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New York ( City ) Second Baptist Church.

The Second Baptist Church . . . to the Warrick Association met at Bedford, October 15, 1793.

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TO THE

# Warrick Association,

MET IN BEDFORD, OCTOBER 15, 1793, SEND CHRISTIAN SALUTATION.

DEAR BRETHREN,

**A**LTHOUGH we are not in your particular connection, yet, esteeming you friends to Zion at large, we hope to be indulged by you, so far, as to give our Letter an impartial hearing and a candid discussion in your own breasts.

When any body of men publish to the world at large, the supposed or real faults of individuals or churches, 'tis but a part of candour to hear a defence made by such individuals or churches. We then, as a church of Jesus Christ, take this method to vindicate our conduct, which you have in so public a manner (without due proof) contemned. Brethren, we wish to use great plainness of speech, in representing matters; hoping, at the same time, to guard against all sourness or moroseness of temper, which unbecomes the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, who, when reviled, reviled not again.

We, as a church, think you, as an association, have given much offence to us, both respectively and as a collected body, by receiving into your fellowship, and in our name, a number of persons whom we excommunicated for disorderly, wicked, and base conduct, which they had practised against the church, of which conduct ~~the church, without dispute, must be the best judge.~~ And how you, dear brethren, as an association, disclaiming all authority over churches, acknowledging their independence, and right of government over their own members, could assume a superior judgment to the church, and receive her cut off members, is to us mysterious. It is a HORN of power we wish not to see on the heads of associations. It is a power they are not invested with by Christ, nor the particular churches which compose their body;—it is a power every Christian (in this land of light and liberty) abhors;—it is a power your constitution disclaims; and yet, in the face of all this, you have exercised it. In so doing you have fulfilled the old sarcastic proverb, viz. *looked one way, and rowed the other*. In your constitution and articles you have, with scripture boldness, looked Zion and the world in the face, and expressed your sentiments truly respecting the independency of each church, and their scripture warrant, to govern themselves, without being amenable to any church, or body of churches, for their conduct; and yet, notwithstanding this publication of your sentiments, you have acted a contrary part, in receiving members under the just censure of a church of Christ. In so doing, you have not only in practice denied your principles (as to church government), but you have poured contempt on the rightful authority of Christ's church, you have re-judged her judgment, and have taken a lordly stride over her, and have told the world you knew better about the conduct of her members than she did, and have taken them into union on this principle. If this is not tyranny, we know not what tyranny is. Your conduct in this affair destroys all church government, and establishes Popery in a Protestant land.

It was not possible, brethren, for you in an associated character, to know the merits of a cause respecting those censured persons, if you had even the right of judgment over churches. Judgment should be according to evidence; evidences are produced on the trial of cases; but no trial concerning them persons came before you, nor was it ruleable there should—your constitution forbid it—the church which cut them off did not apply for it—she knew her own right of government better. You acknowledge yourselves, at best, but an advisory council; but is there such perfect wisdom and authority in your advice, that churches have no right to recede from it, and if they do, be judged by you and condemned, yea unchurched? This horn of authority we hope may never be seen among you again, and if it should, discountenanced by all churches of Christ. It has been seen once, and we have seen the effects of its despotism.

We did not send to you for advice how to deal with our delinquents, nor did we send to ask your opinion in the matter, whether we did right or wrong in putting away from among us disorderly walkers and covenant breakers—we had for our guide in the matter a more infallible instructor, viz. the word of God, and the rule was so plain, we could run and read. Our brother, Francis Vandyke, was not authorized by us, either to ask your opinion, or gain your approbation respecting what we had done in the affair *pro or con*, which he frankly told you; and yet you would appoint a committee to make enquiry, and bring in a judgment, whether we, or our excommunicated members, were the Second Church in New-York. We cannot help thinking, brethren, that, upon a cool and deliberate reflection, or more mature investigation of this piece of conduct, you will see you departed from your constitution, and acted unbecoming the dignity and character of an association.

But the committee's mode of trial is curious, and calls for our attention.—Whatever was asserted by either party, and denied by their opponents, the asserter must prove or loose his case: This may do where parties, with their evidences, are present. But circumstances alters cases. We ask you, brethren, in the name of Common Sense, what chance did we stand, admitting, for a moment, we subjected to it? Whatever our brother Francis Vandyke might assert, be it ever so true, it must fall for want of evidence: for he was alone, he had no evidence to call on to support his assertion; in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every thing be established. Our opponents had the advantage as to this; for whatever any one of them asserted, they could call one or more evidences to support it. But is it consistent with reason to believe we authorised our brother Vandyke to act for us under such circumstances? But if we had, which we deny, did there not appear so much craft and design in the mode of trial, considering the circumstances our brother was in, as would justify him, or any man else in the like case, in receding from it, let justice and sound policy determine. But the truth of the matter is this—our brother, Francis Vandyke, did positively, and in plain terms, inform both the convention and committee, he had no authority to enter into an investigation or proof of any thing the church had done respecting her excommunicated members, and immediately withdrew.

Now, if our information be true, the committee came to no determination that night; but next morning, Mr John Caton informed them, Mr Foster had been to Captain Willes's, and told him the best thing the committee could do, would be to bring in Mr Montayne, and his party, the Second Church. How far this falsehood influenced them to determine in their favour, we leave to God and their own consciences. But a false report it was, as was sufficiently proved to Mr Caton's face. For Captain Willes being asked, whether Mr Foster had been to his house that morning, and said what Mr John Caton reported, he peremptorily denied both; and said Mr Foster had not been that morning at his house, nor did he say to him any such words. Here were two palpable lies charged upon Mr Caton; who, to extenuate both, said, that if Captain Willes had not told him, somebody else did.

We shall now point out some untruths you have published in your Minutes of May 31st 1792. We shall insert your own words between inverted commas.—“A difficulty arose in the Second Church, respecting the method of exercising church government.” This is not true—there was no difficulty in the church of any kind, but all, as we thought, in peace, previous to a church meeting held February 28th 1791, when it was then moved and seconded, (by the party we have since excommunicated) to break the church covenant, which covenant they helped to make, or new-model e'er they joined us, and then expressed their entire approbation of it, and in the presence of God, angels, and men, solemnly (or to appearance so) entered into with us, and so became of our number. (This move they made brought us into trials.) Having now a seat and a voice among us, they, by secret intrigues, premeditated the abolition of the covenant, and exclusion of all who supported it; and expected to seize on all the temporalities of the church, which had been collected at the expence and labour of others.

You also say, “A separation took place, as much as two to one.” It is a great untruth. For there were no more than eleven members who applied to the church for a dismissal, requesting to be constituted a third Baptist church. Their names were inserted in the paper they brought for that purpose, which paper we have, and is a proof of the falsity of the assertion in the Minutes. Their request was laid before the church; and to end all disputes with them, it was agreed to dismiss them if we found we could do it according to rule: but there were four of the leaders in the disturbance already cut off from the church, therefore we could not dismiss them as in good standing with the church, which was what they demanded; the church was willing to dismiss them, and say nothing about good or bad standing; but they refused this, and immediately called themselves the *Second Church*. The inconsistency of such conduct is too obvious not to be seen by the impartial. They, in the first place, acknowledged us to be the church, or why did they ask a dismissal from us? If we were not a church, we had no right to receive or dismiss members; and how they, on a sudden, became the church they asked a dismissal from, is beyond any thing recorded in sacred or profane history, where any thing is said about the rise of churches.

Thus the church sprung up, without a precedent or example in all the annals of history. And this new church, composed of excommunicated members, you have received, under the appellation of the *Second Baptist Church* in New-York; but whether you have not been imposed upon by a counterfeit, assuming the title of the original church yet in being, let truth and a fair statement of facts determine.

After this sudden and unaccountable church was thus formed, they tried by falsehoods and misrepresentations to deceive the hearts of the simple, and draw away with them as many as they could. They also counted in their number all that were members of the original church both at home and abroad. This device is a feature of their unfair conduct. If they denied the rectitude of the covenant the church acknowledged and came together on, had they a right to act for others, who knew of no necessity nor desired to have it altered? if not, is it not fraud and deception to tack to their number those who neither knew of their base conduct, and if they did, they had no reason to believe they would have approved of it?

You further say, “That Francis Vandyke, of the minor part of the Second Church in New-York, rejected the body of the Church.” This is no more true than the rest of your assertions concerning us in your Minutes: For none were considered members with us, but such as have acknowledged our covenant, and walks agreeable thereto. But when their conduct is manifestly opposed thereunto, and they proved guilty of breaches of it, we consider them no longer as members in standing with us: and, in fact, they exclude themselves, according to an article of our church covenant, which runs thus:—viz. “That if any person, or persons, deviate or dissent from the said confession, or church discipline, or this covenant, they are declared to have no right to a voice or membership in this church.” And on this principle, and agreeable to this article, we as a church (not Francis Vandyke) excommunicated the persons you have received. Was it even true what you asserted, that

they were the body of the church, and as much as two to one; yet we hold that, that part of the church which stands to their covenant, are the church, even though they were the minor part. But we declare they never had a majority in their favour, which among other proofs we can produce, their application to us for a dismissal, is one. But when men depart from the truth, inconsistencies and error attend their conduct, while they, through weakness or wickedness attempt to justify themselves. And what makes these expelled members conduct appear so criminal, and renders them inexcusable, is, that they knew there was a provisional article in the covenant for a regular dismissal, had they made such application as the article required. The article runs thus, "Nevertheless, any person or persons, so dissenting, may have a dismissal, setting forth their dislike to any part of the doctrines or discipline of said church, provided they apply orderly for the same at any regular church meeting, and not try to sow discord and divisions among the members before such application is made." If these men did not like the covenant, they were under no obligations to abide by it; if others in the church approved of it, Why did not these men leave them to act agreeable to their conscience? Why did they strive to break the peace of the church? They knew they could be dismissed to join any where else, upon a proper application being made to the church; but, the truth is, restless, ambitious, and vain-glorious characters, are like the waves of the sea, always in commotion, casting up mire and dirt, and foaming out their own shame. This is the glaring conduct of these men, whom you have set forth in your Minutes, "As orthodox in faith, and desirous of good order." We do not know how orderly they have behaved among you, as a member of your body; but we know and can say, (and that too without reflection) they have broke through the hedge of good order in two churches of Christ.

You charge our brother Vandyke with "Assuming the key of the meeting-house, where the church met, and, of locking the door against all, but such as would follow him." We are sorry you have put us so often to the disagreeable necessity of saying your charges are false: but, in justice to ourselves, and to you, and to the truth, we say, this is as false as the rest. He did not act upon the principle insinuated in the charge, but upon the unanimous voice of the church, who said they could not in conscience worship with these men, who sought to break the covenant, and thereby disturbed the peace of the church.

Now, before Mr. Montayne and Garnis signified their intention to break the covenant, the church admitted them to improve their gifts, and lead the publick worship by prayer and exhortation when we had no minister. But when they divulged their intention, and sought to break up the covenant, we could no longer walk with them, nor wait on their improvements. But about locking the meeting-house, our brother Vandyke, before a number of us, laid the keys of the meeting-house on the table in the house where we were assembled, and said to the brethren, there was the keys, if they choosed to open the meeting-house next Lord's day, they might do as they pleased. We did then agree not to open it for the reasons above assigned; and it did appear to us, from sundry circumstances, that these men had a design to seize on the temporalities and name of the church. One of their own party confessed, that it never was their design, to stand to the covenant any longer than till they could get a majority to break it. Was not this rank hypocrisy, to openly, before God and his church, acknowledge a covenant, and at the same time have it in their hearts to break it? 'O how are the hidden things of Esau searched out.' And this person gave such proof of this, as was sufficient to confirm it. Another proof of this we will mention: one of these designing men, told a certain person to come to church meeting, and informed her what was going to be done, viz. they were going to break the covenant, and discipline the old man, and we believe others who would oppose them. You see by all this what jeopardy we stood in; and can you suppose we could worship with these men, and suffer them to take the lead? Put your soul in our soul's stead and answer.

But it was the church that locked the meeting-house door, and not Francis Vandyke, as has been falsely alledged. But if he did, two things appear in his favour: in the first place, the house was his, he paid the rent of it, and the expence of the repairs, 20 or 30 shillings excepted, and he had a right to do with his own as he saw good, especially in that critical juncture of time. Another reason may be offered: he well knew that those who would follow him (as is termed) were one in heart and principle with him; they were such as meant to abide by their church covenant; and he knew that neither he, nor we, could approve of any to lead in church worship, who broke covenant with us. So that on every consideration, circumstance, and voice of his covenant brethren, we think he might be justified if he had done even as slander has reported. But, he is not yet exempt from the pen of calumny. You charge him in your Minutes, "As claiming the keys of the kingdom, excommunicating at his pleasure." This is a high charge indeed, greater in magnitude of offence than locking the meeting-house against covenant breakers, to prevent their intrusion in the lead of worship.

But, brethren, are you all acquainted with this man's conduct throughout the trials in the church? Are you fully persuaded he is "*the man of sin*" you have represented him to be? You have spread your opinion of him throughout the American and European Zions, and the world. Did ever any respectable association before yourselves tell the world, that one of their Baptist brethren had turned Pope? O brethren, we think if you are men of feelings, you must blush on the reflection of such a publication coming out under the signature of the *Warrick Association*. Many of you have not so much as ever seen the man, you have had no personal acquaintance with him, nor knew what steps he took under church trials; and how you, under such disadvantageous circumstances, could exhibit to the world such a charge against him, appears strange to us. But if even you have been told this of him, and was the charge true, it did not become your character to say report, and we will report it.

But the charge is false. We have known the man, some of us, a long time; we have lived in fellowship with him through all the trials; we never have yet seen any thing like his "assuming the keys of the kingdom," nor can there be an instance produced where his voice or vote stood opposed to the church; and so far from "excommunicating at his pleasure," we do assert as a truth, that when the ring-leaders of the disturbance in the church were excommunicated by the unanimous vote of the church,

at a regular church meeting, though he was with us in sentiment, yet he did not vote; nor at any church meeting whatever has he ever presumed to lord it over the church. You must allow us to be better judges of this our brother's character and conduct than you possibly could be under the circumstances mentioned above. And how you could be so lost to candour and common charity as to lift your voice on high, and publicly exhibit such glaring untruths against a man who never sought to hurt you, nor any part of Zion willingly—against a man of good moral conduct—against a member in good standing in the church of Christ—it appears inexplicable to us. We cannot believe it will add to your reputation for you, in your infant state as an association, to enter the field of slander, and publish all you hear from the mouths of factious men as truths. There are, we doubt not, men of principle, wise and judicious, among you, who, if they had not been blinded by the false glosses and misrepresentations of artful designing men, they would not have consented to have such a scurrilous letter go out in their name.

You have not only, in a very barefaced manner, reported many untruths against a brother in Christ and officer in the church, but you have (in the Minutes referred to) reflected very highly on some respectable characters in the ministry, whose usefulness and labour of love to the churches is well known, and gratefully remembered by them. But, brethren, we wot many of you have done it through ignorance, and have been hurried on by the influence of some men among you. We take notice of the following, published in your Minutes so often referred to—"Those who found themselves the major part, as much as two to one, wishing to have the matter settled, sent a request to some other churches for advice and assistance; and notwithstanding there were messengers came from the churches sent to, these who sent for them were refused any assistance from them; and the same persons that refused, received the minor part as the church in the convention, and acted with them on the 12th of April," &c. &c. If it were true, that they were the major part of the church, and orderly members, they might have proceeded to business, we should think, when the messengers came. But the truth of the matter is this—The messengers found they were imposed on by the excommunicated party; for they represented it was by desire of both parties they were sent for; and being informed that the party who sent for them were by the 2d Church excommunicated, and remembering a similar circumstance had taken place on them previous to this, and as the Second Church had no knowledge of the messengers coming till they actually arrived in New-York, they declared they would have nothing to do in the matter, nor did they choose to interfere in the government of any church respecting their members. And we do believe it would have been much to the honour of the Warrick Association had they acted the like part. But instead of this, you have judged a matter before you heard it—you have taken for granted, all our excommunicated members has told you—you have received into your fellowship, though you was told at the convention they were cut off members, and sufficient proof was offered you then if you would hear it—you have published for truths what we in this letter prove falsehoods—therefore, in justice to our brother, Francis Vandye, whom you have publicly accused falsely—in justice to ourselves as a church of Christ, on which you have poured contempt, and without a shadow of truth or justice, have received a church in our name—in justice to Zion at large, who have been blinded by your misrepresentations—in justice to the world, who may be imposed on by your letter of untruths—in justice to you as an association, we have thought proper thus to write, and have given you such a fair statement of *Facts* as must, we think, carry conviction you have done us wrong. There remains one way, brethren, you can repair the injury, viz. by a frank acknowledgment (in your Minutes) you meddled with a matter that did not belong to you as an association: and also to put those men you received as the Second Church where you found them,

We hope our plain dealing may give no offence; for though we may have been rude in speech, yet we hope not in knowledge. We have made use of no terms or phrases with a design to irritate, nor do we wish you any evil, but shall rejoice in your prosperity. We pray you may be led by the Spirit of God to act up to your character as Christians, as Churches, and as an Association. May you advance the Redeemer's cause—may you strive for peace and make peace, and seek the universal good, peace, and harmony of Zion at large—may you be advocates for good order, rule, and government in the churches—and we with you may rise, as a body, respectable, and venerated by all your sister associations, and at length rise to celestial mansions; where jins, tumults and wars, are not known; but peace and endless felicity reigns triumphant in every breast,—and God is all and in all.

This Letter was read at a church meeting, held October 8th 1797, was approved of, and ordered to be signed and sent out, in the behalf of the church.

WILLIAM HURTIN.