

ACT

FOR A FAST,

PASSED AT PHILADELPHIA, JUNE 5, 1818.

THE ASSOCIATE SYNOD OF NORTH AMERICA, taking into their serious consideration, the signs and manifold causes of God's controversy with the people of these United States, with his church, and particularly with that part of it which they represent, agreed to call the people under their inspection to the exercise of fasting, humiliation, and prayer,—for such reasons as the following:

Atheism and ignorance of God greatly prevail in this land. Many are saying, the Lord seeth not, he will neither do good nor evil. The fear of God is not before their eyes. Hence the peace and order of society are so much violated by gross crimes; by lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery, and blood touching blood. The rage for worldly gain is every where apparent. The Lord has driven out the heathen before us, and has given us a large and fat land; but the bounties of his providence are abused by many, in rioting and drunkenness, in vanity of apparel, and other luxuries. The Lord has favoured us with civil and religious privileges above other nations; but how great is our ingratitude to the Divine Author of these privileges. He is saying to us, Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? He has given us his written word, in which the only way of salvation is revealed; but how little the authority of this heavenly revelation is regarded, not only by professed Deists, but even by many bearing the Christian name, is too apparent, from their neglect of reading and meditating on it; from their being so little concerned to have their profession of religion, and their practice, conformed to it; and even by the light and ludicrous application of Scripture expressions in common conversation. The mouths of many are full of cursing and profane oaths. We have reason to fear that the day is not far off, when the land will mourn under the judgments of God for such heaven-daring impiety. The Sabbath continues to be openly profaned, by neglecting the public and private duties of that day, by frequent and unnecessary journeying, by secular business, and carnal amusements.

As we have not been duly concerned to acknowledge the Lord in setting up our civil rulers, so they have added to the causes of his wrath, both by making impious laws, such as, those licensing play-

houses, authorising the superstitious form of swearing by kissing the book, establishing lotteries; and also by neglecting the execution of good laws, such as those against clandestine marriages, against swearing, sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, and other immoralities. At the same time, we have reason to acknowledge that we fail in the duty that we owe to our rulers; particularly in that of earnest prayer for their welfare, and of co-operating with them in the execution of good laws. And indeed the many striking instances that occur among us of the neglect of the duty of other relations, such as those of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, call for mourning before the Lord.

Although we have reason to acknowledge the Divine goodness, in many favourable appearances in the visible church in our day; yet in many respects her state is deplorable and alarming. It is true, we have the clear light of divine revelation; but in some instances we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noon-day as in the night. Nothing seems plainer than that the church communion to which Christ calls his followers, includes a joint confession of him before men, a confession of all his truths and institutions, according to what his church has attained: But according to the scheme commonly called "Catholic Communion," we are bound to admit to the Lord's table, all such as, in the judgment of charity, are deemed Christians; however many of the truths and institutions of Christ they deny, provided they admit as many of these as are accounted essential to salvation. Many who are disposed to resent injuries done to themselves, are hereby taught to regard the opposition made to many of Christ's revealed truths, and the dishonour thereby done to his Name, of which every one of his truths is a letter, as of small importance; and endeavours to promote the reformation of the Catholic Church, by withdrawing from the communion of such as are obstinate in their errors, and in their backsliding from reformation already attained, are considered as useless and noxious. Hence a door is opened for the introduction of error in doctrine, of laxness in discipline, and of corruptions in the worship of God. Zeal and faithfulness in contending for the faith are reproached; our solemn covenant engagements, and a judicial testimony for truth, are treated with contempt.

The departure of church-members from the truths of God in their profession, is usually attended with proportionable degeneracy in practice. So in the present state of the visible church, iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold. Professors are little exercised in secret prayer, and reading the Scriptures; and still less in the heart exercises of meditation and self-examination. That serious conversation about gospel truths and gracious experience, which used in former periods of the church, to warm the hearts of Christians, and endear them to one another, is too little known. Many are careless and negligent in their attendance on public ordinances, and in the observation of family worship, and family instruction.

These and other sins against the Lord our God, we acknowledge, as prevailing in our land with professors of religion in general; and

particularly with us, who have espoused a peculiar testimony for the doctrine and order of the church of Christ; and in our case these sins are peculiarly aggravated, by our witnessing profession, and solemn covenant engagements. We have not been duly exercised in lamenting before the Lord these public evils against which we profess to testify, or in guarding against such conduct as tends to harden others in their attachment to these evils. We are not mourning as we ought for our own sins, while we profess to lament the sins of others. Sinful conformity to the world, and lukewarmness in the concerns of God's declarative glory, and the welfare of his church greatly prevail. While we have the means of grace ourselves, we are too little concerned to have them extended to others. Public covenanting, though we acknowledge it to be an important and seasonable duty, is neglected. The discipline of the church meets with much opposition and contempt. It is lamentable that many have fallen from the good profession that they have made; that many give sad evidence of unsteadfastness and wavering in it; and that so much occasion of reproach is given by open immoralities in the conduct of church-members; such as dishonesty and over-reaching in civil dealings, and the detestable vice of drunkenness, which prevails so much in this land.

We acknowledge, that we have not been duly exercised in tracing these and other actual transgressions with which we are chargeable, to the fountain of our original guilt and depravity; and in humbling ourselves for our unbelief, and neglect of a suitable improvement of Christ in his saving offices; a neglect which has been the principal cause of the prevailing of other evils in our hearts and lives.

The Lord has been speaking to us by the dispensations of his providence, as well as by his word; but we have not obeyed his voice, nor received correction. It is evident to all who have any spiritual discerning, that the Lord has a controversy with us. He is withdrawing from his ordinances, and not allowing us such a refreshing and comfortable measure of the influences of his Spirit, as he used to grant his people in former days.


For these, and the like reasons, particularly specified in the acknowledgment of sins, prefixed to our solemn covenant engagement to duties, this Synod agree to call the several congregations under their inspection to essay the exercise of humiliation and fasting; and with the eye of faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only propitiation for our sins, to present our supplications to him; pleading that he may turn again, that he may have compassion on us, that he may subdue our iniquities, and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea; that he may turn us unto himself; that he may revive his work in the several congregations under our inspection; that he may bless the preaching of the word, and the dispensation of the sacraments, making them effectual to the ends of their appointment; that he may support the discipline of his house, and bless it as an appointed means of restoring his people who have erred from his way; that he may grant signal evidences of his gracious presence

with the judicatories of his church, particularly with this Synod in their meetings from time to time ; that they may obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful in keeping the trust committed to them ; that they may see eye to eye, and may strive together with one mind for the faith of the gospel ; that he may support the testimony for a covenanted reformation displayed in Britain, Ireland, and in these lands ; that he would bless our brethren of the General Synod, enabling them to faithfulness in that cause wherein they and we are jointly engaged ; that he would bless the President of the United States, and our other rulers, with wisdom and integrity, in discharging the duties of their stations ; that he would spread the knowledge of Christ, of his righteousness and salvation, through the world ; that he would bless endeavours that are used to propagate the knowledge of the Scriptures ; that he would revive a covenanted work of reformation ; that he would bless seminaries of learning, and particularly that one under the inspection of this Synod, and his servant employed in directing the studies of young men attending it, preparatory to the holy ministry ; that he would hasten the more eminent glory of the latter day, the final downfall of the Papal antichrist, the abolishing of Mahometan delusion, the general restoration of the Jews, with the in-bringing of the greater fulness of the Gentile nations ; and that the way may be prepared for the glorious appearing of the great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Synod accordingly appoint the last Thursday of August next, to be observed as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer, in all the congregations, settled and vacant, under their inspection.

Extracted by

FRANCIS PRINGLE, *Syn. Clk.*

 Next meeting of Synod at Pittsburgh, on the 4th Wednesday of May, 1819, at 4 o'clock, P. M. Sermon at half past 7 o'clock, P. M.

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