

The Cambridge Platform

1648

NOTE: A declaration of principles of church government and discipline, forming a constitution of the Congregational churches. It was adopted by a church synod at Cambridge, Mass., and remains the basis of the temporal government of the churches. It had little to do with matters of doctrine and belief. The Congregationalists of Connecticut later subscribed (1708), in the Saybrook Platform, to a more centralized church government, resembling Presbyterianism.

CHAPTER I.

Of The Form Of Church Government;

And That It Is One, Immutable, And Prescribed In The Word.

1. Ecclesiastical polity, or church government or discipline, is nothing else but that form and order that is to be observed in the church of Christ upon earth, both for the constitution of it, and all the administrations that therein are to be performed.
2. Church government is considered in a double respect, either in regard of the parts of government themselves, or necessary circumstances thereof. The parts of government are prescribed in the Word, because the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Law-giver in his church, is no less faithful in the house of God, than was Moses, who from the Lord delivered a form and pattern of government to the children of Israel in the Old Testament; and the holy Scriptures are now also so perfect as they are able to make the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto every good work; and therefore doubtless to the well ordering of the house of God.
3. The parts of church government are all of them exactly described in the Word of God being parts or means of instituted worship according to the second commandment, and therefore to continue one and the same unto the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, as a kingdom that cannot be shaken, until he shall deliver it up unto God, even to the Father. So that it is not left in the power of men, officers, churches, or any state in the world, to add, or diminish, or alter any thing in the least measure therein.

4. The necessary circumstances, as time and place, etc., belonging unto order and decency, are not so left unto men, as that, under pretense of them, they may thrust their own inventions upon the churches, being circumscribed in the Word with many general limitations, where they are determined with respect to the matter to be neither worship itself, nor circumstances separable from worship. In respect of their end, they must be done unto edification; in respect of the manner, decently and in order, according to the nature of the things themselves, and civil and church custom. Does not even nature itself teach you? Yea, they are in some sort determined particularly—namely, that they be done in such a manner as, all circumstances considered, is most expedient for edification: So as, if there be no error of man concerning their determination, the determining of them is to be accounted as if it were divine.

CHAPTER II.

Of The Nature Of The Catholic Church In General,

And In Special Of A Particular Visible Church.

1. The Catholic Church Is The Whole Company Of Those That Are Elected, Redeemed, And In Time Effectually Called From The State Of Sin And Death Unto A State Of Grace And Salvation In Jesus Christ.
2. This Church Is Either Triumphant Or Militant. Triumphant, The Number Of Them Who Are Glorified In Heaven; Militant, The Number Of Them Who Are Conflicting With Their Enemies Upon Earth.
3. This Militant Church Is To Be Considered As Invisible And Visible. Invisible, In Respect To Their Relation, Wherein They Stand To Christ As A Body Unto The Head, Being United Unto Him By The Spirit Of God And Faith In Their Hearts. Visible, In Respect Of The Profession Of Their Faith, In Their Persons, And In Particular Churches. And So There May Be Acknowledged A Universal Visible Church.
4. The Members Of The Militant Visible Church, Considered Either As Not Yet In Church Order, Or Walking According To The Church Order Of The Gospel. In Order, And So Besides The Spiritual Union And Communion Common To All Believers, They Enjoy Moreover A Union And Communion Ecclesiastical, Political. So We Deny A Universal Visible Church.
5. The State Of The Members Of The Militant Visible Church, Walking In Order, Was Either Before The Law, Economical, That Is, In Families; Or Under The Law,

National; Or Since The Coming Of Christ, Only Congregational (The Term *independent, we approve not*): *therefore neither national, provincial, nor classical.*

6. A congregational church is by the institution of Christ a part of the militant visible church, consisting of a company of saints by calling, united into one body by a holy covenant, for the public worship of God, and the mutual edification of one another in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER III.

Of The Matter Of The Visible Church,

Both In Respect Of Quality And Quantity.

1. The matter of the visible church are saints by calling.

2. By saints, we understand:

I. Such as have not only attained the knowledge of the principles of religion, and are free from gross and open scandals, but also do, together with the profession of their faith and repentance, walk in blameless obedience to the Word, so as that in charitable discretion they may be accounted saints by calling, (though perhaps some or more of them be unsound and hypocrites inwardly), because the members of such particular churches are commonly by the Holy Ghost called "saints and faithful brethren in Christ"; and sundry churches have been reprov'd for receiving, and suffering such persons to continue in fellowship among them, as have been offensive and scandalous; the name of God also, by this means, is blasphemed, and the holy things of God defiled and profaned, the hearts of the godly grieved, and the wicked themselves hardened and helped forward to damnation. The example of such does endanger the sanctity of others, a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

II. The children of such who are also holy.

3. The members of churches, though orderly constituted, may in time degenerate, and grow corrupt and scandalous, which, though they ought not to be tolerated in the church, yet their continuance therein, through the defect of the execution of discipline and just censures, does not immediately dissolve the being of a church, as appears in the church of Israel, and the churches of Galatia and Corinth, Pergamos and Thyatira.

4. The matter of the church, in respect of its quantity, ought not to be of greater number than may ordinarily meet together conveniently in one place; nor ordinarily fewer than may conveniently carry on church work. Hence, when the

holy Scripture makes mention of the saints combined into a church estate in a town or city, where was but one congregation, it usually calls those saints "the church" in the singular number, as "the church of the Thessalonians," "the church of Smyrna, Philadelphia," etc.; but when it speaks of the saints in a nation or province, wherein there were sundry congregations, it frequently and usually calls them by the name of "churches" in the plural number, as the "churches of Asia, Galatia, Macedonia," and the like; which is further confirmed by what is written of sundry of those churches in particular, how they were assembled and met together the whole church in one place, as the church at Jerusalem, the church at Antioch, the church at Corinth and Cenchrea, though it were more near to Corinth, it being the port thereof, and answerable to a village; yet being a distinct congregation from Corinth, it had a church of its own, as well as Corinth had.

5. Nor can it with reason be thought but that every church appointed and ordained by Christ, had a ministry appointed and ordained for the same, and yet plain it is that there were no ordinary officers appointed by Christ for any other than congregational churches; elders being appointed to feed not all flocks, but the particular flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, and that flock they must attend, even the whole flock; and one congregation being as much as any ordinary elders can attend, therefore there is no greater church than a congregation which may ordinarily meet in one place.

CHAPTER IV.

Of The Form Of The Visible Church, And Of Church Covenant.

1. Saints by calling must have a visible political union among themselves, or else they are not yet a particular church, as those similitudes hold forth, which the Scripture makes use of to show the nature of particular churches; as a body, a building, house, hands, eyes, feet and other members, must be united, or else (remaining separate) are not a body. Stones, timber, though squared, hewn and polished, are not a house, until they are compacted and united; so saints or believers in judgment of charity, are not a church unless orderly knit together.

2. Particular churches cannot be distinguished one from another but by their forms. Ephesus is not Smyrna, nor Pergamos Thyatira; but each one a distinct society of itself, having officers of their own, which had not the charge of others; virtues of their own, for which others are not praised; corruptions of their own, for which others are not blamed.

3. This form is the visible covenant, agreement; or consent, whereby they give up themselves unto the Lord, to the observing of the ordinances of Christ together in the same society, which is usually called the "church covenant" for we see not otherwise how members can have church power over one another mutually. The comparing of each particular church to a city, and unto a spouse, seems to conclude not only a form, but that that form is by way of covenant. The covenant, as it was that which made the family of Abraham and children of Israel to be a church and people unto God, so is it that which now makes the several societies of Gentile believers to be churches in these days.

4. This voluntary agreement, consent or covenant--for all these are here taken for the same--although the more express and plain it is, the more fully it puts us in mind of our mutual duty; and stirs us up to it, and leaves less room for the questioning of the truth of the church estate of a company of professors, and the truth of membership of particular persons; yet we conceive the substance of it is kept where there is real agreement and consent of a company of faithful persons to meet constantly together in one congregation, for the public worship of God, and their mutual edification; which real agreement and consent they do express by their constant practice in coming together for the public worship of God and by their religious subjection unto the ordinances of God there: the rather, if we do consider how Scripture covenants have been entered into, not only expressly by Word of mouth, but by sacrifice, by handwriting and seal; and also sometimes by silent consent, without any writing or expression of words at all.

5. This form being by mutual covenant, it follows, it is not faith in the heart, nor the profession of that faith, nor cohabitation, nor baptism.

I. Not faith in the heart, because that is invisible.

II. Not a bare profession, because that declares them no more to be members of one church than another.

III. Not cohabitation: Atheists or Infidels may dwell together with believers.

IV. Not Baptism, because it presupposes a church estate, as circumcision in the Old Testament, which gave no being to the church, the church being before it, and in the wilderness without it. Seals presuppose a covenant already in being. One person is a complete subject of baptism, but one person is incapable of being a church.

6. All believers ought, as God gives them opportunity thereunto, to endeavor to join themselves unto a particular church, and that in respect of the honor of Jesus Christ, in his example and institution, by the professed acknowledgment of and subjection unto the order and ordinances of the gospel; as also in respect of their good communion founded upon their visible union, and contained in the promises of Christ's special presence in the church; whence they have fellowship with him, and in him, one with another; also in the keeping of them in the way of God's commandments, and recovering of them in case of wandering, (which all Christ's sheep are subject to in this life), being unable to return of themselves; together with the benefit of their mutual edification, and of their posterity, that they may not be cut off from the privileges of the covenant. Otherwise, if a believer offends, he remains destitute of the remedy provided in that behalf. And should all believers neglect this duty of joining to all particular congregations, it might follow thereupon that Christ should have no visible, political churches upon earth.

CHAPTER V.

Of The First Subject Of Church Power; Or,

To Whom Church Power **Doth First Belong.**

1. The first subject of church power is either supreme, or subordinate and ministerial. The supreme (by way of gift from the Father) is the Lord Jesus Christ. The ministerial is either extraordinary, as the apostles, prophets and evangelists; or ordinary, as every particular Congregational church.
2. Ordinary church power is either power of office--that is, such as is proper to the eldership--or power of privilege, such as belongs to the brotherhood. The latter is in the brethren formally and immediately from Christ--that is, so as it may, according to order, be acted or exercised immediately by themselves; the former is not in them formally or immediately, and therefore cannot be acted or exercised immediately by them, but is said to be in them, in that they design the persons unto office, who only are to act or to exercise this power.

CHAPTER VI.

Of The Officers Of The Church,

And Especially Of Pastors And Teachers.

1. A church being a company of people combined together by covenant for the worship of God, it appears thereby that there may be the essence and being of a church without any officers, seeing there is both the form and matter of a church; which is implied when it is said, "the apostles ordained elders in every church."
2. Nevertheless, though officers be not absolutely necessary to the simple being of churches, when they be called; yet ordinarily to their calling they are, and to their well being; and therefore the Lord Jesus Christ, out of his tender compassion, has appointed and ordained officers, which he would not have done, if they had not been useful and needful for the church; yea, being ascended up to heaven, he received gifts for men, and gave gifts to men; whereof officers for the church are justly accounted no small parts, they being to continue to the end of the world, and for the perfecting of all the saints.
3. These officers were either extraordinary or ordinary: extraordinary, as apostles, prophets, evangelists; ordinary, as elders and deacons. The apostles, prophets, and evangelists, as they were called extraordinarily by Christ, so their office ended with themselves; whence it is that Paul, directing Timothy how to carry along church administration, gives no direction about the choice or course of apostles, prophets or evangelists, but only of elders and deacons; and when Paul was to take his last leave of the church of Ephesus, he committed the care of feeding the church to no other, but unto the elders of that church. The like charge does Peter commit to the elders.
4. Of elders (who are also in Scripture called bishops) some attend chiefly to the ministry of the Word, as the pastors and teachers; others attend especially unto rule, who are, therefore, called ruling elders.
5. The office of pastor and teacher appears to be distinct. The pastor's special work is, to attend to exhortation, and therein to administer a Word of wisdom; the teacher is to attend to doctrine, and therein to administer a word of knowledge; and either of them to administer the seals of that covenant, unto the dispensation whereof they are alike called; as also to execute the censures, being but a kind of application of the word: the preaching of which, together with the application thereof, they are alike charged withal.
6. And for as much as both pastors and teachers are given by Christ for the perfecting of the saints and edifying of his body; which saints and body of Christ is his church; and therefore we account pastors and teachers to be both of

them church officers, and not the pastor for the church, and the teacher only for the schools: though this we gladly acknowledge, that schools are both lawful, profitable, and necessary for the training up of such in good literature or learning as may afterwards be called forth unto office of pastor or teacher in the church.

CHAPTER VII.

Of Ruling Elders And Deacons.

1. The ruling elder's office is distinct from the office of pastor and teacher; the ruling elders are not so called to exclude the pastors and teachers from ruling, because ruling and governing is common to these with the other; whereas attending to teach and preach the Word is peculiar unto the former.

2. The ruling elder's work is to join with the pastor and teacher in those acts of spiritual rule, which are distinct from the ministry of the Word and sacraments committed to them; of which sort these be as follows:

I. To open and shut the doors of God's house, by the admission of members approved by the church; by ordination of officers chosen by the church and by excommunication of notorious and obstinate offenders renounced by the church, and by restoring of penitents forgiven by the church.

II. To call the church together when there is occasion, and seasonably to dismiss them again.

III. To prepare matters in private, that in public they may be carried an end with less trouble, and more speedy dispatch.

IV. To moderate the carriage of all matters in the church assembled, as to propound matters to the church. To order the season of speech and silence, and to pronounce sentence according to the mind of Christ with the consent of the church.

V. To be guides and leaders to the church in all matters whatsoever pertaining to church administrations and actions.

VI. To see that none in the church live inordinately, out of rank and place without a calling, or idly in their calling.

VII. To prevent and heal such offenses in life or in doctrine as might corrupt the church.

IIX. To feed the flock of God with a word of admonition. IX. And, as they shall be sent for, to visit and pray over their sick brethren.

X. And at other times, as opportunity shall serve thereunto.

3. The office of a deacon is instituted in the church by the Lord Jesus; sometimes they are called helps. The Scripture tells us how they should be qualified: "Grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not given to filthy lucre." They must first be proved, and then use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. The office and work of a deacon is to receive the offerings of the church, gifts given to the church, and to keep the treasury of the church, and therewith to serve the tables, which the church is to provide for; as the Lord's table, the table of the ministers, and of such as are in necessity, to whom they are to distribute in simplicity.

4. The office, therefore, being limited unto the care of the temporal good things of the church, it extends not to the attendance upon, and administration of the spiritual things thereof, as the Word, and sacraments, and the like.

5. The ordinance of the apostle, and practice of the church, commends the Lord's Day as a fit time for the contributions of the saints.

6. The instituting of all these officers in the church is the work of God himself, of the Lord Jesus Christ, of the Holy Ghost. And therefore such officers as he has not appointed, are altogether unlawful, either to be placed in the church or to be retained therein, and are to be looked at as humane creatures, mere inventions and appointments of man, to the great dishonor of Christ Jesus, the Lord of his house, the King of his church, whether popes, cardinals, patriarchs, archbishops, lord-bishops, arch-deacons, officials, commissaries, and the like. These and the rest of that hierarchy and retinue, not being plants of the Lord's planting, shall all be certainly rooted out and cast forth.

7. The Lord has appointed ancient widows (where they may be had) to minister in the church, in giving attendance to the sick, and to give succor unto them and others in the like necessities.

CHAPTER VIII.

Of The Election Of Church Officers

1. No Man May Take The Honor Of A Church Officer Unto Himself But He That Was Called Of God, As Was Aaron.
2. Calling Unto Office Is Either Immediate, By Christ Himself--Such Was The Call Of The Apostles And Prophets; This Manner Of Calling Ended With Them, As Has Been Said--Or Mediate, By The Church.
3. It Is Meet That, Before Any Be Ordained Or Chosen Officers, They Should First Be Tried And Proved, Because Hands Are Not Suddenly To Be Laid Upon Any, And Both Elders And Deacons Must Be Of Both Honest And Good Report.
4. The Things In Respect Of Which They Are To Be Tried, Are Those Gifts And Virtues Which The Scripture Requires In Men That Are To Be Elected Unto Such Places, Viz.: That Elders Must Be "Blameless, Sober, Apt To Teach," And Endued With Such Other Qualifications As Are Laid Down: 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6-9. Deacons To Be Fitted As Is Directed: Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:8-11.
5. Officers Are To Be Called By Such Churches Whereunto They Are To Minister. Of Such Moment Is The Preservation Of This Power, That The Churches Exercised It In The Presence Of The Apostles.
6. A Church Being Free, Cannot Become Subject To Any But By A Free Election; Yet When Such A People Do Choose Any To Be Over Them In The Lord, Then Do They Become Subject, And Most Willingly Submit To Their Ministry In The Lord, Whom They Have Chosen.
7. And If The Church Have Power To Choose Their Officers And Ministers, Then, In Case Of Manifest Unworthiness And Delinquency, They Have Power Also To Depose Them; For To Open And Shut, To Choose And Refuse, To Constitute In Office, And To Remove From Office, Are Acts Belonging To The Same Power.
8. We Judge It Much Conducing To The Well Being And Communion Of The Churches, That, Where It May Conveniently Be Done, Neighbor Churches Be Advised Withal, And Their Help Be Made Use Of In Trial Of Church Officers, In Order To Their Choice.

9. The Choice Of Such Church Officers Belongs Not To The Civil Magistrates As Such, Or Diocesan Bishops, Or Patrons: For Of These, Or Any Such Like, The Scripture Is Wholly Silent, As Having Any Power Therein.

Chapter Ix.

Of Ordination And Imposition Of Hands.

1. Church officers are not only to be chosen by the church, but also to be ordained by imposition of hands and prayer, with which at the ordination of elders, fasting also is to be joined.

2. This ordination we account nothing else but the solemn putting a man into his place and office in the church, whereunto he had right before by election; being like the installing of a magistrate in the commonwealth. **Ordination therefore is not** to go before, but to follow election, The essence and substance of the outward calling of an ordinary officer in the church does not consist in his ordination, but in his voluntary and free election by the church, and his accepting of that election; whereupon is founded that relation between pastor and flock, between such a minister and such a people. Ordination does not constitute an officer, nor give him the essentials of his office. The apostles were elders, without imposition of hands by men; Paul and Barnabas were officers before that imposition of hands. The posterity of Levi were priests and Levites before hands were laid on them by the children of Israel.

3. In such churches where there are elders, imposition of hands in ordination is to be performed by those elders.

4. In such churches where there are no elders, imposition of hands may be performed by some of the brethren orderly chosen by the church thereunto. For, if the people may elect officers, which is the greater, and wherein the substance of the office does consist, they may much more (occasion and need so requiring) impose hands in ordination; which is the less, and but the accomplishment of the other.

5. Nevertheless, in such churches where there are no elders, and the church so desire, we see not why imposition of hands may not be performed by the elders of other churches. Ordinary officers laid hands upon the officers of many churches; the presbytery at Ephesus laid hands upon Timothy an evangelist; the presbytery at Antioch laid hands upon Paul and Barnabas.

6. Church officers are officers to one church, even that particular over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers. Insomuch as elders are commanded to feed not all flocks, but the flock which is committed to their faith and trust, and depends upon them. Nor can constant residence at one congregation be necessary for a minister--no, nor yet lawful--if he be not a minister to one congregation only, but to the church universal; because he may not attend one part only of the church to which he is a minister, but he is called to attend unto all the flock.

7. He that is clearly released from his office relation unto that church whereof he was a minister, cannot be looked at as an officer, nor perform any act of office in any other church, unless he be again orderly called unto office; which, when it shall be, we know nothing to hinder; but imposition of hands also in his ordination ought to be used towards him again: for so Paul the apostle received imposition of hands twice at least from Ananias.

CHAPTER X.

Of The Power Of The Church And Its Presbytery.

1. Supreme and Lordly power over all the churches upon earth does only belong to Jesus Christ, who is king of the church, and the head thereof. He has the government upon his shoulders, and has all power given to him, both in heaven and earth.

2. A company of professed believers, ecclesiastically confederate, as they are a church before they have officers, and without them; so, even in that estate, subordinate church power under Christ delegated to them by him, does belong to them in such a manner as is before expressed, Chap. V. Sec. 2, and as flowing from the very nature and essence of a church; it being natural unto all bodies, and so unto a church-body, to be furnished with sufficient power for its own preservation and subsistence.

3. This government of the church is a mixed government (and so has been acknowledged, long before the term of independency was heard of); in respect of Christ, the head and king of the church, and the Sovereign Power residing in him, and exercised by him, it is a monarchy; in respect of the body or brotherhood of the church, and power from Christ granted unto them it resembles a democracy, in respect of the presbytery and power committed unto them, it is an aristocracy.

4. The Sovereign Power, which is peculiar unto Christ, is exercised--

I. In calling the church out of the world into a holy fellowship with himself.

II. In instituting the ordinances of his worship, and appointing ministers and officers for the dispensing of them.

III. In giving laws for the ordering of all our ways, and the ways of his house.

IV. In giving power and life to all his institutions, and to his people by them.

V. In protecting and delivering his church against and from all the enemies of their peace.

5. The power granted by Christ unto the body of the church and brotherhood, is a prerogative or privilege which the church does exercise--

I. In choosing their own officers, whether elders or deacons.

II. In admission of their own members; and therefore there is great reason they should have power to remove any from their fellowship again. Hence, in case of offense, any brother has power to convince and admonish an offending brother; and, in case of not hearing him, to take one or two more to set on the admonition; and in case of not hearing them, to proceed to tell the church; and as his offense may require, the whole church has power to proceed to the public censure of him, whether by admonition or excommunication: and upon his repentance to restore him again unto his former communion.

6. In case an elder offend incorrigibly, the matter so requiring, as the church had power to call him to office, so they have power according to order (the counsel of other churches, where it may be had, directing thereto) to remove him from his office, and being now but a member, in case he add contumacy to his sin, the church, that had power to receive him into their fellowship, has also the same power to cast him out that they have concerning any other member.

7. Church government or rule is placed by Christ in the officers of the church, who are therefore called rulers, while they rule with God; yet, in case of mal-administration, they are subject to the power of the church, as hath been said before. The Holy Ghost frequently--yea, always--where it mentions church-rule and church government, ascribes it to elders; whereas the work and duty of the people is expressed in the phrase of "obeying their elders," and "submitting themselves unto them in the Lord." So as it is manifest that an organic or complete church is a body politic, consisting of some that are governors and some that are governed in the Lord.

8. The power which Christ has committed to the elders is to feed and rule the church of God, and accordingly to call the church together upon any weighty occasion; when the members so called, without just cause, may not refuse to come, nor when they are come, depart before they are dismissed, nor speak in the church, before they have leave from the elders, nor continue so doing when they require silence; nor may they oppose or contradict the judgment or sentence of the elders, without sufficient and weighty cause, because such practices are manifestly contrary unto order and government, and inlets of disturbance, and tend to confusion.

9. It belongs also unto the elders to examine any officers or members before they be received of the church; to receive the accusations brought to the church, and to prepare them for the churches hearing. In handling of offenses and other matters before the church, they have power to declare and publish the counsel and will of God touching the same, and to pronounce sentence with the consent of the church. Lastly, they have power, when they dismiss the people, to bless them in the name of the Lord.

10. This power of government in the elders does not any wise prejudice the power of privilege in the brotherhood; as neither the power of privilege in the brethren, prejudices the power of government in the elders, but they may sweetly agree together; as we may see in the example of the apostles, furnished with the greatest church power, who took in the concurrence and consent of the brethren in church administrations. Also that Scripture do declare that what the churches were to act and to do in these matters, they were to do in a way of obedience, and that not only to the direction of the apostles, but also of their ordinary elders.

11. From the premises, namely, that the ordinary power of government belonging only to the elders, power of privilege remaining with the brotherhood, (as the power of judgment in matters of censure and power of liberty in matters of liberty,) it follows that in an organic church and right administration, all church acts proceed after the manner of a mixed administration, so as no church act can be consummated or perfected without the consent of both.

CHAPTER XI.

Of The Maintenance Of Church Officers.

1. The apostle concludes that necessary and sufficient maintenance is due unto the ministers of the Word from the law of nature and nations, from the law of

Moses, the equity thereof, as also the rule of common reason. Moreover, the Scripture does not only call elders laborers and workmen, but also, speaking of them, says that "the laborer is worthy of his hire;" and requires that he which is taught in the word, should communicate to him in all good things, and mentions it, as an ordinance of the Lord, that they which preach the gospel, should live of the gospel, and forbids the muzzling of the mouth of the ox that treads out the corn.

2. The Scriptures alleged requiring this maintenance as a bounden duty, and due debt, and not as a matter of alms and free gift, therefore people are not at liberty to do or not to do, what and when they please in this matter, no more than in any other commanded duty and ordinance of the Lord; but ought of duty to minister of their "carnal things" to them that labor among them in Word and doctrine, as well as they ought to pay any other workmen their wages, and to discharge and satisfy their other debts, or to submit themselves to observe any other ordinance of the Lord.

3. The Apostle, Gal. 6:6, enjoining that he which is taught communicate to him that teaches "in all good things," does not leave it arbitrary, what or how much a man shall give, or in what proportion, but even the latter, as well as the former, is prescribed and appointed by the Lord.

4. Not only members of churches, but "all that are taught in the Word," are to contribute unto him that teaches in all good things. In case that congregations are defective in their contributions, the deacons are to call upon them to do their duty; If their call suffices not, the church by her power is to require it of their members; and where church power, through the corruption of men, does not or cannot attain the end, the magistrate is to see that the ministry be duly provided for, as appears from the commanded example of Nehemiah. The magistrates are nursing fathers and nursing mothers, and stand charged with the custody of both tables; because it is better to prevent a scandal, that it may not come, and easier also, than to remove it, when it is given, it's most suitable to rule, that by the church's care each man should know his proportion according to rule, what he should do before he do it, so that his judgment and heart may be satisfied in what he does, and just offense prevented in what is done.

CHAPTER XII.

Of The Admission Of Members Into The Church.

1. The doors of the churches of Christ upon earth do not by God's appointment stand so wide open, that all sorts of people, good or bad, may freely enter therein at their pleasure; but such as are admitted thereto, as members, ought to be examined and tried first, whether they be fit and meet to be received into church society or not. The Eunuch of Ethiopia, before his admission, was examined by Philip, whether he did believe on Jesus Christ with all his heart. The angel of the church at Ephesus is commended for trying such as said they were Apostles, and were not. There is like reason for trying of them that profess themselves to be believers. The officers are charged with the keeping of the doors of the church, and therefore are in a special manner to make trial of the fitness of such who enter. Twelve angels are set at the gates of the temple, lest such as were "ceremonially unclean" should enter there into.

2. The things which are requisite to be found in all church members, are repentance from sin, and faith in Jesus Christ; and therefore these are the things whereof men are to be examined at their admission into the church, and which then they must profess and hold forth in such sort as may satisfy "rational charity" that the things are indeed. John Baptist admitted men to baptism confessing and bewailing their sins; and of others it is said that "they came and confessed, and showed their deeds."

3. The weakest measure of faith is to be accepted in those that desire to be admitted into the church, because weak Christians, if sincere, have the substance of that faith, repentance and holiness, which is required in church members; and such have most need of the ordinances for their confirmation and growth in grace. The Lord Jesus would not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed, but gather the tender lambs in his arms, and carry them gently in his bosom. Such charity and tenderness is to be used, as the weakest Christian, if sincere, may not be excluded nor discouraged. Severity of examination is to be avoided.

4. In case any, through excessive fear or other infirmity, be unable to make their personal relation of their spiritual estate in public, it is sufficient that the elders, having received private satisfaction, make relation thereof in public before the church, they testifying their assents thereunto; this being the way that tends most to edification. But whereas persons are of greater abilities, there it is most expedient that they make their relations and confessions personally with their own mouth, as David professes of himself.

5. A personal and public confession and declaring of God's manner of working upon the soul, is both lawful, expedient and useful, in sundry respects and upon sundry grounds. Those three thousand, before they were admitted by the

apostles, did manifest that they were pricked at the heart by Peter's sermon, together with earnest desire to be delivered from their sins, which now wounded their consciences, and their ready receiving of the word of promise and exhortation. We are to be ready to "render a reason of the hope that is in us, to every one that asks us"; therefore we must be able and ready upon any occasion to declare and show our repentance for sin, faith unfeigned, and effectual calling, because these are the reason of a well grounded hope. "I have not hidden thy righteousness from the great congregation."

6. This profession of faith and repentance, as it must be made by such at their admission that were never in church society before; so nothing hinders but the same way also be performed by such as have formerly been members of some other church, and the church to which they now join themselves as members may lawfully require the same. Those three thousand, which made their confession, were members of the church of the Jews before; so were those that were baptized by John. Churches may err in their admission; and persons regularly admitted may fall into offense. Otherwise, if churches might obtrude their members, or if church members might obtrude themselves upon other churches without due trial, the matter so requiring, both the liberty of the churches would thereby be infringed, in that they might not examine those, concerning whose fitness for communion they were unsatisfied; and besides the infringing of their liberty, the churches themselves would unavoidably be corrupted, and the ordinances defiled; while they might not refuse, but must receive the unworthy which is contrary unto the Scripture, teaching that all churches are sisters, and therefore equal.

7. The like trial is to be required from such members of the church as were born in the same, or received their membership, or were baptized in their infancy or minority by virtue of the covenant of their parents, when being grown up unto years of discretion, they shall desire to be made partakers of the Lord's Supper; unto which, because holy things must not be given unto the unworthy, therefore it is requisite that these, as well as others, should come to their trial and examination, and manifest their faith and repentance by an open profession thereof, before they are received to the Lord's Supper, and otherwise not to be admitted thereunto. Yet these church members that were so born, or received in their childhood, before they are capable of being made partakers of full communion, have many privileges which others (not church members) have not; they are in covenant with God, have the seal thereof upon them, viz: baptism; and so, if not regenerated, yet are in a more hopeful way of attaining regenerating grace, and all the spiritual blessings, both of the covenant and seal; they are also under church watch, and consequently subject to the

reprehensions, admonitions and censures thereof, for their healing and amendment, as need shall require.

CHAPTER XIII.

Of Church Members, Their Removal From One Church To

Another, And Of Letters Of Recommendation And Dismission.

1. Church members may not remove or depart from the church, and so one from another as they please, nor without just and weighty cause, but ought to live and dwell together, forasmuch as they are commanded not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. Such departure tends to the dissolution and ruin of the body, as the pulling of stones and pieces of timber from the building, and of members from the natural body, tend to the destruction of the whole.

2. It is, therefore, the duty of church members, in such times and places, where counsel may be had, to consult with the church whereof they are members about their removal, that, accordingly, they having their approbation, may be encouraged, or otherwise desist. They who are joined with consent, should not depart without consent, except forced thereunto.

3. If a member's departure be manifestly unsafe and sinful, the church may not consent thereunto; for in so doing they should not act in faith, and should partake with him in his sin. If the case be doubtful and the person not to be persuaded, it seems best to leave the matter unto God, and not forcibly to detain him.

4. Just reasons for a member's removal of himself from the church, are:

I. If a man cannot continue without partaking in sin.

II. In case of personal persecution: so Paul departed from the disciples at Damascus; also, in case of general persecution, when all are scattered.

III. In case of real, and not only pretended want of competent subsistence, a door being opened for better supply in another place, together with the means of spiritual edification.

IV. In these or like cases, a member may lawfully remove, and the church cannot lawfully detain him.

5. To separate from a church, either out of contempt of their holy fellowship, or out of covetousness, or for greater enlargements, with just grief to the church, or out of schism, or want of love; and out of a spirit of contention in respect of some unkindness, of some evil only conceived or intended in the church, which might and should be tolerated and healed with a spirit of meekness, and of which evil the church is not yet convinced (though perhaps himself be) nor admonished; for these or the like reasons, to withdraw from public communion in word or seals, or censures, is unlawful and sinful.

6. Such members as have orderly moved their habitation, ought to join themselves unto the church in order where they do inhabit, if it may be; otherwise, they can neither perform the duties nor receive the privileges of members. Such an example, tolerated in some, is apt to corrupt others, which, if many should follow, would threaten the dissolution and confusion of churches, contrary to the Scripture.

7. Order requires that a member thus removing, have letters testimonial and of dismissal from the church whereof he yet is, unto the church whereunto he desires to be joined, lest the church should be deluded; that the church may receive him in faith, and not be corrupted in receiving deceivers and false brethren. Until the person dismissed be received into another church, he ceases not by his letters of dismissal to be a member of the church whereof he was. The church cannot make a member no member but by excommunication.

8. If a member be called to remove only for a time where a church is, letters of recommendation are requisite and sufficient for communion with that church in the ordinances and in their watch; as Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchrea, had a letter written for her to the church at Rome, that she might be received as becomes saints.

9. Such letters of recommendation and dismissal were written for Apollos, for Marcus to the Colossians, for Phoebe to the Romans, for sundry others to other churches. And the apostle tells us that some persons, not sufficiently known otherwise, have special need of such letters, though he, for his part, had no need thereof. The use of them is to be a benefit and help to the party for whom they are written, and for the furthering of his receiving among the saints, in the place whereto he goes, and the due satisfaction of them in their receiving of him.

CHAPTER XIV.

Of Excommunication And Other Censures.

1. The censures of the church are appointed by Christ for the preventing, removing and healing of offenses in the church; for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for the deterring of others from the like offenses; for purging out the leaven which may infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor of Christ and of his church, and the holy profession of the gospel; and for preventing of the wrath of God, that may justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant and the seals thereof to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.

2. If an offense be private, (one brother offending another) the offender is to go and acknowledge his repentance for it unto his offended brother, who is then to forgive him; but if the offender neglect or refuse to do it, the brother offended is to go, and convince and admonish him of it, between themselves privately, if there upon the offender be brought to repent of his offense, the admonisher has won his brother; but if the offender hear not his brother, the brother offended is to take with him one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established, (whether the word of admonition, if the offender receive it; or the word of complaint, if he refuse it,) for if he refuse it, the offended brother is by the mouth of the elders to tell the church, and if he hear the church, and declare the same by penitent confession, he is recovered and gained; and if the church discern him to be willing to hear, yet not fully convinced of his offense, as in case of heresy, they are to dispense to him a public admonition; which, declaring the offender to lie under the public offense of the church, does thereby withhold or suspend him from the holy fellowship of the Lord's Supper, till his offense be removed by penitent confession. If he still continue obstinate, they are to cast him out by excommunication.

3. But if the offense be more public at first, and of a more heinous and criminal nature, to wit, such as are condemned by the light of nature; then the church, without such gradual proceeding, is to cast out the offender from their holy communion, for the further mortifying of his sin, and the healing of his soul in the Day of the Lord Jesus.

4. In dealing with an offender, great care is to be taken that we be neither over strict or rigorous, nor too indulgent or remiss: our proceeding herein ought to be with a spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted, and that the best of us have need of much forgiveness from the Lord. Yet the winning and healing of the offender's soul being the end of these endeavors, we must not daub with untempered mortar, nor heal the wounds of our brethren slightly. On some, have compassion; others, save with fear.

5. While the offender remains excommunicate, the church is to refrain from all member like communion with him in spiritual things, and also from all familiar communion with him in civil things, further than the necessity of natural or domestical or civil relations do require; and are therefore to forbear to eat and drink with him, that he may be ashamed.

6. Excommunication being a spiritual punishment, it doth not prejudice the excommunicate in, nor deprive him of his civil rights, and therefore touches not princes or magistrates in respect of their civil dignity or authority; and the excommunicate being but as a publican and a heathen, heathens being lawfully permitted to come to hear the Word in church assemblies, we acknowledge therefore the like liberty of hearing the word may be permitted to persons excommunicate that is permitted unto heathen. And because we are not without hope of his recovery, we are not to account him as an enemy, but to admonish him as a brother.

7. If the Lord sanctify the censure to the offender, so as by the grace of Christ, he does testify his repentance with humble confession of his sin, and judging of himself, giving glory unto God, the church is then to forgive him, and to comfort him, and to restore him to the wonted brotherly communion, which formerly he enjoyed with them.

8. The suffering of profane or scandalous livers to continue in fellowship, and partake in the sacraments, is doubtless a great sin in those that have power in their hands to redress it, and do it not. Nevertheless, in so much as Christ, and his apostles in their times, and the prophets and other godly men in theirs, did lawfully partake of the Lord's commanded ordinances in the Jewish church, and neither taught nor practiced separation from the same, though unworthy ones were permitted therein; and inasmuch as the faithful in the church of Corinth, wherein were many unworthy persons and practices, are never commanded to absent themselves from the sacraments, because of the same; therefore the godly, in like cases, are not to presently separate.

9. As separation from such a church wherein profane and scandalous livers are tolerated, is not presently necessary; so for the members thereof, otherwise unworthy, hereupon to abstain from communicating with such a church in the participation of the sacraments, is unlawful. For as it were unreasonable for an innocent person to be punished for the faults of others, wherein he has no hand, and whereunto he gave no consent; so is it more unreasonable that a godly man should neglect duty, and punish himself; in not coming for his portion in the blessings of the seals, as he ought, because others are suffered to come that ought not; especially considering that he neither consents to their sin, nor to

their approaching to the ordinance in their sin, nor to the neglect of others, who should put them away, and do not; but, on the contrary, heartily mourns for these things, modestly and seasonably stir up others to do their duty. If the church cannot be reformed, they may use their liberty, as is specified, CHAP. XIII. Sect. 4. But this all the godly are bound unto, even every one to do his endeavor, according to his power and place, that the unworthy may be duly proceeded against by the church, to whom this matter does pertain.

CHAPTER XV

Of The Communion Of Churches One With Another.

1. Although churches be distinct, and therefore may not be confounded one with another, and equal, and therefore have not dominion one over another; yet all the churches ought to preserve church communion one with another, because they are all united unto Christ, not only as a mystical, but as a political head; whence is derived a communion suitable thereunto.

2. The communion of churches is exercised sundry ways.

I. By way of mutual care in taking thought for one another's welfare.

II. By way of consultation one with another, when we have occasion to require the judgment and counsel of other churches, touching any person or cause, wherewith they may be better acquainted than ourselves; as the church of Antioch consulted with the Apostles and elders of the church at Jerusalem, about the question of circumcision of the Gentiles, and about the false teachers that broached that doctrine. In which case, when any church wants light or peace among themselves it is a way of communion of the churches, according to the Word, to meet together by their elders and other messengers in a Synod to consider and argue the points in doubt or difference; and, having found out the way of truth and peace, to commend the same by their letters and messengers to the churches whom the same may concern. But if a church be rent with divisions among themselves, or lie under any open scandal, and yet refuse to consult with other churches for healing or removing of the same, it is matter of just offense, both to the Lord Jesus and to other churches, as bewraying too much want of mercy and faithfulness, not to seek to bind up the breaches and wounds of the church and brethren; and therefore the state of such a church calls aloud upon other churches to exercise a fuller act of brotherly communion, to wit, by way of admonition.

III. A third way, then, of communion of churches, is by way of admonition; to wit, in case any public offense be found in a church, which they either discern not, or are slow in proceeding to use the means for the removing and healing of. Paul had no authority over Peter, yet when he saw Peter not walking with a right foot, he publicly rebuked him before the church; though churches have no more authority one over another, than one apostle had over another, yet, as one apostle might admonish another, so may one church admonish another, and yet without usurpation. In which case, if the church that lies under offense, does not hearken to the church which does admonish her, the church is to acquaint other neighbor churches with that offense, which the offending church still lies under, together with their neglect of the brotherly admonition given unto them. Whereupon those other churches are to join in seconding the admonition formerly given; and if still the offending church continue in obstinacy and impenitency, they may forbear communion with them, and are to proceed to make use of the help of a Synod or counsel of neighbor churches, walking orderly (if a greater cannot conveniently be had) for their conviction. If they hear not the Synod, the Synod having declared them to be obstinate, particular churches approving and accepting of the judgment of the Synod, are to declare the sentence of non-communion respectively concerning them; and thereupon, out of religious care to keep their own communion pure, they may justly withdraw themselves from participation with them at the Lord's Table, and from such other acts of holy communion, as the communion of churches otherwise does allow and require. Nevertheless, if any members of such a church as lies under public offense, do not consent to the offense of the church, but do in due sort bear witness against it, they are still to be received to wonted communion, for it is not equal that the innocent should suffer with the offensive. Yea, furthermore, if such innocent members, after due waiting in the use of all good means for the healing of the offense of their own church, shall at last (with the allowance of the counsel of neighbor churches,) withdraw from the fellowship of their own church, and offer themselves to the fellowship of another, we judge it lawful for the other church to receive them (being otherwise fit) as if they had been orderly dismissed to them from their own church.

IV. A fourth way of communion with churches, is by way of participation; the members of one church occasionally coming unto another, we willingly admit them to partake with them at the Lord's Table, it being the seal of our communion not only with Christ, not only with the members of our own church, but also of all the churches of the saints; in which regard we refuse not to baptize their children presented to us, if either their own minister be absent, or such a fruit of holy fellowship be desired with us. In like cases, such

churches as are furnished with more ministers than one, do willingly afford one of their own ministers to supply the place of an absent or sick minister of another church for a needful season.

V. A fifth way of church communion is by way of recommendation, when a member of one church has occasion to reside in another church; if but for a season, we commend him to their watchful fellowship by letters of recommendation; but if he be called to settle his abode there, we commit him, according to his desire, to the fellowship of their covenant by letters of dismissal.

VI. A sixth way of church communion, is in case of need to minister relief and succor one unto another, either of able members to furnish them with officers, or of outward support to the necessities of poorer churches, as did the churches of the Gentiles contribute liberally to the poor saints at Jerusalem.

3. When a company of believers purpose to gather into church fellowship, it is requisite for their safer proceeding and the maintaining of the communion of churches, that they signify their intent unto the neighbor churches, walking according to the order of the gospel, and desire their presence and help, and right hand of fellowship; which they ought readily to give unto them, when there is no just cause of excepting against their proceedings.

4. Besides these several ways of communion, there is also a way of propagation of churches; when a church shall grow too numerous, it is a way, and fit season to propagate one church out of another, by sending forth such of their members as are willing to remove, and to procure some officers to them, as may enter with them into church estate among themselves; as bees, when the hive is too full, issue forth by swarms, and are gathered into other hives, so the churches of Christ may do the same upon the like necessity and therein hold forth to them the right hand of fellowship, both in their gathering into a church and in the ordination of their officers.

CHAPTER XVI.

Of Synods.

1. Synods, orderly assembled, and rightly proceeding according to the pattern, we acknowledge as the ordinance of Christ; and though not absolutely necessary to the being, yet many times, through the iniquity of men and perverseness of times, necessary to the well being of churches, for the establishment of truth and peace therein.

2. Synods being spiritual and ecclesiastical assemblies, are therefore made up of spiritual and ecclesiastical causes. The next efficient cause of them, under Christ, is the power of the churches sending forth their elders and other messengers, who being met together in the name of Christ, are the matter of a Synod; and they in arguing, debating and determining matters of religion, according to the Word, and publishing the same to the churches it concerns, do put forth the proper and formal acts of a Synod; to the conviction of errors, and heresies, and the establishment of truth and peace in the churches, which is the end of a synod.

3. Magistrates have power to call a Synod, by calling to the churches to send forth their elders and other messengers to counsel and assist them in matters of religion; but yet the constituting of a synod is a church act, and may be transacted by the churches, even when civil magistrates may be enemies to churches and to church assemblies.

4. It belongs unto Synods and councils to debate and determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience; to clear from the Word holy directions for the holy worship of God and good government of the church; to bear witness against mal-administration and corruption in doctrine or manners, in any particular church; and to give directions for the reformation thereof; not to exercise church censures in way of discipline, nor any other act of church authority or jurisdiction which that presidential synod did forbear.

5. The Synod's directions and determinations, so far as consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement therewith, (which is the principal ground thereof, and without which they bind not at all), but also, secondarily, for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in his Word.

6. Because it is difficult, if not impossible, for many churches to come altogether in one place, in all their members universally; therefore they may assemble by their delegates or messengers, as the church of Antioch went not all to Jerusalem, but some select men for that purpose. Because none are or should be more fit to know the state of the churches, nor to advise of ways for the good thereof, than elders; therefore it is fit that, in the choice of the messengers for such assemblies, they have special respect unto such; yet, inasmuch as not only Paul and Barnabas, but certain others also were sent to Jerusalem from Antioch, and when they were come to Jerusalem, not only the apostles and elders, but other brethren also do assemble and meet about the matter; therefore Synods are to consist both of elders and other church members, endued with gifts, and sent by the churches, not excluding the presence of any brethren in the churches.

CHAPTER XVII.

Of The Civil Magistrate'S Power In Matters Ecclesiastical.

1. It is lawful, profitable and necessary for Christians to gather themselves together into church estate, and therein to exercise all the ordinances of Christ, according unto the Word, although the consent of the magistrate could not be had thereunto; because the apostles and Christians in their time did frequently thus practice, when the magistrates, being all of them Jewish or pagan, and most persecuting enemies, would give no countenance or consent to such matters.

2. Church government stands in no opposition to civil government of commonwealths, nor any intrenches upon the authority of civil magistrates in their jurisdictions; nor any whit weakens their hands in governing, but rather strengthens them, and furthers the people in yielding more hearty and conscionable obedience unto them, whatsoever some ill affected persons to the ways of Christ have suggested, to alienate the affections of kings and princes from the ordinances of Christ; as if the kingdom of Christ in his church could not rise and stand, without the falling and weakening of their government, which is also of Christ; whereas the contrary is most true, that they may both stand together and flourish, the one being helpful unto the other, in their distinct and due administrations.

3. The power and authority of magistrates is not for the restraining of churches or any other good works, but for helping in and furthering thereof; and therefore the consent and countenance of magistrates, when it may be had, is not to be slighted, or lightly esteemed; but, on the, contrary, it is part of that honor due to Christian magistrates to desire and crave their consent and approbation therein; which being obtained, the churches may then proceed in their way with much more encouragement and comfort.

4. It is not in the power of magistrates to compel their subjects to become church members, and to partake of the Lord's Table; for the priests are reprov'd that brought unworthy ones into the sanctuary; then it was unlawful for the priests, so it is as unlawful to be done by civil magistrates; those whom the church is to cast out, if they were in, the magistrate ought not to thrust them into the church, nor to hold them therein.

5. As it is unlawful for church officers to meddle with the sword of the magistrate, so it is unlawful for the magistrate to meddle with the work proper to church officers. The acts of Moses and David, who were not only princes but prophets, were extraordinary, therefore not inimitable. Against such usurpation the Lord witnessed by smiting Uzziah with leprosy for presuming to offer incense.

6. It is the duty of the magistrate to take care of matters of religion, and to improve his civil authority for the observing of the duties commanded in the first, as well as for observing of the duties commanded in the second table. They are called gods. The end of the magistrate's office is not only the quiet and peaceable life of the subject in matters of righteousness and honesty, but also in matters of godliness; yea, of all godliness. Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, are much commended by the Holy Ghost, for the putting forth their authority in matters of religion; on the contrary, such kings as have been failing this way, are frequently taxed and reprov'd of the Lord. And not only the kings of Judah, but also Job, Nehemiah, the king of Nineveh, Darius, Artaxerxes, Nebuchadnezzar, whom none looked at as types of Christ, (though were it so there were no place for any just objection) are commended in the book of God for exercising their authority this way.

7. The objects of the power of the magistrate are not things merely inward, and so not subject to his cognizance and view; as unbelief, hardness of heart, erroneous opinions not vented, but only such things as are acted by the outward man; neither is their power to be exercised in commanding such acts of the outward man, and punishing the neglect thereof, as are but mere inventions and devices of men, but about such acts as are commanded, and forbidden in the Word; yea, such as the Word does clearly determine, though not always clearly to the judgment of the magistrate or others, yet clearly in itself. In these he of right ought to put forth his authority, though oft times actually he does it not.

8. Idolatry, blasphemy, heresy, venting corrupt and pernicious opinions, that destroy the foundation, open contempt of the Word preached, profanation of the Lord's Day, disturbing the peaceable administration and exercise of the worship and holy things of God, and the like, are to be restrained and punished by civil authority.

9. If any church, one or more, shall grow schismatical, rending itself from the communion of other churches, or shall walk incorrigibly and obstinately in any corrupt way of their own, contrary to the rule of the Word; in such case, the magistrate is to put forth his coercive power, as the matter shall require. The

tribes on this side Jordan intended to make war against the other tribes for building the altar of witness, whom they suspected to have turned away therein from following of the Lord.

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