

AN EXPLANATION AND DEFENCE
OF THE TERMS OF COMMUNION,
ADOPTED BY THE
COMMUNITY OF DISSENTERS.

By the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, 1801.
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 13.

ON ARTICLE V: THE DUTY OF
TESTIMONY-BEARING.

IN the fifth article of our Terms, we require an owning of the scriptural testimonies, and earnest contendings of Christ's faithful witnesses; and especially of our own Judicial Act and Testimony, stating and vindicating the various reformation-attainments of these lands in which we dwell.

In the instructive visions of the Revelation, we find the faithful martyrs of Jesus represented him as slain, not only "for the Word of God," but also "for the testimony which they held." [Rev. 6.9.] If, therefore, we mean to sustain the honourable character of public witnesses for Christ and his cause, and to be followers of them, who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises, [Heb. 6.12,] it seems to be highly requisite that we should exhibit an impartial testimony in defence of all the precious reformation-attainments, and in opposition to all the departures therefrom, which have so mournfully stained our national character, and provoked the Lord to plead a controversy against us.

Meanwhile, in exhibiting our testimony, we make no pretensions to infallibility or perfection. Our design, we hope, is good; but we are very sensible that human weakness and infirmity must always be discernible in our best performances. We do not assert, either with respect to our own, or the other testimonies which we approve, that there are no incautious expressions in these compositions. Considering the time, and the peculiarly trying circumstances, in which the compilers of them existed, and considering that they were men of like passions with others; it would, perhaps, be rather unreasonable to expect so much. But if none of the precious truths, stated and vindicated in these testimonies, be given up; if none of the errors or immoralities which they condemn be countenanced; or, in other words, if the whole substance be conscientiously retained; we mean not to differ with those who may plead that some particular modes of expression might be altered to the better.

Let it also be carefully observed here, that, with regard to the Deeds of which we speak, we wish to be understood in the same sense as before, concerning the Confession of Faith and the Covenants. It is only after diligently perusing, pondering, and comparing these testimonies with the Word of God, and after finding them to be founded upon, and agreeable unto it, that

we mean to rank them among the subordinate standards of our church. But, as two, or more, cannot consistently walk together in church-fellowship, unless they be agreed in sentiment concerning the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the church, and concerning the proper way of glorifying God upon earth; we reckon it exceedingly requisite that this agreement should be properly ascertained. ► For that important purpose, amongst others, these testimonies seem to be very much calculated. And it is only to such of them as truly deserve the characteristic epithets of SCRIPTURAL AND FAITHFUL, that we require the assent of our church-members. If any are disposed to question the propriety of applying these designations, either to our own, or to the rest which we approve, we are always ready, as opportunity offers, to reason the matter with them. If we can agree, it is well; “Let us strive together for the faith of the Gospel, and continue steadfastly in the Apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” [Phil. 1.27; Acts 2.42.] If we cannot agree, we must part in peace. For we never entertained the remotest thought that these matters were to be adjusted by any other weapons than those of Scripture and reason, under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit.

===== SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL =====

Q. What Precedent Led to Christians Declaring an Adherence to others’ Testimonies as a part of their own Testimony?

A. This is found commonly in the final Testimonies of many martyrs through the time of persecution.

From the Testimony of Humphrey Colhoune, 1666:

“I am come here this Day to this Place to die this Death, for crimes for which (I thank God) my Conscience doth not condemn me. My crime, as is alleged, is for Disloyalty against the King’s Majesty; Yet I thank God, that my appearing lately with the Lord’s People [in arms] was from my sense of my obligation in the Covenant, and the sense of the wrongs done in the Land, and the crying oppressions committed therein. . . . I die with this my Testimony, my adherence to the National Covenant, to the Work of Reformation a great length carried on, and now overthrown most sinfully by ungodly Men, who have established their Apostacy by Law, which no just Power on earth could ever do. Also I adhere to the Presbyterian Government [of the Church,] the Confession of Faith, Catechisms Larger and Shorter, And to the Solemn Acknowledgment of the Church of *Scotland*, And Public Testimonies thereof against the sins of the time. This day I rejoice that He hath counted me worthy to lay down my life for Him, as one that beareth witness,” etc. — *Naphtali*, ed. 1693, pp. 348-349.

From the Last Speech of Mr. John Kid, 1679:

“I am pressed in Conscience to make honourable mention of all these great and glorious things that God has done in *Scotland*, since the year 1638; the abundant measure of his Spirit that was poured out upon his Servants and people at the renewing of the National Covenant... I bear my testimony to the Solemn League and Covenant, as it was pressed and sworn in *England*,

Scotland, and Ireland, 1643, yea as it was timed and taken by the Representatives and body of these three Lands, which tie is binding, and can by no power on Earth be infringed, whether Secular or Ecclesiastick... IV. I dare not but add this in the case wherein I now stand. viz. I cannot but add my concurrence with, and adherence to all these publick testimonies, protestations, and declarations, that have been owned, evinced, and emitted by all the Presbyterian Ministers and Professors of old and of late, since this work began, and particularly, I dare not but join my approbation of, and adherence to the Testimony and protestation of these renowned and eminently worthy Gentlemen, Ministers and Professors that appeared against the publick Resolutions,” etc. — Naphtali, ed. 1693, pp. 462-463.

From the Dying Testimony of Walter Smith, 1681; with a Caveat on this Topic:

“And now I set to my seal to all His truths revealed in His word, and particularly these: First, That He is one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. But alas! who can think of Him? who can hear of Him, or write of Him aright? Oh! He is God! He is God! . . . Fifthly, I set to my seal to the truth of that precious promise, Josh. 1.5, etc.; repeated, Heb. 13.5: ‘For He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,’ together with all the other promises to that purpose; . . . I adhere to the Confession of Faith and work of reformation (as I shall afterwards speak to), so particularly, I set to my seal to these truths, in the 18th chapter thereof, anent the assurance of grace and salvation. . . . And now I am to die a martyr; and I am as fully persuaded of my interest in Christ, and that He hath countenanced me in that for which I am to lay down my life, as I am of my being. I can get no more written, nor see I great need for it; for the testimonies of martyrs are not your rule. Farewell.” — *A Cloud of Witnesses*.

From the Dying Testimony of Isabel Alison, 1681:

“Now in the first Place, I adhere to the holy Scriptures of the old and new Testament. And likewise I adhere to the confession of Faith, because according to the Scriptures, the larger and shorter Catechisms, and our solemn Covenants, both National and solemn League, as they were lawfully sworn in this land; and I adhere to the Acknowledgement of sins, and Engagement to Duties; I adhere likewise to these forementioned papers, and to the excommunication at Torwood, they all being according to the Scriptures of truth, and so both lawful and necessary. Likewise I adhere to the Rutherglen Testimony, and to all the testimonies of our worthies, who have suffered in Edinburgh, and elsewhere.” — *A Cloud of Witnesses*.

From the Last Speech and Testimony of Mr. James Renwick, 1688:

“Now, my dear friends in precious Christ, I think I need not tell you that, as I have lived, so I die, in the same persuasion with the true reformed and covenanted Presbyterian Church of Scotland. I adhere to the testimony of the day, as it is held forth in our Informatory Vindication, and in the testimony against the present toleration; and that I own, and seal with my blood, all the precious truths, even the controverted truths, that I have taught. So I would exhort every one of you to make sure your personal reconciliation with God in Christ, for I fear many of you have that yet to do; and when you come where I am, to look pale death in the face, ye will not

be a little shaken and terrified if ye have not laid hold on eternal life. I would exhort you to much diligence in the use of means; to be careful in keeping your societies; to be frequent and fervent in secret prayer; to read much the written Word of God, and to examine yourselves by it.” — *A Cloud of Witnesses*.

Q. What Precedent Led to the Covenanter Church Incorporating Such Language in Official Church Standards and Terms of Communion?

A. Published Joint-Testimonies, serving to unite the remnant of those abiding by their Principles, often at critical times, necessarily incorporated such language.

The Protestation & Apologetic Admonitory Declaration, 1685:

“. . . . which sins we desire to Confess & mourn for, before God, Angels & men; As also our sin in not timeously rejecting the foresaid Charles, when he brake Covenant & all parts of his Coronation oath: Howbeit, fearing the lying under such a sin any longer, when we were brought to a very small Remnant, We did by open declarations disclaim his pretended authority, upon many important grounds & reasons, as is to be seen elsewhere, particularly in our declaration published at Lanerk, January 12. 1682 years. All which Declarations we do hereby Ratify & Approve.” — Protestation Published with the *Informatory Vindication*.

The Declaration and Testimony at Mount-Herick, 1741:

“In the first Place, and according to our former Testimonys, We declare and own our Belief of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, to be the very Word of God, the only Infallible Rule of Truth and Life, in which we hope, and according to which we desire and endeavour to live, altho' with much Weakness and many Infirmities, which we desire humbly to confess and lament, and to bewail our many short-comings in all our Dutys and Performances, . . . Also we declare our Adherence to the Covenants National and Solemn League, . . . And to the Confession of Faith, Catechisms larger and shorter, Sum of saving Knowledge, Directory for Worship, Church Government and Ordination of Ministers, and the whole attained-to Work of Reformation, and to the Testimonys of the faithful Witnesses and Martyrs to and for the same, before the Revolution in the Year 1688. — *Mount-Herick Declaration*, 1741.

Discussion Questions

1. What common Christian practice, or necessary character of believers, makes united testimony-bearing necessary?

A. Believers are called to be witnesses for Christ and his cause, and followers of them who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises. [Rev. 6.9; Heb. 6.12; Rev. 3.10.]
2. To what extent do Covenanters allow brethren may vary in their approval of their testimonies?

A. They are not particular about the wording and expression, so long as the truths vindicated are not given up and the errors & sins condemned are not countenanced. See Inf. Vind. 1687, p. 26,41-42.
3. Is the Testimony of the R.P. Church received as a subordinate standard on account of the authority of those who drafted and officially adopted the Testimony?

- A. Not at all. As with other church standards, it is only after diligent examination and comparison with the word of God, leading to the conclusion that it is founded upon & agreeable to that Word of God, that it is ranked with the subordinate standards of the church. Every church membership should receive them this way, otherwise they do not receive them as the R.P. church herself receives them.
4. For what purpose are these church testimonies accounted to be well calculated or subservient?
- A. They assist us in ascertaining a proper agreement in the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the church.
5. Are Covenanters at war with everyone who fails to agree with their testimony?
- A. No. They will only have matters adjusted by “Scripture and reason” as their “weapons” under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit.
6. What authority or bearing should be regarded as pertaining to the testimonies of martyrs?
- A. They are not our rule, by their own admission. But their weight is considerable when it expresses the resolute devotion of Christians called by God to bear testimony to his truth, and unwilling to recede from the matter they witness, even to save their lives. To oppose them is not a light matter.