scriptures as a Witness, *viz.* by writing to bear Witness that they acknowledge the Scriptures to be the Word of God; in so saying they only trifle. For *First*, if they acknowledge such or such a Confession to be sound and orthodox, they can have no Shadow of a Scruple to subscribe it in that Sense, that is, by subscribing to declare, that they believe such a Confession to be sound according to the Word of God. But however, the Act of subscribing a Confession doth necessarily presuppose, that the Subscriber believes the Contents of such a Confession to be true; yet the true and proper Meaning, and Design of the Act it self, is thereby to assume or (if I may so express it) adopt such a Confession to be our own Act and Deed, (*i. e.*) our Confession of our Faith, as if at the Beginning of the Confession, or at the Beginning of every Article we had written, the Word *Credo*, I believe, and our Name at the End of all is to signify who or what Person this (*I*) is, who says he believes so and so. Now, altho' every *Christian* will readily acknowledge, that he believes the Scriptures to be true, to be the Word of God, &c. yet who ever dreamt of subscribing the Scrip-
tures

tures as their Act and Deed, or a Declaration of their Acts of Faith or Believing, altho' indeed, as is before noted, they contain the Object of our Faith, *viz.* the Truths believed, and that not as believed by us, but as revealed by God; whereas our Confessions, tho' they contain the same Truth, yet they express them not immediately as revealed by God to us, but as understood, received and believed by us.

In the last Place, how can a Church, or a Synod be truly said to be guilty of imposing upon Mens Consciences or Faith, by obliging themselves to any Thing of this Kind, seeing it is their own voluntary Act, and refers only to themselves. If it be said, *It is an Imposition with Respect to these Members that are unwilling to subscribe.* I answer, let none subscribe but those who are willing, yea think it their Duty so to do, until such Times as they be convinced, that it is their Duty: If they do otherwise, I'm afraid they will do amiss. If it be still urged, *That the Imposition remains; because if there be any who are now Members that are unwilling to subscribe; such will be obliged either to subscribe, or to separate.* To this I could say several Things, as *First*, according to our recorded and common way of speaking, it is hard to say, whether Subscribers or Non-subscribers would be obliged to separate; I suppose the Minority in the Vote will separate, (if it comes to that) but whether that will fall to the Lot of Subscribers or Non-subscribers, may yet be a Question. Se.

Secondly, I cannot see but in the Main, the Hardship or the Imposition, if it must be termed so, will be equal on both sides, for if one Party think it an Imposition to be required to subscribe as a Term, or Condition of our continuing united as formerly, the other Party, upon as good Grounds, may esteem it an Imposition to be obliged to continue in the Neglect of what in Conscience they conceive to be (as the Case now stands) a necessary Duty incumbent upon them, as a Church, and Watchmen of the Church, in a Way of necessary Provision against imminent Danger; for it's in my Judgment utterly impracticable for those of subscribing Principles to take the Measures which these Principles oblige them unto, in Order to their Defence against the Dangers of inroaching Error, and at the same Time to drop this Overture, by way of Compliance with those of non-subscribing Principles.

Thirdly, Tho' I would not take upon me to anticipate the Synod's Wisdom in this Particular, praying and desiring to hope, that the *Prince of Peace*, who in an especial Manner deserves this Title with Respect to his Church, notwithstanding all the Divisions which fall out in Act; I say desiring to hope, that the *Prince of Peace* will so order Matters, and so incline and dispose our Minds, that against next Meeting, we may all unanimously concur in
Measures

Measures that make for Peace and Unity among us, as far as our Light and a good Conscience will allow. But suppose the very Worst, *viz.* that this Overture should in the Event prove such a Bone of Contention among us, as to effect even a Separation, either by synodical Act or by voluntary Absenting of any Party; may we not hope? ought we not to pray? yea, and endeavour in our Practice and Behaviour towards one another, to maintain a Christian brotherly Affection, and consequently a neighbourly Christian, charitable Communion, in all Things wherein our Principles and Consciences will allow of it? If we could attain to this, we might ever in Case of a Separation, hope for a re-uniting in due Time, if not of all, yet of the greater Part, upon the Access of greater Light, and clearer Convictions and Apprehensions about this controverted Point. But I will insist no further, but commend these Lines, together with my honest and peaceable Endeavours by them, as also our whole Synod and Church, to the Conduct, Influence and Direction of the Good Spirit of God, praying that our Great Lord may pour out such a Spirit both of Light and Love upon us all, that when we meet, we may be closer cemented in the Unity and Harmony of Judgment, as well as Bond of Affection and Christian Charity, than ever heretofore we have been; altho' we have Reason to be thankful (and I desire my
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self to be so) for the great Degree of Unanimity and Concord, that by God's Blessing we have hitherto enjoy'd; so prays an unworthy Labourer in Christ's Vineyard.

P. S. I thought it needful here by way of Postscript, to add a short Word to prevent a Mistake which I suspect the Reader might otherwise fall into, with respect to this Overture, and the Argument brought to support it, viz. some may be ready to collect from my strenuous Arguing for subscribing the *Westminster* Confession, as if I thought of that Performance above what is meet, or as if I thought it simply impossible to equal it by another Performance of the same Kind, or as if I were so biggoted to it by a kind of Nationality (or what shall I call it) that for the Country's sake it should be preferred before all others.

Now I take this Occasion to declare, that so far as I am able to know my self, it is for the divine Truth contained therein, and the real Piety and Holiness for which it is eminent that I so much value it; yet were there any the least Probability of our being able either to procure its equal else-where, or yet to equal it by any Composure of our own, I am not so biggoted to it as to despise all others of the like kind; it's then the Necessity of a Confession in general that I argue for, which if it take place, I doubt not but the *Westminster* Confession

fession will be that which we will readily agree
 unto. I conceive none among us will have
 the Vanity to alledge that we are able to suit
 our selves as well by any Performance of our
 own, as to embrace the aforefaid Confession ;
 and if there should be any Paragraphs or
 Clauses at which some may scruple, there are
 rational Methods according to Charity and
 Piety, to have such Scruples removed in a re-
 gular Way, and it's a Pity to deprive a whole
 Church of the Benefit of such an excellent
 Confession; for the Scruples perhaps of a few,
 or for a few Scruples about some particular and
 lesser Points of Religion.

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OVERTURE

Humbly offered to the

CONSIDERATION

Of this

REVEREND SYNOD

Wherein is proposed an Expedient, for preventing the Ingress and spreading of dangerous Errors, among either our selves or the Flocks committed to our Care.

Reverend Fathers and Brethren,

I Would be heartily grieved if the following Overture, or any Thing in it, should in the Event, prove an Occasion of any Heat or Contention among Us: Sure I am, every Thing of this Kind is far from my Intention, and I hope all my Brethren will not only be persuaded of the Peaceableness and Sincerity of mine Intention, but also to judge for the Necessity of such an Expedient, when they seriously ponder and consider these few Particulars.

First, That it is the unquestionable Duty of every *Christian*, according to his Station, and Talent, to maintain and defend the Truths of the Gospel against all Opposition.

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Secondly,

Secondly, That this Work or Duty is in an especial Manner incumbent upon the Ministers of the Gospel, by Virtue of their Office.

Thirdly, That not only every Christian and Minister, but also every Church, as an Organiz'd Body politick, methodised by Order and Government, is also obliged to act, with Christian Vigilance and Sagacity, for maintaining and defending the Purity of Gospel-Truth.

Fourthly, That the Parties aforesaid are not only obliged to maintain and defend the Truth for themselves, but also to endeavour to perpetuate and propagate it unto Posterity, pure and uncorrupt.

Fifthly, That as the Light of Nature teacheth all Kingdoms, Common-wealths, Cities, &c. even in Time of Peace, to prepare for War; so a Principle of spiritual Wildom should direct the Church of Christ to fortify it self against all Assaults and Invasions that may be made upon the Doctrine it professeth according to the Word of God.

Sixthly, That secret Bosom Enemies to the Truth (I mean those, who being visible Members of a Church, do not openly and violently oppose the Truth professed therein, but in a secret covered Way do endeavour to undermine it) are as dangerous as any whatsoever; and therefore, the Church should exercise her Vigilance in a special Manner against such, by searching them out, discovering them, and setting

ting a Mark upon them, whereby they may be known, and so may not have it in their Power to deceive. The Churches of *Ephesus* and *Smyrna* are commended for this, but *Pergamos* and *Thyatira* are reprov'd for the Neglect of it.

Seventhly, That We the Members of this Synod, together with the particular Congregations of Professors under our Care, are a Church, that is, one entire organized Body or Society of *Christians*, united together by Order and Government, according to the Institution of the Word, and therefore ought (especially when apparent Danger calls for it) to exert our selves, and the Authority we are invested with, in Vindication and Defence of the Truths which we profess, and for preventing the Ingress and spreading of Error.

Eighthly, That we are so a particular Church as not to be a Part of any particular Church in the World, with which we are united by the joint Exercise of Church-Government, and therefore, are not accountable to the judicial Inquiry of any superior Ecclesiastical Judicature upon Earth; and therefore, if we do not exert the Authority inherent in us, for maintaining the Purity of Gospel-Truth, it's not in the Power of any superior Ecclesiastical Judicature authoritatively to call us in question for our Neglects, or for our Errors or Heresies if we should be corrupted with them.

Ninthly, Altho' I hope there are (as yet) few

or none among us (especially of the Ministers) who are infected with any gross Errors or Heresies in Doctrine, yet I think I may say, we are in no small Danger of being corrupted in Doctrinals, and that even as to Fundamentals; which to me seems evident from the Consideration of these few Particulars of our present Circumstances.

First, It seems to me that we are too much like the People of *Lisbon*, in a careless defenceless Condition, as a City without Walls; (or perhaps my Unacquaintedness with our Records may cause me Mistake) For so far as I know, tho' we be an entire particular Church, as hath been observed, and not a Part of any particular Church, yet we have not any particular System of Doctrines, composed by our selves or others, which we, by any publick judicial Act of our Church, have adopted to be the Articles or Confession of our Faith, &c. Now a Church without a Confession, what is it like? It's true, as I take it, we all generally acknowledge and look upon the *Westminster* Confession and Catechisms to be our Confession, or what we own for such; but the most that can be said for this is, that the *Westminster* Confession is the Confession of the Faith of the Generality of our Members, Ministers and People; but that it is our Confession as we are an united Body-politick, I cannot see, unless *First*, it hath been received as such by a conjunct Act of the Representatives

tives of our Church, I mean by the Synod, either before or since it hath been *sub forma Synodi*. Secondly, unless due Care be, and hath been taken, that all Intrants into the Ministry among us have subscribed the said Confession; or by some equivalent, solemn Act, *Coram autoritate Ecclesiastica*, testified their owning it as the Confession of their Faith; which, how far it is observed within the Bounds of our Synod, I am ignorant: Now if this be so (for upon this Supposition I speak) I think we are in a very defenseless Condition. For if we have no Confession that is ours by synodical Act; or if any among us have not subscribed or acknowledged the Confession *ut supra*; then First, there is no Bar provided to keep out of the Ministry those that are corrupt in Doctrinals; they may be received into the Ministry without renouncing their false Doctrines. Secondly, Those that are in the Ministry among us may propagate gross Errors and corrupt many thereby, without being discovered to preach any Thing against the received Truth; because (*Supposito ut supra*) the Truth was never publicly received among us.

Secondly, Another of our present Circumstances is, That we are surrounded with so many pernicious and dangerous Corruptions in Doctrine, and these grown so much in Vogue and Fashion, even among these whose Ancestors, at the Beginning of the Reformation, would have sealed the now despised Truth with their Blood:

When

When *Armianism Socinianism, Deism, Free-thinking, &c.* do like a Deluge overflow even the Reformed Churches, both established and dissenting, to such a Degree, have we not Reason to consult our own Safety.

Tum tua res agitur paries cum proximus ardet.

Thirdly, A third Circumstance we are in, which increaseth our Danger of Infection by Error, is partly the Infancy, partly the Poverty of our Circumstances, which render us unable to plant a Seminary of Learning among our selves, and so to see to the Education of our young Candidates for the Ministry; and therefore, are under a Necessity of depending upon other Places for Men to supply our Vacancies in the Church, and so are in Danger of having our Ministry corrupted by such as are leavened with false Doctrine ere they come among us.

Fourthly, I am afraid there are too many among our selves, who tho' they may be found in the Faith themselves, yet have the Edge of their Zeal against prevailing Errors of the Times, very much blunted, partly by their being dispirited, and so by a kind of Cowardise are afraid, boldly, openly and zealously to appear against those Errors that show themselves in the World, under the Patronage and Protection of so many Persons of Note and Figure; partly by a kind of an Indifferency, and mistaken Charity, whereby they think that they ought to bear with others, tho' differing from them in
Opinion

Opinion about Points that are mysterious and sublime, but not practical nor fundamental, such as Predestination: Now, altho' I would grant, that the precise Point of Election and Reprobation be neither fundamental nor immediately practical, yet take Predestination complexly as it takes in the other disputed Points between *Calvinists* and *Arminians*, such as universal Grace, the Non-perseverance of the Saints, fore-seen Faith and good Works, &c. and I think it's such an Article in my Creed, such a fundamental of my Faith, that I know not what any other Articles would avail, that could be retained without it. Now, the Expedient which I would humbly propose you may take, is as followeth;

First, That our Synod, as an Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction of *Christ*, cloathed with ministerial Authority to act in concert, in Behalf of Truth and in Opposition to Error, would do something of this Kind at such a Juncture, when Error seems to grow so fast, that unless we be well fortified, it's like to swallow us up.

Secondly, That in pursuance hereof the Synod would, by an Act of their own, publicly and authoritatively adopt the *Westminster* Confession of Faith and Catechisms, &c. for the publick Confession of our Faith, as we are a particular organized Church.

Thirdly, That further, the Synod would make an Act to oblige every Presbytery within their Bounds, to oblige every Candidate for the Ministry,

stry to subscribe or otherwise acknowledge, *Coram Profbyterio*, the said Confession of theirs, &c. and to promise not to preach or teach contrary to it.

Fourthly, To oblige every actual Minister coming among us to do the like.

Fifthly, To enact, That if any Minister within our Bounds shall take upon him to teach or preach any Thing contrary to any of the said Articles, unless *First*, he propose the said Point to the Presbytery or Synod, to be by them discussed, he shall be censured so and so.

Sixthly, Let the Synod recommend it to all their Members, and Members to all their Flocks, to entertain the Truth in Love, to be Zealous and Fruitful, and to be earnest with God by Prayer to preserve their Vine from being spoiled by these deluding Foxes; which if the Synod shall see cause to do, I hope it may thro' the divine Blessing prevent in a great Measure, if not altogether, our being deluded with the damnable Errors of our Times; but if not, I'm afraid we may be at last infected with the Errors which so much prevail else-where.

I will only add one Argument more to press this, *viz.* It's to be feared if such an Expedient be neglected, (now I hope it's in our Power) ere many Years pass over our Heads, those, who now discern not the Necessity thereof, may see it when it will be too late; when perhaps the Number of Truth's Friends may be too few to carry such a Point in the Synod.

Thus *Bretbren*, I have offered to your Consideration, some serious Thoughts in a course Dress. May it please the Master of Assemblies to preside among us, and direct and influence us in all Things, for his Glory and the Edification of his Church. So prays your unworthy Fellow-labourer in *Christ's* Vineyard.

F I N I S.