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The Muhlenberg Memorial

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3 To the Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in Council assembled.

4 RIGHT REVEREND FATHERS:

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6 The undersigned, presbyters of the Church of which you have the oversight, venture to approach your
7 venerable body with an expression of sentiment, which their estimate of your office in relation to the
8 times does not permit them to withhold. In doing so, they have confidence in your readiness to
9 appreciate their motives and their aims. The actual posture of our Church with reference to the great
10 moral and social necessities of the day, presents to the minds of the undersigned a subject for grave and
11 anxious thought. Did they suppose that this was confined to themselves, they would not feel warranted
12 in submitting it to your attention; but they believe it to be participated in by many of their brethren,
13 who may not have seen the expediency of declaring their views, or at least a mature season for such a
14 course.

15

16 The divided and distracted state of our American Protestant Christianity, the new and subtle forms of
17 unbelief adapting themselves with fatal success to the spirit of the age, the consolidated forces of
18 Romanism bearing with renewed skill and activity against the Protestant faith, and as more or less the
19 consequence of these, the utter ignorance of the Gospel among so large a portion of the low classes of
20 our population, making a heathen world in our midst, are among the considerations which induce your
21 memorialists to present the inquiry whether the period has not arrived for the adoption of measures, to
22 meet these exigencies of the times, more comprehensive than any yet provided for by our present
23 ecclesiastical system: in other words, whether the Protestant Episcopal Church, with only her present
24 canonical means and appliances, her fixed and invariable modes of public worship and her traditional
25 customs and usages, is competent to the work of preaching and dispensing the Gospel to all sorts and
26 conditions of men, and so adequate to do the work of the Lord in this land and in this age? This
27 question, your petitioners, for their own part, and in consonance with many thoughtful minds among us,
28 believe must be answered in the negative. Their memorial proceeds on the assumption that our Church,
29 confined to the exercise of her present system, is not sufficient to the great purposes above
30 mentioned—that a wider door must be opened for admission to the Gospel ministry than that through
31 which her candidates for holy orders are now obliged to enter. Besides such candidates among her own
32 members, it is believed that men can be found among the other bodies of Christians around us, who
33 would gladly receive ordination at your hands, could they obtain it, without that entire surrender which
34 would now be required of them, of all the liberty in public worship to which they have been
35 accustomed—men, who could not bring themselves to conform in all particulars to our prescriptions
36 and customs, but yet sound in the faith, and who, having the gifts of preachers and pastors, would be
37 able ministers of the New Testament. With deference it is asked, ought such an accession to your means
38 in executing your high commission, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,” be
39 refused, for the sake of conformity in matters recognized in the preface to the Book of Common Prayer,
40 as unessentials? Dare we pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into the harvest, while we
41 reject all laborers but those of one peculiar type? The extension of orders to the class of men con-
42 templated (with whatever safeguards, not infringing on evangelical freedom, which your wisdom might
43 deem expedient), appears to your petitioners to be a subject supremely worthy of your deliberations.
44 In addition to the prospect of the immediate good which would thus be opened, an important step
45 would be taken towards the effecting of a Church unity in the Protestant Christendom of our land. To

46 become a central bond of union among Christians, who, though differing in name, yet hold to the one
47 Faith, the one Lord, and the one Baptism, and who need only such a bond to be drawn together in closer
48 and more primitive fellowship, is here believed to be the peculiar province and high privilege of your
49 venerable body as a College of CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC BISHOPS as such.
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51 This leads your petitioners to declare the ultimate design of their memorial— which is to submit the
52 practicability under your auspices, of some ecclesiastical system, broader and more comprehensive than
53 that which you now administer, surrounding and including the Protestant Episcopal Church as it now is,
54 leaving that Church untouched, identical with that Church in all its great principles, yet providing for as
55 much freedom in opinion, discipline and worship as is compatible with the essential faith and order of
56 the Gospel. To define and act upon such a system, it is believed, must sooner or later be the work of an
57 American Catholic Episcopate.
58

59 In justice to themselves on this occasion, your memorialists beg leave to remark that, although aware
60 that the foregoing views are not confined to their own small number, they have no reason to suppose
61 that any other parties contemplate a public expression of them, like the present. Having therefore
62 undertaken it, they trust that they have not laid themselves open to the charge of unwarranted
63 intrusion. They find their warrant in the prayer now offered up by all our congregations, “that the
64 comfortable Gospel of Christ may be truly preached, truly received, and truly followed, in all places to
65 the breaking down of the kingdom of Sin, Satan, and Death.” Convinced that, for the attainment of
66 these blessed ends, there must be some greater concert of action among protestant Christians, than any
67 which yet exists, and believing that with you, Rt. Rev’ d Fathers, it rests to take the first measures
68 tending thereto, your petitioners could not do less than humbly submit their memorial to such
69 consideration as in your wisdom you may see to give it—Praying that it may not be dismissed without
70 reference to a Commission, and assuring you, Right Reverend Fathers, of our dutiful veneration and
71 esteem,
72

73 We are Most Respectfully, Your Brethren and Servants in the Gospel of Christ,

74 W. A. MLJHLENBERG,

75 C. F. CRUSE,

76 PHILIP BERRY,

77 EDWIN HARWOOD,

78 G. T. BEDELL,

79 HENRY GREGORY,

80 ALEX H. VINTON,

81 M. A. DE WOLFE HOWE,

82 S. H. TURNER,

83 S. R. JOHNSON,

84 C. W. ANDREWS,

85 and others.

86 New York, October 14th, 1853.
87

88 Concurring in the main purport of the above memorial, and believing that the necessities of the times
89 call for some special efforts to promote unity among Christians, and to enlarge for that and other great
90 ends the efficiency of the Protestant Episcopal Church, but not being able to adopt certain suggestions
91 of this memorial, the undersigned most heartily join in the prayer that the subject may be referred to a
92 Commission of your venerable Body.
93

94 JOHN HENRY HOBART,
95 A. CLEVELAND COXE,
96 ED. Y. HIIGBEE,
97 FRANCIS VINTON,
98 ISAAC G. HUBBARD,
99 and others.