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*The Use of the Communion  
Table in the Sacrament of the  
Lord's Supper*

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*The Use of the Communion Table in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*  
by James Begg. Published by Blue Banner Books, P. O. Box 141084,  
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The text taken as the basis for this new edition came from *A Treatise on the use of the Communion Table in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; in which it is endeavoured to ascertain what was the example left by Christ and the Apostles in this matter, what was the practice of Christians in the earliest ages of the Church, and what are the laws and authorized practice of the Established Church of Scotland* by the Rev. James Begg, D. D., Minister of East, or New Monkland (Glasgow: Maurice Ogle, sold by W. Oliphant, Waugh & Innes, Jas. Robertson, and Thomsons, Brothers, Edinburgh; G. Cuthertson and R. Hart, Paisley; and James Duncan, London, 1824).

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## *INTRODUCTION.*

A practice has lately obtained, in several of the Established Churches in the City of Glasgow, and other places, of excluding the communicants from the Communion Table, and making them communicate in pews, somewhat similar to the practice of the Independents, Methodists, and other Sectaries in England. According to this form, all the communicants, sitting in pews, turn their backs on one another, and exhibit no external appearance of friends meeting together in Christian communion, at a feast of love. This Innovation gave just cause of offence to several Ministers and private Christians. It was considered as a corruption of the worship of God, and contrary to the established laws and authorized practice of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. They saw that it was reviving an old heresy in worship, already condemned by the Church of Scotland, and calculated to interrupt the peace of the Church, and to produce schism and division. After due deliberation, the matter was brought before the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, at their meeting in October, 1822. The following is the copy of an Overture on that subject, with the deliverance of the Synod upon it.

## *OVERTURE.*

“Whereas, an Innovation has been lately introduced into some Churches, within the bounds of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, in the mode of dispensing the sacrament of our Lord’s Supper, namely, the distribution of the elements to the communicants sitting in pews, and not sitting about, or at, the Communion Table, according to the laws and practice of the Established Church of Scotland; —

“It is overtured to the very Reverend Synod, that they shall declare their disapprobation of this Innovation, as contrary to the purity and uniformity of worship presently authorized and practiced in our National Church: that they shall enjoin every Presbytery, within their bounds, to take care that a Communion Table, according to the practice of the Church, be provided in every Church under their jurisdiction; and that they shall recommend to all the Ministers within their bounds, that they observe the fifteenth Act of the General Assembly, seventeen hundred and seven, entitled, *Act against Innovations in the worship of God.*

“After deliberation, it was moved and seconded, that the Overture be approved and adopted, and that the Synod declare, enjoin, and recommend, in terms thereof: which motion was agreed to, without a vote. Wherefore, the Synod did, and hereby do, declare, enjoin, and recommend, in terms of the Overture.”

It was supposed that this Innovation had been introduced inadvertently, without any design to follow divisive courses, and that all Ministers and others would have immediately complied with the sentiments of the Synod, so unanimously expressed. This, however, has not been universally the case. Some Ministers within the bounds of the Synod have hith-

erto paid no regard to their recommendation, but have continued to follow this divisive course, although the Synod have, “without a vote, declared their disapprobation of this Innovation, as contrary to the purity and uniformity of worship presently authorized and practiced in our National Church.” The injunction given to Presbyteries has as yet been only partially followed out. The Synod have therefore renewed the injunction on all the Presbyteries within their bounds, at their meeting in April, 1824, with an order that they shall report their obedience thereto, to the next meeting of Synod, and an end will doubtless be put to these disorderly practices.

It may be supposed that this Innovation is but small, and of little moment; but this very erroneous supposition renders it the more dangerous. Great and daring Innovations excite alarm, and powerful opposition; whereas, those supposed to be small, are more readily acquiesced in, and prepare for greater Innovations; and thus corruptions in the worship of God gradually spread and gather strength.

The administration of the sacrament of our Lord’s Supper has always held a prominent place in Christian worship, and when corruptions have at any time been introduced, it has usually been respecting this ordinance; and in times of Reformation, the leading object has been to remove corruptions from this, and the other parts of religious worship.

In the following **Sections** it is endeavored to ascertain and state the truth, in opposition to this Innovation, from the example of Christ, and the Apostles, and from the practice of the earliest and purest ages of the Christian Church. It is endeavored to trace and point out the corruptions which were gradually introduced respecting the sacrament of our Lord’s Supper, and the Communion Table, whence may be seen the strong tendency to corruption in celebrating this ordinance. The laws

and authorized practice of the Church of Scotland, since the Reformation, and as they now exist, are traced and pointed out, and it is endeavored to answer the arguments urged in support of this Innovation.

Our venerable Apostolic form of worship has been transmitted to us, as the fruit of much exertion and suffering of our pious ancestors, accompanied by the blessing of God. It is our duty to preserve it from all the restless attacks of folly or novelty, in these unstable times, and to hand it down pure and entire to after generations. We will thus show that we entertain a grateful sense of the kindness of Divine providence, in conferring on us these religious privileges, and that we form a proper estimate of their value and importance. “The Lord established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children, that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children, that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.”

## *Section One*

**The use of the Communion Table, in celebrating the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper, is in conformity with the example of Christ, and the Apostles, and the nature and design of that holy ordinance.**

THE use of a table in celebrating the sacrament of our Lord's Supper, is in conformity with the pattern exhibited by Christ at the first institution of that ordinance; and the practice of late introduced into some of our Established Churches, of substituting pews for the Communion Table, is a departure from that pattern, and therefore a corrupt innovation, which ought not to be allowed in the Church of Scotland. This ordinance was instituted by Christ immediately after the celebration of the Jewish Passover; and express mention is made of a table by the two Evangelists, Luke and John. In reference to the traitor Luke (22:21) represents Christ as saying, "Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the *table*." In reference to the same person, John (13:27) represents Christ as saying to him, "That thou doest, do quickly;" and the Evangelist adds (v. 28), "Now, no man at the *table* knew for what intent he spoke this unto him." A table was therefore certainly used, and the usual table posture of Judea observed by Christ and the Apostles at the Passover, and first institution of our Lord's Supper; for we are told expressly by Matthew (26:20) that "Christ sat down with the twelve;" and by Luke (22:14) that "He sat down, and the twelve Apostles with him."

It is indeed understood, that the Jews sometimes used an erect posture, and sometimes a reclining posture, at table. The learned Dr. Lightfoot, in his discourse of the temple-service in the time of our Savior (ch. 13) states, that "their sitting at meat was commonly upon beds or

couches, made for that purpose, with the table before them. Now, at other meals, they either sat as we do, with their bodies erect; or, when they would enlarge themselves to more freedom of feasting or refreshing, they sat upon the beds, and leaned upon the table, on their left elbow; and this, or the other, posture, they used indifferently at other times, as they were disposed; but, on the Passover night, they thought they were obliged to use this leaning composure; and you may take their reason for it in some of their own words. They use their leaning posture as freemen do, in memorial of their freedom. And Levi said, because it is the manner of servants to eat standing, therefore now they eat sitting and leaning, to show they were got out of servitude into freedom.”

Different opinions are entertained by rabbinical writers respecting the form of the table used by the Jews at the feast of the Passover; some representing it in the form of a horse-shoe, and some in the form of a triangle, etc., etc. There is, however, no doubt Christ and the disciples then used such a table posture as was usual among the Jews at the feast of Passover, and that they had such a table as they then surrounded, observing the countenances of one another, and enjoying the happiness of social intercourse. That their posture at the Passover table was encompassing or surrounding it is plain from the account given by the Evangelist John (13:21ff). He there states that “Jesus was troubled in spirit, and said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake;” plainly referring to them examining the faces of one another, to see if any of them showed in their countenances any marks of conscious guilt. “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom, one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved: Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake;” plainly supposing that Peter saw the face of John, and that, by beckoning to him, he made himself per-

factly understood. So that Christ and the Apostles must have sat round the table, seeing the faces of each other; and this posture at the Passover table, no doubt, continued at the first institution of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper which then took place. This is the first and highest authority for a Communion Table, to which all the disciples of Christ should approach, to receive the appointed memorials of his dying love, and which they ought to encompass with every token of mutual affection, as children of their Father in heaven. The late innovation of excluding the greater part of the communicants from the table, and substituting pews, where they all turn their backs on one another, can therefore be considered in no other light than a corruption, being a departure from the pattern set by Christ and the Apostles.

The discourse which Christ addressed to the disciples at the institution of the sacrament of the Supper, has a plain reference to the Communion Table. They were dejected and grieved at the prospect of Christ leaving them: but he comforted and cheered them with the promise of the highest delight and communion with him at a table in glory (Luke 22:28-30). "Ye are they," he says, "who have continued with me in my temptation; and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink at my TABLE in my kingdom;" evidently referring to the enjoyment they then had with him at that first Communion Table. Referring also to the happiness they then enjoyed with him in that upper room, or guest chamber, where they were then assembled, he told them for their consolation, that "in his Father's house were many mansions" (John 14:2).

There can be no doubt but that, after the Apostles had been baptized with the Holy Ghost, and thus led into all truth, they used the table posture in celebrating that ordinance. There is plain reference to the use

of the Communion Table in their writings. One design of the First Epistle to the Corinthians is to correct certain abuses which had crept in respecting that ordinance; and the Apostle, in exhorting Christians to abstain from idolatrous practices, and to walk suitable to their Christian profession and engagements, does it in language evidently referring to their having been at the Communion Table. He says (1 Cor. 10:21), “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils.” This reference to the use of the table by the Apostle, is a proof of the practice which then obtained, and was approved by the Apostle, and a proof that the table posture was designed by Christ to be continued in the celebration of that ordinance. To deviate, then, from the pattern exhibited by Christ, and followed and approved by the inspired Apostles, must be considered as a violation of a Divine institution.

Sitting in pews does not answer the design of sitting at a Communion Table in this ordinance; for it is a feast of love, in which the faithful commemorate and show forth the death of the Lord Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice, in their room and stead, and in which they also testify their love to Christ, and one another, as redeemed sinners. This is referred to by the Apostle (1 Cor. 10:16), “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” But when people are all sitting in pews, and all turning their backs on one another, there is no external appearance of a feast of love, in which Christians enjoy fellowship, and social intercourse, and testify their affectionate regard for one another.

A pew is not a table in the common acceptance of the term in this country, nor can it answer the design of a table. A table is designed and

used in the ordinary purposes of life for social entertainment; and when people surround it as friends, and eat and drink together, they enjoy the pleasures of society, and cultivate esteem and affection for each other. Were people, at an ordinary entertainment, all with one consent to turn away their faces, and turn their backs on each other, such conduct would be shocking to the feelings, and every spectator would be filled with disgust to behold such a token of coldness, aversion and hatred, where every mark of good will, friendship, and affection was expected. But this remark will apply with much greater force to this Gospel feast of our Lord's Supper, which commemorates the most astonishing instance of Divine love to our fallen race, and in which Christians testify their great love to Christ and to each other.

In this ordinance Christians not only enter into, and renew their engagements to the service of God; but they also enter into, and renew their engagements to love and pray for one another; to sympathize with, and relieve one another; and to continue united to one another, in the faith, and hope, and obedience of the Gospel. This is referred to by the Apostle (1 Cor. 10:17). "For we, being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." How strange and inconsistent then, will it appear, for Christians, either in entering into, or renewing these engagements, to turn their backs on one another! In an ordinary transaction among men, such conduct would be considered as insulting. The countenance is justly considered as the index of the soul; and in entering into any engagement with another, we are disposed to form an estimate of the sincerity and integrity of the person we engage with, from the expression of his countenance. We may be deceived, but this is a natural feeling; and were the person we treat with to turn away his face from us, we would be quite unsatisfied, and have no confidence in his being sincere and faithful to his promises or engagements. How

revolting then, must it appear in Christians, in this very solemn transaction, to turn their backs on one another, exhibiting only tokens of coldness, distant formality, and hatred, where every mark of Christian sincerity, attachment, and good faith, should be expected!

With great propriety then, have the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 13th February, 1645, declared, that they consider their own order of a Communion Table, in opposition to the practice of the Independents sitting in pews, “to be most agreeable to the word of God, the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the nature of that heavenly feast;” and in the First Book of Discipline, agreed on in the year 1560, that “the table of the Lord is then most rightly ministered, when it approacheth most near to Christ’s own action. But plain it is, that at supper, Christ Jesus sat with his disciples, and therefore do we judge that *sitting at a table* is most convenient to that holy action.” The innovation then, of substituting pews for the Communion Table, is unnatural in itself, and inconsistent with some of the ends of this ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, as well as a departure from the pattern exhibited by Christ, and followed by the inspired Apostles; and is therefore so far a corruption of the ordinance, and substituting for the institution of Christ the invention of men.

If this corrupt innovation is passed over in silence, and not immediately checked, there is good reason to believe that it will spread. Corruptions very readily spread. Such is the corruption of human nature, that any sinful innovation is readily embraced and followed. But it is of all things most difficult to persuade men to submit their understanding, and conscience, and whole conduct, to the authority of God in his word. While men sleep, the enemy sows tares; and thus, through the supineness of those who ought to be active in the defense of the Gospel, corrup-

tions have been silently and gradually introduced into the Church in every age. The laws of the Church of Scotland against innovations are excellent; and, if duly executed, are well calculated to check that spirit of novelty, of giddiness, of restlessness, and desire of change, so prevalent in this skeptical and innovating age. If a door is once opened to innovations, there are no bounds that can be set to them. The purity and uniformity of our scriptural worship will soon be destroyed, and errors and corruptions of every kind, according to the humor, caprice, or fancied interests of corrupt men, who will privily bring in their own inventions, will soon overspread and deface the glory of our Zion. If there are any Ministers of the Church of Scotland who are dissatisfied with our Established Presbyterian form of worship, and are more attached to the Independent form, they ought publicly to declare so, and leave the Church. In this manner they will act as honest men. But it is quite inconsistent with Christian integrity, in violation of their ordination solemn engagements, thus to disturb the peace of the Church by Independent innovations, to eat the bread of the Established Church of Scotland, and at the same time to lift the heel against her.

## *Section Two*

**The use of the Communion Table, in celebrating the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper, is in conformity with the practice of Christians, in the first and purest ages of the Christian Church.**

The new mode of substituting pews for a Communion Table, lately introduced into some of our Established Churches, is not only a departure from the Scripture pattern exhibited by our Lord at the institution of the ordinance of the Supper, and followed by the Apostles, but is also a departure from the practice exhibited by Christians in the first and purest ages of the Church. The Communion Table may be easily traced down from the time of the Apostles. It was an essential part of the furniture of every Church. All the faithful had access to it, to commemorate the death of Christ; and it is frequently referred to in the writings of the fathers. As the primitive Christians were frequently employed in celebrating the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, so there is often reference made in their writings to a Communion Table. A few instances of this may be stated that we may be excited to be followers of them, as they were of Christ.

Ignatius flourished in the beginning of the second century, about the year 105, and so lived and saw the latter end of the times of the Apostles. He was bishop of Antioch, a large and populous city, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Syria, where the disciples first were called Christians, which was a central station from which the Gospel had been very widely propagated, and where there had been many teachers, both Apostles and others, in the preceding age, and where we may now expect to find the institutions of Christianity in their purest form. This holy father and martyr often refers in his writings to the Lord's Table, particu-

larly in his Epistles to the Christians at Philadelphia, and Ephesus, and some others. In his Epistle to the Christians at Philadelphia, he exhorts them to unity and brotherly love, in the most affectionate manner, in language referring to a Communion Table. He says, “I write unto you, and warn you, that you are one faith, one doctrine, one Eucharist: for there is one faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for us, one bread broken for us, and one cup distributed to all, one ALTAR to every church, and one bishop, with the presbytery, and deacons my fellow-servants.” In his Epistle to the Ephesians, he exhorts them to be subject to, and at unity with their bishop, and presbytery, from the consideration, “that as every one, not at peace with his brother, was excluded from the ALTAR (Matt. 5:24), much more those who were disobedient to, and at discord with, their bishop, and spiritual fathers, were excluded from thence.”

Tertullian flourished in the end of the second century, or beginning of the third century, about the year 200, or about one hundred years after the death of John the Evangelist. He was a Presbyter of Carthage, and refers to the Lord’s Table in his Book *de Oratione*, when reproving those who were scrupulous about receiving the sacrament, on their stationary, or fast days. He says, “will not thy station or fast be the more solemn, if thou shalt also stand at God’s ALTAR, where thou mayest receive the Lord’s body?” He refers to it also in his exhortation to chastity and purity of conduct, when he says, “If a soul be conscious of its guilt, and there-upon conscience be ashamed, how will he dare to pray at the ALTAR?”

Within fifty years after Tertullian lived Cyprian, who was bishop of the same church of Carthage, and who flourished about the year 250, who, in his various Epistles, often refers to the Communion Table, and particularly in his 63rd Epistle to Cecilius, in which he says that the words of Solomon (Prov. 9:2), “Wisdom hath mingled her wine, and fur-

nished her table,” typified and prefigured the Christian ALTAR. The same Cyprian was president of a synod of bishops, which met in Africa in the year 258, where, in a reference from Spain respecting some bishops who had apostatized to idolatry, and still claimed the exercise of their Christian ministry, it was determined “that the divine law was express, that none but those who were holy and blameless should approach God’s ALTAR;” plainly referring to the Lord’s Table.

Chrysostom, who flourished about the year 398, refers to the Lord’s Table, in his defense of Christianity against the Jews and Gentiles. “From the very extensive spread of the Gospel,” he says, “the British Islands, which lie out of the sea, and are in the ocean itself, have felt the power of the word, for even there also, churches and ALTARS are erected.”

Gregory Nyssen, who flourished about the year 370, in his sermon on the Baptism of Christ, has a striking reference to the Communion Table. He says, “This altar at which we stand, is by nature a common stone, but being consecrated to the service of God is an HOLY TABLE, an ALTAR INVIOLEABLE.”

But authorities need not be multiplied, for there is frequent reference to the Communion Table, as a part of the furniture of the Christian churches, in all the early ages of Christianity.

This table, from the times of the Apostles downwards, has been sometimes denominated *table*, and sometimes *altar*; but usually with some distinguishing epithet, as Altar of God, Lord’s Table, Holy Table, etc. Ancient writers use both names indifferently, sometimes calling it altar, and sometimes table, and sometimes both *table* and *altar* in the same sentence. Chrysostom usually terms it “the mystical, and tremendous table.” Augustine usually gives it the name of *Mensa Domini*, the Table of the Lord.

When it was called *altar*, however, in these early ages, it did not mean an altar dressed up with images, or idol gods, as the heathens commonly had their altars adorned, or an altar for bloody sacrifices, which was the use of altars both among Jews and Gentiles, but it was considered only as a consecrated table, where Christian people presented their oblations, and received the Eucharist.

During the dark ages, the phrase altar was much abused, as connected with the sacrifice of the mass. The use of it was therefore laid aside by the Presbyterians of Scotland at the Reformation, and the phrase table was generally adopted by them, and has been continued in our Established Church.

The term altar has, however, been adopted by some Protestant churches, as they think, on good grounds. They say, when Christ said (Matt. 5:23, 24), “When thou bringest thy gift to the *altar*, and there rememberest that thy brother has ought against thee, Leave there thy gift before the *altar*, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift,” that he intimated, by way of anticipation, that he would institute an ordinance in his church, to commemorate that sacrifice of himself which was prefigured by the sacrifices under the law, and which should be a pledge of their peace with him, and their reconciliation with one another. They also consider (Heb. 12:10), “We have an *altar*, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle,” as not only referring to Christ, but to him as commemorated in the sacrament; for the Apostle there speaks of an *altar*, of which Christians had a right to eat.

During the three first centuries of the Christian Church, the *altar*, or communion table, was usually made of wood, and was moveable from place to place; but in the fourth century, some of them were made of

stone; and this practice became gradually more prevalent, until, in the Council of Paris, in the year 509, a general decree was made, “That no *altars* should be consecrated but such as were made of stone only.” From the time of this change in the materials of them, they became more in the nature of fixtures, and the form was also changed. Before this, they were in the form of tables, but they now began to be erected more like *altars*, upon a single foot or pillar in the midst.

During the three first centuries, it was custom for all the faithful, both men and women, clergy and laity, without distinction, to communicate at the *altar*, or *communion table*; and we find Dionysius of Alexandria, who flourished about the year 244, in his Epistle to Eusebius, speaking of “both men and women standing at the *holy table*, and reaching forth their hands to receive the Eucharist there.” The exclusion of the women and laity from the Communion Table, and restricting them to what was called the outer-court of the people, was a corrupt innovation of after times.

The place of the *communion table*, or *altar*, was usually at the upper end of the church, before the bishop’s throne or pulpit, but at some distance from it, that room might be left *to encompass or surround the table*. It was the usual practice of the ancient Christians to worship toward the East, for certain superstitious reasons, and the ALTAR was usually placed in the east end of their churches. Their churches were usually built in imitation of the Jewish synagogues; and in them, Maimoides tells us, “That at the upper end, looking towards the Holy Land, the law was placed in the wall, in an arch, and on each side the elders were seated in a semi-circle.” In the Jewish tabernacle and temple there were *two altars*; the one the *altar of incense*, which stood close to the veil which divided the holy of holies from the rest of the temple, and could be approached only

on one side; the other was the *altar of burnt-offering*, which stood in the middle of the court of the priests, and *was surrounded by the worshippers*. It is generally believed that the Communion Table, in the primitive churches, was so placed, as to imitate the position of the altar of burnt-offering. Dr. Hammond is of opinion, that this posture of the altar in Christian churches was in imitation of the altar in the Jewish Temple, alluded to by the Psalmist, when he says (Ps. 26:6), “I will wash my hands in innocency, and so will I compass thine altar.” This position of the communion table, or altar, is referred to by Eusebius, in his *History of the Church* (lib. 10, cap. 4), where, giving an account of an oration made at the dedication of a magnificent church at Tyre, the “holy altar is stated to be placed in the middle (viz. of the east end, or altar part of the church); and to prevent the multitude from pressing too near it, it was compassed with a wooden rail of net work, of such curious workmanship, that it was admirable to behold.”

In the first ages of Christianity, there was only *one altar or communion table* in each church. This is a fact referred to by the Fathers in general. In after times, however, when corrupt innovations were introduced, these altars or tables were greatly increased in number. We learn from the writings of Gregory the Great, who lived in the sixth century, that there were then, in the same church, sometimes twelve or fifteen *tables or altars*. In the year 1642, Dr. Francis Potter of Oxford published an essay on the apocalyptic number 666, in which he states, that at that time, there were in St. Peter’s church at Rome, twenty-five altars, that the great altar was twenty-five feet square, and the cross upon it twenty-five inches long. Altars thus multiplied with other growing corruptions.

From this historical statement, it is evident that, in the first ages of the Christian Church, the Communion Table was a part of the furniture

of every church; that it was so placed that the communicants could *surround, or compass it about*; and that all the faithful, both men and women, both clergy and laity, without distinction, had access to it, to receive the memorials of redeeming love. What a contrast does this exhibit to the new mode of substituting pews for the Communion Table. There is no such thing as surrounding or encompassing these pews. The whole company of communicants, turning their backs on one another, exhibit themselves in an attitude directly opposite to the pattern set by Christ and the Apostles at the first institution of this ordinance; opposite to that referred to as having been observed in the apostolic age; opposite to that observed in the first ages of the Christian Church, when the communicants always *encompassed the communion table or altar*; and opposite to the laws and practice of the Established Church of Scotland: but they also exhibit themselves in an attitude extremely indecent and unbecoming in itself, and inconsistent with those tokens of mutual affection which ought to mark their conduct as children of God, surrounding his table, at this feast of love. A table still remains, it is believed, on which the bread and wine are placed, in those churches where the innovation has been introduced; but from the table the great body of the communicants are excluded, and they receive the elements sitting in pews, and *not sitting about, as required by our Directory, or at, the table*. These things ought not so to be in the Established Church of Scotland, and if they are allowed to proceed, it is impossible to say where corrupt innovations may end. The phrase, Communion Table, or Lord's Table, is language to which we are habituated, and presents a pleasant object; but when we change that phraseology into Communion Pews, or Lord's Pews, it is by no means an improvement, but the very reverse. "Thus said the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

## *Section Three*

**A view of the corrupt Innovations, respecting the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and the Communion Table, in the past ages of the Christian Church.**

The new mode of dispensing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, lately introduced [ed. circa 1828] into some of the Established Churches of Scotland, namely, the distribution of the elements to the communicants sitting in pews, instead of sitting about, or at, the Communion Table, is a corrupt innovation of the worship of God. It is a departure from the pattern exhibited by Christ at the institution of that ordinance, and observed by the inspired Apostles, and followed by their successors in the earliest ages of the Christian Church. This innovation ought therefore to be checked without delay. If it is not corrected, it is highly probable that it will spread, and bring other corruptions in its train. There are no bounds to corrupt innovations. The history of the Church furnishes an abundant and melancholy proof of this, and has laid up a rich store of experience from which we ought to profit.

Corruptions began early to be introduced, and progressively to spread, respecting the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the Communion Table. A few of these corrupt innovations may be traced, as a warning to us, in these giddy and unstable times.

The practice of giving this sacrament to young children; of sending the consecrated elements to the sick and infirm, in their private houses; as well as the practice of standing or kneeling at the table, and each communicant receiving the elements from the officiating minister; were all of them corrupt practices very early introduced into the Christian Church, and were also attended, and followed, by other corruptions.

In that part of the church where the table stood, it was sometimes a practice to have it surrounded with rails of wood, to render it inaccessible to the people. Sometimes the Communion Table was surrounded with a veil or hanging and, in after times, the image of our Savior, or some saint, was painted on these veils. Epiphanius, who flourished in the fourth century, about the year 368, tore a veil from a church in Palestine, because it had such images painted on it, contrary, as the history states, to the rules of the Christian Church.

The altar place was thus kept inaccessible to all but the clergy, in time of divine service; and the laity and women were, in the progress of time, not allowed to communicate there. The Council of Laodicea, in the year 361, particularly forbids women to approach the altar; and, by another canon, allows none but the clergy to communicate there. So strictly was this canon observed by St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, who flourished about the year 374, that he would not permit the Emperor Theodosius to communicate there, but obliged him to retire to the exterior court of the people, when he had made his oblation at the altar. Agreeably to this, the Council of Trullo, in the year 692, decreed, “That no layman should come within the altar part, except the Emperor, when he made his oblation to the Creator.”

This corrupt innovation, however, met with considerable resistance in some parts of the Christian Church, particularly in France. In the sixth century, the Christian people were there still allowed to communicate at the *communion table* or *altar*; and the second Council of Tours, in the year 567, orders the holy of holies (so the altar part of the church was then denominated) to be open, both for men and women to communicate in at the time of the oblation. The fourth canon is in these terms: *Ad orandum et communicandum laicis et foeminis, sicut mos est, pateant sancta sanctorum.*

As the superstitions of Popery advanced in the Christian Church, the corruptions about the *altar* or *Lord's table* were also greatly multiplied. It is difficult, perhaps not possible, to determine the precise time when every new corrupt innovation was introduced. They were generally introduced silently, by some persons of influence, and practiced by them as improvements, and thus they gradually spread, and at last obtained general consent and legal sanction. Thus, while men slept, the enemy sowed tares, which took root, and sprang up, and extended their corrupt and pernicious effects. A short reference to facts may be useful, and should render us watchful against every corrupt innovation on our established form of worship.

In some places, after pictures and images were allowed in churches, the Holy Ghost was represented by a dove, hovering over the *altar* or *communion table*. An accusation was brought against Severus, Bishop of Antioch, in the council of Constantinople, in the year 565, for appropriating to his own use, the silver and golden doves that hung over the baptistery and the *altar*.

The second Council of Tours, in the year 567, decreed, that the sign of the cross should be laid on the *altar*: and Evagrius, who lived about the year 594, in his history of the Church, speaks of crosses of silver, given by Chosroes to one of the churches of Constantinople, to be fixed upon the *altar*.

Censers and incense were probably introduced about the same time; for the same historian, Evagrius, mentions not only crosses, but also golden censures, as given by Chosroes to the church at Constantinople; so that crosses and censers were probably the productions of the same age, viz. the sixth century.

Images and relics of saints were, in after ages, laid on the *altar*, or

communion table. In the Council of Paris, in the year 509, it was decreed, that no *altars* should be consecrated, except those which were made of stone only. After this, they were usually built as fixtures in the altar part of the church; and the relics of some favorite saint were deposited in some part of the erection.

The doctrine of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, began to be taught in the ninth century, by Paschasius Rathbert, Monk of Corbie, who, in the year 818, composed a treatise of the body and blood of Christ. This doctrine of transubstantiation gradually spread, until at last it was decreed in the Council of Lateran, in the year 1215, under Pope Innocent III., in these terms: “That the body and blood of Jesus Christ are truly contained under the species of bread and wine in the sacrament of the *altar*; the bread being transubstantiated into the body, and the wine into the blood.”

The adoration of the host was ordained by Honorius III, in the year 1220, who enjoins, “That the priest should often instruct the people; that at the elevation of the host, when mass is celebrated, they should kneel with respect, and that they should do the same when it is carried by the priest to the sick.”

Gregory the ninth, who succeeded Honorius, ordained the ringing of the bell on these occasions. In the year 1227, he ordained, “That when the body and blood of Christ should be made, and the host elevated, a bell should be rung, that all who heard it might fall upon their knees, and, with clasped hands, worship the host.”

The feast of the sacrament was instituted by Urban IV in the year 1264.

The procession of the holy sacrament was introduced in the four-

teenth century. Some ascribe this institution to John XXII; others think that this procession first began at Padus, about the year 1360.

In the fifteenth century, the people were deprived of the use of the cup in the Sacrament, by the Council of Constance, in the year 1415, whose decree on this head cannot be read without horror, by any who regard the authority of Christ. It runs thus: “Although Jesus Christ instituted and administered the venerable Sacrament to his disciples under both kinds of bread and wine; and though in the primitive Church, the faithful received it in both kinds, nevertheless to evite certain dangers and scandals, this custom with good reason was introduced, that the ministers officiating should receive it in both kinds, but the laity under the species of bread alone; wherefore it ought to be accounted an erroneous opinion, that the observation of that custom or law, is sacrilegious, or any thing unlawful; and those who obstinately maintain the contrary, ought to be banished as heretics, and punished severely by the Diocessians, or officials of the places they belong to.”

From this historical statement, it appears that one corrupt innovation always prepared the way for another, until superstition and idolatry overspread the whole face of the Christian church. Opposition was sometimes made to these corrupt innovations; but whilst one corruption was opposed, another was introduced. Thus the second Council of Tours, in the year 567, which opposed the exclusion of the laity and women from the Communion Table, ordained that the sign of the cross should be laid on the altar; so stupidly blind and inconsistent are men rendered, under the influence of corruption and superstition. Some of these corruptions were, at the first, and for a long time, but very partially embraced: but the leaven was gradually extending its influence, until it spread over the whole mass. The doctrine of transubstantiation, which

was broached in 818, spread but slowly, even those dark ages, and did not receive the full sanction of the corrupt Church of Rome, until the year 1215. The other corrupt innovations above stated, were in like manner only gradually adopted.

The Reformation by Martin Luther and others, was, under the blessing of God, a happy period for the Christian Church; but even then, several errors and corruptions were introduced, and have since been maintained. One of these respected the *Communion Table*. After the Reformation, a party arose who maintained, “That no Communion Table was necessary, and that the body of the Church, in general, was the altar, or *Communion Table*.” In the year 1623, Videlius published at Geneva, Exercises on Ignatius, in which these opinions are stated and defended; and they have since been embraced and followed by some parties of professing Christians in modern times, particularly by the Independents.

The innovation lately introduced into some of the Established Churches, of making the people communicate in pews, coincides very much with the corrupt practice defended by Videlius, and appears also to be nearly allied to the early corruption sanctioned by the Council of Laodicea, in the year 361, of excluding the laity and women from the altar part of the Church, restricting them to the outer court of the people, and allowing none but the clergy to communicate at the Table. It is really and truly an exclusion from the *Communion Table*. There is neither in scripture precept nor example, the smallest countenance given to the very indecent and corrupt practice, of making the whole communicants turn their backs on one another. If this corruption is passed over in silence, it is impossible to say what may be the next. May not the practice of keeling be again introduced, and supported by arguments much more powerful than can be adduced for this innovation?

May not wafers be substituted for the bread? Do not wafers resemble bread as much, or more, than pews resemble a table? In short, there can be no bounds set to innovations, if once they are admitted. The history of the past should warn us to be on our guard for the future. Corrupt human nature is the same. There is the same spirit of novelty, the same desire of change, and of being esteemed wiser than our fathers. There is the same giddiness, and restlessness, and ambition, and folly, and pride, and vanity. There is the same feeling of discontent with present usages and established forms, and eagerness for what may be called, by innovators, improvement and reform. There is the same desire to accommodate religious forms to our own convenience, and worldly interest, and ease, and to the ever-varying opinions and taste, and humor, and fashion of the world, which has been the fruitful source of so many errors and corruptions, in every age of the church, and all flowing from the same *evil heart of unbelief, leading to depart from the living God*. Against all this fascinating influence we should be on our guard, appealing and adhering to the infallible rule of faith and practice. “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

The words of our venerable and worthy reformer, Mr. John Knox, to this purpose, are highly worthy of regard, by all the ministers of the Church of Scotland. When called before the Privy Council of England, on the 14th day of April, 1553, there being then present the Bishops of Canterbury and Ely, and the Earls of Bedford, Northampton, Shrewsbury, and others, and being asked, “If kneeling at the *Lord’s Table* was not indifferent?” His reply was, “That Christ’s action was most perfect, and that it was most sure to follow his example, and that kneeling was man’s addition and invention.” When they stated that they were sorry to know him of a contrary mind to the common order; he answered, “That he

was sorry that the common order was contrary to Christ's institution."<sup>1</sup> So may it be said in this case, that the action of Christ is most perfect, and that it is most sure to follow his example, and that the practice of making all the communicantes turn their backs on one another, is the invention of men, contrary to the institution of Christ, and, it is to be feared, if not corrected, will bring along with it other corrupt innovations.

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1. See Life of Mr. Knox, prefixed to his History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland.

## *Section Four*

**The use of the Communion Table in celebrating the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper, is in conformity with the laws, and authorized practice of the Established Church of Scotland, since the Reformation.**

The late innovation of substituting pews for the Communion Table, is a violation of the laws of the Established Church of Scotland, and a departure from the constant authorized practice of the Church. At the Reformation, our pious ancestors in Scotland endeavored to bring every part of the public worship of God to the Scripture pattern, and particularly the manner of celebrating the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. They acted on that leading principle of the Reformation, "That the holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice." On this principle, they removed from the manner of celebrating this ordinance, not only the superstitious and idolatrous practices, which had been introduced in the darkest ages of popery, but even some unscriptural practices which had obtained among the Fathers in the early ages of the Christian Church.

It was an early practice to give the sacrament to children, which our ancestors in Scotland rejected as contrary to Scripture, because they were not able to examine themselves as directed by the Apostle, 1 Cor. 11:28. It was an early practice to send the consecrated elements from the Communion Table to people in their private houses, especially the sick, there being no authority from Scripture for such disorderly and private administration. It was the early practice for the communicants to *stand* around the Communion Table, and sometimes to *kneel*, which practices were rejected by our Presbyterian ancestors, as not agreeable to the pattern

exhibited by Christ and the Apostles, at the institution of that ordinance, nor to our table posture; and the posture of *sitting* at the Communion Table was adopted, as most conformable to both. It was an early practice for each communicant to receive the elements from the officiating minister; but our Presbyterian ancestors rejected this, and the nearest communicant received the bread and wine from the officiating minister, and then passed them from hand to hand, because Christ said, Luke 22:17, “Take this and divide it among yourselves,” which, though applicable to the cup in the Passover, was considered by them as equally applicable to the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper.

At the Reformation in Scotland, and the times immediately following, there was no dispute among our ancestors whether there should be a *Communion Table*. In the twenty-third Chapter of the Confession of Faith, agreed on by the General Assembly, 1560, the Communion Table is expressly mentioned. It is there called “the *holy table*, and *table of the Lord Jesus*.” In the first Book of Discipline, agreed on by the Assembly, 1560, and ratified by the Privy Council the same year, it is distinctly stated, head second, that “the *table of the Lord* is then most rightly ministered when it approacheth most near to Christ’s own action. But plain it is, that at supper Christ Jesus sat with his disciples; and therefore do we judge that *sitting at a table* is most convenient to that holy action;” and in head ninth, under the title of reparation of Kirks, it is provided, that “every Kirk must have doors; close windows of glass; thatch able to withhold rain; a bell to convocate the people together; a pulpit; a bason for baptizing; and TABLES for ministration of the Lord’s Supper.”

Ministers were enjoined by Act of Assembly, in December 1562, that in the ministration of the sacraments, they should observe the order of the English Kirk at Geneva, where Mr. Knox had been sometime

minister. This Act was renewed by the Assembly, 1564; and the order of Geneva for ministration of the sacraments, etc. was usually prefixed to the version of the Psalms then used in the Church of Scotland, and was the Directory for worship then observed, commonly called the Book of Common order. This order expressly mentions *sitting* at the Communion Table, and refers throughout to that practice. In the exhortation before dispensing the sacrament, the minister says, “In the name and authoritie of the eternall God, and of his Sonn Jesus Christ, I excommunicate from *this Table* all blasphemers of God, all idolaters, all murtherers, all adulterers, all that be in malice or envie, all disobedient persons to father or mother;” etc. etc. charging them, as they will [“]answere in the presence of him who is the righteous Judge, that they presume not to prophane this most holy table,” etc. etc. On the other hand, the minister encourageth the penitent in terms of that order, “Seeing that our Lord hath indued us with will and desire to renounce and withstande our owne affections, with a longing for his righteousnesse, and the keeping of his commaundementes, we may be now right well assured, that those defaultes and manifold imperfections in us, shall be no hinderance at all against us, to cause him not to accept and impute us as worthie to come to *his spirituall table*,” etc. etc. The order proceeds thus, “The exhortation ended, the minister commeth downe from the pulpit, and sitteth *at the table*, every man and woman in likewise taking their place as occasion best serveth; then he taketh bread and giveth thanks, either in these words following, or like effect.” Here follows the form of blessing or consecration. “This done,” saith the order, “The minister breaketh the bread, and delivereth it to the people, who distribute and divide the same among themselves, according to our Saviour Christ’s commandement, and likewise giveth the cuppe. During which time some place of the Scriptures is read, which doth lively set forth the death of Christ,” etc.

etc. After this the minister giveth thanks in the manner there directed. Then the order proceeds, “the action thus ended, the people sing the 103d Psalme, My soul give laude unto the Lord, etc. or some other thanksgiving, which ended, one of the blessings before mentioned is recited;” namely, those in Numb. 6:24-25, and 2 Cor. 13:14, “and so they rise from the table and depart.”

Such is the order of the English Kirk of Geneva,<sup>1</sup> which was observed in the Church of Scotland by enactment of the General Assembly, 1562 and 1564, subsequent to the Reformation, and frequently referred to in after times as the practice of our Church. In this order, sitting at the Communion Table is prominently presented to our attention. The table is called the “*holy table*, the *spiritual table*, and every man and woman take their place at the *table*, as occasion best serveth.”

At and after the Reformation, there was a party attached to the Episcopal forms of worship and government, which considerably increased after the accession of James VI to the throne of England. That Prince favored the Episcopalians, and exerted himself greatly in their behalf. Under the influence of the Court, the General Assembly which met at Perth in the year 1618, enacted that communicants should kneel at the *Communion Table*, and other things favorable to the Episcopal form of worship. These were usually called the articles of Perth. This was the cause of much confusion and dissention in Scotland, and for some time both the practice of kneeling and of sitting at the Communion Table obtained, and caused much dispute. Those attached to Episcopacy,

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1. The above quotations are made from the order prefixed to the old version of the Psalms, used in the Church of Scotland, from the copy in the public library of the University of Glasgow, printed at Middleburgh in the year 1594.

insisted on the practice of kneeling, while the Presbyterians considered sitting as more agreeable to the Scripture pattern, and our own table posture. This struggle continued for nearly twenty years, until the meeting of the General Assembly at Glasgow, in the year 1638. In that Assembly the Articles of Perth were condemned, and the order of Geneva was again approved as a directory for worship, and the ministration of the sacraments. The Presbyterian form of worship and government now acquired the ascendancy; the order of Geneva was observed, and the communicants came in companies, and sat down at the *Communion Table*, according to that order. In this state, matters continued until the meeting of the Assembly at Westminster, in July 1643.

The object of this Assembly was to unite the whole island in one Confession of Faith, one form of Church Government, and one directory for the worship of God. It was then designed to establish the form observed by the Presbyterian Church of Scotland; and commissioners from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland were sent to the Westminster Assembly, to assist in this good work. Our commissioners, it appears, had to struggle about the Communion Table, both with the Episcopalians, on the one hand, and the Independents, on the other. On the 20th of May, 1644, they wrote a letter to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, giving an account of their progress, in which they say, “We cannot but admire the good hand of God in the things done already;” and among other things they state, “that altars were removed, and the communion in some places given at the *tables, with sitting.*”

In a letter from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to the Westminster Assembly, dated June 4, 1644, they say, “We are greatly refreshed to hear by letters from our commissioners there with you, of your praiseworthy proceedings, and of the great things the Lord hath

wrought among you, and for you;” and, among other things, they congratulate them, “That the sacraments were sincerely administered, according to the pattern in the mount,” referring to the account received by them of the “communion being given at the table, with sitting.”

The struggle, however, with the Episcopalians, was then short, and the victory was easily obtained. But very different was the case with the Independents. The struggle between our Presbyterian commissioners and the Independents in the Westminster Assembly, respecting the Communion Table, was long and arduous. The Independents warmly opposed the use of a Communion Table, and going in companies to the table, according to the practice of our Presbyterian Church. Principal Baillie of Glasgow College, one of the commissioners from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to the Westminster Assembly, gives, in his letters, an account of that opposition, from which I make the following extracts: --

In Letter forty-fifth, dated London, April 2, 1644, he says, “Our paper anent the sacraments we gave in. We agreed, so far as we went, except in a *table*. Here all of them oppose us and we them. They will not, and say the people will never, yield to alter their practice. They are content with sitting, albeit not as of a rite institute; but to come out of their pews to a *table*, they deny the necessity of it; we affirm it necessary, and will stand to it. The Independents’ way of celebrating seems to be very irreverent. They have the communion every Sabbath, without any preparation before, or thanksgiving after; little examination of people; their very prayers and doctrine before the sacrament are not to be directed to the use of the sacrament. They have after the blessing a short discourse, and two short graces over the elements, which are distributed and participate in silence, without exhortation, reading, or singing, and all is ended

with a psalm, without a prayer.”

In Letter sixty-four, June 1644, he says, “We are proceeding in our Assembly. This day, before noon, we got sundry propositions of our directory for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper passed; but in the afternoon we could not move one inch. The unhappy Independents would mangle that sacrament. No catechizing nor preparation before; no thanksgiving after; no sacramental doctrine, or chapters in the day of celebration; no coming up to any *table*; but a carrying of the elements to all in their seats athort the Church; yet all this, with God’s help, we have carried over their bellies to our practice. But exhortations at tables we yet stick at. They would have no words spoken at all. Nye would be at covering the head at receiving; we must dispute every inch of our ground. Great need had we of the prayers of all God’s people.”

In Letter sixty-sixth, June 28, he says, “This day we were vexed also in the Assembly; we thought we had passed with consent sitting at the table; but behold Mr. Nye, Mr. Goodwin, and Bridges, cast all in the hows, denying to us the necessity of all in their seats, without coming up to a table. Messrs. Henderson, Rutherford, and Gillespie, all three disputed exceedingly well for it, with arguments unanswerable; yet not one of the English did join with us, only Mr. Assessor Burgess, who was then in the chair, beginning to speak somewhat for us, but a little too vehemently, was so met with by the Independents, that a shameful and long clamour ended their debate.”

In Letter sixty-seventh, July 5, 1644, he says, “As for the Assembly, these three weeks Mr. Nye, and his good friend Mr. Herle, have kept us on one point of our Directory alone, the recommending of the communicants coming up to the table to communicate. Their way of communicating, of some at the table, and some about it, without any succession of

companies to more tables, is that whereon we stick, and are likely to stick longer.”

In Letter sixty-eight, July 12, he says, “In our Assembly we go on as we may. The Independents and others kept us long three weeks upon one point alone, the communicating at a *table*. By this we came to debate the divers coming up of companies successively to the table; the consecrating of the bread and wine severally; the giving of the bread to all the congregation, and then the wine to all; and so twice coming up to the table, first for the bread, and then for the wine; the mutual distribution, the table exhortations, and a world of such questions, which, to the most of them, were new and strange things. After we were over-toiled with debate, we were forced to leave all these things, and take to us general expressions, which, by a benign interpretation, would infer our church practices, which the most promised to follow; so much the more as we did not necessitate them by the Assembly’s express determination. We have ended the matter of the Lord’s Supper, and these last three days have been upon baptism. We have carried, with much greater ease than we expected, the publicness of baptism. The abuse was great over all this land. In the greatest parish of London, scarce one child in a year was brought to the church for baptism. Also, we have carried the parents’ presenting of his child, and not the midwives, as was their universal custom.”

It thus appears from the statements of Principal Baillie, that the Communion Table was a subject of much discussion in the Westminster Assembly for some months; the Independents insisting upon communicating in their pews, as they had been accustomed; whilst our Commissioners from the Church of Scotland insisted that the communicants should come up in companies to the Communion Table. After long and

serious discussion, it was decided as in the Directory, which states, that “The *table* being before decently covered, and so conveniently placed, that the communicants may orderly sit about it, or at it; the minister is to begin the action, with sanctifying and blessing the elements of bread and wine set before him,” etc. etc.; and after the blessing the Directory proceeds, “That the minister, being at the *table*, is to take the bread,” etc.

The Directory thus states the necessity of a table, not a table from which the great body of the communicants are excluded, according to the late corrupt innovation, but a “table that the communicants may orderly sit about it, or at it,” in opposition to the communicants sitting in their pews, as had been argued by the Independents. The Directory for worship, agreed on by the Assembly at Westminster, was examined, approved, and established, by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, by an Act, dated Feb. 3, 1645. This Act was passed unanimously, and “requires, decerns, and ordains, that according *to the plain tenor and meaning thereof*, and intent of the preface, it be carefully and uniformly observed, and practiced by all the ministers, and others, within this kingdom, whom it doth concern;” – thus preventing every minister from introducing any innovation, or making any deviation from the form of worship established in the Directory, “according *to the plain tenor and meaning thereof*,” and which is to be “carefully and uniformly observed and practiced by all the ministers, and others, within this kingdom.” So that no discretionary power is left for any minister to make innovations according to his own pleasure on the established form of public worship.

But as several things in the Directory are, in the language of Principal Baillie, stated in “general expressions, which, by a benign interpretation, would infer our church practices;” and as the *Communion Table* had been a matter of so much debate between the Independents, in the West-

minster Assembly, and our Scottish Commissioners, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in their Act, 1645, approving and establishing the Directory for worship, have inserted a special clause of exception or explanation respecting the *Communion Table*. The words of the clause are: “Provided always that the clause in the Directory of the administration of the Lord’s Supper, which mentioneth the communicants sitting about the table, or at it, be not interpreted, as if, in the judgment of this Kirk, it were indifferent and free for any of the communicants not to come to, and receive at, the table;” – thus prohibiting all communicants from receiving in any other way, that at the Communion Table, and, as the Act respecting the whole Directory bears, “*according to the plain tenor and meaning thereof.*” This clause is evidently directly against the practice of the Independents, and intended to guard against all such innovations as that lately introduced.

In a letter from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, to the Assembly at Westminster, dated Feb. 13, 1645, they plainly and decidedly state their reasons for introducing this clause. Say they, “We have thought necessary to declare and make known, that the clause in the Directory for the administration of the Lord’s Supper, which appointeth the table to be so placed, that the communicants may orderly sit about it, or at it, is not to be interpreted, as if, in the judgment of this Kirk, it were indifferent for any of the communicants not to come to, and receive at the table; in which particulars we still conceive and believe the order and practice of our own Kirk to be most *agreeable and suitable to the word of God, the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the nature of that heavenly feast and table.*” They farther add, “Nevertheless, in other particulars we have resolved, and do agree, and we do most willingly part with such practices and customs of our own, as may be parted with safely, and without the violation of any of Christ’s ordinances, or trespassing against

Scriptural rules, or our Solemn Covenants.”

It thus appears, that the reasons of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in 1645, for introducing this clause of explanation respecting the Communion Table, were at once wise, pious, and conscientious. They were willing to part with such of their own practices and customs as did not violate any of Christ’s ordinances, or trespass against Scripture rules; but in this particular they declare their adherence to the order and practice of their own Kirk, which at that time was that of Geneva, as appointed by Acts of Assembly, 1562 and 1564; according to which, “every man and woman take their place at the *table*, as occasion best serveth;” and this they consider as “*most agreeable and suitable to the word of God, the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the nature of that heavenly feast and table.*” Such then is the law and determination of the Church in this matter; and the Act of Assembly, 1645, is approved by the fifteenth Act of Assembly, 1705.

Many are the laws of the Church of Scotland, guarding against all innovations, contrary to the purity and uniformity of worship authorized and practiced in our national church. The thirteenth Act of Assembly, 1639, and the fourteenth Act of Assembly, 1641, both of which are confirmed by the eleventh Act of Assembly, 1695, are all directed to this object, as well as the ninth Act of Assembly, 1697, commonly called the Barrier Act. The fifteenth Act of Assembly, 1707, is particularly directed to this object; and to this Act every probationer, at receiving license, and every minister of the Church of Scotland, at his ordination, in the most solemn manner, promises subjection and obedience. In answer to questions put to them, they are taken bound, in the most solemn manner, “to maintain and defend the doctrine and worship of the Church as presently authorized and practiced, and contained in this fifteenth Act of

Assembly, 1707, and to follow no divisive courses from said doctrine and worship.”

By the twenty-second Parliament of James VI, chap. 6, in the year 1647; it is ordained, “That kirks be provided with basons, and lavers for baptisms, and cups, tables, and table cloths for the holy communion, at the expense of the parishioners; and that the minister keep the same; and he, and his heirs, and executors, be answerable therefore, in case they be either lost, or used to profane uses.”

The Act of Assembly establishing the Directory, 1645, was confirmed and ratified in all the heads and articles thereof, by an Act of Parliament, dated Feb. 6, 1645: and since the Revolution, the worship of the Church of Scotland, is secured by the Acts of Parliament 1690 and 1693, and by the Act of security, 1707. This forms an essential article in the union with England, and is secured by the coronation oath of the sovereign; so that the form of worship, authorized and practiced in the Established Church of Scotland, is as well secured as any laws, ecclesiastical or civil, can possibly render it.

From this statement it is evident, that the late innovation of excluding communicants from the Communion Table, and substituting pews for the Table, is a violation of the laws of the Established Church of Scotland, as well as a departure from the constant authorized practice, which ought to be corrected without delay. It is exceeding proper and becoming, that the laws of the church on this subject should be carried into effect; that unity and uniformity in public worship of God, may be observed in all parts of our Established national Church: for if every one is allowed to make alteration, as he shall judge agreeable or convenient, nothing but disorder and confusion will follow.

## *Section Five*

### **Answers to the Arguments in favor of the late Innovation.**

Though the innovation introduced into some churches, of excluding the communicants from the Communion Table, and distributing the elements to the communicants sitting in pews, is in direct opposition to the laws and practice of the Established Church of Scotland, and in opposition to the publicly declared doctrine of the Church, “that the table posture is most conformable to the word of God, the example of Christ and the Apostles, and to the nature of that heavenly feast;” yet several arguments are urged in favor of the innovation, by those who have introduced it, or who patronize it. Some of these arguments may be considered and answered.

*First.* It is argued, that the practice introduced by the innovation, is nearest the pattern of Christ and the Apostles, at the first institution of the ordinance of the Supper, where they all, *as a family, sat at one board.*

*Answer.* The sacrament of our Lord’s Supper was instituted by Christ immediately after the celebration of the Jewish Passover. But the ordinance of the Passover was appointed by God to be celebrated in a family capacity (Exod. 12:3-4). If the family were too small, two families were to unite in eating the paschal lamb. It was in this family capacity that Christ and his Apostles then celebrated the Passover, in the evening, according to the Divine institution. Our Savior certainly ought to be imitated in his actions, relating to all the parts of gospel worship, but not in those actions which had a plain reference to Jewish worship, and which were not imitated afterwards by his inspired Apostles. But the practice of the Apostles in after times shows plainly that the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was not designed to be celebrated in a family capacity, as the Jew-

ish Passover had been, but in the assembled congregations of the faithful. This is evident from the conduct of the Apostle Paul, who, in his journey towards Jerusalem, came to Troas, and there, with many Christians collected on the occasion, in the public assembly, celebrated this ordinance (Acts 20:7). When the same Apostle corrects the abuses which prevailed in the church at Corinth respecting this ordinance, the language he employs evidently indicates, that it was to be celebrated in the Christian assembly. Hence he speaks of the Corinthians “coming together in the church” (1 Cor. 2:18) and “coming together into one place” (verse 20); and in verse 22, he says, “Have ye not houses to eat and drink in?” or “despise ye the church of God?” etc. These statements of the inspired Apostle, show that the ordinance was to be observed, not in a family capacity, but in the Christians assembly; and his reference to the Communion Table (1 Cor. 10:21) shows, that the table posture was to be observed, as had been done by Christ and the Apostles, at the first institution of the ordinance. If the Communion Table can be conveniently had sufficiently large, it may certainly be desirable, that all the communicants should be at one board or service; but where this cannot be done, a succession of companies coming to the table, appears to be the only way of preserving the table posture in large congregations. But there is neither in Scripture precept nor example, the smallest countenance given to the late corrupt innovation, of making all the communicants turn their backs on one another.

*Second.* It is argued that the innovation is but small, and of little importance, as it only regards circumstantial, on which little stress need be laid.

*Answer.* If the innovation is esteemed so small, why make it? It must show a great spirit of novelty when people are so very keen to innovate

in a matter that they esteem of so little importance. But every innovation is of importance, that affects the form of our Established worship. The religious feelings and habits of the Christian people, are all connected with those forms of worship, to which, from their earliest years, they have been used. Innovations, therefore, tend to perplex the minds of the worshippers, to disturb their devotions, and to break the peace of the church. This innovation is by no means so trivial and unimportant as is thus supposed, for the Church of Scotland has already in a very solemn manner declared, that this Independent practice is contrary “to the example left us by Christ and the Apostles, and inconsistent with the nature of that heavenly feast;” and this should have great weight, with all the ministers of the Church of Scotland. But though it were a small innovation, which is not granted, small innovations soon prepare the way for greater. There are no bounds to innovations when once they are admitted; and they will very soon deface and destroy the purity and beautiful uniformity of our Established worship. The admission of innovations, as every one may judge advisable, is launching into the boundless ocean, without chart or compass to direct our course; and there is very great danger of ultimately making shipwreck of our Established faith, and Presbyterian form of worship.

*Thirdly.* It is argued that a Communion Table in the usual form occupies a considerable space in the area of the Church, whereas this new form is more convenient, and yields a greater revenue from letting the pews.

*Answer.* This a groveling and mercenary idea; and it certainly cannot be endured, that our Established Presbyterian form of worship should be bartered away for worldly gain. Those who for a few shillings would exclude the Communion Table from our Churches; for a few shillings

more would part with our Established form of worship altogether. Such an argument does not deserve to be listened to. We must buy the truth at any worldly price, but sell it at no price.

*Fourth.* It is argued that the plan of communicating in pews is convenient, as any number of pews can be employed, which tends much to shorten the service; which, with a table, sometimes extends to a great length.

*Answer.* It is granted that every proper arrangement should be made to prevent this solemn service from becoming a mere bodily exercise, by extending it to an unreasonable and fatiguing length; and in large congregations the Communion Table should be large and lengthened in proportion. But whilst this is granted, there can be no good reason for laying aside the Communion Table, and the table posture, and thus to follow a divisive course, in opposition to the Scripture pattern, and the Established form of the Church of Scotland. This is no good reason for abandoning our Presbyterian form of worship, and adopting the unnatural and corrupt form of the Independents, in the holy communion, all turning their backs on one another.

It may also be remarked, that there may be some danger of this service being too much shortened, so as to be injurious to the religious habits and feelings of pious people, whose edification ought to be chiefly considered in dispensing this ordinance. There are some professors of religion who very soon grow weary of devotional exercises. The prophet Malachi speaks of some people in his days, who said respecting Divine worship, “Behold, what a weariness is it!” and who manifested much profane disregard to the service of God, “offering the blind and the lame for sacrifice,” to whom the table of “the Lord was contemptible.” Are there not many people still among ourselves of the same character? And

is there not great danger in studying to please the taste and feelings of such people in the manner of dispensing Divine ordinances? Nothing can be more hurtful to religion, than an endeavor to accommodate its services to the taste and habits of profane, skeptical, or ungodly men; or to the humors and feelings of worldly and nominal professors. This has, in every age of the Church, been a fruitful source of many heresies and errors, both in doctrine and worship. In every case we should adhere to the law and the testimony, and the enactment of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland against innovations, 1707, “That nothing is to be admitted in the worship of God but what is prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.”

*Fifth.* It is argued that when our Lord miraculously fed the multitude with a few loaves and fishes, they were made to sit down in ranks of fifties and hundreds, and that this bears the most striking resemblance to the Communion service, with which we are furnished in the whole inspired volume.

*Answer.* There is no intimation in the whole inspired volume, that this was intended as a pattern for the manner in which we should celebrate the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. In the first institution of this ordinance, our Lord hath left us a pattern of the form and manner in which we should commemorate his dying love, and to that pattern he hath added a precept, “This do in remembrance of me,” which precept should be considered enjoining, not only the performance of the duty, but also the external manner of performing that holy action, at least so far as was afterwards followed by the inspired Apostles, whose practice is the best comment on our Lord’s example and precept. But the pattern which Christ and his Apostles have left, exhibits them *encompassing or surrounding the first Communion Table*, with every external token of mutual

love, and communion with Christ, and one another, and directly opposite to the attitude assumed by those who follow the late innovation.

To neglect this example and command of our Lord, and search for, and grasp at, other parts of his conduct, which were never intended as a pattern in this particular service, to justify us in so doing, is to pervert the precepts and example of our Lord. It shows, in a striking manner, the power of that spirit of novelty and self-will which leads us to gratify our own humor, convenience, or fancy, instead of making conscience of religious duty, and submitting to the authority of God in his word.

*Sixth.* It is argued, that on my scheme there should never be more than twelve persons present at the communion, and that all these should be *men*, nay, *apostles*, and they should meet in a large upper room, and they should be reclining on a sofa, of an oval form, open at one end, with some kind of table, and all this at the hour of supper.

*Answer.* There certainly should be a table, and the usual table posture of the country should be observed by the communicants, who approach to, and surround the Communion Table. There certainly was a table at the first institution, and the usual table posture of the land of Judea at the Passover feast, was, no doubt, observed by our Lord and his Apostles, who surrounded the table. But the after practice of the Apostles, under the influence of the Spirit of inspiration, shows plainly, that several circumstances here referred to, as connected with the Jewish Passover, were peculiar to the first institution of the ordinance, and not intended by our Lord to be continued in his Church under the Gospel. There is no evidence that the Apostles, in dispensing our Lord's Supper afterwards, limited the number of communicants to twelve, or any other definite number, or that it was exclusively dispensed to *men*, and *apostles*, or that it was celebrated only at the hour of supper. On the contrary, the example

at Troas (Acts 20) exhibits the reverse of all this. There the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was dispensed in the assembly of Christians, collected from different places, without any distinction of sex, or official situation, or character, not at the hour of supper, but in open day, although the evening sermon was continued to a late hour. The practice of the inspired Apostles, who received the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth, is the best exposition of the circumstances connected with the original institution, some of which were peculiar to the Passover; and we should be followers of them, as they were of Christ. But the express mention of, and reference to, a Communion Table or Lord's Table (1 Cor. 10:21) is an evidence of the practice which they followed, and that the table posture was designed to be continued in the Christian Church.

*Seventh.* It is argued, that the word table is sometimes used in a figurative sense, to signify the food by which it is covered.

*Answer.* This is admitted; but there could be no figurative use of the word, unless it had also a literal meaning. There was literally a table used by our Lord and the Apostles at the first institution, the very table they had used at the Passover supper, and the after-mentioning of the Lord's table, and allusion to it by the Apostle, even though the word may be used in a figurative sense, has a reference to the literal meaning, and shows the practice which obtained, and was approved by the inspired Apostle.

*Eighth.* It is argued, that the minds of devout worshippers should be principally employed about the one thing needful, the commemoration of the Redeemer's death, and the pleasing anticipation of an eternal feast, and that attending to the form of the table, is like paying tithes of mint, anise, and cumin, and neglecting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.

*Answer.* This argument takes it for granted, that those who follow this innovation of communicating in pews are more attentive to the one thing needful, than those who communicate at the Communion Table, which requires to be proved; and which, I apprehend, will be very difficult, if not impossible, to prove. It is true that the spiritual exercises of the heart are to be chiefly attended to in every part of religious worship. But external scriptural forms of worship are themselves parts of divine worship, and subservient to the promoting of the religious feelings and exercises of the heart; and to undervalue, despise, or neglect these scriptural forms, and teach men so, is to act in opposition to the authority of our Lord, who declares, that whosoever shall break one of the least commandments, and teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. The weightier matters of the law should certainly be attended to, but the smaller matters must not be neglected. The words of our Lord to this purpose should not be forgotten: “These things ought you to have done, and not leave the other undone.” Much is said about the comfort of communicating in pews. If bodily comfort is meant, I cannot perceive how more comfort can be enjoyed sitting in a pew, than sitting at the Communion Table. If spiritual comfort is intended, I apprehend that this is to be most readily enjoyed in this holy service, when we are following the example and precepts of Christ. Now, it is not pretended that sitting in pews at the communion is more conform to the example and precepts of Christ, than sitting at the Communion Table.

*Ninth.* It is argued, “the word innovation has little tendency to create alarm in a mind accustomed to deliberate reflection;” and that ministers may do in this matter as suits the conveniency of their church.

*Answer.* Every innovation on the form of our Established worship, has or ought to have, a tendency to excite alarm in all those who regard it

with proper esteem. The many laws of the Church of Scotland against innovations in the form of our Established worship, and the very solemn obligations laid on all preachers of the Gospel, and ministers of the Church of Scotland, to conform to the worship presently authorized and practiced in our National Church, and to preserve its purity and uniformity, show, in a very striking manner, the anxious care of our Church to guard against these innovations, for which some persons feel no alarm. If every minister is allowed to act as he judges most convenient in his own church, or as may be suitable to what he considers his own enlarged and liberal principles, the beautiful uniformity of our Established worship will very soon be destroyed. Such extensive discretionary power, and latitude of conduct, is utterly inconsistent with any legally established form of worship. The late innovation exhibits, in a high degree, the fatal effects of these liberal views, as they are called. In the city of Glasgow, when the sacrament is dispensed, in some churches the communicants all sit at, or about the Communion Table as the law directs; in some churches the communicants sit in pews, according to the late innovation; in some churches there is a mixed mode of administration; part of the communicants receive the elements at the Communion Table, and part of them receive them sitting in pews. In those congregations, also, who communicate in the pews, part of them do so in the pews in which they usually sit through the year, having occupied them during the time of the sermon preceding; and part of them have not that indulgence, but go to pews in which they do not usually sit, but to which they are only admitted to communicate. Any stranger passing through the city of Glasgow, and looking into these churches on a communion Sabbath, would never suppose that they were all belonging to the same Established Church, who all observed their own particular form of worship. These things may be called liberal, and the effect of enlarged views; but they are

contrary to all order and decency. It belongs to the very nature of a religious establishment, that there be uniformity in doctrine and worship; and the laws of the Church of Scotland are well calculated to preserve, and transmit to posterity, our Established form of worship, in all its purity and uniformity.

*Tenth.* It is argued, that the subject of dispute is scarcely worthy of discussion in Church judicatories.

*Answer.* This may be the opinion of some; but the Church of Scotland has been of a very different opinion. The commissioners from the Church of Scotland, to the Assembly at Westminster, had to discuss that matter for three full months, in that Assembly; and the matter was afterwards discussed in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in the year 1645, and then finally decided, and set at rest, *by a solemn and unanimous decision of the General Assembly.* No part of our Established worship has been more the subject of deliberate discussion, than that respecting the Communion Table, and the mode of dispensing the sacrament of our Lord's Supper. It was the object of our fathers, that the form of dispensing that ordinance should be reduced as nearly as possible to the Scripture pattern. I can then see no good object the innovators can have in view, in reviving an old heresy in worship, already condemned by the Church of Scotland, and rejected as inconsistent with the nature of that heavenly feast, and not conform to the example of Christ and his Apostles. It shows a great spirit of self-will, and self-sufficiency, in any minister, to introduce innovations contrary to the form of worship presently authorized and practiced in our Church. It is a violation of all good order, and their own solemn vows. If any part of our Established worship, in their opinion, needs to be corrected, let them bring the matter before the judicatories of the Church, when the subject will be deliber-

ated on, and determined according to the lawful form and order; but it cannot be endured that any individual, or a few individuals, should break the peace of the Church, by following divisive courses, in opposition to the established laws.

Much is said by those who favor the innovation about the disorder, bustle, and confusion of many people pressing forward at one time, to obtain seats at the Communion Table, where only a small portion can be accommodated; and this has been much exaggerated, and considered a good reason for the innovation. But the same disorder and confusion must take place, if a much greater number of people press forward to a pew than can be accommodated; and therefore this argument makes nothing, either for or against the innovation. It is a good reason for making proper arrangements, that there be easy access to, and egress from, the Communion Table, and that it be extended in proportion to the number of communicants, that the service be not protracted to a fatiguing and unnecessary length; but it is no reason for laying aside the Communion Table, and adopting the very indecent, unnatural, and unscriptural mode of making the communicants sit in pews, and turn their backs on one another.

It is very easy to ascertain the number that can be accommodated at the Communion Table at one time, and such directions given, and arrangements made, that no more people come from their seats at one time, than can be accommodated.

It is in a peculiar manner of duty of Presbyteries to attend to this matter. No church can be built in Scotland, but under the authority and with the approbation of the Presbytery of the bounds. Before it be proceeded in, they should have the plan of the church laid before them, and be satisfied that it be sufficient for accommodating the parishioners, and

have everything requisite for performing every part of the public worship of God, according to the laws of the Church, and the laws of the land; and particularly that *there be a Communion Table*, and that it be large in proportion to the number of the parishioners, and that there be convenient and easy access to it, and egress from it. The system of Communion pews is not recognized by the laws and practice of the Church of Scotland; but it is provided that every kirk be provided with a Communion Table, in the First Book of Discipline, agreed on by the General Assembly, 1560. A Communion Table is also provided for by the twenty-second Parliament of James VI, chap. vi. in the year 1617; and Presbyteries are empowered and directed by that Act, to see the law carried into effect. Presbyteries should also exercise the power vested in them by the laws of the church, and of the land, in guarding against all innovations in the public worship of God within their bounds, in checking every tendency to follow divisive courses, and in preserving entire, and transmitting to posterity, the purity and uniformity of worship as presently authorized and practiced in our Established Church, and as enjoined by the General Assembly, Feb. 3, 1645 – “Take special notice of the observation or neglect of the directory for worship, in every congregation within their bounds, and make known the same to the Provincial, or General Assembly, as there shall be cause.”

*Eleventh.* It is argued that there is no particular form of the Communion Table prescribed, and therefore pews may be used, in which the communicants sit in parallel rows; with their faces to the minister.

*Answer.* The constant authorized practice of the Church fixes the form of the Communion Table, and every person in Scotland knows that sitting in pews is not our table posture at a feast; and far less the authorized posture to which Christians in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland

have been accustomed in celebrating this feast of Divine love. It is not so much to turn their faces to the minister, and attend to him, that Christians go to a Communion Table, as to enjoy communion with their Lord, and with one another, and their external posture there, should exhibit some token of that spiritual communion, which turning their backs on one another does not exhibit. Besides, the authorized practice of the Church is the law in this case; for all ministers are taken bound, in the most solemn manner, “to maintain and defend the doctrine and worship of the Established Church of Scotland as presently *authorized and practiced*, and contained in the fifteenth Act of the General Assembly, 1707, and to follow no divisive courses from said doctrine and worship.” Those, therefore, who designedly follow innovations in either doctrine or worship, violate their ordination vows.

## *Conclusion*

I have now endeavored to show that this innovation is in opposition to the example of Christ and the Apostles, at the first institution of our Lord's Supper after the Passover, where there was such a table as they *encompassed, and observed the countenances of each other*; -- in opposition to the practice of the inspired Apostles of our Lord, in the apostolic age; -- in opposition to the nature and design of this ordinance, which is a feast of love, where Christians meet at the table of their Lord in holy communion with him, and fellowship with their Christian brethren; and being in opposition to all these is a corrupt innovation. I have endeavored to show that it is in opposition to the practice of the earliest and purest ages of the Christian Church; that the altar, or Communion Table, was a part of the furniture of every Church; that there was only one table or altar in each Church; and that the Communion Table was so placed that it could be *encompassed or surrounded by the communicants*. I have endeavored to show the danger of innovation, from a review of the corrupt innovations, which, in former ages were gradually introduced, and progressively spread respecting the Lord's Supper and the Communion Table, which should be a warning to us in these giddy and unstable times. I have endeavored to show that it is in opposition to the laws and practice of the Church of Scotland, from the time of the Reformation; -- in opposition to the Book of Common Order, or Order of Geneva, enacted by the Assembly, 1562 and 1564, which continued to be our Directory of worship, with little interruption, until 1645, when our present Directory was adopted; -- that it is in opposition to our present Directory, taken in connection with the explanations of the Directory in the enactments, sanctioning and establishing it; -- in opposition to the authorized practice of the Church, as founded on the laws; which practice the General Assem-

bly, February 13, 1645, has declared, in opposition to the opinions maintained in the Assembly at Westminster, “to be most agreeable and suitable to the word of God, the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the nature of that heavenly feast and table;” – in opposition to the many laws of the Church against innovations, and the solemn engagements of ministers, to observe, in their practice, the worship presently authorized and practiced, and to follow no divisive courses.

I have also endeavored to answer the arguments urged by those who favor the innovation; and it may be proper to look again at these arguments. They are not taken from the scriptural design and nature of the ordinance, nor from the practice of the first and purest ages of the Christian Church, nor from the laws and authorized practice of the Church of Scotland. No: these I have endeavored to show are all against the innovation. The arguments of those who support the innovation are from conveniency, comfort, worldly gain, shortening the Communion service; that the innovation is what they are pleased to call small and trivial, not worthy of discussion; and that all should be left to act according to their own discretion. Such are their reasonings and arguments; which appear to me to be wholly unworthy of a subject so sacred and important. So long as men are actuated by such views in religious matters, and seek their own conveniency and ease, and to gratify their own humor and fancy, instead of seeking to conform themselves to the institutions of the Gospel, and to please God in the way of submission to his authority, their religious services must be considered as will-worship, and service not required of God. “When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring me no more vain oblations.” How important the direction of the Apostle! “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy, and vain deceit; after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

Our pure and Apostolic form of worship, is the fruit of much toil, patience, and fortitude, of our fathers. They struggled hard for our religious privileges, which are transmitted to us sealed with the blood of martyrs, patriots, and heroes. If we shall wantonly or carelessly innovate upon them, and lose them, we will show little regard to their memory, which ought to be dear to us. We will show little gratitude to God, who protected them by his providence, blessed their exertions, and crowned their pious labors with success; and who has thus distinguished us among the nations by institutions so pure, and conducive, under his blessing, to our spiritual instruction and comfort. All innovations are pretended improvements, but there is a strong tendency in the best religious institutions, as administered by fallible and depraved men to progressive corruption. We should therefore be on our guard. Our fathers have been at great pains to guard against innovations. They left nothing in our religious worship loose, to be changed at discretion. They knew how giddy and fickle men are, how unsatisfied with present things, how desirous to be thought wiser than their fathers, and how fond of change. Hence the many laws of our Church against innovations. Whilst we admire their wisdom, piety, fortitude, and patient investigation and decision, let us now do our duty in holding fast what we have received, and follow these Elders who have obtained a good report through faith.

This matter has already been frequently and solemnly decided. It was decided in the Westminster Assembly, and in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1645. It is decided in all the Acts of the Church against innovations. It is decided in the constant authorized practice of the Church: it is decided by every Probationer at obtaining license to preach the Gospel: and it is decided by every Minister, in voluntarily coming under his ordination engagements. We ought, therefore, to act as honest men before God and the world. It is dangerous, after

vows, to make inquiry. I conclude, with stating my approbation of the sentiments of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1560:

“That the table of the Lord is then most rightly ministered, when it approacheth most near to Christ’s own action. But plain it is, that at supper Christ Jesus sat with his disciples, and therefore do we judge that sitting at a table is most convenient to that holy action;” and in their letter to the Westminster Assembly, dated Feb. 13, 1645, “We have thought necessary to declare, and make known, that the clause in the Directory for the administration of the Lord’s Supper, which appointeth the table to be so placed, that the communicants may orderly sit about it, or at it, is not to be interpreted, as if, in the judgment of this Kirk, it were indifferent for any of the communicants not to come to, and receive at the table: in which particulars we still conceive, and believe, the order and practice of our own Kirk to be most agreeable and suitable to the word of God, the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the nature of that heavenly feast and table. Nevertheless, in other particulars we have resolved, and do agree, and we do willingly part with such practices and customs of our own, as may be parted with safely, and without the violation of any of Christ’s ordinances, or trespassing against Scripture rules.”

*Finis.*

