

1792 Circular Warwick Association

[Elders Ebenezer Ferris, John Dodge, Elias Lee, John Caton and Thomas Montanye was the committee to examine the Circular Letter to be presented the next day for a second and public reading. The committee recommended “postponing the Circular written by Brother Caton, (not on account of defections, nor that we reject it) but from a conviction, of the expediency of our publishing the manner of forming this association, and to shew churches the regularity of our proceedings, in the reception of the Second Church of New York.”

I post this Circular for historical reason: Even this early, there were in place some customs that influenced churches and associations to follow set and tried procedures in relation to each other. There seemed to be some specific reason for the establishment of the Warwick, in that they mentioned a falling away of other churches; the subject of their first Sermon on the last days apostasy; and mention herein of opposition to the formation of this association previous to its constitution, and continuing opposition. As should be pointed out, this is a PARTICULAR BAPTIST collection of churches; and as a newly formed association, it appears to have met cross-purposes with another newly formed association. It seems to this writer that associations already tended to “lord it over God’s heritage” – the churches, in that the Second Baptist Church of New York was not freely given their own voice in deciding what fellowship of churches they wished to be with.

In cross-referencing the below Circular with the Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association Minutes of 1790, I found the following action that bears upon the present controversy in the Warwick: “Met, pursuant to adjournment.- The subject of forming a new Association, to be held at New York, being considered, it **did not appear there were a sufficient number of churches desired dismissal for that purpose.**” And again, “The request of the churches at Stamford, Warwick, First and Second Baptist of New York, King Street, and Staten Island, for permission to join other Associations, if it should be found more convenient, was granted.” (Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707-1807, pages 255 and 256.) - SCP].

CIRCULAR LETTER

The Elders and Messengers of the several churches, met in Association in Pecks-kill, May 31, 1792. To the Churches in Union with this Association, send greeting.

Dearly Beloved,

The following is a narrative of the measures taken by the members of this Association, for the accomplishing of it; and their proceeding since it was formed; particularly with respect to their certifying in their Minutes, that the Second Baptist of New York had joined this body; and also, the transactions of the convention at Mount-Pleasant, respecting said church, previous to their being received by this Association; all which, was done openly, candidly, without partiality, or hypocrisy; and the opposition against said measures, both before its establishment and since.

The occasion of this publication, is in consequence of the late Association formed in New York, certifying in their Minutes that the said Second Baptist Church by the names of Francis Vandike, and Joseph Stout, had joined them; this Association therefore thinks it proper to publish the particular facts, as follows:

At the setting of the Philadelphia Baptist Association at New York, October 5, 1792, it was judged no way expedient to form a new Association in New York, not more than two churches in expressing a desire for it. At which time the church of Stamford

manifested that they had some expectation that an Association would be formed in the country, to the Northward of New York in that State, and if it should take place they expected to join it; therefore wished liberty from the Philadelphia Association. (See introduction above: this “liberty” was granted). The messenger from the Warwick Church, from the King Street Church, and from the Second Baptist Church in New-York, wished the same; which liberty was granted them. The First Church of New-York and the church of Staten Island requested liberty to join some other Association, it was also granted.

November 12, A Council being called at Mount Pleasant to constitute that Church, the subject of a new Association was considered, and unanimously advised, first, after a number of brethren at the Ordination of Mr. Lee of Bridge Field, cordially agreed to forward the same, in the following manner: appointed a committee to send letters to the several churches, that had not yet joined any Association: and also, to those who had obtained liberty to join another, for the said churches, to send Messengers to meet at Mount Pleasant, the 1st of May following, in order to form an Association if thought proper; also appointed a person to form a plan of an Association, containing such doctrinal sentiments, as stood **opposed to the errors spreading in our land**, to produce said plan at the meeting appointed for the consideration of the Convention, and approbation of such as should form. [Note: the Warwick WAS formed for reformation purpose according to the above statement. SCP]

January 4, 1791. The Committee met, wrote the letters; and sent them to the churches.

Upon the reception of the letter, by the First Baptist Church in New-York, in a very contemptuous manner disapproved the measures, of having an Association in the country; and countered the appointment, of meeting at Mount Pleasant, by appointing another meeting of the Churches in New-York, prior to it. In order to effect their purpose, and overthrow our meeting, sent letters to the very churches that were to meet at Mount Pleasant May 31, to meet in New-York, April the 13th, in order to form an Association.

Before the Convention met in New-York, a difficulty arose in the Second Baptist Church of said place, respecting the *method* of exercising **church government**; a separation took place; the church were now in two parties. Those who found themselves the major part, as much as two to one, wishing to have the matter settled, sent a request to some other churches for advice and assistance, and notwithstanding there were messengers came from the churches sent to: those who sent for them were refused any assistance from them, and the same persons that refused, received the minor part, as “the church,” in the Convention: and meet with them on the 12th of April. Upon which those who were the majority of said church before mentioned, two to one, desirous of informing said Convention of the irregularity of those which they had received, were refused by the Convention, being neither heard nor noticed taken of them.

The Convention of this “New-York convention,” was to print the plan of their Association, and appoint the 19th of October following to form, with the name of those persons who acted with them, also appointed a committee, to meet the convention at Mount Pleasant, the 31st of May, 1791. This committee included Francis Vandale, of the minor party of the Second Baptist Church of New-York, who had rejected the body of the church, claiming the key of the meeting-house where the church met, locking the door against all, but such as would follow him; and claiming authority of the keys of the kingdom, excommunicated at his pleasure; the other part of the committee were, William Fun Licere, Roune Runyon, Benjamin Fisher, and Elkanah Holmes.

Mount Pleasant May 31, 1791. The Convention being met according to appointment, a *Moderator* and *Clerk* chosen, and the letters from the churches read. The letter from the Second Baptist Church of New-York being read, with the names of three messengers who were present, *Mr. Holmes* one of the committee from New-York Convention, objected to said letter and messengers as representing said church: which he said he was able to make appear.

The messengers mentioned in said letter replied,(sic) that they could satisfy this Convention, that they were sent by the church, as they had every particular circumstance of the church with them, sufficient to satisfy any person. Upon this several of the committee from New-York Convention, objected against the present Convention having any thing to do in the case – was answered, that as said church, had been requested to attend for the purpose now met; also, had been from the first engaged in its formation; and having now come as far as we knew regular as any, it was no more than right they should act in the business, unless what had been asserted could be made to appear.

Accordingly the Convention to be satisfied in the case, not willing to be imposed upon, or the church neglected, appointed a committee, namely: Thups, Cole, Lee, Caton, and Pelton, to attend to the objection, and report next morning, whether said church was duly represented or not? Upon which the committee notified the objectors, and the messengers in said letter to attend with them. Next morning our committee reported that they, after due investigation of all apparent matter, relating thereupon, are of opinion, that said church is duly represented. No further objection being made, the messengers took their place. It was then observed that as there were **two associations about forming**, and the messengers from the churches no doubt settled in their minds, which the churches they represented, would wish to join: therefore requested, that no debates nor contention might arise, but for each one to act freely as they were best suited.

The plan and sentiments prepared, being produced and read, was approved. Then moved and seconded; that such messengers present authority to act for the Churches, who approved of the plan and sentiments now read, and who were desirous of forming an Association stiled “the Warwick Association;” to meet alternately, the east and west of Hudson’s River; to come forward and give in their names. Accordingly the messengers from fourteen Churches appeared, formed in

an Association; including the Second Baptist Church of New-York.

This being done, the committee from the New-York Convention manifested their dissatisfaction; and abruptly left the room.

This Association conscious, of the simplicity of their intention; the uprightness of their proceedings; wishing that every case might appear in its true light – truth shine, and iniquity fall, appointed a committee namely: Enoch Ferris, John Caton, Elias Lee, brothers Robert Edmonds, and Benjamin Pelton, to wait upon and confer with said withdrawn committee, respecting their dissatisfaction.

Our committee proceeded, and after conferring with, reported, that their dissatisfaction arose on account of this Association receiving the Second Baptist Church in New-York, by the letter and messengers which they had objected to.

Our committee farther reported, that they informed the said committee, that this Association did not wish to encourage any in the wrong, but that right take place; therefore were desirous that a mutual agreement might exit between the Association in New-York, and the Warwick Association, respecting said Church.

Accordingly proposed to the New-York committee, the following plan, hoping it would prove effectual. Namely, to recommend to each of the parties in said Church, to agree and call a council from other churches, to look into the case; including all matters that they might lay before them, and for said council to report which of the said parties were the Church, and that this Association, and the Convention in New-York, (proposing to form an Association) to abide and act according to the report of said council; and that if either of said parties pertaining to said Church, should refuse to call a council and have this matter determined this way, and the other party should manifest a willingness to comply, that the part so refusing, should not be considered the Church: and that the other should.

This plan being proposed by this Association's committee, to the other, was jointly agreed to; each of the committees pledging their word to each other, to abide by this agreement.

The report being made to the Association, by their committee was cordially agreed to; and although they were satisfied the committee had formed a just judgment in the case, yet that those persons of the New-York Convention might be satisfied, were entirely willing to unite in the present plan, and postpone the printing of our Minutes, till the case might be determined according to said agreement: which was to be done in six weeks.

That if it should appear against those which we have received, not to mention them in our Minutes. The other promising that if it should be against them, that they had received; that they should not be inserted in their future Minutes. There being Francis Vandike, of the part that joined the Convention in New-York, and *Benjamin Montanye*, Thomas Garrison an John Gilmore, of that part that had joined the Warwick Association,

they all agreed to said advice, chose the council and place, (New-York) where it should be decided.

After all this the Council was prevented sitting, by Francis Vandike, and his party, who utterly refused to have any thing to do with a Council, or that any Council should have any thing to do in the case. While the other party of the Church, were desirous to have all things understood, and fairly investigated. Here are our reasons, and this the ground of our Minutes containing the name of the Second Baptist Church of New-York, as a member of this Association. Who are still confident, that they have done in every circumstance as they would be willing to be done by; having an eye to that, which appeared justifiable in the sight of God. And can freely say, that the brethren which we have received, by all the opportunity we have had with them; appear orthodox in faith, and desirous of good order; and ever ready to comply with any advice, respecting their difficulties, if reasonable. *Elder Dodge* their pastor, being present, at the time that the Association was formed; hearing of their proceedings, (as he had been from them for a time) approved of their conduct, and jointly agreed in their union with the Warwick Association.

Yet notwithstanding all this, we find in the last association Minutes of the New-York, the names of those very persons who refused to hear the Council, inserted as the “Second Baptist Church of New-York; the grounds of such proceedings; to us is inexplicable. Thus, dear Brethren, you have a candid statement of our conduct, which we hope may ever be circumspect; and we prove ourselves your servants, for Jesus Sake.

Signed by order and in behalf of the Association

John Caton, *Moderator*.

Thomas Montanye, *Clerk*.